Mercian Collaboration

Annual Report 2019

Contents

> ## At A Glance
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> - Informally: The Collaboration
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> - Past Chair Dave Parkes (DMU, to Mar 2019)
> - 8 special interest groups, with 3 new in 2019
> - 14 visits, workshops & networking events
> - 21 committee & group meetings
> - 23 academic library members
> - 82 delegates at annual conference
> - Parent body: SCONUL

Chair's Introduction

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this annual report, the third one the Mercian Collaboration has produced. Once again this has been a highly successful year of activities across our region, with excitingly the opportunity for a number of new areas to come into focus. While, undoubtedly, the jewel in the Collaboration's crown was our annual conference, we have also been blessed by a strong regional activity across our special interest groups, delivering tangible benefits across our membership.

We, as a Collaboration, reached a significant point of maturity in 2019, five years on from our founding. Appropriately, this the year has been the point at which we have paused to re-examine our purpose, question our direction and reaffirm our commitment to our goals. This recommitment has been more formally realised in our

Diane Job
Chair (2019-21) & Director of Library Services, University of Birmingham

developing strategic plan, due for wider circulation over the next twelve months. Alongside these considerations, we have also developed our role in helping grow members' networks, serving to enable their services and staff to grow in knowledge, capability and resiliency.

With my term of office as Chair of the Collaboration began this year, more than ever, I have been immensely grateful for the efforts of our Steering Group members and Officers, ably supported by our outstanding Development Officer. Moreover, I have been delighted by the dedication and contributions from each member of our special interest groups, whose enthusiastic commitment lies at the heart of our organisation's achievements.

Preface

Welcome to the third Mercian Collaboration annual report. As with our earlier reports (**Mercian, 2017a & 2018**), this is one is intended to provide insight into our various groups and activities throughout 2019. We hope it is of interest not only to our members and their staff, but also people and their organisations outside of libraries and the UK Midlands region alike. For a fuller view of activities, the Collaboration's Website (**Mercian, 2019a**) or specific Steering Group members and group chairs should be consulted.

After a successful response last year, we've once again chose to highlight some of the interesting activities and events which have taken place within our members' institutions. Rather than providing a complete overview of the many challenges and accomplishments each has weathered this year; our hope is that they provide a taste of the diversity and range of academic library activities across our region.

My thanks to all report contributors, especially Officers, Group Chairs and those submitting member updates. Additionally, thanks to everyone who helped organise, facilitate or participated in our events programme., and especially those who took the time to write up a report for our news pages.

Dr Gaz J Johnson, *Collaboration Development Officer*

Editor's Note: June 2020

This report is being released later than expected, in part due to the disruptions from the currently ongoing Covid-19 pandemic crisis. As a result, the report documents a period which does not directly map onto the current challenges faced by the region's academic libraries. However, it hopefully still provides insight into the Collaboration's past, as it looks to deal with a significantly reconfigured future environment.

About the Collaboration

The **Mercian Collaboration** is a regional library network based in the UK Midlands. Founded as the Midlands Academic Library Group in 2014 with the initial 22 academic library members joined in 2017 by Cranfield University, as the first non-founding member. Member libraries provide the Collaboration's operating capital through an annual, institutional subscription model. Contributions are proportionate to member's income as reported to SCONUL, with levels reviewed annually and any changes subject to agreement by the **Directors Board** - the Collaboration's ultimate governing body. The Directors Board comprises member libraries' directors, or equivalent senior leader, representatives. The Board meets twice annually, normally March and October, to discuss issues and exchange experiences, along with deciding on the Collaboration's future strategic direction. Where directors are unable to attend, a senior staff member is normally deputised to appear in their place.

Steering Group

Operationally, a **Steering Group** comprising, since 2017, an elected subset of these directors, oversees and advances activities outside of these meetings. The Steering Group also has responsibility for monitoring and supporting the activity of the Collaboration's special interest subgroups. Individual Steering Group members act as group sponsors for particular special interest groups, and represent their interests to the Directors Board and Collaboration at large.

The Steering Group currently includes three officer roles (**Chair**, **Vice-Chair** and **Treasurer**) as well as three non-officer member director positions. Apart from the Vice-Chair, Steering Group members serve two-year terms. The Vice-Chair serves a four-year term, normally progressing to Chair after the first two.

March 2019 saw the second Steering Group elections, with Dave Parkes (DMU) stepping down as Chair as former Vice-Chair Diane Job (Birmingham) took up the reigns (**Mercian, 2019b**). It was also the first year that the Collaboration's Memorandum of Understanding with its parent body, SCONUL, came into effect. Considerable strides towards developing a longer-term strategic plan were also enacted, in consultation with the special interest group chairs.

Mercian Collaboration member Locations

Map data: © 2019 GeoBasis-De/BKG (©2009), Google

Steering Group (Mar 2019-Mar 2021)

Left to right: (top row), Diane Job (Chair, Birmingham), Chris Porter (Vice Chair, Newman), Mark Toole (NTU, Treasurer), (bottom row) Sue Ackermann (Nottingham), Simon Bevan (Cranfield), Emma Walton (Loughborough), Gaz J Johnson (Development Officer).

Development Officer

A Development Officer, employed in a part-time capacity on behalf of the Collaboration by SCONUL, reports directly to the Chair. Their role is to provide executive management of the Collaboration, assisting in realising its objectives, projects, groups, services and developments. The Officer leads on coordinating governance and formal reporting requirements by and to the Collaboration's governing and parent body. Crucially, they facilitate operational matters including communication, liaison and relationships between special interest groups and their officers, as the Chair and Steering Group's representative. Consequently, they are an ex officio member on all special interest group committees and organising bodies, where they advise, inform and help to guide activities. Additionally, they are the primary point of contact for all external enquiries along with maintaining the Collaboration's online and social media presences.

Strategic Plan

After five years in operation, 2018 saw the Chair and Steering Group look towards formalising a strategic plan for the Collaboration. While the outgoing Chair and Steering Group had made steps towards formalising this, it fell to the incoming Chair and Steering Group to take this activity forward. In particular, the changing relationship with SCONUL under the newly established *Memorandum of Understanding* and evolving HE and academic library landscape, were elements which needed to be accounted for within the document. Additionally, there was a acknowledged desire by the Steering Group to see a greater ownership by and input from the established special interest groups to the strategic planning process. For these reasons the Chair convened a meeting in August between the Steering Group and SIG chairs to take the plan forward. Following this meeting the strategic plan is undergoing revisions, and it is anticipated its next iteration will be presented to the Board in March 2029 for hopeful formal approval and adoption.

Treasurer's Report

In what has been once more a busy year for the Collaboration, our expenditure and income balanced. With an income of £22,651 and an expenditure of £22,783, our resultant out-turn for 2019 was a slight loss of £132; leaving reserve funds of £18k. We have been fortunate this year as once again the conference team arranged a significant income from sponsorship to offset the costs of their flagship event. Nevertheless, without this sponsorship, the Collaboration would be running at a loss. Looking towards 2020 and adopting a fairly conservative estimate of likely expenditures against income, I anticipate we would once more be running at a loss. This, alongside the continuing increase in activity under the Collaboration's envelope, are reasons why subscriptions have been mildly elevated to help offset this to a degree. Nevertheless, the Collaboration cannot afford to continue operating beyond our income indefinitely, and as such I and the Steering Group will be closely examining our financial arrangements as we move into the early 2020s.

