



Steering Group

Online, 2pm Wed 21st July 2021

Minutes

Present: Chris Porter (Chair, Newman), Laura Pilsel (Vice, Harper Adams), Helen Curtis (Treasurer, Aston), Chris Powis (Northampton), Judith Keene (Worcester), Jo-Anne Watts (Wolverhampton), Richard Birley (Metadata Group), Sarah Pittaway (Staff Development Group), Simon Satchwell-Giles (Disability Forum), Damian Pugh (Conference Group), Yvonne Budden (Copyright Group)

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Apologies: Stuart Sandilands (Marketing Group)

21/13 Previous Meeting

- a. Minutes of previous meeting: [20th April 2021](#)

21/07(b), final sentence reads 'this remains unclear and satisfactorily addressed.' Should have read 'remains unclear and unsatisfactorily addressed.'

Chair reported she was hopefully moving forward with meeting with some of the other consortia chairs, although many of the England based ones had yet to engage.

ACTION: Chair to report back on discussions with other collaborations at next Steering Group meeting

The minutes were accepted, other than these notes.

- b. [Outstanding Actions \(not on agenda\)](#)

No outstanding actions not on the agenda.

21/14 Governance

- a. [Strategic Plan Revision & Update](#)

As per last meeting there were actions on the Chair to revisit and update the Strategic Plan to align with SCONUL's objectives and activities, before sharing it with the rest of the Steering Group for Discussion. Due to changes in the Chair's senior management team, she had been far busier than normal, but hopefully recent recruitments would help alleviate this issue by September. As such, she would return to this item then, ahead of the Nov/Dec Steering Group meeting.

ACTION: Chair to revisit and update Strategic Plan and share with Steering Group for discussion

- b. [MoU Revision & Update](#)

As above, the Chair's lack of time had impacted on this. She noted there had been no other comments from the Steering Group. GJJ noted a conversation with ALN, with respect to their own MoU and identification of an 'operating statement' and 'work packages'. He explained ALN were making 'minimal' changes to the prior NC/NoWAL MoUs. As these issues were unclear, and in the light of previously noted concerns, it was agreed the MoU update would be used to springboard a conversation with the SCONUL Executive about our relationship. The current MoU expires in September 2021.

ACTION: Chair, Laura and GJJ to review current MoU and propose updates



ACTION: Chair to initiate discussions with SCONUL Executive concerning MoU and Collaboration relationship

c. ToR Update (Membership)

As the membership wording had been changed, the Terms of Reference also needed some minor updating. It was agreed to amend these as follows:

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Current: *The Mercian Collaboration is a professional network formed from SCONUL higher education libraries in the East and West Midlands of England.*

Revised: The Mercian Collaboration is a professional network formed from SCONUL member libraries in the East and West Midlands of England.

Currently: *Library services of Higher Education institutions in the East and West Midlands who are members of SCONUL are eligible to be Members of the Collaboration.*

Suggested: Library services in the East and West Midlands who are members of SCONUL are eligible to be Members of the Collaboration.

ACTION: GJJ to make changes to the policy on the website

ACTION: Chair to report on update to Board in October

d. Collaboration Reserves Policy (SCONUL)

Helen explained she was currently getting up to speed with this issue along with the rest of the Treasurer's work. However, she understood why SCONUL wouldn't wish to pick up any financial liability. GJJ noted, as per the MoU (2018) two clauses made reference to financial reserves:

5.6: 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.

It was agreed to tie this matter into the broader discussions with SCONUL about representation and alignment of our policies and governance. GJJ would also talk to ALN about the issue.

ACTION: Helen & Chair to talk to Ann re reserves policy with respect to MoU and broader Collaboration governance issues

It was noted that the risk register document¹ required updating, and GJJ with Chair would revisit this.

ACTION: GJJ to talk to ALN about reserves policies

ACTION: Chair and GJJ to revisit and update risk register

21/15 Officer Reports

a. Financial Update

Helen has now had the handover from GJJ and reported there had not been much movement of funds. There had been two payments for external trainers (MSDG: trans awareness and difficult conversations). Some sponsorship money had already come in (CUP, £500) giving us a balance of £37,796 which was very healthy. It was noted conference 2021 costs were expected to be modest, and so this wouldn't impact on our reserves significantly.

GJJ noted two issues he had discussed with the Treasurer and the Chair previously: (a) annual salary increase and (b) mobile phone costs. The Steering Group agreed to the first point that while the national agreement hadn't been completed to make a percentage 'inflationary uplift' increase to the spine points previously agreed. This would be implemented, retrospectively from the 1/August annual increase date along with the move to the next spinal point for the Officer.

