



## Steering Group

Online, 26<sup>th</sup> Nov 3pm 2021

### Minutes

**Present:** Chris Porter (Chair, Newman), Laura Pilsel (Vice, Harper Adams), Helen Curtis (Treasurer, Aston), Chris Powis (Northampton), Jo-Anne Watts (Wolverhampton), Gaz J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration)

Page | 1

**Apologies:** Judith Keene (Worcester)

### Actions Summary

**ACTION:** Chair to check she has forwarded the finalised MoU update to Ann

**ACTION:** GJJ to share strategic plan with all

**ACTION:** All to review, comment and discuss revised Strategic Plan

**ACTION:** Chair to finalise Strategic Plan '22 ahead of Board meeting in March '22

**ACTION:** Helen and Chair to add reserves policy statement to MoU

**ACTION:** Helen to share reserves statement with GJJ for archives

**ACTION:** GJJ to share risk register with all ahead of Feb '22 meeting

**ACTION:** All the read and comment on risk register ahead of next meeting

**ACTION:** GJJ to remind Directors and subgroups to contribute to the annual report

**ACTION:** GJJ to draft wording and share with all for comments

**ACTION:** GJJ to update website with events policy

**ACTION:** GJJ to notify all groups of update to events policy

**ACTION:** Helen to resolve issue over missing conference sponsorship income

**ACTION:** GJJ to respond to Ann on behalf of the Collaboration concerning the EDI message

**ACTION:** Chair and GJJ to formally approach potential speakers to invite them to address the Board in March

**ACTION:** Chair and Helen to actively pursue arrangements for expanding GJJ's hours (to 0.4FTE) with SCOUNL

**ACTION:** GJJ to write to MSDG Chair concerning the library assistant event

**ACTION:** GJJ to write to Chair of Copyright Group

**ACTION:** GJJ to write same as Chair of Marketing and Communications Group

**ACTION:** GJJ, Chair and Laura to set date for next Steering Group meeting

**ACTION:** Propose an MSDG event on procurement to explore development needs in region

**ACTION:** GJJ to talk to ALN about their work with procurement groups

## 21/19 Previous Meeting

### a. Minutes of previous meeting: [21<sup>st</sup> July 2021](#)

GJJ highlighted two errors:

- GJJ wasn't listed in the previous attendees, which as he wrote the minutes was a slight oversight.
- *ACTION: GJJ and Chair to development site accessibility statement and best practice advice <- should have read 'develop site accessibility'.*

Page | 2

Other than these amendments the minutes were accepted.

### b. Outstanding Actions

*GJJ had highlighted a number of outstanding actions not on the agenda today.*

*ACTION: GJJ and Chair to develop site accessibility statement and best practice advice*

This was pending time for GJJ to work on it and would hopefully be completed early in '22.

*ACTION: Sarah to share 2019/20 MSDG annual evaluation with Steering Group.*

This was not yet available, but Sarah Pittaway (MSDG Chair) had been reminded. Their Evaluation Officer had not been responding to messages which was causing the delay.

*ACTION: Sarah and Jo-Anne to discuss overlap of mentoring/buddying (SCONUL/MSDG)*

This item was pending, as Jo-Anne had gone back to SCONUL for more information. This had recently arrived and she will follow up with Sarah in the coming months. It was noted the M25 and Academic Libraries North (ALN) are also doing something with 'buddying/mentoring' and hence exploring what overlaps exist would be beneficial. This would help nationally to formalise and route people to the right scheme.

*ACTION: Simon/GJJ to facilitate accessibility/policy issues discussion with the Deputies Group*

GJJ noted this had not been specifically addressed at this morning's meeting, and would follow up with Simon – in the light of the following item.

*ACTION: Simon and Sarah to discuss potential for joint stress event*

*ACTION: Simon and Sarah to discuss issues relating to event accessibility and report back to the Steering Group*

GJJ noted this was also discussed at the MDF meeting this morning, and that a joint subgroup working group would be exploring these issues in the new year. A report would likely be ready for Board in March '22.

*ACTION: Yvonne to talk with Simon offline about overlaps between MDF/Copyright group activities and support/advice that can be offered.*

*ACTION: Simon, Sarah and Yvonne to cascade their inter-subgroup discussions to their respective group members*

It was noted that no progress on this had occurred. GJJ would investigate with the respective group chairs.

## 21/20 Governance

### a. Subscriptions 2022

This had been distributed via email. A moderate increase has been agreed for the next year by the Directors (see item 21/21(a)). The Chair thanked Helen for her work.

### b. Meeting with SCONUL Exec

As reported at Directors Board ([DB 21/09\(c\)](#)), only a minor change to MoU was required which had been broadly agreed. Discussions were relatively cordial, as the Collaboration is perceived as a 'trusted partner' with SCONUL in facilitating the members' wishes. SCONUL does not seek nor desire to interfere with direction of Collaboration. However, as noted they did not wish to accept a specific regional representative on the SCONUL Board.

