



Mercian Collaboration Steering Group Meeting

14th August 2019

Minutes

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Present: Diane Job (Brum, Chair), Chris Porter (Newman, VC), Emma Walton (Lough, Conf Chair, SG Member), Simon Bevan (Cranfield, SG Member), Gareth Cole (Loughborough, RDMSG), Matt Cunningham (Lough, MSDG), Stewart Sandilands (BCU, MarComms), Yvonne Budden (Warwick, Copyright), Richard Birley (BCU, MMF), Laura Waller (Warwick, MDF)

Apologies: Mark Toole (Treasurer, NTU)

19/14 Welcome & Briefing

Diane welcomed everyone and introductions were made.

19/15 Outstanding Actions

- a) Approval of previous minutes (10th May 2019) b. SG:19/08

(SG:19/08(a)) It was agreed Dave's paper on Brexit was now perhaps outdated and while it had not been distributed, there was no reason to chase. However, given every member will have different approaches to Brexit preparations, it was agreed this would be a valuable discussion item to add to the October Directors Board agenda.

ACTION: GJJ to update agenda to include Library Brexit Preparations

- b) Conference payment c. SG:19/09

As per earlier reported issues at Birmingham, this item remains outstanding, but it is hoped to be resolved by the end of 2019. Diane and Mark are continuing to liaise on the matter.

- c) SG Vacancy recruitment d. SG:19/10

Diane reported she had spoken with Sue Ackermann, at Nottingham, who is still acting director at Nottingham for the foreseeable future, and invited her to join the SG. Sue had agreed, and this was supported by the SG.

ACTION: GJJ to sort practical SG arrangements with Sue Ackerman and invite her to attend the December telcon.

- d) Deputies & Senior Staff Group feedback

The report from GJJ's survey was noted, and as has been discussed online it was agreed to move forward with hosting an event, with Loughborough and Birmingham offered as venues. As Diane desired to be present to provide input and advice, it was agreed to arrange the first meeting at Birmingham. GJJ would invite the respondents from the survey who had expressed an interest for their favoured dates, before offering it more widely.

ACTION: GJJ to seek input from Senior Staff on potential event dates, liaising with Diane/Julie for availability

- e) SG:19/10(c): Tangible outputs documentation f. SG:19/12(b):

Comments on this had been made online, and it was agreed to revise and update this offline, before presenting to Directors for information. This document would then ideally be annually reviewed.

ACTION: Diane and GJJ to revise tangible benefits document ahead of December telcon

f) Preparations for October Board

Diane noted these were in hand, with CILIP's Nick Poole invited as the guest speaker, and BGU hosting the meeting (Thu 10th October). It was suggested that some Directors may wish to pool transport, given the distance to Lincoln for some of them. All SG members were reminded to submit agenda suggestions to GJJ before the end of September, although likely some would arise from today's discussions.

ACTION: ALL to submit Board agenda items to GJJ

It was also noted that all Directors should provide input to identify potential future speakers.

ACTION: Chair to seek suggestions of Board guest speakers sought from all Directors

Chris suggested that MUAL (Midlands purchasing consortium) had some sort of alignment with Mercian, at least in terms of membership. They were an independent group, and while there was no strong desire to incorporate them as a SIG, the MMG likely had some (limited) crossover with MUAL. MUAL, it was noted dealt with large contract matters but also the impact of bodies such of JISC on the academic library sector. It was noted that Heather at Aston currently chaired the group, and it was agreed to invite her to brief the Board on its activities, ferment discussions about coterminous matters and consider the two organisation's relationship.

ACTION: Invite Heather Whitehouse to be invited to speak to MUAL as a Board agenda item in October

19/16 Treasurer Update

As Mark was unable to attend, he had sent a written report:

'The transition between Treasurers has been successfully completed and the new working relationships with the SCONUL Office have been established. The only significant financial item to report is the continuing delay of receipt of an invoice from the University of Birmingham for the 2018 conference. At the moment this is just a minor inconvenience and I have agreed with SCONUL to record this as a commitment in our financial accounts, but it would become an accounting issue if we have not received and processed the invoice by the end of our financial year (December 31). Birmingham are aware of this.

