



# Exploring LIS practitioner engagement with research: lessons from a UK case study.

Helen Buckley Woods and Andrew Booth

## The Project Brief

Internationally, LIS academics and professionals share a need to understand how practitioners engage with research. In 2013, a research team from the University of Sheffield was commissioned by the UK CILIP Library and Information Research Group (LIRG) to conduct a Research Scan to address the question “**What do LIS Practitioners want from research?**”. The team, comprising an academic and an LIS practitioner, conducted a scoping review of current literature (2010-12), augmented by an investigation of ephemeral material.

## Methodological Challenges And Solutions

When conducting a literature review, confining the sources of evidence to bibliographic databases is likely to limit the types of evidence to be included. This may contribute towards publication bias and is particularly disadvantageous where the aim is to understand the relationship between research and practice. In addition, published research exhibits an inherent time lag as compared with current professional activity. To address these challenges the team decided to explore other sources of data. Using a sampling frame of the CILIP special interest groups (SIGs), each group was assigned a number of “entities” such as a blog, conference website or similar source, thus reflecting the range of group activities. For each nominated “entity” one of the two investigators scanned the resource for evidence of practitioner engagement with research.

### Using Ephemeral Evidence Added:

- a valuable reminder of the variety and breadth of library and information practice.
- an informative insight into the considerable amount of research that practitioners undertake.
- interesting and illuminating examples of practitioner research and evidence based practice.

## Evaluation And Reflection On Using This Method

The process of identifying the entities evidence was time consuming and difficult to operationalise as a search only approach. The method evolved to become a combination of scanning material and keyword searching of documents. Whilst engaging with each entity e.g. three years of a newsletter, the investigators were also able to combine identification and analysis so that both tasks were undertaken simultaneously. This allowed the investigators to sensitise themselves to, and immerse themselves in, the evidence to get a feeling for the different types of research undertaken and how practitioners engaged with research in their professional practice. This process informed the subsequent synthesis stage of the project. Any difficulties in working with the material were repaid handsomely by the rich evidence of professional experiences as included in the final report.

