



Conference Group

Minutes

14th January 2022

Present: Deborah Munro (Chair, Birmingham), Adrian Clarke (Loughborough), Catherine Robertson (Birmingham), Christine Bradford (Warwick), Funmike Ifie (Loughborough), Nial Halford-Busby (BGU), Ruth Houghton (Cranfield), Hamda Gharib (Birmingham), Matt Cunningham (MSDG, Loughborough), Jo-Anne Watts (Wolverhampton, Steering Group), Gaz J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration)

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Apologies: Laura Newman (Vice, Loughborough)

22/01 Welcome & Introductions

Deborah as conference chair for 2022 welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially the new members who had joined. She outlined how today's meeting was to kick off the planning and preparation process for the conference 2022. Members then briefly introduced themselves.

Deborah next outlined the aims of the groupⁱ, in terms of delivering an annual conference for the staff at academic libraries who are members of the Collaboration. She added that following discussions before Christmas ([CG: 16/Nov/21: Item 5](#)), it had been agreed that the 2022 event would be online once more. The hope remained the 2023 event would be a hybrid or in person event, as the group wished to return to in-person conferences when there were fewer uncertainties to accommodate in the planning process.

22/02 Conference Venue & Date

Ruth had previously noted that Cranfield were willing to host and provide back-office support for the conference, without charge. It was agreed to take them up on this offer, and transition the role of Venue Coordinator from Nial to Ruth.

Cranfield had offered a series of dates on which they could host an event, and it was agreed to request the mornings of **6-7th September 2022**. Ruth would respond to a request for an initial discussion with the Cranfield team in the next week or so. She would then arrange a follow up meeting between the Cranfield team, herself, chair and vice and GJJ for a more detailed exploration of event requirements and facilitation needs later in the month/early February. The chair thanks Ruth, and the Cranfield team, for their kind offer.

ACTION: Ruth to liaise with Cranfield over date and initial requirements

ACTION: Ruth to arrange follow up meeting for chair, vice, GJJ and herself with the Cranfield events team

22/03 Roles & Responsibilities

The chair invited Nial, Ruth and Chris to share their experiences within their roles in organising the past conference. It was noted in each case how having two people to share the roles for 2022 would offer some much-needed mutual support.

Other than the Chair and Vice, the five roles to be filled wereⁱⁱ:

- Delegate Liaison (Chris in 2021)
- Programme/Communicationsⁱⁱⁱ (Chris in 2021)
- Speaker Liaison (Laura & Ruth in 2021)
- Sponsor Coordinator
- Venue/Platform Coordinator (Deborah & Nial in 2021)

Chris noted she was happy to continue as Programme/Communications, but Ruth and Nial would be changing roles with the venue change. The chair noted that the vice chair and herself would be providing some additional support for the Sponsor Coordinator role, as both members involved in this had stood down from the committee last year.

After some discussion of the roles, the chair invited everyone to let her and GJJ know which roles they wished to take on for the rest of the 2022 conference year. It was suggested they should indicate a first and second choice, where possible.

ACTION: All to contact Deborah and GJJ to indicate their preference for group roles by Fri 21st Jan 2022

22/04 Planning & Meeting Schedule

Deborah shared a proposed schedule of meetings and deadlines for the year ahead with the group, outlining the importance of each element (see below).

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| January Initial Committee Meeting (14th) | February Collate, review and outline event theme Agree on committee role assignments Agree final sponsor offer Brief catchup meeting (date TBC) | March Agree final event theme Draft call for papers/speakers Launch call for sponsors Committee meeting (date TBC) |
| April Launch call for papers/speakers (18 th) Committee meeting (date TBC) | May Committee meeting (date TBC) | June Papers/Speakers call closes (13 th) Paper selection meeting (date TBC) |
| July Speakers & Keynote Confirmed (4 th) Delegate bookings open (25 th) Committee meeting (date TBC) | August Weekly committee meetings from (15 th Aug on, dates TBC) Bookings close (22 nd) ^{iv} | September Pre-Event brief committee meeting (date TBC) Pre-Event Speaker Testing (5 th) 6-7th Conference Hosted |
| October/November Review/Washup Meeting (date TBC) Call for new committee members | December/January Annual report to Steering Group | |

She noted that there may be fewer meetings if things were progressing well but stressed there might also be additional brief meetings for some group members if they were needed. She hoped group members would be able to make most meetings, but quite understood when work and life commitments might make this problematic. She encouraged everyone to use the mailing list to keep the rest of the group aware of any issues or progress in the interim.