**ACTION: Chair to check she has forwarded the finalised MoU update to Ann**

### c. Strategic Plan Revision & Update

The Chair apologised for not developing this more ahead of this meeting. In the light of the pandemic revisiting this document remains a priority as what we planned to do in the 'before times' may no longer be as relevant as it once was. The Chair will seek to update this in consultation with the rest of the Steering Group, to present to the Board for approval in March '22.

**ACTION: GJJ to share strategic plan with all**

**ACTION: All to review, comment and discuss revised Strategic Plan**

**ACTION: Chair to finalise Strategic Plan '22 ahead of Board meeting in March '22**

### d. Mercian Reserves Policy (SCONUL)

As Helen wasn't able to speak to this at Board, she noted we needed a statement which aligns with SCONUL's policy. She confirmed this was drafted and had been added into the new MoU. She noted SCONUL was concerned with managing risk, as the request for the policy stemmed from a recent audit of their organisation. SCONUL were happy with our policy as written.

**ACTION: Helen and Chair to add reserves policy statement to MoU**

**ACTION: Helen to share reserves statement with GJJ for archives**

### e. Risk Register

An updated version had been shared with some members of the Steering Group, and the current information in it was briefly discussed. It was agreed to share the risk register with all and suggest any updates at the next meeting.

**ACTION: GJJ to share risk register with all ahead of Feb '22 meeting**

**ACTION: All the read and comment on risk register ahead of next meeting**

### f. Annual Report

GJJ noted he had yet to receive any contributions for the report, and reminded the Chair, Vice and Treasurer of their specific required contributions. It was agreed GJJ would also encourage Directors and subgroups to contribute. The potential for including the 'moments of joy' in the report was suggested.

**ACTION: GJJ to remind Directors and subgroups to contribute to the annual report**

g. [Event Attendance Policy](#)

There had been discussions via email concerning permitting external (to the region) attendees at MC events. In the past the ruling had been clear that Collaboration events were primarily for regional member staff, with exceptions made at the host's discretion.<sup>i</sup> In the light of the shift to online events revisiting this policy was proposed.

It was agreed for physical events spaces should be guaranteed primarily for Collaboration members staff as previously agreed, with access for others at the hosting venue director's discretion. For online events space was less of an issue, and while the events would not be specifically advocated to those academic library staff from outside the region, they would be welcome to attend at the organiser's discretion. In the event external numbers rose, especially if above local delegates, then this policy would be revisited. In essence, academic library staff and those more broadly from SCONUL member institutions would be welcome to consider attending.

As some discussions might be considered commercially or institutionally sensitive, it was agreed subgroups should take care where discussions were recorded for public consumption. Additionally, it was also agreed that non-academic library staffers (e.g. from commercial bodies, suppliers etc) were not seen as valid attendees. Any exceptions to this should be queried with the Chair for permission.<sup>ii</sup>

GJJ would draft an outline update to the policy and share with all for comment, before updating the website.

**ACTION: GJJ to draft wording and share with all for comments**

**ACTION: GJJ top update website with events policy**

**ACTION: GJJ to notify all groups of update to events policy**

## 21/21 Officer Reports

a. [Financial Update](#)

As Helen was unable to present these to the Board, due to dealing with a local issue, she offered a full report on the state of the finances to the Steering Group. Member Subscriptions were agreed as circulated to the Board via email in November. A moderate increase had been proposed and was accepted. This should give a subscription income of £18,727.80 for 2022. Current finances remain in a healthy position as highlighted in the membership subscription proposal.

Income 2021:	£1806.62 <sup>1</sup>	
Expenditure to end of year:	£12,647.90	(est)
Reserves at end of year:	£30,040.74 (est)	

Usual costs and expenses have been incurred since the last report at the Board. There have been no requests from subgroups for training or event support. GJJ noted the MDF, MSDG and MMG potentially had external speakers they were considering for 2022, but nothing had been confirmed. Helen noted that GJJ's annual salary increase had been enacted in August and the Collaboration's mobile phone contract

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<sup>1</sup> This includes £500 conference sponsorship

and device had been updated. GJJ noted he was very happy with the new phone, and thanked Helen and the SCONUL team for making the arrangements.

One concern to be resolved was obtaining the final sponsorship money, which remained outstanding. Helen was seeking information from the former sponsor lead of the Conference Group to clarify this. However, this should provide an additional further income of £500.

**ACTION: Helen to resolve issue over missing conference sponsorship income**

GJJ commented that in line with ALN's 2021 conference, the potential for greater sponsor income even for online events was possible, and would encourage the Conference Group to consider this aspect alongside their other plans.

