Conference Group

Minutes
22nd October 2021

Present:
Damian Pugh (Chair, Nottingham), Deborah Munro, (Vice-Chair, Birmingham), Laura Newman (Loughborough), Matt Cunningham (MSDG Rep, Loughborough), Gaz J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration), Jo-Anne Watts (Steering Group Sponsor, Worcester)

Apologies:
Christine Bradford (Warwick), Alison Charlesworth (Leicester), Cheryl Coveney (OU), Nial Halford-Busby (BGU), Ruth Houghton (Cranfield)

1. Group Reflections & Delegate Feedback

Damian noted, supported by the group's agreement, overall the conference had been a success. He added his particular thanks to all those involved on the day, especially behind the scenes, who'd helped make it so. GJJ agreed that this perception resonated with the Collaboration's conference success metrics, and that congratulations were in order for all. The group moved to discuss their own perceptions of the event, informed by participant feedback, focussing on aspects which could be improved for a future conference.

- **Attendance**: For some people online meant they weren't present for the whole event, rather dipping in. However, this could be viewed as a benefit which attracted some people to attend. The event attracted more attending delegates than any prior conference though, which was a major success.

- **Conference close**: Interaction at the end of the day was higher than expected, potentially as people didn't have to run to catch a train. However, the format of the 2022 closing session should be discussed once more as part of the planning process.

- **Content reuse**: It was noted there had been some interest in recorded content which was gratifying. Some library staff were reportedly feeding it into their own training programme. Hence, this was a new area of success for the conference, as we had not been able to do this previously.

- **Delegates engagement**: People were noted as attending sessions of direct interest to them, but less often going outside their specialities. Some feedback too highlighted the 'lack' of content for their 'speciality'. More perhaps needs to be done to highlight the 'generalist' nature of the event to delegates and speakers, to break down these barriers and perceptions.

- **Moments of joy**: These pre-recorded elements had not been well received in terms of visibility. This may have been due to the lack of a dedicated 'poster' slot for them or perhaps having an insufficiently high profile on the day. They were however now available on the website, so could be viewed. New ways to integrate these for future events would be considered, as they did offer a useful additional source of insight for delegates.

- **Networking**: Online offered a different experience to physical. It was notably harder to meet new people through the event platform, enjoy moments of serendipitous discussions or catch a speaker for a sidebar conversation. Additionally, in the networking breakout sessions there

was also a reluctance for people to start conversations. These could be enhanced through the aid of a facilitator to break the ice or lead chat around a themed topic.

- **Platform**: With one team member (Nial) shouldering so much of the platform and IT support, this was a point of concern and dependency which needed distributing across the team members better for future events. The call for new members should highlight how people with these sort of skills would be especially desirable to join the committee.

- **Session length**: It was agreed the short papers would work better slightly longer in duration (e.g. 15 minutes). While this might reduce the overall number offered it would help generate more engagement from the delegates. In this respect, it was noted the longer sessions Q&As for the most part were more dynamic, supporting this perception.

- **Session moderation**: While this had worked well on the day, thanks to a number of members of the team leading, less time had been devoted in the planning process than would have been desirable to considering this area. More attention to this aspect, alongside supporting networking engagements by the team would key for improving future online events.

- **Structure**: There were some suggestions the multiple parallels made for a confusing experience for some delegates, supported in the feedback and personal interactions. Better signposting in the programme, joining instructions and introduction to the day could help alleviate this issue. Alternatively, a revision to the programme to simplify its structure to reduce this necessity to navigate away from the core 'room', might help enhance the delegate experience at future online conferences.

2. Outstanding Issues

The following were identified as final outstanding issues from the 2021 conference which needed addressing following today's meeting.

a. Conference Content

GJJ reported that he had uploaded and shared many of the session videos, along with pre-recorded materials and moments of joy, via the website.[1] People seemed to have been very pleased that we'd been able to share this material.[2] There were a few sessions still unavailable, which Nial would address when he found the time.

ACTION: GJJ and Nial to continue sharing final session videos on the Collaboration website

b. Prize Vouchers

It was agreed that GJJ would randomly select the winners as planned from all submissions. Helen Curtis would be contacted to sort out the purchase and supply of these to the winners. It was noted as the value of the vouchers had not been certain during the call for feedback, that perhaps people had not realised quite how much they had been incentivised.

ACTION: GJJ to randomly select winners of prize draw

ACTION: GJJ, Helen Curtis and Deborah to sort sending prizes out

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[1] See: https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/conference-2021/recordings
[2] Sadly, we've had very few speakers share their slides with us – perhaps something to consider for 2022, obtaining a copy of all slides ahead of the event.

c. Sponsor Invoices

GJJ asked if all the sponsors had been invoiced for their funds supporting the event? As Cheryl had been unable to attend today, this would be taken up with her via email.

