



Mercian Collaboration Steering Group Meeting

Minutes

Friday 6th January 2023

Online Meeting (Teams)

Summary of actions:

OUTSTANDING ACTION: Creation of Mercian Teams account on hold until new Executive Officer has been appointed.

OUTSTANDING ACTION: Helen to package Mercian Officers phone and send on to Chair before leaving her role in March 2023.

OUTSTANDING ACTION: Chair to continue liaising with Newman finance department to claim back NBF overtime.

ACTION: Chair to circulate interview date ASAP to secure an interview panel.

ACTION: Chair/NBF to add the following to Directors Board agenda: NEYAL report, EDI group proposal and 2 x subgroup proposals, Steering Group elections.

ACTION: Chair to approach Gary Elliott-Cirigottis to see if he might be interested to share again, but to prompt discussion rather than a presentation in its own right. If interested, Chair to ask his availability

ACTION: Helen Curtis to investigate venue availability.

ACTION: Using availability of Gary and Venue, Chair to set a date for next Directors Board (March 2023)

ACTION: Chair to contact Sue Ackerman to confirm that she would be interested in self nominating for Vice Chair.

ACTION: Chair to respond to Bertha Low asking for tweaks, to expand on the groups remit.

ACTION: JW to create ToR for SIG expectations. SIG chairs should work with their Steering Group sponsor, or Exec Officer.

ACTION: Chair to respond to Sarah Pittaway, stating that the Steering Group declined the suggestion for Gloucestershire to join the collaboration.

ACTION: NBF to discuss finalising 2022 reports with Conference Group Chair.

ACTION: NBF to prompt directors for contributions.

ACTION: HC to cancel Zoom licence

ACTION: NBF to look for old benchmark cost of what we charge sponsors compared with what ALN or M25 charge.

ACTION: JW to create a new equality Impact assessment for the 2023 conference.

ACTION: Encouraging Directors and Senior staff to attend the conference to be added to Directors Board meeting agenda

ACTION: Conference group to discuss having a networking event open to Directors and Senior staff

ACTION: Conference Group to discuss Accessibility requirement at next meeting

ACTION: NBF to ask Cheryl Gardner if they have got all the buddies they need, if not, send to Mercian Directors Jiscmail list. [COMPLETE]

ACTION: NBF to approach directors to request photos



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Friday 6th January 2023

Online Meeting (Teams)

23/01 Welcome (introductions) and Apologies

Present: Chris Porter (Newman, Chair) Natalie Baker-Fosker (Mercian Collaboration)

Chris Powis (Northampton), Judith Keene (Worcs), Helen Curtis (Aston), Jo-Anne Watts (Wolves)

Not present: Laura Pilsel (Harper Adams)

Chair welcomed group to first meeting since August 2022. Previous minutes accepted as accurate.

23/02 Previous meeting and Outstanding Actions

Most actions marked as completed, with the exception of the following outstanding actions:

- Chair spoke with Ann Rossiter at Directors Board meeting about a Mercian Teams account. There is a realistic opportunity to move over to Teams. However, it was decided to wait until new Executive Officer has been appointed.
- Helen to package Mercian Officers phone and send on to Chair before leaving her role in March 2023.
- Chair has spoken with Newman finance department and started the process for claiming back NBF overtime. This is ongoing.

23/03 Administration

a) Executive Officer Recruitment

Chair to post advert for new Executive Officer ASAP.

It was agreed that the Vacancy should be advertised on the following discussion lists:

- SCONUL directors
- Lis link
- Lis SCONUL
- All SIG lists
- ALN lists
- The general Mercian mailing list
- Mercian directors list - asking for the vacancy to be circulated to the respective Directors' network of contacts.

It was also suggested that the vacancy is posted via LinkedIn, however, the Mercian Collaboration do not have a profile.

b) Interview panel and dates

Vacancy deadline will be 27th January 2023. This allows 1 week for shortlisting and therefore Interviews will take place on Monday 13th February 2023.

Chair commented that this date should be blocked out as the date for interviews.

ACTION: Chair to circulate interview date ASAP to secure an interview panel.

c) Responses to Tim Wales questions (CP)

Chair posed the questions that were raised by Tim Wales following the Directors Board meeting in November 2022.

