



Mercian Board Meeting 28th March 2025 Aston University & Online Notes and Actions

1. Welcome and apologies

Present in the meeting room: Emma Walton (Chair, Loughborough University), Sue Ackermann (Vice-Chair, University of Nottingham), Pete Maggs (Treasurer, Nottingham Trent University), Ann-Marie James (Aston University), Sarah Pittaway (Birmingham City University), Phil Brabban (Coventry University), Diane Job (University of Birmingham), Benjamin Veasey (University of Derby), Chris Porter (Birmingham Newman University), Jo-Anne Watts (University of Wolverhampton), Judith Keene (University of Worcester), Chris Powis (University of Northampton), Joanne Dunham (University of Leicester), Ruth Jenkins (Mercian Collaboration Executive Officer)

Present online: Gary Elliott-Cirigottis (Open University), Tim Wales (Cranfield University), Stuart Dempster (University of Warwick), Paul Mahoney (Staffordshire University), Lesley Thompson (University of Lincoln), Shaun Kennedy (Bishop Grosseteste University)

Apologies: 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. There was a particular welcome for first time attendees, including Lesley Thompson, Shaun Kennedy and Stuart Dempster.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 29th November 2024 and matters arising

It was confirmed that the Officer commenced her new 0.3 FTE working pattern with effect from 1st March 2025.

Other matters arising were discussed under the relevant agenda item.

3. Updates

3.1 New Mercian Collaboration website

The new website went live on 19th March 2025. This was very much needed as the version of the website management platform we were using was out of date and increasingly challenging to use and keep working. It is also great to have an updated look. We were keen for it to go live as soon as possible and so this was a 'lift and shift' and is a work in progress in terms of content.

All agreed the new website already looked much better than the old one and thanked Pendulum and the Mercian Officer for their work on this so far.

It was hoped that there would be some progress with refreshing the content and slimming down the text over the next few weeks and months. However, there are constraints on the Officer's time due to her now working 0.3 FTE.

It was agreed that the 'strapline' on the homepage was too wordy and would be slimmed down.

TW recommended 'locking down' some content, including Board minutes. We should have some 'facts and stats'.

BV asked for the timeline for a bigger overhaul. TW suggested that there could be some micro projects in future. SP thought that it may be helpful to involve some people who are good at writing for the web.

ACTION: EW and RJ to meet to review the website and make some initial improvements - COMPLETE

3.2 Review work – approach and work packages

The Chair thanked GEC for the slides summarising the main points from the workshop at the November 2024 Board meeting.

The main themes included:

- Collaboration and sharing
- Staff and workforce development
- Community and identity
- Strategic focus and visibility.

The Chair would continue to discuss next steps with the current Steering Group ready for handover to the incoming Chair and Steering Group in the autumn.

3.3 Symposium for National and Regional Library Consortia

The Chair reported back on this Symposium convened by SCONUL in Birmingham on 24th January 2025. Each of the National and Regional Library Consortia had an opportunity to outline their current priorities and challenges.

There was also a discussion about the potential for shared services, including consideration of necessary duplication versus wasteful duplication.

4. Financial Sustainability and Treasurer's Report (PM)

Income and expenditure

The Treasurer gave a brief presentation summarising the income and expenditure for 2024 and the forecast income and expenditure for 2025. The following points were highlighted:

- Expenditure has been higher than income in recent years, but steps are being taken to address this.
- The Conference Group has been successful in raising more income from sponsorship.
- The reduction in FTE for the Executive Officer from 1st March 2025 will reduce monthly expenditure on salary, pension contributions and National Insurance on an ongoing basis.
- It was noted that we are required to maintain a reserve of c.£10,500 with SCONUL and the current level of remaining reserves (as of March 2025) was c.£20K.
- The one-off cost of the new website was £6480, and this will need to come from Reserves. The ongoing cost of hosting and website support would be £60 per month.

There would be a further report presented at the next Board meeting in autumn 2025.

Subscriptions modelling

A Subscription Review Group had been convened to develop a set of proposals for a new, more transparent and equitable subscriptions model.

The proposal was to have an identified 'unit' cost for subscription, with members paying multiples of that as per JISC banding. Band 10 institutions pay 1x the unit cost, Band 9 pay 2x the unit cost, all the way up to Band 1, who pay 10x the unit cost. This would be a more straightforward approach to dividing up costs, in way that acknowledged different capacities of the members to pay. With everyone at the agreed level proportionate to each other, an inflationary rise to the unit agreed each year while the basic model remains the same. It may be necessary to agree a couple of exceptions for members who have a national-level profile, in recognition of their affiliation across multiple regional consortia.

ACTION: PM to share details of subscriptions proposal with the Steering Group and bring the full proposal to the next Board meeting in the autumn.

5. Core Groups

5.1 Conference Group (SA)

The Mercian 25 Conference would be held at the Coventry Techno Centre Wednesday 10th September 2025. Preparations were progressing well with £9.9K sponsorship raised so far.

It had previously been agreed that the 2026 Conference should be held at De Montfort University and they had recommended getting it booked in as soon as possible.

ACTION: SA to confirm that 2026 Conference should be booked in at The Venue @ DMU

5.2 Staff Development Group (SP)

SP highlighted that 28 people were currently signed up to Buddying Scheme. A recent workshop on Environmental Sustainability had gone well.

5.3 Mercian Disability Forum/EDI

5.3.1 Evolving the Disability Forum (JW)

JW shared the 'Evolving the Disability Forum' paper which proposed to expand the remit of the existing Mercian Disability Forum to include a wider range of EDI and accessibility matters.

