

LAI Academic & Special Libraries
Annual Conference 2025

**Cultivating Connection:
Libraries championing quality,
wellbeing and inclusivity**

Thursday 27 March, 2025

Museum of Literature Ireland, Dublin



#ASL2025

Welcome

Welcome to the 2025 conference of the Academic & Special Libraries Section of the Library Association of Ireland! **#ASL2025**

In a world that is constantly evolving, libraries play a vital role in fostering connections, providing high-quality services, and creating inclusive environments that promote and support well-being. As we grapple with rapid technological advancements, constant innovation, and an “always-on” society, we increasingly seek places to connect, find support, and access reliable knowledge amidst information overload.

In our fast-paced and ever-changing world, how can libraries provide services that are deeper and more meaningful for our users? How can we support our communities and provide spaces where users can engage with information, each other, and their own thoughts in a more deliberate and mindful way? And how can we cultivate well-being and inclusivity in our workplaces and communities?

This year's conference runs over a single day, encompassing a host of keynotes, case studies, poster presentations, sponsor exhibits and networking opportunities. We hope you enjoy your time at the conference and that you take the opportunity to chat with colleagues, view the poster exhibition and visit our wonderful sponsors.

The organising committee would like to thank our sponsors:



UCD School of Information
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Schedule

10.00 **Welcome and introduction**

10.15 **Keynote**

The Ripple Effect: How Kindness Transforms Libraries and Communities

Helen Rimmer

11.15 **Refreshments**

11.45 **Platinum Sponsor Talk**

UCD

11.55 **Case Studies - Session 1**

Shush! Sounds from UCC Library: Building connections and library champions through music and conversation – Martin O'Connor

Less stress, more success! DCU Library's exam distress tables – Grace O'Connor

A night to remember at ATU Library: Hosting a murder mystery for student Induction & Inclusion – Jorden McMenamin and Mark Mulholland

13.00 **Lunch**

14.00 **Platinum Sponsor Talk**

Informed Learning

14.25 **Keynote**

Standing Firm: The Role of Public Librarians in Defending LGBTQ+ Resources Amidst Rising Disruption

Dr Claire McGuinness

15.25 **Case Studies – Session 2**

The heart of the campus: A study of academic libraries in Ireland and their provision of well-being supports for students – Claire Mason

Cultivating connection for quality market and category insight – Amy Bond

Empowering library users with AI literacy: Developing high-quality resources to foster knowledge growth – Kirsteen Walters

For staff, by staff: A learning & development group – Nuala Murray and Aoife Murphy

16.50 **Wrap up and Close**

Keynotes



Helen Rimmer

Founder, The Kind Brave Leader

As a passionate advocate for transforming workplaces, Helen Rimmer is dedicated to embedding kindness and wellbeing into organisational cultures. With over 20 years in library and higher education leadership, she combines a strengths-based coaching approach with her expertise in burnout coaching, systemic team coaching and the psychology of kindness. Helen is the author of *The Kind Librarian*, a practical guide to embedding kindness and wellbeing in libraries. The book empowers library professionals to foster supportive, inclusive environments and navigate their careers with confidence and clarity. She is also the founder of the Kindness Unites movement.

The Ripple Effect: How Kindness Transforms Libraries and Communities

Kindness is more than a feel-good concept—it's a transformative force that can enhance wellbeing, foster connection, and create more inclusive and resilient library environments. In this keynote, Helen Rimmer explores the science and practice of kindness in libraries, showcasing how it benefits individuals, teams, and the wider community.

Drawing on real-world insights and interactive elements, Helen will discuss the ripple effect of kindness and its ability to inspire positive change in libraries; practical strategies for embedding kindness into library culture, from team dynamics to user interactions; the impact of kindness on reducing burnout, enhancing workplace wellbeing, and fostering a sense of belonging; and how libraries can become champions of inclusivity, psychological safety, and meaningful engagement.



Dr Claire McGuinness

UCD School of Information and Communication Studies

Claire McGuinness is an Assistant Professor at UCD's School of Information and Communication Studies, whose research interests focus on the critical roles that libraries and librarians play in educational, community, and everyday life settings. Her publications to date include three books and multiple journal articles. She presents this research today on behalf of a team, which includes Páraic Kerrigan (Principal Investigator), Crystal Fulton, Eugenia Siapera, Faye Carrie and Feargal Keenan.