Mark Toole
Treasurer (2019-2021) & Director of Library Services, NTU

Online Communications

Launched in early 2017, the website continues to provide a location member organisations' staff and the wider community to learn about the Collaboration, our events, activities and key figures, alongside providing access to supplementary information such as forthcoming events, news items, reports and governance documentation. Notably the website provides open access to the Directors Board, Steering Group and SIG committee minutes and reports, to provide transparency into operations and decision-making processes. Built and managed by the Development Officer, the site's contents have continued to grow during 2019 alongside the Collaboration's expanding activities.

The Development Officer also manages a twitter social media presence (**@MercianCollab**) to further promote the Collaboration and its activities. This highlights newly added website content, alongside raising the visibility of the Mercian Collaboration to its members' staff and the wider community. As some library staff are not overly keen engagers with social media, a general distribution Jiscmail list, exclusive to staff from member organisations exists (**mercian-collaboration@jiscmail**) for them to join. This list carries semi-regular newsletters highlighting Collaboration events, committee meetings and opportunities to become involved in activities, usually directing readers to our website for supplementary information. The mailing list is also sometimes used to promote vacancies within member organisations, and some unaffiliated regional events.

Individual SIGs, along with the Directors Board and Steering Groups, also maintain their operations thorough a portfolio number of Jiscmail private distribution lists, typically configured and maintained by the Development Officer.

Vital Statistics

Members: 23 Academic Libraries	**Steering Group**: 3 Officers, 3 Representatives, 1 Ex Officio
Special Interest Groups: 8	**Events in 2019**: 14
Most Northly: Bishop Grosseteste University	**Meetings in 2019**: 21
Most Southerly: The Open University	**Twitter Followers**: 208
Most Western: Harper Adams University	**Site Page Views in 2019**: 18,284
Most Eastern: Bishop Grosseteste University (just!)	**Site Unique Visitors**: 4,468

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

Since its formation, the Collaboration has established several special interest groups (SIGs) (**Mercian, 2019c**), beginning with the Mercian Staff Development Group (MSDG). SIGs enabling experience exchange and professional development for practitioners within various specialised niches, along with providing a location for the Directors Board to consult for expert advice. SIGs thus through contributing to furthering the Collaboration's aims and objectives, additionally represent a key membership value. Starting from one group in 2015, the Collaboration now hosts eight SIGs, as of December 2019.

SIGs benefit from having a close and regular liaison with the Development Officer, who in turn provides support, guidance, communication and updates as part of his cross-Collaboration coordination activities. Each SIG also benefit from a Steering Group Sponsor who alongside providing further channels of communication and support, operate as each SIG's representative to the Steering Group and Directors Board. They also help in identifying topics of cross-Collaboration interest and assist in facilitating exchanges between SIGs (**Mercian, 2019d**).

Conference Group (CG)

*The Conference Group's role is to plan, develop and deliver the annual Mercian Collaboration conference. Because of the need to deliver on such a time-sensitive and crucial Collaboration output, committee members are proposed by their Directors. The group's sponsor, **Emma Walton** (Loughborough), also served as its Chair until late 2019, when she was succeeded by **Claire Brown** (Birmingham). Because of their own contemporaneous events programme, the MSDG provides an observer, **Matt Cunningham** (Loughborough), to provide liaison and support between the two groups.*

Conference 2019: Evaluation Report

This report will provide some evaluation, analysis and reflections on the third Mercian Conference held at the Great Hall, Trent Building at the University of Nottingham on Tuesday 10th September 2019. *(It has been previously agreed that the conference will alternate between University of Birmingham (West Midlands) and University of Nottingham (East Midlands))*

The theme was 'Building Bridges: Collaboration, partnership and community' and gave an opportunity for staff from across the Mercian region to share initiatives and activities from their institutions that fit this broad theme. The conference welcomed 82 delegate and speakers from 19 of the Collaboration's 23 member libraries.

Figure 1: Entrance to Conference Venue 2019

The conference received sponsorship from four sponsors at 'gold' level and one sponsor at silver level:

> **Gold**: *Anybook, Browns Books for Students, Cambridge University Press, Talis*

> **Silver**: *Constant Security Services*

Sponsorship generated £4,200 towards the cost of the conference. Our thanks to the sponsors for their support was noted on the day, and in delegate conference materials.

	Expenditure	Income
Venue	-£ 4,900 (+VAT)	
Merchandise	-£ 840 (+VAT)	
Sponsors		+£4,200.00
TOTAL	£1,540	

All additional costs for the conference were met from the Collaboration's reserves.

Evaluation

Feedback was gathered via an online evaluation form. A response rate of 45% was achieved. This feedback indicates delegates were impressed with the conference venue, organisation of the conference, and the quality of the parallel sessions.

Figure 2: Organisation Evaluation

Figure 3: Parallel Session Evaluation

4

CONFERENCE OVERALL

Good
5%

Very Good
46%

Excellent
49%

Figure 4: Overall Evaluation

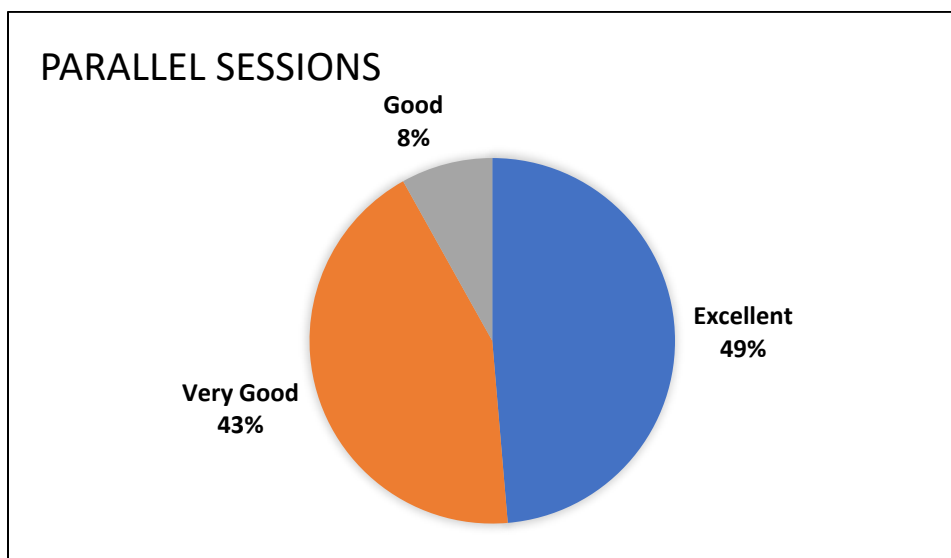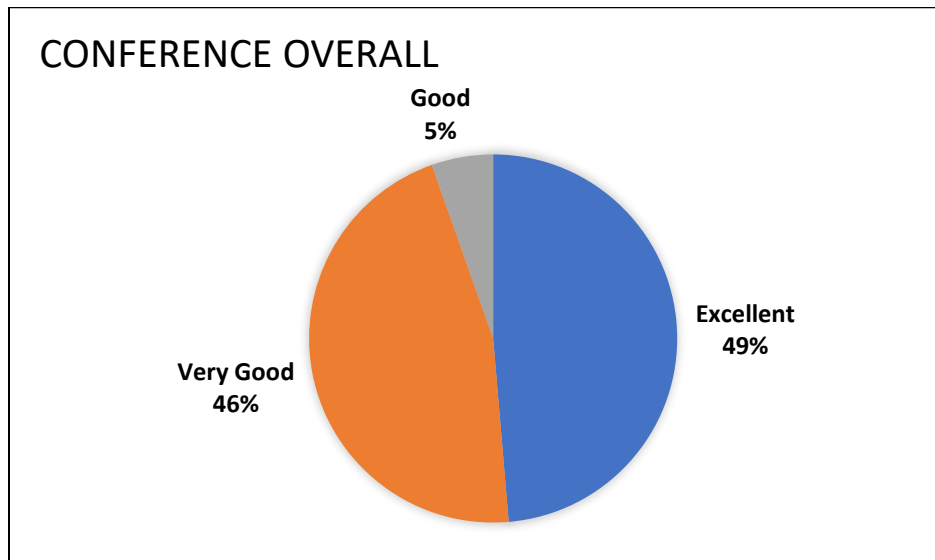*Figure 5: Conference Delegates Mingle Over Lunch*

Sample Comments

Conference delegates provided a range of positive, insightful and reflective comments, of which a sample is presented below. Many of the comments about the most useful aspects of the conference relate to the sharing of experiences, the opportunity to pick up new ideas, and the networking opportunities. This is reassuring as providing such opportunities is one of the main objectives of the conference.

