



## Directors Board

Online meeting, 10am, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022

### Minutes

**Present:** Chris Porter (Chair, Newman), Judith Keene (Steering Group, Worcester), Ruth Jenkins (BCU), Emma Sansby (BGU), Robin Green (Warwick), Laura Pilsel (Vice, Harper-Adams), Dave Parkes (DMU), Jo-Anne Watts (Steering Group, Wolverhampton), Libby Homer (Anglia Ruskin), Paul Mahoney (Staffordshire), Peter Maggs (NTU), Diane Job (Birmingham), Kay Jeffries (Derby), Helen Young (Loughborough), Lesley Thompson (Lincoln), Gareth J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration)

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**Apologies:** Sue Ackermann (Nottingham), Chris Powis (Steering Group, Northampton), Ian Snowley (Lincoln), Steve Williams (Leicester), Ben Veasey (Derby), Emma Walton (Loughborough), Helen Curtis (Treasurer, Aston), Scott McGowan (Keele), Simon Bevan (Cranfield), Selena Killick (OU), Phil Brabban (Coventry), Stephen Dudley (UCB)

### Summary of Actions

**ACTION: Chair to share updated Strategic Plan with Board**

**ACTION: ALL to review Strategic Plan and provide feedback or comments to Steering Group by mid-April**

**ACTION: GJJ to submit annual report to SCONUL Exec**

**ACTION: GJJ to market report to Collaboration membership.**

**ACTION: GJJ to continue final efforts to relaunch Copyright Group**

**ACTION: GJJ to feedback updates on consortial purchasing discussions to MUAL**

**ACTION: Emma W and other NEYAL members to update Board at October meeting on NEYAL review and merger progress**

**ACTION: Steering Group to agree format, topics and speakers for next Board meeting.**

**ACTION: ALL to send suggestions for future Board discussion topics to Chair/Officer**

**ACTION: Chair and GJJ to explore director future meeting preferences**

**ACTION: GJJ to send round meeting date poll ahead of October/November Board meeting**

## 22/01 Discussions & Speakers:

- a. Collections vs Content: Libby Homer and Paul Mahoney

Following the Chair's welcome to the meeting and introductions from new members, she introduced the topic for discussion and invited the two speakers to share their thoughts on the theme.

Libby is Director of Student and Library services at Anglia Ruskin University, and is helping launch ARU Peterborough, as a new campus site and eventually, potentially, a new university. ARU has four campuses catering for around 20k students: London (partner/franchise), main site in Chelmsford and Cambridge, and an existing site in Peterborough. Cambridge is the biggest campus with a lot of international students. Applied science (nursing, paramedics etc.,) and some arts are based mostly at Cambridge along with their medical school. ARU has a large e-textbook deal, via an aggregator, and after three years is looking to retender. They are very much an e-first HEI and removing physical stock to make study space is an ongoing priority. Hence, the focus is on content not collection building. From Sept 2022 a brand-new site will be opened in Peterborough.

In her other capacity, as Chair of SCOUNL's Content Strategy Group, Libby has been discussing content issues at length. These talks have brought people together from across HE, CILIP, NHS Libraries, and publishing consortiums to especially look at the challenges of e-textbooks. Jisc is putting together an e-Textbook group – paralleling work with Elsevier - focussing on teaching and learning materials.

The new ARU Peterborough campus came about as a local council initiative to create a new university, but after examining the logistics they have partnered with ARU for 10 years. The new central university building is designed around teaching, although there is an eye to enlarging the campus to meet local business demands for skills over time. Peterborough is a low HEI participation region of the UK and the new university/campus aimed to help to address that concern. A research building (to open 2023) allied to but not part of ARU Peterborough was already being built and 'levelling up' funds for a further teaching and learning building (to open 2024) have been secured. There are additional plans for a phase 5 and 6 with hopes to include about 12k students on campus in 10 years' time (2032).

