

Mercian Collaboration Steering Group

Meeting 8 August 2016

Present: Phil Brabban, Caroline Taylor (Chair), Emma Walton, Robin Green, Gareth J Johnson (MSDO)

Apologies: Fiona Parsons

Minutes

1. Directors Meeting (October 2016)

a. Jisc speakers for October Meeting (Matt Gallon and Liam Earney),

CT had a response from Jisc to suggest Liam and Matt will attend, and are happy to come, with a preference for a morning slot. The SG needed to brief them about what we wanted covered. Liam likely will want to talk about negotiations. Additionally, since Jisc are realigning their regional support structure, and new customer focus approach this was something big and useful to talk about. They had a regional organisation which hadn't worked that well, so this may be a refining of this. The MC could help to define what a region is, and this may actually shape their thinking and response. E.g. splitting the MC region in half is not sensible nor helpful to our membership.

It was agreed that it would be good to get some of the bigger strategic thoughts for Jisc's development in these discussions. Jisc Collections are one of the core features of service provisions, plus JANET. What would be interesting, in terms of their changing strategic outlook, is what is now core, what is peripheral and any other developments in this area. E.g. EDINA will no longer be a core partner. Knowing how much they still lean towards IT over libraries in their thinking and activities would also be useful.

PB raised an additional question: do we need to make time on the agenda about the Elsevier negotiations and how colleagues will be responding? There were discussions around re-subscribing or taking a collective decision to pull out, noting the potential impact would be greater on some institutions than others. This led to thoughts about what would we do collaboratively to meet the information needs of colleagues around the regions if we were to do this? It was agreed to gain thoughts from Jisc about such hypothetical steps. It would also be valuable to gain a view on how sustainable any sort of collaborative arrangements will be.

CT clarified for the SG that there were four elements she would brief Jisc to talk on: Long term strategy, clarification of core/noncore services, regional alignment, and negotiations with Plan B if no-one subscribes.

It was agreed CT would invite Jisc to speak in the morning session, as discussions could impact on action plan.

AP: CT to invite Jisc to attend in the morning (October 12th) and to brief them on the areas of discussion

b. Other agenda items

It was agreed that these should include: Action Plan, Finance/Subscriptions, Conference, SIG/Networks, Talent Management, and the Chair's succession. It was noted that SIGs could be a big discussion and would impact on the MC's action plan for 2017, actually in terms of defining what we mean by an SIG.

AP: GJJ to draft agenda and share with SG ahead of finalisation

c. Successor/contact at Staffordshire

No one was sure who this was, or the interim arrangements. It was agreed that GJJ would follow this up.

AP: GJJ clarify with Staffordshire their interim Directors representative

2. Conference Group

a. Report/feedback on progress

EW apologised for being less active on this as hoped, as she had been also acting as Assistant Director for Academic Services, so demands on time had increased. However, she had started the recruitment for the Conference Group members, and would aim to be as representative as possible (in terms of institutions and roles). She planned to hold a meeting in advance of the Mercian Directors Committee. It was noted that Matt Cunningham of the MC-SD had agreed to be the representative from the group. As he is based at Loughborough, this should make liaising with the Chair easier.

GJJ noted that a new Jiscmail discussion list for the CG has been set up, and members will be added to it in due course as they are recruited. Owned by Emma and GJJ.

b. Next steps

The first CG meeting would start to get group going, assign roles and begin progress towards the conference. In particular it would look at generating ideas. Unlikely that there would be much concrete progress beyond this by the October Directors Committee meeting, but that at least the CG's membership would be set.

CT noted that there would need to be input via email from Directors between the October and March meetings, to keep all members onside and engaged with the conference progress. In this respect the Directors' expectations in terms of communication were raised.

Agreed CG will forge ahead with the ethos of ‘this is what we’re going to do, unless Directors strenuously object’ rather than seek clarification and affirmation for all decisions. This was agreed as appropriate and desirable.

AP: GJJ & EW to coordinate brief updates for Directors on conference progress following CG meetings

3. Special Interest Groups

a. Feedback/comments on SIG report (draft) previously circulated

The recommendations from GJJ’s *Special Interest Groups and Library Collaborations* report had been presented to Directors at the 16th March meeting. As time for discussion had been limited, their feedback had been subsequently sought, and collated into the *Special Interest Group Feedback* report circulated two weeks ago to the SG. GJJ briefly summarised the report, and its conclusions.

Generally a feeling was that the response to the questions had been somewhat underwhelming, with no especially strong steer emerging. RDM and CM have some strong support in the region, but this did not seem to be represented in the survey. With respect to RDM discussions focusses on what kind of group would be best, an autonomous network without any overt MC links, an ongoing SIG or something else. Noted that a questions may be does bringing such a group or network under the MC umbrella offer advantages to both the group members and the MC itself. A network would have very different processes and remit to a SIG.

