

Deputies & Senior Staff Group

Meeting Notes: 2nd March 2021

Present: Ant Brewerton (Meeting Chair, Warwick), Janet Weaver (Keele), Kay Jeffries (Derby), Selena Killick (OU), Kirsty Kift (Coventry), Phil Vaughan (Coventry), Jessica Wainwright (UCB), Alan Brine (DMU), Ben Veasey (Loughborough), Emily Clark (Wolverhampton), Alison Pope (Staffordshire), David Crozier (Newman), Gaz J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration),

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Apologies: Vicki McGarvey (Staffordshire), Bertha Low (BCU), Liz Mallett (Lincoln), Heather Green (Warwick), Anne Knight (Cranfield)

1) Issues & Actions from Previous meeting

Ant welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially given people were very busy. The minutes were accepted as read. The actions of the past meeting were all complete with the following exceptions:

- **Phil to share research data plans from Coventry with the group**

Phil apologised, and said he'd make every effort to do so.

- **Consider arranging a separate scholarly communications event within the Collaboration**

Initial discussions with Julie Robinson (Warwick) had taken place following the previous meeting with GJJ, although nothing concrete was set up yet.

2) Themed discussion:

- a) Things we have learned? What are the outcomes from lockdown/Covid for our services and how they inform our future learning/working/activities?*
- b) How might our services have changed? Are these interim arrangements or fundamental/evolutionary changes?*

The twin themes for discussion were (a) things have learned as an outcome of lockdown, and (b) how our services have evolved and continue to change to meet anticipated future needs and demands. There were various points of general discussion and update, including the following areas:

Experiences

Coventry: New services like click and collect, space booking and is looking at these will be continued. Click and collect is popular but a high demand service, although space booking seems more manageable. An increase in staff digital skills was noted, enforced by remote working over previous lack of engagement. Has exposed some training needs though. Also exploring new ways to teach and support staff/students. However, because the library had been often the only campus location only, this had proved challenging for staff in many respects. Strong student appreciation for library efforts though.

Loughborough: Noted staff were being celebrated for their phenomenal response to working remotely and adapting services. Like Coventry, some staff able to pivot easier than others, and there were some comfort and adaptability issues relating to tech and the return to campus working: anxiety is a challenging aspect to manage. Demand for library services demonstrated as a high demand for students, although this period is likely to drive the pace of change, especially in the transition to digital services.

DMU: Noted a challenge in terms of staffing when remove staff unable to come to campus and those less willing to return (anxious) then team pool is much diminished, which in cases of staff absence and sickness becomes a greater problem. Clash noted between HR policy and library opening necessity. Staff may need to be transitioned to new roles, where their willingness or ability to be present in future doesn't line up with prior expectations. Suggestion that moving away from 24/7 opening might be up for discussion in the future.

Newman: Front of house staff happier to be in than back office, but this might be down to team configurations. Some particular challenges have been face in supporting students with a lot of needs during this period, taking up a lot of staff time.

Keele: Large group study space has been open, and smaller group spaces to come. However, students who use library space for societies have been a challenge, so need for more thought here. Dealing with changing government guidance on 'group space' has also been tricky. Staff office space is being removed, as realisation more staff can home work long term. Lots of data gained on usage, engagement with library, VLE etc – which has helped raise the library's perception with the executive. Fines may not be resumed, as they have always been a bugbear. While many staff have been furloughed, most seem to be happy to return to work on campus after a long time 'off'.

OU: Lockdown drove introduction of new services like click and collect. Good for opening up access to stock 24/7 when unable to open the building. Issues over library design from pre-pandemic days, means thoughts as to ventilation (e.g. no opening windows) have been exposed as suboptimal, and have rendered the space unusable under current laws. OU students also don't put cams/mics on when in teaching sessions but people now required to keep their cams on in team meetings, but ensures there is space to 'chat' as well as address work issues.

