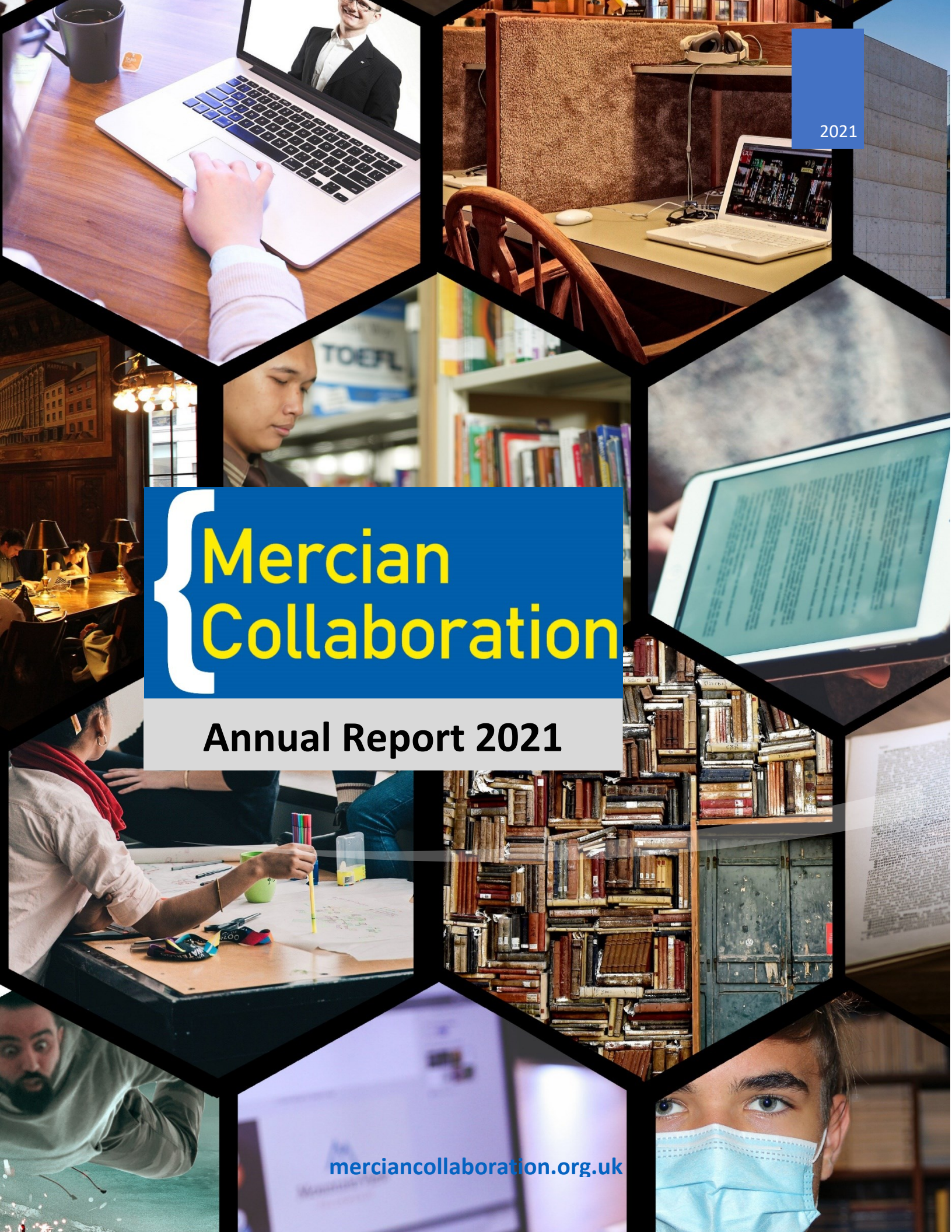


2021

Mercian Collaboration

Annual Report 2021

merciancollaboration.org.uk



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At A Glance

- 5th Annual report (2021)
- Formal name: The Mercian Collaboration
- Informally: The Collaboration
- Governing body: Directors Board
- Parent body: SCONUL
- Founded in 2013/4
- Chair: Christine Porter (Newman University)
- Subgroups: 2 operational & 5 special interest groups
- 13 workshops & networking events
- 21 committee & group meetings
- 23 academic library members

Chair's Introduction

For libraries, as well as the wider world, 2020 was a year of sudden and rapid change, when all our resources were focussed on an unknown and unexpected threat. 2021 has felt more like an endurance event, with hope of recovery constantly hovering on the horizon, but slightly out of reach.

All the resilience and inventiveness that characterised our pandemic response in 2020 has been called on again as we moved into a more settled pattern of mixed mode delivery with a watchful wariness about what the future would bring. All of this has been solidly underpinned by the partnerships we have developed and with the shared wisdom and insights from library colleagues right across the region.

The reports from our operational groups and special interest groups show the sterling work that has happened under the banner of the Collaboration, whilst the member highlights showcase some of the excellent practice that has emerged and been embedded as we have collectively and individually adjusted our services in the light of the continuing pandemic.

The Collaboration has helped us to work together as we responded to the many challenges of a testing year, and increased our confidence as we met and mastered each new trial.

The pandemic may have dominated much of our thinking, but there have been other major strategic influences – the stronger emphasis on equality and diversity throughout society and in our libraries, the increased weight being placed on wellbeing and mental health, the growing use of transitional journal deals to accelerate the drive towards open access publishing, and the realisation of our collective power when standing resolutely united – as demonstrated by the dramatic brinkmanship of the negotiations with Elsevier.

Nationally and locally, we have benefitted from the strength of our regional collaboration.

I have greatly appreciated the many contributions from right across the region, and from all our members in operational and special interest groups, in our Conference Team, our Steering Group and Director's Board and from our energetic and tenacious Development Officer who keeps us organised and on track.

I encourage you to read and be inspired by this record of successes and resourcefulness that demonstrate the value of our Collaboration and the ingenuity and perseverance that characterises our profession.



Chris Porter

*Chair (2021-2023),
Director of Library & Learning Services,
Newman University, Birmingham*

Preface

Welcome to the fifth Mercian Collaboration annual report!

As with our [prior annual reports](#), this document is designed to provide insight into the Collaboration, our activities and those of our various subgroups throughout 2021.ⁱ Obviously, the past year has been a second very challenging time for the academic sector, and everywhere else. Consequently, with library staff time squeezed within competing priorities – let alone coping with everyday life – the Collaboration has continued to offer a modestly reduced but still vibrant programme of activities. Nevertheless, we hope this document still provides some interesting insights for our members, their staff and indeed anyone interested in our continuing work. We hope too that this report is of value to those organisations in comparable higher education settings beyond the UK Midlands region including our parent body, SCONUL. My thanks especially to my counterparts and collaborators at these bodies for their support, insight and generosity of spirit throughout 2021.

As the report only represents a snapshot of activity, for a more detailed and regularly updated view of ongoing and planned activities then the Collaboration's website should always be consulted. Additionally, once more we have given space over to our member libraries to highlight their own experiences in the past year. These I think you will find provide a diverse snapshot of the academic libraries experience in the Midlands region in 2021 and may even resonate positively with your own *weltanschauung*.ⁱⁱ

On behalf of the Collaboration though, I'd like to thank all report contributors, a list of whom can be found at the report's end. Additionally, a hearty thanks to everyone who helped organise, facilitate, speak at or participate in our events programme, most especially those who authored a post-event report for our news pages. Finally, thank you to everyone who took the time to reply to one of my 'nagging' emails asking for information, an update or clarification on an issue. Running the Collaboration's operations at a considerable remove has been a unique if satisfying challenge, but also remains a continued pleasure due to the wonderful library staff I continue to work with. Hence, my personal kudos to you all.

Dr Gaz J Johnson, *Collaboration Development Officer*ⁱⁱⁱ

About the Collaboration

The **Mercian Collaboration** is a regional library network based in the UK Midlands. Founded as the *Midlands Academic Library Group* in 2014 with the initial 22 academic library members joined in 2017 by Cranfield University, as the first non-founding member. Member libraries provide the Collaboration's operating capital through an annual, institutional subscription model. Contributions are proportionate to member's income as reported to SCONUL, with levels reviewed annually by the Treasurer and Steering Group, with any changes subject to agreement by the Directors Board.

