Senior Staff & Deputies Group Survey

July 2019, Dr Gareth J Johnson

Executive Summary

A survey across the Mercian Collaboration shows there is reasonable support for the establishment of a special interest group for senior library staff, among those people who would be eligible to be involved. Support has focussed on a semi-autonomously operating group, guided and supported by the Directors Board, meeting several times a year. However, a key focus remains on the need for any group to establish its own identify, purpose, and function in order to establish a sustainable and valuable forum. Steering Group will take a decision on whether to progress this idea practically, based on this evidence.

Contents

Introduction

This report collates survey results from senior staff and deputy librarians across the Collaboration, with respect to their opinions on the formation of a group dedicated to their needs (DSSG, Deputies & Senior Staff Group). Following earlier discussions at Steering Group and subsequently at the Directors Board, this survey was instigated at the direct request of the Chair and Board (DB 19/05(a) & SG 19/10(a)). It was conducted online by the Development Officer during a six-week period (June/July 2019), with member directors responsible for cascading and encouraging responses. The questions are appended to the end of this report (see **Appendix**).

Results

Respondents

Staff from 16/23 of the Collaboration members responded to the survey, with a total of 31 returns. All substantive questions were answered by every respondent. Respondents job titles typically included the terms 'Head' (8), 'Assistant/Deputy Director' (10), and 'Manager' (11).

From the outstanding 7 Collaboration member organisations, no responses were received from 5 institutions[i]. However, from the remaining 2 members[ii], directors contacted the author to note no suitable people existed to join such a group within their staffing structures.

Interest & Rationale

The majority of respondents were strongly (71%) or potentially (26%) interested in the establishment of a special interest group (**Figure 1**). Only one respondent was uncertain, with no respondents indicating a negative interest[iii].

Figure 1: Degree of Interest in DSSG
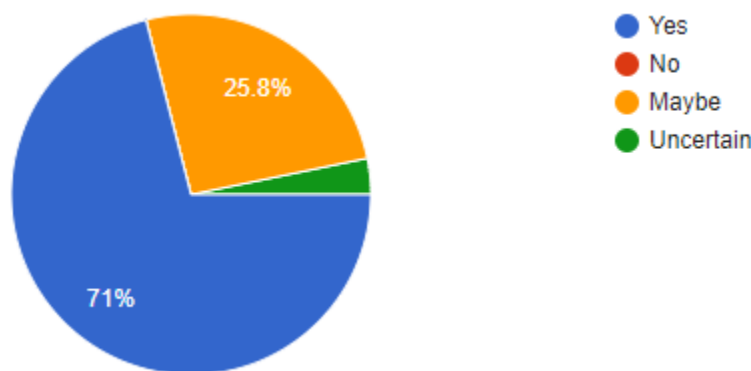
Those voting yes expressed a range of reasons to support their decision (**Figure 2**), which included learning from and exchanging best practice with their peers, developing professional networks and potentially enabling collaborative working endeavours. Additionally, access to skills, expertise and perspective from outside their organisational skills-base was perceived of value.

Figure 2: Value to Respondents Supporting Establishment

Rationale (Yes)

