

Championing diversity and inclusion: an introduction to BIALL's D&I working group

Abstract: BIALL is laying the foundations for a thoughtful, genuine and sustained commitment to diversity and inclusion (D&I), embedded throughout BIALL activities and events. Here D&I Working Group members **Narinder Toor** and **Julia Bhojoo** set out the background to this new initiative, including the creation of the working group, and the key goals, progress made and future priorities. To tie in with International Stress Awareness Week and World Kindness Day, the working group arranged the inaugural BIALL wellbeing event focused on mental health. This article highlights many of the speaker's tips and the helpful techniques that can assist with stress and anxiety. It also provides BIALL members with details on how to contribute to the D&I dialogue as well as access useful mental health resources and other wellbeing support.

Keywords: BIALL; mental health; wellbeing

Roy Mersky began his address at the 85th Annual Meeting of The American Association of Law Libraries in San Francisco, California on July 21, 1992, with: "Why should we care? Why should we as law librarians be involved in discussing the importance of diversity within our organisation?"¹ It is these questions that AALL, our sister organisation, has sought to answer through successive studies and reports, as well as other law library associations and national associations in the years since, with particular focus on understanding the make-up of their respective membership and attracting members to reflect the diversity within society. It's now BIALL's turn.

The past few years have rightly seen an increase in awareness around diversity and inclusion issues, with workplaces offering internal support networks for employees, celebrating and hosting multicultural events, as well as highlighting issues around equity. There are also many individuals within the library and information space already doing fantastic work regarding diversity and inclusion, particularly across academic and higher education libraries where work is being done to decolonise the curriculum and diversify reading lists, as well as within other firms and institutions who have been reviewing their recruitment and interviewing processes to encourage a wider pool of applicants, both in terms of diversity and social mobility.

WHY IS THE BIALL D&I INITIATIVE SO IMPORTANT?

One of the main drivers in creating the D&I working group, in addition to the BIALL salary surveys, was the

2015 ARA/CILIP Workforce Mapping survey², which undertook an extensive study of the UK information sector workforce. The report identified, amongst other things, that across a workforce of around 86,000 people there was a significant gender pay gap, low ethnic diversity, disparities in age and educational background, as well as a workforce that was dominated by women, who in turn were under-represented in senior management. Whilst the BIALL legal librarian community accounts for only a small section of the information sector, the issues highlighted in the survey are of great significance to everyone.

The 2015 ARA/CILIP survey further identified that within the library and information profession itself, we have a workforce that is "97% white, compared to a UK population that is 88% white. Predominantly female, except in leadership roles. Predominantly older. A high academic barrier to entry. A high proportion of people who remain in one role for 15-20 years."³ These statistics only serve to highlight the importance of encouraging greater engagement and feedback from the diverse BIALL community.

Observable and less apparent differences (including invisible disabilities and social background) are shown to have a substantial impact on securing a new position and on career progression. In 2019, CILIP reported that: "We have a society in which Black, Asian or minority ethnic people are more than twice as likely to be overlooked in a job application or promotion process than their equally qualified white counterparts. Disabled people are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as people who do not have a disability. That gender inequality in the UK today is exactly as bad

