Editorial

This is my final issue as Editor-in-Chief of *Information and Learning Science* (*ILS*; previously *New Library World, NLW*). Over five years in that role, I have had the pleasure of reviewing and helping to prepare for publication well over 200 papers. I would like to thank everyone – editorial board members, reviewers, authors (successful and unsuccessful) and the team at Emerald – for their interest, time and commitment to the publication process. A special thanks must go to Bruce Massis, my regular columnist during the whole of my time in charge.

While the regular editorial section was discontinued some time ago, the publisher and I agreed that this farewell issue gave me an opportunity to reflect on the past five years and what might be in store for authors, editors, reviewers and readers in the future. This has been an interesting task, and I hope that journal readers will find my summative reflection of value.

The period 2014-2018 has seen significant changes across the globe – politically, socially and economically – changes that have inevitably impacted on the world of library, information and learning sciences. These transitions have been reflected in the content submitted to the journal, which has resulted in a major refocusing of the title, even to a change of name from *NLW* to *ILS* (to be changed to *Sciences* from 2019) and to a gradual move from the journal issue as the main unit of publication to the journal article itself.

Notwithstanding these changes, scholarly publishing, underpinned by a robust peer review process and high standards of quality assurance, remains – and will remain – an essential element of the global research endeavour and the pursuit of both knowledge and truth. Library, learning and information sciences have much to contribute to these fundamental aims. As one author puts it, it is so much not about replacing the old paradigms as transforming them: "from Gutenberg to Zuckerberg"; "from the Library to the Information Commons".

Reviewing the content pages of the issues produced during my editorship, it is obvious that there remains much to be said about libraries, as evinced not only by the early special issue on *Strategic Library Futures* that I edited but also the first double issue of volume 118, overseen by Graham Walton and Jeremy Atkinson. Both special issues have already been heavily downloaded and well cited. There is still, it would seem, much to be said for "books on shelves", so despite (and perhaps because of) the many digital developments described in *NLW/ILS*, the strategic development and usage of library space – both physical and virtual – is likely to be an important topic for a good while to come.

Despite the digital revolution and the dawn of the information age, then, there remains much interest in physical space – the library (and more recently the information commons) – as a location: bricks and mortar where people can go to socialise as much as study, teach and learn. Some of the most popular papers in *NLW/ILS* (as evinced by downloads) have been about space, much of it to do with that third place between home and work where the library (in the broadest sense of the word) has so much to offer, whether for the general public, academic communities or subject specialists.

Even now, as we move to new editors, there continue to be many good quality submissions to ILS on all aspects of library and information provision, including special reference to libraries – and librarians – as helpers and facilitators on the "information journey". In addition, the burgeoning development of digital libraries and services still requires information professionals to select, collect and provide high-quality access to content, facilities and applications. But it is more than just information management; librarians of the future must be knowledge managers. They need to be able to detect and respond to changing information behaviours in flexible and user-friendly ways. They will

have to "sell" the library, moving their marketing as much as their services from the traditional to the digital. That is where the concept of the "embedded" librarian comes in: library staff taking services and expertise out to the users, whether physically or virtually; "out of my comfort zone into yours", as one paper title puts it.

The broadening out of the journal's subject base was already evident in the first issues of volume 115 (2015). For example, in Issues 3 and 4, the papers included are as much about the internet, resources discovery, open and mobile access as they are about "traditional" library collections and services. The word "digital" occurs across the volume and just as frequently in later volumes, whether in relationship to strategy or citizenship, content creation or collection development.

This has resulted in a whole sub-group of articles questioning the role of the library and the librarian in the twenty-first century. Are libraries the "gateway to the future", as one author has suggested? Is there to be a new "golden age" of libraries, as some authors have forecast? This may be the case, though it is instructive to note that some submissions have talked of the "threat" to libraries – and especially public libraries. But as Derek Law pointed out in his thought piece "The World is our Lobster", it is too easy to paint a doom-laden picture of the future of libraries against a background of library cuts, professional deskilling and the relentless advance of ever more powerful digital information systems. These self-same threats offer new challenges and opportunities for information management. Many papers in *NLW/ILS* talk of the ways in which the benefit and positive impact – the "return on investment" – of library and information provision can best be measured and demonstrated, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