- Networking
- Peer Learning
- Best Practice
- Collaborative Working
- Solutions & Perspectives
- Other
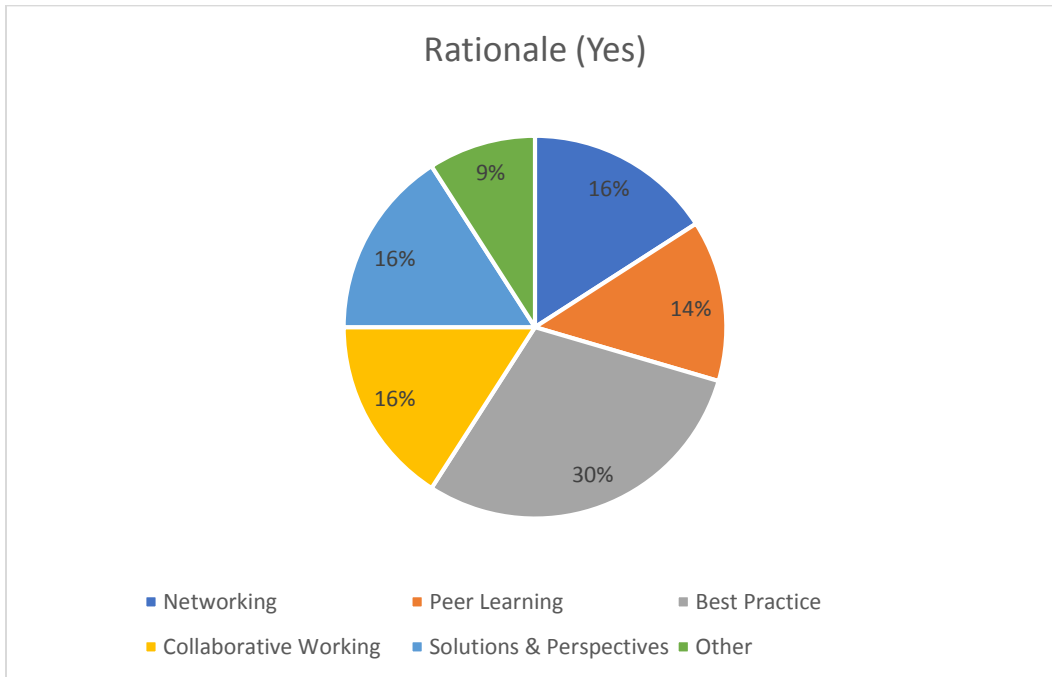
Those who expressed some hesitancy in supporting the group's establishment (**Figure 3**) mainly noted issues around overlaps or redundancy when contrasted with extant national groupings. There was also some uncertainty as to the relevancy such a group and/or its members might have to individual's roles, especially considering the Collaboration's disparate members' operational configurations. Furthermore, there were minor concerns over the frequency and location of meetings, contrasted against other time demands. The one uncertain respondent mirrored many of these issues.

Figure 3: Concerns from Respondents Less Supportive of Establishment

Rationale (Maybe)