Steering Group Members (2021-23)



Left to right: (top row) Chris Porter (Chair, Newman), Laura Pilsel (Vice-Chair, Harper Adams) Helen Curtis (Aston, Treasurer), (bottom row) Chris Powis (Northampton), Jo-Anne Watts (Wolverhampton), Judith Keene (Worcester), Gaz J Johnson (Development Officer).

Development Officer

A Development Officer, is employed part-time on behalf of the Collaboration by SCONUL, reporting to the Chair. Their role is to provide executive management of the Collaboration, assisting in realising its objectives, projects, groups, services and developments. The Officer leads on coordinating governance and formal reporting requirements by and to the Collaboration's governing and parent body. Crucially, they facilitate operational matters including communication, liaison and relationships between subgroups and their officers, as the Board and Steering Group's representative. Consequently, they are an ex officio member on all subgroup committees and organising bodies, where they seek to advise, inform and guide activities within the Collaboration's overarching goals. Additionally, the Officer is the primary point of contact for all external enquiries along with maintaining the Collaboration's online and social media presences.

Policy & Reports

In addition to documents detailed earlier a number of other reports and policies were launched by the Collaboration. Principally among these were a minor update to the Collaboration's Terms of Reference with respect to membership^{iv}, event attendance eligibility^v along with a refresh of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with our parent body (SCONUL).

The Officer also produced numerous reports, summarising their activities alongside conducting pieces of research in support of the Collaboration's objectives. Notably these included: two detailed analyses of conference experiences, the results of a broad membership event preferences survey and an investigation into website accessibility. A limited number of closed-access reports were also produced for the Steering Group and Board, with limited circulation due to the operationally sensitive nature of their contents. However, wherever possible all reports and policy documents continue to be made openly available on the Collaboration's website, as per our underlying transparency and open access ethos.^{vi}

Strategic Plan & Membership Values

After five years of the Collaboration's existence, the Steering Group sought to devise a more formalised strategic plan during 2018. This *Strategic Plan* aimed to clarify how the Collaboration delivers membership value through enabling collaborative solutions and support within a changing policy, practice and societal context. It also provided a statement of intent against which future activities could be aligned and successes measured. Following discussions and engagement with the membership, the Plan was launched in early 2020, with the Board's approval. ^{vii}

While the Plan was devised to account for anticipated challenges and development of the academic library sector, impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic and shifts in working arrangements cannot be ignored. Hence, the Steering Group are conducting a review of the Plan during 2022 to accommodate these altered circumstances and emerging membership needs in the light of a considerably reconfigured academic library environment.

The development of the Plan instigated the creation of two further strategic documents. The first, *Tangible Membership Value* highlighted benefits deriving from membership.^{viii} The second, a *Risk Register*, offers risk mitigation routes for the Collaboration and its operations. While the former document is publicly available, this latter one is reserved for access by the Steering Group. The Risk Register is currently under review, as part of the Strategic Plan update.

Treasurer's Report

2021 saw the continuation of restrictions affecting Mercian activities and events and as such expenditure across the year remained low. Physical events did not return during the year, but subgroups have continued to meet, organise external training and development opportunities, and we saw the welcome return of the annual conference too. As the conference was held online it did not require the cost of venue hire and refreshments, so we again did not incur our biggest annual expense. In this respect, our grateful thanks to Bishop Grosseteste University for making this possible. The conference group were also successful in generating sponsorship funds totalling £700 from two sponsors. With an income of £18,702.62 and expenditure of £13,637.07 the reserve funds were at £29,051.57 as of 31/12/2021 leaving the Collaboration in a healthy financial position for 2022. Subscription levels have been increased for 2022 in preparation for the potential of higher expenditure with increased collaboration activities and meetings, and the proposal to increase the Collaboration Officer's hours. There is greater potential for the conference to generate more sponsorship income as the other regional collaboration conferences are more successful in this regard. The conference group sponsor will support the group in developing the approach to potential sponsors. Finances will be continually monitored by the Steering Group across the year.

Helen Curtis
Treasurer, Mercian Collaboration;
Aston University

Communications

Web Presence

First launched in early 2017, the website^{ix} continues to represent the principal public facing presence of the Collaboration to the world. Alongside representing the Collaboration as a whole, it also offers a location where member organisations' staff can learn about our aims, activities, membership and key contacts. The site provides access to a wealth of information including, but not limited to: forthcoming events, news, reports, policy, governance and committee minutes. The site's broad range of openly accessible content reflects the inherent transparency embodied within the Collaboration's organisation ethos. The site itself is overseen, updated and checked by the Development Officer, with platform hosting and support outsourced to SCONUL's web provider. As noted elsewhere (see *Vital Statistics*), traffic to the site in 2021 significantly increased, likely as a result of our online 2021 conference event.

Social Media

In addition to the website, the Officer also manages a twitter presence to further promote the Collaboration and its activities, highlighting events and new web content, alongside raising the organisation's visibility with its members' staff and the wider academic library community. Twitter interaction with members, outside of coverage of the annual conference, remains minor, but with followers continuing to climb represents a low-resource, easy additional route to raise awareness of the Collaboration's work.

Mailing Lists

A general distribution Jiscmail list, exclusive to staff at member organisations is also maintained as a further source of information on events, meetings and developments. The monthly newsletter (see below) is also distributed via this route. The general mailing list may also be used on occasion to promote vacancies within member organisations, as well as spotlight selected, unaffiliated regional events and news. Each of the Collaboration's subgroups, along with the Directors Board and Steering Group, also maintain operations thorough various Jiscmail private distribution lists, typically maintained by the Officer.

News & Announcements

Throughout 2021 the Collaboration continued to highlight outputs and reports from subgroup events, as well as drawing members' attentions to developments pertaining to the conference. As in previous years the majority of the news content was produced by the Officer, in their role as the public face and marketing lead for the Collaboration.

Headline	Date	Associated Group	Author
Appreciating the Challenges of the Accessible Remote 'Locked Down' Library Service	27 th Jan	MDF	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
Online Library Induction Sessions: Experiences, learning outcomes and reflections	24 th Feb	MSDG	Emma Hollinshead (Aston)
Annual Report 2020 Published	25 th Mar	Directors Board	Gareth J Johnson (MC)

New Steering Group Inducted as Old One Stands Down	25 th Mar	Steering Group	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
Adaptation and Growth: Conference Theme for 2021 Announced	22 nd Apr	Conference Group	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
Reporting on Crowd Control: Library Bookings in a Lockdown Landscape	28 th Apr	MSDG	Kirsty Kift (Coventry)
Call for Session Proposals: Conference 2021	5 th May	Conference Group	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
May '21 Newsletter Published	5 th May	Steering Group	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
Exploring Difficult Customer Situations	12 th May	MSDG	Kate Marshall (NTU)
Talking about Learning: Virtual Networking Event (April '21)	18 th May	Steering Group	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
Deadline for Conference Submissions is Mid-June	2 nd June	Conference Group	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
Record Year for Conference Speaker Submissions	24 th June	Conference Group	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
Conference 2021: Bookings Now Open	28 th July	Conference Group	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
Conference 2021 Content Now Available	4 th Oct	Conference Group	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
New Conference Group Members (2022) Wanted!	27 th Oct	Conference Group	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
Library Data Visualisation & Benchmark Event - Presentations	3 rd Nov	MSDG	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
Future Collaboration Conferences – We Want to Hear from You!	10 th Nov	Conference Group	Gareth J Johnson (MC)
Social Media Platforms Event - Presentations	16 th Dec	MSDG	Matt Cunningham (Loughborough)

Newsletter

Having been informally distributed during preceding years via the general Collaboration email list (mercian-collaboration@jiscmail), from March 2021, a monthly newsletter was formally launched by the Officer. A member only perk, the newsletter offers a summary of recent and forthcoming events, alongside highlighting news of group meetings and announcements. The newsletter also carries occasional job advertisements within the region, and more rarely, information on activities and events from outside the Collaboration. As a result, the newsletter has become an essential resource available to any registered list member. In total nine issues were produced and made available in 2021.

