



Steering Group

Online, 9th August 10.00am 2022

Minutes

Present: Chris Porter (Chair, Newman), Natalie Baker-Fosker (NBF - Mercian Collaboration), Susan O'Sullivan (BCU), Annmarie Lee (BCU), Jo-Anne Watts (Wolverhampton), Emma Sansby (Bishop Grosseteste), Laura Pilsel (Harper Adams), Simon Satchwell-Giles (Newman) Helen Curtis (Aston), Emma Halford-Busby (Bishop Grosseteste), Will Peaden (Aston), Deborah Munro (Aston)

Apologies: Judith Keene (Worcester), Chris Powis (Northampton),

Summary of new and outstanding actions

ACTION: NBF to upload Strategic Plan document on website ✓

ACTION: Group asked to consider how to promote the Strategic Plan to membership

ACTION: Chair to formally invite Ann Rossiter (Sconul) and Liam Earney (Jisc) to attend next Board Meeting in Mid/late October at Nottingham. (Theme for next Directors board meeting includes looking at SCONUL strategic plans with Ann Rossiter).

ACTION: Chair to ask Sue Ackermann (Nottingham) if they can livestream board meeting for hybrid attendance.

ACTION: Chair to inform members of plans for discussions with SCONUL and JISC at the Autumn Board meeting.

ACTION: Chair and Vice to outline draft agenda for Autumn Board meeting

ACTION: NBF to upload Marketing group minutes on website ✓

ACTION: Simon requested that institutions with no current representation on the forum, please get in touch with him (Simon Satchwell Giles at Newman University) for inclusion in the subgroup.

ACTION: Steering Group asked to promote the conference to their colleagues at their home institutions.

ACTION: Chair to follow up with Ann Rossiter at SCONUL, to continue discussions around getting a Mercian Collaboration Teams licence. It was noted that it may need to wait until the appointment of a new Executive Officer, as setting up the Teams account is time consuming.

ACTION: Annmarie invited feedback to MSDG on sessions and networking ideas

ACTION: Annmarie requested testimonials from people who have used the Buddying scheme

ACTION: Annmarie to send all info about the aforementioned programme of events to NBF for inclusion on Mercian website.

ACTION: NBF to upload Marketing and Comms meeting minutes to website. ✓

ACTION: Training requests and requests for speakers invited for inclusion in the Marketing and comms group.

ACTION: If attendance at subgroup meetings start to decline, contact should be made with a member of the steering group to encourage staff attendance.

ACTION: Emma H-B welcomed all interested staff to attend the Marketing and Communications sessions and join in the discussions.

ACTION: Steering group members requested to advise all subgroup chairs that they need to make their own admin arrangements until new executive office is appointed but may request support from NBF if needed.

ACTION: NBF to send out details of interim arrangements to all committees and subgroups ✓

ACTION: CP requested group to send further ideas/suggestions to her within the next few weeks for inclusion in the Executive Officer person specification / job advert



ACTION: NBF to correct spelling errors on previous Steering group meeting minutes

ACTION: Chair to contact Newman University finance department to clarify payment terms for NBF's overtime arrangement as interim cover.

ACTION: NBF to continue to keep a record of all hours worked for the Mercian Collaboration ✓

ACTION: Chair to coordinate with Newman Finance department to raise invoices for 'services rendered' which will be sent to Helen for authorisation before being passed to SCONUL for payment at an appropriate interval (possibly a monthly basis).

ACTION: Chair and Treasurer to discuss what is to happen with the exec officers' mobile phone

ACTION: NBF to check if the Executive Officers mobile phone number is listed publicly and make changes where necessary ✓

ACTION: Chair to investigate if SCONUL would allow the Mercian Collaboration to rent space on their SharePoint site.

ACTION: Chair to add Research SIG to agenda for Directors board meeting.

ACTION: Chair to approach Special Interest Groups to ask for recruitment panel volunteers

ACTION: Chair to continue drafting the vacancy.

