Directors Board

Vidcon, 2-4pm, Thu 25th March 2021

Minutes

Present: Diane Job (Chair, Birmingham), Christine (Chris) Porter (Vice Chair, Newman), Ian Snowley (Lincoln), Scott McGowan (Keele), Robin Green (Warwick), Ruth Jenkins (BCU), Emma Sansby (BGU), Judith Keene (Worcester), Laura Pilsel (Harper Adams), Paul Mahoney (Staffordshire), Simon Bevan (Steering Group member, Cranfield), David Parkes (DMU), Chris Powis (Northampton), Helen Curtis (Aston) , Selena Killick (Open University), Jo-Anne Watts (Wolverhampton), Emma Walton (Steering Group member, Loughborough), Sue Ackerman (Steering Group Member, Nottingham), Gareth J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration)

Apologies: Mike Berrington (NTU), Phil Brabban (Coventry), Neil Donohue (Leicester)

Summary of Actions

ACTION: Chair to post the memorial letter into the book of condolences

ACTION: All to continue sharing experiences on dealing with the lockdown and post-pandemic service transformation via mailing list and other channels.

ACTION: New Steering Group to meet in April to agree Vice Chair and Treasurer, and assign Subgroup Sponsorship roles

ACTION: GJJ and Chris to set date of next SG meeting in mid/late April

ACTION: All to provide comments on the membership wording to GJJ by end of April

ACTION: All to submit any suggested modifications or amendments to the Deputies ToR to GJJ by mid-April

ACTION: SG to finalise Deputies ToR and feedback to the subgroup

ACTION: Emma W and GJJ to talk about SCONUL, Conference Group and MSDG outside the meeting

ACTION: Steering Group to consider suggested discussion themes and agree for next Board

ACTION: Chair and GJJ to set next Board date for October 2021

Diane opened the meeting, and noted how glad she was to see everyone in attendance, welcoming new members.

21/01 Remembering Mark

Diane noted this was the saddest part of the meeting, and was heart broken to have to acknowledge the loss of Mark who had been such a vital member of the Collaboration, colleague and friend. She noted she had contacted the VC at NTU and the Library on behalf of the Collaboration to express our loss and sympathy to Mark's family and the NTU library team especially. A minute's silence was held for reflection. There was a brief discussion about other steps taken to memorialise Mark's contribution, and it was agreed to publicly share the letter to the VC in Mark's book of condolences.

ACTION: Chair to post the memorial letter into the book of condolences[i]

21/02 Discussions:

a. Evaluating the Online Experience & Reinventing Libraries & Services

    i. Robin Green (Warwick), Paul Mahoney (Staffordshire)

The Chair introduced our two speakers for today, with Robin going first.

Robin discussed how they had previously held primarily physical engagement events, with food, drink and freebies encouraging attendance. Some online was used to reach out to others, but it was limited, and people were unsure how to adapt training for online. After a challenging few personal and professional months for the staff with the onset of lockdown, the point became moot. There were concerns over poor attendance at online events, and how this reflected on some post's longevity, which make for a 'crisis of confidence'.

However, once underway it was fine, with sessions creatively and enthusiastically delivered. Community interventions have been live and pre-recorded within the LOL (Library Online Lunch) environment via– twitter, Facebook and Instagram; with the latter proving the most popular. Teams hangout space was also used to engage students as this had a limited time commitment and 'kept them warm' for other interventions without much staff time needed. Warwick has been capitalising on relationships with online communities with escape rooms being quite popular in the absence of library spaces. Their team of 'Study Happy' ambassadors (UGs) who offer peer support had also proved excellent for engagement with the user community.

Robin advocated their specialist and one off events too, offering something distinct, while advertising the general programme can help you reach a wider audience. The over-saturated online environment has meant though event attendance is dropping, and not just for the library, as the pandemic continues. Attendees though, are more engaged when they do attend and as a result the events are more valued.