Expenditure for this financial year remains largely on course in line with the budget. As of the end of July (month 7 of the financial year) the Collaboration had a balance £22,797; this includes an adjustment for the expectation that 2018 Conference invoice is paid this year. The projected balance at the end of the year is just over £9,000. This includes projected expenditure for the 2019 conference but at the moment does not include any sponsorship income around the conference that we might gain.

Discussions with the Mercian Metadata Group have resulted in an offer in principle to provide up to £500 to fund their inaugural event on 20th August. This is with the proviso that the event open to staff of Mercian Collaboration institutions only and we will need evidence of the use of any claimed funds. Providing we do not get a rush of other inaugural events from the SIGs, this should not strain the budget.

At the last Steering Group, there was an enquiry about possible discussions on membership fees, banding & structures with NoWAL and NC treasurers by the previous treasurer. I have found out that these discussions did not take place and I agree with the previous treasurer's comment when I contacted him about this; as he is unaware of any complaints from members about the group they had been assigned to for subscription purposes, it is not clear that we should open up this particular can of worms.'

Diane accepted the report, and Mark's recommendations were accepted. There were no questions.

4) SIG Representatives Updates

At this point each of the SIG representatives were invited to provide an update on their activities.

a) Conference Group (CG)

Emma reported that we were rapidly approaching the conference, and progress is going well. Bookings are open, if currently at a slightly lower level than might be desired. However, going on experience of the previous two years they would likely to pick up in the next few weeks. She acknowledged the conference's date is always problematic for some potential delegates but also in terms of marketing the event and coordinating the planning group over the summer months. The clash with some institutional induction weeks was a concern too. However, there would be more marketing of the event shortly. Emma explained that while for the first three years we had kept the same approximate date for the event (second week in September), going forward this would be reconsidered in the post event evaluation process. She noted setting a mutually acceptable date had been one of the most problematic tasks the group initially faced.

Sponsors had proved problematic to recruit this year, despite efforts and revisions to sponsorship policy to simplify the process. A lot of time had been expended with some sponsors attempting to re-negotiate price, seeking to pay a fraction of our requested fee. Sponsorship support in funding the conference was clearly a topic for the CG and treasurer to discuss offline, in the wake of the post-event evaluation. One measure taken to reduce costs had been to seek speakers within the Collaboration. GJJ and Emma were also scheduled to meet to look at succession planning and sustainability of the group and conference, once Emma stands down as group chair in the near future.

ACTION: Emma and Treasurer to discuss sponsorship arrangements

Emma noted part of her tasks post-conference was a more formal review of the conference as a tangible deliverable for the Collaboration, rather than simply in terms of delegate satisfaction. The review would consider: costs, benefits, format, schedule, regularity and venues. It was agreed Emma would bring her evaluation to the SG initially, to determinate the shape and legitimacy of any post-2019 conferences. She noted that any incoming chair would face a range of challenges, and potentially considerable demands on their time, and this would need to be made transparent to any applicants.

ACTION: Emma to make evaluative report on conference to next Steering Group

A discussion around the practicality and desirability of wider Collaboration sponsorship followed, e.g. not only for specific events. It was also noted the value expressed by sponsors in talking to non-director level staff. However, the SG generally concluded for now this remained a undesirable option, noting it might also conflict with SCOUNL's charitable status.

b) Copyright Group (MCG)

Yvonne reported on the group, now in their second year, which had been looking at a number of different areas: orphan works & Brexit, licenses and partnerships, gamification of copyright learning, guidance documents on Plan S and copyright. She noted with respect to the last of these, the MCG could work with Midlands Research Group on the topic, as interests overlaps. The group is also looking at examining and contrasting what copyright training each member organisation offers, and how they might learn from each-others' approach. She noted the MCG while growing, although not yet not fully representative, and hence they continued to look at membership and member representation. In terms of committee succession planning, given the difficulty of recruiting people to take on the roles of group chair and vice-chair, herself and her deputy looked set to continue for now. The group had also been talking to NoWAL and Northern Collaboration's copyright groups, with the potential for a joint event.