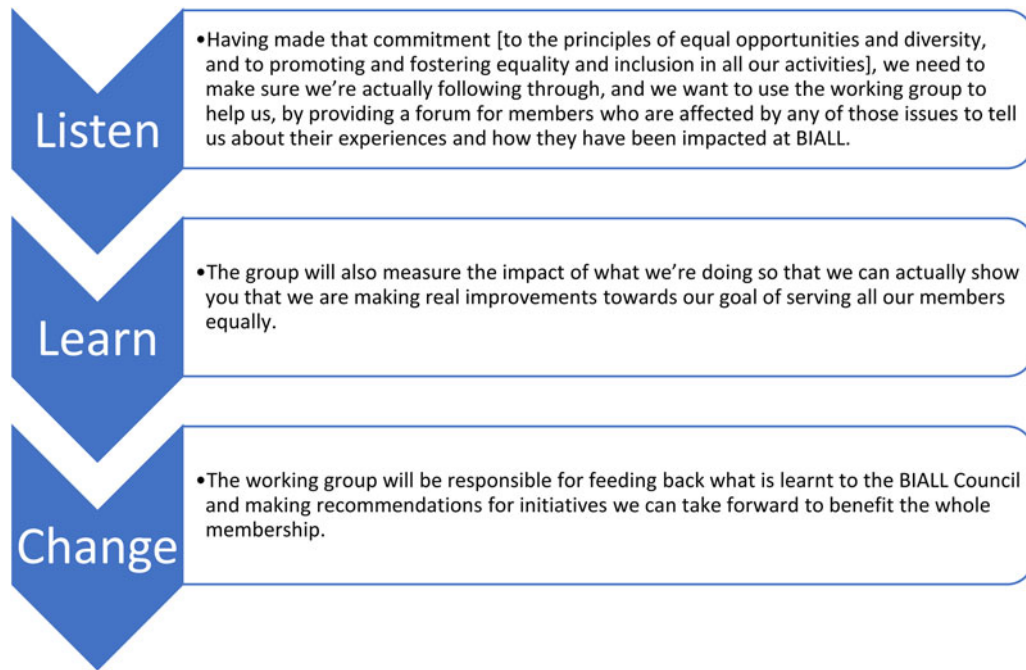


Figure 1

as it was a decade ago, and among the worst in the European Union.”⁴ We recognise the work that must be done to raise more awareness and help address these issues.

TAKING A DECISIVE STEP FORWARD

For law librarians, as Mersky notes: “We are primarily concerned with equity [and it] is important that we acknowledge the fact that our professional responsibility goes beyond finding information and resources.”⁵ These beliefs underpin the primary objective of BIALL’s Diversity & Inclusion working group, which was formed to assist BIALL to create and sustain a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion.

BIALL is committed to promoting and fostering equality, diversity and inclusion in all its activities and opportunities. This commitment aligns with BIALL’s core purpose which is to support the vital contribution legal information and knowledge professionals are making throughout the legal sector. For its members to thrive and contribute to their fullest potential, all members need to feel respected, to feel heard, and to feel that their contributions matter. By fostering a sense of belonging, BIALL is dedicated to supporting all members so that they feel valued, included and understood. BIALL wants every member to feel welcome and not hide who they are.

The first call for a working group was made in May 2020. Due to the pandemic – and mindful of the challenges, work pressures, extra caring responsibilities and other time commitments during that time – BIALL decided to postpone any group activity until 2021. The group was officially launched later that year with a

successful call for volunteers posted as a video message at the 2021 Virtual BIALL Conference.

LISTEN, LEARN, CHANGE

The group will work towards engaging, motivating and communicating with the BIALL community as well as coordinating with BIALL Council. BIALL Council member Claire Fox was instrumental in helping to establish the D&I working group and capture the group’s aspirations to engage with the BIALL community and coordinate with BIALL Council to achieve a unified goal (Figure 1).

D&I WORKING GROUP – IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

As a small working group, we have investigated what we think will have the most impact on our membership and be achievable. The initial priorities of the group were to assess the best ways to capture issues and experiences anonymously from the membership. This would aid us in better understanding the needs, challenges and gaps within the association, to provide the group with a benchmark to measure success and change.

The group has created the BIALL Diversity & Inclusion working group webpage on the BIALL website.⁶ Members are welcome to contact the group via our dedicated email address: inclusion@BIALL.org.uk.

We have also established an anonymous feedback system to encourage members to share their experiences in confidence. The online form is hosted on the BIALL D&I webpage.⁷

The importance of Wellbeing

Hosted by



Join us on Wednesday the 16th of November 2022 at 13:00pm, for an exclusive online event supporting the mental health of legal librarians across the UK.



John Sidebotham
Programme Manager
at Network Rail

John has specific responsibilities for health and wellbeing, diversity and inclusion, alongside engagement.

A Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, winning the Institute's prestigious Award for Excellence, Diversity Champion 2020. He has also been awarded the British Empire Medal in the Queen's 2021 Birthday Honours list for services to wellbeing at Network Rail.

Successful in delivering change at national and local level, and passionate about safety and wellbeing, he sees kindness and compassion, coupled with diversity and inclusion, vital to success, bringing in fresh ideas to challenge existing thinking, creating innovation and opportunity.