> *Fantastic opportunity to learn more about what is happening in libraries and expand my network.*
>
> *I enjoyed the collaborative theme and that sharing of ideas was encouraged throughout the day.*
>
> *It provides an occasion for creative thought, learning and sharing best practice - and great for networking.*
>
> *It was great to be able to share practice and learn from others.*
>
> The parallel sessions that I attended were informative and fun to participate in. I have tasks coming up in my role which I can apply ideas from the day to help me achieve them.

A handful of criticisms were related to some issues with refreshments:

> *Needless change of room for refreshments*
>
> *My only niggles are with the catering; some soya milk would have been nice*
>
> *The catering staff were a bit quick to remove the coffee in the morning and also possibly the sandwiches could have been better labelled and not all piled in together.*

The conference group also attempted to try something different for the conference close and to seek engagement on ideas for this, but this was seen as one of the least useful aspects/provided little actionable feedback:

> Wrap up session - but if didn't have one would feel odd, always difficult as people like to get away, but without drawing people together again feels odd and disparate and can feel flat - no easy answer to what it should be.
>
> No need for the plenary ending. Just have refreshments available for those who want to continue to network, catch-up on emails, etc.
>
> I think the plenary session perhaps didn't really work but they did explain on the day that this was problematic. But it's really hard to end a conference Many people were already thinking of heading off by this point and it's hard to know how to structure a plenary in a way that works for people. I wonder if we experimented with no plenary. I'm sure people would complain but why not try it. Or make it even more light touch.
>
> Something more definite and positive to end the day.

Reflections and Recommendations

For 2019/20 the Conference group will be changing its Terms of Reference to reflect the governance of the other Special Interest Groups in the Collaboration. To this end the chair will come from within the group, the position of vice chair will be added and the group will have a sponsor from within the Steering Group. Each year after the conference the Conference Group hold an evaluation meeting to reflect on the conference and look at recommendations for the next conference. This follows an informal review held immediately following the end of the event. This was held on 4th Nov 2019, and the following proposals were put forward:

1. That the conference be held at the same time in the academic year and the date confirmed as Tuesday 8th September 2020.
2. The 2020 conference will take place at the University of Birmingham
3. Theme for 2020 will be around diversity and inclusion, as chosen by the Mercian Steering Group.
4. That we look to continue to seek sponsorship to help with costs
5. We retain the 100-120 delegate number for 2020.
6. That we look for greater diversity from keynote speakers.
7. That we make best efforts to encourage attendance from across the library workforce and strongly encourage those in Library assistant roles to both attend and present.

Conclusion

The CG ran a successful event, successfully incorporating changes based on the evaluation of past conferences. Thanks go to the group members for their hard work, time, creativity, judgement and support throughout the planning and delivery process.

Claire Browne, Conference Group Chair, University of Birmingham

2019 Conference Group Members

Figure 6: Conference Group Team 2019

Emma Walton (Chair 2016-2019 and Steering Group Sponsor, Loughborough), Jen Brotherton (Wolverhampton), Helen Curtis (Loughborough), Jo-Anne Watts (Keele), Charlie Hill (BCU), Cheryl Coveney (OU), Kim Maxwell (Warwick), Claire Brown (Birmingham); *ex-officio* members Matt Cunningham (MSDG rep, Loughborough) and Gaz J Johnson (MCDO).

Copyright Group (MCG)

*The MCG is a network of library staff with a responsibility for Copyright guidance and advocacy at their institutions. Membership is representational and largely self-selected by individuals within membership organisations. The group's sponsor is **Chris Porter** (Newman), and the current chair is **Yvonne Budden** (Warwick).*

The Group held two meetings in 2019, at De Montfort University in February and Aston University in June. Although a subsequent meeting was planned for September unfortunately this was postponed due to a lack of availability of many attendees.

At the first meeting the group were updated on the Jisc TNE pilot, which has developed guidelines relating to categories of HESA Aggregate Offshore Return students which should be included in existing licence agreements and were drafting a new partner decision tool. The University of Birmingham shared their experience of, pretty successfully, negotiating approximately 980 licence agreements with regards to their new overseas campus. Authentication of such overseas students for online resource access was discussed, including the difficulties encountered in getting clear, clean and consistent data to use.

At the second meeting in June the group received feedback on the key areas covered in the CILIP Copyright Executive Briefing, and De Montfort and Loughborough University gave an overview of their recent CLA audits. It was noted the audits were being discontinued in favour of Account Management. Gareth J Johnson then gave

an update on the Mercian Collaboration developments, and the group then moved onto discussing different approaches to 'teaching' copyright and various games experienced by members of the group were flagged.

Plan S and Brexit and their potential impact on copyright were discussed at both meetings but delays with implementing each meant the group would be discussing these areas again when things were more finalised.

Deputies & Senior Staff Group (D&SSG)

The D&SSG is a recently established forum for senior managers and leaders, residing below directorial level. Membership is open to all staff in senior graded roles within libraries. The group's sponsor is **Diane Job** *(Birmingham).*

Directors Board discussions during 2019 included evaluating the value of establishing a forum for senior staff within member libraries. The vision was that such a group could meet part of the Collaboration's talent and leadership development agenda, while also providing an invaluable regional community of senior library practice and experiential exchange. While the SCOUNL Deputies groups partially meet this need on a national scale, no comparable regional community exists, and furthermore, some member libraries' staffing structures preclude members below institutional lead level being eligible for these groups.

As opinions on the value of such a regional group varied, a survey of eligible staff was conducted during summer 2019, by the Development Officer. This sought to gather options and establish the degree of interest in the group among senior library professionals. The results of this investigation (**Johnson, 2019**) resonated strongly with exploring the group's establishment and value further, with the greatest support focussing on creating a semi-autonomously operating group, guided and supported by the Directors Board, meeting several times a year.

However, the results indicated such a group needed to establish its own identify, purpose, and function in order to achieve a sustainable and valuable forum. To explore this practically, the Collaboration's Chair conveyed an inaugural meeting in November (27th November, University of Birmingham) with survey respondents and other suitable staff, which saw a consensus to take establish the group. The D&SSG will reconvene for its next meeting, in early 2020.

Marketing & Communications (MarComms)

The MarComms group comprises library professionals with a particular interest in the marketing, promotion and reputational enhancement of academic libraries. Membership is representational and largely self-selected by individuals within membership organisations. The group's sponsor is **Mark Toole** *(NTU) and the current chair is* **Stewart Sandilands** *(BCU).*

The first official meeting of the group took place in August at Birmingham City University. Prior to the meeting, the members were asked to complete a portfolio documenting their current roles, skills and areas of expertise. The intention is for the group organisers to use the member portfolios as a reference to help guide content of future sessions and to help keep track of any future developments in terms of experience and job roles. A group discussion followed which helped everyone in the group to establish shared work-related practices as well as differences in approaches.

