Steering Group
Online, 2pm Tue 20th April 2021
Agenda

Present: Chris Porter (Chair, Newman), Chris Powis (Northampton), Judith Keene (Worcester), Laura Pilsel (Harper Adams), Jo-Anne Watts (Wolverhampton)

Apologies: Helen Curtis

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the new Steering Group.

21/07 Previous Meeting

a. Minutes of previous meeting: 3rd Feb 2021

These were approved.

b. Outstanding Actions (not on agenda)

Incoming Steering Group to be appraised of SCONUL relationship and MoU as part of induction [see (3a) below]

This had been shared ahead of the meeting. The Chair noted that the SCONUL/Collaboration Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is due for an update this September[i], and it would be good to start looking at this now. She also noted that the Collaboration's ToR do not reflect our regional subgroup of SCONUL status, which will therefore need to be updated as a result.

A reference in the MoU to the Collaboration's representation of SCONUL's 'charitable objectives' was highlighted. It was unclear how this was currently being addressed, beyond the annual report. Additionally, how accountable the Collaboration was to SCONUL, and vice-versa, would benefit from more exploration. Previous discussions over formal representation routes to and by SCONUL, were revisited by the new SG, and it was agreed that this remains unclear and satisfactorily addressed.

Notably the MoU lacks responsibility on SCONUL to communicate or advise the Collaboration, especially with ahead of any rules or policy changes such as the membership categories, which have the potential to impact on our operations. It was agreed aspects of the discussions concerning the MoU's redevelopment would need to be explored further with the Directors Board.

ACTION: ALL to review current MoU and feed back comments to the Chair

ACTION: Chair to initiate discussions with Board via email with respect to the redevelopment of MoU

Incoming Steering Group to take position relating reporting and representation alignment with SCONUL Board by the Collaboration

It was agreed this would be addressed as part of the MoU redevelopment. GJJ noted that he was expecting to have a discussion with Emma Walton, as a SCONUL Board member, with respect to this and other matters soon.

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21/08 Governance

a. Handover from Previous Steering Group

The Chair noted the previous Chair and Steering group had stressed their successors should be 'appraised of SCONUL's relationship and the MoU as part of induction' (see **21/07 (b)** above). It was suggested all should familiarise themselves with recent points of discussion in the minutes.

ACTION: ALL new Steering Group members to review recent meeting minutes for key items of discussion

b. Officer Appointments

Helen had tentatively offered to take on the Treasurer role, which the Chair welcomed and accepted in her absence. Noting the Vice-Chair role is low-impact, but important, the Chair sought volunteers to take this on. Laura offered her services, which were accepted. Meetings with the Officer and the new Steering Group Officers would be arranged in the near future to update everyone on activities and ongoing concerns.

ACTION: GJJ to approach Helen and clarify she is willing to take on Treasurer role.

ACTION: GJJ to arrange meeting with Laura and Chris

ACTION: GJJ Update website to reflect changes in Steering Group Officers

ACTION: GJJ to update SCONUL as to full membership of Steering Group 21-23

c. Membership Terms & Tor

Following discussions at Board (DB 21/03(d), p5) there had been no further comments. The Chair proposed a final version of membership wording as follows:

As noted above, all regional members of SCONUL are welcome to apply to join the Mercian Collaboration. Members and their staff are expected and encouraged to participate fully take a full-participation in the life and work of the Collaboration, in terms of: subgroup membership, event hosting, Steering Group and Board membership and attendance at our events.

Organisations who are full SCONUL members, located within the region and request membership will normally have an automatic right to join the Collaboration. Applications from Associate members of SCONUL will be considered by the Steering Group, and approved by the Board, to confirm organisation suitability against a number of criteria, including but not limited to: maintenance of an appropriately sized library service and commercial conflicts of interest.

In both cases, membership fees will be levied at the appropriate tier and satisfied before membership commences. For more information on membership contact the Officer or Chair.