ACTION: Chair to share the job description document with Steering group for feedback and suggestions. (Judith and Chris might want to add ideas).

ACTION: Chair invited Steering group members to contact her with insights in how to move forward with the vacancy

ACTION: Chair to add elections to the agenda for the November steering group meeting.

ACTION: Chair to look into how to approach people to volunteer for steering group elections, noting that Gaz had previously tried to encourage newer directors to become more engaged with the committee.

Group welcomed to meeting and introduced to Natalie Baker-Fosker (Interim cover), as well as brief introductions to chairs of sub-groups.

Subgroups: Representative Updates

Subgroups updates moved to the head of agenda to allow representatives to leave the meeting before the other business of the Steering Group.

Chair invited subgroup representatives to give a brief roundup of their respective groups and activities in the pipeline.

Mercian Disability Forum (MDF)

Simon Satchwell Giles introduced the Mercian Disability Forum, which meets approximately twice a year, with members from across the region, and at all library levels. It is a forum to discuss how we recognise and support students with disabilities, as well as how we have managed living through the pandemic.

Mercian Disability Forum recently set up partnership with Mercian Staff Development Group to discuss ways to deliver more accessible and inclusive training for staff with disabilities and neurodivergence.

ACTION: Simon requested that institutions with no current representation on the forum, please get in touch with him (Simon Satchwell Giles @ Newman University) for inclusion in the subgroup.

Group briefly discussed observations regarding the emerging approaches to the 'new normal' way of hybrid working. Simon briefly discussed the different approaches to face-to-face vs online access to delivering training / teaching. Observing himself, that the Zoom platform helped at the beginning of the pandemic, but Zoom's live captions are not as good as those in MS Teams. The advancement of functionality for recording and hosting online training materials using MS Teams has made online training easier. And therefore, Teams is often preferred.

Conference Group

Deborah Munro gave brief overview of Conference Group, as those responsible for organising the annual Mercian Conference. This year's conference theme is about Redefining Engagement and will be an online event hosted at Cranfield University studio.

As the event hosts, Cranfield University has a special interest in ensuring that the conference runs smoothly, so they have arranged for their team to meet with all participants in advance, to give directions/instruction for speakers.

As an online event, the Conference Group have been able to accept almost all submissions, so there is a wide variety of talks in the programme – some 15-minute quick fire sessions, some longer sessions, plus a talk from the conference sponsor BibliU, as well as Keynote speaker Ant Brewerton.

ACTION: Steering Group asked to promote the conference to their colleagues at their home institutions.

Group discussed the challenges they faced, with respect to being a lesser-experienced conference group this year, and the recent departure of the Executive Officer who was very involved in all aspects of the conference planning in previous years.

Due to being hosted externally, this year's event is slightly more complex than last year, with a good spread of institutions represented.

Subgroup Chair noted suggestions for next year's conference planning group, including the need for additional helpers as conference planning is time consuming.

Steering Group discussed how participation in the conference planning group could be used by as skills development for staff at all levels. The encouragement of staff to present at the conference is also seen as a staff development opportunity.

Chair prompted discussion regarding future years, where it is likely to revert to an in-person conference. General consensus from past feedback and discussions was that face-to-face conferences are better for networking and engagement, online conferences promote wider access to participation and diversity, but can present technical challenges. And equally, there is limited enthusiasm for hybrid conferences because it is difficult to successfully manage.

Conference Planning Team were praised for their impressive work so far.

Staff Development Group

Anmarie Lee, chair of the Staff Development Group, gave brief overview of the group's remit and programme of events.

Recent staff development sessions have been hosted online due to the pandemic, which was said to have been a learning curve, but subgroup chair noted that attendance has been good at all sessions and were very well received.



Steering Group discussion around using Teams to aid better communication and ease of file sharing, which would also help with handovers when the tenures of the respective groups' officers expire.

