

# The Mercian Collaboration

## Annual Report 2017





## Chair's Introduction

The Mercian Collaboration - an ancient heritage in that name, a great legacy but very much an organization focussed on the future. An idea, an endeavour which makes every member more effective, more knowledgeable, more communicative, more engaging and innovative. One which encompasses, celebrates and embraces the diversity and excellence of our members.

Libraries are stronger when they come together, when they share and they learn from each other. Together we can provide better services to our users, develop our skill sets, offer better value and become greater assets for our universities. We have a huge pool of talent, experience and expertise at our disposal.

As libraries we play a crucial role in recruiting, supporting and ensuring students succeed and that world class research is facilitated. Although regional in our grouping we are of course also part of a national and international body. Our collective, our collaboration will continue to influence the future of libraries in higher education. Through informed discussion and debate, we will continue to develop staff and become more confident and innovative in all our endeavours.

Thank you, to everyone who generously contributes their time and expertise, thanks for every development opportunity and to every member of staff who together make up the Mercian Collaboration.

*David J Parkes*  
Mercian Collaboration Chair  
Director of Library and Learning Services, De Montfort University





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## Contributor Acknowledgements

Thanks to all those of contributed photos, articles and other inputs into this annual report. Particular thanks to: Beck Maguire, David Parkes, Diane Job, Emma Walton, Gareth Cole, Kirsty Kift, Paul Reynolds and Yvonne Budden.

Edited by Gareth J Johnson, Mercian Collaboration Development Officer

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## Membership

The Mercian Collaboration is a regional library network based in the UK Midlands. Since its founding as the *Midlands Academic Library Group* in 2014, it has until recently comprised 22 academic libraries<sup>1</sup>. However, in September 2017, a new institution joined the Collaboration, with Cranfield University becoming our first new non-founding member organisation<sup>2</sup>.

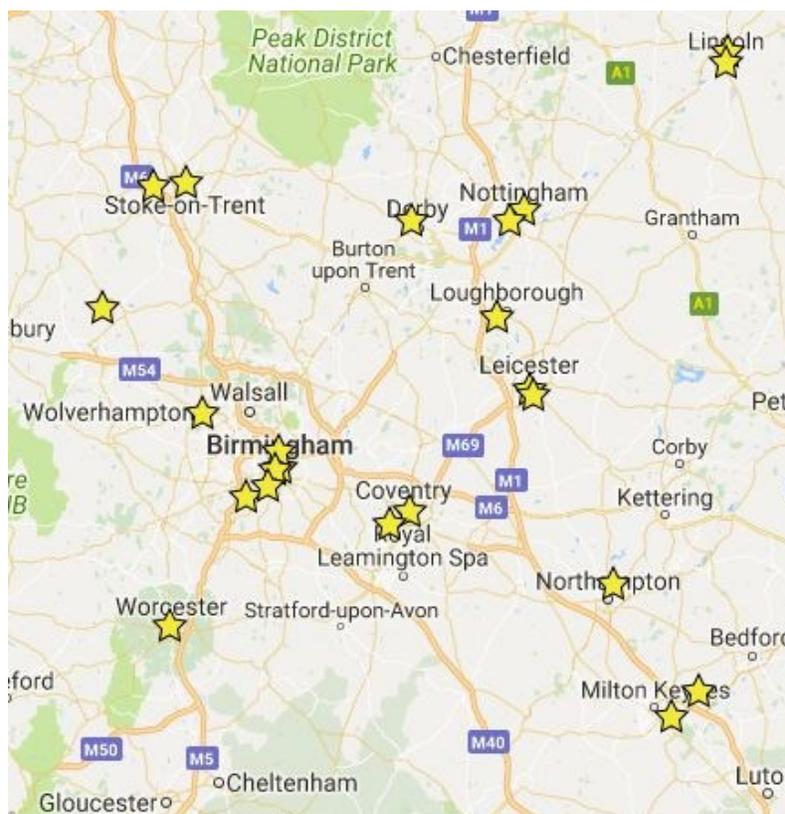


Figure 1: Mercian Collaboration Member Locations

Map data: © 2017 GeoBasis-De/BKG (©2009), Google

## Governance Structure

The directors of the member libraries form the Collaboration's ultimate governing body. This body meets twice annually to discuss issues and exchange experiences, along with deciding on the Collaboration's future strategic direction. Where directors are unable to attend, they can deputise a senior member of their staff to appear in their place. Operationally, a Steering Group, comprising a subset of these directors, oversees and advances activities outside of these meetings, along with having responsibility for monitoring and supporting the activity of the Collaboration's special interest subgroups.

