



Mercian Board Meeting 29th November 2024 Open University & Online Notes and Actions

1. Welcome and apologies

Present in the meeting room: Emma Walton (Chair, Loughborough University), Gary Elliott-Cirigottis (Open University), Pete Maggs (Treasurer, Nottingham Trent University), Tim Wales (Cranfield University), Anna O'Neill (University of Warwick), Chris Porter (Birmingham Newman University), Jo-Anne Watts (University of Wolverhampton), Chris Powis (University of Northampton), Joanne Dunham (University of Leicester), Ruth Jenkins (Mercian Collaboration Executive Officer)

Present online: Ann-Marie James (Aston University), Judith Keene (University of Worcester), Ian Keepins (University of Birmingham), Sarah Pittaway (Birmingham City University), Paul Mahoney (Staffordshire University), Phil Brabban [morning] and Kirsty Kift [afternoon] (Coventry University)

Apologies: Sue Ackermann (Vice-Chair, University of Nottingham), Benjamin Veasey (University of Derby), Ian Snowley (University of Lincoln), Dave Parkes (De Montfort University), Laura Pilsel (Harper Adams University), Scott McGowan (University of Keele), Stephen Dudley (University College Birmingham)

The Chair welcomed everyone present at the Board meeting, whether they were joining in person or online.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 23rd August 2024 and matters arising

The [minutes of the last meeting](#) were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting.

The Chair updated the Board on the following actions:

- The reduction in hours and salary of the Executive Officer to 0.3 FTE will come into effect from 1st March 2025.
- The Mercian Collaboration website will be completely rebuilt in Wordpress by Pendulum.dev by spring 2025. The costs of doing this work have been included in the expenditure forecast for 2025.

JW reported back on discussions with the Mercian Disability Forum about the potential to expand the remit to include a wider range of EDI and accessibility matters. It was expected that a proposal would be presented to the next Board meeting in March 2025. A proposal for a 'Global Majority Network' will also be produced for the next Board meeting.

2.2 November handover date for SG members and Officers

The Chair and Steering Group made a recommendation to move the handover date for Officers and new Steering Group members from March 2025 to November 2025. This will allow more time for the current Chair and Treasurer to complete activities already in train.

This was unanimously agreed.

The current Steering Group members and Officers were thanked for their willingness to extend their terms of office for a further 9 months.

2.3 Update on review of Mercian Groups

Further to discussions at the summer Board meeting, the Chair had produced an updated [Mercian Collaboration Group Proposal](#). This updated proposal was welcomed.

It was noted that the decision to reduce the Officer's hours to 0.3FTE would mean that support for Special Interest Groups and Communities of Practice will be more minimal. This would include to mailing list management and web support, but there not be an expectation of the Officer attending every meeting or taking notes of meetings.

There was a useful discussion about how to get the most out of the Groups, including the following points:

- Terms of Reference for most of the Groups will need to be refreshed and updated to reflect changed priorities and patterns of activity, including the shift to online meetings.
- It would be helpful if all Groups could produce a short annual summary of what they have achieved, as this would demonstrate the value and impact of what we are doing. Highlights could be included in the Mercian Collaboration Annual Report.
- It would also be helpful to provide some guidance to new and potential members of Groups, setting out the expectations of group members and the benefits of membership.
- New colleagues should be encouraged to get involved in Groups. It may be appropriate to have terms of office for some roles.
- Some Groups are good at organising their own activities and setting their own agendas. Other Groups may need more of a steer from the Board.
- Groups that are no longer active could be discontinued.

3. Treasurer's Report (PM)

PM gave a presentation summarising the current figures for income and expenditure for 2024 and the forecast for 2025. The following points were highlighted:

- The Conference Group were thanked for their success in bringing in £6.5K in sponsorship for the 2024 conference. This more than covered the costs of the venue, catering, keynote speaker, etc.
- SCONUL will be raising invoices for 2025 membership subscriptions in January, with an increase of 3% p.a. applied to subscription levels for 2025.
- PM is convening a Subscription Review Group to develop a set of proposals for a new, more transparent and equitable subscriptions model. The aim is to have proposals ready for the next Board meeting in March 2025.
- The reduction in FTE for the Executive Officer from 1st March 2025 will reduce expenditure on salary, pension contributions and National Insurance on an ongoing basis.
- The new website will cost c.£8K in 2025 and this will need to come from Reserves.

There would be a more detailed report presented at the next Board meeting in March 2025.

4. Name Change Proposal (TW)

TW led a useful discussion about the pros and cons of changing the name of the 'Mercian Collaboration' to something more descriptive, possibly including some combination of the words 'Academic Libraries' and 'Midlands' in the name.

- Some colleagues were not particularly attached to the 'Mercian Collaboration' name and branding and would welcome the opportunity to review this.
- Others highlighted that there would be a cost to making a change to the name and brand, and we have other priorities.
- It was also noted that we have had some success with raising commercial sponsorship income for the 'Mercian Conference' and there would be a need to explain any new name to previous sponsors.
- 'Mercian Collaboration' is easy to find via Google (or similar). A new name combining the words 'Midlands' and 'Academic Libraries' is likely to bring less relevant results.

GE-C proposed a 'strapline' of a few words to encapsulate what Mercian Collaboration is. Several colleagues supported the idea of this. RJ hoped that the new website would make it easier for us to incorporate a 'strapline'.

There was a vote, with majority agreement to continue to use the name 'Mercian Collaboration'.

ACTION: Steering Group to consider the wording of the 'strapline' to be used on the new website.

5. Conference Group update

The [Mercian 2024 Conference Report](#) was shared with the Board.

RJ provided a brief update on initial planning for the Mercian 2025 conference:

- The Conference Group now has sufficient members for 2025.
- Currently seeking quotes for venues in the West Midlands for 2025.
- Conference theme(s) to be confirmed as soon as possible in the New Year.
- Already making good progress in signing up [conference sponsors](#).

6. Workshop to discuss the Value of the Collaboration (led by GE-C)

GE-C facilitated a workshop with several breakout groups including people in the room and those who were joining the meeting online.

We considered the following questions:

4. What are other regional consortia and professional groups known for?
5. How would we describe Mercian Collaboration currently? What do we value about Mercian Collaboration?
6. What do we want to be known for? What should we be doing better/more of?

ACTION: GE-C to produce a summary of the main points coming out of the workshop, to inform planning and next steps.

7. Challenges and Change

This was a confidential discussion about current challenges and whether/how Mercian Collaboration can support members.

7. Some members have recently experienced, or are going through the process of, significant budget cuts.
8. This is impacting on the money available for journal subscriptions and some are considering cancelling or not renewing subscription deals, others have already done this.
9. Organisational restructuring and headcount reduction is also happening in various ways.
10. There have been some mergers of other activity including 'hubs' combining different student services and/or bringing study skills teams into libraries.

It was felt that the most useful support in the short term would be by people continuing to share experiences informally and confidentially.

However, we are open to further ideas on anything Mercian Collaboration can do.

8. Next meeting – March 2025

ACTION: RJ to poll members on a date for the next meeting, with venue to be confirmed.

Please see previous Mercian Board agendas and meeting minutes:

<https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/about/agendas-minutes/directors-board/>

Please see previous Steering Group agendas and meeting minutes:

<https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/about/agendas-minutes/steering-group/>

Ruth Jenkins, Executive Officer

Updated links March 2025

Minor corrections made after Board meeting on 28th March 2025

Final version uploaded to Mercian website 9th June 2025