



The Mercian Conference 2017: Delegate Regionality, Representation and Session Preference Analysis

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Introduction

This document draws on information captured concerning the delegates attending the Mercian Collaboration 2017 conference, held at De Montfort University's conference centre (The Venue), 12th September 2017. Including key speaker and organising committee, 98 delegates attended the conference¹, closely matching the 100 delegate places nominally catered for within the Mercian Conference Group's plans.

The document is designed to inform the Steering Group, and as a result the Directors, as to the outcome of the Mercian Conference 2017 in terms of delegate recruitment and their interest in the topics on offer. It is also intended to provide additional clarity and context for the Mercian Conference Group in their post-event 2017 evaluation, and pre-event planning for the 2018 conference².

This version prepared for Mercian Directors meeting, Nov 2017

Executive Summary

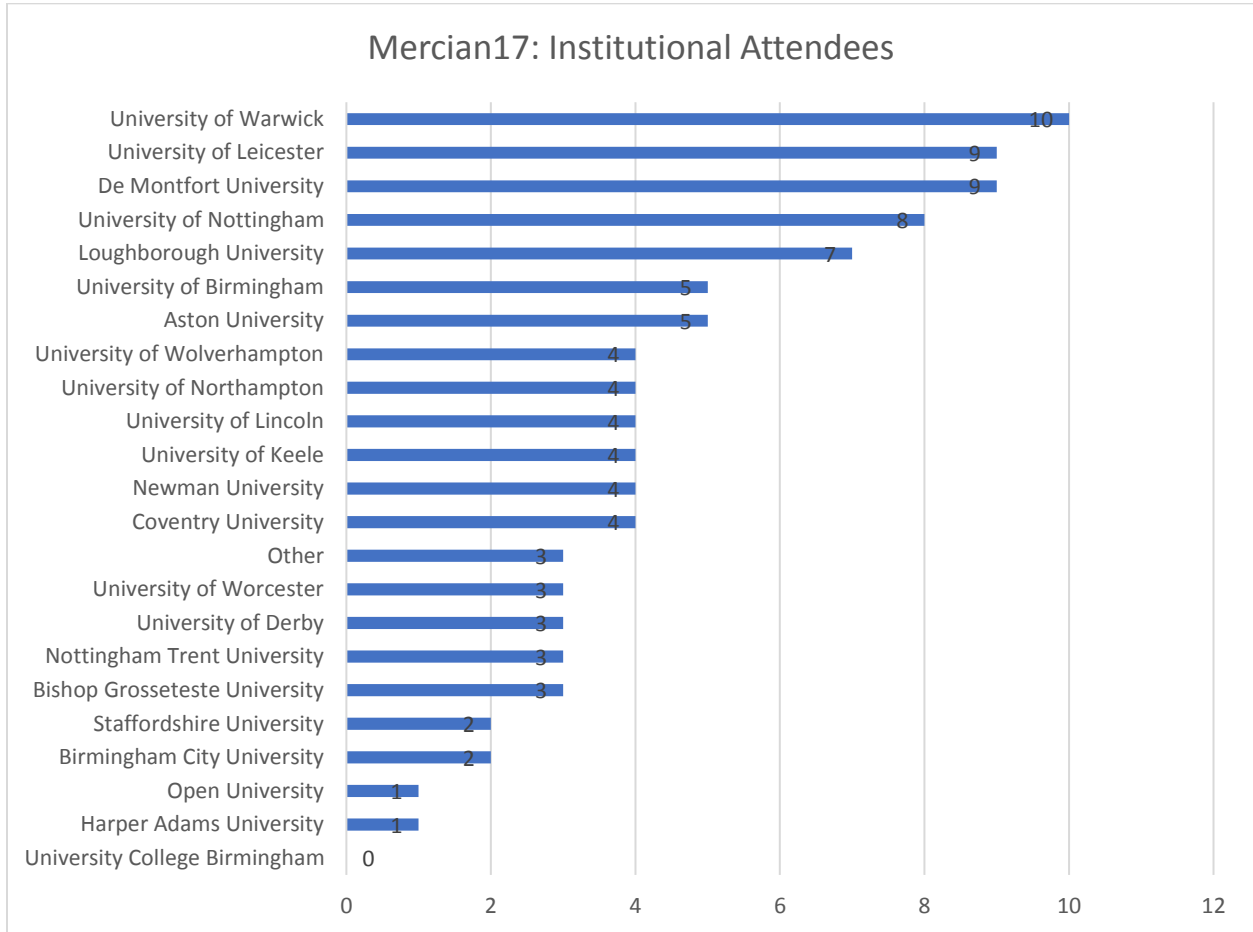
- 98 delegates drawn from 21 Mercian member institutions, plus the keynote speaker, attended
- The more venue local and/or larger institutions sent the most delegates
- 9% more delegates were drawn from the East than the West-Midlands
- 24% of delegates were junior/library assistant level
- The highest pre-booked breakout session saw 37 delegates, while the lowest saw 6
- Three sessions' pre-bookings fell below the statistical norm for the conference
- Recommendations for the Steering Group and Conference Group are included

