



Mercian Collaboration Conference 2019: Delegate Demographics

Dr Gareth J Johnson, October 2019

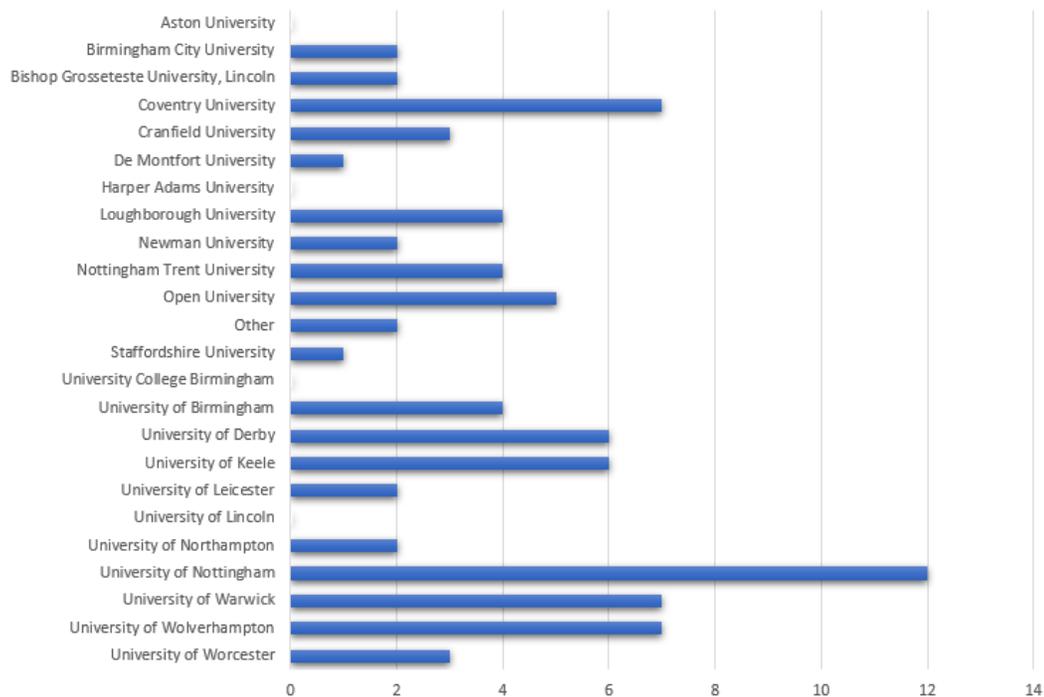
Distribution: Conference Group only (Nov 2019), Steering Group (Dec 2019)

Introduction

This is a brief report and analysis of the range of delegates who attended the 2019 conference. The data is inclusive of all non-exhibitor attending delegates, of whom there were a total of 82, out of a potential 110-120. It is provided as background information for the Collaboration's Conference Group, and Steering Group, for their evaluative discussions, planning processes and communication plan going forward. This report should be read in conjunction with the comparator analysis between the three SCOUNL regional group conferences in 2019 (**Johnson, 2019**) and the Conference Group Chair's evaluative comments to Directors Board (**Mercian, 2019b: p8**).

Institutional Representation

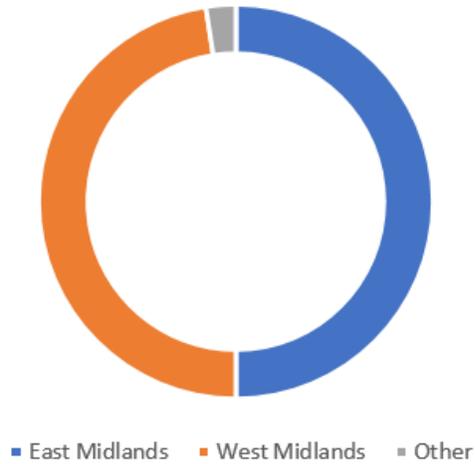
Delegates by Institution, MC Conference 2019



19/23 (83%) of the Collaboration member organisations were represented, down from 21/22 (95%) at the inaugural conference (**Johnson, 2017**). Interestingly, UCB was unrepresented at both events. Notably, as the 2019 conference was hosted in the East Midlands, the absence of 3 West Midlands members is perhaps not unanticipatedⁱ. However, the absence of any delegates from Lincoln is less immediately understandable given the venue's geographic proximity. Additionally, the raw number of delegates (n=82) is down 16.4% on 2017 (n=98), despite there being one additional member organisation for the 2019 conference to draw upon for attendees.

Regional Representation

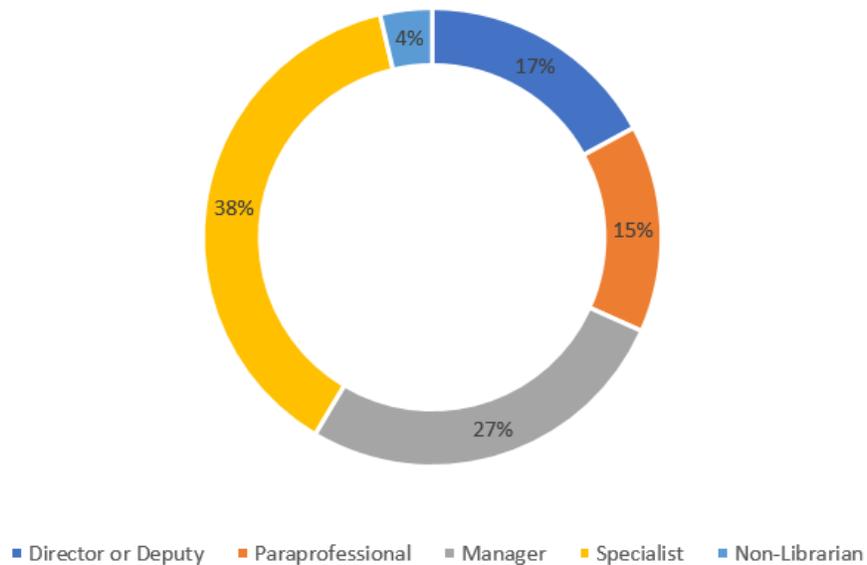
Delegate Region of Origin, MC Conference 2019