It was agreed that GJJ would try and identify where the balance lay in the RDM members own thinking e.g. continue as a network or would they like to move that group and have it supported by the collaboration. For example finding resources to support something they would want to do/produce/organise.

AP: GJJ to report back on progress to SG/Directors’ Group on progress with RDM Subgroup

It was noted that not all directors responded. It was suggested that it could be valuable to find out who didn’t respond, and why (beyond pressures of work). This was an issue relating to engagement with the MC by Directors, and not a side issue.

AP: Chair/SG to Follow up lack of response from Directors to survey

One question was the definition of SIG and how formal they are, which wasn’t defined in survey. However, it was noted that this survey followed on discussions at SG and Directors group.

RG highlighted a disparity between practitioners and directors think is important. It could be that practitioners would autonomously form their own groups, which is positive, and certainly the MC should be encouraging of this kind of staff led focus. At the same time, what level of support we could extend to these, and the advantages being part of the MC (e.g. funding) should be something to be flagged up to such groups.

PB suggested it would be useful to look at groups in terms of outputs. For example a SIG having a purpose and products that were one off or regular production (e.g. the SDG). Something productive for example, doesn't really fit with the network concept. Once you start subdividing into more granular parts, it fractures the whole a bit too much. He suggested a single research support group was a more practical approach, that any kind of network could be rolled into it.

It was suggested that a clear distinction was needed between a group of practitioners and a SIG/task & finish group we might commission to do a piece of work. There are not mutually exclusive but are essentially different things, although one might morph into another over time and as needs change. RG noted that the MC action plan may provide guidance on the kinds of subgroups needed, especially if there is a feeling that we need to deliver on particular areas. It was noted that from the away day RDM had been high on the agenda even then.

CT raised the issue of how to progress the SIG matters for the October meeting. It was prosed to go ahead with one new subgroup in Research Support. Depending on the outcomes of the RDM meeting, this may be the same 'group' or another other. It was agreed that for all SIGs, a SG would be assigned as subgroup liaison and support lead.

AP: Chair and SG to conclude via email what recommendations are for to the October meeting

b. Report on RDM possible group

A meeting was being held on 24th August at Loughborough University, led by Laurien Williamson (Leicester) and other interested parties, following discussions subsequent to the recent MCSDG RDM event (at Leicester). GJJ would be in attendance to facilitate and report back, but from initial online discussions there seemed to be strong interest. Noting the above comments and suggestions for questions, GJJ will test the waters for the kind of group and its particular configuration

c. Report on CM possible group

During the Collection Management event, co-presented with Jisc, earlier this year there had been some time set aside for discussions about a potential CM subgroup of the Mercian. While there did not initilly seem to be a strong drive for one, as of July 2016 Jo Aikins

(Leicester) was continuing to take informal discussions forward. GJJ noted he had made himself available to provide support to any formalisation of such a group.

EW noted that different purchasing consortia would be used by different universities, so there will be some overlaps with what happens within these, as well as Jisc. Plus there's also national activity, which makes this quite a complex area. GJJ noted that he had been asked by SCURL if the MC had a Consortia Collection Management policy, to which he had replied in the negative. CT noted this may be an area to address further in discussions with Jisc.

AP: GJJ to report back on any progress with CM subgroup

d. Status of Disability Group (unaffiliated)

GJJ noted a number of questions had arisen during his talks with Directors and at SDG about this group, its status and relationship to the MC. It would be advantageous to clarify its relationship (if any) with the MC, possibly through discussions at the Directors' Group meeting.

Lack of knowledge from SG members as to the remit for this group. Difficulty seeing other than sharing best practice what this group is doing, or indeed if it is active.

Any action or just let it run?

AP: GJJ to follow up with Jane Mortimer (DMU) about Disability group functions and activities

4. Community engagement

This was a topic coming up from Directors comments which CT had particularly noted. Certainly it speaks to the wider corporate responsibility agenda. There were some discussions about how the MC might get involved, but no concrete decisions. Webpages update

a. Development Progress

Steering Group approved Website costs from Lori (SCONUL, July 2016) and a prototype Mercian Website (inc developer's feedback) has now been established. Adaptive (web developers) are adjusting the site in response to discussions with GJJ and Lori. GJJ now has editorial access to it and will be exploring this shortly. The final URL will be merciancollaboration.org.uk.

SG commented that the site design looks clean and tidy, and the colour scheme suitable. RG commented on the difficulties and confusions over registering the URL, and the final expediency of SCONUL handling this. GJJ noted that he hopes the site will be live by October meeting or at least in a near finalised version.

AP: GJJ to continue working with Adaptive to finalise MC website

b. Mercian Logo decision

EW's designer had provided updated logos as requested, and these had been circulated for comment. Other than from RG no comments had been received via email. After discussions a final short list was agreed, and GJJ would mock up versions of the site front page with these. The SG would then decide via email on the final choice.