¹ No clear critical success factors were defined for the Mercian 2017 conference, beyond a qualitative expectation that a 'well attended and regarded event' was held. Hence, no critique against pre-established expectations of the delegate demography can be made in this paper.

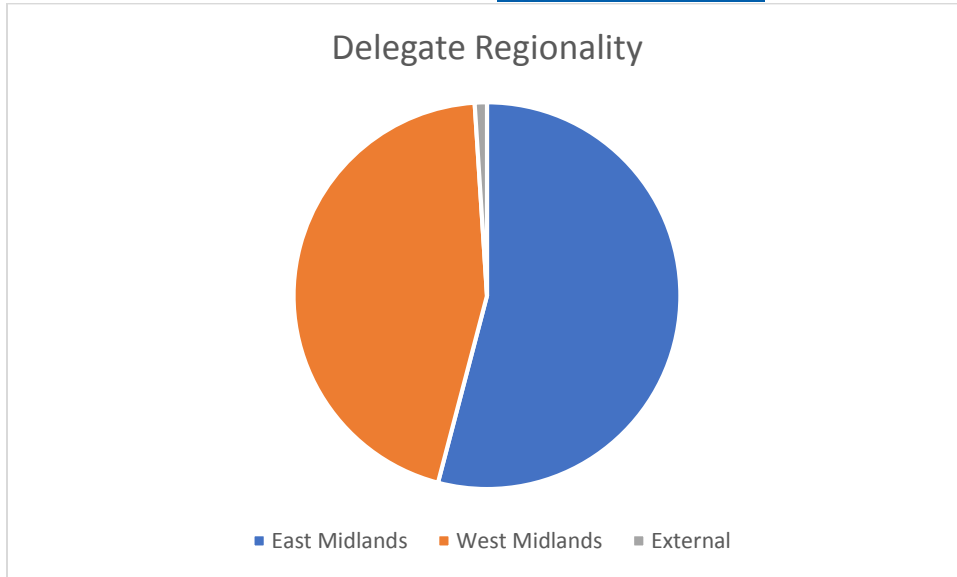
² See also Walton, E., 2017. *Evaluation Report: Mercian Collaboration Conference 2017 'In Libraries We Trust'*. Loughborough: Mercian Collaboration.

Institutional Representation

Twenty one out of the twenty-two extant Mercian Collaboration member institutions were represented by conference delegates, with unsurprisingly the larger and more local institutions being among the best represented. These numbers include the organising committee.



With the event being held in Leicester, there was an underlying expectation that delegates from the East-Midlands would be more strongly represented at the event. This perception was justified, with a 9% greater representation by delegates from the East, and only one West-Midland institutions declining to send delegates.



This suggests that considering a West-Midlands venue for 2018 to facilitate a greater proportion of delegates from the member organisations³ to the west, could be an important planning concern for the next event.

Attendee Demographics

One of the strongly articulated desires of the Mercian Directors, was that the conference attracted delegates from all staff seniority strata⁴, and in particular those at the more junior library assistant (and equivalent) grades. However, as efforts were made to conceal delegates’ rank and seniority to facilitate a freer exchange of experience, and to avoid elements of siloing, precise data as to delegates seniority was not gathered. However, it is possible to extrapolate from job titles submitted alongside bookings, an approximate evaluation of seniority⁵.

To this end, delegates were classified as coming from the following seniority demographics.