Last updated GJJ 28th August 2019

A question was raised about non-library group members, but Yvonne explained currently the group members were to the best of her knowledge drawn from libraries.

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

Stewart reported on the MarComms first official meeting last week at BCU, which had 12 people in attendance. The TOR and group remit had been explored, with GJJ and Mark Toole (as sponsor) were also present. The meeting started a project to build up a portfolio of the member's current roles, and what they do within their respective organisations but also what they were seeking to gain from group membership. Stewart explained his hope to use this activity and information to drive and inform future members, and as the group's membership grows, ensure its activities remain focussed on what everyone finds most valuable. The core organising team planned to meet soon with a mind for hosting an event in December, with meetings or events for the group being envisaged as being held on a quarterly basis. The meeting had ended with a 'show and tell' session on marketing experience, which had ended the first meeting on a very positive note. Stewart explained that with the growth of members, and interest in the room, future meetings might be lengthened to day long events. He also explained the possibility of running wider training events, facilitated in partnership with the MSDG.

Diane noted how the group's community of practice could also advise the Collaboration on how we market ourselves, which Stewart agreed had been already noted following the Board discussions.

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

Laura reported that she took over from Beck Maguire at the start of the year. The MDF has been reflecting on the group remit and activities, and especially how they could help improve awareness of accessibility related matters across member libraries. Best practice exchange has continued to be a core and valuable part of the MDF's activities, although this is often between specialists as their audiences tend to self-select to attend meetings. There is a hope they could facilitate an experience sharing event which could reach out to non-accessibility specialist staff too. To this end the MDF has been working with MSDG to consider where the latter group's events could include accessibility elements. There was also some potential to collaborate with the MarComms group. The MDF is supporting this activity by drawing together some guidance on how to make events more accessible. The group is also creating an overview of what each library provides for accessibility support, and identifying those, often smaller HEIs, that might need more support. The next group meeting is planned for Dec 2019.

Emma noted she planned to speak to Laura more about the conference and the potential for improving accessibility support elements.

ACTION: Emma to speak to Laura and MDF concerning accessibility issues for the conference

e) [Mercian Metadata Group \(MMF\)](#)

Richard reported on the work of the other new SIG, and their planned first formal event next week (20th, Aston University) on 'the future of cataloguing'. It was hoped it would bring a diverse audience together. He also explained the event and group likely overlapped with some of the RDMG's memberships interest, and hoped this would lead to some exciting future crossover events. Richard noted that one difficulty with getting people involved with the group had been identifying the right people, as often metadata roles are subsumed within less-than-obvious job roles. The hope is the meeting will help facilitate the identification of more appropriate people and widen the group's representation. The group was also planning to use e-forums, and would be hosting one on legacy data in September. The group had also noticed *CILIP Cataloguing and Indexing Group* were holding an event, elsewhere, and were looking to co-facilitate an event in the Mercian region to make attendance for regional staff more cost effective. As forming a community of practice is a stated intent of the group, next week's event would be the start of realising this intention. He noted thanks on behalf of

the group for the event funding from the Collaboration, as bringing in an external expert speaker (from the British Library) to talk on standards was seen as being both attractive and valuable to delegates. The event is open to anyone from the Collaboration region and encouraged anyone with any interest in metadata to come to future events.

f) RDM Support Group (RDMSG)

Gareth reported for the group, noting his co-chairs (Laurian Williamson and Patricia Herterich) have stepped down recently, which was a challenge for sustaining the RDMSG and its activities. Notably, as Gareth is looking to stand down himself in the near future, succession planning and recruitment to the organising committee is a particular priority; although he had some potential successors in mind. He reported on the event run by the group in March (Birmingham) which while looking at RDM skills, also reached out to a broader audience of RDM specialists than library staff. He noted RDM needs to be a broad-church including IT and Research Office staff too. The event had also looked at writing business cases and advocacy to senior management. Gareth and Patricia had also participated in a telcon recently with GJJ and Simon (as group sponsor), to catch up on various pending matters. Gareth commented that events tended to draw 15-25 attendees depending on location and theme, and were held 11-3pm,

The Chair noted that there is a workload and commitment required in organising any SIG, and it was important that Directors recognise the commitment and benefits for their staff through becoming involved. It was noted it was difficult to quantify for each SIG the degree of commitment required from membership or serving as an officer, but that it was certainly not a trivial contribution. The Chair stressed it was important that along with time allowed by managers and directors for their staff involved in SIGs, that their contributions should be recognised through the local appraisal programmes.

