



## Mercian Disability Forum

### Minutes

Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023, 13:00, Online

**Present:** Manda Laine (Co-Chair, Open), Deborah Munro (Co-Chair, Aston), Julie Adams (Staffordshire), Bernadette Carter (BCU), Anna Cope (Harper Adams), Jane Dashwood (Warwick), Kathryn Devine (Worcester), Amanda Dow (Lincoln), Gill Evans (Coventry), Sally Forrest (Derby), Teresa Jordan (Birmingham), John Mackay (NTU), Amelia Manning (Newman), John Phillips (Wolverhampton), Rose Roberto (BGU), Lara Skelly (Loughborough), Jenny Townend (Northampton), Clare Williams (Nottingham), Jo-Anne Watts (Steering Group Sponsor, Wolverhampton), Ruth Jenkins (Mercian Officer).

**Apologies:** Simon Satchwell-Giles (Newman).

### Summary of Actions

**ACTION:** Ruth to share proposed changes to the Terms of Reference with the Mercian Collaboration Directors Board in advance of their next meeting.

**ACTION:** Manda to share Diversifying Recruitment, and improving onboarding and retention, as discussion topic on the Jiscmail list.

**ACTION:** ALL to continue to share any updates from their institutions via the [Padlet](#).

**ACTION:** Co-Chairs to liaise with Ruth on MDF update for Mercian Collaboration Annual Report.

**ACTION:** Co-Chairs to liaise with Ruth on updating the MDF webpage.

**ACTION:** ALL to consider suggesting topics for news items on MDF topics.

**ACTION:** MDF members to consider submitting proposals for deliver Mercian 2024 conference sessions.

**ACTION:** Deborah to poll members to find a suitable date in the spring for the next meeting.

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### 1. Housekeeping, apologies and welcome to new members

The agenda had been circulated by Deborah in advance of the meeting, together with a Padlet for MDF members to share updates: <https://padlet.com/dmunro10/mercian-disability-forum-1intnpgbgsjradah>.

The Co-Chairs welcomed everyone to the meeting. There was a particularly warm welcome to the new members of the MDF:

- Jo-Anne Watts (Steering Group Sponsor, University of Wolverhampton)
- Teresa Jordan (University of Birmingham)
- Amelia Manning (Birmingham Newman University)



## 2. Minutes and actions from the last meeting (July 2023)

<https://www.merciancollaboration.org.uk/sites/default/files/minutes/04July2023%20-%20MDF%20-%20Minutes.pdf>

The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting.

All actions had either been completed or were progressing as planned.

It was noted that the Making Staff Training Accessible Task & Finish Group would be meeting later in the month and would then report back on progress.

## 3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising, other than those already on the agenda.

## 4. Changes to Terms of Reference for the Mercian Disability Forum

Following on from the discussion at the previous meeting the updated proposal to update the Terms of Reference had been circulated via email.

A copy of this document is also available here:

[https://www.merciancollaboration.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/202307\\_MDF\\_terms-of-reference-DRAFTv1.pdf](https://www.merciancollaboration.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/202307_MDF_terms-of-reference-DRAFTv1.pdf)

Jo-Anne reported that the Mercian Collaboration Steering Group met on 5<sup>th</sup> October and was broadly supportive of what is proposed. This will now need to be signed off by Directors at the next Directors Board meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

It was noted that there would be a wider review of Special Interest Groups, but this should not delay what we are trying to do with the MDF.

There was definite support from the Steering Group for information exchange events, maybe with external speakers. This could provide a good opportunity to get others along to MDF events.

Julie agreed it would be helpful for others to attend MDF meetings, depending on what was being covered, and it would be useful to know the agenda a bit more in advance so that the right people could attend.

Kathryn also thought this sounded reasonable. At Worcester they are keen to have two MDF reps covering two different roles. Kathryn is an academic liaison who is "disability link tutor" and her colleague in the Reading Resources team focuses on alternative formats/RNIB Bookshare.

**ACTION: Ruth to share proposed changes to the Terms of Reference with the Mercian Collaboration Directors Board in advance of their next meeting.**



## 5. UK Disability History Month

Manda was interested to know what members were doing for the next UK Disability History Month (<https://ukdhm.org/> 16th November to 16th December 2023). There is a particular focus this year on Disability, Childhood and Youth.

Jen reported on the talks programme they were running at Northampton. There was a lot of interest in this from the group and people were keen to see whether it would be worth doing something similar in their own institutions.

People also talked about highlighting relevant collections and books. For example, Deborah mentioned highlighting a relevant collection at Aston and Teresa mentioned their plans to do a book display at University of Birmingham. Others were also doing book displays.

Jo-Anne reminded people that there is a general Mercian Collaboration Jiscmail list for news, discussion and announcements. It could be good to put out a message from MDF sharing some of the links highlighting what people are doing.

## 6. Updates from member institutions (round table discussion)

Some colleagues were joining the meeting from open plan offices and found it easier to contribute to this discussion via the onscreen chat. More details and links can be found on the [Padlet](#).

Amanda shared details about the Craft sessions at Lincoln.