With regular virtual events, students have become more able and willing to express themselves in these environments. Potentially, Robin suggested, they were now reaching the students with the most genuine need, rather than just those after the freebies. Community reach too is further now it is now longer campus bound. Creating a 'playlist' of events and sessions which students can engage with has proved popular too.

Robin finished by stressing that 'blended' future seems the norm, but left questions about (a) the level of demand and (b) how do libraries meet this capacity with their resource? Capturing qualitative feedback along with quantitative metrics has been key in evaluating how 'engaged' the students are with their events. Nevertheless, there were still many challenges concerning online engagement to be answered.

Paul spoke from a timeline of where they are at Staffordshire, and where they have been. Having been prewarned in Jan/Feb '20 by a staff member with connections in China, nevertheless in March 2020 they were looking at 18 months plans ahead, starting with a staffing review, and submitting a case for increased resource budget along with a planned library relocation and LMS upgrade. Then lockdown hit.

April-July '20: The libraries were all closed, some staff furloughed but not all of their customer service staff. Library and academic skills did have online services, but had been almost exclusively previously face-to-face as they felt the online experience wasn't as good. Luckily the team was equipped to move to digital only delivery, but the service was not in a good place with online resources. Thankfully, supplier and publisher deals during the first lockdown helped; although the issue of digital poverty and study space were particular challenges for many of their student demographic.

Aug-Nov '20: Staffordshire reopened the study and stacks in late July, with restrictions and also had staff returning to campus. There was a push to bring staff in to support other teams, where it was needed. Some staff were happy to return, some less so, and some were shielding and unable to return even when wished. Reservations were well used, because building work required stock moves. The Library's application for digitisation funding was approved, a case strengthened by the need for these resources during remote working. E.g. when supplier offers end, what will students do to access their resources? Additionally, 85% of library staff were at risk in terms of restructuring plans, and while people knew it was coming doing it online was a further complication.

Dec '20-Mar '21: Blended working framework now across the university, with remote working not simply working from home, with the institution looking business needs: when and where people can be most productive. For full-time staff two days a week off-site would be supported on average, but this cannot be applied to all, and this unevenness has to be accepted. Under the new library roles it's been made clear to the level at which people can take advantage of this policy.

The library service has also been challenged in terms of being more flexible for student services. The service review is now complete with a new structure live from next week. Merged some services with other ones on campus, very much using digital tools to answer questions regularly answered. New LMS coming from July which will include reading list. Plus, the new campus library locations have been agreed, and alongside fewer physical lectures on campus, Paul's team is taking on some of these spaces as library managed areas.

Paul finished by reflecting on some of the changes the library had experience: Skills demand for training had increased, and was almost entirely online. The student experience without commuting has been seen to be a better experience. Blended working is working well although face-to-face as part of team building remains important, especially in the wake of the service review, and cannot be as easily duplicated online. Preparing for new academic year and new students with distributed learning was a very eye-opening experience. The year has brought more sharply into focus issues of accessibility and inclusion, especially digital poverty issues, civil rights and decolonisation too. In these latter respect they've been looking at metrics, and taking what they hope are positive steps, and while an impact has yet to be seen it remains an area of current focussed work.

After thanking the speakers, the Chair highlighted the role of the library and its civic responsibility was evident in both these talks, and opened the floor for comments. Emma W noted Loughborough was keen to look at how to encourage an equivalence in their online and physical spaces. Robin suggested the timeline of impact was valuable and could be shared further. Ruth noted having started only a few months ago and was yet to meet many of her team members and the issue of digital poverty was key for many BCU students too. As much as possible, physical buildings had been kept open as students lacked study space off site. Their virtual enquiry service has rocketed in use, and it was suspected this will continue rather than people seeking to use the physical desk, which was generally agreed as a common trend.

Judith suggested there were new opportunities for schools and outreach (e.g. non-university students and pre-entry people) as she saw online was an efficient way to do some joined up outreach with other university departments. Hence, reaching a wider community with a broader message about the university experience.

