



Mercian Collaboration Deputies & Senior Staff Group

Meeting Notes: 24th May 2021

Present: Ben Veasey (Meeting Chair, Loughborough), Liz Mallet (Lincoln), Julie Partridge (NTU), Selena Killick (OU), Bertha Low (BCU), Alan Brine (DMU), Janet Weaver (Keele), Kirsty Kift (Coventry), Vicki McGarvey (Staffordshire), David Crozier (Newman), Ant Brewerton (Warwick), Gareth J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration)

Apologies: Jessica Wainwright (BCU), Heather Green (Warwick), Curwen Thomas (Harper Adams), Emily Clark (Wolverhampton), Alison Pope (Staffordshire), Kay Jeffries (Derby), Phil Vaughn (Coventry)

1) Issues & actions from Previous Meeting ([2nd March 2021](#))¹

Ben welcomed everyone to the meeting. The minutes were accepted as read with the exception that the update for Keele had been incorrectly allocated.

It was noted Phil had not yet shared his research data plans, which remained a desirable outcome. GJJ reported that discussions regarding a scholarly publishing/communications event and possible group had been held but were yet to be developed any further.

2) Context

Ben offered some meeting context, noting how the environment for academic libraries had changed for the better in the wake of decreased infection rates and the vaccination programme. As a result, more students were on campuses, and staff were increasingly moving to a hybrid working pattern – although it was not universally applied across the collaboration. However, there was certainly a greater appreciation on how to deliver effective online learning, research and support activities by library services and their staff.

Referencing the Steering Group discussions, on behalf of the group, Ben paid tribute to the late Mark Toole. He also highlighted a number of developments, including the new Steering Group Membership, and especially the sponsor for the D&SSG (Collaboration Chair, Chris Porter, Newman). GJJ noted Chris hoped to attend the next meeting of the group in this capacity. It was noted both Board and Steering Group looked towards the D&SSG membership as playing a key role in their individual libraries, and in facilitating the work of the Collaboration.

3) Group Terms of Reference (ToR)

Feedback from the Directors Board had been circulated ahead of the meeting, and it was noted the ToR had been broadly accepted. Ben noted thanks to Phil and Kirsty for their work on it. In terms of the specific points:

¹ Attendees might also like to glance at (a) [Directors Board \(25/3/21\)](#) and (b) [Steering Group \(20/4/21\)](#) minutes, for background information on Collaboration activities.



- Clarification (1) 'acting as a springboard': It was agreed the Group would seek to identify relevant and important areas in their discussions and advise the Steering Group and Board as circumstances warranted.
- Clarification (2) Regional Perspective: It was agreed this element related to previous point, and the Group members could feedback advice, concerns and insight from their own experiences and national contacts to inform their Directors and the Board. As such this element was agreed as redundant as an additional remit point.
- Insert (1): 'To make recommendations as appropriate to the Directors/Steering Group regarding Mercian activities, policies, etc.' It was agreed to replace point (2) in the ToR with this insert

It was noted the Board had mooted tasking the D&SSG with undetermined future 'projects', as part of their remit to develop future library leaders. However, Group members felt that with the current operational and managerial challenges they lacked spare capacity to devote to such operations, for now.

From the discussions, it was also suggested it would be useful to invite Jisc speaker to a future meeting to talk about transformational agreements, distribution models and costs. GJJ will feedback on behalf of the Group to the Board and Steering Group concerning these discussions.

ACTION: Ben to approach Jisc for speaker for future meeting

ACTION: GJJ to feedback ToR comments to Steering Group

ACTION: GJJ to finalise ToR and put on the website

4) Themed discussions:

Returning to campus:

BCU: Hot desking is now normal, unless staff have particular physical needs or job requirements. Awaiting university directives on working norms from the Agile Working Group. 'Mobile conferencing units' are being looked into, rather than a fixed group meeting booth, allowing some more flexibility for group working.

Coventry: Most staff back to campus and it is easier getting staff back contrasted with earlier lockdown periods as people are more used to what to expect. If anything, staff have become keen to be away from home now. Some staff are on a rota to be 'campus present' but are not on site all the time, which seems to be working well. Some staff though, such as shelvers are on site all the time. Contracted weekend and evening teams also remain on site for their full working time; although some individual exceptions apply. Agile working policy (20-40%/home, 60% home and 'Fully Mobile') is being implemented although it is up to local managers to decide which roles fall into these categories. However, ad hoc home working continues to be supported for occasional needs.

