Mercian Disability Forum

Minutes

Online Meeting 29th July 2020

Present: Bernadette Carter (BCU), Gill Evans (Coventry), Laura Waller (Warwick), Jenny Townend (Northampton), Kathryn Devine (Worcester), John Mackay (NTU), Gaz J Johnson (Mercian Collaboration)

Laura welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologised for the late circulation of the agenda.

1. Roundtable updates from members

The meeting opened with a brief roundtable of current experiences at each members' library, with a particular focus on planned re-opening.

BCU: Every space will have to be pre-booked, with a one-way traffic system around the library. A click and collect service will be introduced as part of the reopening plans. When students are campus, once a lecture is over, the expectation is they will then leave campus rather than stay. Bookable rooms for students with disabilities or learning differences are big enough for social distancing with their helper. In terms of library staff, some will be available, but teams will rotate in 'bubbles'.

Coventry: While there remained areas still to be addressed, campus was re-opening in part week beginning 3rd August. Two group rooms have been set aside for students with disabilities or learning differences but allowing students to have their helper was an unresolved issue across campus for the time being. For other library spaces students would have to reserve a study space to use the library to work in. The whole library will be silent and there were no other group rooms being made available. Some staff will remain off site until after Christmas.

Northampton: Click and Collect Service running since 15th June – all going smoothly. Students collecting items are currently being met at entrance, and not allowed in further to the building. One-way system, and furniture moved and rearranged. Hoping to have a browse option, but no date yet. Staff on site will rotate each week, but seem to be adjusting to being back on site after a little initial trepidation.

NTU: Click and collect starting soon. Relaunched 'scan and send' service, despite retiring it five years ago. No concrete dates for going further towards reopening, but expectation from VC that university will be 'fully reopen in some capacity' from the new academic year.

Warwick: While none of the library is currently open, individual bookable student spaces are potential additional consideration post-service reopening due to ventilation concerns. Click and collect is however up and running, but students are not yet allowed into the building. A lot of work is in its initial stages currently, but students can at least get physical books. More developments expected over the next month.

Worcester: A 'Reserve and Collect' service has launched, although the expectation was that academic liaison staff may not be back on site any time soon. They have a few computers available that can be booked, reopening as public library cross over. How study space will operate is uncertain, although a 'different campus feel' is expected.

2. Captioning of videos- best practice

Gill explained that Coventry was looking towards live captioning of video material. Pre-recorded videos will need to be captioned as standard from 23rd September 2020 in line with WCAG regulations. Live-captioning is likely to be something which is increasingly critical for the new academic year. Gill explained she was interested in learning what people's experiences were with approaches to live captioning.

Kathryn noted how it was possible, but it can be quite challenging in terms of the potential time commitment[i]. Echo.360 being used, Otter.ai said to be really good. For very good captioning having someone typing live is the best, but expensive in terms of staff time. Zoom can work with Otter.ai for live captioning, and there are other options that possibly deliver the same service. There has been an explosion of these kinds of products, which is making identifying a really good and reliable service more time consuming for accessibility library staff.

3. Inductions for new students

Laura asked everyone to share any plans or thoughts they had with respect to induction activities. Gill explained she would be creating a brief video, focussed on their lib guide, the building and also the key staff students would need to know about. This would be targeted at all new students and hosted on YouTube. Others said there would be a mix of physical and online, but mostly remote was the expected norm. Requests from disabled students for small group inductions (physically) have been noted at some universities. One approach might be to stagger inductions over a longer period, to hopefully be less overwhelming for the students and staff. However, running early induction sessions meant using off-campus platforms, as students might not have access to their campus ID and login details yet.

Gill noted she hadn't been asked for any physical sessions, but expected there would be requests from students for whom online materials were more problematic to access. It was commented that some students though might prefer online induction, so as they don't have to interact with people physically. Kathryn explained she frequently used online induction sessions, and would be promoting them more than in the past, although people would be able to book a personal session with her or colleagues.

Laura noted that the topic of facemasks was an area for accessibility which would need to be considered. Helena said all staff were getting a kit including masks, visors and cleaning gel. She was also hosting a session for students to help clarify any accessibility concerns with the new health precautions ahead of the new term to better inform the library's response. It was generally commented it was a challenging scenario, given the time-lag between asking for advice and any coherent guidance emerging at an institutional level. Additionally, there was a potential for some students to have anxiety over confronting masked staff on a regular basis.

In a related point the group discussed the issue of breaking down barriers and making staff and spaces feel accessible, recognisable and welcoming. The loss of casual inter-personal conversation at desks was seen to be a further barrier to engaging students, and recognising where they might have needs. It was suggested having pictures of the re-configured library and library staff more available, online and physically, could help. Additionally, highlighting the library enquiry staff, was key as they are the staff many students most frequently encounter. Making use of lib-chat, and similar interactive platforms, to allow students to engage informally with staff was also seen as being beneficial.

