



## Mercian Collaboration Directors Board

Vidcon, 2-4pm, Thu 28th May 2020

### Minutes

**Present:** Chris Porter (Vice-Chair, Newman), Emma Walton (Steering Group, Loughborough), Simon Bevan (Steering Group, Cranfield), Sue Ackermann (Steering Group, Nottingham), Ian Snowley (Lincoln), Neil Donohue (Leicester), Jo-Anne Watts (Wolverhampton), Emma Sansby (BGU), Laura Pilsel (Harper Adams), Robin Green (Warwick), Dave Parkes (DMU), Paul Reynolds (Keele), Helen Curtis (Aston), Chris Powis (Northampton), Guy Lavender (OU), Judith Keene (Worcester), Gaz J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration)

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**Apologies:** Diane Jobs (Chair, Birmingham), Gary Elliott-Cirigottis (OU), Paul Mahoney (Staffordshire), Margaret Weaver (BCU), Steven Dudley (UCB), Mark Toole (Treasurer, NTU), Mike Berrington (NTU), Phil Brabban (Coventry), Sue Morrison (Derby)

### Summary of Actions

- ACTION: All to share any further library lockdown service, staffing and reopening experiences on the mailing list
- ACTION: Emma to revisit the question of named representation for the regional collaborations and their interests with the SCONUL Board
- ACTION: Steering Group to propose lowered 2021 subscriptions and provide details at next Board
- ACTION: Steering Group to discuss value obtained from Officer, against current FTE
- ACTION: MSDG to consider moving to a blended online/physical meeting schedule
- ACTION: MSDG to reconsider its terms of reference, and consider reconfiguration as an operational group
- ACTION: Steering Group to consider configuration and clear delineation of SIG and Operational Groups within the Collaboration
- ACTION: MSDG to consider splitting into a twin operations group and discursive SIG
- ACTION: MSDG to reiterate membership expectations to all current, and future group representatives as a pre-condition of their involvement
- ACTION: MSDG to consider recruiting Admin Officer role from outside the member representative pool
- ACTION: All to go back to discuss issues about MSDG and local reps.
- ACTION: MSDG to issue third and final call for officer roles among their membership
- ACTION: All to promote call for conference sessions to their staff
- ACTION: All to provide any further comment on revised risk register to Chair
- ACTION: Chair and Steering Group to complete work on and release Annual Report as soon as possible
- ACTION: All to suggest potential speakers or topics for the Board to GJJ
- ACTION: Chair and Steering Group to consider, decide and approach speakers for next Board

## 20/08 Welcome and introductions

### a. To note departures/arrivals on Board

The Vice-Chair welcomed everyone, especially the new members and representatives: Neil, Jo-Anne, Guy, and Helen. It noted there had been a notable number of changes in service heads, including founding chair Caroline Taylor retiring, since the last formal meeting of the Board in October 2019.

## 20/09 Discussions: The Library Lockdown Experience

### a. Regional Responses & Insights

The Vice-Chair introduced this topic, noting how Loughborough was the only library in the Collaboration to have reopened in any capacity. Emma shared her experiences and along with some images of her library's adaptations. Potential changes needed to the physical library environment to enable sufficient social distancing were noted as challenging. However, it was commented that for effective risk management, PPE was seen as the lowest desirable option, with other mitigating approaches (processes, layout, procedures etc) being prioritised as more desirable resolutions.

Discussions over where the UK was in terms of phase of the pandemic emergency were touched on, and how this related to academic library services. It was acknowledged this posed a challenge for directors in terms of knowing when was a potentially safe date to reopen. This was exasperated because of the significant lead time needed to set-up new arrangements before achieving even a partially open library service. It was noted most libraries were making plans for reopening some services, although timescales remained uncertain: some members were looking to the near future (4<sup>th</sup> July onward), while others were operating under the assumption that the shutdown period would extend over a longer period. How libraries cope when their buildings reached capacity, in terms of staff or patrons, under safe-reopening rules, was discussed especially the practicalities around potentially having to turn people away, going against the welcoming 'ethos' of academic libraries.

