



## Deputies & Senior Staff Group

14<sup>th</sup> June 2022

### Minutes

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**Present:** Anne Knight (Meeting Chair, Cranfield), Brenda Low (BCU), Matt Cox (Derby), Julie Robinson (Newman), Jessica Wainwright (UCB), Katie Mann (Newman), Karen Jackson (Warwick), Gareth J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration)

**Apologies:** Selena Killick (OU), Elizabeth Mallet (Lincoln), Georgina Dimmock (Northampton), Heather Green (Warwick), Kay Jeffries (Derby), Kirsty Kift (Coventry), Phil Vaughn (Coventry), Jon Granger (Wolverhampton), Alison Pope (Staffordshire)

#### 22/07 Welcome and apologies

Anne welcomed everyone to the meeting, and noted despite the number of apologies how good it was to see so many people in attendance.

#### 22/08 Chair for November meeting

GJJ reported there had been offers from Ann-Marie James (BCU) and Kirsty Kift (Coventry). As Kirsty has chaired the meeting in the past, it was proposed to invite Ann-Marie to host the November meeting, and Kirsty the spring '23 one.

#### **ACTION: Officer to coordinate meeting chairing with Ann-Marie and Kirsty**

#### 22/09 Issues/Actions from Previous Meeting ([7/Apr/22](#))

Anne noted that while not all actions had been completed, she encouraged people who still wanted to share information about processes, policy and service standards for click and collect services to do so via the mailing list.

#### 22/10 Themed Discussions

##### *a) Staffing matters (e.g. levels, resource, working arrangements, recruitment etc)*

Anne opened discussions on the first of today's topics.

**Cranfield:** There were still many challenges around staffing levels, with COVID and NHS waiting lists taking a toll on people's availability and ability to run services. However, the library has now discontinued many of their pandemic-era services, although pressures remain to maintain remote services in addition to physical ones. Alongside this, HR staffing changes have impacted on role approval processes, partly due to budgetary sensitivity, meaning new staff acquisition is slower than normal. As a result of these issues, demands on staff time and resource continue to be high.

**Newman:** Some similar recruitment difficulties were reported. For example, for one recent post there were only three applicants, and then one of these dropped out. An appointment was made, but as it was internal it then created another space in the team. There are efforts to revise posts as part of the vacancy/recruitment process to more closely match the emerging user and library needs but getting these approved can be a challenge in terms of finances. A knock-on impact has been reduced enquiry services, but as student numbers on site remain lower this is currently less of an issue.

**UCB:** There is a very small library team, so as a result there aren't so many recruitment issues. That said, it has been observed that recruiting and retaining good quality candidates for roles when they do fall vacant has been a recurrent issue. One approach to resolve this has to be reconfigure existing posts to make them more appealing to a wider pool of candidates. Interestingly, there has been an increase in applications from candidates based outside the UK, possibly with an expectation to perform the job remotely. The university has developed a working from home policy, like most other institutions. Staffing resource is currently okay, as there are notably fewer students physically accessing services and facilities, so the degree of f-2-f support has been somewhat diminished. However, this is balanced by much increased online support demands – by teaching staff and students alike. There is a variance in paraprofessional staff's abilities to work with and support digital services, which means professional staff often end up resolving more of these tasks. The longer-term plan is when seeking future staff recruits, to ensure they bring with them more strengths in these areas.

**Warwick:** The library has been able to successfully recruit, but there's still an issue with attracting the best candidates. There had been a vacancy freeze for a while during pandemic, but this has now been unlocked, and post-approvals are moving forward. Hence, there's now a rash of recruitment coming through across the library. The old University Librarian retired in May and a new one is not expected to be in post until November. Hence, followed by a period of settling in for them, it will probably be 2023 before it's known what their staffing priorities are.

### *Library Courses*

There was general discussion about the quality, number and relevance of library masters courses in the UK. It was suggested a reduction in the number library courses may be impacting on services in terms of available staffers to recruit to posts. As a result, some libraries are struggling to attract good quality candidates. The loss of the library trainee posts across the UK have also made it harder for new people to move into professional roles.

In addition, it was agreed many of the remaining course were less than suitable for libraries in the broadest sense, and not simply for academic library needs. It was agreed there was a need for a concerted, coordinated approach to improving these, and that CILIP should lead on this community effort. Students emerging from these courses should benefit from up-to-date content, and a focus on where jobs would be in the future rather than today. For example, it was noted Aberystwyth had only relatively recently introduced an information literacy module, demonstrating the lag between courses delivered and library practice.

### *Holistic Review & Needs Analysis*

Anne posed a question – had anyone approached their staffing needs more holistically, looking at the needs against current resource, skills and personnel?