ACTION: Chair to follow up with Ann Rossiter at SCONUL, to continue discussions around getting a Mercian Collaboration Teams licence. It was noted that it may need to wait until the appointment of a new Executive Officer, as setting up the Teams account is time consuming.

Staff Development Group received positive feedback from session participants, including wanting longer sessions, uploading info and padlets before the live sessions, requests for in-person visits to other institutions as well as requests for continuing online sessions for more convenient attendance at shorter meetings.

Staff Development Group plans to do a comparison on attendance numbers from in-person attendance vs virtual attendance (i.e. pre and post pandemic attendance figures).

Group discussed the finalised programme for the upcoming year, which was compiled following suggestions from staff across the region.

- Sept – Speaker briefings
- Oct and Nov – Dealing with difficult customers (event repeated twice)
- Nov – All the same but different at BCU
- Dec – The changing role of library assistant- to be run by NTU
- Jan – Open Access - to be run by Loughborough and NTU
- Feb – Use of new technology when creating new learning materials to be run by BCU, UOB and Coventry (a bring and share session)
- March – the experience of blended learning to be run by Northampton and Warwick - with student panel.
- April – BAME network / EDI decolonising event to be run by DMU and Lincoln (workshop)
- May – Trans awareness – to be run by the OU, but hoping to have external provider
- June – Supporting international students

Possibility of relaunching the buddying scheme. The group is currently looking at strategy for promoting this scheme.

Chair praised staff development group for their successful and continuous hard work.

ACTION: Annmarie invited feedback on sessions and networking ideas

ACTION: Annmarie requested testimonials from people who have used the Buddying scheme

ACTION: Annmarie to send all info about the aforementioned programme of events to NBF for inclusion on Mercian website.

Copyright group

Emma S. (Bishop Grosseteste) gave brief overview of Copyright Group, which had been dormant throughout the pandemic and was rebooted in May 2022 following an expression of interest meeting.

There are 4 coordinators for the group, all sharing the role and tasks. The copyright group had their first proper meeting in July 2022 with 10 people in attendance and 4 apologies. They plan to meet once per semester and their next meeting is due in the Autumn.



They plan to look at: pooling training resources, possibility of licensing an OER (Open Educational Resource) for training, Rights retention related to the transformational agreements and journals, and also, possibly controlled digital lending.

Emma noted they are keen to encourage membership from libraries with scholarly comms as well as copyright to broaden the group as there is some crossover between the two areas.

Chair noted a recent proposal for a new Special Interest Group (SIG) for a Research Support Group. If proposal is accepted, there might be some interesting synergy between these two groups, particularly on the side of scholarly comms. Chair indicated that we'll need to look at the proposal and see where the boundaries lie and whether there is enough content for two separate groups or if they need to be merged.

Deputies and Senior Staff group

There was no one present to represent the Deputies and Senior Staff Group today, so Chair gave a very concise overview of group's remit. Senior managers from libraries across the region – operating successfully with no issues to report.

Marketing and Communications group

Emma H-B and Susan present today to represent the Marketing and Communications group.

This group was dormant during the pandemic but in March 2022 they held an expression of interest meeting and collectively found that there was value in rebooting the group.

There are 4 members on the organising committee, who met in July 2022, along with approx. 10 attendees.

Susan was thanked for writing the minutes of the meeting following the departure of the Executive Officer. Susan has sent these to Natalie for inclusion on the website.

ACTION: Natalie to upload meeting minutes to website.

The group format is a discussion forum, usually with a regional roundup. At the July meeting, the subgroup voted on topics of interest, with lots of covid related topics suggested.

The group is made up of a mixture of roles, including front line staff and librarians who have responsibility for marketing and some full-time marketing staff. This mix of skills and experience allows the group to look at varied perspectives.

A doodle poll is going out this week for the Nov meeting, where they plan to discuss the start of session review and preparing for exam communications.

The group will meet 4 times per year and will be a forum for sharing good practice, offering information and experience relating to ideas such as treasure hunts and golden tickets.