The Board acknowledged how 'Click and collect' services were becoming a common term and solution to re-opening at least partial service, but were challenging in terms of managing staffing levels, maintaining personal safety and achieving a quality service for patrons. Uncertainty over the demand levels (services, stock, study space), practicalities (biosafety in a shared study spaces, staff offices and refreshment areas, toilets) and timing of a safe reopening point were key considerations. Toilet cleanliness and occupancy provided particular challenges, for staff and patrons alike, in terms of process, safety and physical availability limits.

Returns was another service issue, and while SCONUL was noted as gathering information it was unsure if this would be disseminated with a sufficient lead time to be useful. Arranging for practical returns, under lockdown and health restrictions was challenging. Some libraries considered postal returns (e.g. freepost), but who paid for this varied, practicalities (decontamination, storage, handling) were challenging, with overall additional costs noted as potentially extensive. There were some related concerns over the potential impact from lost stock.

Staff working from home had introduced new challenges for libraries and management. Some staff had found home working challenging for various reasons (home schooling, care, physical arrangements, etc.), and others had roles where their roles could not be conducted at a distance. It was agreed that post-

lockdown more staff may choose to work from home, where possible, especially given the normalisation of video communications. This might also decrease the need to travel across campus for meetings. Conversely, the loss of physical interaction had impacted on staff morale, with tensions in some areas reported between staff able to remote work and those who could not. Efforts to redress this issue of 'team spirit' were touched on relating, with some directors reporting efforts to promote remote social activities to keep staff integrated. It was agreed there was much to learn in terms of effective digital/remote working for future library practices.

Staff well-being was discussed, along with questions around balancing employers; duty of care and personal choice. Some staff were noted as being keener than others to return to work onsite, which offered challenges and tensions where these posts provided additional support for roles between different teams or across dissimilar work areas. Furloughing of staff was a further topic of exchange, where some members had taken this option although others had not.

Suggestions for service improvements included providing personal keyboard covers for shared machines. Providing cleaning equipment (wipes etc) was noted as another help, although how this was resourced or supplied was often unclear. A question of physical screens to protect staff was noted as a frequent area of additional practical safety. However, as the government had said employers did not have to supply masks, so these would not need to be provided by libraries themselves.

The Vice-Chair thanked everyone for their comments, and invited the continued sharing via the Collaboration's mailing list.

**ACTION: All to share any further library lockdown service, staffing and reopening experiences on the mailing list**

**b. International Library Perspectives**

The Vice-Chair noted it had been hoped to invite an international perspective today, with an overseas library director speaker, but this had not been realised by the Steering Committee. However, it was hoped this would be something which could be explored for a future Board, where there was interest.

## 20/10 Governance

**a. Minutes of Oct 2019 Board and notes from postponed March 2020 meeting**

Bar a single minor spelling error, the minutes and notes were accepted as an accurate record.

**b. Any outstanding actions**

There were no outstanding actions, aside from any matters of continuing business on the agenda today.

## 20/11 Operations

**a. Update on Covid-19 impacts on Collaboration activities**

GJJ reported, that after discussions with Steering Group and other regional collaborations, and in line with governmental direction, all live events for the Collaboration were suspended for the foreseeable future. As was noted in the later reports, it was hoped to provide a limited range of online events in the coming months, with a pivot to a blended programme for the next 12-18 months.

## **b. Update on SCONUL activities & response**

Emma Walton reported on behalf of the SCONUL Board, now being the sole Collaboration representative on this body. She noted that while a lot was going on at SCONUL, some things were being moved or postponed into the next calendar year. The SCONUL Conference is expected to be held in mainland UK, to ease traveling concerns, rather than Belfast as was planned for 2020. Planning for this, other events and SCONUL activities continued to adjust and adapt to the current evolving circumstances.

GJJ raised a query relating to discussions held concerning the Memorandum of Understanding, signed in 2019, and representation on the SCONUL Board. It had been proposed at the time that a member of the SCONUL Board would have a portfolio to represent the interests of the three 'subgroup collaborations'<sup>1</sup>. Emma confirmed that no discussions or action had been taken in this respect, to her knowledge, but she would raise the question.

