

LISA Conference 2026: Change through the lens of self-kindness

I attended the LISA Conference 2026, which had the overall theme of Change through the lens of self-kindness.

The keynote speaker, Helen Rimmer, founder of *The Kind Brave Leader*, opened the conference with a session entitled *Kindness in Times of Change*. Helen challenged us to think carefully about what kindness really means. She suggested that kindness encompasses emotional intelligence, empathy, flexibility, warmth and care, but that it is often confused with simply being "nice". True kindness, she argued, involves being honest, setting boundaries and having difficult conversations when necessary, rather than avoiding conflict.

Helen emphasised the practical benefits of kindness - acts of kindness trigger the release of oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin and endorphins while reducing stress, and that even witnessing kindness can have the same positive effects. This highlighted that kindness is not simply a personal value but something supported by scientific evidence and capable of improving workplace culture.

Something as simple as offering to cover a busy service desk, acknowledging a colleague's work, or allowing staff flexibility in how they attend meetings can make a significant difference. Helen also stressed that kindness should extend to everyone within an organisation, including colleagues whose work may be less visible, such as cleaners and security staff, as well as senior leaders.

Helen also spoke about the importance of self-kindness during periods of organisational change. She argued that resilience should not be confused with simply enduring increasing workloads. Instead, when colleagues leave or priorities change, organisations should consciously decide what work can be stopped as well as what should continue. Rather than relying indefinitely on the goodwill of staff, organisations have a responsibility to address workload issues strategically. This was an important reminder that looking after ourselves is not selfish but a professional responsibility that enables us to work more effectively in the long term.

She said that kindness meant being direct, setting boundaries and giving honest feedback rather than avoiding conflict and difficult conversations. Helen talked about the importance of being brave to be kind and setting boundaries and limits yourself, asking yourself what you need and being clear about it.



Following the keynote, delegates had the opportunity to visit either Senate House Library or the Library at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). As I work at SHL, I chose to visit LSHTM to gain an insight into another academic library. Library Director David Archer gave us an informative tour and explained both the history of the institution and the recent refurbishment work. I was particularly interested to discover how many of the challenges faced by LSHTM are similar to those at SHL. Both libraries occupy beautiful listed buildings, which provide unique architectural character but can also limit the ability to create the flexible study spaces, plentiful power sockets and collaborative learning environments expected by today's students. The newly refurbished Pumphandle Social space in the basement was an excellent example of adapting an historic building to meet contemporary student needs while respecting its heritage. I also appreciated how former features, such as the old book lift, had been creatively repurposed as display space rather than removed. Throughout the building I noticed decorative details, including balcony railings, that reminded me strongly of Senate House, reinforcing the similarities between our institutions.

The afternoon began with Neil Johnstone's session, *How Do We Respond to Change?* Neil immediately encouraged audience participation by distributing stress toys to each table before asking us to undertake a simple but revealing exercise: writing our names first with our dominant hand and then with our non-dominant hand. The activity generated a wide range of emotional responses, from frustration and discomfort to curiosity and excitement, providing an effective demonstration that people naturally experience change in different ways.



Neil reflected on his own experience of redundancy and introduced the change curve based on Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's stages of grief. One observation that I found interesting was that senior leaders often spend months discussing and planning organisational change before announcing it to staff. By the time the wider team hears the news, leaders may already have accepted the change, while staff are only just beginning to process feelings of disbelief, uncertainty or frustration. This creates an understandable disconnect that can affect communication unless managers recognise where individuals are on their own journey through change. Neil emphasised the importance of listening carefully to people's language and continuing to ask questions throughout the process.

The afternoon continued with three lightning talks that each offered practical examples of managing change in different library settings. Rosemary Johnson from the Global Banking School presented *Thriving Through Change*, using Robert Burns' famous line about "the best-laid schemes of mice and men" as a starting point for discussing adaptability. Her memorable framework encouraged delegates to Connect, Harness, Adjust, Negotiate, Govern and ultimately Embrace change, providing practical strategies for prioritising work, managing energy and supporting colleagues.

Aneeka Shezad from the University of Birmingham reflected on her own journey into librarianship since joining the profession in 2022. She described how increasing automation through LibAnswers, scanning technologies and workflow reviews had transformed services while also creating opportunities for professional development and improved ways of working.

The final lightning talk, by John Stammers from the Royal College of Nursing, was particularly relevant to my own work. He described the systematic process used to redesign his library's FAQs by analysing enquiry data, reviewing LibChat transcripts, benchmarking against other libraries, consulting colleagues across different teams and using Springshare's Query Analyzer. As my own team is planning to review our FAQs, this session provided several practical ideas that I hope we can adapt for our own project.

The final presentation of the day, *Career Development in Uncertain Times*, was delivered by Thomas Pratt from the University of East London. Thomas introduced two useful frameworks: VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) and BANI (Brittle,

Anxious, Non-linear and Incomprehensible), which describe the increasingly complex environments in which organisations now operate. Through a series of Mentimeter activities, delegates reflected on their own career development and the challenges they faced. I particularly valued Thomas's reassurance that careers do not always follow a linear path and that sideways moves can be valuable strategic decisions rather than setbacks. His emphasis on prioritising wellbeing alongside professional development echoed the themes introduced at the beginning of the conference. career development, the importance of health and wellbeing, and practical next steps to take.

Overall, I found the conference extremely worthwhile and am very grateful to have been offered a free place. Although each speaker approached change from a different perspective, there was a clear and consistent message throughout the day: successful change depends not only on effective processes but also on kindness, empathy, communication and self-care. Alongside the excellent presentations, the conference also provided valuable opportunities to meet colleagues from across the sector, exchange experiences and learn from the challenges faced by other libraries. I have returned with practical ideas that can be applied within my own work, particularly around supporting colleagues through change and reviewing our customer service resources, as well as a renewed appreciation of the importance of kindness as a professional practice.

Elizabeth Morcom, Senate House Library