

Deputies & Senior Staff Group

Meeting Notes: 24th November 2020

Present: Phil Vaughn (Meeting Chair, Coventry), Alison Pope (Staffordshire), Sally Wilkinson (Cranfield), John Dowd (Birmingham), Ian Keepins (Birmingham), Julie Robinson (Warwick), Selena Killick (OU) Vicki McGarvey (Staffordshire), Heather Green (Warwick), Jessica Wainwright (UCB), David Crozier (Newman), Scot McGowan (Keele), Ant Brewerton (Warwick), J Bridges (???), Gaz J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration)

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Apologies: Diane Job (Steering Group Sponsor, Birmingham), Kay Jeffries (Derby), Ben Veasey (Loughborough), Emily Clark (Wolverhampton), Kirsty Kift (Coventry), John Dowd (Birmingham)

1) Issues & actions from [Previous Meeting \(23rd June 2020\)](#)¹

After brief introductions, Phil agreed to chair today's meeting. The minutes of last time were accepted as read, with all actions having been completed.

2) Themed discussion: Research support, scholarly communications etc.²

Phil introduced a general discussion on matters relating to research support, of which the following were some of the key areas of interest:

EPrints: A good FOSS system, albeit with a heavy labour/staff resource cost to customise the reports produced. Commercial platforms may cost more initially but may be more streamlined 'out of the box' and have lower support demands. Going down the FOSS route means having a well-established and resourced team of developers for maximum success.

Funders: Plan S is a further issue, and the change in policy from Wellcome which starts in January 2021. Navigating what Wellcome will and what they won't fund is tricky, as is the rights retention side. Hence, there is confusion among the academic community due to the nuances of the different policies. There are some perceptions that Wellcome's approach this will work, even if there are issues with the scheme. Whether the publishers will play ball is another matter. UKRI consultation still needs to be brought back too as this will likely condition what the OA requirements will be. Unclear if it'll come in before the new grant year in April 2021, and hence how it will be implemented remains uncertain. Assessing transformative agreements, it was agreed, is a very labour-intensive role.

Institutional Repositories: Some universities reported an uptick in deposits, with more staff now involved in OA and IR activities. General queries and gold OA funding requests were reported as being more frequent in recent months by some institutions. Download of content was also up, likely as a result of an increased reliance on non-rivalrous materials. Some universities are finding gold OA funded out of departmental budgets, outside of central mechanisms.

REF: Submission preparations going well generally, with many expecting some not inconsiderable degree of bibliographic clean-up closer to the submission deadline. Practice-based subjects have been a particular challenge to support in this respect. Additionally, the change to the REF submission deadline has clashed

¹ Attendees may wish to also review the most recent [Directors Board minutes](#) for further information on issues and matters of concern in the Mercian Region

² TBC ahead of the meeting

in some institutions with other planned major activities (e.g. new LMS), but also impacted on expected staff availability.

Research Data: For some this is the next big thing to be addressed, with interest increasing and new services launched. Not all of these were integrated with the CRIS/IR with some reporting a 'two system' approach. Seen as an area of institutional importance incorporates but also goes beyond the library. Especially with the links to the REF, perceived as an area executive management will support as 'business critical'. Issue with academic loyalty to subject data repositories, even were there's cost, was a challenge for getting data into local platforms. Streamlined user experience seen as key, along with more outreach, in shifting this attitude.

Subgroups: GJJ noted that the [RDMSG](#) has wound up as subgroup of the Collaboration, as reported elsewhere, due to lack of interest from its members in continuing its work. The hope is a new research related group will emerge organically over the coming months/years from within the membership.

Training: Researcher and research student training programmes were having an excellent take-up online, where available, although some reported they'd not been able to offer as much training as they liked, although direct support requests had increased. It was noted not all prior training material was easily repurposed for online delivery though, which caused challenges in finding time or alternative approaches to deliver the content.

Virtual Support: Changes in approaches have been triggered, driven by remote working and institutional needs were reported. As a result, more and different staff were getting involved at some institutions, especially where people were seen as being underutilised in their normal roles. Clarity as to where responsibility for aspects of research support lay was not always obvious, as it can be perceived to fall between areas of teams or specialities. Getting teams to cross-work/overlap more with their responsibilities here was seen to be helping.