**ACTION: Emma to revisit the question of named representation for the regional collaborations and their interests with the SCONUL Board**

It was noted it would be useful for SCONUL to collate examples of directors whose libraries have scheduled re-opening dates. This was seen as being helpful in informing other directors, along with making or informing their own plans and reopening schedules. Robin noted that with the increased financial pressures, many if not all institutions would not have any travel budget available for staff development activities. How was SCONUL seeking to address this in terms of its activities, and legal requirements like the AGM? Emma noted hosting the AGM non-physically but within legal requirements was being investigated; and it was noted the RLUK has successfully held an online AGM. Emma agreed to feed these points back to SCONUL and their Board.

## **c. Subscriptions 2021 & Membership**

The Vice-Chair noted the Steering Group had discussed the topic of annual subscriptions in the light of the expectations of tight budgets facing likely all members in the coming 18 months. It was understood there would be concerns or difficulties for some members in making a case or finding the resource to continue their subscription. In the additional light of the expected considerable underspend against Collaboration resources in 2020, it had been agreed to reduce the subscription costs for 2021 to assist members' continued participation. The Board agreed this was a sensible approach, along with sending the right messages to the executive management strata about fiscal prudence. Alongside this the Board reiterated the value of membership in the Collaboration through the SIGs, events programme and other tangible benefits. It was noted without the Collaboration, such activities may continue but would exist in an uncoordinated, disunified and likely more resource expensive manner, and as such there was considerable benefit in the organisation's continuance.

**ACTION: Steering Group to propose lowered 2021 subscriptions and provide details at next Board**

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<sup>1</sup> NoWAL, Northern Collaboration, and the Mercian Collaboration

Robin made a point once again, that the value, labour and output received from the Officer continued to clearly outstrip the FTE for which he was remunerated. It was noted, this was a recurrent concern noted at numerous previous Board meetings. The Vice-Chair acknowledged the incredible value the Officer delivered for the Collaboration and agreed to discuss take the matter 'under advisement' with the Steering Group.

**ACTION: Steering Group to discuss value obtained from Officer, against current FTE**

**d. MSDG Committee Issues**

The Vice-Chair summarised this issue for the Board (detailed in the circulated report (20/13 (f) below)); while acknowledging a slight conflict of interest as a Director, group sponsor and representative on the MSDG committee. She explained how the MSDG was experiencing twin problems of (1) insufficient volunteers coming forward to fill outgoing key officer posts along with (2) concerns over appropriate staff members representing institutions. For the former, the proposal was to either disband the group or choose officers by random ballot.

The Board acknowledged the MSDG's reported relatively high turnover of representatives, meaning potentially the many new members might be reluctant or unsure of fulfilling the officer posts' duties. Additionally, a number of smaller member institutions were represented by their Director on the group. Those at the Board agreed they felt uneasy about adopting a leadership role within the MSDG, given their influence as directors. GJJ and Emma commented that recruitment to non-discursive, activity focussed roles was a challenge endemic across the Collaboration's committees. The Board acknowledged how the MSDG had always benefited from individuals with a high level of professionalism and commitment in the officer roles, which could be daunting for potential successors in 'filling their shoes'. The Board suggested as attendance at MSDG meetings was proving a challenge, shifts towards a more blended meeting schedule (e.g. 2 online, 1 physical annually) could potentially increase the regularity of attendance. In this way the representative pool familiar enough with MSDG operations and activities would broaden and might increase a willingness among members to volunteer.

**ACTION: MSDG to consider moving to a blended online/physical meeting schedule**

As to the second point, the Board noted that there may be a discontinuity in perceptions of group membership for some representatives as well as an evolving operational difference in the MSDG in contrast to other SIGs. The role of primarily experiential exchanging SIGs (e.g. Marketing & Comms, MDF) was different from those whose key focus is on delivering tangible outputs (e.g. MSDG, Conference). In this respect, the Board noted the strategic steer for Conference Group and MSDG has always been different to other SIG, as both delivered on the core aspirations and member value of the Collaboration. Hence, while the Board acknowledged the value in a discursive and networking group around staff development, the focus of the MSDG was perceived to be more operational. It was suggested Steering Group should consider more clearly differentiating SIGs and Operational Groups as standard practice.