Standing Firm: The Role of Public Librarians in Defending LGBTQ+ Resources Amidst Rising Disruption

In recent years, public libraries have become increasingly contested spaces as they withstand a storm of ideologically motivated agitation relating to the provision of materials and programmes for their LGBTQ+ communities.

Although steadfastly committed to an ethos of inclusivity and equality, the mental and emotional toll of this disruption on public library staff has been severe, as they strive to maintain their services in the face of highly visible online and offline antagonism.

This study centres and amplifies the voices of Irish public librarians as they describe their experiences of the past few years and highlights the critical and unique role of public libraries as custodians of epistemic rights in society.

Case Studies



Martin O'Connor, UCC Library

Shush! Sounds from UCC Library: Building connections and library champions through music and conversation

Shush! Sounds from UCC Library is a weekly radio show and podcast which has been running since 2016. This academic year it has rolled out a new initiative to foster connections and strengthen relationships between UCC Library and the wider UCC community.

Academic and support staff from across UCC take part in Takeover episodes where they curate 45(ish) minutes of music, sharing their song choices alongside insights into their roles and how the library supports their work.

During the show the guests answer library-themed questions, offering reflections on their work and the library that highlight how UCC Library positively impacts their academic and professional lives. Much like Desert Island Discs, these conversations combine personal expression with professional insights, allowing the library to build meaningful, collaborative relationships.

The enthusiastic participation—the show is already fully booked with guests for the next six months — demonstrates the show's effectiveness in creating an inclusive, enjoyable space whilst turning UCC staff into champions for UCC library and of libraries in general. These shows exemplify how our libraries can build deeper connections in a fun way within our communities.

As with all things Shush there will be music and audio.

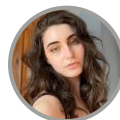


Grace O'Connor
DCU Library

Less stress, more success! DCU Library's exam distress tables

DCU Library, in collaboration with the Student's Union, implemented "De-Stress Tables" during the December exam periods of 2023 and 2024. These were designed to support students' mental well-being and foster a sense of community.

This initiative provided free resources such as healthy snacks, green tea, chocolate, earplugs, bubble wrap for stress relief, and community jigsaws. Rooted in the ethos of quality service, well-being, and inclusivity, the initiative was a low-cost yet impactful effort to address student anxiety, strengthen connections within the campus community, and position the library as a champion of holistic student success. This case study examines the planning, execution, student feedback, and outcomes of the initiative.



Jorden McMenamin and Mark Mulholland,
ATU Library

A night to remember at ATU Library: Hosting a murder mystery for student Induction & Inclusion

This case study explores a unique approach to First-Year Student Induction in the Yeats Library, ATU Sligo, by using a Murder Mystery & Games Night format. This event was promoted during the #First5Weeks initiative at ATU to set up evening events for students during their induction to engage with fellow-students from across the University in a social context and gain key knowledge about the Library. Our main goals were to get students interacting in teams, gain familiarity with the library's location, key resources, and the library staff, through solving clues together.

We aim to show how the team developed a framework document and script for a large audience of new students, and set up the Murder Mystery event to gain learnings about the Library layout in a fun way. As part of our promotion, we designed a poster, distributed flyers around campus, and linked with ATU Global and our Student Services Team to inform students. The feedback we gathered through our survey and reach on our social media pages highlighted the positive engagement we received across ATU. This reflects how interactive events hosted by the library can have a huge impact on a student's ability to form connections with their peers and staff on campus.

Case Studies



Claire Mason,
Maynooth University Library

The heart of the campus: A study of academic libraries in Ireland and their provision of well-being supports for students

Academic libraries are at the heart of campus life and are therefore in a unique position to provide mental health and well-being support to students. Despite many initiatives taking place on the island of Ireland very little literature has been published providing evidence of this. Academic librarians who were either library directors, or who had responsibility for student services in the library, enthusiastically responded to a survey which asked questions regarding the provision of mental health and well-being supports in their libraries, and the drivers and barriers in doing so. The study also investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on service provision. The findings of this study and recommendations for academic libraries in Ireland will be discussed in this presentation.



