



Conference Group Meeting

14:00-16:30, Wednesday 13th January 2021

Minutes

Present: Damian Pugh (Chair, Nottingham), Deborah Munro (Vice-Chair, Birmingham), Charlie Hill (BCU), Nial Halford-Busby (BGU), Christine Bradford (Warwick), Laura Newman (Loughborough), Emily Forster (DMU), Cheryl Coveney (Open University), Ruth Houghton (Cranfield), Alison Charlesworth (Leicester), Deborah Munro (Vice-Chair, Birmingham), Emma Walton (Sponsor, Loughborough), Gaz J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration)

Page | 1

Apologies:

Matt Cunningham (MSDG Rep, Loughborough)

1) Administration

Introductions were made for the old and established group.

a) Minutes of last meeting (25th Nov 20)

Accepted

b) Outstanding Actions

- **CG: 25th Nov (3): EW to discuss [Storage Locations] with GJ for recommendations**

GJJ confirmed that files were stored as needed on G.Docs where they needed to be accessible to all, and locally in an encrypted backup. Any old documents for storage or archiving should be sent to him, and where people needed access in the first instance, he was the main point of contact.

- **CG: 25th Nov (4): EW to check with Mercian steering group if they wish to keep the 2020 inclusion theme, or are open to change**

This had been discussed at the December '20 Steering Group, but there had not been any feedback. During today's group meeting GJJ obtained confirmation and support from the Steering Group for the outline theme as discussed below.

2) [Terms of Reference](#)

It was noted these had been discussed at last [year's January meeting](#), and it was agreed there was felt to be no great need to revisit them. All members were encouraged to familiarise themselves with them, as they are the basis of the group's activities.

ACTION: ALL to familiarise themselves with ToR and group role documentation

3) Member roles and responsibilities

Following discussions online and at the previous meeting, the chair asked if people were (a) happy to remain in their roles, and (b) if any new members were willing to step into the roles as co-facilitators. The roles for 2021 were allocated as follows:

- Copy and Marketing: Charlie & Chris
- Delegate Liaison: Chris & TBC
- Finance & Sponsorship: Cheryl & Emily
- Speaker Liaison: Laura & Ruth
- Venue Coordinator: Deborah & Nial

GJJ noted he would update the website to reflect these discussions.

ACTION: GJJ to update group website with role allocations

4) Theme

There was a lengthy discussion regarding the theme for the 2021 conference, illuminated by experiences in the previous year. While the 'diversity' theme had been one picked up by many library conference in recent years, it remained a salient and pressing issue. However, it was acknowledged the theme may have been partially responsible for the limited response to the call for papers last year; although the impacts of COVID on work and staff time may have played a bigger role. Hence, it was agreed to restructure the 2021 conference theme to incorporate a 'diversity' core theme, albeit one reconfigured to appear fresh and appealing to a broad spectrum of staff. GJJ would check with Steering Group this was acceptable, although he expected their blessing would be readily forthcoming.

ACTION: GJJ to confirm with Steering Group that this outline theme remains desirable

It was noted personal development time and opportunity has been impacted in many academic libraries, due to the new and unexpected pressures of lockdown/remote working and emerging support needs. It was suggested therefore, potentially, a whole day event might prove a good way to enable people to set aside the 'day job' and engage in some developmental experiences.

It was suggested that an element of 'personal development' should be included as a conference subtheme, incorporating 'fun' elements such as mindfulness, well-being and celebration within the programme. There was likely expertise across the Collaboration in these areas, and additionally this would help address the role of the conference as 'community enabling' event. It was noted that the term 'personal development' might be off-putting to some, and re-phrasing it as a 'sharing of personal experience' or 'celebration of success in the face of adversity' would be a useful alternative.

Hence, it was proposed to acknowledge how library staff's roles had developed over the past year, would be counterpointed with 'pockets of joy' and 'contrasting pathos' as engaging and informative programme elements. For example, it was suggested to invite delegates to supply 20 second pre-recorded 'snippets/updates' on theme of 'continuity, change and growth' to emphasis the success of the past year, would make for some valuable additional conference content. It would also be attractive to people who might not feel able to submit a paper proposal on the core 'diversity' theme.

It was agreed Charlie and Chris would coordinate framing the theme, with everyone encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas on this via the discussion list. The theme would then be finalised online, so that the conference planning and call for papers could be quickly developed following the next meeting.