This proposal was approved by the Board, and it was agreed that the new EDIA Group would be one of the Core Groups (along with the Staff Development Group and the Conference Group).

The new EDIA Group would be launched at the Conference in September. Manda Laine would be continuing as Co-Chair and along with a new Co-Chair (to be confirmed).

5.3.2 Global Majority Network Proposal (SP)

The proposal for a 'Global Majority Staff Network' and was approved by the Board.

Membership would be optional, and there was no expectation that all Mercian members would be represented.

6. Oversight of Groups and Proposals for New Groups

Several people involved in the workshop on Environmental Sustainability had asked how they could submit a proposal for a new Environmental Sustainability Community of Practice.

This prompted a discussion about the process for proposing and approving new groups, to ensure that expectations are clear and there is appropriate oversight from the Board.

There are also concerns about duplication between different groups, not just in the Mercian Collaboration but also nationally. Some institutions may have challenges releasing team members to participate in groups, given the current context. Group members need to have checked with their institution before joining groups.

AMJ recommended reviewing current groups and what we are getting out of them. It would be useful to have an annual summary of outputs. Groups were also being encouraged to submit posters and presentations to the Conference.

7. Key Institutional and Sector Issues

7.1 'Big Five' negotiations and 'Walkaway' scenarios

PB (Chair of the Sconul Content Strategy Group) gave an update on the 'Big Five' negotiations. He emphasised the importance of ensuring voice of entire Sconul community is represented.

It was noted that there is significant pressure on budgets and a strong concern about equity of access (including Global South).

JISC will consult over the summer. JISC and SCONUL are considering scenarios across the sector. Collaborative action is very important.

There seem to be efforts by some publishers to split the sector and to negotiate separately with senior academics, bypassing librarians.

Any walkaway scenarios would have different impacts on different types of institutions. Some institutions are seeing RapidILL as part of the solution, but this is not an option for other institutions. There are staffing and resourcing implications to consider.

There was a discussion about what role has Mercian Collaboration can play in supporting members and sharing good practice.

Ideas included:

- Learning lessons from recent negotiations (e.g. when publishers tried to bypass the library and sell directly to academics).
- Building relationships with senior academic colleagues and legal and financial colleagues.
- Using evidence, including from the SCONUL Financial Survey.
- Advocacy for teaching-led institutions and access for teachers who are doing a bit of research.

SD briefly described the approach at the University of Warwick and said he would be happy to share more information, possibly in the form a checklist.

In the longer term there is a need to think about service design. For example, Interlibrary Loans and document supply could potentially be more automated, with a move towards managing by exception. Some libraries are already getting the broader team involved in Interlibrary Loans and document supply, rather than expecting a small number of people doing everything.

ACTION: PB and EW to ensure discussions on the 'Big Five' negotiations continue over the summer.

7.2 Shared services/Consortial purchasing

TW gave a presentation on options for shared services across the following areas:

- Systems
- Content
- Services
- Facilities (e.g. shared book storage)
- Entities (e.g. White Rose Partnership)

The presentation summarised some of the main factors to consider, particularly the importance of achieving cost reductions in the short and long term. There was a need to be clear about the minimum savings required to justify the effort involved.

The Board thanked TW for his very helpful presentation and agreed that it would be useful to have further discussions to explore scenarios and share experiences. There may be potential for a small Mercian Collaboration working group on this.

TW offered to share his slides and run a survey for members.

ACTION: TW to circulate his slides on Shared Services via the LIS-MIDLANDSLIBRARIES Jiscmail list – COMPLETE

ACTION: TW to create survey on Shared Services and circulate this - COMPLETE

ACTION: EW to talk to TW about next steps for the Shared Services discussion - COMPLETE

8. Call for new Officers

EW will be handing over the Chair role to SA at the autumn Board meeting. With JA and JK also stepping down from the Steering Group we will need a new Vice-Chair and three new Steering Group members. PM will stay on as Treasurer until early 2026 to see through the new subscription model (with end date to be confirmed).

ACTION: Steering Group to agree next steps for call for new SG members to replace those stepping down later this year.

9. Next meeting – October or November 2025

It was agreed that the next meeting would be hosted by the University of Nottingham with the option for some Board members to join the meeting online.

It was decided not to have an external speaker for next meeting because there is value in having further time for discussion amongst ourselves.

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:

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Ruth Jenkins, Executive Officer, October 2025



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Aston University & Online
Action List

Action	Lead(s)	Dates & Progress
EW and RJ to meet to review the website and make some initial improvements.	EW/RJ	May 2025 COMPLETE
PM to share details of subscriptions proposal with the Steering Group and then bring the full proposal to the next Board meeting in the autumn.	PM	SG meeting 10 th June 2025 Board meeting 9 th October 2025
2026 Conference to be booked in at The Venue @ DMU	SA/Conference Group	COMPLETE
JW to report back to MDF Co-Chairs that Board approved their proposal to expand the remit of the MDF to an EDIA Group	JW	COMPLETE
SP to discuss next steps for the Global Majority Staff Network with Alex Mormoris	SP	COMPLETE
PB and EW to ensure discussions on the 'Big Five' negotiations continue over the summer.	PB/EW	Ongoing
TW to circulate his slides on Shared Services	TW	COMPLETE
TW to create survey on Shared Services and circulate this	TW	COMPLETE
EW to talk to TW about next steps for the Shared Services discussion	EW/TW	COMPLETE
Steering Group to agree next steps for call for new SG members to replace those stepping down later this year.	EW/Steering Group	SG meeting 10 th June 2025 COMPLETE

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