<sup>1</sup> See: Member Institutions, <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/about-collaboration/member-institutions>

<sup>2</sup> For more on the history of the Collaboration, see Johnson, G.J., 2018. Collegiality, Community, and Cooperation in the Midlands: Growing the Mercian Collaboration. *SCONUL Focus* [forthcoming]



## Steering Group

The Steering Group also has a responsibility for representing the interests of all member organisations in their deliberations and decision-making processes. While initially Steering Group members had been informally co-opted, from March 2017 a biennial nomination and election process was instigated as the new standard practice. Hence, the current Steering Group now comprises three officer roles (Chair, Vice-Chair and Treasurer) as well as three non-officer positions. Apart from the Vice-Chair, Steering Group members serve two-year terms. The Vice-Chair serves a four-year term, normally progressing to Chair after the first two.

### Mercian Collaboration Steering Group (2017-19)



**Dave Parkes**  
(DMU)  
Chair



**Diane Job**  
(Birmingham)  
Vice-Chair



**Paul Reynolds**  
(Keele)  
Treasurer



**Phil Brabban**  
(Coventry)  
Steering Group



**Fiona Parsons**  
(Wolverhampton)  
Steering Group



**Emma Walton**  
(Loughborough)  
Steering Group



**Dr Gaz J Johnson**  
Collaboration Development Officer  
(Ex Officio Member)

The Steering Group, along with all other parts of the Collaboration, benefit from the support provided by their Development Officer (MCDO). Acting as the Collaboration's executive manager, the MCDO facilitates communications, coordinates operations, monitors subgroups, enables sector intelligence and analysis, alongside providing a corporate secretarial functionality. Operationally, they maintain and develop the Collaboration's online presence and liaise extensively with the special interest groups. They also represent and inform the Collaboration's interests through frequent interactions with their counterparts based at other regional library collaborations. The MCDO notably sits on the Steering Group and Directors' Committee, in an ex-officio, advisory capacity.



## Financial Review

2017 was a very successful year for the Mercian Collaboration. It witnessed our first conference, a continuing and growing programme of staff development events and the creation of new special interest groups. Inevitably, additional activity brought with it increasing costs some of which were anticipated and, where possible, were offset. The provision by DMU of a free event venue, along with an additional contribution from the University of Birmingham, towards other conference costs significantly helped the Collaboration to deliver on its goals. Meanwhile, additional unanticipated costs to support the website's security updates, made a greater than expected call on Collaboration reserves.

Nevertheless, the Collaboration has still ended the year with the desired level of financial reserves required by the Directors' Committee. However, in line with the increasing levels of collaborative activity, and the anticipated support they will require, membership subscriptions will be increasing in 2018, in order to maintain a healthy and stable financial future for the Mercian Collaboration.

## Activities and Developments

2017 was a year that saw many new activities for the Mercian Collaboration. Not least among these were the buddying scheme's introduction, hosting our first annual conference and the inauguration of the Collaboration's website. Alongside this, discussions were held among Directors and the Steering Group as to how staff talent across the Collaboration's member institutions could be managed and nurtured. Meanwhile the Staff Development Group continued to organise their regular and well-received programme of staff development events and site visits

### Buddying Scheme

Introduced in September at the Mercian Conference 2017, the buddying scheme<sup>3</sup>, is a way for new or relatively new library staff to find an experienced and informed colleague at one of the other member institutions. Coordinated by the Mercian SDG on behalf of the Collaboration, participants, or buddies, are partnered up for a six-month period of peer-to-peer support. Unlike mentoring, which comes with far more formal arrangements for monitoring and reporting, buddying is designed to be light-touch, flexible and mutually beneficial for all participants.