Sue noted live chat was good, but also at Nottingham they had gathered a lot more data on usage and student behaviour of resources, including demographics, than previously. They were looking to review their frontline services, recognising there are changes in what students need and how it is delivered. Hence, there is an opportunity to revisit this now informed with the broad behavioural data that has been gathered. It was generally commented that campus space 'ownership', and disconnects between staff and students had been an issue in resent months. Rebuilding these relationships and a sense of trust and community was a key ongoing task.

Jo-Anne said she had had similar experiences at Wolverhampton, noting like Nottingham they had taken on responsibility for learning spaces. There was a reported culture clash between staff on site and students returning expecting everything 'back to normal' now. Additionally, with an agile working policy coming in, their frontline staff were feeling somewhat disenfranchised, especially given how much they've been on site throughout much of the lockdown period. She highlighted that staff morale and student relationships are two key areas for her service to work on.

Emma W explained that with a recruitment freeze at Loughborough, some posts had been filled with students, leading to staff tensions. I seeking to engage rather than police behaviour on campus, she noted some work at SCONUL would feed into resolving this and would likely be of interest across the Collaboration.

Chris Powis lamented he'd spent years mitigating the 'traffic warden' tendency in staff, only for elements of it to return in lockdown. Hence, addressing this will be a major piece of work. Chris noted the absence of a physical library building at Northampton, allowing his team to focus on services not space, had been advantageous throughout lockdown. Nevertheless, he did caution that the digital vulnerability of a [primarily online only service was a major risk.

Helen noted for Aston, the library had at times been the only face-to-face location open on campus, although she stressed the service was not a building. She felt there was a strong team ethic, although issues around culture clashes between users and staff resonated with her. Nevertheless, she is proud that their service has felt like a lifeline to the student community.

The Chair thanked people for their input, especially Paul and Robin. She highlighted that she perceived how at an institutional level library services have not been fully acknowledged for how 'present' they have been on campus throughout this period. She added, given the breadth of this discussion, that members of the Board should continue to share their experience via the mailing list over the coming months. Especially, where projects or particular initiatives were seen to be having effects.

> **ACTION: All to continue sharing experiences on dealing with the lockdown and post-pandemic service transformation via mailing list and other channels.**

21/03 Governance

a. [Minutes of October 2020 Board](#)

These were accepted as an accurate record.

b. Any outstanding actions

All actions had been completed, were in progress or were on the agenda.

c. Steering Group Elections 2021

There had been five self-nominations as follows:

- Chris Powis   Northampton
- Jo-Anne   Wolverhampton
- Helen Curtis   Aston
- Judith Keene   Worcester
- Laura Pilsel   Harper Adams

Hence, with Chris Porter succeeding to Chair, we have six members for the Steering Group. However, as no one stood explicitly for Vice-Chair or Treasurer it was agreed the Steering Group would nominate volunteers from among themselves to fulfil these roles at their first meeting in April. Chris as incoming Chair encouraged all new SG members to strongly consider taking on one of the two roles.

> **ACTION: New Steering Group to meet in April to agree Vice Chair and Treasurer, and assign Subgroup Sponsorship roles**

> **ACTION: GJJ and Chris to set date of next SG meeting in mid/late April**

d. Membership Terms & Wording

As per discussions at SG and developments at SCONUL, it had been proposed the Collaboration clarified its membership statement to accommodate potential new members. This would also necessitate an update to our terms of reference. It was noted it would be important to clarify only SCONUL, not the Collaboration, had associate members. It was agreed to ask all for comments by the end of April, and the Steering Group to agree the final wording in May.