Wolverhampton: Big challenge is demand for resources and how people were making sure there's enough for demands for online learning. Lower take-up on ebooks, but local licences were not sufficient to meet demand levels when everyone shifted to online learning. Now the acquisition budget is running low, we are looking at e-textbook learning. The library is also moving towards digital only, big push for a 'hub' and online collection, and hence more support to online learning.

Engagement, Teams & Working

Coventry: People attending more online events than they normally would, although a lot of time spent in sessions explaining how things work. Keen to get user community back on site, when safe, to improve interaction. Camera behaviour can be varied, and there is a need at times to see people to adjudge their state of mind and engagement.

DMU: Looking at customer journey planning, how this has changed and what impacts this has on our longer term planning. Having staff looking to move to other parts of the country which means there are some difficult discussions as people are used to working together.

Loughborough: The shift to 100% online, with MS Teams as central platform, has been the biggest change. Because students like the hybrid model, there's an expectation this will be adopted as standard going forward.

OU: Have done some consensus building workshops online. MURAL¹ seems to be the platform that works best. How do we collaborate with those on and off campus at the same time is a key issue, as can be guilty of forgetting those offsite, and need to get over the culture of ignoring them. Used VLE and other customer relationship management tool, with different weighting to measure. Still a drive for physical space and collections, despite the OU being a leader in digital delivery. Work environment in the future will be changed, hybrid, and a monthly staff forum has been essential in getting everyone on board with this.

Wolverhampton: A lot of interest in looking at the parity of student experience across all the different engagement platforms. Looking to grow distance students, but this changes the need for face-to-face engagement and raises questions on how achieve parity of service provision.

Warwick: Community engagement very difficult to do normally and it is much easier to do in person. Getting that engagement in a virtual world even harder. Sudden change in government policy/law and then having to rethink what we are offering very rapidly coupled with a and fatigue for more online events has been a particular challenge.

Digital Poverty, Resource & Accessibility

Coventry: Stability and bandwidth of internet connections has been evidenced, especially for the 'heavier duty' software. Chrome books are often insufficient technologically to successfully access these kind of platforms. Can be hard to 'read the room', one reason why we hosted a virtual coffee morning every Thursday to provide an informal space.

Derby: A lot of things covered similar to Derby – live stream, podcasts too. Staff have done amazing things, and been very flexible. We have a skills audit going on at the moment. With five sites there have been a lot of different people and experiences, coming out. Plus, as we have HE and FE students, who have very different library support needs. However, team feelings have grown considerably over the period, which is one success. However, there are various resource shortfalls now being faced.

DMU: Lots of students don't always have the kit they need or need to share with children, which can restrict what they can use. Moving everything online, as a society need to address issues of digital poverty. Some things don't readily translate to the virtual environment, given the lack of feedback (e.g. laughter, body cues) to what is said to provide tone and context. 'Tea activities' at DMU using to get staff to tell us how they're dealing with remote activities. Some are explicit tea activities people just talking over tea, which allows the 'human' element to be nurtured.

Keele: Trying different VLE resources, and measuring engagement in terms in discussion and interaction, not usage statistics. Students seem happier to interact in 'chat' rather than 'voice' though.

Loughborough: Meeting the demand, especially for core and highly desired texts online has been challenging. Have been hitting publisher access limits, especially for students doing assessment work. A feeling we're in a reactive rather than strategic response phase currently in regards to this.

OU: Email traffic has reduced, but webchat has increased from 30-60% of all contact from service users, but takes longer to manage than email. Especially with attendance at training sessions increasing, there's

¹ <https://www.okta.com/integrations/mural/>

a need for more staff resource to manage the chat discussions alongside it, as students have adapted to using it well. Looking at demand planning on staff, normalising data on how modules, students and enquiries interrelate to deliver on requirements. Art not science perhaps, but helps in terms of resource planning. Broad band speeds in rural areas have been an issue.

Warwick: Building relationships, creating ideas, gaining affirmation – makes it difficult to interact with these lack of indicators. Warwick had similar ‘tea’ gatherings to DMU, as some staff were lacking in regular informal contact. Main library not physically accessible presently, and an issue because students like to browse the books.