Last updated NBF 15/03/2023

General group discussion on the following:

- Suggestion for Round table discussions about what each institution is doing – concerns raised about the length of time that would be needed to do round table discussions for each of the 23 member institutions. May encourage off-topic discussions and get very long/tedious. Chair suggested that if someone has a topic that they particularly want to raise, they can ask for a time limited item to be added to the agenda for issues and queries.
- Accountability of SIG's and meeting targets. The less admin we give SIG chairs, the better.
- Target driven standards.
- Possibility of creating an additional category of group (Operational / SIGs / other type of group i.e. Research Group.)
- Directors Board meeting next due in March 2023. It was agreed at last meeting, that Helen Curtis would host. Helen will still be in post and is able to host.
 - Possibility of hybrid meeting for people who are unable to attend in person.
 - Possibility of speaker (theme TBD)
 - Do we need an actual topic? Or case studies of what people are doing? Hot topics currently include mental health, staff retention, EDI.
 - Potential to use Annual Report submissions to get hot topics.
 - Items to discuss at next Directors Board meeting

ACTION: Chair/NBF to add the following to Directors Board agenda: NEYAL report, EDI group proposal and 2 x subgroup proposals, Steering Group elections.

- HC stated that Gary Elliott-Cirigottis at OU has done a lot around EDI and inclusivity. Spoke at libraries after lockdown event on recruitment life cycle. He presented lots of data, tracking impact on applicants and successions through to post.

ACTION: Chair to approach Gary to see if he might be interested to share again, but to prompt discussion rather than a presentation in its own right. If interested, Chair to ask his availability.

ACTION: Helen Curtis to investigate venue availability.

ACTION: Using availability of Gary and Venue, Chair to set a date for next Directors Board (March 2023)

- Regarding question raised about working location of Executive Officer. Group discussed the potential to work from SCONUL head office. Chair noted this unlikely to be helpful as SCONUL are based in London.

23/04 Governance

a) Steering Group members elections

- Self nominations for Steering Group Members received from: Peter Maggs & Judith Keene.
- Joanne Watts offered to stay on Steering Board as Conference Group Liaison until (at least) the next conference in Sept 2023.
- Emma Walton self nominated for Chair or Vice Chair.
- Sue Ackermann previously mentioned she may be interested in serving as Vice Chair and progressing to Chair in next elections.

ACTION: Chair to contact Sue Ackerman to see if she would be interested in self nominating for Vice Chair.

- Chris Porter and Chris Powis confirmed their plans to stand down in March 2023.
- We have received no offers for Treasurer role.

b) New Subgroup proposal – Research

Chair has not been chased for a response to the proposal. Given the concerns raised at the last Directors Board and a lack of enthusiasm from the proposer, this proposal appears to have fallen by default.



c) New Subgroup proposal – Systems

Bertha Low has chased for a response to the proposal. Steering Group are broadly in favour but agreed that the proposal paperwork needed to be clarified to define their outputs more clearly.

ACTION: Chair to respond to Bertha asking for tweaks, to expand on the groups remit.

d) Framework documentation revisions - who should be tasked with designing the framework? (i.e., before the new Officer is appointed? Perhaps a task for the new Officer?)

Currently, SIG's appear to have no accountability, this is why some of the groups previously folded and were reformed with the help of the former Executive Officer.

Once the new Executive Officer is settled in their role, Steering Group should discuss with their respective SIG's that the outlined framework states they need to report back to steering group several times per year. (TBD)

It was agreed that these framework conversations should be supportive rather than onerous. SIG's come together for good reasons and get a lot from it. However, we need to develop expectations of each group's remit and what they plan to achieve, especially if they use Mercian money to fund the group. E.g., MSDG deliver a programme, MCG deliver a conference. Whereas Marketing SIG and the proposed Research SIG would be more like a community of practice.

It was agreed that Joanne would put together a ToR or Terms of Business.

ACTION: JW to create ToR for SIG expectations. SIG chairs should work with their Steering Group sponsor, or Exec Officer.

e) Promotion of Strategic Plan

The strategic plan was adjusted post-covid, and uploaded to the Mercian website. We are now halfway through the plan. Chair noted that the recent SIG proposals referred to the Strategic Plan, so no further action is required to promote it.

f) New Mercian member

We have had a request from Uni of Gloucestershire to become a Mercian member.

Group discussion around geographical borders of the Mercian / Midlands regions.

