



Mercian Collaboration Conference Meeting

Agenda

Web Conference, 28th April 2020

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1. Welcome and apologies

Claire Brown (Birmingham, Chair), Charlie Hill (BCU), Damian Pugh (Nottingham), Laura Newman (Loughborough), Alison Charlesworth, (Leicester) Emma Walton (Loughborough, Steering Group Sponsor), Gareth J Johnson (Officer), Matt Cunningham (Loughborough, MSDG),

Apologies: Christine Bradford, Cheryl Coveney, Deborah Munro

Claire welcomed everyone to the meeting. A few issues connecting to Zoom were noted, which GJJ would add to his guidance notes.

ACTION: GJJ to add tech insights virtual meeting guidance notes

2. Virtual Conference 2020

Claire noted since the previous meeting (28th Feb) and following lockdown, she, GJJ and Emma had met online to discuss the conference. They had agreed to explore pivoting to an online conference, rather than a physical event in 2020, and returning to physical hosting location hopefully in 2021. It was agreed a dedicated day for the conference was still an ideal focus; although there was considerable discussion over the exact date. For now, it was agreed to continue aiming for 8th September 2020, but to review this in the light of submissions and discussions with potential speakers, and developments in terms of the members re-opening campuses.

The platforms to be used were discussed, especially questions around if reliance on cloud solutions (e.g. Zoom, YouTube etc) was preferred over making use of a specific institution's purchased systems (e.g. Adobe Connect). This latter option might cause issues for group members who were not at the specific institutions in terms of accessing the 'host' functions, although would increase the level of grandfathered in ICT support. It may also offer a superior capacity to external hosting, although this was not always the case as problems could still arise. It was agreed to keep options open, while remembering the mantra to 'keep things simple' for contributors and participants.

Discussions followed concerning some participants ability to listen and engage for long periods of time, especially in the light of the core 'inclusivity' theme. This may be due to personal circumstances, technological issues or simply 'screen fatigue'. Moreover, in terms of speakers, concerns were raised with regard to timing of the event versus people's workloads. It was agreed that while the group would push forward with the conference date and calls as previously agreed, with the proviso that were there insufficient uptake or response to the call, the event could be pushed back until 2021. Any preapproved papers would be automatically invited to contribute at the re-arranged date.

3. Virtual Conference Experiences

The chair asked for experiences of attending virtual conferences, with a limited response. Damian noted he was attending a forthcoming virtual conference, and would share back his experiences and the approach taken with the group to inform planning. GJJ explained how the forthcoming virtual networking event would feed into the group's event facilitation as well as the practical elements of hosting the conference.

It was agreed engaging with the online conference could be better facilitated for some staff through hosting some 'warm up' sessions by the group. This would let participants test their tech kit and become familiar with the virtual environment.

ACTION: Group to host pre-conference virtual event familiarisation session(s)

4. [Scheduling & Risk](#)

It was noted there may be a risk to the conference's success with the potential reopening of campuses across the Collaboration. This could affect team, speaker and participant engagement or availability, along with uncertain workloads. It was agreed, for now, to maintain awareness of these risks and to factor into planning and publicity consider how the event may need to be reduced in scope nearer the time. This was preferred over the option of not offering the conference at all. GJJ noted therefore it was important to use caveats reflecting these circumstances in all publicity, stressing our hope to offer an excellent event, but acknowledging how circumstances may force us to reduce our offering.

5. [Theme: Retaining or Reconfiguring](#)

Charlie instigated discussions about retaining or changing the theme of the conference, due to the pandemic's impact on the HE and academic library sector. GJJ noted in his recent members survey for the MSDG there had been considerable interest in events on remote working, crisis management and adapting to virtualised engagement. It was broadly agreed to keep the 'inclusive' theme but ensure 'sub-theme strands' existed which permitted proposals which sought to share distanced working experiences, guidance or advice. Emma suggested the phrase 'Libraries in a time of change' for this strand.

ACTION: Claire to write theme outline and share with group ahead of formal launch

6. [Sponsors](#)

There was a discussion about whether a virtualised event still required sponsors. While previous years had not achieved cost-neutrality with respect to Collaboration funding, potentially this year could as venue, catering and marketing costs were near zero. As previously noted some platform costs may exist, but these would be minimal in contrast to enabling a physical event. It was stressed how any positive income contribute to supporting future Collaboration activities, but could also be used to offer 'best speaker prizes' or similar such tokens of recognition linked to the event. Emma agreed she would raise funding issues with the Steering Group at their meeting next week and report back. How other collaborations were using income would be raised through the regional officers' forum by GJJ.