Key Links

Website: merciancollaboration.org.uk

Twitter: [@MercianCollab](https://twitter.com/MercianCollab)

Mailing List: mercian-collaboration@jiscmail

News: merciancollaboration.org.uk/news

Events

Since the onset of the pandemic and remote working, the Collaboration has pivoted to an online events programme. While this may have reduced the level of events offered, a strong events programme was still offered by the various subgroups over the year, including our first online annual conference. Events in 2021, facilitated by the Collaboration were as follows:

Event Title	Date	Venue	Associated Group	Organiser	Institutional Host
Virtual Networking Meeting: Brave New Year	21 st Jan	Online	N/a	Gaz J Johnson	Mercian Collaboration
Planning and Delivering an Online Induction Programme during Covid	29 th Jan	Online	MSDG	Emma Hollinshead & Clare Langman	Aston University
Crowd Control: Library bookings in the lockdown landscape	24 th Mar	Online	MSDG	Teresa Jordan	University of Birmingham
eBook Management eForum	24 th Mar	Online	MMG	Will Peaden	Aston University
Handling Difficult Customer Situations	14 th Apr	Online	MSDG	Diana Edmonds	Bridgford Consultancy
Virtual Networking: Talking about Learning	22 nd Apr	Online	N/a	Gaz J Johnson	Mercian Collaboration
Trans-Awareness in the Library	16 th June	Online	MSDG	Kit Heyam	External Facilitator
Adaptation and Growth in Times of Adversity (Conference 2021)	9-10 th Sept	Online	Conference Group	Conference Group	Bishops Grosseteste University
Library Data: What are we collecting and why?	19 th Oct	Online	MSDG	Kirsty Kift	Coventry University
Social Media Platforms for Customer Engagement	10 th Nov	Online	MSDG	Matt Cunningham	Loughborough University
Making Use of MarcEdit	17 th Nov	Online	MMG	Richard Birley	Birmingham City University
Implementing a new Library Management System (LMS)	7 th Dec	Online	MSDG	Laura Pilsel	Harper Adams
Collaborative Partnerships	9 th Dec	Online	MSDG	Katie Mann & Kirsty Kift	Newman University

Operations

Subgroups

Since its formation, the Collaboration has established several subgroups, beginning with the Mercian Staff Development Group (MSDG). These subgroups sought to enable experience exchanges, form communities of practice and offer a locus of expertise within the region. Moreover, many of these subgroups contribute to maintaining an ongoing professional development environment for library staff, within their particular areas of focus. Consequently, subgroups contribute significantly to furthering the Collaboration's aims and objectives in line with its strategic plan, along with representing a key tangible and highly visible value to its membership.

The Collaboration operates two types of subgroup: *operational* and *special interest groups*. The former primarily deliver on providing tangible, membership outputs through their respective programme of events. Hence, while experiential sharing at their committee meetings is an acknowledged benefit of participation, it is not their primary operational goal. Conversely, special interest groups committees are chiefly tasked with being regularly hosted forums for experiential exchange which enables library staff working in particular roles to develop and update their personal knowledge base. Special interest groups may, and many choose to, organise successful events for their members and other interested library staff. However, it is not expected nor a requirement of their operations.

No matter their configuration, all subgroups benefit from regular liaison with the Development Officer, who in turn provides them with support, guidance, communication and updates as part of their Collaboration coordination activities. The Officer also sits as an *ex officio* member of all subgroup committees. Additionally, each subgroup benefits from a *Steering Group Sponsor* who alongside providing further channels of communication and support, operate as each the group's representative to the Steering Group and Directors Board.* Sponsors also help in identifying topics of cross-Collaboration interest and assist in facilitating exchanges between other subgroups.

Operational Groups

Conference Group (CG)

*The Conference Group's role is to plan, develop and deliver the annual Mercian Collaboration conference. Because of the need to deliver on such a time-sensitive and crucial Collaboration output, committee members are proposed by their Directors. The group's sponsor is **Jo-Anne Watts** (Wolverhampton) with the group's chair for 2021 being **Damian Pugh** (Nottingham) and Vice-Chair **Deborah Munro**. Because of their own contemporaneous events programme, the MSDG provides an observer to provide liaison between the two groups.*

After the regrettable cancellation of the 2020 conference, we were delighted in 2021 to be able to once more host an event. Held for the first time both online and split over two half days, the Collaboration conference saw a record 130 delegates and speakers register to attend on 9-10 September. The theme for the 2021 event, [*Adaptation and Growth in Times of Adversity*](#), was chosen as one which the planning committee felt would resonate with the experiences of library staff over the past 18 months. It certainly

generated a wide range of submissions from potential speakers, making the task of creating a varied and engaging programme all the easier.

A keynote paper from **Emma Cragg** (Independent Personal Development Coach) set the tone for the two days, and she was followed by a further 22 papers from 10 different member organisations. Papers were delivered online via the MS Teams platform, kindly provided by **Bishop Grosseteste University**, Lincoln to whom the entire committee are most grateful. Sessions themselves were presented as a mix of live and recorded papers, although speakers were encouraged to participate in live Q&A sessions at the end of each panel. In this way audience members had a chance to interact directly with them and generate discussions around each topic. We also experimented with pre-recorded 'Moments of Joy', vox-pop content designed for access around the timetabled sessions.

The online format of the event allowed another first, as we were able to [record and share every session](#) after the event. This, we hope, has helped increase the reach and awareness of the conference further than ever before. [Delegate feedback](#) was certainly positive, and while it is clear not everything worked perfectly on the day, clearly a lot of value was gained by participants.

Once again, we also sought external sponsorship to support our endeavours. While that achieved was lower than in previous years, we were still delighted and appreciative of the two companies who took the opportunity to support us. Their generosity allowed us to offer a number of prizes for those delegates who chose to return their conference feedback forms.

As always, the Conference Group is also grateful to the delegates and speakers for helping make the 2021 conference a resounding success. As past Vice-Chair, and now Chair, of the group I also deeply applaud the contributions of the past committee members for making the event happen under such challenging circumstances. As a committee we are already looking towards the 2022 conference, and have welcomed a number of new and willing members, while saying a fond farewell to others who had served their time. I am hopeful that with our second online conference ahead, we can use the experiences and learning outcomes from 2021 to help make this next event an even greater success for everyone involved.

Deborah Munro, Conference Group Chair, University of Birmingham

[Staff Development Group \(MSDG\)](#)

*The MSDG was the first subgroup formed by the Collaboration. It has a remit to organise an annual programme development and training events for library staff within member institutions. Additionally, it manages the Mercian Buddying Network, which aims to partner staff with more experienced contacts at other regional institutions. Membership is representational, with staff usually occupying a staff developmental lead role within their own organisation. The group's sponsor is **Chris Porter** (Newman), and the current chair is **Sarah Pittaway** (Worcester).*

The past year has once again proved to be a challenge for us all, but it has also been one of many successes for the Staff Development Group. Despite the continued remote working for so many of our members and colleagues, the group has sustained our varied and diverse programme of events throughout the year.

From the, sadly still, highly topical ‘Delivering an Online Induction Programme During Covid’ through our energised ‘Social Media Platforms for Customer Engagement’ to our flagship ‘Handling Difficult Customer Situations’ event, we have continued to deliver on the group’s goals of a broad programme of staff development. In total we delivered 9 events in 2021, not to mention our support for the Virtual Networking sessions and various members speaking at the annual conference. Notably, we once again drew on not only the expertise within the region, but also through the hiring of external facilitators. Our thanks to the Steering Group for supporting us in this latter respect.

Moreover, feedback from delegates at our events continues to be positive. Hence, while we are far from ready to rest on our laurels, it has been a most gratifying outcome to continue to make a positive contribution to the region’s staff development landscape. Feedback from delegates, as well as input from members and the Directors Board, continues to be used in shaping our current 21/22 programme and to shape our thoughts for the 22/23 one too.^{xi}

Alongside this, the MSDG buddying scheme has continued to operate quietly in the background. While we hope to revitalise and better publicise this scheme in 2022, we are also talking with SCONUL about its relationship to their own mentoring programme. Conversely, despite our best efforts, our pivot to virtual All the Same, But Different ‘visits’ have so far not yielded an event, we are optimistic with increased regional expertise in virtual presence and online engagement, 2022 will see our first ‘remote’ library tour. Or at least that’s my ambition at time of writing!

Events for 2022 will include the highly topical online recruitment of staff, along with plans to introduce more ‘bring and share’ types of knowledge exchange events. These events will aim to be less reliant on speaker presentations, and more focused on addressing particular challenges or ideas face across the membership: such as LMS implementation.

In closing I would like to thank all the MSDG committee members for their insight, contributions and support this year, especially my officers. I would also like to take the opportunity to applaud anyone who has hosted or spoken at one of our events too – without you we quite literally wouldn’t have a programme!