The group's first event was held in the autumn

With assistance from the BIALl Publications Committee and BIALl Conference Committee, the BIALl Membership D&l survey was launched at the BIALl Conference AGM in 2022. The anonymous D&l survey (accessible via the BIALl 2022 Conference App, and also circulated to the BIALl membership after the conference) assists us in:

- Obtaining information about our members and the make-up of BIALl; in particular, on how representative the association is of minority groups
- Gathering feedback on how our members perceive BIALl, and their experiences of BIALl events and other BIALl activities, as well as any suggestions for improvement

- Providing a benchmark that we can use to help measure progress

We are currently undertaking further analysis of the results as well as the suggestions and comments that were raised by members who completed the survey. The 2022 BIALL D&I Survey Report will be circulated to the BIALL Council and BIALL membership in due course. All data and any comments within the report will be completely anonymized.

INAUGURAL EVENT – A TIMELY FOCUS ON WELLBEING

It is no surprise that library, information, and knowledge management professionals are resourceful and adaptable, however, during the pandemic, many changes and additional stresses were placed on BIALL members. Our first event was organised as a response to feedback from members in the BIALL ‘State of the Nation’ survey report and BIALL Council reflections regarding diversity and inclusion activities which highlighted issues surrounding stress and mental health. We wanted to bring this topic to the forefront and offer members further practical information on managing stress as well as providing the opportunity to listen and learn from someone who offered an empathetic and holistic approach to wellbeing.

We invited John Sidebotham to present his talk on ‘Tools to stay well – Dealing with Stress and how to be kind to yourself. Practising preventative measures.’ In his role as Programme Manager at Network Rail, John has specific responsibilities for health and wellbeing, diversity and inclusion, alongside engagement. His regular activities include facilitating daily Teams wellbeing calls and a monthly ‘Loose Men’ panel discussion, which offers a safe space for male colleagues.

It is his commitment to both the support of others and the wellbeing initiatives at Network Rail during the pandemic which saw him being recognised in the Queen’s 2021 Birthday Honours list, with his honour being cited “for outstanding service to health and wellbeing [...] and starting a movement that embodies trust, collaboration, diversity and inclusion, and the celebration of uniqueness.”

To frame his talk, John shared statistics on how stress can add pressure at work. The latest Health and Safety Executive (HSE) figures for 2021-22 estimate a staggering 17 million working days were lost to work-related stress, depression and anxiety, with around 914,000 cases where poor health and wellbeing are having a significant impact on someone’s ability to perform their best at work.⁸ Behind these figures, we have to remind ourselves, is someone who may be struggling and needs help, whether it’s a friend or colleague, and that we as helpers need to have the right tools and information to be able to spot the signs and offer support.

The HSE has identified six management standards⁹ which together provide a set of conditions for assessing the risk of stress within the workplace:

1. Demands of workload
2. Control over ways of working
3. Support from within the workplace
4. Relationships to promote positive working
5. Understanding your role
6. Communicating organisational change

With reference to the HSE conditions, John gently reminded us that some tolerable stress is a normal part of life, but it is also important to understand what a healthy work-life balance looks like. It can also be helpful to view stress as a curve, with feelings of fatigue, exhaustion and burnout reaching peak levels.

The first part of John’s talk focused on identifying stress and checking in with yourself – how are you feeling today? How have you been feeling lately? In answering these questions, John shared two ways of measuring the emotional response and understanding the level of stress, the first looking at a coloured scale, ranging from red ‘in crisis’ to green ‘excelling’ (Figure 2), and the second visualising a V-shaped container that might be blocked and overflowing (Figure 3).

Seeing these helps place where you feel you are, especially if stress starts affecting you physically, emotionally, or mentally. John highlighted the importance of looking critically at how we deal with stress when it appears and what sort of helpful or unhelpful coping methods are we using to avoid dealing with the stress or issue at hand – are we comfort eating or are we using alcohol to unhealthily cope at the end of a workday?

John emphasised the effect of sustained periods of ‘toxic stress’ which can be damaging to overall health and could potentially develop into anxiety or depression as well as other medical conditions, so it is crucial to understand how to check in with yourself. For John, the importance of understanding what signs to look for within ourselves (or others), whether they are physical, emotional, or mental, is key to being able to reframe, avoid catastrophising thoughts, and reduce stress. From his experience, it can also be a turning point for someone in realising how their ordinary, day-to-day activities are being impacted because of anxiety or stress and can enable someone to start addressing stressful thoughts or behaviour, reframe, and start working towards solutions.