Keele: Waiting for an agile working policy to be implemented. All of the customer services team have been back since August which has created some issues of 'them and us', as quite a number of other staff have not returned at all or remain on site only one day per week. The university has done a lot to support wellbeing of those working at home, and staff on campus have access to have free covid tests on site.



Lincoln: Slowly returning to campus, and while there is a local campus culture space challenges means a lot of staff offices have been repurposed for students. Hence, some staff are unable to return as easily on site, even when they're being distributed to other satellite campuses. Various new groups have been set up to try and address some of these challenges, and importantly make staff feel part of the process. Notably, if it will benefit their well-being, staff are encouraged to come in on site. Meanwhile, student panels have been asked about what they want in the future in terms of T&L and service delivery, and unsurprisingly they prefer a hybrid approach as they see the benefits of physical and virtual delivery.

Loughborough: Campus based university culture and a framework which encourages staff to return to campus one day a week initially. This has now shifted to two days a week. However, some staff continue to elect to continue working from home. The library is keen to ease people back on site during the quieter period now and over the summer than at the start of a hectic new academic year. Dynamic Working project has begun to categorise roles, and what it means for post holders in terms of 'being present'. e.g. 100% on campus roles for front-facing staff. The project acknowledges that a fully remote working category is a possibility, but currently unclear what areas or roles this would include. Recruitment questions are common about whether roles can be 'fully remote'.

NTU: University Leadership Team has made it clear that all roles are expected to spend some time on campus.

OU: A very different kind of university, so the response is different, although akin to others recruitment questions are being asked concerning the need for staff to be on campus or if fully remote working can continue indefinitely. Currently, no mass return is planned any sooner than July 2022, a policy which is devolved to departments in terms of how they deal with this. Ideally, the institution is looking for staff to work where they will be the most effective. This is helping make a wider recruitment pool as well as aiding in terms of addressing EDI requirements.

Staffordshire: Staff now expected to be on campus for the majority of the week (3/days), and thanks to office reconfiguration team members are more confident about returning. Some leniency and flexibility in policy application, but the general expectation remains that everyone should be coming back on site. Staff should be tested twice a week before coming back onto campus too. In the future, the aim is to have blended working options for everyone, which means mobile portable devices are needed by all. Using meeting rooms remains challenging, in terms of setting them up for the right numbers in a safe, spaced manner.

Warwick: Most team members are still successfully working from home, although colleagues are being encouraged back onto campus, especially for front-line staff. A lot more all-staff meetings are being held to keep everyone informed and engaged. Currently looking at different future working models (all on site, all at home or a hybrid blend) with staff. Also discussing space requirements, in terms of what staff need from a physical space and how effective a hot-desking approach might be. Particular challenges are being faced for teaching sessions, where it is often unclear how many students will be on site and how many will be remote ahead of delivery. Alongside this, the library is talking to students and exploring their preferred study options as well as mapping their various customer journeys.



Planning and preparing for the new academic year & supporting increasingly diverse library users needs

Coventry: Conducted a mystery shopper exercise which was useful, with some arriving on site as part of this assessment, although this wasn't a requirement. Most comments were good, but some feedback for improvement. Students seem to be desiring a return to campus, rather than doing more 'online' activities (social as well as learning ones). Stability of internet connection for users is an issue, and a reason why users often want to make use of campus facilities. The institution is looking to move away from the 'lecture' to a more 'active' learning environment. However, the 'crowded' online space means it is challenging to reach target communities in virtual environment. User testing online planned this summer because while we have a high use of LibGuides which our mystery shoppers found to be a rich information source, they also commented there were too many 'clicks' needed to find information.

Lincoln: Created a section called Digital Library on the website, which was placed on the front page. A quick but appreciated fix for our community. Have found students prefer Instagram for following the library, but Twitter is more effective for engaging with academic staff

Loughborough: Considering getting academics to help with UX design, due to expertise, as well as looking at how to better guide user journeys through the library's web presence.