Group representative noted that thoughts and observations are emerging already, including the group's collective observations about the changing needs of our students, including individual/quiet study vs group work and allowing access to online Teams meetings

Chair praised the group's efforts and offered thanks to the useful forum.

Annamarie, on behalf of the Staff Development Group, raised the group's collective interest in attending or co-hosting a marketing and communications session relating specifically to staff development.

This suggestion was embraced by the Marketing group representative.



ACTION: Training ideas and offers of speakers or new members of the group are welcomed by the Marketing and comms group.

ACTION: If attendance at subgroup meetings start to decline, contact should be made with a member of the steering group to encourage staff attendance.

ACTION: Emma H-B welcomed all interested staff to attend the sessions and join in the discussions.

Mercian metadata group

Will represented the Mercian Metadata group and talked of the group's first in-person meeting in April 2022, which was attended by 10 people in-person and 2 online.

Last year the group hosted a training session on MarcEdit, which was so successful it will be run again this year, with a slightly different twist.

Feedback received was that it was the "Best training session [one attendee] had in years", which was lovely to hear.

They will be working in collaboration with MADSIG (Metadata and Discovery Special Interest Group, the SUPC & LUPC Metadata & Discovery SIG). SUPC want to work with the Mercian Metadata group to develop MarcEdit training online.

Group are planning to work on running e-Forums on specific metadata topics at least once per year.

Will briefly discussed the group's membership, where he commented that the Metadata group has no representatives from some local institutions, but they have opened up their membership to madsic people, to help expansion opportunity.

Finally, Chris thanked all subgroups and praised all member libraries, on behalf of steering group committee

Administration

Officer Interim Arrangements

Chair informed the steering group that Natalie Baker-Fosker is currently helping with administrative support to help keep the Mercian activities ticking over for the interim period before the appointment of a new Executive Officer. Natalie has been commissioned to work up to 2 days per week and is very new to the role so currently unable to replicate the levels of support provided by the previous Executive Officer. Therefore, group reminded that while Natalie is available to help, she needs to be prompted to complete tasks whenever necessary.

Natalie is unable to attend all subgroups meetings, so subgroup chairs should make their own arrangements to facilitate the administration of each session.

ACTION: Steering group members requested to advise all subgroup chairs that they need to make their own admin arrangements until new executive office is appointed but may request support from Natalie if needed.

ACTION: Natalie to send out details of interim arrangements to all committees and subgroups

SIG chair feedback on criteria for Executive Officer role

Chair asked the group for feedback on what aspects of the Executive Officer role is particularly important and therefore necessary to include on the recruitment criteria.

Group discussed the experience required for the Executive Officer role, with initial suggestions for the prerequisite skills and knowledge identified as:

- Coordinating and facilitating groups
- Supporting chairs and committees
- Willingness to be involved in ALL groups and committees, with a good cross connection and networking knowledge
- a wider knowledge of Mercian Collaboration subgroups and member institutions
- Organising polls, scheduling meetings and other general admin tasks
- Marketing and promotion of the groups and meetings, including advice on how to reach possible new group members
- Liaise extensively with other collaborations and feed back on activities and common themes (a general awareness of what was going on in other regions)
- Writing agendas and minutes

ACTION: CP requested group to send further ideas/suggestions to her within the next few weeks for inclusion in the Executive Officer person specification / job advert

Special Interest Group representatives left the meeting, and the Steering group continued to run through the outstanding agenda items.

Previous Meeting

Meeting minutes

Minutes accepted as mostly accurate - except for spelling mistake on 'incorporate' page 6/section C, and typo on Simon's name on page 4.

ACTION: NBF to correct spelling errors on previous meeting minutes

Action list – Outstanding actions

Chair went through Action List from last meeting to mark off completed items and provided progress updates for the outstanding actions, as below:

ACTION: NBF to upload Strategic Plan document on website

ACTION: Group asked to consider how to promote the Strategic Plan to membership

ACTION: Chair to formally invite Ann Rossiter and Liam Earney to attend next Board Meeting in Mid/late October at Nottingham. (Theme for next Directors board meeting includes looking at SCONUL strategic plans with Ann Rossiter).