ACTION: Chair, Helen and GJJ to agree spinal point and inflationary uplift to salary

ACTION: Chair and Helen to arrange for pay increase to be enacted via SCONUL

GJJ noted in the second case we continued to potentially pay over the odds for an old phone and contract, via SCONUL; although noting the phone line was useful as the sole telephone point of contact for the Collaboration. Helen agreed to roll these issues into her other conversations with SCONUL

ACTION: Helen to speak to SCONUL re-mobile phone costs.

GJJ queried if 2021's lower funning costs would affect the 2022 subscription rates. Helen agreed to consider this, and would discuss further with the Chair, ahead of presenting a proposal for 2022 to the autumn Board meeting.

ACTION: Helen to set member subscription rates proposal for 2022 in discussion with Chair

The Chair asked if the 2018 Birmingham conference invoice had been closed. GJJ confirmed that this matter had been concluded.

b. Development Officer: Update

GJJ had circulated a brief update ahead of the meeting. The Chair thanked him for this, and noted her determination to revisit and enhance the currently challenging limited employment hours for the Officer, to the benefit of the Collaboration.

21/16 Operations

a. Preparations for October Board

GJJ noted a date was needed, but the Chair's autumn schedule wasn't clear yet, and so it would be addressed in the weeks following the meeting. Matthew Greenhall (RLUK Director) had been invited to attend and speak about leadership. Emma Walton was also willing to talk about her own reflections as a non-RCUK member library on the same topic.

ACTION: GJJ, Chair and Laura to agree on potential dates for the Board

ACTION: GJJ to send poll to Directors for autumn Board date

ACTION: GJJ to invite speakers formally to Board once we have a date set

b. Conference 2021: Keynote Speaker

As per discussions online, Emma Cragg has been invited and accepted as the keynote speaker, with only a modest fee requested. She would be speaking on a theme of 'Developing personal effectiveness and resilience'. More information on her session would shortly be added to the conference website.

c. Website Accessibility: Progress Update

GJJ had shared a report ahead of the meeting outlining initial work and steps necessary for it to be conducted. He noted that the audit indicated the site was for the most part well set up for accessibility, with some minor issues identified. The Chair and Steering Group thanked GJJ for his report, which was then discussed.

It was agreed that a major overhaul would be expensive in times of Officer time and external web host costs and would deliver only very minor enhancements. It was agreed GJJ would explore addressing some of the minor site issues, and that a clear accessibility statement for the site should be created. This would highlight where and how users could request improvements or alternative formats, and also offer best practice guidance for the subgroups and their own activities.

ACTION: GJJ and Chair to development site accessibility statement and best practice advice

ACTION: GJJ to continue investigating minor site improvements to increase accessibility rating

d. Officer Workloads: Update

It was noted the Chair and Vice-Chair continued to closely observe GJJ's monthly activities through his reported time-sheets, and were in discussions about extending his hours. The Chair asked if the Officer could take all his vacations with ease, to which GJJ noted he did although it remained tricky to book them as there was very limited 'quiet time' for the Collaboration annually. He noted that SCOUNL had requested all officers employed by them report their vacations, but as he had always done this it was not a concern.

21/17 Subgroups: Activity Update

The Chair welcomed the representatives of the subgroups, and thanked them for attending for their annual discussions with Steering Group.

a. Conference Group

Damian Pugh reported that the conference planning, for an online event (9/10th Sept), was going well. A bumper crop of submissions for speakers had been received, and a keynote speaker had been secured. The team is now focussing on the hosting pragmatics, seeking to make the best possible event while considering what the speaker and delegate experience will be like. A test event was planned for the forthcoming weeks to check the platform selected works sufficiently well. Bookings for delegates will open up this week or next week at the latest.

The Chair noted it was an excellent conference theme, and what sounded like a really interesting programme. As such she commended the whole group for their efforts. Damian noted how hard people had been working behind the scenes. Jo-Anne, as sponsor and former Conference Group member, noted she was amazed how organised the group were especially given the challenges faced.

The Conference Group would like to offer some delegate reward for attendance. This had been discussed as tied in to booking, but agreed this could be problematic. It was proposed to make it part of the evaluation mailshot as a 'thank you for attending'. The Steering Group discussed the levels of payment and the number of delegates, and hence potential costs. It was agreed that while the idea of a modest voucher was acceptable, this could only be sent to those delegates who were Collaboration members. More discussion would be needed concerning the value and mechanics of sending the vouchers, and Damian would talk with GJJ about this offline, with Helen copied in as required.