It was proposed the MSDG should review its terms of reference and membership criteria and seek decide if they were to retain their SIG configuration or formally reconfigure into an operational group. This would be supported with advice and input from Steering Group. Clarifying this question, it was suggested could then help solve concerns over appropriate committee representatives and help officers to step forward.



**ACTION: MSDG to reconsider its terms of reference, and consider reconfiguration as an operational group**

**ACTION: Steering Group to consider configuration and clear delineation of SIG and Operational Groups within the Collaboration**

The Board discussed if new people on the MSDG Committee were aware of the purpose of the group, along with the expectations membership placed on them; including how they were all candidates for officer roles. It was further suggested that the MSDG might successfully operate under a model where the core officers (operational group) could convenience to drive activities forward, with a larger or companion group gathering for a more discursive SIG exchange of experience. This hybrid/twin model, might address some operational concerns, although not answering officer succession issues. A further suggestion was that the Admin Officer could be a role adopted by a more junior member of staff, rather than being drawn from among the MSDG representatives. As such, as a development opportunity, it could be made open to a wider pool of staff.

**ACTION: MSDG to consider splitting into a twin operations group and discursive SIG**

**ACTION: MSDG to reiterate membership expectations to all current, and future group representatives as a pre-condition of their involvement**

**ACTION: MSDG to consider recruiting Admin Officer role from outside the member representative pool**

It was agreed that all directors should meet/talk with their MSDG representative as soon as possible about their involvement, expectations and commitment to the group, informed through these discussions. It was proposed, ahead of any longer-term group reconfiguration, that the MSDG Chair should make a third and final call for the roles among the current members; supported by the Board and Steering Group.

**ACTION: All to go back to discuss issues about MSDG and local reps.**

**ACTION: MSDG to issue third and final call for officer roles among their membership**

## 20/12 Conference 2020

### a. Update on plans for online event

Emma Walton reported back as Steering Group sponsor, as she had now passed chairing the conference group over entirely to Claire Browne (Birmingham). Following lockdown, the pivot to an online conference rather than postponing the event had been a popular decision and this year's committee is doing well. The online format was changing many of the planning processes, although experience with organising earlier events was still proving valuable. The online-conference would blend some recorded sessions with some live discussions and workshops and would permit staff unable/unwilling to attend a physical regional event to participate. In this respect, she noted this made for a very exciting prospect, and hopefully a valuable developmental opportunity for all participants. Noting that the [Call for Session Proposals](#) was now live as was a revised [call for sponsorship](#), Emma encouraged all directors to promote the call within their services.

**ACTION: All to promote call for conference sessions to their staff**

## 20/13 Previously Circulated Reports

A number of reports had been circulated in advance of the meeting, to assist with the more limited running time of online Board meeting. However, the Vice-Chair invited specific questions or points of interest from the Board.

### a. Strategic Plan

A revised version incorporating suggested changes, and SIG improvements, was distributed to the Steering Group for consideration 12th Feb 2020. This was approved (SG 20/01(c)) and has now been made public. SIG chairs had been encouraged to consider where their planned activities lay within the Plan's framework. The Vice-Chair noted, in the light of the Covid-19 outbreak, lockdown and anticipated sectoral financial challenges, the Steering Group has agreed the need to revisit, revise and update this document starting from late 2020, with an expectation of a revised plan being developed during 2021.

### b. Key Operational Documentation

Following requests at Board two key documents had been created by the Officer 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 earlier in 2020. The Board noted the value of both documents for the Collaboration, and especially the Values one with respect to helping justifying membership subscription costs. The Vice-Chair noted the **Risk Register** was currently with the Chair for revisions to planned mitigation actions, informed in the light of the Covid-19 crisis experience. However, she invited further input from the Board. The Vice-Chair thanked those Board members who had already provided some comments on the Register.

**ACTION: All to provide any further comment on revised risk register to Chair**

### c. Annual Report 2019

Due to the lockdown period, the completion of this report was delayed, with currently the Chair's introduction remaining the only outstanding item. The Vice-Chair noted how, the 2020 report and especially the information from the members, will likely focus on a very different environment and Collaborative activity than the previous year. It was noted the report will hopefully be available soon.