Following a brief discussion, it was agreed to accept this revision with the following points highlighted:

- There would only be full Collaboration Members, no associate tier.
- Associate SCONUL members based in the region would be considered for membership by the Steering Group.

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- Associate SCONUL members with a regional presence ('expression') could be considered for membership, but adjusted on a case-by-case basis.[ii]
- A larger Collaboration membership would be beneficial in terms of diversification of insights and expertise.
- The Terms of Reference wording will be updated to reflect this change in membership criteria.

ACTION: GJJ to update website with membership criteria

ACTION: GJJ and Chris to agree proposed ToR update to reflect this member change

d. Mercian Reserves Policy (SCONUL)

A request from the SCONUL Director on the Collaboration's reserves policy had been received. GJJ noted two salient points from the MoU:

5.6 In the event of dismissal, grievance or other employment issues arising with the dedicated member of staff, legal and other associated costs would be met from the designated fund. Reserves equivalent to three months' staff costs will be maintained in the Mercian Collaboration's designated fund.

5.7 The designated fund should contain sufficient reserves to cover any financial liabilities associated with the employment of a dedicated member of staff.

A rough estimate for (5.6) would require reserves around £2k, and the founding Treasurer's rule of thumb to maintain '£5k minimum' reserves more than met this expectation. However, the point relating to (5.7) was less clear on how much 'contingency funds' should be held in reserve. GJJ noted, currently, year end projections were in excess of £25k for 2021, which indicated the strongest financial position for the Collaboration an incoming Treasurer had ever inherited.

It was agreed to task Helen with considering the matter of the reserves policy as one of her first tasks as Treasurer, and in consultation with the Chair, outline spending and reserve plans for the next two years. It was noted discussions on reserves would fold into work on the new MoU.

ACTION: Helen to lead in considering and updating Collaboration Reserves Policy

ACTION: Chair to report to SCONUL Director on outline Reserves Policy

e. Relationship to SCONUL Communities of Practice[iii]

As had been noted on email, the Collaboration and its subgroups relationship to SCONUL's recently announced communities of practice was currently unclear, but some alignment with them would be likely beneficial. It was important to have some engagement with these conversations, but there was no need to replicate these with local work directly. It was suggested future conferences could draw on these communities for core themes. The Chair noted the major themes from SCONUL mapped to our areas of strategic interest, with the exception of research.

As the Strategic Plan required updating this year, it was agreed the Chair would take a first pass at updating it in line with these developments and would share with the rest of the Steering Group ahead of the next meeting.

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ACTION: Chris Porter to take first pass on revisiting the Collaboration's Strategic Plan and aligning more with SCONUL objectives and activities

ACTION: Steering Group members to re-read and consider updates to the Strategic Plan, to bring it back for the next meeting as standard item[iv]

21/09 Officer Reports

a. Financial Update

GJJ apologised as time pressures meant he had not obtained an update on funds. However, the figures presented to Board last month were unlikely to have substantially changed. He noted the following pending additional Collaboration costs:

- Renewal of Zoom licence (1 year):   £119(+VAT)
- External Trainer (March MSDG Event):   £650
- GJJ Internet costs (6 months, retrospective):   £30.37
- Trans Awareness Facilitators (May MSDG Event):   £225

GJJ noted he would seek to arrange a meeting with Helen to formally hand over the Treasurer role and brief her on a number of ongoing financial matters.

ACTION: GJJ and Helen to meet to discuss ongoing Treasurer matters

b. Development Officer Update

As GJJ continued to be short on time there was no written report. He made a brief oral report in its place, noting most matters were addressed in agenda items today. He stressed a lot of his time recently had been split between offering administration and coordination support for subgroups, and especially the Conference Group. The Chair thanked GJJ for his work.