ACTION: Damian, GJJ and Treasurer to liaise on voucher scheme

b. Mercian Staff Development Group

Sarah Pittaway reported it had been a challenging year for the group with many of the committee members finding it harder to participate and contribute as much as normal. However, from an attendee perspective things had worked well, and the online events had been well attended. Topics covered had included: challenging conversations, trans-awareness, customer service excellence and reopening libraries in a (post) COVID world. The events programme had always been intended to have been a reactive one for 20/21. Given the changing circumstances, legal restrictions and external environment it had been agreed to respond to new developments rather than set an agenda in stone. The final evaluation for the year was pending, and Sarah would share this with the Steering Group once it was ready.

ACTION: Sarah to share MSDG annual evaluation with Steering Group.

For the 21/22 academic year there were more ambitious plans for a bigger programme of events. A second version of the well-received trans-awareness workshop would be hosted, along with hopefully sessions on topics including: online staff recruitment, social media, networking, digitisation & ILL, blended information literacy, KPIs and impact, collaborative partnerships, and 'building on the wins'. Additionally, knowledge exchange sessions on implementing new LMSs and negotiating deals would bring people together for informal but informative discursive sessions.

There had been efforts to run some remote 'All the Same, But Different visits', but these had not come to fruition. Given these are especially valued by front-line staff, the group planned to redouble efforts to present some of these in 21/22.

GJJ reminded Sarah of the Buddying Scheme, which it was noted was being looked at to be relaunched/promoted in the next academic year. However, it continued to attract a steady if low number of participants annually since its launch.

Jo-Anne noted the SMOG/SCONUL Mentoring Group, which was looking to work with collaborations on buddying/mentoring and would talk with Sarah following the meeting about any overlaps. The Chair thanked Sarah and all facilitators of MSDG events for their efforts.

ACTION: Sarah and Jo-Anne to discuss overlap of mentoring/buddying

c. Copyright Group

Yvonne Budden reported that the COVID lockdown impact in March 2020, meant the group initially agreed not to meet until after the pandemic. However, members had been active on Lis-Copyseek at a national level in terms of support and knowledge sharing. There had been some limited discussions about meeting, but the shift to online teaching and support had meant job demands on members escalated.

However, now the group were considering what to do for the new academic year, as some aspects of members' jobs were reducing in load. Yvonne noted the rest of the core committee had stepped down, and hence she are looking to refresh/restart their activities with a new committee. Certainly, group members had a desire to meet again, now they had a greater 'head-space' to deal with things outside of the day job. It was planned to put out a call for new members, as well as encouraging old members to become more involved too, in future activities, as a first step to relaunch. The Chair thanked Yvonne for the update, and wished the group well, in her capacity as chair and subgroup sponsor.

ACTION: Yvonne and GJJ help to relaunch group and make call for members

d. Deputies & Senior Staff Group

GJJ updated Steering Group on behalf of this subgroup. They had met three times in the past year (Nov '20, Mar & May 2021), and would be meeting again in October/November. Each meeting now had a volunteer chair to guide discussions, while GJJ took care of administrative and organisation aspects for each meeting. The group had updated and agreed its terms of reference, following Board feedback. Meetings continued to be valued for their free and frank exchanges of knowledge and experience, with topics tackled in the past year including: return to campus, supporting diverse user needs, research support, scholarly communications, lessons from lockdown, evolution of service delivery. The group was not representative, but was relatively well attended with robust and energised discussions each time. The theme for the next meeting was under discussion but would likely focus on aspects of evolving/new working arrangements (e.g. hybrid/offsite) and the related impacts on services and teams.

While the group was not task focussed, Steering Group noted the subgroup's recognised and varied expertise meant they might be called on them in future to provide an invaluable point of view in discussions relevant to the Collaboration.

Simon, on behalf of the MDF, noted his group members often encountered disability (and related) policy issues which went beyond their expertise/seniority but directly impacted and were relevant to their members' work. Simon was encouraged to explore this matter further with the Deputies group directly following further discussions with the MDF members.

ACTION: Simon/GJJ to facilitate accessibility/policy issues discussion with the Deputies Group

e. Marketing & Communications Group

Stewart was unable to attend today, due to a recent LMS launch at his institution. He had noted in an email to GJJ that he hoped for more positive news about the group soon. Helen agreed to follow up with Stewart and offer support for their relaunch.