At the new site, library space is limited although the anticipated main users (nurses and midwives) are a population which are expected to make considerable demands for print and staff support. Ideally, no physical stock on site was the aim, but student feedback has steered ARU back from this for now. However, academic staff seem favourable to moving towards e-only given the 'innovative' Peterborough campus ethos. ARU is now consulting with staff and students with an aim to 'ween' them off physical stock. Hence, while there will be a lean collection at first there is a two year plan to transition away from it. For other courses (gaming, engineering, etc.,) no hardcopy stock will be purchased from the outset.

On site there will only be one self-issue machine and nor will any security be used as stock retention is simply not a priority. There will be a joint student and library help desk plus some library space on first floor, with then quieter study space on 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. The plan is to manage different library space across different elements of the building includes using different furniture to demarcate different uses. For example, the silent focus space for invidiously study contains no comfy chairs or relaxation options as this is offered elsewhere in the building. There is an expectation library staff will likely manage behaviour across the building, despite not all it being a library run space.

ARU Peterborough is therefore an experimental model and a test bed for the way library services could be run across the university. Libby closed by noting the Peterborough senior management team and principal had been very supportive through the project.

Next, Paul explained how at Staffordshire during 2021 they had replaced the LMS, moved their physical library, and restructured the staff. Because of Covid some students have never been on site, and so they aimed to take the opportunity to also conduct a realistic assessment of future student needs, funding and service management as part of these developments. The intention was to promote the library as a digital service rather than a building, something which has now been achieved alongside a campus wide shift in library and ICT associated services.

Hence, while the idea of a digital library is being pursued an increase in in learning resource budget was still needed. Staffordshire has successfully secured a relatively large rise in this over three years, with the high use of 'free' e-resources at the start of lockdown and the resultant high student satisfaction levels in using them helping to drive this forward. A digital first policy is now in place, although with 40 partner bodies, there are issues in terms of achieving access and provision which need to be worked on with suppliers. Reading list completions were poor (<50%), but now are around 80%, and improving, and some e-textbook deals have been purchased. The library is also launching a campaign to encourage use of rapid ILL – as people shouldn't be stuck for a book. Staffordshire aspires to deploying a no fines culture, but currently there is still a desire for materials to returned, and this remains the best option. Fines were suspended for the past couple of years until they were reintroduced this month but capped at £5. The library still has high physical loan figures and the resultant operational demands needed to deal with this, however the reduced stock collection means this problem has also been decreased.

Staffordshire's main campus is located in Stoke and now has a new flagship building – the £40M Catalyst Building – as the campus focal point. There is a masterplan which will see a big development towards enabling a more 'rural' setting, as the heart of campus is shifted away from older buildings. These developments though called extant stock collections into question, as space is now increasingly given over to teaching and learning development needs. As there was space allocated for 50k books, but Staffordshire had ~150k books in stock, there was a dysfunction between aspiration and reality. Through policy, usage statistics and withdrawal efforts the library has reduced its physical stock is now down to ~95k books, a level at which they are currently happy to maintain.

The library itself is now adjacent to new focal building, and occupies an area formed by repurposed lecture rooms. The space looks good but has very limited study space, as this is provided elsewhere on site. The aim is for students to collect books from the library but read them elsewhere. The library also delivers books across campus. Staffordshire's satellite campuses (Shrewsbury, London) can also have books sent to them, but primarily they rely on e-access to materials. Library spaces are designed to be unstaffed, with notably laptop loans, once in very high demand during the pandemic, have now fallen considerably.

With the disaggregation of the future campus, staff teams were also re-examined. For example, Paul discussed the Student Connect Team which is a combined library and front of house team. This team used to comprise 24 staff, with their own arrangements, knowledge bases and arguably rigid working practice; such as not moving away from the help desk. They also had student ambassadors who worked with them but in practice the ambassadors reported very variable experiences. Now this team has been slimmed down to 14 people and not all of the staff are from a library background. The student ambassadors

experience has improved too as they now work alongside and are treated as part of the team, including being given a full range of customer service activity to handle. Additionally, people from the team often move on to new roles because they're good staff and hence are recruited to work elsewhere in the university.