ACTION: Chair to ask Sue Ackermann (Nottingham) if they can livestream board meeting for hybrid attendance.

ACTION: Chair to inform members of plans for discussions with SCONUL and JISC at the Autumn Board meeting.

ACTION: Chair and Vice to outline draft agenda for Autumn Board meeting

ACTION: NBF to upload Marketing group minutes on website

Officer Reports

a. Financial Update

Chris shared her plans with the steering group for the financial arrangements of using Natalie as interim cover for the Mercian Collaboration administrative tasks.

ACTION: Chair to contact Newman University finance department to clarify payment terms for Natalie's overtime arrangement as interim cover.

ACTION: Natalie to continue to keep a record of all hours worked for the Mercian Collaboration

ACTION: Chair to coordinate with Newman Finance department to raise invoices for 'services rendered' which will be sent to Helen for authorisation before being passed to SCOUNL for payment at an appropriate interval (possibly a monthly basis).

As treasurer, Helen gave a brief update on the Mercian Collaboration's financial position. We have invoiced BibliU, the conference's platinum sponsor, so the income will offset the recent expenditure. Reserves are currently sitting at approximately £41k, which she noted is perfectly healthy at this point.

Helen stated they are not currently planning to increase fees for Mercian subscriptions.

Expenditure being factored in the coming months include:

- website domain renewals
- paying the former Executive Officer's remaining expenses and salary
- paying the expenses of the interim cover
- The salary of the new executive officer expected to be appointed later this year
- Some conference related travel expenses
- some additional expenses around the conference, but it was noted that these costs are likely to be minimal due to it being an online event.

Helen confirmed that she has received the former Executive Officer's mobile phone and raised the question of where this should be kept for the interim period.

ACTION: Chair and Treasurer to discuss what is to happen with the exec officers' mobile phone

ACTION: Natalie to check if the Executive Officers mobile phone number is listed publicly and make changes where necessary

Chair reiterated Annmarie's earlier point on the possibility of getting Mercian Collaboration to purchase an Office 365 subscription; noting that it is sometimes difficult to sign up to events without an official university (.ac.uk) domain and that a gmail.com domain is seen as less professional / academic.

Chair noted that ALN use a SCOUNL email address and SCOUNL use a SharePoint site, so wondered if SCOUNL would allow the Mercian Collaboration to rent space on their SharePoint site.



ACTION: Chair to investigate if SCOUNL would allow the Mercian Collaboration to rent space on their SharePoint site.

Operations

Chair requested the group's initial observations on the forthcoming proposals for two new Special Interest Groups (SIG's), noting that while we do not necessarily want to overextend our repertoire of SIG's, the two proposed groups may be useful new additions.

- Proposed Systems Group

Laura Pilsel has been approached with a proposal to consider starting a Systems Group, as several member institutions are currently implementing a new LMS. An offer to express interest will go out imminently for the proposed group.

- Proposed Research Group

A formal application has been received for the proposed Research group. It was observed that the research group had similarities with the existing copyright group, which needs some consideration. If formed, the groups may need to work closely together.

Chair noted that the normal process would be to invite the proposer to attend a face-to-face meeting to discuss the proposal in greater depth before going to the Directors board, and due to location of the proposer, Chair advised that discussion of this proposal could be added to the agenda of the Director's board meetings.

ACTION: Chair to add Research SIG to agenda for Directors board meeting.

Recruitment decisions

Chair has drafted the job description and job advert, which she has sent to the Steering Group for feedback. These revised documents cover most of the things that Mercian Collaboration needs from a new Executive Officer, making some notable changes from the previous job description and appropriating job descriptions of comparable positions in other regional library collaborations. Firstly, Chair advised her intentions to change the working location of the new Executive Officer - from being based in the office of the current Chair - to being remote working, with some occasional travel expected.