**ACTION: Chair and Steering Group to complete work on and release Annual Report as soon as possible**

### d. Treasurer's Update

In lieu of a treasurer's report, the following are key figures for the Collaboration's finances (correct to 22/May/2020). GJJ noted his especial thanks to Kim Hardingham at SCONUL for producing these at very short notice.

Income (2020):	£18,821.00.
Expenditure (2020):	£5,717.35
Current Balance:	£34,783.01 <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Figure includes reversal of accrual for Birmingham Conference 2018.



Estimated Minimum Expenditure (May-Dec/2020)	£5,963.12 <sup>3</sup>
Estimated Reserve 31/12/20 (for minimum expenditure):	£28,819.89

The Vice-Chair noted, as had been commented earlier, that with a reduction in physical activity, the Collaboration remained in a good financial position for the medium term.

**e. Special Interest Groups**

The most recent reports can be found in the recent Steering Group minutes ([SG 20/04, p4-5](#)) with earlier reports for the period Oct 2019-early March 2020 in the March Board Briefing Notes ([DB 20/06 p2-3](#)). A brief summary of activity follows.

<b>CG (Conference)</b>	As reported elsewhere, plans are underway to pivot #Mercian20 to an online only event, hosted 8 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2020. A <a href="#">call for session proposals</a> is now live.
<b>D&amp;SSG (Deputies)</b>	Plans for a virtual meeting (23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2020) are underway following a second successful event in March 2020.
<b>MarComms (Marketing)</b>	Limited current planned activity, though organisers remain responsive to enquiry.
<b>MCG (Copyright)</b>	While the mailing list has some activity, Group Chair is currently unresponsive so Collaboration Vice-Chair following up.
<b>MDF</b>	As their April meeting was cancelled due to lockdown, an online meeting was held Tue 26 <sup>th</sup> May 2020, minutes available soon. Topics discussed included: support for students with special needs under lockdown, plans for reopening, click to collect book services and potential conference support/contributions.
<b>MMF (Metadata)</b>	Active group, and while they have postponed an event in June are receptive to potential online activities.
<b>MSDG</b>	Postponed current events programme, with the exception of (1) Decolonising Academic Libraries (16 <sup>th</sup> June) and (2) the <a href="#">virtual networking pilot</a> (13 <sup>th</sup> May 2020). Conducted a survey of member staff, along with local rep discussions concerning 2020/21 programme: expected to embrace a hybrid (online/physical) approach. Handover to new chair (Sarah Pittaway, Worcester) underway, with an online meeting anticipated June/July 2020.
<b>RDMSG</b>	No currently visible or reported activity.

**f. MSDG Representation & Attendance**

This contents of this report item were addressed in (20/11(b)) earlier in the meeting, with the Vice-Chair thanking the MSDG for their contribution.

<sup>3</sup> Figure mainly accounts for officer’s salary and phone costs, and absence of costs for physical events or travel expenses under lockdown operations. Comparable costs for the same period 2019 were £10,690, which included £3,828 towards conference hosting costs.

Incoming MSDG Chair Sarah Pittaway and outgoing Chair Matt Cunningham wished to bring the following concerns to the directors' attention for feedback and guidance. The Group is lacking volunteers to take up essential posts (2 years) for *Admin Officer* and *Evaluation Officer*. These (along with Chair/Vice, which have been potentially filled<sup>4</sup>) were previously identified and agreed as essential for the Group and its programme to operate successfully. Despite calls for volunteers (twice) there have been no candidates willing to take on these roles. As a result, the options currently are:

- a) Disband SDG/put on hiatus if no one comes forward
- b) Pull names from a hat for these 2 roles

Either way, this situation ties into broader concerns around how member representatives' prioritise MSDG commitments within their own work commitments, as well as how directors frame the group's importance with their local representatives. Two particular related concerns which may impact on the above issues are:

**Attendance:** The Group has a lot of representatives not attending relatively regularly, sometimes missing multiple meetings in a year<sup>5</sup>. While they recognise all staff are likely busy, as an important group for staff development across the Collaboration the Group believe membership and involvement (attendance at meetings and engagement outside) should be a relatively high priority.