ACTION: Emma to raise issue of income, costs and funding of conference at Steering Group

ACTION: GJJ to discuss conference funding with other regional collaborations

It was agreed to approach sponsors and offer them the chance to be recognised within the conference in some respect. This might be within the programme as previously, or potentially, through adding short (2 minute) video inserts accessible via the site. The possibility of sponsoring specific sessions was discussed, although care would need to be taken to match sponsors to content.

ACTION: Claire and Emma to follow up with Cheryl about sponsorship for the conference

7. Session Formats

It was expected more formats of 'talks' would be accepted, with those confident in offering online workshops to be encouraged to propose them. However, it was noted that local institutional platforms would have to host these rather than the Collaboration's site, which may cause difficulties to people engaging on less advanced platforms or mobile devices. Due to the potential physical challenges of lengthy screen time interactions, shorter talks would be favoured, along with lightning talks.

It was agreed that the majority of content (e.g. papers) would be best provided as recorded content, with a phased release on the day to create a timely 'programme'. This would allow people to dip in and out, and not be overwhelmed by content. However, the potential, post-event of providing a longer, compilation version of the event was discussed as potentially of interest. This event structure would also let people choose more sessions than they might normally be able to have attended. It was noted that video recording through Zoom or PowerPoint, or audio only in Audacity, were both relatively simple technical solutions for people who had not done this before. However, there may be a need to develop some guidance in this respect.

Some live content including question and answer sessions with hosted speaker panels, along with one or more virtual networking sessions would also be desirable for the programme, although more discussion was needed to plan for these. It was noted it should be explicit in all publicity the event would largely not be 'live', but that a variety of formats and chances for interaction would be offered. In this way this would be a 'hybrid' event in terms of the variety of ways to engage.

GJJ proposed registered participants should be encouraged to produce brief (30 second) 'vox pops' in the run up to the conference about their 'lockdown library experiences', to be shared online as part of the programme. In this way the wider voice of the members, normally heard in discussion over coffee, could be realised. He apologised for this slight flight of fancy, but the group agreed this seemed a desirable route to pursue further.

ACTION: Claire to outline rough timetable for conference for discussion

It was noted that, as in previous years, most speaker content would essentially become openly available via the Collaboration's site. However, some elements (workshops, networking, Q&A sessions) would remain member exclusive for delegates on the day. Some consideration would also be needed as to manageable numbers registering for these live sessions, in terms of hosting practicalities and maximising delegate benefit.

8. Call for Papers

Laura noted she was happy to handle the proposals submission process using the Google Form. Claire will look at this and see where it needs updating, in terms of themes and changes to format. It was agreed that while we can accept more papers than normally, due to no venue limitations, that the group would still ensure sufficient quality was maintained. Hence, a latter discussion would be tabled to review submissions by the group. It was agreed the call should go out as soon as possible, but should have a longer lead time to accommodate people's challenging work commitments and circumstances.

ACTION: Charlie and Claire to develop formal call for papers publicity

ACTION: Laura and Claire to update paper submission form

GJJ would create a pre-announcement of the coming call to build awareness of the format and plans, following today's meeting. This would appear on the site and via the distribution list

ACTION: GJJ to create news item and distribute concerning conference format and forthcoming call for papers

9. *Team Roles on the Day*

While it was hoped a (socially distanced) team could be present somewhere together on the day, to help facilitate the event, how other team members could support the conference practically was discussed. It was noted they could co-host online discussions and offer some support to participants and speakers. As noted earlier, they could also help through hosting familiarisation events. How group members could contribute would be explored over the coming months through future meetings, individual discussions and as more clarity as to the content and form of the day appeared.

10. AOB

Accessibility

Claire asked a question about the MC website accessibility. GJJ said he thought this had been confirmed by SCONUL and their provider but would check.

ACTION: GJJ to check with SCONUL re-website accessibility

Date of Next Meeting

This would be confirmed by Claire via email

ACTION: Claire to arrange next meeting date