- National Groups
- Relevance
- Frequency
- Location
- Other

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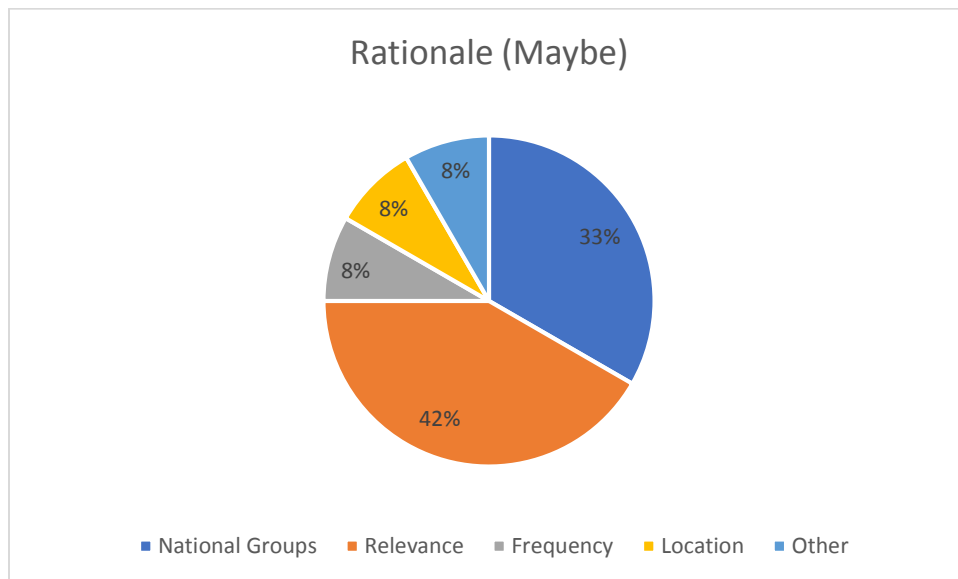
Notably, 21 respondents, including those who voted yes or maybe, also indicated their potential interest in being directly involved in establishing a group.
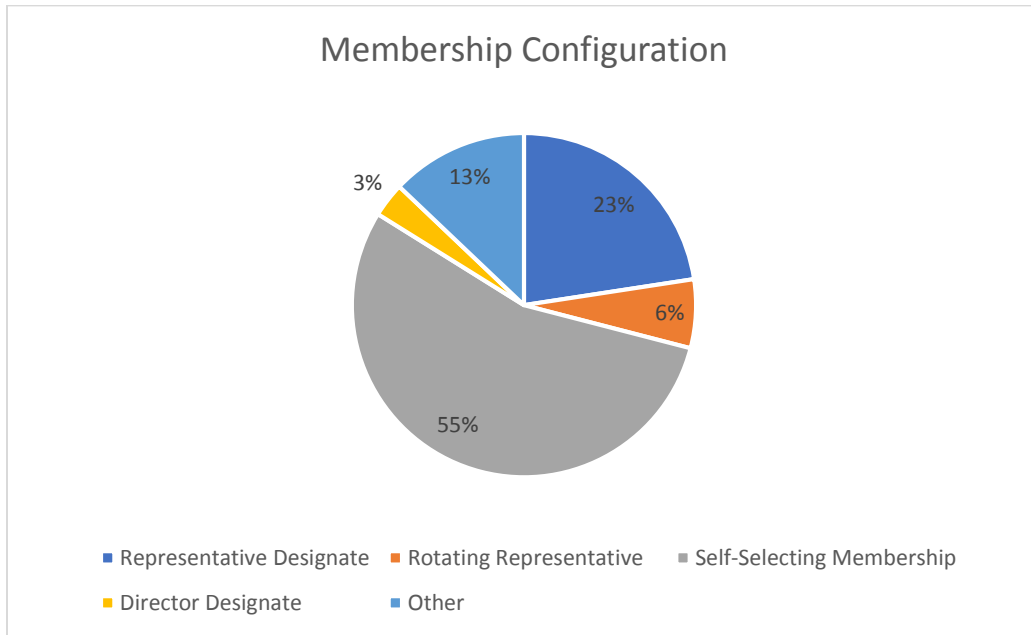
Group Configuration

Four questions were answered concerning how the group should be organised. Firstly, in response to the question of setting the group's direction and function, responses strongly favoured a collaborative approach (74%) whereby the group would set their direction with regular interaction and input from the Directors Board (**Figure 4**). A smaller, but not insubstantial, proportion of respondents (23%) preferred an autonomously, entirely group directed agenda. A single respondent preferred the agenda to be entirely directed by the Board.

Figure 4:DSSG Direction & Agenda
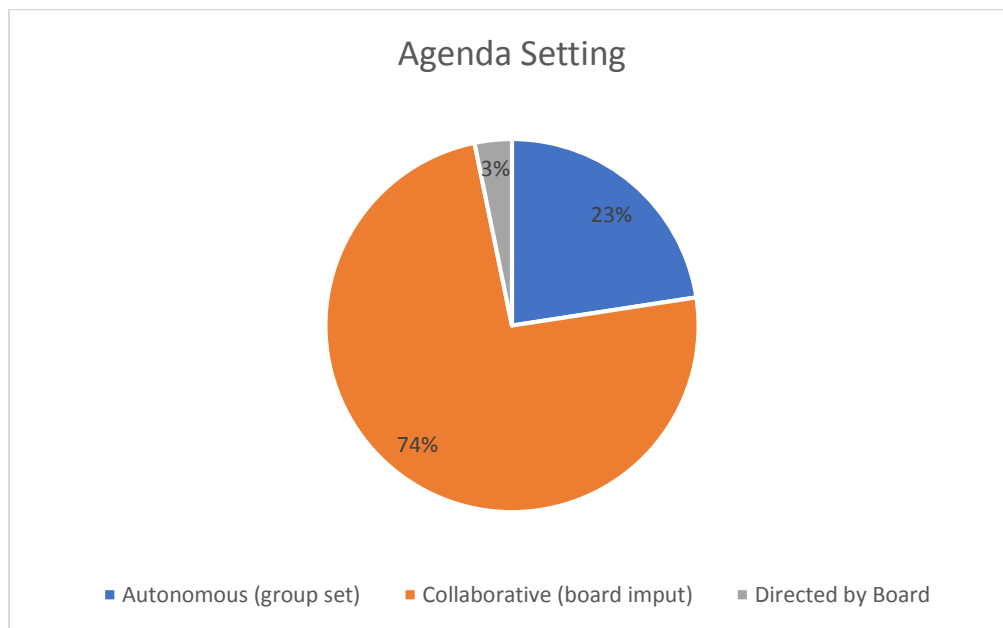
In terms of how the group's membership could be defined (**Figure 5**), respondents made a strong representation (55%) for individual's self-selecting to attend or not. Alternatively, a smaller number of respondents (29%) favoured some form of representative member delegate system. The remaining other suggestions (13%) outlined how the group's as-yet undefined function and purpose would likely shape the membership.