John also shared five key things that we should each do to look after our wellbeing, as identified by the New Economics Foundation¹² and also promoted by the NHS and other global health providers:

- Connect with others and make every moment matter
- Be curious – keep learning!
- Move more and make it fun!
- Allow yourself time to be in the moment and stay present



Figure 2: Mental Health Continuum Model created by Delphis, a mental health course provider¹⁰

- Give more, be kind to others and make sure to be kind to yourself!

The above can include hobbies, or new skills such as learning a new language, or a sport or exercise class. John also reminded us about the importance of paying attention to our diet and what we are eating, especially if these food and drink choices are impacting our mood and fatigue levels.

For the second part of his talk, John shared techniques to help build successful habits towards better health, such as breathing exercises and embracing nature as ways to deal with stress and anxiety. With over 40% of our actions being down to habits, John underscored the importance of re-assessing a habit when you are building a system for success – if there is a failure, then it is not you but the system (i.e., the habit) that needs to change.

John demonstrated a technique to help build mindful practice into your day. Mindfulness involves being present in the moment, observing the world around you

(especially when out in nature) and being aware of what you are feeling and thinking. With stress and anxiety, breathing tends to be shallower but using, for example, the box breathing method (each step lasting four seconds: breathe in, hold, breathe out, wait and repeat) combined with mindfulness can help to physically regroup yourself in the present moment.

Other breathing techniques or meditation exercises will also help, especially if you find yourself in situations where you might need to step back and regroup within yourself (such as using the STOPP method¹³ to remove yourself from an upsetting situation) or help boost your confidence and assert yourself in the room (by simply taking time to sit in a quiet room before presenting at an important meeting).

To help reframe your day, John suggested practising gratitude and finding positives throughout the day to reflect on, either by writing these down in a journal or saying them aloud. By not focusing on the negatives, and avoiding comparing yourself to others, John says this can help with sleep, energy levels, as well as long-term resilience.

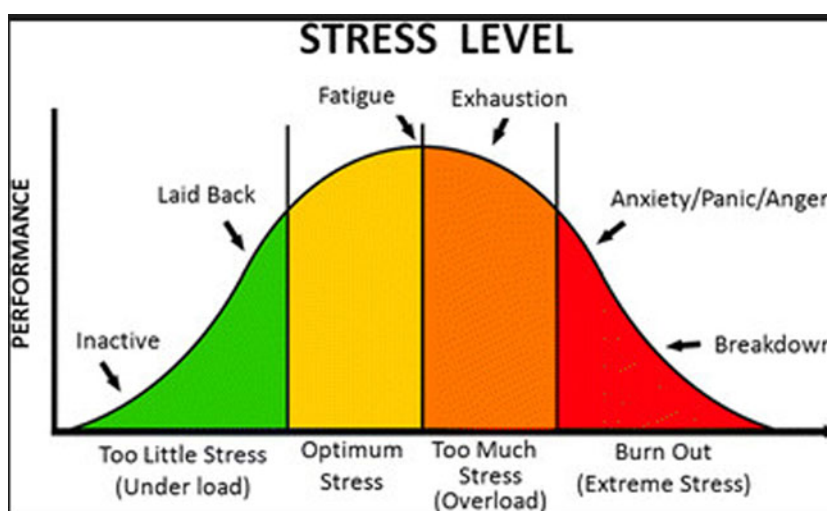


Figure 3: Illustration of the Yerkes-Dodson human performance and stress curve¹¹

Employers are taking advantage of digital mental health apps to support employees, especially tools and resources provided by mental health charities. John highlighted the monthly calendar produced by the charitable organisation Action for Happiness¹⁴ which suggests a new activity or action for each day of the month. So far this year (at the time of writing), there's been Happier January, Friendly February, Mindful March, and Active April.

The recording and slides for John's detailed and invaluable session are accessible on the BIALL website.¹⁵ To echo John's closing words, we do not need to worry about whether the grass is greener somewhere else, but we can certainly thrive and bloom where we are planted. Our community garden within BIALL is a perfect place to do just that.

D&I WORKING GROUP – FUTURE PRIORITIES

The group is planning the next event for BIALL members, and we are keen to arrange a health and wellbeing session on menopause. This talk is timely as the UK Government has recently announced access to cheaper HRT,¹⁶ and many employers are creating supportive work policies, with both developments providing women with much needed support with menopause symptoms. We want to equip our members with knowledge and strategies so that they can better support themselves and those around them who are affected by menopause.