ACTION: Phil to share research data plans from Coventry with the group

3) [General discussions & updates](#)

Although a few attendees had to depart before this point, the remaining delegates shared updates on their library services.

Coventry: A new APC fund to be introduced, although level is still TBC.

Cranfield: Restructuring of staff which means they now have staff who just focus on research support and others only on education support. This had been brought in at the start of lockdown but has been going very well so far. Potentially, this means there is more support being offered than previously, because much of it takes place outside of the 9-5 working day, hence international students especially like this approach.

Keele: Will be open for a few days over the Xmas period. Click and collect allocation has been increased. With tweaking of the library's layout, there's been an increase in spacing to allow more students into the building to use it safely. Still getting enquiries for requests to digitise as a service, but not physically possible in terms of available tech and staffing, so e-acquisition is seen as the way forward.

Newman: Student recruitment levels were similar and steady due to local student base. The short notice for government changes has been challenging but trying to think about what are the advantageous things which have been learned during in this period and how these relate to resourcing physical and online services going forward. Changes in senior library management ahead which will doubtless reshape service approaches and workflows.

OU: In a different position than other libraries due to long history of distance provision and services, although challenges for materials which cannot be procured electronically (e.g. art history). Campus is shut currently through to April '21, so not able to offer study space. They are also changing their requirements for students to be physically close to MK for students. SCONUL access is considered business critical, but aware currently this would be a problem for other unis to deal with. Communicating this issue to students has been crucial as some have struggled to understand why they can't access other institutions. Considerable student growth this academic year, so new posts for staff advertised to reflect this. Wellbeing for staff is also a keen concern with a split between staff comfortable and effective working from home, and those who prefer a return to the office space.

Staffordshire: Reopened in August with no booking for desk space and will be open 24/7 including over the Christmas period. Face coverings expected while at desk and in public areas. Staff are supporting students online mainly, but some f-2-f support is happening too. Started using chat in March and now this is being supported by a wider range of staff. Customer service staff are broadening their portfolio of activity as a result of the changes in service provision to great success. A planned change in the LMS will happen in early 2021. Book stock has increased, as has digitisation of available texts, although the impact of Dawson Books collapse has required some adjustments in terms of supplier process and library workflows. A blended working policy has been introduced but is still in its infancy. Staff are expected to be offered additional time off at Christmas, although library services need to continue over this period.

Warwick: Considerable work around online delivery teaching and learning, although take-up by the students has varied. Some reflections on how the 'working day' has altered over this period, and how the library and its staff can accommodate these changes. Shifting to online has present challenges in successful community engagement, expectations of interaction and building relationships with students, an experience which has resonated with academic staff too. While services and support have been offered in isolation, the university is shifting to promote these centrally as part of the 'Warwick offer'. Students are keen to study and perform group work, which has offered challenges to managing the health/safety requirements. Surprisingly despite online pivot, a lot of students on campus, with a few thousand staying on site over the Christmas period. The library is seeking to how they keep facilities and services open and continue to support students during this potentially isolating time.

4) [Next meeting](#)

a) [Approximate date](#)

It was agreed to seek a date in March 2021 for a meeting. A volunteer chair will be sought to lead discussions on the day.

ACTION: GJJ to send doodle poll in new year to find date for next meeting

b) Potential themes & topics

A number of themes were suggested, including:

- **Things we have learned?** What are the outcomes from lockdown/Covid for our services and how they inform our future learning/working/activities? Are there elements of our online or physical services we should stop, start or continue in the light of these experiences?
- **How might our services have changed?** For example the provision of physical services: what are we providing physically now and are there better ways to deliver resources (e.g. scan and deliver)? Evolution of services as interim arrangements or fundamental changes.
- **Scholarly communications:** It was agreed a further meeting relating to scholarly communications would be valuable, although separate and in addition to the next 'deputies/senior staff' meeting.

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It was agreed the first two areas would form a coherent topic to address during the next meeting.

ACTION: Consider arranging a separate scholarly communications event within the Collaboration

5) AOB

a) Terms of Reference

It was noted that these are still outstanding as a 'draft' document. Phil agreed he would coordinate their finalisation over the email list. GJJ would then present them to the Board for information in March 2021.

ACTION: Phil to recirculate TOR and ALL to agree final wording to present to March 2021 Board