Figure 5: DSSG Membership Preference

Membership Configuration

- Representative Designate
- Rotating Representative
- Self-Selecting Membership
- Director Designate
- Other

Concerning the longevity and sustainability of a group (**Figure 6**), there was strong support (61%) for making it an ongoing concern, with far fewer respondents (16%) proposing making a fixed term arrangement. Around a quarter of respondents (23%) made other suggestions, many of which incorporated an element of 'trial and review', whereby the group would be initially fixed term and then after an agreed period undergo some measure of evaluation to establish if it was worth continuing.

Figure 6: DSSG Duration

Duration

- Ongoing
- Fixed (<2y) Term
- Fixed (>2y) Term
- Other
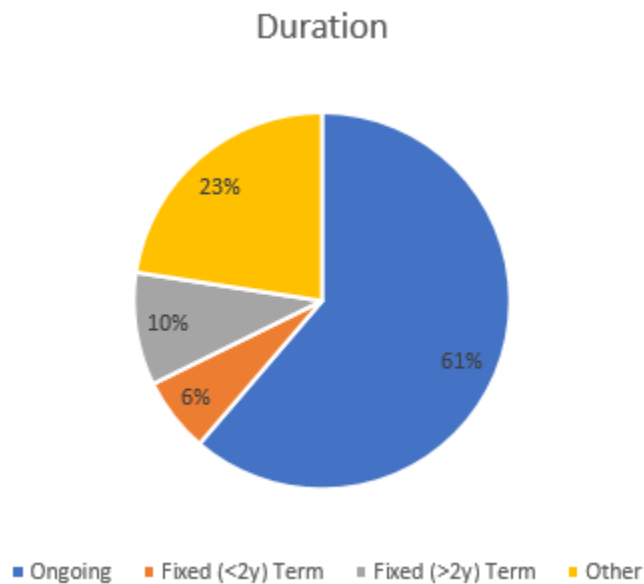
In terms of the frequency with which group meetings should be convened (**Figure 7**) respondents demonstrated a moderate (48%) preference for biannual assemblies, in line with the Directors Board's pattern. Quarterly (19%) and termly (16%) meetings were preferred by a smaller proportion of respondents. Other responses (16%) included comments noting the overall direction of the group (e.g. short term, longer term) would affect its frequency, and the importance of letting the group establish its own natural recurrence rhythm during establishing discussions.

