Mercian Disability Forum

Agenda

24ᵗʰ November 2020, Online meeting

Present: Laura Waller (Warwick), Tim Stubbs (Derby), Sarah Akhtaruzzaman (Aston) Jenny Townend (Northampton), John Mackay (NTU), Julie Adams (Staffordshire), Kathryn Devine (Worcester), Gill Evans (Coventry), Simon Satchwell-Giles (Newman), Rose Roberto (BGU), Gaz J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration)

Apologies: Alison Charlesworth (Leicester)

1) Previous meeting

a) *Corrections or amendments to minutes*

These were accepted as read.

b) *Matters and actions arising*

- Share Warwick guide: This is included on the agenda under ebooks
- Leeds Becket. Talked around ebooks and lot of information there.
- Accessibility: It was agreed to use one of the virtual networking event slots in early 2021 to host an event on this theme.

ACTION: GJJ and Laura to coordinate and promote accessibility virtual networking event

2) Introductions to new members

Laura welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introductions were made. It was noted Laura will likely be standing down as group chair in early 2021, and the group will need to agree a successor. Laura explained how the role works, highlighting how it didn't take up a large amount of working time. She and Gareth were both available to discuss the position.

ACTION: All to consider taking on Chair role and to contact Laura/GJJ for more information

3) Roundtable: Updates from institutions

- **Aston**: Priority on keeping the library building as open as possible, although a lot of staff working off campus still. RNIB Bookshares coming through, plus a booking system for print books but no special requests, as open for all to use. Focussing on ways to offer better remote support for visually impaired users using software to access materials they've not used before. New inclusivity network launched, which is looking at improving service provision, and will slowly grow activities. There is a general expectation there will be further accessibility improvements in 2021.

- **BGU**: New post-holder since September. Library services reopened to allow use of collections but changing national/regional regulations and travel were challenging to accommodate. Library praised as being open (physical) service on campus during recent months.

- **Coventry**: New Health and Wellbeing Portal, and more training for staff especially on neuro-diverse teaching awareness. Push driven from top down with other initiatives coming from library staff with personal experience and expertise. Plans for sensory room planned to be set up post-lockdown/Covid. A cross-campus group, including academics, coming together as a community of practice which is helping support a push for more disabled student support in teaching/learning.

- **Derby**: Reopened 1st Sept. Challenges for younger (pre-HE) students in moving to online systems and hence library working with tutors to provide additional remote support services. Online booking system for space in the library is another new service that has been introduced. Increasingly though, supporting these 'new services' is becoming normal practice.

- **Newman**: Some unexpected challenges, for example, IT updates conflicting with accessibility specific software on library machines. Captioning not yet standard practice campus-wide, although it is for library materials, training and videos etc. Import-captions on Panopto have been varied in quality and require some manual correction. However, very big uptake for 1-2-1 sessions for students, levels of which are comparable with f-2-f sessions pre-lockdown/restrictions. Hence, improved ability to reach and assist students who need additional support. Formal referral process for RNIB Bookshare still under development.

- **Northampton**: Back on campus. Frontline staff (both those working on and off site) have had some training in British Sign Language and awareness raising with respect to caring responsibilities. Staff working from home have undertaken training, where they're not as able to offer service contributions. However, click and collect has been very successful, for those who are unable, unwilling or uncomfortable coming into physical library. A click and deliver service to local area has also been offered with much success. Meanwhile, the library website has been rebuilt and is now compliant with accessibility requirements.

- **NTU**: Booking system and click and collect in place which has vastly reduced the people in the building, reducing the requests for in person disability support. High use of 1-2-1 support via online routes. All lecture captured is captioned, a push from top level. Library open over Xmas, while campus is mostly closed. Planed project for group study rooms has been postponed, but massive investment in e-materials has both vastly increased availability and take-up of online study materials. It has also served to diversify the customer service team's roles within the library teams. Push for more formal disability support coordination, to increase coordination.

- **Staffordshire**: Lot of workshops and appointments online, possibly even more than normal physical services! Web pages were updated to better meet accessible standards. There is also a push for mental health support and awareness across the university. Working closely as part of University Disability Network, and within a related library group helping to coordinate and feed into activities across campus. New LMS planned for in 2021, for which accessibility will be reviewed to ensure the platform meets requirements.

- **Warwick**: Click and collect concluded once library reopened, due to staff resource demands. Fetching service though operated for those who couldn't bring their own books. Released a new free postal loan service and a free scan & deliver service. These were available for current Warwick staff and students who are shielding, have been told to self-isolate or unable to visit the Library due to a disability and/or chronic condition, or caring responsibilities. Service levels still to be seen as many services are new. There has also been a lot of work with e-books, to raise awareness of what users can do with them[i]. Productivity tools page launched[ii], can filter by device or studying need. Provides further information on each one and how to download. Target is for all students inclusively. New task force with a university wide coms campaign to 'Let's talk about…' issues: for example dyspraxia, dyslexia, disability history, invisible disability etc. The aim is to raise awareness and get people talking about disability more. Workshops on sensory tips and home environment have been delivered, with more planned in the new year.

- **Worcester**: Library open, some on-campus teaching going on, but 1-2-1 appointments remain online. Recording these MS Teams-based meetings has been useful in providing students with a record of discussions which they can replay. Some issues with captioning remain, but very positive feedback for online library service provision.