ACTION: Value and commitment of SIGs organising teams to be added as topic for October Board.

g) Staff Development Group (MSDG)

A well-established group, the current chair, Matt Cunningham, reported on their three main areas of activity:

- (1) Organising visit events ('All the same, but different'), aimed at mainly at library assistants to discover new ways of working and good practices. This coming academic session OU, Newman, Leicester would be visited. These events are effectively a cycle with nearly every location now hosting a visit at least once.
- (2) Running the Mercian Collaboration Buddying Scheme. While it hasn't seen a huge take up, had been running successfully for a couple of years. There had been some renewed interest lately, and the group was working with GJJ to raise awareness of it within the Collaboration. He noted involvement should be encouraged for new staff at any level. Matt highlighted feedback from the informal evaluation embedded within the scheme has been very positive.
- (3) Events and workshops. Unlike previous years, the MSDG had created a long list of topics, and canvassed library staff across the Collaboration for their feedback to create the final shortlist. As always a range of audiences and topics would be addressed, as unlike the other SIGs the MSDG's remit was staff training and development in a broad sense. Hence, no particular staff segment was targeted throughout the programme, which was noted as being in line with the annual conference's programme.

This coming year, Matt was hoping to work more closely with the other SIGS, notably MarComms and MDF initially. He also commented how the 19/20 programme represented a strong and interesting range of events.

Emma highlighted the contribution from Matt as the SDG rep on Conference Group. She noted that while there had always been discussions to provide the MSDG with declined conference session proposals, the timing of the CG's review and the MSDG's event planning was currently out of sync; hence it could be a year before declined papers formed the basis of an event. However, the CG were revising how and when paper submissions came in, which may facilitate more timely sharing.

Diane thanked all the group representatives for their input and efforts.

5) Reviewing, Revising & Clarifying the Strategic Plan

Diane introduced the main item, which was to revise the strategic plan, drafted by the previous Chair and GJJ. She noted her desire to reduce it extensively in length, making it more readable and valuable as a tool to guide the Collaboration's future activities. This was agreed by the SG members present. It was also agreed the core readership for the plan was the Directors and SIG Chairs, along with member library staff. However, it was hoped it would also be of use to senior institutional management, although it may be necessary to create an even briefer executive summary. In this way, along with the other outputs from the Collaboration, it would help justify the ROI and benefits generated through Collaboration membership.

A general discussion followed with the following key points agreed:

- The 7 themes would be revised to 5, with environment and agency being rolled into the introduction.
- Impacts and benefits should be revised, with impacts remaining at the end, and benefits pointing to the tangible benefits document, as these were not strategic elements.
- Elements of risk (e.g. Brexit) could be rolled into a risk register document.

At this point the meeting broke into small groups to edit sections of documents. Following this activity, all were charged with completing the editing of their sections by the end of September, with the hope the revised strategic plan could be presented to the Directors before the end of 2019.

ACTION: ALL to provide their revised sections to Diane and GJJ by the end of September 2019

ACTION: Diane and GJJ to coordinate new version of document

ACTION: SG to scrutinise and agree final version of strategic plan ahead of further dissemination

ACTION: Diane and GJJ to investigate creating a risk register for the Collaboration

6) AOB

a) Other SIGs

The Chair, noting that previous SIGs had been formed by member demand, suggested that perhaps diversity was a key area to address. Matt noted the MSDG were holding a discussion hosted at Leicester, although not in any formal context. It was highlighted that diversity relates to diversifying the workforce and curriculum agendas which are increasing in importance within the sector. It was agreed to potentially task the Deputy's Group with looking into this area for the Collaboration, but that a discussion at the Board would also be invaluable in framing this activity.

ACTION: Matt to report back to Diane and GJJ on diversity meeting discussions

ACTION: Diversity SIG considerations to be discussed at the October Board