There is obviously much experimentation and innovation going on in this area, whether it is through embracing Massive Open Online Courses or phot-sharing, virtual reality or artificial intelligence. Evaluation of libraries and information services therefore remains a crucial activity. The development of learning analytics and impact assessment is especially important here. How do libraries and librarians best take decisions on their future provision and services? How is the increasing amount of usage and user data used to best advantage? How can and how do libraries improve productivity, efficiency, effectiveness? Or economic and social well-being? And a whole lot more? The whole quality of life, in fact! All these questions have been asked – and begun to be answered – over the past five years in *NLW/ILS*! As one author put it, it is about broadening and expanding the impact of libraries so that they can thrive.

The future of publishing and scholarly activity are inextricably linked with that of libraries. *NLW/ILS* has covered a range of important areas, from open access to Web 2.0 and the Internet of Things; from electronic textbooks to research repositories; and from digital collection development to information literacy. Perhaps even more important has been the debate about the veracity of information and the importance of library and information workers in an age when "fake news" is so prevalent. Several papers stress the important role of librarians in gauging "information reliability" across an environment that encompasses both Wikipedia and the Gamification of Learning. Digital or information literacy is another pervasive theme. Many authors have stressed the need to foster information literacy across a broad spectrum of contexts: in education; at work; at play; and in the community.

These various strands are consistently underpinned by another theme – arguably the most important of all – people: people as users, providers, creators, researchers, teachers, students, managers, entrepreneurs and much more. The *cri de Coeur* about the need to understand people remains as valid today as it did when I was a library school student many years ago! As the title of one paper succinctly puts it: "Information innovation: it's all about people!" The "user experience" remains of paramount importance regardless of the type of library.

NLW/ILS has had – and will undoubtedly continue to have – an international reach. Submissions have come from across the English-speaking world; the UK, the USA, Canada, Australasia and elsewhere; from Scandinavia, western, central and eastern Europe; China, Japan; Africa and the Middle East; and the South Americas. The journal has been the richer and more varied for the diverse and diversified provenance of its content. Yet equity if not equality of access to resources and services remains a challenge in an unequal world. During my time as Editor, I have tried to ensure that the journal has had a global reach and provided opportunities for Second- and Third-World authors to submit to and publish in *NLW/ILS* and for others to read their problems, approaches and achievements. Significant pieces of work have appeared in the journal over the past five years, including studies of migrants and displaced people, including as a result of the Syrian War. How much library and information provision can help positive change for the common good! There also remains much to be done regarding equity and equality of access in terms of those who are differently abled: library and information services have to recognise the rights of all to be included on the same terms.

Are library and information staff ready for all the changes that are taking place and will continue to take place? What will we be called? There is so much to add to existing portfolios and job descriptions without the traditional roles and responsibilities all necessarily being deleted that it is difficult to think of a word or words that can sum up what "librarians" (in the broadest sense of the word) might in future be doing. A whole strand within *NLW/ILS* during my editorship has been about the human resource aspects of the journal's subject reach, from recruitment and internships to continuing professional development; from the future of formal education to the role of the library school; from key characteristics to required core skills; and from employability and career development to succession planning and leadership challenges and styles. A whole range of subject terms could be listed from the papers presented to the journal. What is obvious is the global nature of the issues. As Bruce Massis has pointed out, the future survival and success of library and information services depends on staff's ability manage – and indeed lead – change effectively and strategically. "I have to change to stay the same", says one writer. Innovative strategies that "take knowledge where it is needed", says another, "bringing the library to you [the user]" stresses a third. Not surprisingly, there is a batch of papers to be found in the journal about the future education of library and information professionals. How should "library schools" best anticipate future workforce needs and employability requirements? There would aware to be only limited consensus, though the need for creativity and innovative approaches loom large in much of the literature!

Ultimately, "the business of the library is service". The future effectiveness and value of information provision and knowledge management must be based on robust research and development and imaginative and creative innovation in new and participatory ways. "The best way to predict your future is to create it", as Abraham Lincoln and Peter Drucker are both supposed to have said. Whatever the origin of the quotation, it is very true, in my experience. I hope that during my tenure of office *NLW/ILS* has helped prediction through creation. There is much to challenge and much to hope for; and there is everything to be gained.

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