

Collaboration Development Officer's Report

Dr Gaz J Johnson, October 2020

This is an update and overview of Collaboration activities, relating to the Development Officer's work over the period E.Mar-E.Oct 2020

Governance

The Steering Group has met twice, online, in the past 6 months (7th May & 13th Aug), with the latter meeting also attended by representatives of most special interest groups. Support for various governance considerations was provided by the Officer during this period, notably, to the Staff Development, Conference, RDMSG and Deputies Groups. Briefings on the Collaboration and its remit have been made available to new Directors joining during this period, although update has been low. After two years in development, the [Strategic Plan](#) (20-24) was launched, although in the light of the ongoing pandemic, a review of its fit against aspirations and realpolitik is anticipated as a task for the incoming 21/23 Chair and Steering Group. Additionally, the [conference sponsorship policy](#) was revised to account for the then-planned online event.

- [Conference Sponsorship Policy](#) (May 2020)
- [Steering Group Minutes](#)
- [Strategic Plan 2020-24](#) (May 2020)

Research & Reports

A [membership survey report](#), on behalf of the MSDG, was collated providing information on member appetites for blended and virtual events, and feedback on proposed event themes for the forthcoming year. The report was also been used to shape a series of virtual networking events for the membership. Following the successful hosting of the first virtual networking event, [an evaluation report](#) was produced, to shape any similar future events under the Collaboration's umbrella. Following various delays the [annual report for 2019](#) was finally also published. As per standing policy, these reports have been made openly available.

- [Annual Report 2019](#) (June 2020)
- [MSDG Events Programme & Virtual Events Survey](#) (May 2020)
- [Virtual Network Pilot: Feedback](#) (May 2020)

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

A number of SIG Committee meetings were attended during this period, which included: **MSDG** (Mar, Aug, Oct), **Conference Group** (Apr, July), **MDF** (May, July), **Deputies** (June). **Copyright**, **Marketing**, **Metadata** and **RDMSG** did not hold any committee meetings during this reporting period. Regrettably, scheduling precluded the Officer's involvement in discussions with the outgoing RDMSG committee, although the SG Sponsor was able to conduct this meeting. Demand for the Officer's presence at SIG meetings and consultations continued to outstrip the available salaried time. As normal, priority was given to attendance at those meetings/events where the Officer had been unable to attend previously. Attendance at SIG events has continued to not be a priority, with the exception of facilitating the three virtual networking events, although with the pivot to online very few SIG events have been hosted in this period. The cancellation of this year's conference meant that the expected support for the event and Conference Group diminished considerably, in contrast to same period in previous years.

Alongside this, SIG ongoing related activities have included: group officer liaison, maintaining website documentation (e.g. events diary, membership lists, reports etc.), providing governance advice, promoting events, participating in discussion events. There have been no subgroup requests for funding during the reporting period.

A clarification between [Operational and Special Interest Groups](#) has now been added to the website, w.r.t. specifically the MSDG and Conference Groups' activities and contributions to the Collaboration/membership.

Website Maintenance & Usageⁱ

Despite the lockdown period, the website has been maintained and developed. As noted above updates to subgroup pages have been a major aspect of this work, although with the downturn in events less information than normal during this period has been provided. With the cancellation of the Conference 2020, RDMSG mothballing, and withdrawal of the physical events programme, appropriate clarifying notes have been added to these sections.

A number of minor updates to the underlying platform by the web hosts Adaptive have taken place, with the Officer coordinating testing and error checking for the site. However, no problems were encountered. Exchange of comparative website policy, content and operation continued with the Northern Collaboration and NoWAL officers during this period, which has been used to inform prospective site developments, as well as feedback to Adaptive.

Surprisingly, despite the considerable reduction of Collaboration events, and the pivot to online meetings hosted elsewhere, overall traffic to the site has fallen only very slightly (-0.6% unique users) against the previous reported period (2,154 vs 2,166 users, **Figs 1 & 2**).ⁱⁱ

Figure 1: Most recent 6 months website users (weekly, Mar-L.Sept 20)