[Buddying Scheme](#)

The Buddying Scheme, first introduced in 2017, as a way for new or relatively new library staff to find an experienced and informed colleague at one of the other member institutions, may be the Mercian Collaboration’s best kept secret!^{xiii} Managed by the MSDG, the scheme facilitates the partnering of participants (*buddies*) with a corresponding library staff member at another member institution for a six-month period of peer-to-peer support. Unlike mentoring, which includes more formal monitoring and reporting arrangements, buddying is designed to be light-touch, flexible and mutually beneficial for all participants. There are no specific requirements in terms of how frequently buddies should be in contact, although a number of exchanges during the six-months is encouraged. While the scheme has only a limited traffic annually, feedback from participants continues to be positive. More information on the scheme is available in the MSDG section of the website, or by following the link above.

Special Interest Groups

[Copyright Group \(MCG\)](#)

*The MCG is a network of library staff with a responsibility for Copyright guidance and advocacy at their institutions. Membership is representational and largely self-selected by individuals within membership organisations. The group's sponsor is **Chris Porter**, and the current chair is **Yvonne Budden** (Warwick).*

The Copyright Group has not met since 2019, nor has its mailing list been active in the past year. Consequently, its continuance is currently under review by the Steering Group.

[Deputies & Senior Staff Group \(D&SSG\)](#)

*The D&SSG is a forum for senior managers and leaders, residing below directorial level. Membership is open to all staff in senior graded roles within libraries, with members coming together a number of times each year to exchange experiences. The intent is for members to participate in horizon scanning, obtain support for strategic planning and gain insights into the operationalisation of national agenda items. The group's sponsor is **Chris Porter**, with the group's meetings normally facilitated by the Collaboration's Officer. The position of meeting chair rotates among members present.*

Following the pattern set in previous years, the group met three times in 2021, thanks to Ant Brewerton (Warwick), Ben Veasey (Loughborough) and Kirsty Kift (Coventry) who each chaired one meeting apiece.

The March meeting discussed the learning outcomes recognised as emerging from the lockdown and remote period experiences and how they might best inform future working practices and service delivery. The group explored the perceptions that while some accommodations might be transitory, others were recognised as evolutionary shifts which were likely to be retained. The meeting moved to consider issues of engagements, team practices and how staff (and user) behaviours have also been modified, and what this pertains for the future. Issues of user digital poverty, and the library service's role in helping to alleviate this provided a valuable counterpoint to ideas of wholesale pivots to a 'digital first' study environment.

The May meeting debated the (then) topical return to campus experiences. Attendees shared and explored how different institutions were handling this task, as well as the degree to which staff and students had migrated back to a more campus-centric environment. Notably that there was a considerable variance in this latter regard across the Collaboration. Discussions followed on concerning the practical preparations for the next academic session, illuminated by considerations of diversification of user communities' needs and expectations.

Mindful on the continuing impacts from the pandemic driven changes, alongside the developing wider picture, November returned to discussions on new and emerging staff working practices. After exploring updates in this regard, the meeting moved on to examine in greater detail issues of staffing resource and recruitment challenges, policies and practice. Other topics raised throughout this year's meetings have included decolonising collections, changing student expectations for online/in person training and support, as well as opportunities to update each other on developments at member libraries.

The Group will be meeting again in Spring '22, and will be looking at the National Student Survey, as well as the future of print collections. The Deputies & Senior Staff Group always welcomes any and all senior members of library management, below director level, to attend their meetings.

[Marketing & Communications \(MarComms\)](#)

*The MarComms group comprises library professionals with a particular interest in the marketing, promotion and reputational enhancement of academic libraries. Membership is representational and largely self-selected by individuals within membership organisations. The group's sponsor is **Helen Curtis** and the current chair is **Stewart Sandilands** (BCU).*

The Marketing & Communications Group last met in January 2020, nor has its mailing list been active in the past year. Consequently, its continuance is currently under review by the Steering Group.

[Mercian Disability Forum \(MDF\)](#)

*The MDF comprises library professionals working within member institutions with an interest in, or responsibility for, supporting disabled students. Membership is representational and largely self-selected by individuals within membership organisations. The group's sponsor is **Chris Powis**, and the current chair is **Simon Satchwell-Giles** (Newman).*

The Forum met twice during 2021, online both times as it had done the previous year. Forum meetings have continued to be lively opportunities for members to exchange experiences and update each other on developments relating to disability and accessibility related issues. They have also been valuable opportunities to offer support and insight to one another during these challenging times.

As in 2020, the increased reliance on distance learning and support for the majority of the student and academic body had given rise to a lot of new, and sometimes unexpected, developments for the Forum's members to tackle. Topics of particular debate in 2021 have included: RNIB Bookshare, new and emerging work practices, staff wellbeing and stress, video captioning, eBook accessibility, service level agreements, disability awareness training for library staff.

During the last meeting of the year the Forum also welcomed the chair of the MSG, Sarah Pittaway, to discuss steps towards making all training within the Collaboration more inclusive. We hope that in 2022 these initial discussions will not only help in the development of advice and best practice guidelines, but also potentially enable an experience exchange event open to the wider Collaboration membership.

2021 also saw the handover of the reins of office, from outgoing chair Laura Waller (Warwick) to myself at the March meeting. Laura did an admirable job of curating the Forum and its activities over the previous couple of years, and it has been an honour to take the group forward in 2021. Looking to the future, I would expect 2022 to offer us new challenges, but hopefully also further opportunities to gather together as disability practitioners within the Forum in a spirit of enlightened collaboration.

[Mercian Metadata Group \(MMG\)](#)

*MMG group members have particular interests in around the creation and management of metadata. Membership is representational and largely self-selected by individuals within membership organisations. The group's sponsor is **Judith Keene** with the current organisers being **William Peaden** (Aston), **Richard Birley** (BCU) and **Ed Kirkland** (Warwick).*

Once more the Metadata Group has not allowed the challenging year to diminish opportunities for engagement and discussion among our members! The year began with our annual meeting in February, hosted online but with an excellent turnout. Unsurprisingly as an opportunity for everyone in attendance to share their experiences, and reflect back on a tumultuous 2020, it proved a major success. It provided a welcome opportunity for everyone to catch up, as well as share their thoughts on topics as diverse as: decolonising subject indexes, RDA/BL application profiles and special collections. Moreover, for the group officers the meeting was a valuable occasion to start our planning for the year ahead, in terms of hosting events to address various hot topics suggested from within our membership.

As a result, this year we were delighted to be able to host two different events. The first held in March, comprised the latest in of our series of eForum discussion events, tackling this time the topic of eBook Management. The second event was held in late November and focussed instead on the application and utility of MarcEdit. During the event various speakers shared their own experiences and advice with the tool, which was warmly received by the attendees. Both events were well attended and received by the community, and have helped to shape our ideas for future activities going through into 2022.

Alongside this, the group continues to interact with other sectoral bodies, notably the CILIP's Metadata and Discovery Group, and metadata practitioner groups in other regional collaborations too. We have high hopes 2022 will permit us to once more meet in the flesh, and look forward to a new year of activity and discussion across the region.

Membership Highlights

Each year the Collaboration presents highlight reports from our member libraries.^{xiii} These are normally warmly received by the community and serve to provide an overview of activities across the region. As in 2020, once again the Collaboration believes showcasing what member libraries have achieved during this continuing period of disruption is more important than ever. It not only provides a powerful message about the diversity of member experience and accomplishments but also helps demonstrate the richness of experience across the Collaboration. Member directors are asked ahead of this report's publication, to provide brief updates which highlight notable activities, occurrences or responses enacted within their services or institutions. Report submission is not a member requirement, nor is it possible to provide an overview of all activities within each member library. Hence, the following are only a taste of the regional academic libraries' achievements. For more information on specific member libraries, goals and activities, readers are advised to approach the appropriate Director of Library Services, or equivalent.

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Aston University

It has been another challenging year for the Library team at Aston but despite the challenges we have still achieved a great deal and have much to be proud of. The Library has continued to provide a high level of user support across our services throughout the restrictions through the management of the library building and study spaces, the provision and expansion of digital resources, and our online learning and research support. The quality and consistency of this support resulted in commendations in our professional service review, reaccreditation with CSE achieving 10 elements at the level of 'Compliance Plus', and the Library team winning the award for Best Customer Service at the Aston Achievement awards.