**b. Development Officer: Update**

Following October's Board and subsequent actions, GJJ's focus has been on supporting the handover and restart of the Conference Group. This has included conducting their feedback evaluation, formatting and uploading session recordings and other media from the event alongside coordinating the call for new group members. GJJ has also been updating the group's member policy document to more clearly define the specific roles and responsibilities for members old and new alike. There has been some coordination too with Helen over the voucher incentives for feedback forms. Currently, GJJ is in the middle of running a membership survey on future conference themes, formats and attractions. This will be analysed and reported on early in 2022 to the group members.

Alongside this, GJJ has been facilitating and recording discussions at the Deputies Group and the Disability forum, and supporting the Metadata Group in promoting their events. Ongoing and regular liaison with the Mercian Staff Development Group has continued over this period too. Discussions with the counterpart officers at ALN concerning their events, evaluations and future plans have continued, as have exchanges with other regional officers too. Experience exchange meetings are planned with ALN (16<sup>th</sup> Dec) and the regional groups (2<sup>nd</sup> Feb '22).

A glitch in the website admin access, traced to issues with SCONUL's mailhost, took up a half-day to resolve in October, with the support of Adaptive. Resolving these issues exposed a few minor, broader technical communication problems, which are all now resolved.

GJJ has updated the risk register ahead of discussions today, and is in the process of encouraging and collating material for the annual report. However, contributions are currently lacking from anyone else. Following today's meeting, GJJ's priorities for December are catch up on some accessibility work on the website (policies and protocols), along with analysing the conference survey data.

GJJ also noted he routinely facilitated minutes for a number of groups, and after a brief discussion it was noted this remained a valuable service. The Chair noted the Steering Group's heartfelt thanks to GJJ for all his work in keeping the Collaboration functioning.

**c. Inter-Collaboration Meetings**

As at Board, the Chair reported back on her meeting with other collaborations. It had been a 'getting to know you' event, with a follow up session due soon. However, she was not clear what would be discussed and if there was a huge value going forward in future such meetings, but was happy to remain engaged.



It was noted that the MSDG's 'All the same but different' events, targeting library assistants, were seen as a valuable model for other collaborations to adopt.

The Chair also noted that other regional collaborations have more of an involvement in procurement than the Collaboration. This may be an issue to explore further within the region, although noting the increased demand it would place on staffing resources. (see also item 21/24 (b)).

As per his report (21/21(b)) GJJ noted he would continue his ongoing liaison with other collaboration officers.

## 21/22 Operations

### a. Conference Group: Format & Feedback

GJJ reported that both attendance/engagement and delegate feedback reports were out, and feeding into the group's planning processes. In short, the event was a success, with the online format mostly working well. However, it was clear on the day and in feedback that networking segments needed revisiting for future online events. GJJ also noted he was running a member survey on themes, formats and attraction of the event to feed into future planning.

The Chair noted her thanks to all the conference team for their efforts in delivering on this event.

### b. SCONUL: EDI Resource Sharing

The Director of SCONUL had also written asking the Collaboration to assist in their considerations 'on how to best share resources and information on race equality and other EDI matters across our community'. A discussion followed considering how we could encourage people to contribute or engage with this theme. It was suggested an EDI group for the Collaboration might be a valuable future consideration in this respect. It was agreed the Collaboration was interested in exploring this issue further, but was less sure how they could engage with it – but welcomed suggestions.

**ACTION: GJJ to respond to Ann on behalf of the Collaboration concerning the EDI message**

### c. SCONUL: eBooks and eTextbooks

The Director of SCONUL had also written asking the Collaboration to assist in promoting the joint statement on publisher barriers to eBook access. It was agreed to promote awareness of this statement via the Collaboration's social channels.

**ACTION: GJJ to promote SCONUL statement on eBooks**

### d. Preparations for March Board

At Board themes including circulation policy and managing print collections would be suitable areas were proposed. Robin had offered some proposed speakers, drawing on an RLUK subgroup. In the ensuing discussion it was noted that many libraries were now largely moving away from print, meaning space considerations were more a concern than stock. Staffing changes also resonated with these issues as roles and needs changed. It was agreed there was viability in a broader discussion, albeit with carefully chosen speakers. It was proposed potentially inviting speakers from Peterborough and Staffordshire to speak to the topic: Collection vs Content.

**ACTION: Chair and GJJ to formally approach potential speakers to invite them to address the Board in March**

e. **Officer's Hours & Contract**

In the light of the moderate increase to subscriptions, healthy balance and in the light of long-standing discussions at Board and Steering Group recognising a genuine need, the Chair proposed actively exploring expanding the Officer's hours (0.2>0.4FTE). GJJ noted this would likely require a discussion with SCONUL as it was a contractual change. It was agreed the Chair and Treasurer would actively pursue this with SCONUL, and report to Board on the outcome. It was hoped to introduce this new arrangement from February 2022 onward.

