



Mercian Conference Group
 Conference Evaluation Meeting
 Friday 27th October 2017
 Loughborough University

Present: Emma Walton (Chair), Helen Curtis, Carol Barker, Jennifer Brotherton, Anna Richards, Gaz J Johnson (MCDO), Matt (MSDG)

Apologies: Rob Davies, Liz Kennedy

1) Our Reflections

It was noted that the MC Chair has been very positive and appreciative of CG's efforts, and the conference itself overall. Emma noted that initial reflections has been discussed post-event by the entire group, but she thought it would be valuable for future planning to have a broad discussion on those areas the team recognised needed revision, before turning to delegate feedback.

Technology:

- **Presentations:** Require these pre-submitted where possible or early on the day to check links and see that they work. Guidance on web formats perhaps needed. Noted that where they don't work (e.g. Mac always a problem for uni PC based sites) speakers should consider bringing an alternative. Speakers should specify if they anticipate any additional technology required or the CG should provide guidance based on what is available at site (e.g. this is a PC site). This should be added to the submission requirements.
- **AV tech:** Needs to be checked that it is working and also where possible as many of the CG team understand how it works. Might not be practical (if time is short) but the more people who know, and what the fall-back options/support is available, the better.

Speakers & Delegates

- Speaker deadlines must be clearly articulated to help in their planning and also where it fits into our planning cycle.
- Close bookings earlier (e.g. two weeks prior) perhaps, but how long should we keep them open? Do we need to specify 2 weeks+4 weeks booking, and then have absolute roll out date for bookings?
- Important to tell delegates what sessions they will be in. But this can be hard work to tell everyone what they're doing (e.g. badge) but other options less efficient
- Delegate numbers were good, but will always impact on the venue size, choice and logistics on the day. E.g. we could have had 120 delegates at DMU, but breakout rooms would have been problematic.
- Session selection do we keep to the pre-chosen parallel sessions option? This depends largely on venue and how well rooms can cope with overspill. Also need to address under subscribed sessions and how to populate.



- While all submitted session abstracts contained useful information, not all were as well pitched more towards attracting potential session attendees, e.g. more clearly why people should come to the session. Lengths were also variable, and a min and max word count should be introduced (e.g. minimum expectations not met for all sessions) to even coverage out.
- Deadlines: Bio, abstract and picture are needed much earlier than this time, as this caused major delays for the website and conference booklets. Info also needed for bookings so people can choose sessions.
- Posters: Next time if we do more, invite all Mercian subgroups to have a 'stand' or representation via posters. We should discuss what subgroups can or should do (e.g. posters or stands) and what benefits this may offer to them.
- Speaking times may need to be careful – some over/under run issues.

Organisational

- The event venue was excellent, and the local non-library support very good also. Finding a comparable venue for 2018 will be challenging.
- Team to meet on the day ahead of conference opening for short briefing, this was a little ad-hoc this year.
- Floating team members and tasks for them to deal with (beyond greeting/desk management) should be clearly defined and/or on a rota.
- Consider freebies and impact on facilities (e.g. coffee mug). Chair adamant, no coffee mugs next time!
- Repository of CG conferences e.g. all materials, delegate pack - may need to be more clarity on who is organising these as well. Suggestion to take up Trello or similar project management tool to assist with planning and coordination.
- Feedback form should be ready ahead of event and ready to go, to send out ASAP.
- Planning, more wiggle room would be useful e.g. CG deadlines sooner rather than later for group tasks, but also on speakers and submissions. Summer dead zone of August especially problematic for September event.
- Produce literal toolkit for day – Velcro pads and drawing pins should be added
- Timings on breaks and venue need to be reconsidered, especially lunch was too short

Action: Carol to draw up a list of items to include in a conference toolkit

Catering

- Water was not supplied with tea break nor automatically for speakers - university catering can be tricky to navigate, and we need to be clearer in our expectations to venues
- List of people who ordered special diet - a few difficulties but may be venue specific



- Refreshment space was roomy but layout didn't work for speed of throughput - two service points or better flow needs to be considered. Surprised catering staff didn't do more to assist here.
- Separate out fluid refreshments and supply - on tables during event or separate table elsewhere
- One CG team member overseeing catering - double checking things in the right place - making sure things work and are cleared etc
- Potentially having catering in non-workshop area may be of value, in terms of delivery/clearing - or notify venue hosts if area cleared