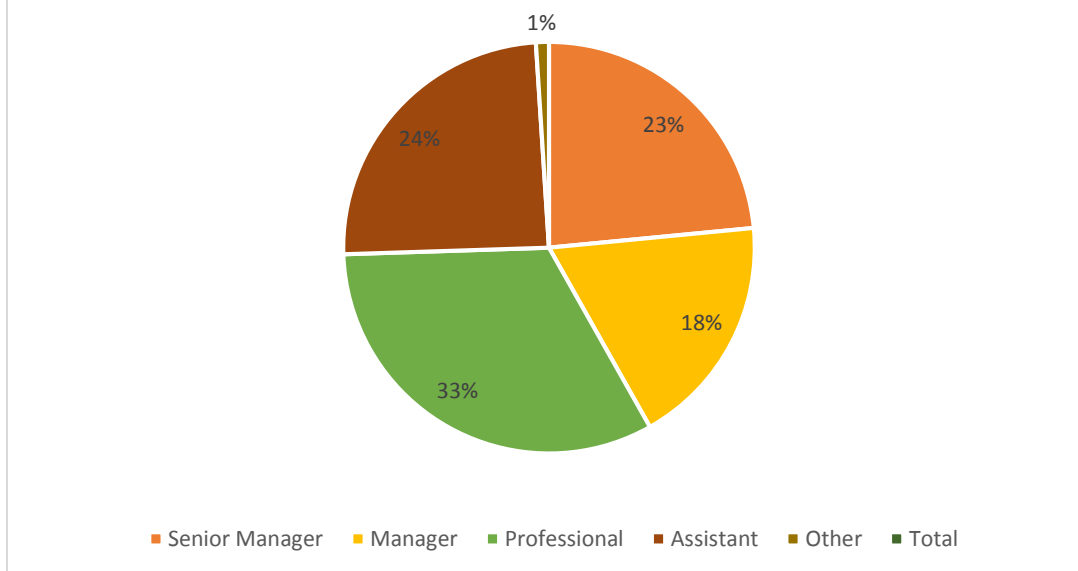
Classification	Seniority	Representatives	Proportion
Senior Manager	E.g. Director, sub-director	23	23%
Manager	E.g. Mid-level manager	18	18%
Professional	E.g. assistant librarian	32	33%
Assistant	E.g. library assistant (junior) staff member	24	24%
Other	Non-library staffer	1	1%

³ The Mercian Collaboration currently comprises 12 West-Midlands, to 10 East-Midlands institutional members, which underlies the importance of, where practical, geographically favouring these for the subsequent conference’s location.

⁴ In some regards, this might be considered a CSF against which to judge the events success. If so, indications here are that it was met.

⁵ Where rank was unclear, institutional websites were consulted for clarification.

Mercian17: Attendance Demographics



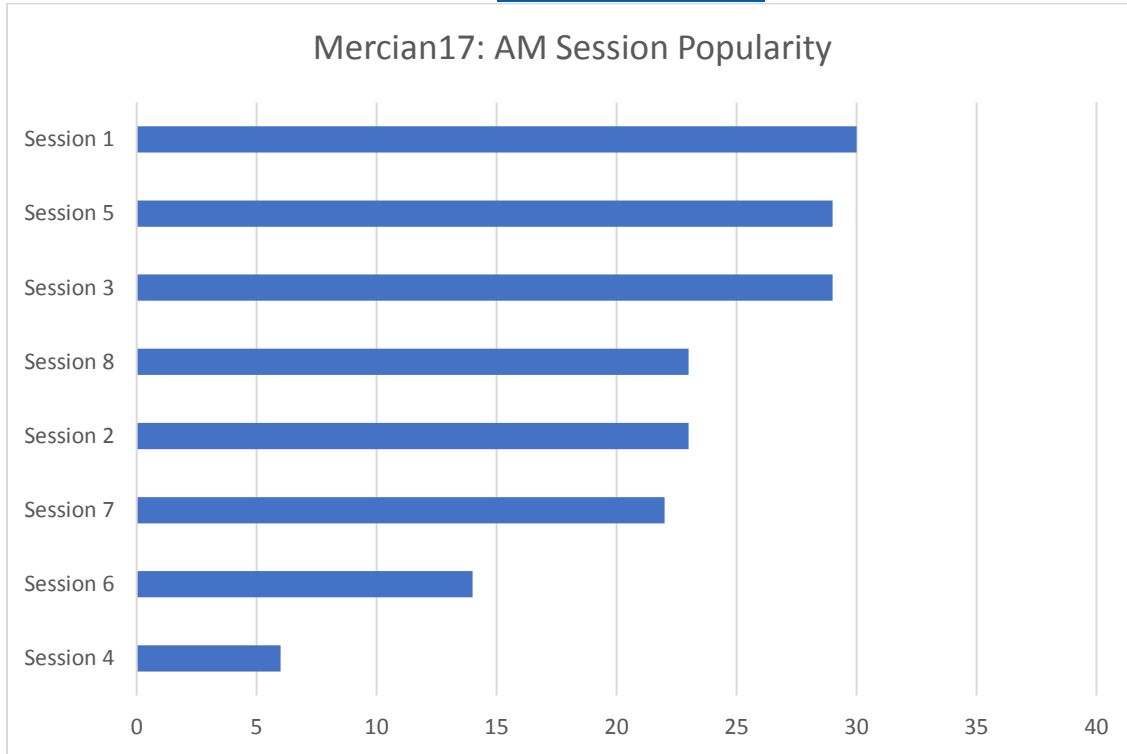
With almost a quarter of all delegates coming from the junior grades, the conference clearly was attractive in terms of content, venue and organisation to these kinds of staff; and perhaps equally importantly, perceived as a valuable excursion by their managers. While only a smattering of Mercian Directors were present⁶, it was notable that their deputies (and equivalents) were well represented too. Unsurprisingly, most delegates were drawn from the middle manager and professional librarian strata, who make up a sizable proportion of all library service staff. Arguably, these two classifications could be merged, although here are clear semantic differences between their roles and activities to necessitate their granular isolation in this appraisal.