There are no formal expectations on how often or where buddies will meet during their partnering period, and additionally they're free to choose whether an in-person, online or over the phone meeting scheme works best for them. To date around twenty people have come forward to be involved in the buddying scheme, from across the Mercian region. The scheme is being run for an initial trial period, and during 2018 will be reviewed by the MSDG and Mercian Directors, using feedback provided by the initial tranche of participants.

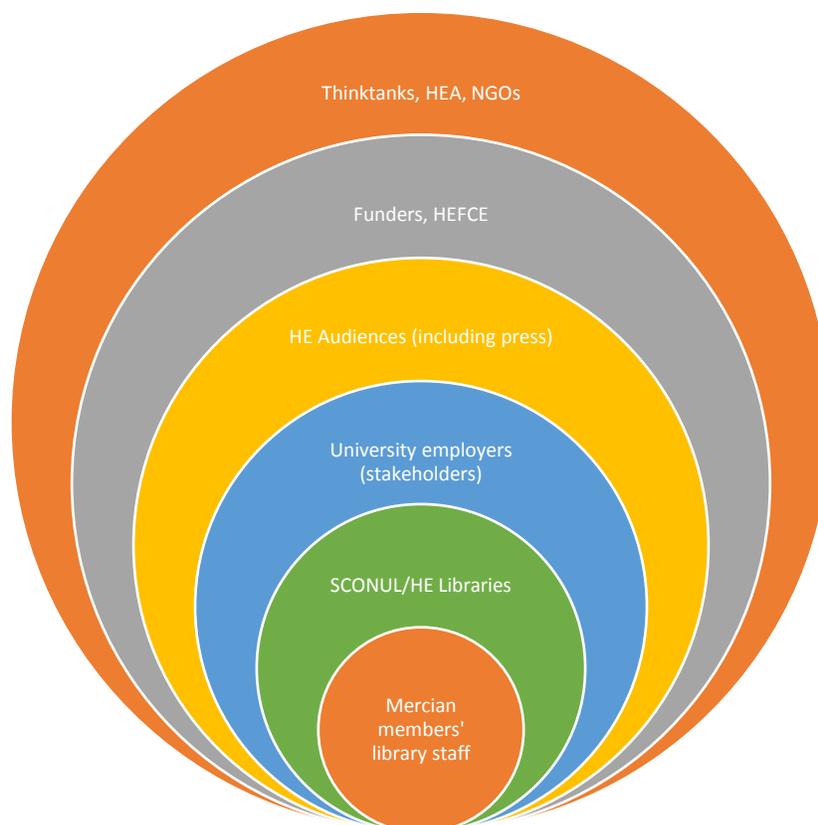
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<sup>3</sup> For more, see: Buddying Scheme, <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/sdg/buddying-scheme>



### Website and Social Media Presence

The Collaboration's website content was developed by the Development Officer, with technical realisation provided by Adaptive. Formally launched 20<sup>th</sup> January 2017, the website was intended to primarily provide a location where staff within member organisations could find out about events, special interest group activities along with reports and decisions taken by the Directors. However, as the site and its content have developed, an appreciation has grown that the Mercian's website fulfils a wider communicative goal to a broader audience.



*Figure 2: Mercian Website Core and Fringe Audiences<sup>4</sup>*

While site usage remains relatively quantitatively low, reported satisfaction with its design and content has been strong across the membership. The introduction of Google Analytics to the site in February 2017 provided the ability to monitor usage figures, and track how events and circumstances affected its user base. Notably, the run up to and launch of the 2017 Conference (July-Sept) saw a significant jump in the site's users, which subsequently has continued to remain at a much higher level. It is hoped further developments in site content, along with a review of the Collaboration's communication will help to further enhance the site's user base in 2018.