Staffordshire now also facilitates direct access to information using the university app *Beacon*. Previously, campus signage expected people to visit locations to find an answer, but now the app supplies ~80% of answers to questions remotely. Last month, as an example, there were 750k app accesses and over a thousand questions answered. This has helped the Student Connect team to be more mobile in their work and provides for a richer job experience. The questions being asked are also reviewed and utilised to inform and refine working patterns and the team's focus.

Today, the library works more closely with estates on things such as informal study spaces across campus and making information for students available. E.g. study space information is provided via an app which shows where they're located. Consequently, now students can discover the spaces, understand where they are located and comprehend how they can book them, they can make a more effective use of them.

The Chair thanked Paul and Libby for their comments and opened the floor for comments and discussion. Diane asked where the critical moments were in the ten year project for ARU Peterborough to form an independent university. Libby explained while the date for 'independence' was 2032, the council needed to seek degree awarding powers by '27/28. If this does not go according to plan, by 2032 a renegotiation on the contract will be due and the outcome of that would depend on the prevailing circumstances – not least the success of the campus to grow its student population and courses. Diane asked Paul in terms of campus wide learning space how Staffordshire was approaching managing the various spaces. Paul explained these spaces are all bookable in the flagship building, and they were looking to expand this model across the campus. IT, estates and the library had formed a working group to monitor their usage and update facilities, along with considering revisions to the information needed to use them well. The library's role has been central in making it easier to maintain these locations and has encouraged updates where facilities are in need of improvement.

Judith commented how the combined help and support desk is especially of interest to her, and asked how a shared knowledge base was achieved. Paul noted there was a universal job description now, with staff rotating through different roles to broaden and maintain their knowledge base. Libby noted there were combined desks at Chelmsford and Cambridge, although staff reactions had been varied with one site accommodating the change well and the other being less receptive. These experiences would feed into the ARU Peterborough staffing plans and organisation though.

Jo-Anne noted Wolverhampton had three other campus libraries to support, and spent a lot of time now getting stock to different locations. Given the decentralised challenge of managing the logistics of this without a 'hub' building, she asked how best to solve this? Paul commented with shifting to more online, physical stock move was a more limited issue. A healthy reservation and click and collect service helped in dealing with the remaining physical stock access. Currently staff rotating to campus locations helped transport stock to other library locations, although a smaller campus footprint and more limited physical stock demands meant this wasn't a lengthy distance to travel or volume to transport. Libby noted currently they hitched material on different services, and shared transport costs with other departments.

Although, this meant only a couple of stock runs a week were possible. They were exploring a similar approach for ARU Peterborough.

The Chair summarised that ARU Peterborough represented a library as space with resources online, while Staffordshire had retained stock alongside e-access but within a minimal dedicated library space. Hence, these were two very different set ups, albeit both configured around diminished physical collections. She noted how Newman's library represented a stock collection without space and this was not satisfying to their students who focussed on desires for more stock in feedback. Now the library had a larger space, the adverse focus on stock had diminished. She asked Libby if the subjects ARU taught responded better to textbook learning approaches, then how and where did students source a richness of resources beyond these? Libby noted that many of their students had 'complex' lives which prevented this reading around behaviour and aimed to do the minimum to complete their degrees. Hence, textbook teaching was perceived to satisfy their needs. Students are taught to research for their projects though, and along with blended and team learning approaches they *do* perform some further reading. She conceded those doing it independently though were rarer.

Ruth commented that going e-text only was not always possible in some areas (e.g. music/composition), and that many students expressed a strong desire to browse print stocks. It was suggested given senior executive staff were not always recruited from HE, they could be less aware that not 'everything' could be accessed online.

The Chair thanked Paul and Libby, and encouraged others to reach out to them for follow up questions.

## 22/02 Governance

### a. [Minutes of October 2022 Board](#)

These were accepted with the amendment that Emma W and Emma S need to be more clearly demarcated in future.