Group members then went on to reveal best and worst examples of marketing and communications at their own institutions which lead to further lively discussions and further useful insights into working practices.

We hope to be able to hold meetings on a quarterly basis with planning ongoing for the second meeting of the group to take place in either December 2019 or January 2020. As well as proposing a shortlist of dates, the group organisers, along with the help of members, hope to generate a list of topics to cover. Processes such as file sharing and minute taking are also being refined as the group progresses.

Mercian Disability Forum (MDF)

*The MDF comprises library professionals working within member institutions with an interest in, or responsibility for, supporting disabled students. Membership is representational and largely self-selected by individuals within membership organisations. The group's sponsor is **Diane Job**, and the current chair is **Laura Waller** (Warwick).*

The MDF has had a busy year. In January, Beck Maguire (Nottingham) handed over to Laura Waller (Warwick) as new MDF chair. Initial discussions within the group, and the wider Collaboration considered new approaches to work more inclusively with the other Special Interest Groups.

After meeting with the Mercian Staff Development Group, it was agreed the MDF would support and contribute the current MDSG events plan, with an aim to provide a more inclusive approach to accessibility awareness across the Collaboration.

The MDF were represented at the 2019 Conference both as speakers and attendees. The group continues to offer meet regularly (four times within 2019) to provide support and share best practice across collaboration Libraries, which members report to be a key benefit of involvement.

Mercian Metadata Group (MMG)

*MMG group members have particular interests in around the creation and management of metadata. Membership is representational and largely self-selected by individuals within membership organisations. The group's sponsor is **Susan Ackermann** with the current organisers being **William Peaden** (Aston), **Richard Birley** (BCU) and **Ed Kirkland** (Warwick).*

The Mercian Metadata Group was established in March 2019 and has subsequently has run 2 events:

- The future of cataloguing held at Aston University:
  https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/future-cataloguing-investigated-world-caf%C3%A9-event

- Legacy metadata e-forum held on our webforum:
  https://mercianmetadatagroup.createaforum.com/

The first event was a great success and the outcomes of the conversations will form the basis for our plans in the coming year. In addition, this event, along with the similar CIGS and CIG events run in Scotland and London respectively, will form part of CILIP's Metadata Discovery Group plan for 2020. The legacy e-forum was somewhat of a success. Certain technical details need to be ironed out. In our meeting on 22nd Jan. 2020 we will discuss the merits of this kind of interaction. However, two actions arose from the meeting

1) Investigate the possibility of de-colonising the subject index

2) Better understand what metadata elements make our records '*fit for purpose*' including what '*purpose*' means.

As a result of the establishment of the group **Will Peaden** was invited by JISC to join a task and finish group looking at UK standards for metadata, giving the perspective of our members to this group. We also worked in collaboration with the **CLILP Cataloguing & Indexing Group (CIG)** and **UKCoR** to host an event on their behalf within the collaboration. The RDA orientation workshop ran 11th December 2019 and included speakers from the BL and global experts on the standard.

RDM Support Group (RDMSG)

*The RDMSG aims to provide a forum for local support and exchange of experiences within membership organisations relating to research data management practices. Membership is not representational but is largely self-selected by individuals within membership organisations with interests. The group's sponsor is **Simon Bevan** (Cranfield), and the current chair is **Gareth Cole** (Loughborough).*

The Mercian RDM Support Group (RDMSG) is the special interest group of the Mercian Collaboration, aiming to provide regional and local support and exchange of experiences within and for membership organisations. The main focus of the RDMSG in 2018 was to plan and deliver an event on professional development and the skills needed to support RDM in the sector. The Group's sponsor during 2019 was Simon Bevan.

The RDMSG held a well-attended event in April 2019 at the University of Birmingham which examined the skills needed to support RDM. This was a successful event with an external speaker, Eddy Verbaan, from Sheffield Hallam University. The event also included presentations from Liaison Librarians which helped to contextualise how RDM fits into the wider librarian skillsets.

2019 has also been a year of change for the RDMSG. We said goodbye to two of the co-ordination group members, **Patricia Herterich** (Birmingham), who left the region to join the DCC, and **Laurian Williamson** (Leicester). Thanks to both for their hard work and valuable contribution to the group and we wish them well in their current and future work. Losing two of the members has meant there has been a short hiatus in the work of the group, but we are progressing in the recruitment of additional members to the co-ordination group."

Staff Development Group (MSDG)

*The MSDG was the first SIG formed within the Collaboration and has a remit to organise an annual programme development and training events for library staff within member institutions. Additionally, it manages the Mercian Buddying Network, which aims to partner staff with more experienced contacts at other regional institutions. Membership is representational, with staff usually occupying a staff developmental lead role within their own organisation. The group's sponsor is **Chris Porter** (Newman), and the current chair is **Matt Cunningham** (Loughborough).*

The Mercian Staff Development Group (MSDG) is the longest established Collaboration SIG, and as a consequence has a mature programme of activity. Driven by a member representative committee, the MSDG has a remit to organise and deliver an annual staff development and training programme. Some events and workshops are targeted at staff within specialised professional niches, while others are intended for more general consumption, for example the All the Same, But Different library showcase visits.

The group chair for 2019 was **Matt Cunningham** (Loughborough), and their sponsor was **Christine Porter** (Newman). Thanks go to all members of the group for their continued drive in delivering an interesting and varied programme and especially to **Jane Mortimer** (De Montfort University) who continued her role as Admin Officer/Secretary and **Sarah Pittaway** (Worcester University) the Group Evaluation Officer.

The Group Developed its programme along similar lines to previous years with sessions aimed at different types of library staff, with 10 events[i] being organised in the academic year 2018-19, split into: learning exchanges/workshops and *All the Same but Different* library site visits (**Mercian, 2017b**):

- All the Same, But Different: 11th July 2018   (Birmingham City University)

- Managing Student Behaviour: 23rd November 2018   (University of Worcester)

- All the Same, But Different: 5th December 2018   (University of Wolverhampton)

- Digital Literacy: 18th January 2019   (Coventry University)

- Negotiating & Positive Influencing Skills: 7th February 2019   (Aston University)

- Access to Resources: 12th February 2019   (De Montfort University)

- All the Same, But Different: 21st February 2019   (Nottingham Trent University)

- What do Final Year Students Need to Know?: 27th March 2019   (Aston University)

- All the Same, But Different: 15th May 2019   (University of Northampton)

- The Learner Journey: 22nd May 2019   (University of Derby)

Of particular note this year, was the negotiating and positive influencing session by Terry Gillen – a consultant hired to deliver the session for the day. Being able to hire external trainers is an invaluable resource for the group and it is pleasing to note we had lots of positive feedback about the event from attendees (**Brown, 2019**). Details on all past MSDG, and other SIG events, can be found online.

Where any staff member at one of the Collaboration's libraries has an idea about an event they would like to be run, they are encouraged to talk to their institutional contact for the MSDG who can bring it to the Group for discussion when planning the programme for the following year.