<sup>4</sup> See [Johnson, G.J., 2017. Mercian Website Audiences. Leicester: Mercian Collaboration, p.1](#)

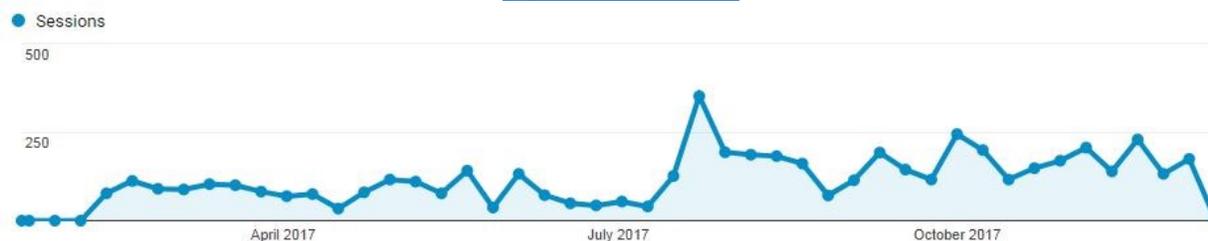


Figure 3: Weekly Mercian Website Users 2017

Alongside the website's launch in January, a twitter social media presence ([@MercianCollab](https://twitter.com/MercianCollab)) was established to further promote the Collaboration and its activities. Run by the Development Officer, this twitter presence has served to particularly highlight new additions to the website in terms of meetings, events and news content. Consequently, it has also served to actively raise the visibility of the Mercian Collaboration itself. To date, @MercianCollab has accumulated a modest 118 followers and has sent out over 500 tweets promoting the Collaboration and SIG's activities

### Conference 2017

The inaugural Mercian Collaboration Conference, *In Libraries We Trust*<sup>5</sup>, was held on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2017 at De Montfort University. Themed around the issue of engendering, creating and maintaining trust, the event was organised by the Conference Group, chaired by Emma Walton and comprising a small dedicated team of library staff who volunteered to participate in its planning and organisation. The group were assisted by Matt Cunningham (MSDG) and Gaz J Johnson (Development Officer), in the planning, execution and review of the event.

In total 98 delegates and speakers attended, drawn from virtually all the Collaboration's member organisations along with a few external delegates. Moreover, delegates spanned staff seniority levels from assistant through to director levels all being represented. The conference, intended to showcase interesting, innovative or insightful practice conducted across the Collaboration, saw submissions of breakout paper proposals far exceeding the number of parallel sessions available.

Additionally, an external keynote speaker, Eric Stoller spoke about the core conferences themes of trust and libraries in the early 21st Century. Papers and recordings from the conference were shared via the Collaboration's website afterwards<sup>6</sup>.

#### Delegate Thoughts

A great opportunity to network with other academic library staff and share insights about best working practices.

An opportunity to learn about interesting activities and projects across the region. It was this regional component that was most interesting to me.

The opportunity to see what other members of the Mercian Group were involved with provided a chance to take back some relevant ideas

<sup>5</sup> See, [#Mercian17](https://twitter.com/Mercian17) for tweets from and about the conference

<sup>6</sup> See: Conference 2017: Outputs, <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/conference-2017-outputs>



Costs for the conference were mainly covered from Collaboration funds, with additional support for the keynote speaker from the University of Birmingham. Additionally, DMU graciously provided the conference venue for no charge, a fact which strongly enhanced the conference's financial viability. The event was strongly and positively received by delegates, with feedback already being fed into the planning of the 2018 conference, expected to also be delivered during September. It is also anticipated the 2018 conference will seek external sponsorship, to deliver on the Collaboration's aspirations for a showcase regional event.



Figure 4: The Venue, DMU, Leicester - Conference Location 2017

### MSDG Programme

The Mercian Staff Development Group (MSDG) runs an annual programme of events, which are instigated through reflective practice and discussions by member representatives. Each event is designed to meet emerging or continuing areas of mutual concern and challenge, alongside providing an invaluable forum for Collaboration members' staff to exchange experience and insights.

The programme runs across the academic rather than calendar year, meaning events are normally hosted October-June<sup>7</sup>, although planning and preparation activities are conducted throughout the year. As with all Collaboration SIG events, the anticipated attending audiences are limited to staff from member organisations, although where space permits and interest arises beyond the Collaboration, local event hosts can opt to open registration beyond the region.