**Cranfield:** With the arrival of a new library director, they had moved to bring people together within a single team structure. Within this, information advisors (library assistants) have a specialism e.g., front of house, but would spend their time spread across the other service areas too. Hence, all the team members would be more readily able to offer support to areas where increased demands arose.

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**UCB:** There had been a staffing review, which will change how the UCB library operates. This has been a result of those library services and areas (e.g. digital work, metadata) that are far busier today than they used to be. There is a need for a broad upskilling of staff in some sections, and over the next few (3-5) years there was a hope to bring new people on board to help support this transition to a more digital capable team overall.

**Warwick:** Library assistants are grouped into specialist teams. There is a generic job description, but they work in different areas. Hence, the library is trying to build flexibility into roles to cope with peak period demands. This is quite complex, and it is clear that a lot of training will be required. There are concerns and questions about how ‘flexible’ this arrangement might be for the team, but it is perceived as a way to explore becoming a more adaptable service. It is hoped it will also help raise the overall team skills base.

It was generally observed that an academic library truism was that there was always a little too much work and never quite enough people.

### *Staffing Environment & Flexibility*

**BCU:** Staff attendance is set at the organisational level with a blanket policy requiring 3 days on campus a week. Where staff can’t commit to this, it triggers a conversation with senior managers. While there are some who are less happy with this policy, the idea is of trying to be fair to all. There are some space issues for offices, and so hot desking and agile working is being coordinated at a building by building level to help. This seems to be working well, and often there are even desks left over. There are also bookable booking meeting spaces but obviously never quite as many as desired all the time. What is difficult is finding 1-2-1 spaces where staff can run training undisturbed. The library has put aside a couple of single person study spaces to permit this to happen for library tutorials. The university also offers an app to book/reserve spaces for use – although some staff find they’re having productive business conversations in the stairwell!

**Cranfield:** Staff have different percentages for when they have to be in, as everyone is having some home working time. It is based on the tasks they are needed to complete, although some junior staffers feel it is less fair. Issues with people on site in online meetings, as there are too few single offices available for these. So, personal offices are being made bookable for other people to host their meetings in. It is difficult to find a quick fix though, although subject librarians are tending to teach from home as a workaround. The university policy says 40-60% of time on site, but obviously front-line services (cleaners/catering) are 100% on site. It has been left to departmental staff to set appropriate levels for their staff; for example, 80% for library frontline staffers although in time it is hoped this can be reduced to 60% on site. Noticeable that is the casual conversations and the results which come from having them which can’t be easily replicated online.

**Derby:** It was a similar recruitment experience at Derby in terms of locating good, suitable and willing candidates. This was proving especially challenging in terms of recruited to fixed term roles. There is now a hybrid way of working called 'Team Agreements' where your onsite basis varies depending on what is right for your team. E.g. Matt's team are in 40% of the time but the front link teams are in 80%. Student numbers in the library are still far below the pre-pandemic levels, although there is a hope this will change in 22/23 with students coming to study who will be unaffected by lockdowns etc.

**Newman:** There's been a return to more f-2-f meetings, although lacking the 'names underneath' knowing who everyone is has become a challenge once more! The institutional expectation is now 'business as usual' on campus. There is a new remote working policy, but it offers only very limited off site working arrangements. That is up to 1/day a week, and this has to be reviewed and agreed with your manager on a week-by-week basis. There were some teething problems when people started coming back to campus – because some people were needed to be there all the time. Currently, conversations about remote working are a very regular occurrence for managers and team members. On top of this, where online meetings do take place the space to host them privately is a challenge. E.g., the subject librarians share one office which means individual online meetings are problematic for them. Senior staffers can and do offer their offices if people need the space for an online meeting though. Overall, while there's a desire to make the library feel like a welcoming vibrant space, it is acknowledged some staff can and do work better at home.

**UCB:** Staff may opt to work up to 2 days a week from home, although it depends on their line manager. It is noticeable that the flexible working policy is a question which is being asked by staff applying for roles, so it clearly matters for recruitment.

**Warwick:** The university doesn't go in for 'definitive' policies, and so staff are now roughly 50% on site based primarily on task and team with any individual needs coming last. As a result, most people are on site 2-3 days a week. Like others, the space for hosting online meetings is a problem, but there are more face-to-face meetings are planned for September onward. Staff don't have to hot desk, because due to capacity and fire-risk issues, it is not possible to give over more offices to study space. Nevertheless, private space for working was always an issue, but now post pandemic even more so. It had been noticed that the idea of 'physical' presence on campus was being promoted to prospective students at various other universities. Certainly, it is acknowledged that some intangible conversations and interactions that are lost between colleagues working remotely. There are also some staffing issues arising from those teams with some staff who are very seldom present on campus.