### b. Any outstanding actions

All actioned, for discussion today or underway with the following exceptions:

*ACTION: Emma [W] to write up notes on her leadership comments and share online*

This had not happened, and Emma W was not in attendance

*ACTION: Steering Group seek ways to continue development and debate around leadership discussions*

This had been rolled into the Steering Group's ongoing discussions around strategy.

*ACTION: Emma [W] to share notes/update on SCOUNL meeting ahead of March Board.*

This had not happened, and Emma W was not in attendance

c. Strategic Plan & MoU: Update

The Chair had shared an updated version of this ahead of the meeting, which had been revised in the light of Covid and Steering Group discussions. It had been slimmed down and revised, but broadly covered the same area. The Chair invited any final comments ahead of the April Steering Group meeting, at which point the plan would be finalised for the next two years.

The MoU had been signed off and agreed with SCONUL for the next three years.

**ACTION: Chair to share updated Strategic Plan with Board**

**ACTION: ALL to review Strategic Plan and provide feedback or comments to Steering Group by mid-April**

d. Collaboration Reserves Policy: Update

GJJ noted as had been reported to Steering Group this was now agreed with SCONUL as:

*The Mercian Collaboration Steering Group will ensure that adequate reserves are held to meet the requirements of the SCONUL reserves policy. The following contingency amounts for the Collaboration's commitments form the basis of the calculation and the total amount required to meet the policy.*

The reserve figure was derived from the total of 18 weeks of the Officer's salary, SCONUL hosting costs, a 10% subscription loss buffer and the largest spending commitment (web hosting costs). This gave a figure slightly above £10k, well within the current balance and end of year figures to meet. The statement is also represented in the MoU.

## 22/03 Operations

a. Treasurer's Update & Current Finances

As Helen was unable to attend today GJJ gave a brief update on the finances. These remain in a healthy state with the most recent figures showing an income for 2022 of £18,827.78 (subscriptions) and outgoings of £1,671.41 (salary, phone costs, expenses) – although the most recent two months salary for the Officer were not yet shown in these figures. As per these figures the financial balance (reserve) was £46,307.94, providing more than sufficient funds to cover the year's expected outgoings, even with the increase to the officer's hours, annually salary increment and currently anticipated low conference costs. The Chair noted part of the increased costs for 2022 were the increased hours for the officer (now a 0.4FTE role). She also added the title of the role had changed to *Executive Officer*, from that of the prior *Development Officer*.

b. Annual Report 2021

This had been shared with the agenda. The Chair noted how strongly it showcased what the Collaboration has been doing and thanked all contributors. Robin expressed how much he liked the small statistics boxes and encouraged more such random stats of interest in future publications. Ruth highlighted how valuable the member updates were, especially those with photos, given we had been unable to visit each other's campus as easily in recent years.

**ACTION: GJJ to submit annual report to SCONUL Exec**

**ACTION: GJJ to market report to Collaboration membership.**

c. Under Review: Copyright, and Marketing & Communications Groups  
GJJ reported back that following his efforts, the Marketing and Communication Group had held a relaunch meeting the previous day. This had been a great success, and as a result a new committee had been elected which planned to host regular meetings going forward. The next group meeting would be in May, and all regional members with an interest in marketing and communications in libraries would be welcome to attend.

Conversely, there had been far more limited interest in relaunching the Copyright Group. GJJ aimed to still schedule an exploratory relaunch meeting in April/May for anyone interested, but he did not currently hold out a lot of hope that a new committee could be formed. In this eventuality the group will be discontinued.