Event Evaluation Summary: Academic Session 2018-2019

> '*I think this was one of the best courses (if not the best) I have ever been on'* (**Negotiating and Influencing event delegate comment**)
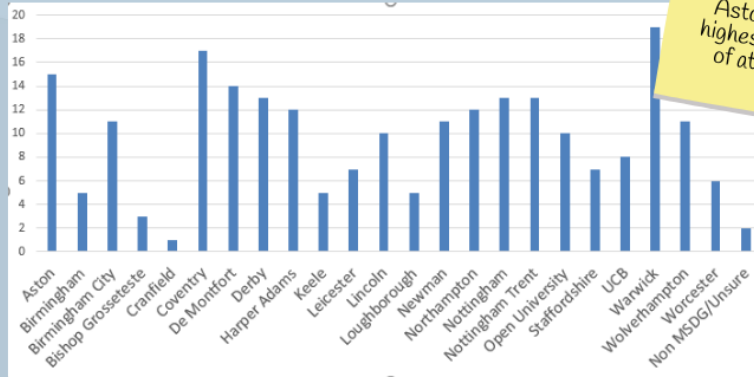
Evaluation was taken after each of the events using a standard template giving delegates the opportunity to feedback how events met their expectations. An impact questionnaire was sent towards the end of the academic year giving delegates a chance to reflect on how attending an event influenced their working practices and professional networks. The following diagrams give an overview on delegates (**Figure 7**) and their feedback (**Figure 8**).
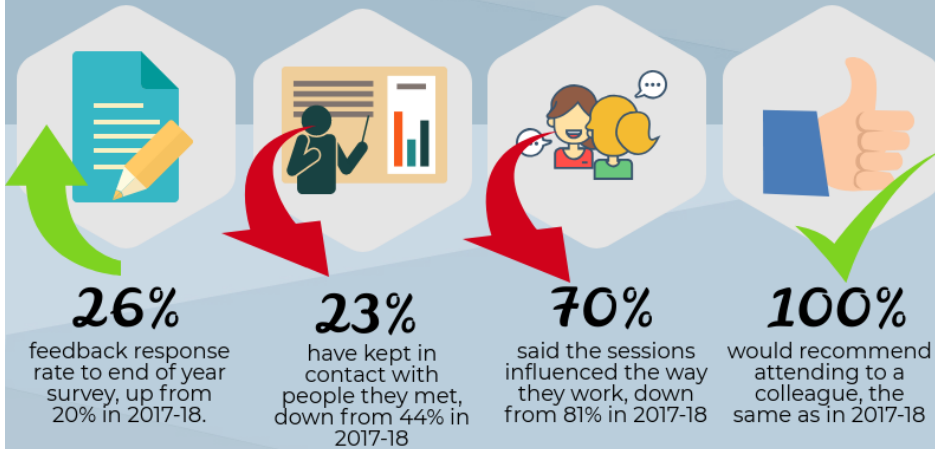
Figure 7: MSDG Attendance at Events 2018/19

What are the benefits of Mercian events?

In 2018-19, we ran 10 events, with 230 attendees:

6 Learning Exchanges
- Managing student behaviour
- Digital literacy
- Positive influencing skills
- Access to resources
- Learner journeys
- What do yr 3 students need to know?

4 All the Same But Different visits
- BCU
- Wolverhampton
- NTU
- Northampton

You said:

70% of you said that attending an event has influenced the way you work

99% of you ranked the event you attended as excellent or good

23% of you have kept in touch with people you met

100% of you would recommend Mercian events to a colleague

> It gave me confidence that I was doing the right things

> All these events are fascinating and what I learn often does influence the way I work

> I'm a big fan of the Mercian events - both the content and the way they run on the day. I'd love to see more running more often.

> [The presenters'] passion and enthusiasm really shone through and was inspiring. I left with plenty of ideas and optimism!

powered by
PIKTOCHART

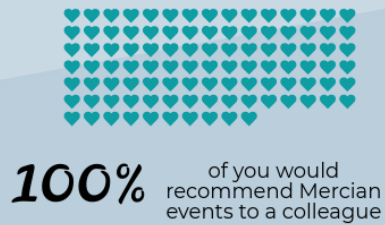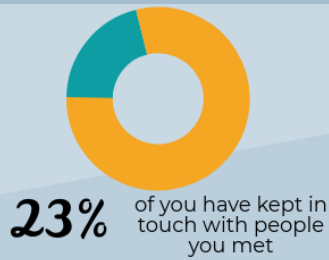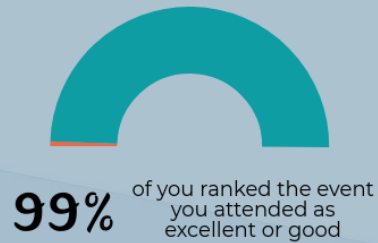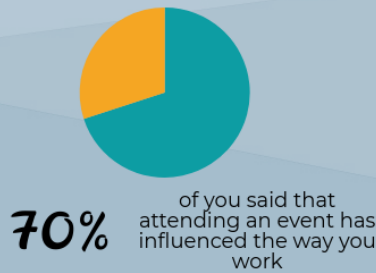*Figure 8: MSDG Delegate Feedback 2018/19*

Buddying Scheme

The buddying scheme remains a useful tool in a manager's arsenal – having willing mentors within the region is of undoubted help to both new staff and gives experienced staff an extra string when it comes to career development. Introduced in September 2017, this scheme is a way for new or relatively new library staff to find an experienced and informed colleague at one of the other member institutions (**Mortimer & Johnson, 2019**). Participants, or *buddies*, are partnered up for a six-month period of peer-to-peer support. Unlike mentoring, which comes with far more formal arrangements for monitoring and reporting, buddying is designed to be light-touch, flexible and mutually beneficial for all participants. There are no formal expectations on how often or where buddies will meet during their partnering period, and they're free to choose whether an in-person, online or over the phone meeting scheme works best for them. The feedback to date has been largely positive with all respondents indicating they would recommend the scheme and found participation rewarding, insightful and good for their self-confidence. Suggested improvements have been discussed by the MSDG committee and considered in the scheme's ongoing operation.

Membership Highlights

Last year we featured reports from nine of our member libraries (**Mercian, 2020**), which were warmly received and, in some cases, formed the basis of conference contributions. Once again, this year we asked all of our members to submit brief reports on activities, events and challenges faced during 2019. In this way we hope to provide a thumbnail sketch of the diversity and capability in play across the Mercian Collaboration region's academic libraries, while also highlighting nodes of expertise and practice. Submission of a report was not a membership requirement, and as such the following vignettes represent only a taste of the full spectrum of regional activities. Readers are advised to approach the appropriate Collaboration Director to learn more.

Aston University

Open Access Activities at Aston University

The Open Access and Research Data Management team at Aston University have been working on a range of improvements to our repositories in 2019. Much of the work has been centred on data quality and system improvements as part of a larger effort to make our Eprints publications and data repositories, and their contents, more discoverable, visible and usable to the public. Completed work includes: overall metadata improvements, weeding orphan records, de-duplicating, accessibility improvements, overall redesign, implementing an end user licence agreement, improved indexing by Google Scholar and adding a CORE plugin.

Related to this work was a major system improvement to our Current Research Information System (**Elsevier's Pure**) and its frontend portal Aston Research Explorer. Both Pure and the frontend portal had been hosted locally at Aston since they were implemented in 2013, but over time it became apparent that local server speed and technical support were become problematic. We completed the move to cloud hosted at the end of September and launched our new look portal at the same time. The response from academic and support staff has been unanimously positive.

Leigh Stork, Open Access and Research Repositories Specialist, has presented on the repository work to an international audience at Open Repositories 2019 in Hamburg in June as well as at the UKCoRR member's day in London in September. Leigh and **Rich Gough** (Research Knowledge Exchange) presented on the move from local to cloud hosted at the Pure International Conference 2019 in Prague in October.

Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln

2018/19 at Bishop Grosseteste University Library was unusually busy and dominated by two major projects: one to reclassify the Library collections and implement RFID, the other to introduce **Talis Aspire reading list** software across the University. A high amount of staff turnover in semester 1 added unexpected pressure to the mix.