GJJ suggested moving the sponsor call to Feb/March, given the experience of organisation allocating their sponsor funds earlier in the year. This was agreed, in the light of later discussions concerning the final sponsor offer for 2022.

22/05 Conference Themes

It was agreed in the light of experience, the main conference theme should also include some subthemes, especially for attracting a range of speakers to present. The chair had used a padlet to gather thoughts on potential themes^v, and there had also been a range of suggestions received from the membership too.^{vi} EDI, leadership & management, as well as evolving work practices had proved the most popular.

Funmike spoke to her suggestion of 'Redefining Engagement' as one which could be tailored to appeal to all levels, seniority and interests within the academic sector. For example, exploring how different service branches are responding to the challenges of engaging/re-engaging with their customer base (staff, students, external etc). This would offer some valuable lessons and shared experiential outcomes for all delegates. Additionally, this theme could successfully embrace the popular themes of EDI, changing leadership and work practices as subthemes.

It was agreed this was a strong contender for a theme, but the chair wanted everyone to continue thinking about the conference themes and come back to the next meeting ready to agree a final proposal to go to Steering Group. The chair encouraged the use of the padlet to continue collating feedback and thoughts on themes, or it could be sent directly to her in the meantime.

ACTION: All to continue thinking about a conference theme, and to add more information to the padlet as desired

22/06 Keynote

The chair encouraged everyone to think of potential keynote speakers, as this was an area she was keen to resolve in the relatively near future. She also suggested the potential for a keynote for each day of the conference, although this was at this stage only a suggestion. GJJ noted that from the member survey report, that the three most desirable keynote speaker origins were: academic library staff, academics and senior institutional managers (e.g. VC).^{vii} Keynote speakers it was noted should complement the theme of the conference, although they did not need to necessarily speak on a topic directly adjacent to it.

ACTION: All to consider potential keynote speakers and report back at next meeting

22/07 Sponsor offer

GJJ, the Chair and Vice had met to review this at the end of 2021.^{viii} GJJ provided an overview of the role and activities relating sponsorship, noting how the new sponsor deal had been brought in line with the levels and offers made by comparable collaborations. He noted that some elements of it may need to be adjusted in the light of the facilities available by the hosting organisation, and also where committee members had any concerns. The idea of an overall 'title' sponsor had been popular for other collaborations, and would be offered this year for one organisation only.

Discussions followed around the area of sponsor engagement during the event. It was agreed where any offer provided the opportunity for a presentation or representation by sponsors during the conference, this should be 'baked in' as part of other sessions to ensure a good turnout. It was agreed that if there were any further comments on the sponsor offer, that people should contact GJJ directly, with a mind to finalising and agreeing the details at the next meeting.

ACTION: GJJ to upload updated sponsor offer onto the website

ACTION: All to feedback any comments on sponsor offer ahead of next meeting

22/08 Call for Papers

This would be developed once the final theme had been agreed and approved by Steering Group. GJJ noted that Steering Group normally supported the theme selected by the conference group members.

22/09 Next Meeting

The next main committee meeting would be in March. However, a brief catchup meeting to look at role allocations was proposed. A Doodle Poll would be shared with all members ahead of any proposed dates to check availability.

ACTION: Deborah, Laura and GJJ to liaise on arranging the dates of the next meetings

22/10 AOB

a. Programme Format

Chris suggested the programme might be better as an online formatted item, rather than a PDF, and this was generally agreed to be desirable. A PDF version could be made available as a backup, with the online version containing the links to sessions, breakouts etc. How it was formatted may be affected by discussions with Cranfield concerning their platform.

b. Committee Portrait Images

Deborah checked if any of these were outstanding. GJJ noted only Hamda was now outstanding.

ACTION: Hamda to supply headshot for webpages to GJJ ahead of next meeting

Endnotes

ⁱ 'The [Group & its members are] responsible for defining, planning and delivering all aspects of the Collaboration's annual conference.': <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/conference-group>

ⁱⁱ For a run down of roles see:

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ⁱⁱⁱ Due to his ownership of the website and mailing lists, GJJ usually handled the marketing aspects of the event – including the frequent news items.

^{iv} The exact date should be as late as possible, but may depend on the requirements of the Cranfield team to have access details for speakers and delegates

^v Available at: <https://padlet.com/LCSstaff/xa2dfp84vqacpfey>

^{vi} See page 7/8 of the member survey report:

<https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Conference%20Group%20Member%20Survey%202021.pdf>

^{vii} See page 7 of the member survey report above.

^{viii} Sponsor deal now on the web at: <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/sponsorship-policy>