



Mercian Collaboration Steering Group

Vidcon, 10:00am-12noon, Thu 7th May

Minutes

Present: Diane Job (Chair, Birmingham), Emma Walton (Loughborough), Simon Bevan (Cranfield), Chris Porter (Vice-Chair, Newman), Sue Ackermann (Nottingham), Gareth J Johnson (Officer, Mercian Collaboration)

Page | 1

Apologies: Mark Toole (Treasurer, NTU)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting it was good to see everyone. Following a general exchange of lockdown experiences within academic libraries at a director level, the value of online discussions like this at a senior manager level was acknowledged.

20/01 Governance

a. Minutes of 11th Dec 2019 & Outstanding Actions

The minutes were accepted as read. GJJ noted there were no outstanding actions not on the agenda. It was agreed future Board and SG agendas would link to papers as much as possible.

b. Annual Report 2019: Update and launch

As a requirement of our SCONUL status finalising the report is a priority. Only the finalised chair's introduction remains outstanding. GJJ had outlined draft text for Diane earlier, and she apologised for not having reviewed it and would address this as a priority. Due to the delay in releasing the report, and the Covid-19 lockdown, the report documented a fundamentally different period for academic libraries. Hence, GJJ would add a caveat to reflect these circumstances.

ACTION: Diane to provide finalised Chair's introduction for annual report ASAP

ACTION: GJJ to upload, share and promote finalised annual report

c. Strategic Plan: Final Revisions & Approval

A revised version incorporating suggested changes, and SIG improvements, was distributed to the Steering Group for consideration 12th Feb 2020. It was agreed to upload this version to the public website, albeit with a caveat noting current uncertain conditions. Principally concerns over HE sectoral finances in the post-lockdown period and with an uncertain academic library environment over the next year would necessitate a re-visitation of the strategic plan in late 2020/early 2021. How SCONUL's agenda would be impacted by Covid-19 would also need to be considered in discussions around the plan.

ACTION: GJJ to add note to strategic plan and share online

d. Key Documentation: Risk Register & Tangible Values

These had been created and approved by the Steering Group in early 2020. The Tangible Values document has been shared online. Both documents have been shared with the Board, to general approval. The Chair noted the value of the tangible values document with respect to the febrile funding environment left in wake of Covid-19's impact on the sector.

It was agreed to consider further developments of both these documents, in the wake of further director comments and experiences in meeting the current crisis. While future staff development budgets will likely be heavily impacted by university restricting of funding and priorities, the Chair stressed networks like the Collaboration, retained considerable, irreplaceable sectoral value. Diane agreed to take an initial look at the risk register to consider where mitigation could be enhanced, and where any new risks should be incorporated.

ACTION: Diane to revisit risk register and propose updates in light of current events

ACTION: Tangible Value document to be updated in light of current circumstances and discussions at May 2020 Board

20/02 Officer Reports

a. Treasurer's update

While Mark was unable to attend, it was noted the Collaboration was in fair financial health, and with a reduction of physical events and travel to meetings by the Officer, limited demand was being made on our current reserves. Potentially, this would allow for a reduction in 2021 subscriptions, which could help with member retention in the forthcoming financially challenging period. It was commented that SCUNL income is constructed along different lines to the Collaboration, although Jisc was facing a major cut to their income and would have to reduce support for the sector.

b. Interim Treasurer

Mark is now on a prolonged leave of absence, meaning there is a need to appoint an interim treasurer. It was agreed returning to one of the experienced previous officer holders would be ideal; assuming they had capacity. Given the current online pivot of Collaboration activity, it was hoped there would be limited demands on the treasurer, beyond very occasional expenses. An alternative might be to approach a member of the Deputies & Senior Staff Group. Diane agreed to speak to the various candidates.

ACTION: Diane to speak with past treasurers to seek interim financial management support for the Collaboration

GJJ commented he was unsure who was NTU's interim Board contact. It was suggested he approach Mike Berrington to discuss the matter.

ACTION: GJJ to approach Mike Berrington with respect to NTU's Board representation

c. Development Officer Update

GJJ noted his [earlier report](#) covered Dec '19-March '20. Since lockdown began GJJ has been offering regular support, coordination and updates for all SIG, Board and SG. He has attended online meetings of the MSDG (25th March) and Conference Group (25th March & 29th April), as well as providing practical support to their chairs. This, coupled with various outreach activities along with liaison with regional library collaborations as well as work towards enabling online meetings, has meant GJJ remains very busy.

With respect to the regional collaborations, discussions have focussed on exchanges of experience on responses to Covid-19 by regional academic libraries and effective online networking practice. GJJ chaired an online national meeting of Officer counterparts (22nd April) and will be participating in a follow up meeting (2nd July 2020). Experiences within the various collaborations seem broadly comparable to our

own, and these have fed into guidance documents, available on the website for participants and hosts of online events. They are also being used to input to discussions around this year's conference. It was noted the existential threat to regional collaborations, funded by member subscription, was also a common concern across the country.

GJJ had also conducted a membership survey with respect to event engagement, partly in support of the MSDG. The survey results are now being collated for distribution and informing MSDG's future event plans. The survey also identified willing participants for a virtual networking event pilot (13th May). The Chair noted her thanks to GJJ as the 'glue holding the Collaboration together'.

20/03 Operations

a. Date, Agenda Items & Arrangements for Board (May 2020)

It was agreed following discussion to hold the meeting online **Thu 28th May 2-4pm**. The agenda was reviewed, and it was agreed because of the format, to table all report items as written reports beforehand. It was also agreed to include two discussion items, to allow for an exchange of experience, moral support and good practice as the main focus of the meeting.