Planning for the reclassification/RFID project began in earnest in autumn 2018 and was at its peak the following spring. It culminated in a nine-week period of intense activity in summer 2019, during which time 107,745 resources were reclassified, from Bliss Classification to Dewey Decimal Classification, 135,157 were fitted with an RFID tag, and all security and self-service equipment was replaced. Ultimately the project was completed on time and under-budget.

Figure 9:Image credit: Bishop Grosseteste University

The (2-year) project to introduce Talis Aspire across the University had begun in early summer 2018. Work continued throughout the academic year, with subject librarians compiling lists whilst closely consulting with academics over list structure and importance tags.   The project also resulted in a set of guidelines for reading list creation and review, introduced programme by programme as lists are transferred. All milestones have so far been met and the project is on target for completion by September 2020.

Effective communication and collaboration played a huge part in the success of the above projects. Not only did the library teamwork their socks off but library users were incredibly patient and understanding throughout. We also received invaluable support from academic colleagues and colleagues in the IT Services and Estates teams, and from key external partners such as OCLC, The Tagging Team, 2CQR and Talis, all of whom were exceptionally professional and generous with their time.

Cranfield University

Another busy year at Cranfield - no change there then!

Four significant projects have been undertaken this year, all with a view to enhancing the student experience. Following a major review of our web/intranet presence we have succeeded in moving all content to a single platform using the Springshare Content Management System. We have simultaneously introduced libanswers to sit alongside our libcal room booking software, also from Springshare. We've also implemented OpenAthens authentication (with many positive comments from students) and, following a procurement process, we are increasing the number of resource lists on our recently implemented Talis Aspire Reading List Management System.

After the successful development of the 'Impact Game' last year (a different approach to research support and available for purchase! https://cord.cranfield.ac.uk/collections/The_Impact_Game/4080161), we've developed a new game: 'Infinite Possibilities – the Library advocacy game' soon to be at an online store near you! On a wider University front, in March 2018 Cranfield was chosen as the lead Higher Education provider for a new undergraduate University in Milton Keynes. Staff from the Library have been involved not only in relation to designing the new Library space but also in developing and contributing to a piece of work on Innovative Education and the development and delivery of course curricula. MK:U is due to open its doors 2023.

Nottingham Trent University

The NTU library service continues to engage in a wide range of activities across the University.

At the beginning of the Academic Year, the library service took on the responsibility for the stewardship of general study spaces across the University. In a phased programme, the initial focus was on general study spaces at the City campus to meet the challenge of rising numbers of students when there is already insufficient capacity.

During the year existing general study spaces, including the IT rooms, were remodelled to form a "network" of coherent and co-ordinated study spaces and to establish the associated expectation of library-type levels of service for students using those areas. The programme also included trials of real-time monitoring of occupation using thermal sensors. Student feedback has been good and additional study rooms are coming on stream in the new Academic Year

The library's proposals for a Research Data Management service for research postgraduate students were agreed by the relevant University Research committees in the late spring. This is a significant step in improving the management and sharing of research data at the University and came into effect in autumn 2019. It includes commitments that all research postgraduates will produce a Data Management Plan for any project that generates research data, or involves the use of third-party research data, and data should be deposited in an appropriate repository prior to the thesis being submitted for examination.

Figure 10:Image credit: Nottingham Trent University

A full University wide service for **PebblePad ePortfolio software** was launched in September 2018 in a project led by the library following the successful large-scale trial in the previous academic year. The new service was implemented smoothly with the only noteworthy issues arising around summative assessment which had not featured in the earlier trial. Usage was high with over 5,000 active student users.

The library led a trial to increase the support available for students who are resitting, resubmitting or repeating in August or have deferments: it covers examinations and coursework. There was an increase in engagement by students of 60% compared to the previous year and analysis shows a correlation between engaging with the service and higher rates of progression.
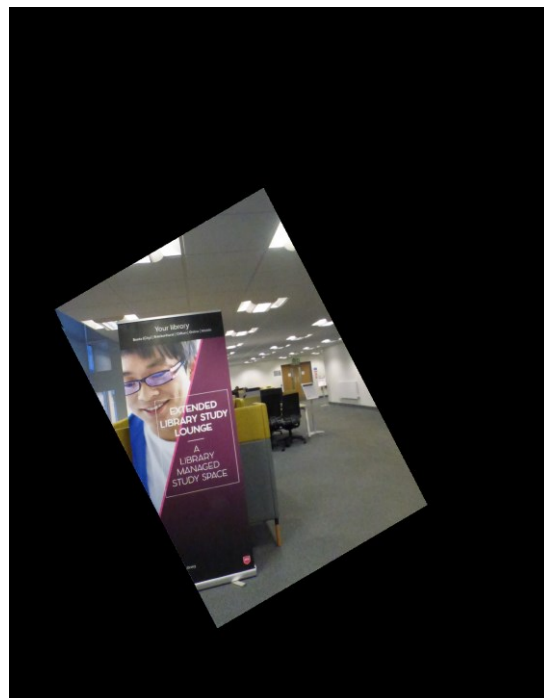

Figure 11: Image credit, Nottingham Trent University

Staffordshire University

There have been a number of developments at Staffordshire University Library in 2019, among them are:

- Introduction of a 'Wellbeing' collection in the library;

- Removal of charges for document delivery;

- Integration of Keylinks reading list software with CLA's digital content store;

- Subscribing to SensusAccess.

Figure 12: Romy Cheeseman, Honorary Curator for the Victoria Theatre Archive

 The team have also facilitated some community events including a very successful Sigma event in July (http://www.sigma-network.ac.uk/) attended by maths skills supporters from HE across the UK, and a 'Teachmeet' - "A systematic approach to supporting postgraduate research students".

Relating to our special collections, The New Vic Theatre has been awarded a national grant to develop its Victoria Theatre Archive (VTA). It documents the early development of this creative organisation and includes materials of artistic, social and historical significance.

Inspired by the visionary theatre-maker Stephen Joseph and led for 36 years by the late director Peter Cheeseman CBE, the Vic Theatre developed an international reputation for creating documentary dramas based on local subjects. Early works included *The Jolly Potters*, about the struggle for workers' rights in the pottery industry; *The Knotty*, about the North Staffordshire Railway; and *Fight for Shelton Bar!* which highlighted the campaign to save the local steelworks.

The Vic Theatre moved from an old cinema building in Hartshill in 1986, when local people fundraised to build a new theatre for the community – and the New Vic became the first purpose-built theatre-in-the-round in Europe. It is now a key part of the cultural life of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Finally, the Library Team also undertook a large-scale reorganisation of the Library at short notice just before Christmas to allow for essential building works – A brilliant team effort resulted in completion of the moves in record time!

University of Birmingham

At Birmingham, a consistent level of progress has been seen with an increase of 1.12% in the NSS from last year and 7% over the previous two survey periods.

As the year neared a close, the Main Library was awarded the 2019 SCONUL Award for library design and the building and its services were commended for their transformational vision and innovative approach. Just one example: the facilities available in the new build have enabled a collaborative relationship with Student Services leading to the introduction of a virtual and physical area offering a range of resources in support of wellbeing and a related development that includes a team of trained NHS professionals who offer wellbeing support from the Main Library lounge. Looking to the future, a new library-managed Teaching and Learning Building will open soon, providing:

- A 500 seater lecture theatre

- A 250 seater interactive lecture theatre

- 10 seminar rooms for 30 students at a time

- Learning spaces for up to 1,000 students

- A café

As well as this new build, the library continued its programme of Learning Spaces refurbishment, which resulted this year in 62 spaces being upgraded and improved. Other significant achievements included the negotiation of over 1000 license agreements to support activity based in the Dubai campus, and in Special Collections a substantial research grant has been secured to support work on the Save the Children Collection.