How these delegate proportions compare with the demographics of staff within Mercian Member organisations, is a broader, and more complex, question for perhaps later consideration or reflection. Nevertheless, were definitive KPIs or CSF desirable, such an exploration might be necessary for future evaluative purposes.

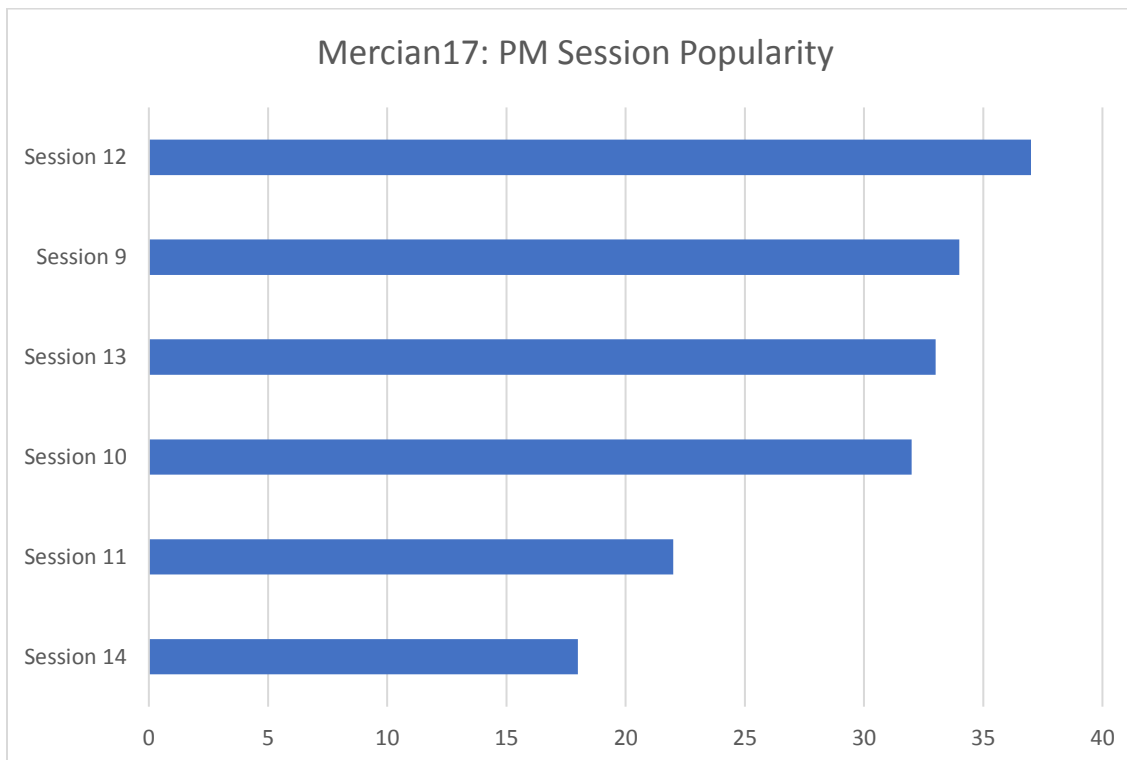
Session Popularity

As the morning breakout sessions offered a choice from two sets of four options, and the afternoon a choice from two sets of three options, it is not possible to directly compare delegate preference. Nevertheless, for the morning and afternoon respectively, the two sessions demonstrating the highest delegate preference were *(George et al) You only get what you give: a new radical approach to promoting trust at University of Worcester Library Services* and *(Savage) Understanding and responding to student reading strategy behaviours, practices and needs*. See the appendix for a full breakdown and session titles.

⁶ Again, a consideration of a future CSF or policy, might be an expectation of how many Directors should be in attendance. Notably, should the Steering Group members be present? Reasonable expectations around these, are questions for the SG to reflect on initially.



Mean: 22/Median:23/SdDev +/- 8.3



Mean: 29.3/Median:32.5/SdDev +/- 8.3



Statistically speaking, sessions 4, 6 for the morning, and session 14 fell outside the standard attendance levels, potentially representing less engaging topics for delegates. As such, it may be advisable to reflect on this outcome when reviewing speaker proposals ahead of the 2018 conference. The delegate evaluation forms may give further indicators or greater context as to any rationale for these sessions' relative unpopularity.

Additionally, as no checks were made as to actual delegate numbers attending individual sessions, the above information should be relied upon as only demonstrating the degree of initial interest. Attendance to sessions on the day, may have varied considerably⁷, but if or how they did, was not captured by the conference team. Capturing this data as part of future events would be recommended, in terms of providing a greater clarity of authentic delegate interest, and how far it deviates from original stated session intentions.

Conclusions

