

Strategic Plan 2020-2024

Scope

This document outlines the Mercian Collaboration's five-year strategic plan for 2020-2024, providing an overview of aspirations and priorities. Informed by our *Terms of Reference* and operational experiences, and SCONUL's national strategy (**Mercian, 2017; SCONUL, 2019**), it seeks to clarify how the Collaboration delivers membership value through enabling collaborative solutions and support within a changing policy, practice and societal context. It also provides a statement of intent against which future activities can be aligned and successes measured.

Anticipated Readership

Key stakeholders (e.g. SCONUL Board and Executive, senior institutional managers), national bodies (e.g. Jisc, CILIP), special interest group (SIG) chairs and comparator organisations.ⁱ

Caveat: Covid-19 Pandemic

While this strategic plan was devised to account for anticipated challenges and development of the academic library sector, the impacts from the currently ongoing Covid-19 pandemic cannot be ignored. As such, this plan will be revisited during academic year 2020/21, to accommodate the altered circumstances and anticipated needs of the Collaboration's membership, and in the light of experience meeting the unanticipated challenges to library service provision.

Introduction

Founded in 2014 as a member-led '*professional network*' formed and focussed on SCONUL higher education (academic) libraries within the UK Midlands region (**Johnson 2018**), The Mercian Collaboration states its aims are to '*explore training and development*' alongside seeking '*efficiencies on behalf of our institutions and the wider community*' (**Mercian, 2017**). Funded through membership subscriptions, proportionally levied by institutional size (**Green, 2014; Jisc, 2018; Reynolds, 2017**), a Steering Group and Development Officer facilitate, coordinate and manages operations and governance. Specific evaluative efforts, alongside event delegate and SIG committee feedback help inform member priorities (**Johnson, 2017, 2018, 2019a & b**). Consequently, the Collaboration has a continued member buy-in, demonstrated through financial support, event participation and acknowledged benefits (**Job & Johnson, 2019**).

Nevertheless, while the established Terms of Reference have guided the Collaboration's development, activities, largely enacted through staff employed within member organisations, have markedly grown since their inception.ⁱⁱ While the Collaboration's development has often operated within a reactionary mode, given its expansion and maturation, coupled with an organisational realignment with SCONUL (**2018 & 2019**), a desire exists to embrace a more strategically nuanced evolution (**Mercian, 2018: 11**).

Environment & Agency

Member library services operate in an environment comprised of a multiplicity of cultural, political, economic and technological factors, within HE and broader societal contexts.ⁱⁱⁱ The Collaboration's activities must consider how these factors may necessitate certain responses. However, in turn the Collaboration can deploy a collective agency on behalf of its membership to reshape its environment.^{iv}

Vision

Institutional members of the Mercian Collaboration share a common purpose supporting their respective university's goals, through providing exceptional library services (Mercian, 2017 & 2020), with membership conferring tangible value for participating staff and institutions (Job & Johnson, 2020). The Collaboration facilitates this through enabling the exchange of best practice, seeking efficiencies, enhancing the academic library workforce's skills pool within the UK Midlands region. The Collaboration seeks to empower its member community to overcome concerns and meet service challenges, while situating a locus of regional collective influence within the wider higher educational environment.

Themes

The Collaboration recognises five key strategic and interdependent themes, within which all activities are enmeshed (Figure 1). Some activities may address only a single aspect, while others may engage with multiple realms, nevertheless all activities under the Collaboration's aegis can be located within this matrix. Each theme's strategic contribution to the Collaboration's operations and resultant member benefits is briefly outlined, along with a summary of organisational intent, in the following pages.



Figure 1: Mercian Collaboration Strategic Themes 2020-2024

Theme 1: Workforce Development

Upskilling, reskilling and expanding the knowledge capital embodied by the collective Collaboration members' staff is crucial in delivering on effective library services and meeting future challenges. Member libraries benefit from collaborative support for skills development, along with facilitated access to a collective knowledge base. Member libraries will benefit through an economy of scale when faced with increasing diversity of patron need, as individuals gain personal employability advantages, which enhances the recruitable regional talent pool.

The Collaboration will support the development of member staff's efficiency, experience, expertise, employability and excellence through facilitating knowledge exchange, skills training and professional development.

Theme 2: Collections

Collections and resource access reside at the core of academic library services contributions to their institutions. These include physical stock, building infrastructure, online materials and the facilitated access to all three. All member libraries can benefit through regionally coterminous collections, alongside various potentially beneficial consortial opportunities including: disaster management, preservation, archival access, data quality, digitisation, and purchasing.

The Collaboration will explore how access, discoverability and content within regional collections can be developed to the mutual benefit of its members and their communities.

Theme 3: User Experience

User experience (UX) resides at the heart of what academic libraries deliver to their institutional communities. Within a competitive higher education environment, maintaining satisfactory, tangible and acknowledged quality services to these communities is crucial. Member libraries will benefit through the shared recognition, adoption and enhancement of effective UX through the championing of regional exemplars.

The Collaboration will continue exposing and espousing exemplary user experience practice to enhance member reputations and enrich organisational service delivery.

Theme 4: Learning & Teaching

Libraries have a core role in facilitating learning and teaching, enabled through a rich diversity of pedagogy and practice. Members facilitate the achievement of critical institutional educational goals, while additionally enhancing the student learning experience. Member libraries will benefit through a shared enrichment of library educational skill portfolios, and a broader understanding of accommodating evolving patron learning needs.

The Collaboration will seek to reinforce library staff's contribution to enabling learning and development, through facilitating sharing of best practice, pedagogy and techniques.

Theme 5: Research

The role of the library is not simply the enabler or supporter of research practices, but the instigator of original work, projects and enquiries at a collaborative scale. Member libraries will benefit from engagement with questions of research support, research practice, knowledge discovery, exploration and experimentation through Collaboration membership.

The Collaboration will support efforts between members and their staff engaged in research support and practice and will contribute to the development of original knowledge and insights.

Implementation

The Steering Group, supported by the Board, Development Officer and SIG Chairs, are responsible for realising these aspirations.

Evaluation

The Strategic Plan provides an evaluative lens to assess how the Collaboration's aspirations are being met through its operations, enabling appropriate action to be taken to address any identified shortfalls.

Impacts

Anticipated impacts from will likely include:

- Standing Steering Group item reviewing current operations against strategic aspirations
- SIG activity alignment against the themes within planning processes and evaluative reporting
- Revisions to the Terms of Reference to align them with the direction of travel
- Consolidation of issues concerning member obligation and member recruitment
- Director highlighting of Collaboration commitments, obligations and benefits within local managerial structures

Revision & Review

The plan will periodically be amended by the Steering Group to account for developments, with an end of life review in 2024 informing any future strategic planning. See however note: **Caveat: Covid-19 Pandemic.**

Document Control

Final version revised May 2020 following Steering Group approval. This follows an earlier major revision (Jan/Feb 2020), following input from Directors, SIG Chairs and Steering Group in 2019.

The original version of this document was initiated during the 2017-2019 Steering Group, under Chair David Parkes. It was passed to the Steering Group (2019-2021), under Chair Diane Job, to finalise and implement.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

ⁱ Including potentially: QAA, UKRI, Office for Students, funders, publishers, suppliers, technological disrupters, and specifically other regional library collaborations .

ⁱⁱ Now encompassing eight special interest groups (SIGs) and their respective events programmes, annual conference, buddying network and online presence. In marked contrast to a single SIG in 2014/5.

ⁱⁱⁱ E.g. Brexit, governmental policy environment, student demographics, funding, Collaboration members.

^{iv} Expansion and contraction in member base may impact on individual member voice efficacy.