Gloucestershire is a bit further south than our current most southern member, but during the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy there was a time when Gloucestershire was in the kingdom of Mercia! Therefore, on a pure technicality, there is scope to include Gloucestershire (if only marginally).

Chair's view is that if they want to join us, and they don't already have an alliance with another collaborative organisation, then allow them to join!

However, contrary discussions included:

- Do they have access to another staff development scheme, i.e. an equivalent to LIEM?
- Would they add value to our collaboration?
- Potential to cause issues for other institutions or organisations if we extend our reach.
- Could we propose to offer an affiliate membership instead?
- Do Gloucs just want access to the staff development programme and to attend the conference? Or do they wish to join Groups, SIG's and indeed committees?

Group discussed the necessity to come up with a geographical border to define our patch. For example, CP suggested that the Midlands region could be defined as the following counties: Staffs, West Midlands, Shropshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Rutland,



Northants, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Bedfordshire and Oxon.

Chair suggested we formally define the "Mercian region". It doesn't need to be publicly advertised, but it will give us a sense of our geographical location and will help in future discussions if other institutions request to join. A number of potential external definitions were considered, but the consensus was to choose and own our own definition. To be discussed when new Executive Officer is in post.

There was collective unease at the proposal and general consensus was to decline the request.

ACTION: Chair to respond to Sarah Pittaway, stating that the Steering Group declined the suggestion for Gloucestershire to join the collaboration.

Noted that a future Steering Group could take a different view.

23/05 Reports

a) Conference Group reports 2022 (JW)

Not discussed.

ACTION: NBF to discuss finalising 2022 reports with Conference Group Chair.

b) Staff Development Group annual reports 2022

Not discussed. Annual reports usually go to Directors' Board for info.

c) Annual report 2022 – Call for contributions (deadline Wed 18th Jan 2022)

NBF is collating the annual report. Vignettes have been requested via email.

ACTION: NBF to prompt directors for contributions.

d) Financial update 2022 (HC)

HC provided a brief financial update, with the caveat that there has not been much movement since last update.

There was a small increase to subscriptions this year, generating slightly more revenue than in previous years. Subscriptions generated an income of approx. £19,000.

Newman need to claim back the costs of overtime pay for NBF as Interim cover.

The last invoice relating to 2022 conference has been received and passed to SCOUNL for payment.

Reserves are healthy at the moment, standing as approx. £40,000.

The conference is expected to be the main expenditure for the coming year.

Treasurer will have a more accurate picture of reserves, once the interim cover hourly overtime is paid, and after receiving up-to-date info from Kim at SCOUNL.

Chair thanked Helen for her work during her tenure as treasurer.

23/06 Operations

a) Renewal of zoom licence VS purchase of Microsoft Teams licence for the Mercian Collaboration

Chair noted that the Zoom licence is due for renewal and asked for opinions on whether to renew the licence. Group discussed the reduced use of Zoom since the Executive Officer left - Most institutions use Teams, and all SIG and committee chairs have recently been making their own arrangements using Teams.

Chair noted that SCOUNL have agreed to a Teams Licence in principle, although, this won't come into effect until the new Executive Officer is appointed, but we can manage without a Mercian video conferencing account for a short time. Steering group agreed not to renew the Zoom licence.

ACTION: HC to cancel Zoom licence



23/07 Subgroups updates

a) *Conference Group*

JW updated Steering Group on various aspects of the Conference Planning process:

i. *2023 conference dates, location, budget etc. (See 2 x quotes from UOB)*

Tentative date set as 7th September 2023.

UoB have provided venue quotes. Both look reasonable and in line with pricing of past conferences. Further details and initial planning schedule to be discussed further at next CG meeting.

ii. *Conference theme (see padlet for suggestions received)*

JW read out the groups' initial thematic ideas from the padlet. Theme to be discussed in more detail and hopefully defined at next CG meeting. Steering Group requested that two proposals be brought to Director's Board meeting in March 2023.

iii. *Conference sponsorship pricing model*

Group discussion on benchmarking sponsorship costs against other similar organisations, as it was believed that former Executive Officer had done some work on this.

ACTION: NBF to look for old benchmark cost of what we charge sponsors compared with what ALN or M25 charge.

JW noted that we usually get more interest from sponsors if it's an in-person conference, as they will likely want to send some delegates.