Figure 1: The Aston Library Team with Aston University Vice-Chancellor Alec Cameron at the Aston Achievement Awards 2021

In January we began work on our extensive etextbook programme with Kortext to provide etextbooks across all Aston module reading lists. It has been a significant project that has allowed us to provide etextbooks on a scale not possible before and to explore new models of provision. We are continuing to evaluate and learn lessons from the programme which were shared in a recent [Wonkhe article](#).

Complementing the increased digital resources, our Information Specialists have been at the forefront of developing and delivering library support for blended learning and with our Library Content Developer led a new and improved 'Discover Your Library' programme as well as teaching across Aston programmes online and in person. We continue to see increased engagement in the skills support provided by the Library and with the improved quality of our learning materials.

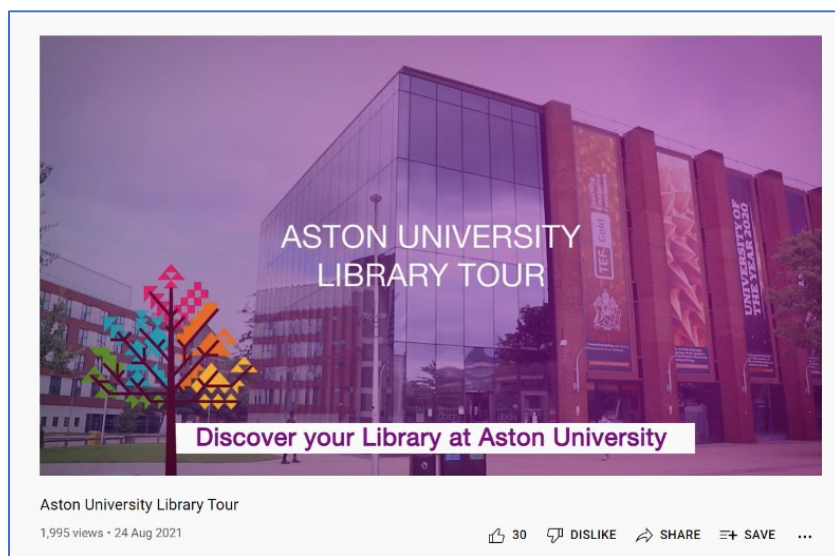


Figure 2: Aston University Library Tour Front Page

This year also saw the University's best REF submission to date. The Library's research team played a significant role in supporting the REF submission, worked with our repository host to add DOI minting to the Aston Publications Explorer, and further developed the range of researcher development workshops to support Open Research practices at Aston.

The Aston Library team have continued to engage with partners and colleagues across the sector, sharing ideas and experiences in specialist areas, as well as how we are adapting to new ways of working. Aston staff have presented at a range of conferences and events for the Mercian Collaboration, CILIP, SCONUL and Kortext. Our Mercian Conference presentation reflected on the varying range of 'any other duties' that come our way in the Library and we now adding 'saving wildlife' to the list as we rescued and saved a woodcock who flew into the windows of the library building!



Figure 3: Library Meets Birdlife

More recent efforts this year have focussed on moving out of the ‘COVID response’ mode of operation and beginning to look forward and plan for our future Library. A key priority has been workforce development and the creation of new Service Lead roles within the Library to drive developments across our areas of strategic focus. We have welcomed the appointments of a Content and Discovery and Open Research Leads who are working together on a range of developments and sharing the ups and downs of the Elsevier negotiations and ever changing read and publish deals.

For 2022 we are focussing on continuing workforce and skills development, improving our physical and virtual environments to support blended delivery, and the development of Library strategy.

Birmingham City University

Despite all the challenges presented in 2021, Library and Learning Resources (L&LR) continued to place the student experience at the heart of its strategy.

L&LR successfully maintained accreditation to the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) standard in January 2021; retaining 10 ‘Compliance Plus’ elements including consultation and the adapted services in light of COVID.

Following the announcement of a national lockdown in January 2021 and due to the increased risk of virus transmission, library services remained open with bookable study spaces only available to students who fell into government approved categories. Browsing and borrowing was temporarily suspended.



Figure 4: BCU Library Stock Image (c) BCU Assets

The national lockdown inevitably had an impact on student experience and this was reflected in the L&LR NSS results. However, this also highlighted the importance of the library service to students and emphasised the need to improve the library's digital offer.

From 19th April 2021, 24/7 opening resumed at Curzon Library, and School of Art and St Paul's libraries were re-opened. Study space bookings were retained and a reservation service for essential print items for self-service collection was resumed.

In recent years, replacing the LMS has been high on the list of priorities. Alma and Primo VE were launched in July 2021, providing a platform to further the development of a user-centred, innovative and integrated library service. Despite virtual working during the pandemic, the implementation mobilised all library staff and involved library users in the design and testing of workflows and search interface.

L&LR continues to extend its partnership with professional services across the University. Working with Organisational Development to incorporate copyright in e-learning on web accessibility and with the Faculty of Arts, Design and Media to pilot the hosting and discovery of digitised objects.

With resources becoming increasingly diverse, two new posts were recruited:

A Library Content Developer was recruited in December 2020 to progress the offer of a flexible and blended approach to providing teaching and support, in response to the diverse learning styles and the different delivery modes of study. This approach offers a combination of face to face and online support, using a variety of tools and platforms to create and deliver teaching and support.

A new Digital Services Development Officer started in post in September 2021 and will be leading the way in evaluating our digital platforms to improve user experience.

We also welcomed Ann-Marie James who joined our Senior Management Team as Head of Collection Management and Engagement in June 2021. Our thanks and best wishes go to John Fry-Smith who retired in 2020.

L&LR continued to affirm its online presence with improvements to the virtual service model; offering support through the 24/7 online chat with a librarian service. The service saw a 200% increase in usage during the academic year.

With so much emphasis on digital resources we were also mindful of the importance of reconnecting with the diverse BCU community by maintaining our presence at Open Days and holding outreach events such as a Pop-Up Library at the School of Jewellery.



Figure 5: Pop Up Library at the School of Jewellery, BCU

Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln

2021 was another year dominated by the global Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the country entering its third national lockdown on 6 January 2021 our Library remained open throughout. The click & collect, browse & borrow and study space booking services we'd implemented the previous autumn proved a solid foundation, allowing us to sustain library provision throughout the 2020/21 academic year. We continued to support learners and academics as effectively as possible, mainly using a combination of live chat, email and online communication tools.

In the early spring, mindful that final year undergraduates were starting to work on their dissertations in earnest, we extended our postal loan service to them and continued to focus on the provision of online resources. We also worked hard to ensure no-one felt under pressure to return loans by having fixed return dates and bulk-renewing loans on a regular basis. In February we began initial discussions about what our roadmap out of the pandemic might look like.

In the spring we realised that service disruptions caused by the global pandemic provided a rare opportunity to make major changes to our loan policies, so the next few months were spent planning the introduction of auto-renewal and the abolition of fines for late returns, both of which were successfully implemented in September.

We stopped quarantining books in June, and throughout the summer rolled back restriction after restriction, so that by September, when the new cohort of students arrived, everything felt a little more familiar (though no less unpredictable). The main challenge of the new academic year was getting students into the library building. Footfall continued to be low throughout the autumn and we began to work with a student engagement champion to explore and address the issues. This work continued into 2022.

Our activities weren't completely dominated by the global pandemic. Amongst many other things, the first half of the year was spent rationalising our scanning and digitisation services, as well as publishing a series of reading lists relating to equality, diversity & inclusion. Having already actively supported open access compliance in relation to the University's 2021 REF submission over many months, activities ramped up as the March submission date approached. We also developed a series of Talis Aspire training materials for our academic staff, published two issues of our children's literature newsletter (*The Four Corners*), undertook a systematic review of all items in our collections published before 1875 - the oldest of which dates from 1574 – and, in September 2021, were proud to be the virtual hosts of the Mercian Collaboration's annual conference.

All of the above was undertaken in the context of fluctuating staffing levels and the shifting sands of the global pandemic and I'm immensely proud of my team, not only for all they achieved in maintaining & developing services and supporting our users, but also for supporting and looking out for other as colleagues.



Figure 6: Inside the BGU Library

Harper Adams University

Having operated with restrictions for over twelve months, the Library team were pleased to be able to open up more of our spaces and collections for the academic year 2021-22. With the removal of quarantine, we opened up our downstairs collections and downstairs study spaces (these had been cordoned off during the first part of the pandemic in order to assist with access and quarantine). With the space re-opened, it was an opportunity to reconfigure some of the study and service areas. While this involved reusing old furniture, we have since been awarded £50k in funding from the University for new furniture for this zone and procurement is currently in progress. As this is anticipated to be an initial round of investment in the library space, it is hoped that this area will inform future developments and factor in the changing study and learning needs of students.