<sup>7</sup> See: Conference 2017: Programme, <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/MSDG%20Events%20Flyer%202017-18.pdf>



Event Type	Overview
<b>All the Same, But Different</b>	<p>Opportunities to visit, explore and tour one of the diverse institutional Mercian member libraries. These events represent an excellent chance for staff members to learn about a wide range of operations, systems and experiences within different organisational settings and working cultures.</p> <p>Staff observe front of house and behind-the-scenes procedures and processes. Informal networking with local staff permit attendees to further develop their understanding.</p>
<b>Learning Exchanges</b>	<p>These facilitated and interactive events represent opportunities for staff working within similar roles across the Collaboration to come together for an exchange of experience.</p> <p>These events present opportunities to air concerns or consider common challenges, as well as solutions, to issues within specific library operational areas.</p>
<b>Workshops</b>	<p>These focussed half-day events generally provide the chance to hear from several speakers on particular themes or topics. Drawing on expertise from within and outside of the Collaboration region, workshops represent an excellent opportunity to update knowledge and awareness across a wide range of library related arenas.</p>

The event programme embraces two strands of evaluation. Firstly, delegates attending events are provided with the opportunity to feedback and evaluate how the event met their expectations, using a standard template form. Secondly, delegates attending any event are approached towards the end of the academic year to ask about the impact of attending any programme element on their working practices, professional networks and desires towards future events. Notably, most delegates who respond report high levels of satisfaction in the events programme.

The logo for Mercian Collaboration, featuring the text "Mercian Collaboration" in white on a blue background with a white bracket-like shape to the left.

Figure 5: Montage of MSDG Events 2017



## Special Interest Groups

Since its formation, the Collaboration has established several special interest groups (SIG), beginning with the Mercian Staff Development Group<sup>8</sup>. During 2017 several newer SIG have been created, largely instigated to meet member organisations' staff needs. All SIG benefit from having the Mercian Development Officer sitting on their committees, where he provides support, guidance and coordination while also serving to channel information between the various entities comprising the Collaboration. Another innovation this year has been the assigning to each SIG of a Steering Group sponsor. The intention here is to provide further support, insight and communication between the membership and Mercian Directors, while also serving to enhance cross-collaboration coordination.

### Conference Group (CG)

The Mercian Conference Group was set up to act as the planning and operational team responsible for overseeing all aspects of the annual Mercian Collaboration conference. This SIG was first established in late 2016, with the primary task of organising the first in a, hopefully, annual programme of conference events. Because of the need for a singular, focussed output unlike other SIG, members of this group's committee were initially proposed by their Directors. Since the group's activities represent a high-priority tangible output for the Collaboration, their Steering Group sponsor, Emma Walton (Loughborough), also serves as its Chair.



*Figure 6: CG Members Smile at the End of the 2017 Conference*

Additionally, because of their own contemporaneous events programme, the MSDG supplied an ex-officio observer to provide guidance, liaison and support between the two groups. Over 2017, with the support of the Steering Group and Directors, they shaped, configured and instigated the first annual conference 'In Libraries We Trust', on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2017. After this highly successful event, the CG members also took on the task of reviewing the delegate evaluations, and using this information along with their personal experience to begin developing the 2018 conference.

<sup>8</sup> For further information on all groups, see: <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/activities-groups>



### [Mercian Copyright Group \(MCG\)](#)

The Mercian Copyright Group is the newest of the Mercian SIG, and was formally approved for a 12-month initial trial period at the November 2017 Directors' meeting. Previously known as the *Midlands Copyright Group*, it comprises a network of library staff with a responsibility for Copyright guidance and advocacy at their institutions. While the group aims to transition to formal SIG governance structures in the new year, the interim Chair is Yvonne Budden (Warwick). The group has organised and will be hosting an event early in 2018, examining copyright and data protection for HEIs with a focus on new roles, responsibilities and obligations under the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations). The Group's sponsor is David Parkes (DMU).