We are closely monitoring the development of Plan S and contributed to the consultation on its implementation guidance at the end of 2019. We continue to contribute to consultation around the new UKRI Open Access policy and are working with JISC as they negotiate 'transitionary deals' with publishers.

University of Keele

Focus on things green at Keele…

The University has an ambitious sustainability agenda, including our SEND (**Smart Energy Network Demonstrator**) project, an at scale demonstrator facility for smart energy research and development across the Campus.

As part of this agenda, the Library Green Team are working to support the University's aim to '*promote environmental sustainability in all that we do*'. In 2018/9, we led a number of initiatives related to sustainability, including participating in the **Fitness Tracker Challenge**, promoting health and wellbeing, where 19 staff competed with other departments to achieve the most steps over a two-week period; collecting pumpkins after Halloween and adding them to their Food Waste collection. We also ran an '*in lieu of Christmas cards*' charity appeal for Library staff, which raised £100 for the Donna Louise Hospice. The Team were presented with the **Keele Root and Branch Sustainability Benchmark Award** in March 2019.

We will be building on this work during the current year, by launching some new recycling initiatives including providing a glasses recycling collection point at the Campus Library plus creating crisp and snack packet recycling points at both libraries. We are also planning to hold a food bank collection point in the lead up to Christmas and a litter picking event in spring 2020, as well as contributing to wider Keele sustainability programmes such as Fairtrade Fortnight and Green Week 2020.

University of Northampton

We've now been at the new Waterside Campus for over a year and memories of the previous libraries are fast fading. The IT problems that bedevilled the Learning Hub in its first few months have now eased, but the NSS (National Student Survey) took a hit from them and from the disruption caused by moving the final years. This was disappointing, but perhaps inevitable and we've been working hard with students to iron out any wrinkles in the building and service. The NSS was also interesting for what it didn't contain – there were only seven comments on the disappearance of fixed PCs from open areas as we moved to BYOD.

In common with many colleagues, we faced cuts this year to both pay and non-pay budgets. We have managed to cope with these without significantly reducing services, but that is helped immensely by being free of sole responsibility for our shared building.   Librarians and Learning Developers have successfully rolled out our

Integrated Learning sessions to all first and second year undergraduates while maintaining the existing provision to final year and postgraduate students. These ensure that all students receive targeted and subject specific interventions around information and academic skills within their courses. The impact of our interventions was tested by work done by our Learning Development team who showed an increase of 2 sub-grade points for students who sought support. We have also increased our work with Schools engagement including a well-received consultation package for primary schools that complements the Schools Library Service.

A full review of our VLE resulted in our staying with Blackboard and we finally got PURE installed in the Spring and, in the last weeks of the year, it has been joined by Arkivum. These latter systems have cemented our role in the university's preparations for the REF. Now for the LMS …..

University of Nottingham

2019 saw the implementation of new library management system, **Alma**, as part of University of Nottingham Libraries' two-year Integrated **Scholarly Information (ISI) project**. The objectives of the ISI project being to deliver a personalised, reliable student learning experience, to support self-directed learning, integrated online resources and a seamless user journey between services and applications. With several strands to the project, the implementation of Alma was phase one of strand one. This provided a timely platform for the department's staff engagement initiatives over the past twelve months.

A strategic decision was taken to make this large-scale, cross-departmental project a focus of a wider staff engagement action plan: bringing staff together and reducing silo working. This led to an unprecedented level of meaningful involvement for staff at all levels across the department. Activity included a comprehensive communications plan; appointment of a Business Change manager; an all-staff launch event; roadshows; drop-in sessions; newsletters; blogs and email updates; and a SharePoint site to provide a single point of information.

Many staff across the department were involved in everything from testing and user experience, to process mapping. A network of staff Change Champions was established, to gather feedback and provide an '*ear to the ground*' for the project team. And within libraries there were Functional Leads as well as Expert Users, who provided a programme of tailored training, and were also on hand to answer any pressing questions from colleagues.

At the ISI launch event, all staff were invited to make a '*pledge to the project*', by inscribing the contribution they planned to make on a large Lego-style brick. As well as providing a fun visual for the project, this represented how

Figure 13: Image credit - University of Nottingham

all members of staff had a stake in the project in order to see it through to success.

University of Warwick

Find your Research Superpower: Student videos at Warwick

In 2018 we launched a triptych of information support videos created by students for students, to use at key points in their research journey. During the project evaluation, our student partners commented on how useful they found it to listen to the ways their peers approached research and how varied their methods were, even within the same department. They suggested creating a follow-up video series, which captured the authentic variety of student approaches to essay research.

Figure 14:Image credit: University of Warwick

The four undergraduate humanities students created four videos and a trailer which embodied the diversity of student approaches to essay-based research, rather than the ideal way we as librarians hope that students research. During an initial two-hour workshop, the students identified broad caricatures which they felt best summarised their research approach and developed tips and advice based on their own experiences. They then filmed and edited the videos themselves, and created an additional superhero-themed trailer.

- Find your Research Superpower – Trailer
- Find your Research Superpower – The Early Bird
- Find your Research Superpower – Mr My Argument is Better than Yours
- Find your Research Superpower – Reads Absolutely Everything Woman
- Find your Research Superpower – Last Minute Man

The videos have been promoted in induction sessions, lectures and seminars in term 1 and shared across social media both internally and by other libraries. Overall the series has had over 700 views since they were made public in October 2019, alongside very positive feedback from both students and staff. Students in particular have commented on how honest the videos feel and how the range of styles captures the reality of many students' experiences of doing research.

To see these and other University of Warwick Library videos go to https://www.youtube.com/user/uowLibrary

Human Library Events

I bet your library has print books and e-books …but what about 'human' books?

Early in the academic year a student approached us with the request to host a Human Library® event in our PG Hub, one of our Library spaces dedicate to postgraduate students. He had previously taken part in a university Human Library® abroad and was keen to bring the concept to Warwick.

The Human Library® is an organisation based in Denmark that hosts events in over 80 countries worldwide, with an event coordinator based in the UK who supports events in this country. The concept of the Human Library® creates a safe space for dialogue where topics are discussed openly between Human Books and their readers. Each 'reading' (conversation) lasts approximately 20 minutes. This usually comprises the book telling their 'story' and the reader asking questions.

We weren't sure what to expect from our first event but over the 2-hour period our 10 books were read over 40 times! We had a variety of book titles covering different topics such as mental health, physical health, sexuality, religion, and ethnicity. Some books covered more than one topic.

Figure 15: Image credit: University of Warwick

The event was a positive experience for all involved and we got excellent feedback from books and readers. Many 'Readers' who attended the event borrowed multiple 'Human Books' as they were so enthused by their conversations. We believe the success of the event comes from the ability to have open and honest conversations with people in a safe environment where they can engage in the kinds of questions you may not feel comfortable asking and answering in other contexts.

> **Feedback from Readers**: "…thought provoking…" , "What an amazing experience…", "Please have more"

> **Feedback from Books**: "…I really hope you put it on again soon", "I was actually considering temporary withdrawal prior to the event. I was so inspired I have decided to continue with my studies"

We plan to run our next Human Library session in March 2020. For more information go to https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/pghub.

University of Wolverhampton

It's been another highly productive (albeit challenging) year at University of Wolverhampton Library. We welcomed Jo-Anne Watts as our new head of department; continued to roll out the Digital Library Platforms project (DLP); implemented new policies and processes; signed up to the Jisc Transnational Education Licensing Service; revamped our Skills offer; presented at the ARC2019 research conference; instigated a series of staff development projects and lay the foundations for the Harrison Library Refurbishment project – to name just a *few* activities.