Essential/Desirable criteria

Steering group suggested alterations to the essential and desirable attributes of the person specification (to be used for shortlisting), noting that:

Essential criteria could be changed to include:

- being a graduate
- experience of project management
- ability to work independently and to organise own workload
- Knowledge of the workings of HE environment and/or libraries
- Knowledge of web-based applications
- Experience of writing/contributing to web content
- Website editing and management



- Experience of working with committees, including providing professional advice and admin support

Desirable criteria would include:

- Ability to speak to audience with clarity, diplomacy and tact
- Setting up mailing lists and updating websites
- awareness of and ability to use online marketing tools

Group discussed the type of candidate that may be interested in the post.

Promotion of the vacancy

Group discussed the best platforms to advertise the vacancy, and factored in the cost of each.

Suggestions included:

- Jobs.ac.uk – to gain a broader audience
- Mercian mailing lists
- An advert on CILIP would cost around £1000.

Interview Panel

Group discussed the requirements of the interview panel:

- Must comply with the recruitment law, rather than own intuitional recruitment policy
- It was agreed that it would be beneficial to have a diverse panel, at least in terms of gender and ethnicity
- It was agreed that there should be a minimum of 3 panel members
- It was agreed that the panel should be made up of mostly steering group members
- It was suggested that we include at least one representative from a Special Interest Group
- Chair informed the group that she has asked for guidance from SCONUL, noting the response that while the Executive Officer would be employed directly by SCONUL, they do not have any other involvement in their day-to-day activities or the recruitment process. However, T&C's, SCONUL pension scheme, payroll, disciplinary and sickness would be dealt with my SCONUL
- Steering group agreed that the details of the vacancy (0.4 FTE, based on 35 hour week = 14 hours per week – replacing Gaz like for like)
- Steering group agreed the proposed salary, which sits at points 32-38 of the national pay spine.
- Chair asked for volunteers to be on the interview panel. Chris and Laura confirmed they were willing to be on the panel
- Chair noted the representation issue – noting that a mixed gender panel would be easy to accomplish, but mixed ethnicity panel is a challenge.

Interview tasks directly relevant to job role.

Group discussed interview tests/tasks should be directly relevant to advertised role.

Discussions included:

- Presentation not appropriate as it is not an essential requirement of the job. Need tasks to evidence the candidate's ability to speak and write appropriately.

- Suggestion for candidate to facilitate a discussion between two people, which might tease out confidence and interpersonal skills. This task could be done virtually but would be very challenging to undertake if there were lots of candidates.
- Complete writing tasks such as creating a news article for the website, using the minutes of a SIG (pitched to general public).
- Group agreed that tasks must be measurable in a way that is easily comparable.
- Candidate needs confidence to liaise with Directors.
- Discussion around how candidates cope with technical issues of remote interviews.

ACTION: Chair to approach Special Interest Groups to ask for recruitment panel volunteers

ACTION: Chair to continue drafting the vacancy

ACTION: Chair to share the job description document with Steering group for feedback and suggestions. (Judith and Chris might want to add ideas).

ACTION: Chair invited Steering group members to contact her with insights in how to move forward with the vacancy

AOB

Going back to Research and Systems proposals – Steering group would like an accessible copy of the proposal document (rather than PDF) to make notes.

ACTION: NBF to look on google drive for editable copy of research proposal? (Version 3 Jan 2022)

If not readily available, NBF to recreate the PDF as an editable copy.

Next Meeting

Date: – TBC (usually mid/late November)

Format: Online or in person – TBC

Agenda items to include: Elections for steering group

ACTION: Chair to add elections to the agenda for the November steering group meeting.

ACTION: Chair to look into how to approach people to volunteer for steering group elections, noting that Gaz had previously tried to encourage newer directors to step up within the committee.