Teresa gave the following update from the University of Birmingham:

- University of Birmingham EDI Group that involves different teams across the university, including Disability Services. Reviewing assistive technology booths - new software and kit and staff.
- Disabled Students' Contribution Group (<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/student/equality-and-diversity/accessibility/disabled-students'-contribution-group.aspx>). Made improvements to the Main Library in response to feedback – step-free access and automated doors.
- Study Welfare. This includes 'Christmas Crochet'.
- Inclusive recruitment practice. Questions in advance (that you can't Google)
- Teresa noted that she is also a member of the Mercian Staff Development Group (MSDG) and would be happy to help link up areas of common interest.

Deborah (Aston) noted that several places are now sending interview questions in advance. She also emphasised the need to improve processes after someone has been hired, including HR, IT colleagues.

Bernadette (BCU) talked about having a 'passport' that you can take to new role/department saying what adjustments/needs to avoid having to start all over again when you have a new manager.

Jane offered to share more information about the 'adjustment passport' they use at Warwick.

We are all thinking about how best to retain staff and make working environment and managers better?

Ruth noted that Diversifying Recruitment was also covered in two sessions at the Mercian 2023 conference – should Mercian do something more on this?



It was suggested that it might be useful to have a further discussion about this topic on the MDF Jiscmail list.

**ACTION: Manda to share Diversifying Recruitment, and improving onboarding and retention, as discussion topic on the Jiscmail list.**

Gill (Coventry) - looking at software to improve accessibility – e.g. by converting PDFs to audio. They had looked at Audemic but were not signing up due to high cost of institutional subscription.

Jen gave an update from Northampton:

- Further details of their events, including the talks for Disability History Month, are available at [libguides.northampton.ac.uk/whatson](http://libguides.northampton.ac.uk/whatson)
- Jen introduced Tom, who is a student recently recruited to the team. Tom is autistic and found it helpful to receive the interview questions in advance. He has written an ‘instruction manual’ for himself and is now creating a guide to the library for neurodivergent students (based on feedback).

Deborah reported on feedback received from student ‘Mystery shoppers’ (students) at Aston. They had involved students who used disability services, including those who identified as neurodivergent. The feedback from some of these students was that they found the entrance lobby and ground floor noisy and intimidating and that some students were discouraged from accessing quieter spaces on upper floors. In response to this the Library will be publicising quiet times and spaces. They are also looking at how best to support students who are struggling to focus and procrastination.

Bernadette said that BCU had Neurodiversity Cafes for neurodivergent staff or students. People with no formal diagnosis are welcome. They are also part of Neuro Kin which is an online chat group and there is a Library session at the Disabled Student Conference.

Manda (OU) talked about the EDI workshops they would be holding in December. She highlighted Intersectionality and working with colleagues and students. They have also updated their web content accessibility guidelines and are using a content accessibility tool.

Jane (Warwick) highlighted her Mercian 2023 conference session: Menopause - what it is, how does it affect the workplace and how to create an environment where every woman can thrive!  
<https://www.merciancollaboration.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Dashwood.pdf>

Clare gave a brief update from University of Nottingham:

- Brickfield Toolkit on Moodle – reviews content and flags issues (e.g. images should have alt text) via a Learning Technology dashboard. Training can be provided for academics.
- Students have access to accessibility tools.
- Neurodivergent Staff and Disabled Staff focus groups.

**ACTION: ALL to continue to share any updates from their institutions via the [Padlet](#).**



## 7. AOB

Ruth is keen to help ensure the [MERCIAN-DISABILITY-FORUM@JISCMAIL.AC.UK](mailto:MERCIAN-DISABILITY-FORUM@JISCMAIL.AC.UK) distribution list is as useful as possible.

Additional people can be subscribed to the list via the following webpage:

<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa-jisc.exe?A0=MERCIAN-DISABILITY-FORUM>

(Or they can send an email request to Ruth to do this for them).

**ACTION: ALL to check whether the right people from their institutions are subscribed to the MDF Jiscmail list.**

Opportunities to showcase the work of the MDF:

- **Mercian Collaboration Annual Report 2023** – would like to include an update from MDF with highlights from the year.
- **Mercian Collaboration Website** – would like to update the MDF webpage with the new Terms of Reference. There is also potential to have news items on MDF topics, and promote these via social media and Jiscmail lists.
- **Mercian 2024 Conference** – all Special Interest Groups and Communities of Practice are being encouraged to consider submitting proposals to deliver conference sessions. Venue, date and themes will be confirmed announced as soon as possible in the New Year.

**ACTION: Co-Chairs to liaise with Ruth on MDF update for Mercian Collaboration Annual Report.**

**ACTION: Co-Chairs to liaise with Ruth on updating the MDF webpage.**

**ACTION: ALL to consider suggesting topics for news items on MDF topics.**

**ACTION: MDF members to consider submitting proposals for deliver Mercian 2024 conference sessions.**

## 8. Date of next meeting

The next MDF meeting should be held in the spring term. This will be an online meeting. It was agreed that it would be worth trying to get the date confirmed and in diaries as soon as possible.

**ACTION: Deborah to poll members to find a suitable date in the spring for the next meeting.**