Wolverhampton: A laptop loan scheme has been set up, as a lot of students without laptops or internet. Trying to beef up collections to meet demands.

Wolverhampton: Consideration of different time-zones (e.g. 9-5 support model no longer works), which might fit in better for people working remotely/more flexibly. Yet to see how this works in practice, and it does raise planning difficulties for managers – many questions and not many answers as of yet.

Future Developments

Coventry: Will get finalists soon with limited experience of normal libraries, but also A-level students who’ve had a dissociated experience in terms of face-to-face teaching and what libraries can do for them. This could be a big issue at September intake. Doing some work for students transitioning to university as an optional module, should strongly drive them towards taking it. Note running a number of City of Culture projects (in association with Warwick and public libraries) – a lot more cooperation coming out of the lockdown experience. Easy to support face to face and remotely, but better having staff who do different support models. Online chat can’t be staffed at the same time as physical support though, which means prioritisation is needed: what will we develop, and what will we reduce in importance?

Keele: New model ‘on duty in person’ vs ‘on duty off site’ - hybrid is great for service delivery, but practically difficult to cope with. If a book is not checked out for three years, it is removed - have to prove their value . The library stock has moved three times in recent years and we’ve reduced from 200k items to >50k books. Pressure to be even fewer, hence needs to be really strong argument for retention/acquisition. Trying to balance budget and provide space are key issues for the future.

Loughborough: How do we deliver all these things in a hybrid model? Many are replicating physical services so are not really ‘new’. Although, desk focus on booking not rooms does feel new. This feels like a period of evolution not revolution as digital provision trend was happening anyway. Loughborough feels its services may be behind in terms of tools and technology. Having discussions too about use of estate (library building) and if is this the best use of this space. Especially when there’s more demand for student space and collaborative working, this becomes a crucial conversation. Could click and collect, meaning offsite storage of books, be a way to address this? Although, there are huge logistical challenges to be answered in making more effective use of the ‘library’ space in the future.

OU: The new University Secretary was keen to deliver on service design for whole institution, joining up professional service units so they work more closely together. Collaborative working now seen as one of the main reasons to come back to site, as online not working so well for this. Staff will no longer need to be within commuting distance of Milton Keynes in future as a result of this shift.

Warwick: Promoting face to face services, and likely redevelop the website as experience has shown it could be improved. Click and collect should we continue or is it done post-pandemic? Students always say they can't find books on the shelves. So is the amazon model for the future rather than them searching for themselves?

ACTION: Phil, Jessica and Selena to talk about student engagement offline

ACTION: Selina to share papers on UX at a distance with group

3) General discussions & updates

a) Decolonisation

A question about decolonising/recolonising the collections was raised – noting ideas in the discourse about universities perceived 'too woke' by the UK government. Student enthusiasm for decolonisation was noted, extending to issues of LGBTQ+ as well. It was noted, DMU had made considerable strides relating to decolonisation, which had served to focus attention from across the university of this issue.

4) Next meeting

b) Approximate date

It was agreed that May/June would be an ideal time for the meeting.

ACTION: GJJ to send out Doodle poll to seek date for the next meeting

c) Potential themes & topics

Three themes were suggested from discussions today:

- Returning to campus – how will library staff/teams work in the future?
- Planning and preparing for the new academic year preparations.
- Supporting increasingly diverse library users needs e.g. accommodating entrants with no face-to-face library experience and finalists with little on-campus experience

Ben volunteered to chair the meeting.

5) AOB

a) Terms of Reference

These would be going to the Board at the end of March for final review and hopeful acceptance.

ACTION: GJJ to take ToR to Board and report back at next meeting

Resources

- **Higher education coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance:**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses>
- Keren Stiles and Caroline Barratt, 2020 [UX and usability at a distance](#) (slideshare slides).
- Keren Stiles, 2017 [UX research with distance learners](#). (UXLibs handbook chapter)



- **MURAL:** <https://www.okta.com/integrations/mural/>