Figure 7: DSSG Meeting Frequency Preference
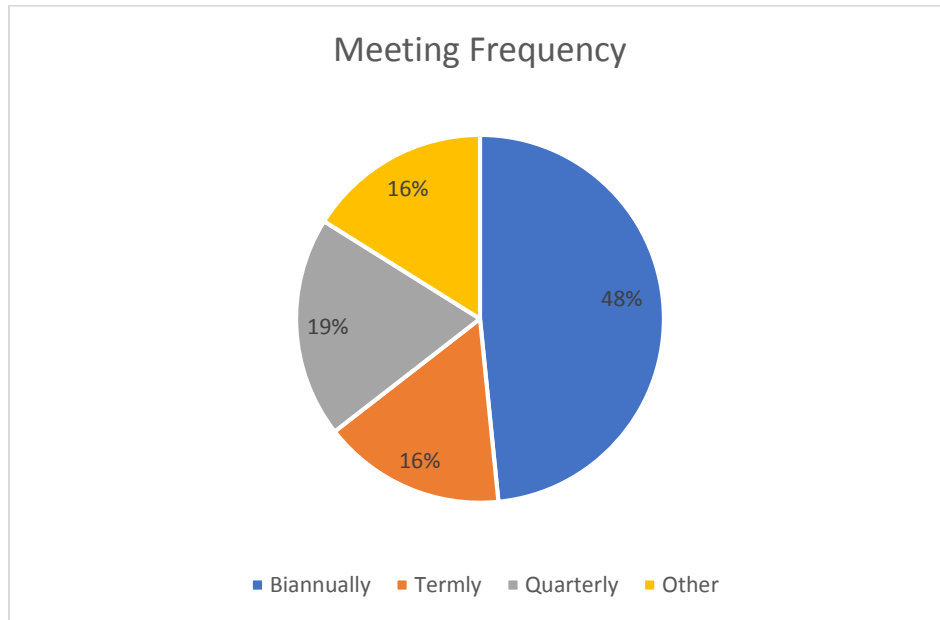
Recommendations

From this brief survey it can be demonstrated there is sufficient interest and value in organising a special interest group within the Collaboration for senior library staff. From the raw data such a group would meet twice yearly indefinitely, largely set its own agenda and comprise a self-selected non-representative membership. It would provide benefits to senior staff in terms of developing their peer networks, professional awareness, best practice knowledge and comparator experiences. It would be hoped this would help the group forge its own identity and value to participants, within the Collaboration and the wider library professional landscape.

However, there are a number of key issues which need further clarification, in order to demonstrate value to participants, along with encouraging attendance from eligible but currently uninterested staff. Not least among these concerns is strongly establishing a rationale and value gained from participation. Furthermore, operational questions over facilitation, reporting, Board relationship, governance and record keeping will also need to be addressed in any inaugural assemblage.

Finally, it can be surmised that 7 institutions either have no eligible staff or none interested in engaging in such a group. Hence, any decision taken concerning its formation should acknowledge the potential non-representative nature any initial group would demonstrate. However, it should be noted that many of the

extant Collaboration SIGs are not fully representative after a number of years of operation. Thus, this should not provide an impermeable barrier to progression.

Next Steps

The Chair and Steering Group will consider this report, and in the light of the support for the idea, come to a decision on how to progress the DSSG idea further practically. In line with other Collaboration special interest groups, it would be expected that an initial scoping meeting be held for all interested parties, with an outline for the group's guiding terms of reference and operational agenda be consequently developed. One member of the Steering Group and the Development Officer would ideally be in attendance.

Appendix: Questions

Preamble: *The Directors Board has proposed to explore setting up a 'Deputies & Senior Staff Group' (DSSG) as part of the Mercian Collaboration, comparable to those operated by other regional collaborations. While it is hoped the DSSG would develop a purpose complementary to the Collaboration's strategic plan, ideally members would also shape the group's specific identify, agenda and focus.*

However, the Board wishes to first establish if there is sufficient interest from senior library staff. All data will be handled under the Collaboration's data privacy policy.

1) Respondent information

    a. Indicate your institution*

    b. Provide your job title/role*

2) Would meeting with other senior librarians within a regional context be of value/interest to you?*

3) Why did you give the previous answer?*

4) How should the DSSG's agenda and direction be defined or set?

5) How should membership of and attendance at the DSSG be configured?

6) Should the DSSG be an ongoing gathering or limited in term?

7) How frequently should such the DSSG meet?

8) If you would like to be involved in any initial gathering to develop the DSSG idea further, please add your email. This information will *not* be disclosed to the Directors Board.

*Indicates a mandatory response

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[i] Aston, Harper Adams, the OU, UCB or Nottingham

[ii] Newman & BGU

[iii] However, the null-response from 5 institutions, along with staff not responding at others, likely indicate some senior staff with limited or no interest in such a group.

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