ACTION: Helen to work with Stewart to relaunch the Marketing & Communications group

f. Mercian Disability Forum

Simon Satchwell-Giles reported on the subgroup's work, crediting past chair Laura Waller (Warwick) for her efforts. The group comprised staff with varied levels of experience, and it was noted rarely with accessibility/disability as their sole role focus. Forum meetings usually focussed on issues raised by members, along with the sharing of best/effective practice. Recent discussions had often focussed on outside content accessibility (e.g. eBooks), a much raised priority issue in the light of remote learning/study/support needs. In particular, the group had examined what steps could be taken to help users navigate and use the different, and contrasting, content platforms. Exploring accessibility statements has been a major aspect of this work.

Additionally, it had been observed by MDF members how some areas of their institutions were out of step with best practice accessibility guidelines, for example due to the massive rise in decentralised content creation for VLEs. Consequently, the library was often called upon to offer guidance and advice over a much larger set of resources than usual. Hence, this work was for members more critical, but also more challenging on their available time and resource.

Laura had co-chaired a well-received virtual networking event, with GJJ, in January, which had proved a useful format for future discursive events by the group. There was hope that the MDF could also work with the MSDG on a jointly badged stress (staff/student) event in the future as this was a growing area of concern and interest. Sarah noted she would also like to talk with the MDF concerning guideline for making events (online/physical) more accessibly. The Chair noted this would be valuable to the whole Collaboration, and encouraged the sharing of any expertise or information in this respect.

ACTION: Simon and Sarah to discuss potential for joint stress event

ACTION: Simon and Sarah to discuss issues relating to event accessibility and report back to the Steering Group

Simon noted he would be talking about library reopening and the impacts on staff and students with disabilities, following MDF discussions. In particular, he noted issues with masks were a hot topic.

Yvonne highlighted that the forthcoming UKRI open access policy would include an EDI assessment which would draw attention to the accessibility of items held within repositories. Given this was a challenging area to address, there was potential for the MDF and the Copyright Group to have discussions or look to facilitating a joint event on this area.

ACTION: Yvonne to talk with Simon offline about overlaps between MDF/Copyright group activities and support/advice that can be offered.

ACTION: Simon, Sarah and Yvonne to cascade their inter-subgroup discussions to their respective group members

Chair thanked Simon and the MDF, noting there was a lot of work going on.

g. Mercian Metadata Group

Richard Birley reported on behalf of the group, which had a relatively quiet year of activity. They had held an event in March (eBook management) which was a topic request from within the group. William and Richard as co-chairs had also met in March with Judith as their new sponsor. Another event was on the cards for September, but details for this were still TBC. This would focus on MarcEdit, a free tool which helps cataloguers and metadata workers do interesting work. This was also prompted by interest within the group, and will use real examples to work on during the session. Richard noted the group remained engaged as a collective, and had hopes for more events and activities as more 'normal' working practices resumed. While the group was not representative of all Collaboration members, it had a healthy attendance at most engagements. However, more library staffers were welcome to become involved.

The Chair noted the MMG had been one of the more visibly active groups and asked about any plans for face-to-face meetings. Richard noted not for the foreseeable future, although hopes for an RDA event remained – as this would work best as a physical exchange. However, this would need to remain in abeyance for now unless circumstances dramatically changed. He said they hoped to invite some representatives from the British Library to contribute, so the MMG would be looking for some funding support to cover their travel expenses.

Chair closed this section of the meeting by thanking the officers and members of the subgroups for their activities, and efforts in helping deliver value and support to the Mercian Collaboration member community.

21/18 AOB

a. Date of next Steering Group meeting

This would be held in late November, early December as per usual custom and practice. The date would be agreed by the Chair and Vice, and shared with the rest of the group. There was a discussion concerning an online or physical meeting, and it was agreed taking into account travel budgets, room availability and safety considerations that for the remainder of 2021 that online would continue to be the norm. GJJ noted this would set the de-facto policy for the subgroups.

ACTION: GJJ to set date for next Steering Group meeting in discussion with Chair & Laura

b. Annual Report 2021

GJJ noted the format and content of this year's report needed consideration, and he would be making a call for contributions after the summer. The target market for the report was discussed and it was agreed that primarily it was SCONUL and its membership. Hence, there was no need to be too ambitious in what we wanted to achieve, lest we create too much required effort .

ACTION: GJJ to lead on developments for annual report as per normal operations

ACTION: All to contribute to annual report as requested

ⁱ This is not shared publicly but is available for consultation by the Steering Group on request.