We are presently seeking out external guidance and opinions and identifying guest speakers for other future events, and guest bloggers for the BIALL website. Members of the D&I working group are also looking into arranging future sessions on a wide variety of topics including allyship and cultural humility, as well as highlighting issues that are under-represented and directly affect members both within the workplace and within the profession, such as implicit bias.

From the feedback we have already received from the BIALL community we understand that there are several issues of particular importance to our members, ranging from mental health and imposter syndrome to awareness surrounding disabilities, barriers around social mobility, and microaggressions. All feedback and comments help to drive the priorities of our working group, as we look to concentrate our efforts towards providing members with access to resources, and inviting qualified speakers to speak to members, in order to raise awareness on these issues and to help create a better environment, both within the legal community as well as within the association.

We are learning from the work being done by other organisations and law firms to create an inclusive workplace culture. Professional associations (including CILIP, LAI, AALL and CALL) have already made great strides forward to try and identify and address the scope of D&I issues that face our librarian community. We are reviewing their progress with interest to help pinpoint the key areas of focus for BIALL. In particular, we are

investigating whether to put forward a recommendation to BIALL Council in support of creating a formal Equality and Diversity Action Plan.

We are also working with other BIALL groups, including the Professional Development Committee on their project to create more video training content for the BIALL website with particular attention on the topic of diversity recruitment, including attracting and recruiting a more diverse team and the practical steps that can be taken to eliminate bias during the candidate selection and interview process. BIALL shares a longstanding working relationship with specialist recruitment agencies in the library and information management field. We look forward to further collaboration with a view to enhancing diversity recruitment and retention.

As an association, BIALL already does a lot of work in promoting and fostering equal opportunities. A particular highlight is our annual collaboration with CLSIG and SLA Europe in jointly hosting a Careers Evening aimed at students, graduate trainees and early career librarians. This event is a fantastic opportunity for BIALL members to share their own career stories with attendees, including education routes and experiences with job searching. We intend to promote this event to



Equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace is vital and the working group is striving to help generate positive change

encourage even more BIALL members to get involved to support future professionals.

In the coming months, the D&I working group is looking forward to consulting with the BIALL Committees and Groups, and collaborating with BIALL Council so that together we can assess future conferences, activities, events and materials through an EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) lens and effect real change. The D&I Survey will

assist in this process by adding clarity and focus to our discussions. By working together – and with the assistance and input of our valued members – we are taking a meaningful stride towards being better informed and also ensuring that equality, diversity, and inclusion are at the heart of all BIALL activities and opportunities.

BIALL recognises that equality, diversity and inclusion are just as important to the legal community as to our society at

Find out more

- **To learn more** (and to join the D&I working group), please consult our webpage [About > BIALL Groups]: <<https://biall.org.uk/working-groups/biall-diversity-and-inclusion-working-group/>>
- **Email the group** directly [inclusion@BIALL.org.uk] or use the anonymous online form on the BIALL website [About > Diversity & Inclusivity]: <<https://biall.org.uk/about/diversity-inclusivity/>>
- **BIALL Wellbeing event** - Talk by John Sidebotham 'Tools to stay well – Dealing with stress and how to be kind to yourself. Practicing preventative measures': <<https://biall.org.uk/membership-resources/>>

Share

- Be a **BIALL D&I Champion** by sharing our D&I initiative with your LinkedIn colleague/friendship circle.
- Get in touch and share your **D&I successes** so that we can learn from the activities that are getting a great response and making such a positive difference.

Resources

- The support and advice provided by **employee assistance programmes** are indispensable. We also recommend:
 - Wellbeing resource **Action For Happiness**
 - Access the monthly calendar for practical ideas and tips on daily actions to help promote a sense of wellbeing: <https://actionforhappiness.org/calendar>
 - Based on the latest research, Action for Happiness have identified 10 Keys that tend to make life happier and more fulfilling: <https://actionforhappiness.org/10-keys>
 - Take advantage of the regular live talks and also elect to receive the daily actions via their app
 - Free Podcasts and details on other support resources and information are accessible on the Action For Happiness website: <https://actionforhappiness.org/>
 - **LawCare** (the mental wellbeing charity for the legal community) offers free, confidential, emotional support to anyone working in the law. Consult the website for details on their helpline, online chat, and email support: <https://www.lawcare.org.uk/>
 - **Frazzled Café** (an online facilitated peer-to-peer wellbeing support group) meetings provide a safe space to share, talk and listen. <https://www.frazzledcafe.org/#ItsOkToNotBeOk>
 - The mental health charities **Mind** (www.mind.org.uk/) and **Mental Health UK** (<https://mentalhealth-uk.org/>) have a wealth of toolkits, information, and support programmes accessible on their websites.
 - **Hub of Hope** provides a UK directory of mental health services as well as support and information which is searchable by specific areas of concern: <https://hubofhope.co.uk/>

