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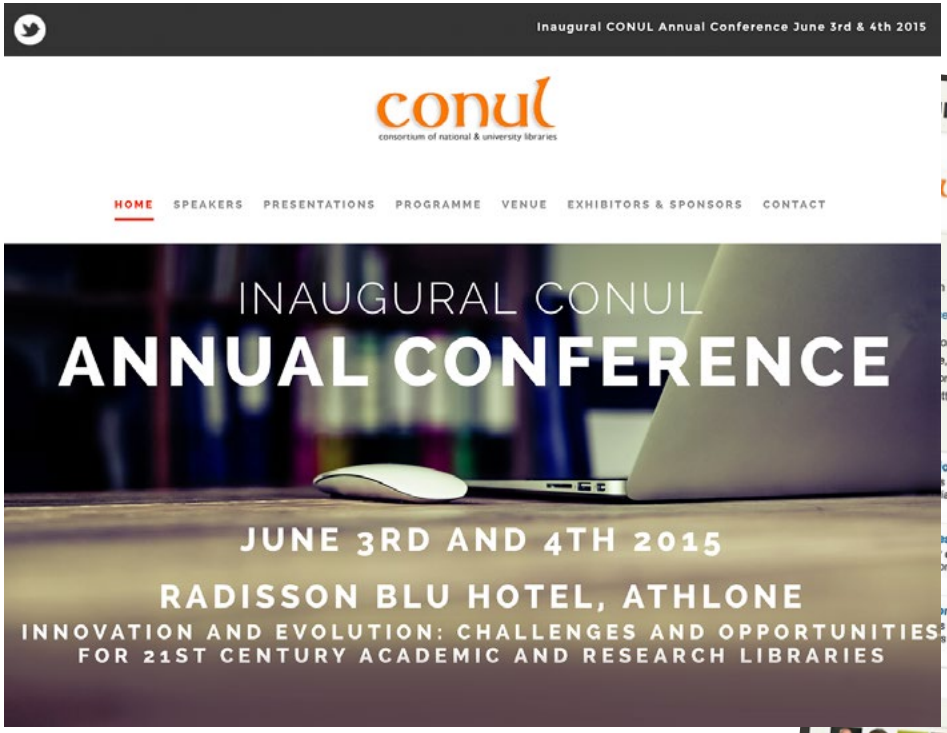
Innovation and Evolution: challenges and opportunities for 21st century academic and research libraries

Radisson Blu Hotel, Athlone, June 3rd & 4th 2015

CONUL (Consortium of National & University Libraries) was established in 1971 by the seven university libraries and the National Library of Ireland. Later the consortium included RCSI, DIT and RIA. More recently Queen's University, Belfast and Ulster University have joined this consortium which aims to act as the voice of research libraries on the island of Ireland.

The inaugural CONUL conference took place in Athlone and some 136 delegates attended from various academic and special libraries, coming from all over Ireland. The professional conference organisers ensured all went smoothly throughout the two days. Live streaming was also provided, enabling our colleagues to follow the proceedings from their desks.

Attendees enjoyed a very full programme with a focus on topics including the digital library, open scholarship, emerging roles, skills sets





and services, library space, resource discovery, unique and distinctive collections (UDCs). Poster presentations set up to inform and engage delegates, were placed alongside the sponsors and exhibitors. This prompted plenty of discussion over coffee throughout the two days until the poster prize winner was announced. Christine Cullen (UCD Library) won with her poster entitled "Self Service in UCD".

The first Keynote speaker was Marshall Breeding, independent consultant, author, and founder and publisher of Library Technology Guides. He observed that library systems are big business, accounting for $1.8bn per annum globally. He identified several current trends in the area of library management systems such as the move to bringing together separate applications, the shift towards strategic cooperation and a new phase of the library without a catalogue – interesting times ahead!

Professor Sarah Moore (Chair of the National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, and Associate Vice -President Academic, University of Limerick) was the second keynote speaker. She addressed the theme of enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education in Ireland. She highlighted the term "Digital Literacy," and I think all would agree that our so-called "digital natives" may instinctively know their way around a smartphone, but are not automatically literate in terms of information and media. She strongly urged librarians to "crash the party" – to have more confidence in their role as part of the teaching and learning process.

Over the course of the two days the pace was varied by a mixture of longer talks, shorter parallel sessions and lightning talks based round central themes. It was difficult to make a choice as to which of the excellent and informative parallel sessions one should attend as they were not repeated. The nature of the conference was very practical and creative, with a huge willingness to share good, research based practice and experience among colleagues.

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The conference atmosphere was enthusiastic and friendly. This was a great networking event for the staff from the various academic, institutional and specialist libraries. There had been a gap in networking opportunities since the last INULS (Irish National & University Staff) conferences which were held from 1965-2011. It is great to have a forum in Ireland again to bring together all those working in this sector. Networking is vital for librarians and something we generally do very well – as was evidenced by the buzz and energy throughout the conference.

Congratulations to the steering group and all the hardworking team who made such a successful event come to pass. It was a great start and everyone who attended is already looking forward to next year. It is clear from the inaugural conference that the future of academic libraries in Ireland is in good hands.

The slides and YouTube videos can be viewed here:

- http://www.slideshare.net/conulconference
- https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeiGMTSgBVZ92wzoU2uuzPw

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