ACTION: GJJ to invite Directors to attend 28th May Directors Board and share agenda

ACTION: GJJ to circulate report document ahead of Board meeting

b. Covid-19 impacts on Collaboration activities

i. Online Meetings: Update & Current Programme

As noted physical events were currently suspended, however, the planned event *Decolonising Academic Libraries*, led by Leicester and DMU, is being reconstructed for online delivery at its organisers' instigation. The Chair noted this could be a significant event in dealing the post-Covid library sector challenges.

GJJ noted a Zoom Pro licence has been purchased by the Collaboration, which permits a single meeting with up to 100 participants of effectively unlimited duration. It also allows GJJ to appoint co-hosts to run meetings and back-channels. There were some discussions around effective meeting practice and platforms. GJJ noted the guidance on good meeting practice he had drafted, with support of the other regional officers.

ii. Online Networking Event: Update

A virtual networking pilot event is being hosted by GJJ next week (13th May) in collaboration with the MSDG, using the Zoom platform. This was both to trail the format and practice, for potential adoption by individual SIGs should the event format prove successful. Bookings for the event were currently coming in but it was anticipated around 10-15 people would participate.

General comments from library staff were noted identifying a desire, now home working had become more normalised, for events and development opportunities. It was agreed there was value for services and personal benefit to be gained in sharing experience, as well as engaging with fellow library staff online. It was commented that international speakers might be more easily accommodated with all participants online only; with potentially former UK library directors giving useful overseas input.

ACTION: All to approach overseas contacts to participate in future Collaboration events

iii. Promoting Member Responses to Covid-19 difficulties

There was a general discussion over the value to the membership and library services of collating information on local responses to the lockdown period. It was noted that SCONUL has been doing work in this area, but it was not public. GJJ noted despite being a nominally employed by SCONUL, he lacked rights to view it for example. There were comments directors were being asked for a lot of information by their own management, as well as external bodies, and as a result there was a risk of duplication and redundancy of information. It was agreed not to specifically gather any information locally, unless significant demand from the membership became apparent. However, Emma in her capacity as a SCONUL Board member would discuss their activities and findings at the Collaboration Board.

c. Dutch Library Visit

It was noted with the lockdown this visit was likely terminated. However, in the nature of continuing good relations, the Vice-Chair agreed to propose a 2021 visit.

ACTION: Chris to send a well wish and suggest for 2021

20/04 Special Interest Group - Activity Update

a. Conference Group

Emma reported that the Group had met recently, and agreed to move forward this year with an online only event; utilising a variety of asynchronous and synchronous platforms and channels. However, the intention would be to keep it as simple for participants and speakers as possible, to avoid any large technological challenges. Given the theme was 'access, inclusivity and diversity', it was also important to facilitate member staff with restricted devices and network accessibility participating as much as possible. The call for papers, due out soon, would include a request for 'lockdown experiences', although given a number of other events were pursuing this theme, it would only be part of the whole.

Emma commented the new conference team were enthusiastic, and while there had been some practical concerns over the online pivot were by and large behind the idea. Some issues, with respect to funding costs and sponsors remained to be clarified; especially if there were any new/unexpected costs to be met. However, without the physical event, it was anticipated that costs would be minimal overall. Emma and GJJ noted that other regional groups were taking comparable steps towards online events.

Emma hoped the event would be interactive, and by demarking a specific day (8th Sept) to release talks and host live events, the membership would be able to attend, exchange, share and engage in some capacity. The event would be evaluated and the group would consider for future years if a return to the physical format was desirable or if transitioning to online event would be more desirable.

ACTION: GJJ to check with conference group developments towards call for papers

The question of charging for the conference was briefly reappraised. Emma noted that while the talks would be freely available, any live elements would be a member benefit. Having a nominal 'external delegate fee' was agreed as desirable, in terms of minor income generation but more importantly broadening the experience and insight exchanged between delegates. It was agreed to explore this further, depending on degree of demand from external delegates.

b. MSDG

As previously noted, most MSDG events are postponed, but planning for the new year's programme is underway. As well as the member survey, a discussion on themes is being led by MSDG representatives at each institution. The core themes will be collated and brought to the Board for consideration and gap analysis as in previous years. It is likely for academic year 20/21 the MSDG will adopt a hybrid online and physical event programme, especially as familiarity with virtualising events will have grown during the lockdown period. The incoming group chair is Sarah Pittaway (Worcester).

c. Other SIGs

MCG: Very little activity from the Copyright Group, and no response from the group chair for an extended period. GJJ noted 2019's annual report entry was written by an ordinary member, due the lack of response from repeated approaches to the group chair and general list. It was agreed Chris, as a sponsor and group member, would seek to spur activity.

ACTION: Chris to approach Copyright Group chair for update on group plans

D&SSG: Plans for a virtual meeting are underway, with GJJ coordinating on dates. Likely in to be held in June/July 2020, dates TBC.

MarComms: Limited current activity, though organisers remain responsive to enquiry.

MDF: As their April meeting was cancelled, the group is planning for a May/June online meeting, date TBC. GJJ would support as needed with video conferencing.

MMF: Remains an active group, and while they've postponed an event in June, are receptive to potential online engagement. GJJ to support as needed.

RDMSG: No visible activity or engagement since the start of 2020. It was agreed to revisit the viability of this group post-lockdown.

20/05 AOB

a. Approximate date of next Steering Group meeting (Aug 2020)

Agreed to arrange this in August, as normal, as video conference.

ACTION: GJJ to coordinate date of next meeting of the Steering Group

Diane thanked everyone for attending, and following a discussion on the need for informal exchange, it was agreed to organise a Steering Group informal online meeting for general discussion and mutual support, potentially at the late May Bank Holiday

ACTION: All to coordinate social meeting for end of May