The split between regions slightly favours the East Midlands, which given the geographic location for the conference, is understandable. This is comparable to 2017, although there was a marginally greater proportion of East Midlands delegates in attendance at the DMU event (**ibid, 2017**). However, in terms of drawing participants from both regions, the Nottingham venue appears to have been successful without any overwhelming numeric bias.

Seniority Representation

Delegate Seniority, MC Conference 2019





The analysis of seniority is based on job titles supplied by delegates and assumptions on their perceived degree of seniorityⁱⁱ. Managerial and Specialist grades likely overlap and might be considered a single datum of professionally qualified but non-strategic managerial staff (65%). However, as the distinction was made for the 2017 report (51% of total delegates) it is maintained here to provide a direct comparison. Notably, those at the highest and lowest levels of seniority, the director/deputy and paraprofessionalⁱⁱⁱ staff, make up a smaller proportion of the delegates in contrast to the original conference (23% and 24% respectively in 2017).

Comments

As noted, there are some assumptions which have been made in the collation and analysis of this data. However, the results indicate some mildly concerning trends with a notable reduction of raw delegate numbers and reduced representation of member organisations. Given the core role of the conference, to bring a cross-section of library staff together for experiential exchanges, such a diminution represents an element to be considered in future event configurations. It must be acknowledged, the conference is no longer a new or novel event, and a 'refreshing of the brand identity' in 2020 may be a salient endeavour. Nevertheless, other elements such as structure, papers, theme or venue may have also affected attendance numbers. It also should be noted, at its instigation questions were raised by the Mercian Staff Development Group (MSDG), and by the Conference Group too, over the importance of a regional major event being sufficiently appealing attractive to non-professional grades. As this year's attendance levels suggest a reduced attractiveness for this group, it is advisable some further attention to this question is employed.

In this regard further information is required from both attendees but crucially non-attending staff members to better contextualise this report's findings. Hence, gathering data from attendees and non-attendees on their perceptions, anticipations and thoughts on the conference, should aid conference planning conversations and decisions resonate more closely with any recognised regional needs.

There are related discussions too, best addressed in concert with the Steering Group, as to how closely the demographics and demonstrated attendance levels, represent an 'acceptable' level of engagement. Hence, a continued dialogue with the Steering Group and Directors Board, should ensure a closeness of fit for the conference with the Collaboration's overarching strategic agenda. Further discussions at Directors Board may be necessitated if as the Collaboration's 'centrepiece event' the conference is perceived, to no longer deliver against expectations.

Nevertheless, one final point: The annual conference and its delegates represent a single event within an increasingly broad calendar of Collaboration activities. It is important it succeeds, although no longer perhaps as 'mission critical' as when first instigated. Crucially, event feedback this year demonstrated a near consensus by delegates that the conference was a beneficial event^{iv} (Curtis, 2019). This is line with similar positive feedback in prior years. Hence, by present metrics of achievement, the conference is a demonstratable continued positive accomplishment, and a credit to the Group Chair and conference team's efforts to have delivered on it once more. However, lessons must be drawn from the qualitative evaluation feedback, along with the issues highlighted in this report, by the incoming planning committee if success and satisfaction levels are to be maintained.



Recommendations

That the Conference Group Chair, Organising Committee and Sponsor:

- Engage in dialogue with under-represented member institutions to establish any causal commonality
- Recruit one or more paraprofessional member to the Conference Group
- Revisit the conference core documentation and terms of reference to ensure strategic and operational alignment
- Consider where elements or timing of event communications and promotion could be enhanced
- Consider surveying regional library staff on their perceptions, misconceptions and opinions on the Collaboration conference

Acknowledgement

My thanks to Jennifer Brotherton for collating the raw data.

References

Curtis, H., 2019. *Mercian Collaboration Conference 2019 feedback*. Loughborough University. (internal distribution only currently).

Johnson, G.J., 2017. *The Mercian Conference 2017: Delegate Regionality, Representation and Session Preference Analysis*. Mercian Collaboration.

<https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Conference%202017%20Attendee%20Analysis%20.pdf> [Accessed: 21 October 2019].

Johnson, G.J., 2019. *Three's (Good) Company: A comparator Between the three regional SCOUNL collaboration's 2019 conferences*. Mercian Collaboration. (internal distribution only currently).

ⁱ Noting also, that Aston University were hosting an away day for library staff on the conference date.

ⁱⁱ With some recourse to cross-checking of institutional websites to confirm individuals' level where it was uncertain. However, these results should be treated with as indicative rather than definitive.

ⁱⁱⁱ Aka what is traditionally configured as non-professional grade library assistants

^{iv} 45% feedback return rate