OU: Social media has been useful not just for students, but also in reaching senior institutional managers in terms of them seeing what the library is doing or seeking to accomplish. This is very valuable in terms of political capital, as well as its success for user engagement and service promotion.

Staffordshire: The library web pages have been redesigned, consolidating what their services were ahead of first lockdown. Very clear now what service provision requirements are for users. LibGuides is the main platform which has made adapting to change easy. Some user testing with student scenarios has been conducted, seeing how easy it is to find information and to test if the platforms were working effectively. The library has been re-opened since August, which has helped a number of students. Especially those with digital poverty or access issues, as well as those whose accommodation arrangements preclude them having home study space.

Warwick: Very clear that online teaching sessions need two people, a facilitator and a support person, to deliver the best experience, and staff are getting better at this style of delivery. Highly-flexible teaching is however very challenging, and the library is evaluating what the best technology is for effective delivery. Part of this is considering which session elements should be live (synchronous) or pre-recorded (asynchronous). However, the library website operates very much as a promotional tool, rather than an enabling portal currently. Engaged in talking with students about what their future needs and expectations are to help shape our approach. The library staff are working across the institution more to promote events, which has been warmly appreciated by senior institutional management. Facebook has proved very good for outreach, as metrics watches of video hosted there has been a successful way of judging engagement. 'Library online lounge' has also been popular for various sessions e.g. 'Cat Café'. While engagement numbers aren't massive, the quality of engagement is high.



5) General discussions & updates

Future Staffing Resource Requirements

There was a general discussion about future planning for staff and related resource budgets. Some universities were quantifying every action taken as part of this, but others argued this was not something which could be easily accomplished. It was generally agreed that successfully 'doing online' teaching and support required more, rather than less, staff time, if it was to be delivered effectively. If people wish to continue this conversation, Selena would be interested in hearing from them.

ACTION: All interested in staffing requirements to get in touch with Selena for more discussions

General Updates

BCU: LMS change coming soon (July '21) which will have big impact on staff roles and what they do. Jisc Online Literacy Tool backed by PVC and will rolled out for students at some suitable point. A new head of Collection Management and Engagement has also recently been appointed.

Coventry: ITS and Estates reviews underway, not the library yet but anticipated. Looking to September and what COVID services will continue to be sustained. Library visibility and perceptions are strong in the user community, as a result of lockdown period efforts. More cross-university working anticipated, along with particular activities relating to decolonisation.

DMU: Current major challenges around 'T&E' being addressed, plus going out to market for a new LMS. The university is not making staff return to campus, and hence is engaging on a major consultation about the 'New World of Work'. Cost implications for home working, plus who is needed on site and when are significant strands of this activity.

Keele: Taking opportunity of 'closure' period to revisit issues over user behaviours, furniture and access controls. Hope to produce a new user behavioural culture as a result, thus promoting library as primarily a 'study environment', not social space.

Lincoln: Opened new library (bioscience, medical & health sciences), so stock moving. Decolonisation and what this means for collections and reading list, plus support for staff are also hot topics.

Loughborough: New VC in October, Nick Jennings. Decolonisation and future working are also on the agenda.

NTU: New CRM (Microsoft Dynamics), new director (~October), plus a new LMS. Interim Library Director is Robert Hall. Also considering future ways of working and steps needed ahead of the new academic year.

OU: Future ways of working are being considered now.

Staffordshire: Alma Primo coming in July, plus other systems. Library transformation project, and an 'inclusivity project'. Restructure came into force 1/April. Additionally, all stock to be RFIDed by September. There is a project, part of a wider inclusivity initiative, which is looking at book provision and decolonisation.

Warwick: Future working project, plus revisiting at what can be achieved/delivered with the website. Additionally, looking at decolonisation and how the library can support 'co-creation'.



6) Next meeting (Autumn 2021)

- a) *Meeting Chair*
- b) *Approximate date*
- c) *Potential themes & topics*

Themes for the next meeting could include: systems, changing working patterns, leadership and development, team working, and university presses. Plus, other areas identified in the discussions today. These would be agreed, and Ben asked GJJ to sort the arrangements in terms of date, themes and meeting chair via the email list.

ACTION: GJJ to circulate polls for (1) date (2) theme and (3) meeting chair

7) AOB

None