While most of our spaces are now open access, we have retained three small designated zones as bookable. This is in part in response to positive feedback from some students who really appreciated being able to book a space, but equally to support those more anxious about being back on campus as these areas have fewer desks. That being said, whether this will be ongoing is not yet decided as we have found that far fewer people than anticipated are actually booking space; instead, many students have returned to their former habits and 'favourite' study areas.

The challenges, innovations and opportunities resulting from the pandemic has encouraged us to consider how we want our services and collections to develop. Like most Universities, we now have a 'digital first' acquisitions approach (for an institution that was extremely print-focused, this has been a significant cultural shift!) and we decided in the summer that we wanted to see if Click & Collect could continue as part of our mainstream services. It is a much more streamlined process than we implemented during the pandemic and has seen consistent use. Another key change is that we are no longer providing access to print dissertations. This is in part due to the retention policy (we have not received print dissertations since 2019), but equally in part the result of discussion related to the value of access to dissertations and the changing assessment criteria.

We made the transition from an in-house Harvard style of referencing to Cite Them Right Harvard in September, following nearly two years of advocacy. As part of the process, we subscribed to Cite Them Right Online and have provided tutorials to academics and support services as part of the transition. We are supporting students and offering reassurances – as you can imagine, there is some anxiety from the student body about this change but it is intended that the project is reviewed at three, six and twelve months. Anecdotally, some students are left bewildered by CTR Harvard as they are struck by the sensible and simplistic approach taken to referencing, where our former bespoke style was comparatively complicated!

We resumed 24/7 in mid-October and this has been positively received by all. The return to 24/7 (the out-of-hours part of which is unsupervised) has also been beneficial for the team as it has enabled every member of staff to benefit from the trial of agile working currently being conducted at the University. While on-campus working remains the priority, in the Library it has been arranged so full-time staff now work two days per week from home and part-time staff, one day.

Agile working is not the only staff change. During the last 18 months, we have welcomed a new Academic Registrar, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Vice Chancellor and Director of IT. This has led to some structural changes, including the University Librarian taking on an additional service area, Registry. This enabled a career opportunity to develop within the team with the creation of a Deputy Head role. Further staffing changes have since happened, as three of our Library Assistants and one Librarian decided to retire or depart for pastures new. Consequently, we have recently appointed an Assistant Librarian and Senior Library Assistant.

Newman University

2021 has been a time of great change for us at Newman.

Both of our long-standing team managers left the organisation, taking with them over 25 years' experience of the Library.

Recruiting replacements for these key roles was our main priority in the first half of the year, but delivered great appointments and fresh thinking at a time of significant change.

2021 also saw the launch of a major project we had been anticipating for some time. Approaching the end of our current contract, we planned to tender for a new Library Management System. This was a daunting prospect as we have very limited procurement advice available to us as an institution, as well as a small and over-committed staff. The launch of the APUC LMS framework agreement in 2020 enabled us to undertake this onerous task more easily, and we signed a contract with OCLC in December 2021.

As a small team, the specifying, tendering and implementation of a new LMS, after over 25 years with the same supplier, has taken up a major part of our year – and will continue to occupy much of our efforts until summer 2022.

As part of the process, we are reflecting on most of our existing processes and practices. This is especially true of our circulation policies. As part of our response to the pandemic, we moved to auto-renewals. We have been evaluating this experience in order to inform our approach for the newly relaunched service in summer.

After the first lockdown of 2020, we neither closed nor restricted our opening hours but the number of staff working on site has varied according to Government guidelines and the pressures on our services.

The number of seats we allowed students to book varied from time to time. Other than a very small number of optionally bookable seats, we have now removed all limits. We have been happy to welcome back external borrowers and Sconul Access members.

As an institution, we feel that a positive and vibrant Campus experience is vital to our distinctive ethos. We particularly feel that our student body, which is largely composed of commuting students, needs the opportunity to build relationships in and out of the classroom. So, from September 2021 our position has been that the normal place of study and work for all students and staff is on Campus.

Although there is now more flexibility to work remotely for specific projects or in response to the changing rules around self-isolation, the workforce is generally Campus based – though the drop in library footfall demonstrates that this is not universally observed!

Amongst all the pressures, we have been pleased to support Mercian activities by contributing speakers to the Mercian Collaboration’s event ‘Reporting on Crowd Control: Library Bookings in a Lockdown Landscape’ held in April, alongside colleagues from Leicester, Coventry, Birmingham, Cranfield and Loughborough Universities, by working with colleagues from Harper Adams, Birmingham City and Birmingham Universities on the knowledge exchange session on Implementing a new Library Management System (LMS) in December, and by one of our team taking over the Chair of the Mercian Disability Forum, and speaking at the Conference in September.

We look forward to the opportunities and challenges that 2022 will bring.

Open University

During 2021, we have gradually reopened the library building, starting with office space for staff, then enabling requests for print books to be collected - either from brand new lockers outside the building, or posted to staff and postgraduate research students (PGRs). In September, we reopened the building for use by OU staff and students, and in November, as SCONUL Access resumed, full public access was reinstated. In response to pre-pandemic user research, we reopened the building with an improved staff presence near the entrance, having been self-service prior to the pandemic.

In further support of the OU’s commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion, the Digital Services and Metadata team created [lists of resources](#) that can be used by the public, as well as students, to explore topics such as Autism, Black History, and LGBTQ+. They also improved the organisation, structuring and labelling of the [Library website](#) content based on user research; continued to audit and improve Library websites and digital services in line with [government accessibility requirements for public sector bodies](#); and played a key role in the development of OU Digital Governance policies for Metadata and for Digital Curation and Preservation.

The Library’s research support team launched new guidance on [creating an accessible eThesis](#), which includes a handy accessibility checklist and information on how to convert an eThesis to a PDF. Although the guidance was made specifically with research students in mind, it provides useful information that can be used by all to create accessible and inclusive content.

Library Services provide other unique services to staff and students at The Open University. The Intellectual Property team form part of the Content, Licensing and IP team. This area consists of copyright specialists who source, negotiate and acquire appropriate licences to use third party content in teaching and learning across all OU platforms. The Intellectual Property team experienced a 24% increase in demand this academic year and copyright cleared over 50,000 assets for learning and teaching across all platforms and projects.

The Digital Archive launched two new online exhibitions this autumn that showcase the OU's world-class heritage. The [Open Programme exhibition](#) was developed to celebrate over 50 years of offering OU students the chance to create a personalised course of study across a range of academic disciplines. The [PhD Pioneers exhibition](#) features the stories and experiences of twelve of the OU's first PhD graduates from 1973-79.

Participation in the Library's live online training sessions increased by 69% this academic year compared to the previous year. Based on feedback, students clearly find the training valuable:

'I had no idea when it came to referencing and this evening's tutorial was so helpful, I no longer feel like a deer in headlights'.

'I've gone from thinking I won't ever grasp referencing to feeling confident. So much so that I could probably explain it to someone else'.

Staffordshire University

Early in 2021 the service undertook a redesign with new teams and roles formed. Part of this redesign involved merging the library customer service team and the university front facing 'hub' team into a single team. Through this team we have been successfully promoting a self-service ethos by focussing on direct student access to information and services via the university digital guide app and self-service forms. We will be further exploring the benefits of this approach during 2022.

We also took the opportunity to redesign our skills provision, combining our study skills and subject librarian roles into a single role. Through this we have been able to make the offer to students clearer, more accessible, and more easily understood.

Our resources and systems team have also worked hard to move the university to a new library management system - we went live with this in July. Also, at this time we introduced RFID for all stock and replaced all existing self-service and security machinery with new. Towards the end of the year, we migrated all reading lists from our old to our new reading list system ready for the start of semester two.

During the year we moved our core collection to its new main campus location, a repurposed building close to the heart of the new university estate masterplan. At our Stafford campus library, we completed a redesign, completing structural changes, relocating the print stock, and introducing new self-service machinery and furniture.

All this has taken a huge effort by the team (all whilst maintaining an excellent service) during a time of changing working methods. We believe the changes made put the library on a footing to deliver an excellent future service, and as the university welcomes a new Vice Chancellor at the start of 2022 one which aligns with the emerging long-term strategy for the organisation.