Venue

- Level of detail e.g. water, table for speaker's notes. Must specify, and be prepared to get down to fine details to avoid issues in future. Also useful for contract negotiations if going for commercial venue, as can impact on costs and venue choice.
- Venue staff were supportive and helpful, and responsive to demands on the day
- Essential to have on site help from local uni (e.g. on CG) library staff. Even if not employed at venue hosts, must have CG team members from one or more of the local unis to assist and chase things on the ground.
- Costs, sponsorship etc will have an impact on venue - go through unis as a priority

Action: Carol and Anna put together document on items to specify key minor items for future planning/venue hosts

2) Review of Feedback

Survey to inform and see opinions. Group needs to produce an output for the MC, and currently two things are planned: produce a report to Directors (6th Nov) and also something for the website e.g. an infographic. For the infographic we want to decide what we want to pull out to illustrate the event's success, and include positive and reinforcing comments. For report to Directors, have that plus some critical issues raised by delegates.

Noted that 49% of (non-CG) delegates responded, which compares very well to SDG rate of around 23-25% responses to post event feedback forms

Keynote received the most mixed qualitative comments, although quantitatively it was well received. Picking keynote for future conferences requires additional thought, and also ensuring the speaker clearly understands the wide audience range and interests of delegates is key. Potential to go back to attendees and ask follow-up questions such as recommendations of speakers, or even the kinds of speakers, they would like to hear. May need to consider procedures of how and when CG selects keynote. Important to make conference inclusive for members, and keynote sets tone for whole conference, so speaker selection remains a very critical decision to be taken by the CG.



There were a range of discussions around KPIs and CSF with the CG trying to establish if we need them, what value they might offer, and indeed what factors should be measured. For 2017 we didn't have any established KPIs or CSF, and setting these for 2018/9 might be a useful exercise in terms of demonstrating our success. However, may need discussions with Directors to agree what factors/metrics they are interested in seeing. Note in terms of offering a variety of sessions, broad range of levels of staff attending, and enabling a regional networking even that the event was a success.

3) Reports and Marketing

Two reports were agreed to be provided to Directors. Gaz had already reviewed the delegates information and provided a detailed analysis of their origins, choices and disposition. Emma agreed that she, with help from GJJ, would draw together an evaluative report using the feedback from delegates as well as the recommendations from the CG members. These would then go to the Directors meeting (6th Nov 2017) for approval, and to set the tone for the next conference planning cycle.

Action: GJJ's analytical report on delegates to go to Directors

Action: Emma and GJJ to draft evaluative report to Directors, noting challenges and recommendations for next year

It was agreed to try and identify people who could contribute reports on the conference for the website, and if this was not possible, at least remember to do this as a priority for 2018.

Action: All to seek people to contribute articles for Website at home institutions

4) Group organisation and terms of reference review

Anna noted she now had a secondment of 12hrs weekly in senior assistant librarian role, which means she will have to, with regrets, step down from committee. Chair noted her thanks to Anna, especially for her and Carol's on site efforts.

Action: GJJ to remove Anna from CG mailing list

Jennifer noted that as she will be going on maternity leave in e.2018, she too will be standing down from the committee at that point. However, she was keen to continue for as long as she felt able.

This section of the meeting was set aside to consider if the ToR and roles worked, and what adjustments were needed to the CG's configuration. Emma especially noted that GJJ and Matt's involvement is ex-officio, but they both have made considerable and valid contributions throughout the conference planning and delivery, and she noted her especial thanks to them for taking on this extra responsibility.

Emma noted, for her own part as chair, there was a need to more clearly assign tasks and responsibilities within the group, as while the MCDO had assisted in coordinating these, his time was extremely limited. She noted understanding the degree of time and resource demands on the Mercian Officer, and his availability was crucial, and that she will be discussing the support issue with Directors. However, in the meantime there is a need for individual CG members to take on a greater ownership for tasks. Noting that each of the roles, had variable time demands during the planning cycle, delineating these diagrammatically, would help all CG members understand the demands on their time, and especially new members to understand where the peaks and troughs of activities were.



Action: Emma to coordinate all to contribute to Gantt Chart on peak times for roles and individuals.

Roles worked:

- **Chair:** takes on additional responsibilities and tasks to back fill. Coordination role across all tasks and activities, but needs support especially during vacation and term busy times.
- **Speaker Liaison:** Handles contacting, recruiting and liaising with keynote and parallel session speaker talent. Busiest towards the latter half of the planning cycle.
- **Booking Operator:** Local support role rolled into this, and this is actually a busy role anyway. Busiest towards the latter half of the planning cycle.
- **MCDO/MSDG Rep:** Provided input but also crucially provides support on day and before. Ex-officio in name, but in status full group member. Group members should however, endeavour to use the MCDO/MSDG reps time with care.