Teaching patterns were changing at some institutions, with longer teaching hours coming in, in order to try and still give students a feeling of 'community and belonging' at their institutions. The priorities for this on-campus teaching was likely to, mostly but not always, be for new students. Library opening hours were in some cases contracting, due to the requirement for monitoring space and social distancing adherence. In others they were lengthening to accommodate a more elongated studying day, but this could create staffing well-being concerns.

4. eBook accessibility and advice

Laura asked if anyone had thoughts about e-books, given their massively increased importance; with respect to accessibility. Gill said all of their eBook catalogue records were planning to have an added note about their accessibility – linking to the statement of the supplying company, obtained from the 'Aspire' platform. However, there were system challenges which they were looking to overcome to provide the best possible student experience. Laura was looking at pulling together tips on using eBooks and dealing with the different formats, along with producing some video media guides, although these were not being created solely from an accessibility perspective.

ACTION: Laura to share Warwick guide materials with the group

It was discussed that while eBooks may have been favoured for acquisition for some time, this doesn't mean that users know how to make the best use of the resources. A good marketing and training approach was to push the benefits of the alternative to print, rather than suggest they are 'substitutes'. It was also discussed that advising all students should consider adding filter-screens for their monitors, due to the increased screen time, along with taking breaks from their ICT, was a good practice to adopt.

As noted earlier[ii], art materials are not as easy to translate to electronic, as the physical media format experience is often not replicable online. Laura highlighted conversations with the OU, with respect to eBooks, and had gained permission to reshare their 'Database accessibility page'[iii] which draws on work at Leeds Beckett in this area. [iv] As these pages contained a lot of valuable material on eBook accessibility here, re-using the material in local guides would be worth exploring.

ACTION: All to review Leeds Beckett and OU eBook guide materials

5. Collaboration Update

Gareth provided an update on the MSDG and Collaboration Conference plans for events. The MSDG is still working on planning their events programme for 20/21, although with the twin barriers of financial restrictions and Covid-19, were anticipated a largely virtual programme.[v] The Collaboration Conference had regretfully been cancelled, but a mini-event was being explored for January 2021; which would likely be online. However, this might be replaced by Conference 2021, which may also be brought forward to earlier in the year (June/July) due to difficulties for some members in attending early September dates. The Conference Group would be meeting to examine the next steps in this respect in mid-August. He commented that accessibility for online events was a current concern, and welcomed any steer or insight from the group to the Collaboration at large.

6. Events

Laura asked if there was interest in hosting an event, even if it was likely that the group would need to push the date back to the new year (2021). Accessibility is something which is very key within online teaching, hence meeting this need and helping improving teaching practice was agreed as an area to which the group could make a valuable contribution. It was noted that while there is a lot of information in this area, pulling it together in a coherent form would be valuable to the Collaboration membership. Gill noted that Coventry was pulling together some material in this respect, which they hope will develop over time into a larger key resource.[vi]

ACTION: All to review Coventry's material

The group agreed to hold off on planning any major events, although noting the potential to become involved in any mini-conference sessions hosted by the Collaboration. It was agreed to explore a virtual discussion event themed around accessibility topics, adopting the format of the *Virtual Networking* events to enable informal but informed conversations with staff at all levels. In this respect it was noted how getting input from people with disabilities would be invaluable for shaping content and informing discussion accurately. Laura agreed to lead on this, with support from the group members and GJJ.

ACTION: Laura and group to plan 'accessibility coffee morning' online session

7. AOB

Simon Satchwell-Giles (Newman) had mailed the group to ask about the policies and procedures used to get referrals from student support/welfare advisors to help set up students with reasonable adjustments. It was noted that most institutions do not have formal processes, with direct emails to the library advisor instigating proceedings, and then the library approaching students directly. It was suggested processes could be much improved in this respect as while policy on how to support student needs in this respect existed in many libraries, procedures tended to be more *ad-hoc*.

ACTION: All to feedback details of their process to Simon via email

8. Date of next meeting

Because of the current uncertainties, the next meeting would be longer away than normal. It was agreed to aim for a November 2020 date, although if there was a demand among the group members this could always have been brought forward. Laura thanked everyone for their contributions and wished them well, as she closed the meeting.

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[i] Services include: Ai-media, Caption.ed, Enco, enCaption, Kaltura, Live captioning, MS Teams, Otter.ai, PP slides, YouTube

[ii] During today's Virtual Networking event, see news item to appear shortly.

[iii] https://www.open.ac.uk/library/help-and-support/databases-accessibility-issues

[iv] https://libguides.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/resources/ebooks/ebook_collections

[v] See the most recent Staff Development Group minutes p3-4:
https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/sites/default/files/minutes/MSDG%20Minutes%2013%20July%202020.pdf

vi https://libguides.coventry.ac.uk/accessibility