4)   Masks in Libraries

There was a general discussion over experiences of library services and facilities during the current pandemic period.

Student masks: Staff on front lines have concerns on dealing with exceptions. Sunflower lanyard scheme has been very positive but it has also caused some confusion e.g. expectations that people have to wear lanyard to be exempt, which isn't the case. Looked to positive ways to challenge exemption queries, e.g. in terms of the language used 'Do you have?' rather than 'why aren't you wearing?' Cannot ask people why they are exempt as government advice is 'no one has to provide information.' Government exemption cards are available, and one approach can be to provide these at library desks for people to pick up. This helps roving members of staff not to repeatedly ask people questions. Issues too with people who are wearing masks but not wearing them correctly (under the nose, chin diaper etc). Campus police have fined people for not wearing masks correctly and refusing to comply on at least one campus. Rule breakers are however reported to be in the minority. There have been more problems since the shift to more mask requirements indoors, where students aren't exempt and may simply refuse to comply.

Staff concerns: Varies how people wear these within shared office spaces. Concerns for staff in having to deal with these issues, as well as managing their own health and safety. Impact on students who are exempt due to 'rule breakers' creating negative conversations and perceptions. Acknowledged this is a vastly tricky area with which to deal. Frequent changes to advice from government has proven confusing and difficult to apply for library staff. Noted some universities have flexed with the requirements changing, while others have taken the approach of requiring a standard higher level of mask requirement from the outset and maintained it. Pressures too between students from pre-18 (FE) and HE, where requirements differ.

5) Covid related services

There was a general discussion over experiences of library services and facilities during the current pandemic period. Some of the issues which came up in discussion included:

Captioning: There is an increased need for support and resource for captioning videos, which is a new demand on staff time and expertise. Additionally, insufficiently resourcing these kinds of services, resulting in potentially poor captioning on recorded material, might be considered discriminatory. Post-Covid this is likely to be an area of library service which will need to continue to be addressed and better resourced. While auto-captioning may save time for a rough draft, it was still time consuming to review and clean up errors. However, for live talks auto-captioning was good enough.

Eligibility: Working out who was eligible for click & collect/fetch & carry services varied, and some suggested these services should be offered to all users. Fetch & carry has a greater level of care and can help users who may have difficulties with using catalogue to locate books in the first place. Noted some Students Unions have offered to provide fetch and carry service to those were self-isolating and wanted to sign up for the service.

Communication: How are support services effectively communicated to those who may need them but be unaware? Effective communication is often easier for institutions with smaller student numbers.

Buildings: Varied use levels of physical building were reported, with social distancing generally being observed by users.

Postal Loans: People still want access to print and there are issues where books are not being returned despite the recall requests. This was reportedly as a particular issue where course materials are unavailable in e-formats (e.g. arts).

Renewals: Various approaches were reported, with some turning off loan periods, with students only notified when a book was requested for recall.

Declaration: Seeking to avoid students having to declare or reveal anything to library staff, in order to be able to access or make use of additional support/services, as this was a form of indirect discrimination. Aim to make it easier to access the services and reduce any potential road-blocks to students a need to utilise them.

Study spaces: Some reported group study spaces being used by students in close proximity despite social distancing requirements and library rules. Masks at desks in some cases only required after formal national guidance given. Spacing and shields/screens are being used to reduce risks, along with opening windows to increase airflow. Desk cleaning routines and its relationship to mask wearing is another issue, e.g. people breathing on the desk while studying without a mask on. Not every library operates a booked study space service, although many do.

6) E-Book accessibility & student feedback

This was addressed in the preceding discussions.

GJJ 16th Dec 2020

7)   RNIB Bookshare

There was a discussion around this service, noting how ideally referrals to be able to use it should be as easy as possible from a user perspective, despite the disclosure requirements. Students often do not wish to declare their disability directly to library staff. Hence, for this approach centralising the declaratory data rather than hosting in different parts of the university would be preferable. Key in effectively facilitating this service was maintaining a close relationship with central disability services (or similar) by the library.

It was commented that removing registered service users who had departed (graduated, withdrawn etc), can be time consuming, especially for large student populations. Hence, this may need to be delegated to other teams/departments to assist, although there is no guarantee there is sufficient staffing resource elsewhere to deal with it.

Some institutions are very early in their involvement in the RNIB scheme, and hence there a need for up skilling to overcome some of the roadblocks experienced by other institutions in rolling it out. Passwords and accounts seem to a common concern, with being unable to change passwords a particular issue. It was agreed that Laura would provide feedback to the RNIB Scheme on behalf of the group.

ACTION: Laura to feedback practical concerns on RNIB Scheme on behalf of the MDF

8)   AOB

a)   *Date of next meeting*

Feb 2021, TBC by Laura, as her intended handover meeting to the incoming chair.

b)   *Tax relief*

It was noted staff working from home should be able to claim for £6/week heating tax relief.[iii]

c)   *Desk Cards*

Laura agreed to feedback on how the 'desk card' exemption notification system was working to the mailing list.

ACTION: Laura to feedback on desk card experience

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[i] https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYZllzyrlpMf0z5lN8wDSAQrrfasHBRKi
[ii] https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/using/productivity-tools
[iii] More information at: https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home

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