University of Keele

Despite the wider pressures and stresses of the pandemic, Keele's library service (within the university's Directorate of Information and Digital Services) has had a successful year in catering to our user communities. We have strived to develop and streamline our on-site and remote services, with colleagues at our Campus and Health Libraries working in partnership to improve customer experience, collection development and user training and support in a hybrid working environment. Over the year our customer-facing teams at both the Keele campus and health libraries worked tirelessly to maintain borrowing services, computing facilities and study spaces throughout the lockdowns and subsequent transitions through different Covid operating levels. At the campus library we revamped our welcome desk and foyer area (adopting a more secure, card entry system), as well as reconfigured our study space to more effectively locate collaboration spaces and enhance student's choice of silent study areas.

We have continued to build and develop our collections to support Keele's new Joint Veterinary School with Harper Adams University. Throughout the year the university has moved to an agile working model for teaching and professional services staff, as well as implementing reconfigured professional support services under a *OneKeele* project. Keele has restructured its management team in the last 12 months following the retirement of Paul Reynolds as University Librarian in December 2020. Dan Perry, the University's Chief Information Officer and Director of Information and Digital Services is now University Librarian. The library management team is now Janet Weaver (Head of Customer Relationships), Paul Johnson (Head of Content and Collections) and Scott McGowan (Head of Academic Services). The new team are looking to push forward on many new initiatives, as part of a refreshed service catalogue with documented procedures and processes to enhance service access for our users, enabling more effective evaluation and benchmarking of services.

Looking ahead, the Library and our Directorate are developing a new faculty liaison model; a project managed approach to service delivery; enhanced online training resources and services utilising our Microsoft Teams learning environment and apps; and pushing ahead with developing our portfolio of electronic resources, including demand driven acquisition and resource evaluation processes. We were delighted that the National Student Survey 2021 resulted in an above-average score for our service, but in the coming year we will be continuing to review and evaluate our role in supporting teaching and research, which be complemented by a new library strategy and vision for the years ahead.

University of Northampton

And they said it would be all over by Christmas!

The baseline achievement was to keep open, every day throughout this most disrupted year. Resources were made available in print and online, teaching, tutorials, drop-ins and staff development sessions were delivered and we amended, adapted and invented services to make sure that students and staff were supported as everything collapsed around us. This was never more obvious than during a major cyberattack in March that wiped out virtually all of the university systems and the effects of which are still being felt now. The value of the wider LLS team was immediately apparent in the immediate

aftermath of the attack when Learn Tech and the library teams worked together to get 1,000 new guest Collab rooms up in record time so that teaching could continue. An interesting experience but on the whole I'd recommend one to read about rather than experience.

Above this we've successfully run a Tender for our LMS and begun the process of moving all our eggs to Ex Libris. In July 2022 we will have changed from Sierra to Alma and Talis Aspire to Leganto (we already have Primo). We've launched fantastically popular Live Chat service and helped roll out our FAQ service, AskUs, to other areas of the University including most of Student Services. We successfully held two conferences; the university Learning and Teaching conference and our biennial LLS Conference and our Research Support team made a huge contribution to the REF submission, indeed working so successfully with Research and Enterprise that they moved over to them at the end of the year! The central learning and teaching team and Educational Linguistics (EFL) came the other way into LLS at the end of 2020 and we've undergone a major restructure to create the new Learning and Teaching Enhancement team. Great things are already happening through this including new university-wide communities of practice and a Language Development Centre.

2022 will bring a new Vice Chancellor, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Information Officer so we expect a much quieter year.

University of Nottingham

Whilst our focus in 2021 remained on supporting our staff and the wider university within the ongoing and ever-changing context of Covid-19, we also sought out opportunities to engage with, and support, our community.

Black History Month

Every year, we ask staff and students to share their recommended reads for our [Black History Month reading list](#). For 2021 we also hosted an online talk, reading group and book giveaway.

The reading group, hosted by Dr Hannah Marie Robbins, was well attended and provided an opportunity for students and staff to meet and discuss the book 'Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race' by Reni Eddo-Lodge. The book was voted for by students and the first 20 people who signed up received a copy.

The feedback from attendees was positive and inspired Equality, Diversity and Inclusion colleagues to set up a university-wide EDI reading group. Supported by Libraries, the new quarterly reading group will provide a safe space for staff and students to have open and honest conversations about selected titles.

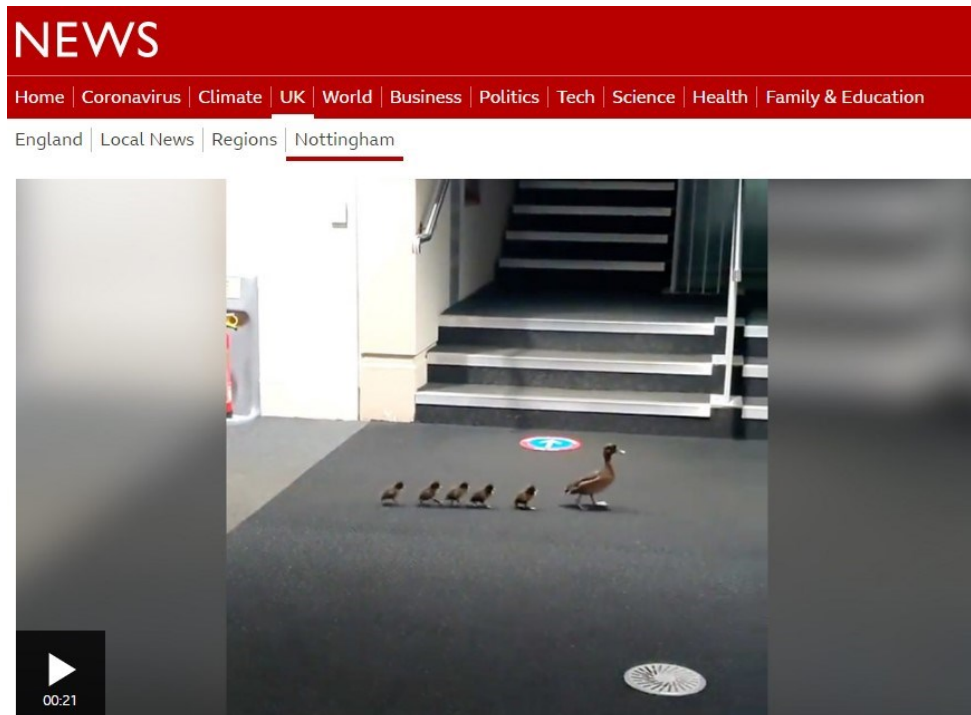
We also hosted a fascinating talk from award-winning poet, Panya Banjoko on her ongoing research into the Black presence within the historic building, architecture, and spaces of Nottingham's National Justice Museum.

Disability History Month

Responding to feedback from surveys and focus groups, we worked on raising the profile of our available services and support for disabled students and students with a learning difficulty or long-term health condition.

Alongside the creation of new promotional materials, a [blog post](#) and [redesigned webpages](#), we also launched our new bookable calm spaces and Assistive Technology Room.

And finally, how could we not mention the [family of ducks](#) that paid a visit to us over the summer and became a worldwide sensation, featuring on Chinese, American and Australian news outlets.



Family of ducks waddles through University of Nottingham library

A family of ducks needed to be ushered out of a university library after waddling their way in.

Figure 7: Nottingham's World Famous Waterfowl

University of Warwick

In some ways, we have all had the 'same' year – so we won't focus on Covid, the rise of Click & Collect or how we have started to try to make sense of hybrid working.

So what are the more 'Warwick' things we have been up to?

Our biggest news is our Library refurbishment. We originally secured over £4m of University funding in 2019 but the project was delayed by the pandemic. The work began in summer 2021. Like everyone else, we faced supply chain issues so the refurbishment was not completed by the beginning of the

academic year as hoped but our student population has been very supportive and appreciative of the changes.

The refurbishment has brought an increase in study space, a more professional feel to the environment and some new types of spaces to support different user needs. Our new Co-Creation Space supports partnership working between students, academics and professional services staff. Based next to the Teaching Grid it is (most importantly) based in the place where students feel most at home and not in an academic department (which would arguably impact on the power balance for partnership working). We have invested in reconfigurable 'building block' furniture so the community can co-create the space as well as the curriculum.