### [Mercian Disability Forum \(MDF\)](#)

The Mercian Disability Forum is one of the Collaboration's newer special interest groups. While its members had been meeting informally for some time beforehand, in July 2017 they were formally incorporated into the Collaboration as a SIG. Comprising library professionals with a remit, reasonability or strong interest in providing and developing support for disabled students, the MDF is currently Chaired by Beck Maguire (Nottingham). They meet on a termly basis to exchange experiences, discuss developments and explore potential training opportunities. The MDF's sponsor is Phil Brabban (Coventry).

### [RDM Support Group \(RDMSG\)](#)

The RDM Support Group was created in 2017 and continues to develop a range of activities. A restricted JiscMail list was created in early April 2017. Following the model utilised by UKCoRR, the list provides a mechanism for members to be able to ask questions and discuss issues in a safe environment. Thus far, the list has seen limited use and wider promotion of it will be necessary as we progress the group's offering. Importantly on the 24th April 2017, the RDM Support Group held its first event at Loughborough University.



*Figure 7: Loughborough University RDM Workshop (April 2017)*

This event attracted around 20 attendees from across the region. Then, on the 12th September 2017, the group presented at the inaugural Mercian Conference at De Montfort University. The presentation focussed on: the RDM landscape, what an RDM service might look like, benchmarking figures obtained at the April event and areas where the RDM support group is able to offer support. Feedback received for the presentation and the resulting discussion was positive and indicated a strong interest in future RDM events.



There are two planned activities for 2018. Firstly, conversations at the conference indicate that the community requirements around RDM are vast; from a basic RDM 101 through to support and guidance around digital preservation. The complexity of the type of events is growing and a meeting with the group's sponsor (Fiona Parsons, Wolverhampton) is due to take place in early 2018 to discuss priorities and next steps. A second group event will be scheduled for some point in the New Year, and will be hosted by Nottingham. The theme will be finalised following the initial meeting with the group's sponsor. Finally, RDMSG members will continue to engage via the closed JiscMail list.

### [Mercian Staff Development Group \(MSDG\)](#)

The Mercian Staff Development Group (MSDG), formed in 2014 from the amalgamation of EMALINK and WESLINK groups. As a special interest group, the SDG has a remit to organise an annual programme of development and training events, targeted at library staff within member institutions (see *MSDG Programme*). The SDG has representatives from each of the member libraries, and is currently chaired by Kirsty Kift (Coventry). Additionally, in 2017 the MSDG introduced and manages the Mercian Buddying Scheme (see above), which is based on a successful mentoring scheme trialled by Aston and Wolverhampton. The MSDG's sponsor is Diane Job (Birmingham).



Figure 8: MSDG Chair, Kirsty Kift



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## Looking Ahead

The Mercian Collaboration achieved remarkable progress during 2017. During 2018 I'm sure we'll all be aiming to build on the momentum and successes we have achieved so far.

We have a great deal to look forward to in 2018 including:

- A varied and exciting staff development programmes aimed at staff across all services and all grades.
- Our second annual Mercian Collaboration Conference on [Tuesday Sept 11th Sept 2018](#) at the University of Birmingham.
- The fruitful discussions and outputs of our various special interest groups which focus on topics which are high on our priority list.

Of course, we are living through very 'interesting' times for tertiary Education. We have a new minister; the review of fees has been announced; subject level TEF pilots are in progress; the Office for Students will come into being on the 1st April; the continuation of preparation for the next REF; GDPR 'go live' in late May and the debate about free speech and censorship at Universities remains a hot topic. The list could go on and on...

Some things topics are going to be of equal concern to us all, others less so.

What is certain is that our collaboration will provide a supportive environment in which we can debate and challenge as well as share best practice and support each other.

The mechanisms we have for doing so are many, face to face meetings and training sessions, thought provoking items on our web pages and through our social media presence.

Geographically, we span the middle of the country- but in terms of our profession, our collaboration will put us right at the centre.

*Diane Job*

Mercian Collaboration Vice-Chair  
Director of Library Services, University of Birmingham