large. It is our collective responsibility to see that all people are treated equally. In order to support these commitments, we must ensure that there is a space for members to both raise issues and also share their experiences. The working group is generating positive change for the benefit of all current members. The group will make recommendations to BIALL Council which may be developed into initiatives to benefit members and could lead to other changes to BIALL events and activities, all with a view to making BIALL a more inclusive and representative organisation.

We must also pay particular attention to the future and how the association will continue and flourish. The creation of the group is a crucial step towards a more diverse, inclusive and supported BIALL community where each member is accepted and welcomed. We encourage BIALL members to contact the group and make their voices heard. Mersky captured the power of change in accurately summarising that “[f]or all law librarians, the chance to help shape the future of the profession by developing future professionals is a source of both pride and responsibility.”¹⁷

Footnotes

- ¹ Roy Mersky, ‘AALL and the Road to Diversity’ *Law Library Journal* 85 (1993) 859–66.
- ² ARA/CILIP, ‘Study of the UK Information Workforce. Mapping the Library, Archives, Records, Information Management and Knowledge Management and related professions in the United Kingdom 2015’ <www.cilip.org.uk/>.
- ³ CILIP, ‘Diversity within the Profession – speech to CILIP West Midlands Members Day.’ 8 February 2019.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ Mersky (see n 1).
- ⁶ <<https://biall.org.uk/working-groups/biall-diversity-and-inclusion-working-group/>>.
- ⁷ <<https://biall.org.uk/about/diversity-inclusivity/>>.
- ⁸ Health and Safety Executive Statistics, ‘Working days lost in Great Britain’ <www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/dayslost.htm>.
- ⁹ Health and Safety Executive, ‘What are the Management Standards?’ <www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/>.
- ¹⁰ Delphis, ‘The Mental Health Continuum is a Better Model for Mental Health’ <<https://delphis.org.uk/mental-health/continuum-mental-health/>>.
- ¹¹ AT Welford, ‘Stress and Performance’ *Ergonomics* 2007 567–580.
- ¹² New Economics Foundation blogpost, ‘Five ways to wellbeing at a time of social distancing’ (30 March 2020) <<https://neweconomics.org/2020/03/five-ways-to-wellbeing-at-a-time-of-social-distancing/>>.
- ¹³ STOPP method, as described on a NHS Trust website <www.hey.nhs.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/OHC_STOPP.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Action for Happiness Monthly Calendar <<https://actionforhappiness.org/calendar/>>.
- ¹⁵ BIALL membership resources webpage <<https://biall.org.uk/membership-resources/>>.
- ¹⁶ UK Government Press Release, ‘New scheme for cheaper hormone replacement therapy launches’ (1 April 2023) <www.gov.uk/government/news/new-scheme-for-cheaper-hormone-replacement-therapy-launches>.
- ¹⁷ Mersky (see n 1).

Biographies

Narinder Toor is an Information Manager at US law firm Arnold & Porter and works closely with her global Research Services colleagues to provide research support across all international offices. Narinder is also research liaison to the global Antitrust and Life Sciences Practice Groups. Since joining BIALL, Narinder has volunteered on the BIALL LIG Committee (now known as the Supplier Liaison Group) as a publisher contact and authored one of the LIM articles celebrating BIALL’s 50th Anniversary. Narinder is currently serving as Co-Chair of the BIALL Diversity and Inclusion working group.

Julia Bhojoo is an Information Officer at Kingsley Napley, where she leads the team’s current awareness service. She is also a member of CILIP’s BAME Network and is the website manager for EARLL, a professional network for early career librarians based in London. Julia received the SLA James M. Matarazzo Rising Star Award in 2022 for revamping SLA Europe’s online presence and will be SLA Europe President in 2024.