Roles > Revised

- **Sponsorship/Finance:** Amalgamated into one role with fiscal responsibility. Noted may be a more demanding role if sponsorship is accepted for 2018 conference.
- **Venue Coordinator/Onsite Support:** Revised role, very specific and should be specific, possibly co-opted. May be more than one person in this role, as Anna and Carol had demonstrated a partnership/additional resource to be invaluable.

Roles > Tasks/discontinued

- **Marketing Operator:** This was a task not role, with GJJ handling most wider conference publicity, and only a brief period of time when this is needed. Agreed to discontinue specific role and absorb within other functions.

New Roles

- **Secretary/Task Coordinator:** Project management role to support chair, and have an ownership for chasing other group members on their tasks. Could be filled by MCDO, if more time was available.

Action: Anna and Jen to contribute experiential documents on their roles to knowledge bank for future CG team members

Action: Emma to lead next meeting in constructing process map and overview of conference planning process (including time resource demands)

5) Recruitment

It was discussed how many spaces were on the group. 2 vacancies (currently) and it was agreed to strongly encourage West Midlands involvement, as these Mercian members were currently under represented on the CG. It was agreed that a staggered recruitment would take place, with venue team



members coming on board later once venue agreed. In the meanwhile, Emma would speak to the Directors and encourage participation in the CG by their staff.

For the current team it was agreed that ideally a 2 year term of office, with a potential to remain for an extra year to provide continuity of expertise was ideal. It was noted that of the 8 original CG members, by early 2018, only 5 would remain, hence a similar loss might be anticipated over the next year, meaning only a few members would stay on for their entire term. Emma would be serving as Chair until March 2019 under current Mercian term rules. It was also agreed that Emma would check individually with all members if they were willing to continue, or wished to stand down. She would also ask if they had colleagues who might be encouraged to participate in the group.

Action: Emma to speak to all group members to confirm continued involvement

Action: Emma to seek 2 new recruits for CG via Directors Group meeting

Action: GJJ to update online TOR documents with reference to revised discussions above

Additionally, as a CG recruitment tool it was agreed that Jen and Anna would be encouraged to write an article or two articles on their experiences as conference team members. Gaz would provide support here and style guidance. Anna would also explore if DMU marketing had covered the event, and if there was a report we could point to or extract comments from within our own marketing materials.

Action: Anna and Jen write their experiences of conference group for website

Action: GJJ to send style guide on writing to Jen and Anna for articles

Action: Anna chase up DMU Marketing and see if they did anything about the event

6) Bigger questions

It was agreed the suggestion of tying the conference into the Birmingham International Librarian event in e.July would be too soon for event planning process, given committee and roles were still evolving. However, Emma proposed that organising something, possibly collaborating with the SDG as a joint event might be better. She highlighted that there remained too many unknowns at this stage to make organising a second conference to tie into this timeline a viable proposition.

Action: Emma and Matt to approach Kirsty to discuss potential tie in event to International Librarian event in Birmingham

Questions remained about making the conference biennial or annual, although Emma agreed that a 2018 conference should be held. After this point the annual/biennial cycle could be reviewed, and it could be a useful question to engage delegates with. However, if there was no conference every year, there should be some form of CG event organised, but what form this could take was uncertain.

The question of charging fees, and sponsorship, were agreed as ones to pose to Directors. However, given the likely venue costs for #Mercian18 (a free site being unlikely) these were real issues that must be accepted, if a further conference is planned. Emma noted that a fee of ~£50 would be a reasonable one, and could cover considerable, but not all, costs for a delegate audience of 80-120 people. Charging more than this was felt could impact on library assistant attendance rates.



There remained the question of how to deal with external delegates, who could be charged more. However, the Mercian conference was believed to be primarily for Mercian members' staff, rather than for the purposes of revenue generation. Emma would discuss this with the Directors also. Subsequently, she and the CG would draw up a target audience statement for the conference, outlining clearly who it was aimed at and the overall purpose of the event, as this was felt to be an element still lacking.

Even a limited amount of sponsorship could help with costs, although there were questions about what sponsors would expect and what we would be prepared to agree to. GJJ noted he was drawing up a sponsorship policy for the Mercian as a whole, which would be going to Steering Group later in the year, which may answer some of these questions.

Action: Emma to discuss issue of delegate fees and sponsorship with Directors

7) Next meeting (date and location)

It was agreed that this should take place after Directors and SG meeting in E.Dec. Jen proposed Wolverhampton would be happy to host the CG members for this.

Action: Emma to send out doodlepoll for meeting dates, and agree date & venue with everyone