We have also developed a 'recharge room' to support wellbeing. Based on the work of US hospitals to support their staff during Covid, here students will be able to take time out from their studies, 'recharge their batteries' and 'take a breather'. We are still working on provision but we will call the room 'The Breathing Space'.

For more details on the refurbishment please see our blog post at: <https://studyblog.warwick.ac.uk/2021/10/21/the-library-refurbishment-improving-services-for-you/>

What else have we been doing?

We moved out of our commercial store into a purpose-built Library and Archive Store at Wellesbourne. This is especially important as – following a successful bid to the Wellcome Trust – we will soon take charge of and begin work on the preservation and cataloguing of the sizeable archives of the National Union of Mineworkers.

Our Resource Acquisitions and Digital Access team (RADA) and the Teaching and Learning team have worked tirelessly to improve Reading List provision for our students. Working closely with the Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor (Education) and colleagues in IT Services, they set up a network of Reading List Liaison Officers in the academic departments this year. This enabled the Library to work more effectively with academic colleagues on the publishing, resourcing and effective use and monitoring of reading lists. By working in this way we were able to move from 33% of modules having a reading list on Talis Aspire to 67% over the 2020/21 academic year.

Lockdown has brought many challenges for all of us. One such challenge for students has been how to access resources. The Library has always invested heavily in e-resources and in 2020/21 we spent an additional £180,000 to support students with key e-textbooks. On top of this, we have set up a new document delivery package. Rapid ILL was initially 'running in the background' with a service launch set for September. By the end of June 2021 we had had 688 requests, with a 92% satisfaction rate and an average turnaround time of eleven hours!

Another busy year.

University of Wolverhampton

Although 2021 has continued to be a challenging, and busy, time for the Library, we have adapted to the many changes and worked hard to provide both a high level of customer support across our libraries and further increase our provision of digital resources.

eTextbook Scheme

One of the larger projects the library undertook in 2021 was the roll-out of an eTextbook scheme, working with Kortext. From September we have been providing students with copies of all their core textbooks identified on reading lists. We introduced the scheme, in part, to offset the challenges that students have faced in accessing ebooks due to availability, restricted licences and usage limitations. Kortext Complete has allowed us to provide significantly more ebooks and early indications are that usage has been very high. We are continuing to evaluate the pilot scheme to see whether we can sustain this investment in future years.

Laptop Loans

In Aug 2021 we installed Lapsafe lockers for short-term self-service laptop loans, providing students the opportunity to borrow a Win 10 laptop for use around campus for up to 6 hours, available from all 3 campus libraries. The short-term loan service compliments the existing 30-day laptop loan offer that has been available to students since August 2020. Both schemes have proved very popular.

We now have 70 devices available for short term loan and 250 devices for long term loan. Short term has had over 1000 loans between Sept – Dec 2021, with 75% of users borrowing more than one. The biggest challenge has been meeting demand on the long-term loans, which has been exacerbated by students unable to return on time due to lockdowns, restrictions, and self-isolations. Non-the-less initial feedback from students has been positive.

Academic Skills support

Our Skills for Learning team returned to providing on-campus drop-in sessions in September, which have led to an increase in our appointment numbers on last year. Bookable skills workshops remain popular and are well attended and embedded sessions are also seeing some extremely promising engagement, with over 290 delivered in Semester 1 2021/22 alone.

Skills Development Manager, Joe Carey, has a leading role on the University's Digital Confidence working group, forming part of the University's Digital Strategy. A student survey will soon be launched to identify the digital needs and capabilities of students, and a Digital Skills Canvas course is under development. We look forward to seeing the progress of this incredibly important work, throughout 2022.

Research Support

It was also an incredibly busy year for our Scholarly Comms Team who took on a significant role in supporting the institutions REF submission, completing *a lot* of data checking, developing OA policies and processes, applying exemptions, and collating hard copy outputs. Their work did not go unnoticed as they were shortlisted for a Vice-Chancellor's award for going 'Above and Beyond' with the nomination recognising the teams' 'diligence, knowledge and professionalism'.

Inclusivity Collection

At Wolverhampton, the Library has a key role to play in the development of an inclusive curriculum. One example of this has been the development of guidance for academics developing inclusive reading lists.

Another project we are excited to be leading on, is the development of an Inclusivity Collection. Liaison Librarian Tom Hicks secured funding of £4k from the CPL Group and is working closely with faculties and the SU school/course reps on the student-driven initiative, which invites suggestions for material that reflects the lived experience of our students, including reflecting authors from diverse backgrounds with diverse experiences and differing perspectives.

Looking Ahead

The last two years have marked the educational landscape. Libraries have demonstrated, arguably more than ever, the pivotal role they have to play in our institutional, local, national and global communities. Our services and teams have shown remarkable adaptation, embraced changes on an unprecedented scale, worked tirelessly in the face of relentless uncertainty and challenge, been inventive in the delivery and support of users, and made significant contributions to ongoing student education. The list goes on.

2022 will continue to see more disruption and challenges, but it will also be a time of enormous opportunity and great innovation, whether at an individual, team, service or sector level. As Universities evolve in the post-pandemic world, with shifts in pedagogical practices, working arrangements, sustainability, technological and space investments, and let us not forget the ever-changing student expectation, what we have achieved over the last two years - the connections that have been built and strengthened, the insights that have been gained, and the benefits of sharing our knowledge - will ensure that we will 'be ready for anything'.

Over the coming year, our teams and our services remain key institutional drivers in pushing through cultural, educational and organisational transformations, with central themes including literacies (information, media, digital, cultural, critical); curriculum development and learning technologies; staff development; student and staff wellbeing; combatting disinformation and digital distraction; and continued efforts to improve diversity and Allyship. We will equally stand with our national partners in the fight for transparent and fair pricing and provision on ebooks.

Through your efforts, the members of the Mercian Collaboration continue to thrive, and our libraries are set on course for a positive year ahead.



Laura Pilsel
*Vice Chair (2021-2023),
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The Mercian Collaboration is a regional library network based in the UK Midlands. Originally founded as the Midlands Academic Library Group in 2014, it currently comprises 23 academic libraries.

Vital Statistics

Members: 23 Academic Libraries	Events in 2021: 13
Subgroups: 7	Meetings in 2021: 21
Steering Group: 3 Officers, 3 Representatives, 1 Ex Officio	Twitter Followers: 237 (+5% on 2020)
Most Northly: Bishop Grosseteste University	General Mailing List Members 189 (+22% on 2020)
Most Southerly: The Open University	Site Page Views in 2021: 17,314 (+48% on 2020)
Most Western: Harper Adams University	Site Unique Visitors: 5621 (+34% on 2020)
Most Eastern: Bishop Grosseteste University (just!)	

Contact

For more information, visit our website or contact the Development Officer.

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Endnotes & References

- ⁱ Annual Reports for 2017-2020 can be found online at: <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/key-documents#annual>
- ⁱⁱ The Officer apologises for dropping into academic jargon. It won't happen again, in this report at least.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Technically the role title changed to *Executive Officer* as of 1/3/22. However, as this report reflects activity in 2021 the old nomenclature is retained.
- ^{iv} Mercian, 2021. *Terms of Reference*. The Mercian Collaboration. <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/about-collaboration/terms-reference>.
- ^v Mercian, 2021. *Events: Eligibility*. The Mercian Collaboration. <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/events>.
- ^{vi} Mercian, 2021. *Key Documents*. The Mercian Collaboration. <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/key-documents>.
- ^{vii} Mercian, 2020. *Strategic Plan 2020-2024*. The Mercian Collaboration. <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Strategic%20Plan%20Jan%202020%20v1.0.pdf>.
- ^{viii} Mercian, 2020. *Tangible Membership Value*. <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/MC%20Tangibles%20and%20Value%20-%20v1.0%20Jan%202020.pdf>.
- ^{ix} Mercian, 2021. *The Mercian Collaboration: Homepage*. The Mercian Collaboration. <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/>.
- ^x Mercian, 2021. *Subgroup Sponsors*. The Mercian Collaboration. <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/subgroup-sponsors>.
- ^{xi} Editor's note: The MSDG events programme is organised by academic year, rather than calendar year.
- ^{xii} Mortimer, J., & Johnson, G., 2019. *Buddying Scheme Trumpets 2 Years of Success Stories*. <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/buddying-scheme-trumpets-2-years-success-stories>.
- ^{xiii} Mercian, 2020. *Mercian Collaboration Member Institutions*. Mercian Collaboration. <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/about-collaboration/member-institutions>.