

# **Mercian Disability Forum: Proposal to Directors**

## **Background**

The Mercian Disability Forum (MDF) is a special interest group of the Mercian Collaboration, aiming to provide local support and exchange of experiences within membership organisations. An initial meeting was held at De Montfort University on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2016 and brought together Librarians and other Professional Services staff who are either responsible for accessibility or have an interest in this area. After this initial meeting it was felt that an annual collaboration with the possibility of an email discussion forum was a way forwards. The group subsequently met in December 2016 and this was a very positive and valuable meeting for those involved: highlighting the broad spectrum of knowledge, awareness and resource across the Mercian Group members. Consequently, Gaz Johnson has instigated discussions around the possible options for the future of the group.

## **Group Purpose**

It is intended that the Support Group will:

### **Key purpose**

Enable members to exchange experiences, knowledge, shared problems etc. with other practitioners working within the Mercian area in a safe, supportive, and friendly environment. It will include those institutions and practitioners with both direct and indirect responsibilities for supporting disabled students within a library context.

### **Other areas for possible development**

Investigate what comparator Institutions are doing in the area of disability support and collate an overview of this work. It can also signpost to existing resources and help for those members who are less experienced in this area.

Look at building relationships and communications, and possible collaboration with other similar groups around the country, such as CLAUD, to share good practice.

Develop a possible buddy system where more experienced practitioners act as a more personal support network for those who are new to the area.

Investigate collaboration with other Mercian groups such as the Mercian Staff Development Group and, for example, support a 'Learning Exchange event.'

## **Personnel and Leadership**

A core group will co-ordinate the Group's management. Initially, it is proposed that this will consist of Beck Maguire, Carol Keddie, Janice Morris and Laura Waller but this will be revised as the Group matures. It is also proposed that there are terms of office of the co-ordination group members to enable different views to be heard and reduce reliance on a small number of individuals who may move on to other roles.

It is proposed that all Mercian membership institutions will be included in the Group, to ensure inclusivity of those Institutions which haven't had involvement to date. It would be useful to have Membership which consists of staff beyond the Library community, given disability support often involves Student Welfare/Support and IT staff.

## **Governance**

- One member of the Mercian Steering Group to act as a Group sponsor
- Co-ordination group to maintain activities
- An annual evaluative report (March) on the group's activities to ensure accountability
- Representation by the Support group at the proposed Mercian Conference (2017) to ensure visibility of the Group

## **Next Steps**

- It is proposed that the group co-ordinates a further meeting, as appropriate, possibly with a pre-agreed focus such as software, space, ebooks etc. to maximise useful discussion
- Possibility of involving Gaz Johnson in the next meeting to help to contextualise the group within the wider collaboration and also for him to gain insight into the structure/dynamic of the group
- A closed mailing list is already established but criteria for acceptance on the list for future members will need to be agreed at the next meeting. This could be developed into an online forum, if it was felt it would be useful, where group members can share and discuss events, technologies, training etc. This could support communications and promote sharing of best practice 'all year round' rather than once a year

## **Recommendations**

- Agreement from Mercian Directors to progress this collaborative initiative
- Acknowledgement that Mercian senior support and potential funding will be required

## **Authors**

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