The 2022 conference had one platinum sponsor to make it easier to manage their expectations due to the online format. As we plan to return to in-person, the 2023 conference is going to cost substantially more, and we should therefore look to increase the sponsors, while sticking to the current pricing model. The new Executive Officer will need to do some work to look at the pricing model for future years.

iv. *Equality Impact Assessment needed for in-person conference. Steering Group to discuss and decide who will author this.*

Brief discussion about whether there is a template for this. JW agreed to investigate.

ACTION: JW to create a new Equality Impact Assessment for the 2023 conference.

v. *Directors/Senior Staff meeting prior to conference, to drive up interest in senior staff attending the conference.*

Group discussion on how to increase attendance by Directors and/or senior staff.

The online conferences over the past two years have meant no limitations to the number of delegates, however, returning to a physical event this year will limit the number of attendees. In previous years we limited the delegates to 3-4 staff members per institution. It was suggested that this year we should recommend 3 staff members of varying grades IN ADDITION to 1 Director or Senior Staff member from each institution.

It was noted from the 2021 and 2022 delegate demographic reports, that the number of Directors in attendance has decreased substantially since it was held online. Do we need to investigate the causes more thoroughly?

Questions posed: Is the conference not hitting the mark for Directors? Is it due to the nature of it being online? Are they too busy to attend? Are they stepping back to allow others to attend?

The fact that the trend has been noted, could therefore cause an issue for potential sponsors.



Chair declined the suggestion to setup a meeting with Directors prior to the conference to drive interest but suggested it would be more appropriate to have targeted communication to Directors and Senior Staff.

ACTION: Encouraging Directors and Senior staff to attend the conference to be added to Directors Board meeting agenda

ACTION: Conference group to discuss having a networking event open to Directors and Senior staff

vi. Accessibility requirements

Not discussed.

ACTION: Conference Group to discuss Accessibility requirement at next meeting

b) Mercian Staff Development Group (Inc refreshed Buddying programme)

Chair gave brief overview of group's remit.

This year the MSDG have refreshed the buddying programme. There has been requests for buddies in particular areas such as UX, Research, Accessibility, Digitisation and Archives. The refreshed scheme has been advertised on the website and in various groups.

ACTION: NBF to ask Cheryl Gardner if they have got all the buddies they need, if not, send to Mercian Directors Jiscmail list. [ACTION COMPLETE]

i. Request dates and locations for forthcoming programme of activities

The programme is up and running, with some of the forthcoming events posted to the website. Kirsty Kift has requested updates on forthcoming programme.

c) Copyright Group

Chair gave brief overview of the Copyright Group. There is a planning committee that collectively coordinate the group's meetings and discussions. They have met themselves as a planning committee a couple of times recently, and the next full group meeting is planned for 18th January. The group is active and meeting semi-regularly.

d) Deputies and Senior Staff Group

Chair gave a brief update. The last D&SSG meeting was held in person. Nine people attended. Chair was not able to attend, but believes it was a positive meeting with discussions on student engagement, working with SU's, social media, civic engagement and CSE (and alternatives), followed by a library tour.

The meeting was held in person at UCB, which was a welcome return to active membership.

e) Marketing and Communications Group

HC met with the Marketing Group before Christmas.

CILIP's marketing group (Prev PPRG) have reached out to the Mercian marketing group. They are looking to do online event aimed at working with central marketing teams. The event is expected to be dual badged and free to Mercian members.

The Marketing group is chaired by a four-person committee, jointly coordinating the meetings and activities. HC noted that the group is still fairly new, but there are plenty of people able to join in.

f) Mercian Disability Forum

Last scheduled meeting was cancelled due to strikes and has been rescheduled for next Tuesday.

Chair noted nothing new to report today.



g) Mercian Metadata Group

It is understood that this group is planning an event in late January, although CP noted that he sometimes finds it difficult to communicate with the coordinators due to conflicting demands on their time.

23/08 AOB

a) Website photographs

NBF requested permission from the Steering Group to approach institutions for photographs to use on the Mercian website. Steering Group gave permission.

ACTION: NBF to approach directors to request photos

23/09 Next meeting

Directors Board in March 2023 (Date TBC)

Meeting came to a close with Chair offering her thanks to everyone for their continued hard work over the past few years.