**ACTION: Chair and Helen to actively pursue arrangements for expanding GJJ's hours (to 0.4FTE) with SCONUL**

21/23 Subgroups: Activity Update

a. **Conference Group**

The call for new members is out, and following a wash-up meeting after the event, a meeting is planned in early 2022 to bring the new committee together. The 2022 conference will be online once again, with longer term planning for hybrid/physical 2023 taken onboard throughout this year. A larger committee will hopefully be established to help deliver on the 2022 event's requirements. A number of nominations had been received by the group chair, who with the vice-chair, would make arrangements to extend invitations to new members. As noted elsewhere, the group was running a member survey for feedback on future event themes and formats.

b. **Mercian Staff Development Group**

They have (or will have) hosted four events this term: Library Data (19<sup>th</sup> Oct), Social Media (10<sup>th</sup> Nov), Implementing LMS (7<sup>th</sup> Dec) and Collaborative Partnerships (9<sup>th</sup> Dec). Nothing concrete is set for 2022 yet but a number of events are planned including: Building on the Wins, Online Staff Recruitment, Blended Delivery, and Negotiating Skills. It was noted that the social media event was very well received.

The All the Same but Different events were currently paused, although a subset of the group were looking at ways to conduct these online. A relaunch of the buddying scheme is paused until the new year. The Chair asked about the much advertised and anticipated 'Changing Role of the Library Assistant' event, as this had yet to be delivered. It was agreed to approach the MSDG Chair directly to discuss this and encourage its organisation.

**ACTION: GJJ to write to MSDG Chair concerning the library assistant event**

c. **Copyright Group**

It was noted despite the Chair's attendance at the August meeting there remained no traffic on the email list or group activity, a situation which had existed since mid/late 2019. It was noted the current chair may have too many competing priorities to run the group and may appreciate the Steering Group's assistance in taking the group forward. After discussion it was agreed, the time had come to take action. GJJ will write to the current group chair and offer a series of options from mothballing the group or seeking a replacement chair from amongst the membership to reconvene the group. The Chair expressed a hope the latter option would be possible.

**ACTION: GJJ to write to Chair of Copyright Group**

d. [Deputies & Senior Staff Group](#)

GJJ and the Chair reported this group had met most recently on 10<sup>th</sup> Nov to discuss future working practices and emerging staffing/recruitment challenges. Despite a raft of apologies ahead of the meeting, a good turnout and lively discussions ensued. The next meeting to be held in the spring will look at the NSS and future of print collections. It was noted this theme potentially resonated with proposed discussions at the next Directors Board.

e. [Marketing & Communications Group](#)

As with the Copyright Group, this group had also been moribund for nearly two years. It was agreed to write to the chair with the same options as the Copyright Group, in an effort to offer support and stimulate a relaunch.

**ACTION: GJJ to write same as Chair of Marketing and Communications Group**

f. [Mercian Disability Forum](#)

The MDF met this morning (26<sup>th</sup> Nov) ahead of the Steering Group, with the Chair and GJJ in attendance. Sarah Pittaway of the MSDG also attended to discuss ideas and guidance around accessibility for Collaboration events, and joint working looking at library staff stress and mental health. Chris noted there had been a strong element of 'universal design' present in discussions as well, and that it had been a very positive meeting with an engaged group.

g. [Mercian Metadata Group](#)

The group hosted a *Making use of MarkEdit* event (17<sup>th</sup> Nov) and have plans for a f-2-f meeting at Aston around the turn of the year, early 2022. They have plans too for other events, and it was noted that there is clearly a demand for their activities among the membership.

The Chair noted her thanks to all those involved in running subgroup meetings and activities.

[21/24 AOB](#)

a. [Date of next Steering Group meeting \(Feb 2022\)](#)

This would be normally held sometime during February 2022, ahead of the March Board meeting.

**ACTION: GJJ, Chair and Laura to set date for next Steering Group meeting**

b. [MUAL](#)

Jo-Anne asked a question concerning any overlap between MUAL and the Collaboration, which GJJ noted was only very informal. They had been previously invited to send representation to Board meetings, but the discussions had not gone anywhere in particular. It was noted MUAL potentially faced closure, and the loss of this group would impact on Midlands libraries. This suggested procurement was a development need within the region. It was agreed if MUAL was wound up that the role of the Collaboration and procurement would be explored further, acknowledging some members have links with other bodies. It was suggested that organising an MSDG event on procurement would be a way to begin exploring these possibilities and scoping the current level of development needs. GJJ would also speak to ALN about their work with procurement groups.





**ACTION: Propose an MSDG event on procurement to explore development needs in region**

**ACTION: GJJ to talk to ALN about their work with procurement groups**

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> See: Eligibility: <https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/events>

<sup>ii</sup> The Conference is an explicit exception, in that commercial bodies sponsor in return for access