



Conference Group Meeting

10:00-12:00, Tuesday 30th March 2021

Minutes

Present: Deborah Munro (Vice-Chair, Birmingham), Charlie Hill (BCU), Matt Cunningham (MSDG, Loughborough), Nial Halford-Busby (BGU), Ruth Houghton (Cranfield), Laura Newman (Loughborough), Gaz J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration)

Apologies: Damian Pugh (Chair, Nottingham), Cheryl Coveney (OU), Christine Bradford (Warwick), Alison Charlesworth (Leicester), Emily Foster (DMU)

1. Actions

Deborah was chairing today, as Damian was unavailable at the last minute. The minutes (13th Jan 2021) were agreed and actions were reviewed. All actions were reported complete or in progress with the exceptions:

- **Emma to continue to feed into conference discussions on behalf of SCONUL Board**

While Emma had stood down from Steering Group, she would be continuing to actively support the conference from the Directors Board. She was due to meet GJJ in the near future to update him on SCONUL related matters, and he would report back.

- **13/Jan/21 (10): ACTION: Emily and Ruth to supply GJJ with headshots**

GJJ noted that Emily's picture was still outstanding for the website.

ACTION: Emily to supply headshot for the website

2. Title and Theme

The proposed theme (*Adaptation and Growth in Times of Adversity*) had been accepted by the Steering Group, and as there had been no further feedback to Charlie and Chris' outline this was now agreed.

ACTION: Charlie to reshare final version of conference theme document with all

ACTION: GJJ to create conference microsite and news item announcing theme

3. Feedback from Northern Collaboration (NC) Meeting

Deborah reported back on the meeting with the NC's conference representative (Rosi Jelfs, Durham) that she, Damian, Emma and Cheryl had attended. GJJ had also met with Rosi separately. Rosi had shared experiences of organising and helping host last November's online conferenceⁱ, which Deborah noted had been a very useful meeting.

The two half-days which comprised the event had been hosted on Teams, on Durham's platform, limiting it to 250 delegates (although this may be a higher number now). Attendance was much higher than previous physical conferences, which was a major success. The NC hadn't started to set up their technology until a month ahead of the conference itself, which in hindsight might have been a little late. Once delegates signed up for the conference, they received an invite and a guide on expected online etiquette. The NC encouraged all delegates to keep their screens off to help with platform stability. It was noted, we might prefer to be able to see people for the Mercian event. There had been some technical (security) challenges for some NC members in using Teams, but as with the MC, it seemed to be the most commonly used platform. Matt noted that Cheryl had been collating which platforms people in the Collaboration used, on behalf of the MSDG, which supported this perception.



As Teams allows private channels, the NC had a 'cake and chat' channel to enable the conference's social and informal discussion element, and this had proved highly successful. Private channels had also been used by the planning committee, and gold-level sponsors had been given their own channel to engage with delegates too. There had been some security issues for some member organisations which had precluded their full engagement with the platform though, especially the chat functionality. The NC used the standard Teams installation, rather than any add ons. Delegates were added to separate sessions for the event, rather than a single meeting.

The NC had four members of the conference team working behind the scenes on the day keeping the platform running, which had worked successfully. They had offered practice sessions for speakers, but with very minimal take-up. Delegates were added on the Monday of the conference week, but this left insufficient time for addressing technical issues, and hence a longer lead time was desirable. As a platform though, Teams generally worked well, and the feedback was positive from attendees.

The NC had received both gold (top) and bronze sponsors, with differing access and promotion as a result. Sponsor engagement was higher as a result of the online environment, with gold sponsors being included in slides for all sessions along with their own Teams channel to interact with delegates.

4. Format

As had been previously agreed, this year's conference would be online, and alongside the main talks would feature pre-recorded 'reasons to be cheerful' short inserts. Given the transformative experience of libraries and staff in the past year, it was likely a large community of people who'd be willing to share their positive experiences.

5. Platform & Hosting

Nial noted that he had access to a Live Events version of Teams, which offers functions beyond the basic version. For example, there is a Producer mode, who has the ability to choose which video feeds are seen by delegates and can aid in keeping the event moving in an organised fashion. The Live Events version would also allow for breakout rooms, along with other functions: as these would be required if the event included parallel sessions this was seen as a very useful addition. Additionally, Nial noted BGU might be willing to act as the 'host' for the Conference event, and he would explore this with his local ICT Teams in terms of feasibility and any cost requirements.

ACTION: Nial to explore functionalities of the MS Teams Live Event installation and report back

ACTON: Nial to explore potential of BGU acting as online conference host for the 2021 conference

Deborah noted at Birmingham a group of staff who were upskilling themselves with online conferencing, who could be used as a potential test community for our platform. Additionally, the members of the committee would also be willing to act in this capacity.

ACTION: Deborah to check if local staff can act as test bed for Collaboration conference experience

6. Outline Conference Schedule

To facilitate the call for papers, it needed to be agreed what session lengths and the conference overall schedule should be. After some discussions it was agreed to seek three kinds of papers: (1) longer (~45 minute) ones, (2) shorter (10 minute) ones, and (3) brief 'moments of joy' pre-recorded (5 minutes max). The longer papers could be shaped as workshops or papers, as the speakers wished. It was noted



the online format could facilitate us in running all the submissions we received which passed a sense check by the committee, and hence widen the appeal of the event to the Collaboration's membership.