21/10 Operations

a. Website Accessibility

The Chair and GJJ introduced this item, noting earlier work by the Northern Collaboration on their site. In brief they had:

- Reviewed their site (via their Accessibility Group) to meet WCAG 2.1 Guidelines.
- Updates required costed by Adaptive (SCONUL web hosting company) at £2,496.
- Due to merger, decided to make the new ALN site compliant from the start rather than enacting retroactive site revisions.
- 'Cookie consent' law requirements suggested an additional £1,000 was required to resolve this issue.
- Given our site and the NC site use the same template, chances are we have similar issues, or at least aspects of them.

Following a discussion it was identified, based on advice from SCONUL, the legislation does not apply to the Collaboration as we 'are not a public service organisation.' It was agreed though, a more accessible site was a desirable 'good practice' move anyway. However, there are twin issues of potential considerable costs and work required to enact the changes, alongside developing robust policies to

maintain compliance in the future. It was highlighted recordings of events, if shared, should be fully captioned too.[v] This would be especially important to be communicated to the MSDG and Conference Groups, should they be looking to share event recordings online.

It was agreed that ideally making use of the Officer to conduct as much of the work as possible was likely the most cost-effective approach. GJJ stressed he would however be unable to deliver this work, under the current work-time arrangements (see *21/10(c)*). It was agreed a conversation with the MDF Chair, as the group with the most likely corpus of knowledge in this field, would make for an effective starting point.

ACTION: GJJ to initiate conversation with MDF concerning web accessibility practicalities

ACTION: GJJ to share NC accessibility costs document with Steering Group

ACTION: GJJ put together outline workplan for accessibility work on website

b. Theme(s)/Speaker(s) for October Board

From Board (DB 21/6(a), p7) we had suggestions of:

- **Working**: Changing working patterns, blended working & emerging risks
- **Leadership**: RLUK's work on leadership, recognising/developing emerging leaders
- **Teams**: Re-engaging staff, reintegrating team members, policies for campus working
- **University Presses**: UCL & Paul Ayris, other efforts in this direction

The Chair noted we needed to consider the meeting format and if any guest speakers were needed. It was agreed while most people would be, hopefully, back on campus by October the pressure for campus space on would make venue booking difficult. Hence, it was agreed to retain the online format for October.

While a watching eye on university presses would be useful, discussions on working and teams felt like a rehash of earlier discussions. With respect to the RLUK's work, with no RLUK members on the Steering Group there was a difficulty in taking this forward coherently, as this topic might have the most relevance to the Board members. It was agreed moving to approach Emma Walton to explore potential external speakers and themes which might be addressed from the RLUK work at the next Board.

ACTION: GJJ and Chair to coordinate date for next Board meeting

ACTION: GJJ to approach Emma Walton concerning speakers and themes for next Board

c. Officer Workload Update

As per the brief discussion at Board (DB, 21/07(a), p7) and the potential accessibility work discussed today (*21/10(a)*) the Officer's continued high workload was noted. GJJ commented while he could, more or less, maintain levels under the current 0.2FTE arrangement, there was no spare capacity for new, additional or unanticipated work. As had been repeatedly noted at Board and prior Steering Groups this had been the situation for some years. In particular, he expressed requirements to travel to events and meetings had proven increasingly impractical to satisfy, unless some responsibility were transferred or additional time resource purchased.

It was agreed the Chair would keep Officer workloads under review, in the light of emerging needs as well as the return to physical events and meetings.

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ACTION: Chair and Officer to meet to review work/time demands

21/11 Subgroups: Activity Update

a. Group Sponsor Allocations

It was agreed that the subgroup sponsors for the next two years would be as follows:

- Conference Group: Jo-Anne
- MSDG: Laura
- Copyright Group: Chris Porter
- Deputies Group: Chris Porter
- Marketing & Communications: Helen
- MDF: Chris Powis
- MMG: Judith

It was noted that GJJ would facilitate introductions to the chairs of the groups, and that sponsors would follow up with them as time allowed.