From this data, it is apparent that the Mercian Collaboration Conference 2017 attracted a wide range of delegates, in terms of regionality and seniority, exceeding the diffusely defined event critical success factors. It also demonstrated that while most breakout sessions were perceived as attractive, that this was not a universal assessment. Consequently, some lessons should be learned and applied for future event planning.

Recommendations

- The data in this report should be considered by the Steering and Conference Groups to inform their evaluative conference review
- Steering and Conference Groups to consider West-Midlands venue for Mercian 2018
- Efforts to attract more library assistant staff to Mercian 2018 should be continued
- That this report (or version thereof) be widely shared, via the website and/or Directors' Committee, as part of the conference review process
- Session chairs to monitor actual breakout session attendance against booked

Version Control

- ~~Version 1.0 25th September 2017~~
- ~~Revision, 1.1, 4th October 2017~~
- This revision 1.2, 31st October 2017

⁷ Although, this author was one of the few attending session 4, where delegate numbers on the day correlated exactly with pre-booked attendance, suggesting at least a reasonable degree of coherence between these figures in other sessions.

Appendix: Session Attendance⁸

Session	Title	Attendees
Session 1	You only get what you give (George et al)	30
Session 2	The shifting sands of open access (Hibbert&Denkinson)	23
Session 3	Beyond Building Trust – Co-design and Co-delivery (Toole)	29
Session 4	Do they trust us, do we trust them? (Cliffe & Mansfield)	6
Session 5	Students as partners (Courage)	29
Session 6	Creating a trusted support network (Cole et al)	14
Session 7	Texts for every reader (Keddie & Maguire)	22
Session 8	Using Digital for Listening and Leadership (Stoller)	23
Session 9	Building trust and engagement with students (Matheson et al)	34
Session 10	Placing the library at the centre of institutional trust (Towlson)	32
Session 11	Re-envisioning academic services at the University of Northampton (Dimmock & Watkins)	22
Session 12	Understanding and responding to student reading strategy behaviours (Savage)	37
Session 13	In data we trust? (Harper et al)	33
Session 14	From aspiring to practicing W.I.S.E Interactions (Pelekanou & Barratt)	18

⁸ A deeper analysis of the delegate attendance correlated with staff demographics is possible, if time-consuming and of questionable greater value.