**Representation:** There are questions concerning if the right people are currently serving as group representatives<sup>6</sup>. Initially, representatives were drawn from the deputy directors and/or heads of service areas strata, but this is now more varied. The MSDG acknowledges there are benefits from group membership as a staff developmental opportunity. However, MSDG representatives need to have a good understanding of their entire service to provide updates, recognise staff training needs along with putting forward event programme ideas and identifying suitable colleagues to host events.

#### **g. Member Event Participation Survey**

A membership survey was conducted online during March/April, partly in support of the Staff Development Group's 20/21 programme of events. The survey also gathered information on delegates willingness to engage with online events and desires to travel to events. Respondents were also invited to attend a virtual networking pilot event. 50 member staff responded, and the full report is now available.

#### **h. Online Event Guides**

The Officer has developed guidance for organisers as well as information for participants in online video conference events. This material has been developed in discussion with other collaborations' officers and is subject to update as a result of ongoing experience. It is available for re-use under a CC-BY licence (as is most Collaboration material).

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<sup>4</sup> Pending approval by the next group meeting July

<sup>5</sup> Group normally holds 3 meetings annually

<sup>6</sup> Current representatives: <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/sdg/representatives>. These are selected by each institution, according to their own internal processes and/or personal preferences.

## i. Officer's Update

See also [report to Board March 2020](#). Following the previous update, over and above his regular coordination, administration and governance work, during the lockdown period the Officer has been spending a lot of time facilitating and attending video meetings with the Steering Group, and other SIGs. These have notably included: the Conference, MSDG and MDF. Further meetings with the MSDG, Conference Group, and Deputies & Senior Staff Group are anticipated in the next few weeks.

The officer has acquired a licence for the Zoom platform, which is regularly being deployed to facilitate Collaboration meetings. He was instrumental in initiating and facilitating the recent video networking event ([13<sup>th</sup> May 2020](#)) and subsequent feedback analysis, which followed a survey on behalf of the MSDG on membership future event desires. A [report on this work](#) is now available. He will be co-hosting a second networking event (8<sup>th</sup> June 2020, in collaboration with the Conference Group Chair). He has created a range of [support documentation](#) relating to this, and has been handling queries relating to hosting online meetings.

GJJ also chaired the annual meeting of the Regional Library Collaboration Officers' forum (April 2020), where issues of mutual interest concerning developments across the UK were discussed. Despite the lack of travel in the past two months, the Officer remains close to or mildly over-capacity in terms of workload.

The Officer's second salary increment was implemented in spring 2019 (following the first adjustment in 2018), following work by Chair and Steering Group<sup>7</sup>. The annual review of Officer remuneration, remains an 'on request' action, rather than being incremental within scale, which is out of step with practice adopted by the other SCONUL regional officers (NoWAL and Northern Collaboration).

## 20/14 Next meeting

### a. Themes, speakers & format for autumn meeting

The date and format of the next meeting was discussed. It was agreed while it could be pushed back to later in the year, to host it in October as normal, but once again in the online format.

#### **ACTION: GJJ to coordinate date of next Board with Chair and Steering Group**

Potential speakers for the Board were discussed, with UKRI and Plan S being topics of interest, with Sally Rumsey of cOAlition S being a potential candidate. It was noted that only with the impacts from Covid-19, Brexit would also continue to dominate HE and academic library concerns too, and speakers or discussions in this respect could be valuable. The re-opening of buildings and recruitment activities in the new-normal would also be useful points to focus discussions around, although these would need to potentially be confidential discussions within the Board only. Finally, it was suggested that Liam Earney from Jisc, might also be a useful return speaker on the topic of textbooks. The Vice-Chair invited all members to make further speaker suggestions to GJJ

#### **ACTION: All to suggest potential speakers or topics for the Board to GJJ**

#### **ACTION: Chair and Steering Group to consider, decide and approach speakers for next Board**

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<sup>7</sup> The Officer has been in post since November 2015



20/15 AOB

There were no AOB, and the meeting closed at 4pm.