> **ACTION: All to provide comments on the membership wording to GJJ by end of April**

GJJ 30th March 2021

e. TOR Deputies & Senior Staff Group (revised)

The terms of reference for the subgroup had been updated by the members in discussion and was presented for information to the Board. It was noted feedback from the group had been very positive, and it had met five times since it was founded in late 2019. It would be meeting again in May 2021. Robin suggested it would be valuable to invite the Deputies Group to take on a formal recommendation role to the Board, given the breadth of experience and expertise represented by the group. Hence, this should be reflected in their ToR. It was agreed to make this, and other minor suggestions, to be collated by Steering Group and then presented to the Deputies Group as a final version of the ToR.

ACTION: All to submit any suggested modifications or amendments to the Deputies ToR to GJJ by mid-April

ACTION: SG to finalise Deputies ToR and feedback to the subgroup

21/04 Operations

a. Update on SCONUL activities

Emma W as a Board member spoke to this item, and especially with respect to the new SCONUL Strategy Groups. She noted the rich regional groups and their work had been acknowledged within these, and SCONUL was looking to make use of the experience and resource available in the regions. Issues around staff development and skills training especially was seen as salient, and there would likely be discussions with groups like cpdM25 and our own MSDG. Understanding what was going on in the different regions would be an element to be explored. While Emma was standing down from our Steering Group, she would continue to feed into our related discussions, and on behalf at SCONUL. Emma also noted she would brief GJJ about various SCONUL matters outside of today's meeting.

ACTION: Emma W and GJJ to talk about SCONUL, Conference Group and MSDG outside the meeting

b. Annual Report 2020

This had been launched a few days previously to a warm reception, including from the SCONUL Director. The Board agreed it was a milestone report, given the events of the previous year, and praised its format and contents.

21/05 To Receive Previously Circulated Reports

These were received for information, there were no questions. GJJ noted, he had received an update for the Collaboration's finances from SCONUL, and updated the previously distributed information as follows:

- Income 2021: £17,502.62
- Expenditure 2021 (to 16/3): £2,375.61
- Anticipated Expenditure (to 31/12): £8,614.53
- Balance 31/12/20: £24,686.02[ii]
- Current Balance (16/3/21): £39,813.03
- Anticipated year end balance: £31,196.50

He noted the incoming Treasurer would be taking on an organisation in good financial health.

21/06 Next meeting

    a. Themes and speakers for Autumn 2021 meeting

The next meeting would be held in October, and a decision would be made nearer the time if it would be online or face to face. Diane asked for suggestions for topics or speakers to be addressed. Robin suggested that discussions around changing working patterns would be valuable, at a local level with reference to the national conversations. These would include the changes and how they are being implemented. Emma W agreed, adding the RLUK's work on leadership, blended working and emerging risks would also speak to this theme. Diane noted the question of developing and recognising emerging leaders within the current environment, and their necessary skill sets, would also be useful to consider in this respect.

Ruth highlighted the importance in this conversation of re-engaging staff and the re-integration of teams, especially in the light agile working arrangement expectations and related institutional policies.

Emma S talked about the UCL eBooks webinar and the discussions from people like Paul Ayris about the open university press. She questioned if the Collaboration had any thoughts in this direction. While it was noted this had been touched on in the past, with limited enthusiasm, that the time might be ripe for a more serious revisitation.

    ACTION: Steering Group to consider suggested discussion themes and agree for next Board

    ACTION: Chair and GJJ to set next Board date for October 2021

21/07 AOB

    a. ALN Officers/Workload

Ruth noted that ALN (Academic Libraries North) had retained both NoWAL and the Northern Collaboration's Officers (1.0FTE in total), and suggested that the Collaboration should look again at the level of support it needed from its own officer. It was agreed to add this to the Steering Group agenda.

    b. Hand over

Diane formally handed over the role of Chair to Chris Porter, who on behalf of the new Steering Group. The past chair and Steering Group for their work over the past two years.

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[i] https://www.ntu.ac.uk/book-of-condolences/mark-toole
[ii] The Birmingham Conference charge 2018 has been retrospectively billed to 2020's figures rather than 2021