ACTION: ALL to share their thoughts on theme/strands of the conference via the mailing list

ACTION: Charlie & Chris to draw together outline conference theme and share

ACTION: ALL to discuss and agree final theme, online, ahead of next group meeting

5) Keynote speaker

There were extensive discussions around potential keynote speakers, tying into the previously discussed themes. Emma noted that it was important that a conference incorporating a 'diversity' theme would need to think about diverse representation within its keynote. Additionally, it was suggested drawing on an alumnus of a Mercian Collaboration member organisation would be a good approach. Outline suggestions of potentials included: Chris Addison, Timmy Mallet, Sarah Keyworth

Emma noted her time as group sponsor was coming to an end. However, due to her work on the SCONUL Board as vice-chair of the Organisation Development subgroup, and the recently announced BAME Open Forum, she continued to be willing to support the conference group, where potential overlaps existed.

It was agreed all group members should go away and think about potential keynote speakers for the conference and share their thoughts online ahead of the next meeting.

ACTION: Emma to continue to feed into conference discussions on behalf of SCONUL Board

ACTION: ALL to think and share ideas of keynote speakers and share thoughts via mailing list ahead of next group meeting

6) Sponsors

Cheryl led a discussion around sponsorship, illustrated by the previous years' experiences. Noting the [2020 sponsor offer](#), she highlighted that we may wish to offer some form of 'boon' to sponsors, such as an online meeting room, (video) advert in the programme or other such feature. It was suggested while sponsorship income would not be needed to offset venue costs, it could be used to offer something 'fun' to delegates, to make them feel part of the community. Suggestions included food vouchers or physical gifts (e.g. gin).

Cheryl noted there was a list of potential organisations to approach, although in the past some have directly approached us to discuss sponsorship. She cautioned that COVID might mean that some smaller organisations would have limited ability to offer sponsorship, which would need to be reflected into the fees charged and what we offer in our packages. GJJ noted he would speak to the ALNⁱ about sponsorship experiences for their conference.

Emma noted we should consider why we seeking sponsorship, as normally this is to offset costs. While there may be new costs (e.g. platform or external support) this year rather than venue fees, it was agreed the technical needs of the new conference will impact on the level of support we seek from sponsors, along with any reciprocal benefits. Hence, as the platform and configuration of the conference was yet to be clarified, the sponsor offer could not be updated for 2021 as of yet. Cheryl noted she would ideally like to have this ready to go in March/April.

ACTION: Cheryl and Emily to liaise over outline plans for sponsors

7) Planning schedule

There was some discussion about dates and noting while there was no overarching requirement to retain this, generally it was agreed it was desirable to retain the e.Sept slot. An earlier date in 2021 remained impractical in terms of lead time. It was noted while the Northern Collaboration pushed their Sept '20 conference back to Nov '20, to account for the 'lockdown year start' demands on staff, although, were this still an issue, library staff were more familiar with the demands now. The exact conference date would be agreed at the next meeting in March, informed by the various going discussions above.

8) Conference structure

The key question was that of an online or physical event. It was generally agreed that committing to an online conference for 2021 was advisable, although the exact format was yet to be decided. There was potential, as with the Northern Collaboration 2020 conference, to split it into two half days, to reduce the 'screen time' of delegates, as well as making it more available to people who couldn't make the other day. Additionally, making more use of short/lightning talks would potentially be attractive to potential speakers, as they would reduce necessary preparation time and help enhance delegate attention.

There was a brief discussion about the conference structure. Having agreed to aim for an online event in 2021, it was proposed that some elements could be live (introductions, keynote, Q&A) while others could be recorded or live (talks). This would help in terms of timekeeping, but also in enabling speakers to perform at their best.

It was suggested that a third-party conference platform or organisation might be engaged to help enable the conference, although the costs for these were uncertain. Various suggestions were made, but these would be shaped by the forthcoming conversation with the ALN conference group. Hence, they were postponed until that meeting could be held. Group members in contact with other library conference organisers (e.g. CILIP, UKSG, Lilac) were encouraged to reach out via their networks to explore their practical experiences, platforms and outline costs too.

ACTION: Meeting with ALN Conference Group to be held for officers

ACTION: ALL members to approach contacts at other conference organising bodies to explore practical elements of online event facilitation

9) Date of next meeting

It was agreed to host two meetings. The first would include the chair, vice and sponsor leads, along with GJJ and the ALN representative, to talk through platform and technological experience, hopefully by early Feb. This would be followed by the next full conference group meeting in March. The ALN representative may be invited to attend this meeting as well, if there was sufficient need/interest.

ACTION: GJJ to coordinate officers meeting with ALN conference team

ACTION: GJJ to coordinate date for next conference group meeting

10) AOB

Website images

GJJ reminded Emily and Ruth their images for the site were outstanding.

ACTION: Emily and Ruth to supply GJJ with headshots

ⁱ Since 1st Jan 2021, the Northern Collaboration and North West Academic Libraries (NoWAL) have merged to form Academic Libraries North (ALN). They are continuing to transition through to Easter, when their new online presence is expected to launch.