#### *b) Student induction*

Anne invited comments and discussion on the second topic.

**Cranfield:** The library is well underway on its preparations on areas such as reading list provision and front of house support for example. Anne noted the library often received a lot of questions around printing, and so some particular attention on guidance in this area was being developed. Induction will be a blended approach, partly driven by necessity and availability of sufficiently large campus rooms. Like other places the library had been a location for open day events, and this was a problem for noise levels, although valued because of the recognition of the library as a campus hub site.

**Newman:** There is a move away from 'big talk' sessions, and induction as a whole is now more devolved to programme leaders, so they can best slot it into the courses. However, there are some concerns in the library that their induction presence may be marginalised, obfuscated or slotted in as an afterthought. Notably, with the new LMS due in 7 weeks' time, there's a need to re-train everyone because of the way it operates so differently from the legacy system. As a result, the library is seeking innovative ways to reach out. One new opportunity is how the Students Union considering hosting the freshers' fayre in the library, following the success of the library during open day visits. While this will help in terms of visibility and outreach for the service, there are some concerns it could adversely impact on user conduct and noise levels.

**Warwick:** With some pre-sessional students on site from next month, library preparations are quite advanced. For 2021, there was a move for more face-2-face sessions, but then new COVID waves drove the library online, so inductions became more reactive than planned. This year the hope is for more in person sessions, but also learning from the pandemic era of where time and effort can be saved by moving some sessions online. Certainly, space on campus remains at a premium. The hope is this blended approach will be driven more by pedagogical choice rather than necessity.

#### *Printed vs Online Collections*

**Cranfield:** The library is keeping postal loan services going but not click and collect, as it was too big a demand on staff resource. Through the pandemic while there was a pivot to ebooks (reading list access), the library kept buying some print (collection development). Some of this pivot though was a consequence of their TALIS installation. There was now a refocussing back onto more collection development focus.

**Warwick:** The library was moving back to ideas of printed materials after the last couple of years where the focus has been on online provision. However, any anticipated savings made were limited. While a blended provision is now the 'normal' way of operating, it is noticeable students have become accustomed to print and e-access. Hence, even when there is a good availability of online books, students are still keen to gain print access. Postal loans and click and collect services are continuing.

#### *Decolonising & Inclusion*

**Cranfield:** The library was striving for more inclusion on both recruitment, as well as within their collections.

**UCB:** The library wasn't looking to lead in this area, but keen to be responsive to the direction of travel for the institution. Part of this was a decolonisation of their whole collection in five years, and racial sensitivity training for all staff. It was noted they have a big BAME student intake, and so it was vital the institution reflects this diversity too.

**Warwick:** Staff were also working through anti-racism training. Alongside their collection building work, the library was also doing work on decolonising the collections too.

22/11 Next meeting (Nov 2022)

*a) Format – physical, hybrid, online*

GJJ shared the results of the survey of the membership. In terms of preferences for future meetings the survey said:

- Return to physical: 0%
- Hybrid: 56%
- Online: 44%

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After some discussion it was agreed to explore a face-2-face meeting, with virtual attendance possible, for the November meeting. While the exact venue would be decided nearer the time, both UCB and Warwick were proposed as potential venues. However, the list will be asked for any other offers as well.

**ACTION: Jessica to explore UCB as potential meeting host for November**

**ACTION: Officer to poll ALL for potential dates for next (November) meeting after the summer**

*b) Potential themes & topics*

There had been a number of suggestions, but given the limited attendance today it was agreed to poll the list membership for topics. It was noted subjects like strategies for engagement (tying into the conference theme) and decolonisation might be strong candidates, based on today's discussions.

**ACTION: Officer to poll list members for themes for November meeting**

22/12 AOB

*a) Conference '22*

GJJ updated everyone on progress, noting the call for speakers had now closed and a goodly number of submissions had been received. The programme would go live mid-summer, as would the delegate bookings, which once again would be free and unlimited in numbers. He would be formally announcing the keynote speaker hopefully later this week.

*b) Report from Staffordshire*

While she was unable to attend, Alison Pope sent a brief report for the minutes: Vicki McGarvey has retired, and also Liz Tomkinson and Soo Plant will be following her in July. There is a lot of focus on activities and developments our London campus just now. The Library and Academic Skills Team showcased innovations at the SU Learning and Teaching Festival. Plus, Staffordshire got a really good REF2022 report, which was a very pleasing result for everyone involved.