ACTION: GJJ to handle introductions to Chairs of subgroups and sponsors

ACTION: GJJ to add sponsors to subgroup mailing lists

ACTION: All sponsors to reach out to their relative group chairs/committees

b. Conference Group

GJJ briefly reported on the Conference Group's most recent meeting (16th Apr, minutes). The conference theme was to be *Adaptation and Growth in Times of Adversity* with an event over two half-days (9/10th Sept). The conference would be online and hosted on MS Teams Live, with BGU providing the platform, apparently at no charge to the Collaboration. A call for speakers was expected in the next few weeks, followed by one for sponsors too. A microsite for the event had been drafted by GJJ and would be made live shortly.

It was noted the Conference Group had approached the comedian, Sarah Keyworth, to be the keynote speaker and had been asked by her representative for the 'maximum fee' we were looking to pay for a 50-minute contribution. After a brief discussion, it was agreed to seek more clarification as to the business case and rationale behind the speaker choice from the Conference Group, before any advice on fees could be made.

ACTION: Jo-Anne to speak with Conference Group Chair and seek clarification over keynote speaker rationale and business case

c. Mercian Staff Development Group

GJJ reported they had met 15th March (minutes) and were meeting again 15th June. It was noted, in contrast to other SCONUL regional groups, and in previous years, the number of planned events from our MSDG was considerably lower.

d. Copyright Group

GJJ reported that had been no tangible group activity noted since late 2019. As such it was noted this group may be in need of a refresh, relaunch or potentially mothballing.

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ACTION: Chris Porter to follow up with Copyright group chair and organising committee concerning group activity

e. Deputies & Senior Staff Group

GJJ reported they had met 2nd March and would be meeting 24th May next. Past minutes should be live soon, GJJ's schedule pending. There is good engagement in the group, and while it is not fully representative of the whole Collaboration membership, there are regular healthy discussions and exchanges of experience at each meeting. The Chair noted this group could be tasked with particular projects, given their collective expertise.

f. Marketing & Communications Group

GJJ noted there had been no visible activity by this group since late 2019, and hence it may be in need of a refresh, relaunch or potentially mothballing. It was agreed Helen, as its sponsor, would explore the MarComm's plans more closely with its organising committee.

ACTION: Helen to follow up with Marketing & Communication group chair and organising committee concerning group activity

g. Mercian Disability Forum

GJJ reported this group had met 15th March (minutes) and had a new chair in Simon Satchwell-Giles (Newman). He noted Sponsor support for the new chair would likely be much appreciated.

h. Mercian Metadata Group

GJJ reported the group had hosted an event (eBook Management eForum) back in late March (24th) and was co-hosting a coffee morning with the Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium (SUPC) on the 20th April. GJJ commented this is one of our most active subgroups

21/12 AOB

a. Date of next Steering Group meeting

After a brief discussion it was agreed to arrange the next Steering Group meeting in late July or early August. Subgroup Chairs, or their nominated representatives, would also be invited to attend to update the Steering Group on their recent activities and future plans.

ACTION: GJJ to coordinate date for next meeting with Steering Group Members

ACTION: GJJ to extend requirement to attend next Steering Group to Subgroup chairs

b. Additional Subgroups

It was noted the Collaboration is not looking towards creating any more subgroups, pending any demand from membership staff for their establishment. There was a speculative discussion about a potential approach from MUAL to affiliate with the Collaboration, although this would be more fully addressed under the normal governance rules for group establishment should it occur.vi

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i Current MoU expires 1/Sept/21

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ii It was noted the OU, while geographically based in the Midlands, has representation on most regional Collaborations

iii https://www.sconul.ac.uk/page/libraries-after-lockdown-project

iv Strategic Plan (20-24): https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Strategic%20Plan%20Jan%202020%20v1.0.pdf

v The recent recording of the 'Crowd Control' event was for example, fully captioned. See https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/reporting-crowd-control-library-bookings-lockdown-landscape

vi Prospective subgroups proforma: https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/subgroup-proposals