AP: GJJ to create dummy versions of logo and website for SG to review

AP: SG to agree on final logo in advance of October meeting and Website launch

c. Mugshots Phil and Fiona, outstanding

GJJ remind FP and PB that he would still like a head shot for the Website from them.

AP: Fiona and Phil to supply headshots ASAP for the website

5. Development Officer report

a. Other Collaborations: Finance document from M25

This had been prepared by the M25's Executive Manager, from feedback by the various Collaboration Officers around the UK. It had been previously circulated for information by GJJ to the SG. It was noted that due to the relative youth of the MC, and current lack of project activities huge chunks of money were not required to resource these.

b. NC Conference attendance

GJJ noted he had been invited to attend the Northern Collaboration conference, and would be doing so in September (15th). His main purpose in attending is to observe and report back on the experience and operational approach adopted to the Conference Group.

c. Progress on site visits

Of the 22 Mercian Collaboration sites, 15 had been visited to date, and 18 would have been completed by the end of August. Visits had been very information rich, along with free and frank discussions focussing on local challenges and specialties, along with thoughts about the benefits and role of the Mercian Collaboration itself. Forthcoming dates included, Northampton and Harper Adams (17th Aug). The OU was pending the new librarian, Rosie Jones, start (1st Aug) and her PA arranging a suitable date, likely to be Sept/October. Likewise DMU was pending Dave Parkes starting as their new Librarian (22nd Aug) before being arranged. The final three, Coventry was pending Phil's reply, Warwick, RG's post-op recovery and Leicester as to suit CT.

Emerging themes include: Developing readership, recruitment and regional talent management, talent exchange programme, community engagement (public/public

libraries), managing partnerships, budgets and staffing resources, rebuilds/refurbishments, and holistic staff team working.

Value of Mercian was largely recognised, with some issues over ability to be more involved from some smaller staffed institutions, but generally very positive. Some feelings of disconnect (e.g. Mercian list is low traffic). Desires for recognisable tangibles present for many. Interests in exploring overlaps and engagement with other regional coterminous library groups. Ensuring Mercian recognised/recognisable within the region (website) important to many. Regional fringe concerns remain, but value of being part of 'larger' regional body for information exchange commonly acknowledged.

The topic of talent exchanges was warmly noted, and after some discussions was agreed to be on the agenda for the October meeting. How to manage and encourage it, without generating friction with staff who weren't involved would need to be carefully considered. However, the developmental benefits for investing in staff, who can't be automatically be promoted, could be at least partially satisfied through this. It was agreed that it would probably need a small group to make a workable proposal.

AP: GJJ to coordinate with FP in the preparation of a short think piece proposal on talent management for the Directors Meeting

The issue of buddying (which the MC-SDG are currently looking at) was raised and if this forms part of this programme. It was agreed these were not the same, but related, and may need to be sympathetically developed.

6. Arrangements for securing next MC Chair

CT opened the discussion about the need to consider how the arrangements will work ahead of the March 2017 Directors Committee meeting when she will step down. RG noted some interest had been expressed privately about taking on treasurer's role. It was agreed that Directors needed to be really clear at October meeting about the definitive standing down of CT, and potentially RG, and the need for successors. SG agreed people should be enabled to step up if interested, and to be aware that the roles were not particularly time consuming. It was noted that with GJJ on board keeping things moving added an extra dimension, and made the roles of the officers much easier.

It was agreed in addition to Chair and Treasurer, that a Vice Chair role was necessary and should be filled from March 2017 onwards as well, with the understanding that they would succeed to the Chair. It was reiterated that the SG believed that all Directors would serve on the SG at some point during the MC's existence.

The SG and the MCDO would manage handover. It was proposed that due to the lack of Vice Chair currently and the need for continuity, that the Chair should occupy an advisory Past-Chair role from March 2017 to provide support for the new SG. This was agreed as desirable

AP: CT/RG to write piece for the Directors in advance of the October meeting, outlining the demands and commitment and reward from serving in their officer roles

7. AOB

d. Finance

RG reported that there was £10.5k in bank, and probably £3.5k spend to come this year, which leaves £6-7k as our reserve and to cover last part of SDG funding course funding, if they wish to draw on it. Conference costs are still to be determined, and the Conference Group would report on these once they had had some initial discussions. Emma was keen to survey those staff coming on the CG about conferences they had attended previously, and if the location (geographic, university/hotel) had affected their attendance decision.

8. Date of next meeting

Agreed not that another tel-conference was not needed in advance of October meeting, and matters outstanding could be decided via email.

PB noted that KK (current SDG Chair) had changed jobs to Assistant Director at Coventry, for which congratulations were made. Noted that she may in time need to drop off SDG.