



Collaboration Development Officer's Report

Dr Gaz J Johnson, March 2020

This is an update and overview of Collaboration activities, relating to the Development Officer's work over the period early Oct 2020 – mid March 2021.

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Governance

Since the last Board, the Steering Group has met online twice, online (1st Dec & 3rd Feb). The nomination and election of the new Steering Group was overseen by the Officer. Additionally, the Officer has continued in his role as interim Treasurer, a position held since March 2020, in addition to their normal portfolio. This has included activities including subscription and expenditure modelling, as well as maintaining awareness of incoming and outgoing funds. Additionally, requests for information on planning and finances by SCONUL Executive have been addressed, with the Chair.

Research & Reports

Other than updates to Steering Group and subgroup committees there have been only two significant reporting activities during this period. Firstly, the compilation and editing of the Annual Report 2020 which should be presently available. Secondly, modelling of various subscription scenarios to account for potential reductions in fees in 2020, for consideration by the Board.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

A number of subgroup meetings have been attended including: Conference Group (Oct 20, Jan 21), Deputies (Nov 20 & Mar 21), MDF (Nov 20 & Mar 21), Metadata (Feb 21), MSDG (twice in Mar 21). Additionally, a MSDG event in Dec 20 was attended, to observe online participation by delegates. As usual, a couple of meetings were impossible to attend due to limited availability. Repeated efforts and largely unsuccessful efforts have also been made to engage with the chairs of the two currently moribund groups (Copyright, Marketing and Communications) concerning their planned future activities over this period.

Alongside this, subgroup related activities have included: officer liaison, maintaining website documentation, providing governance and funding advice, and promoting events. In particular the Officer has been providing a minute taking service for subgroups, as in many cases, the notes taken by groups would otherwise be minimal or entirely absent. As such there is a better record of activities now captured on the website.

There has also been one subgroup request for funding (MSDG, '*Handing difficult customer situations*', April 21), which after revision was approved by the Steering Group.

Website Maintenance & Usageⁱ

The website has continued to be maintained with updates to subgroup pages, events and news items being the major activities, along with minor revisions to structural content. Overall traffic to the site has diminished again this period, unsurprisingly given the reduction in the Collaboration's events and tangible activities as well as the Christmas shutdown period (1,896 users this period contrasted with 2,154 in the previous 6 months) (**fig 1 & 2**).

Figure 1: Most recent 6 months website users (weekly, Oct 20-Mar 21)

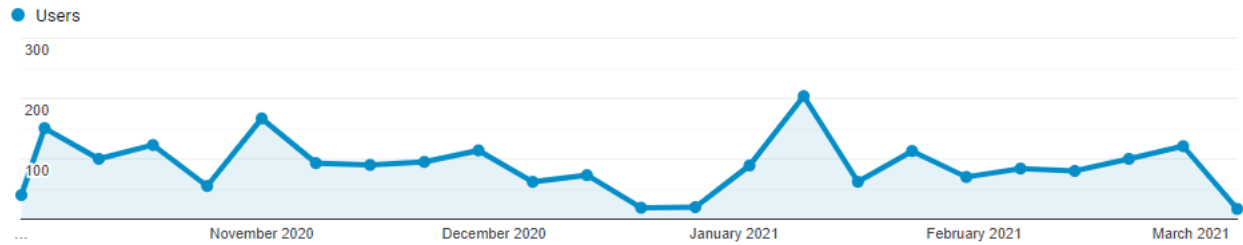
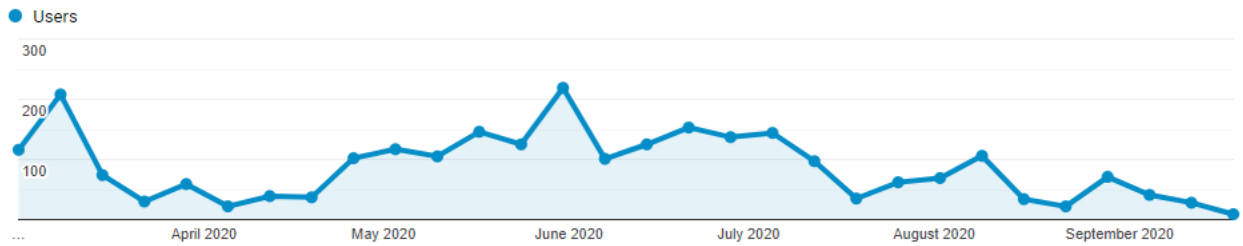