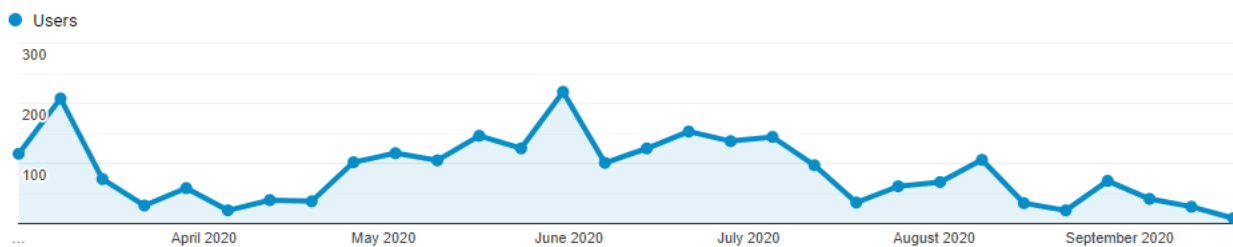


Figure 2: Previous reporting period website users (weekly, 1.Oct 19-L.Feb 20)



Geographically, the UK remains the primary source of website traffic as expected, with England representing 88.4% of national access locations: down from 96.9% last reporting period (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Collaboration Site User Geo-Locations

Rank	Top Geographic Accesses	Previous Reporting Period
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1	UK (63.6%)	UK (62.8%)
2	USA (9.7%) ⁱⁱⁱ	USA (17.8%)
3	Finland (5.4%)	Finland (3.8%)
4	Netherlands (5.4%)	Netherlands (3.54%)
5	France (3.4%)	South Korea (2.8%)

Marketing & Promotion

Thanks, largely, to efforts by the Officer, a steady stream of news articles have continued to appear on the website: 13 over the past half-year, in contrast to an average of ~1.2/month normally (**Table 2**). Consequently, all events hosted over this period have an accompanying web report. Additionally, information on the Collaboration's response to lockdown, and information resources to support library staff at this time, have been the features of a number of news items. It is hoped the range and number of news items have helped to demonstrate to the membership that the Collaboration has not been dormant during this period.

Table 2: Website News Items (past 18 months)

Theme/Topic	News Items (Mar-Oct 19)	News Items (Oct 19-Mar 20)	News Items (Mar 20-Oct 20)
General Collaboration News	2	0	4
Conference Group	3	2	3
Deputies & Senior Staff Group	N/a	1	0
Marketing & Communications Group	0	0	0
Mercian Copyright Group	0	0	0
Mercian Disability Forum	0	0	0
Mercian Metadata Group	0	1	1
RDM Support Group	1	0	0
Mercian Staff Development Group	2	2	5

Our Twitter presence ([@MercianCollab](https://twitter.com/MercianCollab)) grew to 233 followers (211 at last reporting), with events, activities and announcements regularly promoted through this channel. As one of the remaining visible channels to demonstrate MC activity externally, especial attention has been applied here to ensure that, despite lockdown, the membership perceives the organisation as a 'going concern'.

The members only discussion list (mercian-collaboration@jiscmail.ac.uk), has seen a tiny overall rise in members to 157 (150 at last reporting). Due to the withdrawal of most planned events and many committee meetings list traffic continues to be low. However, as with twitter, the Officer has maintained efforts through continuing the monthly newsletter to the list. Other than this, list traffic includes occasional regional vacancies or other non-Collaboration events requested for sharing.

Training and Development

None recorded for this period.

External Relations

Regular contact and exchanges of experience with our comparator organisations have continued on matters of shared interest during this period. Two meetings with UK regional counterparts were attended, and in one instance, chaired by the Officer (Apr & July). A further meeting is anticipated in the autumn, as well as a further engagement with the NoWAL and Northern Collaboration Officers (21st Oct). The Officer has also been seeking to facilitate a meeting between the three chairs of the 'SCONUL Regional Subgroup' collaborations before the year's end. Additionally, intermittent communication with SCONUL Officers in support of the Collaboration's business, notably the Accounts Officer, have continued throughout this period.

Workload

During this reporting period (22 working days/weeks), 13 (59%) of these contained a formal committee meeting, commonly hosted by the Officer through the Collaboration's Zoom account. These figures contrast with 47% of working days containing a meeting in the previous reporting period. A number of days contained multiple meetings with different groups and individuals, something which was not routinely possible before the online pivot. The number of days containing meetings would have been higher had the Officer not previously scheduled vacation time when some took place. As normal the officer continued to work at capacity throughout this time, frequently varying employed day to meet operational needs.^{iv} Annual salary increment remains a manually initiated endeavour, out of step with the other SCONUL regional subgroups, with related enquiries to the Chair remaining unacknowledged.

Endnotes

ⁱ <http://merciancollaboration.org.uk>

ⁱⁱ Comparable period 1/3/20-22/9/20 vs 1/10/19-29/2/20

ⁱⁱⁱ 132 users from Virginia make up the largest portion (63%) of US accesses by far.

^{iv} See separate report tabled on Officer Priorities with respect to this issue.