**ACTION: GJJ to continue final efforts to relaunch Copyright Group**

d. Subgroup proposal: Midlands Library Research Support Group  
As had been noted at Steering Group ([22/02 \(g\): pp. 03](#)) we had been approached by this independent regional group, seeking to merge into the Collaboration. GJJ had provided them with feedback and a guidance on formally submitting a proposal for Board approval, and Steering Group had warmly encouraged the efforts. This was back in January/February '22 and there had been no follow up since then. Helen Y noted as a committee member of the group, she was aware they planned to get back in touch after Easter to explore the next steps, following internal discussions.

e. Regional Purchasing Consortia  
GJJ and a number of the NEYAL (North East and Yorkshire Academic Libraries) regional members had met the previous week to discuss various issues. ALN (Academic Libraries North) was exploring merging the NEYAL purchasing consortia role into itself, although the reasons for this appear uncertain. NEYAL as an entity wishes to continue, but what this means for MC members was unclear – as gaining ALN membership seemed less than desirable. NEYAL has staffing resource, contrasted to MUAL's run volunteer basis. NEYAL was seeking to hire an independent consultant to review situation and make recommendations, although any change is likely one to two years in the future. MC NEYAL members will be involved in talks and Emma W is on NEYAL's management group to aid in this.

GJJ had also provided a breakdown of purchasing consortia membership across the country, although taken verbatim from their various websites one or two errors of fact were noted by the Board. Meanwhile there had been some discussions concerning MUAL becoming a more fully formed purchasing consortium and working more closely with or as part of the Collaboration. The Chair invited comments and a brief discussion followed. It was agreed to keep a careful eye on this area as a standing Board item, as any action need currently was unclear. GJJ would update MUAL via John Dowd on discussions.

**ACTION: GJJ to feedback updates on consortial purchasing discussions to MUAL**

**ACTION: Emma W and other NEYAL members to update Board at October meeting on NEYAL review and merger progress**



f. SCONUL Activities: Update

Emma W had been invited to submit a report ahead of the meeting but had not been able. The Chair confirmed no one present was on the SCONUL Board and so no formal report was taken. Robin noted that while he wasn't on the SCONUL Board, he was aware there had been a recognition and subsequent discussions concerning duplication of efforts across their strategy groups. His understanding was there were plans to have a more formal crossover between these groups and improvements to their communications.

### 22/04 To Receive Previously Circulated Reports

- a. Steering Group Minutes (Nov '21 & Feb '22)
- b. Operational Groups Updates
- c. Special Interest Groups Updates
- d. Officer's Update

These had been circulated by GJJ ahead of the meeting. The Chair invited comments from the floor, but none were forthcoming.

### 22/05 Next meeting

- a. Themes, speakers and format for October 2022 meeting

The Chair asked for topics for discussions or speakers at the next Board meeting. Suggestions included:

- **Lending policies:** – building on elements of what was discussed during today's meeting.
- **Partnerships:** Exploring new and old partnerships, unusual developments, new ways of working with other university departments and ways to break down barriers.
- **Skills:** Fitting in with strategic aims and changes in policy, experiences and key areas of knowledge, exploring library staff skill bases along with new/innovative/effective routes to deliver training.

The Chair thanked everyone for their suggestions and would return to the matter at forthcoming Steering Group meetings. She invited any further topics to be sent to herself or the Officer. There was a brief discussion about returning to a face-to-face meeting, noting previous discussions at Board. The Chair noted that while a hybrid meeting may be possible, the Board agreed the convenience of online meetings (in terms of time, cost and ease of attendance) had been considerable.

The Chair noted her wish not to create a tier of members at the fringes of the region who would consistently attend hybrid meetings remotely, due to distance. It was noted the MSDG was considering a one face-to-face and two online meetings as a potential future meeting pattern. The Chair proposed to explore member's preferences working with the Officer

**ACTION: Steering Group to agree format, topics and speakers for next Board meeting.**

**ACTION: ALL to send suggestions for future Board discussion topics to Chair/Officer**

**ACTION: Chair and GJJ to explore director future meeting preferences**

**ACTION: GJJ to send round meeting date poll ahead of October/November Board meeting**





22/06 AOB

a. Retirements

Robin noted this would be his last meeting, as he would be retiring later this year. The Chair thanked Robin for his contributions over the years, especially in terms of getting the Collaboration established and being its first treasurer. Jo-Anne noted that Fiona Parsons was also retiring soon at Wolverhampton, and the Chair also acknowledged her contributions too. It was agreed both would be much missed within the academic library sector, along with best wishes for a long and happy retirement.