Figure 2: Previous reporting period website users (weekly, Mar-Sept 20)



Geographically, the UK remains the primary source of website traffic as expected, with England representing 80.1.4% of national access locations: down from 88.4% last reporting period (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Collaboration Site User Geo-Locations

Rank	Top Geographic Accesses	Previous Reporting Period
1	UK (55.0%)	UK (63.6%)
2	USA (9.9%)	USA (9.7%)
3	Finland (8.4%)	Finland (5.4%)
4	Netherlands (7.7%)	Netherlands (5.4%)
5	China (7.3%)	France (3.4%)

Marketing & Promotion

The lockdown and remote working period has continued to significantly impact on the Collaboration’s subgroup activities, and as a result there have been far fewer events to cover than in this period, amplified by the Christmas close-down. Of the four news items (**Table 2**) added, three were from the Officer and one a report on an MSDG event. It is hoped as more events occur in the next six months, including the conference, a return to a more normal level of items might be witnessed.

Table 2: Website News Items (past 18 months)

Theme/Topic	Oct 19-Mar 20	Mar 20-Oct 20	Oct 20-Mar 21
General Collaboration News	0	4	3
Conference Group	2	3	0
Deputies & Senior Staff Group	1	0	0
Marketing & Communications Group	0	0	0
Mercian Copyright Group	0	0	0
Mercian Disability Forum	0	0	0
Mercian Metadata Group	1	1	0
RDM Support Group	0	0	0
Mercian Staff Development Group	2	5	1



Our Twitter presence ([@MercianCollab](#)) shrank slightly to 232 followers (233 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, 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 168 (157 at last reporting). Due to the low level of events, list traffic continues to be low. However, the Officer has maintained the monthly newsletter to the list covering forthcoming and recent events, Collaboration news and wider matters of interest from SCONUL and the sector.

Events

The Officer has continued to arrange and host the virtual networking events, held in Oct 20, Dec 20 and Jan 21. Very positive feedback continues to be received from delegates. The next one is planned for April, theme and host TBC.

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. Notably a conversation (21/1) was held with Carol Brooks of LIEM concerning our organisations mutual areas of interest, which especially overlapped with the MDF and MSDG's agendas. A meeting of the UK Regional Consortia officers/managers was attended (and chaired) by the Officer (21/1), for an exchange of experience and practice. A further meeting of this group is anticipated later in the year. Additionally, intermittent communication with SCONUL Officers in support of the Collaboration's business, notably the Accounts Officer and Executive Director, have continued throughout this period.

Academic Libraries North (ALN)

The former Northern Collaboration and North West Academic Libraries collaborations officially began a process of merger from 1/Jan/21 to form this new collaboration (ALN), comprising 31 academic library members.ⁱⁱ A new website and fully integrated organisation is expected to launch in April, as currently both groups continue to maintain sperate online presences. However, both their officers are already, and will continue, working together to deliver on their programme and aspirations (effectively a 1.0FTE role). The Office maintains an ongoing close liaison between our two organisations.

Workload

During this reporting period (23 working days/weeks), 11 (47%) of these contained a meeting or event requiring the Officer's attendance; which exactly matches the level of activity for the similar period 19/20.ⁱⁱⁱ A revised salary arrangement was agreed by the Chair and Vice-Chair in February 21 (to be back-dated to Aug 20), although as of writing this has not been confirmed as being enacted.^{iv} Conversations concerning revisions to contracted hours remain outstanding.

Endnotes

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

ⁱⁱ The prior NC comprised 29 members, and NoWAL 13. The considerable overlap in membership was a partial driver for the merger, as all prior members of both groups have continued into ALN.

ⁱⁱⁱ Given this was mostly pre-lockdown, this seems to demonstrate level of demand for the Officer's time remains the same.

^{iv} Awaiting confirmation in March 21 payslip