ACTION: GJJ and Cheryl to confirm that sponsor invoices have been issued

d. Sponsor feedback

It was asked if sponsors had been asked for feedback or had attended the event. GJJ confirmed while one representative had booked, they had not attended. It was suggested writing to thank the sponsors would be an important step towards securing future income, and GJJ would check with Cheryl if this had already been accomplished.

ACTION: GJJ check with Cheryl that all sponsors have been thanked for their support of the event

3. Group Membership

a. Standing Down

Those people who had agreed to step down as of today's meeting were:

- Alison Charlesworth
- Charlie Hill[3]
- Cheryl Coveney
- Damian Pugh

b. Remaining

The following group members had noted their wish to continue on to the planning group for the 2022 event.

- Christine Bradford
- Deborah Munro (progresses to chair)
- Laura Newman
- Nial Halford-Busby
- Ruth Houghton

It was noted Matt Cunningham, Jo-Anne Watts and Gaz J Johnson remain as ex-officio members.

c. Uncertain

- Emily Forster

As Emily had not engaged or responded to group emails in some time, it was assumed she wished to standdown by default. GJJ agreed to double check the issue with her, in case there had been a miscommunication.

ACTION: GJJ to contact Emily to confirm if she is standing down

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[3] Stood down earlier in the year, noted for completeness

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4. Governance

a. Recruitment

This left four, potentially five, vacancies to fill. It was agreed that in previous years recruitment to the group would be via member directors, due the demands on the staff time arising from group membership. GJJ would draft a call, and share with the group for input, and then send out as soon as possible. Where group members were aware of keen potential new members, they would be encouraged to make their respective directors aware of this interest. In particular, skills relating to IT and online events were especially sought, to help share the administrative burdens of this aspect of the future conference.

ACTION: GJJ to draft outline call for new group members and share with group for input

ACTION: GJJ to share finalised call for new group members with directors

ACTION: ALL to encourage potential new group members to make themselves know

b. Vice-Chair

The role of vice-chair was discussed, and Laura having previously noted an interest in the role was strongly supported in this role as vice-chair elect. This would be formalised by the first meeting of the new group, assuming there were no additional members interested in the role.

c. Roles & ToR

It was agreed to revisit and update the terms of reference and role descriptions as part of the next committee meeting, especially with respect to the IT aspects. It was also agreed that who took on each role would be revisited at the first full committee meeting of the new year, allowing members to shift in their responsibilities where wished.

ACTION: ToR and roles to be revisited and updated at next committee meeting

ACTION: Assigned roles to be discussed and re-allocated at Jan/Feb committee meeting

5. Next conference initial thoughts

Looking to 2022, the issue of staff budgets and uncertainty of the pandemic background made it difficult to make a call as of yet in terms of an online, hybrid or physical event. While face-to-face was desirable, approaching the next conference as hybrid or retaining the online only version might be more pragmatic for planning purposes. It was suggested in future, post-pandemic, the conference could switch between physical and online each year, to help encourage those who found one format more attractive, accessible or desirable over the other to attend.

Given the various questions concerning theme, format and programme arising from the feedback and today's discussions, it was agreed that a general members survey would be a useful tool to inform the group's plans. GJJ would coordinate this and aim to gather the information for the Jan/Feb first full meeting of the new committee.

Hence, all key issues for 2022 would be discussed more at the next two conference meetings. Where needed advice and support would be sought from the Steering Group, acting as a sounding board for the group's ideas.

ACTION: GJJ to draft members survey and share with group members

ACTION: ALL to feedback on survey aspects

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ACTION: GJJ to facilitate member survey distribution and feedback from the membership on future conferences

6. AOB

   a. Next meetings

It was agreed to host a brief catch up and planning meeting in late November with as many new and returning members as possible in attendance. Reflections on some of the points above would also be captured. A Jan/Feb 2022 kick off meeting would then be held to agree team roles, theme and start the formal event planning for the 2022 event. Member survey feedback would also be examined at this latter meeting to inform planning. GJJ asked if Damian would be willing to write an outgoing-chair's reflections on the conference and its organisation, to help with recruitment and also to promote the event.

ACTION: Damian to write reflective piece on the conference for Collaboration news pages

   b. Thanks and acknowledgements

Damian closed by reiterating the committee members' particular success of organising the first major online event for the Collaboration. As he was now standing down as Chair, Damian noted his extensive thanks to all the members of the committee who had brought about the successful conference, and who had made his role as chair as easy as possible. He expressed he was happy to be called upon in the future as a resource or to support future events. Deborah and Jo-Anne thanks Damian on behalf of the group and the Collaboration for his contribution as well.

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