All Systems Go

We began the year by steaming into phase 2 of the DLP project, our £1.65 million investment in innovative technologies. Integration and development of the new library management systems (Primo and Alma) has been ongoing and we've continued to improve service by activating online payments and direct to site delivery of content, speeding up the time it takes for new content to reach the shelves.

Access to content has been enhanced with the new Reading List Management system, *Leganto*. The system has been well received by academics, who can now better manage their lists, and students, who can easily access resources with a click of a button from their Canvas module. Advantages for the library which we look to realise in the years ahead include improved management of resources enabling better buying processes so we can purchase additional stock when necessary.

Since launching in Feb, our new e-journal browsing software, *BrowZine*, has been a great success, with around 63,000 full text downloads this year. In May, we went live with a new Current Research Information System, *Elements*, making it much easier for researchers to share their activity within the community and manage their REF submissions.

Figure 16: Judging the Wayfinding Project

Harrison Reimagined

Another major undertaking this year has been the UX Project, which sought to explore the experiences of library users in the context of the impending Harrison Library Refurbishment. (An overview of the project, 'Collaboration through UX Design' was presented at the Mercian Conference in September.)

A number of research methods were employed over a 4-month period, such as guerrilla interviews, touchstone tours, cognitive mapping and card sorting to observe behaviours, and open dialogues about user needs, experiences and opinions of the library. Ideas generated from the data were tested in the form of prototypes and pilots, such as a Reading Garden and Silent Escape room. An Artist in Residence scheme and Wayfinding project engaged students in longer-term activities to produce artwork and designs responding to the space. The UX methodology will hopefully mark the way for a new approach to student engagement and enhancing student experience.   Recommendations from the UX project, as well as ongoing user engagement work will inform plans for the refurb taking place in 2020 – so watch this space.
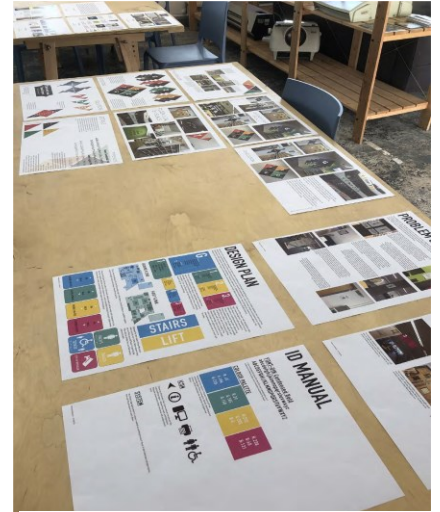

Figure 17: Wolverhampton's Reading Room Prototype

University of Worcester

The big event this year has been the tender and implementation of a new LMS, with a move from Capita products to SirsyDynix. Ensuring that the needs of both County and University customers were fully met proved challenging in many ways but we successfully went live in July following a huge amount of excellent and collaborative work from teams across both partners.

We've been seeking to support the University's priorities around recruitment and retention, including workstreams around helping students transitioning from BTEC or HNDs. One small but interesting piece of work was the postcard designed for Open Day attendees, based on their interests and feedback. Exploring what they actually want to know and are interested in was an eye-opener. For instance, few had thought about the range of resources provided though agreed it was important when it was brought to their attention.

Figure 18: Image credit: University of Worcester

This work was led by our student engagement coordinators, whose extensive activity has brought a new dimension to service development and have introduced what is now a mature impact framework that we use with all relevant library projects.

We rolled out a new teaching menu based on extensive learner journey research, and also have a self-audit tool for course teams to assess how and where embedded information literacy occurs in their courses. Use of both is slowly growing – effective dissemination of new initiatives to busy academics remains challenging. Support for the REF is also ramping up, and we're proactively looking for, and finding, outputs that have not been put into the institutional repository. We continue to lead and support the transition to full Electronic Management of Assessment across the university and are developing more video and online guides for both students and staff.
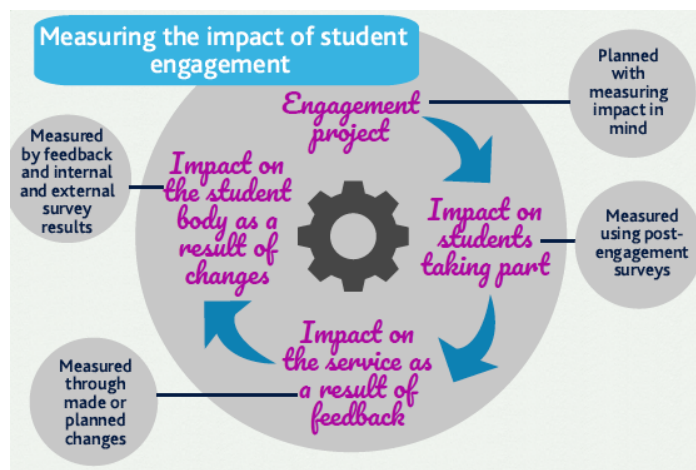

Figure 19: Image credit: University of Worcester

Current challenges include meeting the new accessibility regulations, supporting and resourcing new course models including apprenticeships, and responding to Worcestershire County Council's new strategy for their library service, which refers extensively to the **DCMS Libraries Taskforce** ambitions. Balancing County priorities and ambitions with the need to protect our customer needs whilst also recognising opportunities for the University to extend its outreach, remain at the heart of what we do. It has also opened a really interesting and previously unexplored research area on leadership roles in joint-use libraries, preliminary thoughts on which were presented at the 2019 Mercian conference.

Looking Ahead

As I write this, the media is full of reflections on a decade passed and a new decade to come – or, at least, the end of the 2010s and the start of the 2020s.

As universities, we continue to live in interesting times. The next decade sees the UK negotiating a new place in the world, outside the EU, with unresolved issues around student funding and the place of higher education in national priorities, an increasing regime of accountability and a self-confident government looking for ways to make its mark.

In the current confused and troubled times, it is good to have friends and colleagues to encourage and challenge one another as we work through issues that affect us all - and the Mercian Collaboration stands out as a beacon of good practice in positive engagement and working together. As we face the 2020s it is increasingly important that we continue to hold firm to that sense of shared service and common purpose that drives us all to do what we do.

Chris Porter
Vice Chair (2019-2021), Director of Library & Learning Services, Newman University, Birmingham

Whether we are large or small, with an international reach or a regional focus, leading elite research or transforming local lives and communities, we are – in our own words – All the Same but Different.

We all have challenges to meet, but by working together and supporting one another – whether in the fields of diversity, wellbeing, responding to regulators or transforming the landscape for information provision – we push forward on our collective mission to educate, develop and support.

On behalf of the Mercian Collaboration Steering Group, I look forward to another year working with all you creative, ambitious and dedicated staff, right across the region, as we develop our Collaboration together.

Let's get Collaboration done!

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The Mercian Collaboration is a regional library network based in the UK Midlands. Originally founded as the Midlands Academic Library Group in 2014, it currently comprises 23 academic libraries.

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Contributor Acknowledgements

Editor-in-Chief: Dr Gaz J Johnson, Mercian Collaboration Development Officer.

With thanks to all contributors, including: Andy Dodds, Ant Brewerton, Chris Porter, Chris Powis, Claire Brown, Elisabeth Jackson, Emma J Sansby, Emma Walton, Gareth Cole, Heather Whitehouse, Judith Keene, Mark Toole, Matt Cunningham, Paul Reynolds, Pauls Mahoney, Sarah Pittaway, Simon Bevan, Stewart Sandilands, Susan Ackermann, Tania Rowlett, William Peaden

Endnotes

i Technically the event 11th July 2018 was in the previous reporting cycle, but as it is included in the infographic, it is also included in the events list for consistency.