Amy Bond,
Bord Bia

Cultivating connection for quality market and category insight

In this presentation, Amy Bond will discuss how the Bord Bia library team led a project to update the organisation's market and category understanding templates. In doing so they moved from a suite of six rigid, out-dated, and difficult to use templates, to two flexible, easy to use, and visually appealing templates. This was achieved by leaning into their connections across the organisation, from the insights and capability development teams to colleagues based in Bord Bia's overseas offices. These reports will help provide Bord Bia's client companies with nuanced and in-depth insights into categories and markets, to help them achieve business growth. As well as guiding the development of the templates themselves, the library will also continue to support the completion of templates through providing necessary information resources, and through one-to-one calls with colleagues to talk them through the library reports shared and how best to use them. Through this, the library will continue to cultivate connections across the organisation and demonstrate their value.



Kirsteen Walters, South East
Technological University Library
(SETU)

Empowering library users with AI literacy: Developing high-quality resources to foster knowledge growth

The talk is focused on developing an AI literacy and prompt engineering tutorial at SETU. As a library professional, it is important to consider how to stay current with changing technologies and emerging trends in higher education. It is our role to impart knowledge to assist our students in navigating the fast-changing technological landscape at play. Given this context, a project was developed to enhance students' skills in artificial intelligence literacy. The initiative became possible through securing SATLE funding and was designed to complement the other AI projects at SETU. The focus of the project was to create and implement an open educational resource to impart the required AI literacy skills to our student community.

With AI becoming increasingly prevalent across many industries, equipping students with essential AI literacy skills is vital for their academic and professional success. The tutorial showcases prompt engineering skills to provide students with the knowledge and ability to use generative AI tools effectively. In addition, it offers frameworks for critically evaluating the outputs of these tools and their sources of information. This initiative demonstrates the libraries' commitment to designing user-centric services that are accessible to all users, meeting their current and future needs.

Case Studies



Nuala Murray and Aoife Murphy,
DCU Library

For staff, by staff: A learning & development group

In a recent article, the World Economic Forum released their top skills for workers with analytical and creative thinking topping the bill; soft skills such as flexibility, resilience and self-awareness are also required. Moreover, in an increasingly changing library landscape, staff must constantly update their skills in order to assist our diverse community of users.

With this in mind, DCU Library assembled an innovative Learning and Development Working Group (LDWG). In line with the Library's Learning and Development Policy, the group aims to promote a culture of continuous learning, enhancing staff skills, knowledge, and expertise to keep pace with technological advancements. Comprising members from all grades and directorates ensures diverse perspectives and comprehensive support. It identifies common development needs, evaluates the effectiveness of current learning and development practices and recognises the importance of CPD in improving the library environment at both micro and macro levels.

The LDWG hosts opportunities for staff to share knowledge, enhance their presentation skills and foster professional growth through an annual all staff learning day. Currently, we are reviewing our induction policy and exploring peer-led shadowing of other directorates.

Staff engagement has been vital in achieving our objectives and continues to shape future strategic planning.

Posters



Reimagining library spaces for student well-being: Insights from the development of the MIE library well-being area

Aislinn Shanahan Daly, MIE Library



Building Connections, One Book at a Time, through UCC Library's Inclusive and Collaborative Thematic Book Displays

Anne O'Callaghan, UCC Library

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UCD's School of Information and Communication Studies strives to educate students to become leaders, policymakers, and designers of information services in the evolving information society. Our MLIS and GradDip programmes are structured for attaining a professional degree in the field of Library and Information Studies. Our programmes are accredited by the Library Association of Ireland (LAI), and our accreditation is recognised in other countries by their library associations.

Modules cover a broad range of topics, which include theoretical and foundational knowledge, research skills, and specialised professional skills and knowledge in areas such as digital libraries, information services for children and youth, scholarly communication, teaching librarianship, digital curation, web design, collection development and management, communication and information behaviour, and organisational and project management. Our teaching draws on international best practices to facilitate a high-quality learning experience for students in a variety of in-person and blended modes. Reflective practices and collaborative work constitute the core of our learning activities.

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Informed Learning delivers innovative continuing professional development for library workers through in-person and online workshops. We empower library professionals with new skills in communication, design, and reflective practice. Our mission is to help libraries thrive in a modern world while supporting individuals in their professional growth. Founded in 2024 by librarian Clare Conneally, Informed Learning is shaping the future of libraries and the communities they serve.

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