There was the potential to end each session on a 'happy note', using the 'reasons to be cheerful' lightning talks. As in previous years, hour long sessions would be the default unit of time for the conference. These talks might be about coping with lockdown working and life, rather than specifically directly related to the library environment, but would ideally end sessions on a positive note.

It was proposed Laura and Ruth should draw up an outline conference schedule for discussion online, and agreement at the next meeting, and this would be used to help formulate the call for papers.

ACTION: Laura & Ruth draw up an outline conference schedule ahead of next meeting

7. Inter-Collaboration Conference

GJJ had communicated an interest from ALN (Academic Libraries North) to co-host this year', given the likely similar dates for their 2021 conference, that we could consider hosting a joint event. After discussion it was agreed the benefits were unclear, while the additional complications working with a separate group with a close, but not identical, agenda were far more pressing. Hence, for 2021 this was a non-starter.

However, the idea generally received a warm welcome, and it was proposed to this end to start a 'softer' collaborative effort. Representatives from ALN's conference group would be invited to future MC conference meetings, and we would send someone to their meetings. In this way, we would develop a closer working relationship, allowing the eventual, hopeful, creation of a future joint event in a more coherent manner. Matt commented that a future MSDG event between the two organisations might also help relationships develop practically too.

ACTION: GJJ to feed back to ALN about our proposed conference exchange of experiences and meeting representatives

8. Call for Papers

As the call could not be written until the conference schedule was agreed, this was postponed to the next meeting. It was noted that in order to reach out to members of staff who might not normally consider submitting a talk, that the lightning talks/moments of joy could be facilitated by personal invites to specific staff members from directors, managers and the group members rather than as a response to the call.

It was proposed recording all sessions, with the exception of the keynote, would be an automatic condition for all speakers upon submission of their proposals. This was seen to be not only valuable, but also a standard expectation now for delegates and speakers alike at other events. It was agreed the keynote would be an exception to this, unless expressly wished, due to potential commercial sensitivity.

9. External Speakers & Delegates

As previously discussed, it was agreed to propose to the Steering Group that attendance at the conference as a speaker or delegate would be opened up beyond the Collaboration. This would be of benefit in terms of content, interaction and experience exchange; with the online format easily facilitating this greater potential attendee numbers. It was also suggested that a 'honeymoon' period for delegates from the Collaboration would be offered, ahead of making booking more widely available. Likewise, a clause in the call for papers would see MC applicants receiving 'favoured nation'

status where any decisions on declining applications were required. It was agreed to seek the Steering Group’s permission to take this forward, and how this should be best framed.

ACTION: GJJ to seek Steering Group’s approval for opening up attendance to external delegates and speakers

10. Keynote

Following the previous discussions on keynotes, it was suggested that a motivational speaker, in the line of 2018’s Andy Cope might be appropriate for the theme. Sarah Keyworth, with her connection to the region, might be a strong possibility. It was agreed that Damian would make an outline approach to see if she was available and what her fees might be.

GJJ noted that the Directors could be asked if needed alternative suggestions, although this shouldn’t be relied upon to yield suggestions. Other alternative speakers were also invited from the group members.

ACTION: Damian to make outline approach to Sarah Keyworth as potential keynote

ACTION: All to consider and propose additional/alternative keynotes as alternatives at next meeting

11. Sponsors

Deferred to next meeting as neither Cheryl nor Emily were present.

ACTION: Cheryl and Emily to update group on sponsorship call at April meeting

12. Timeline

Ahead of the meeting Damian had shared a proposed timescale for the conference.

April	15 th Call for Sponsors Open 29 th Call for Papers
May	N/a
June	18 th Call for Papers Closes W/b 21 st June – Committee Meeting to select papers 28 th - Notify applicants successful and unsuccessful
July	12 th Speakers to confirm attendance 26 th Bookings open + Outline Programme
Aug	End of August: Close bookings
Sept	Sept 1 st Committee Meeting and Event set up/loading delegates/Teams/Platform set up, tech testing etc. Sept 9 th 10 th Conference (two half days)

It was agreed to revise the schedule as follows:

- W/b 26th April: Call for Papers, Call for Sponsorship
- W/b 23rd August: Event & platform set up and tech testing
- W/b 6th Sept: Close conference bookings (day or three before event)



These adjustments would allow for more lead time in preparing materials, testing technology and hopefully the recruitment of more delegates. Hence the revised schedule would look like:

April	w/b 12 th News item announcing theme on website 29 th Call for Papers & Call for Sponsors Open
May	N/a
June	18 th Call for Papers Closes W/b 21 st June – Committee Meeting to select papers 28 th - Notify applicants successful and unsuccessful
July	12 th Speakers to confirm attendance 26 th Bookings open + Outline Programme
Aug	W/b 23 rd August: Event/platform set up & tech testing End of August: Close bookings
Sept	Sept 1 st Committee Meeting. Loading delegates onto platform (delegate invites/info) Sept 9 th 10 th Conference (two half days)

13. Date of next meeting

It was agreed that a short meeting would be held after Easter, ensuring Damian and Cheryl were in attendance specifically, to catch up on progress on all the matters suggested today. Damian would arrange the dates as per his availability.

ACTION: Damian to schedule a meeting of the group for after Easter

14. AOB

a. Group Sponsor

GJJ noted that as Emma Walton had stood down from Steering Group, that a new sponsor for the Conference Group would be forthcoming in April. He hoped, potentially, one of the members with group experience might consider the role.

ⁱ NC 2020 Conference Programme:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EXzpiiheImGbyssm2jBNHrr2EMM77AawulwzNIZ1Ti8/edit>