



Strategic Plan 2020-2024

Scope

This document outlines the Mercian Collaboration's five-year strategic plan for 2020-2024, providing an overview of our aspirations and priorities. The plan is informed by our [Terms of Reference](#) and operational experiences, together with [SCONUL's national strategy](#) and seeks to clarify how the Collaboration delivers membership value through enabling collaborative solutions and support within a changing policy, practice and societal context. It also provides a statement of intent against which we will align our future activities and measure our successes.

Introduction

Founded in 2014, the Mercian Collaboration is a professional network formed from SCONUL member libraries in the East and West Midlands of England. We operate as a regional sub-group of Sconul, with a relationship governed by a Memorandum of Understanding. Our [terms of reference](#) commit us to "work together to explore training and development and to seek efficiencies on behalf of our institutions and the wider community". We are funded through membership subscriptions, proportionally levied by institutional size, with a Steering Group and Executive Officer [*title to be confirmed*] to facilitate, coordinate and manage operations and governance.

Since our beginnings in 2014, the work of the Collaboration has grown substantially. In marked contrast to our single Special Interest Group in 2014/5 we now [have two operational and five Special Interest Groups](#), each with their respective events programmes, an annual conference, a buddying network and [a rich online presence](#). We regularly [review our efforts](#) and use this together with member feedback to inform organisational priorities. Member buy-in is strong, demonstrated through financial support, event participation and the activity demonstrated in [our annual reports](#).

While our development initially operated in a reactive mode, we have taken the opportunity of our expansion and maturation, coupled with our formal relationship with SCONUL, to adopt a more strategically nuanced evolution.

Update Feb 2022: Covid-19 Pandemic

While this strategic plan was devised to account for anticipated challenges and development of the academic library sector, the impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be ignored. As such, this plan has been lightly revised, to accommodate the altered circumstances and anticipated needs of the Collaboration's membership, and in the light of our experiences in meeting the unanticipated challenges to library service provision.

Environment & Agency

Member libraries operate in an environment comprised of many cultural, political, economic and technological factors, within both HE and broader society. In the lifetime of the current strategy, these will include, for example, Brexit, the governmental policy environment, student demographics, and pressures on funding. Much of the planning period has been dominated by the global Covid-19 pandemic and the need to react to its pressures. While the Collaboration's activities must respond to these external factors, we aim to deploy a collective agency on behalf of our membership to reshape the environment in which we operate.

Vision

Institutional members of the Mercian Collaboration share a common purpose supporting their respective university's goals, through providing exceptional library services, with membership conferring [tangible value for participating staff and institutions](#). The Collaboration facilitates this through enabling the exchange of best practice, seeking efficiencies, enhancing the academic library workforce's skills pool within the UK Midlands region. The Collaboration seeks to empower its member community to overcome concerns and meet service challenges, while situating a locus of regional collective influence within the wider higher educational environment.

Themes

The Collaboration has identified five key strategic and interdependent themes, which frame all our activities (**Figure 1**). Some activities may address only a single aspect, while others may engage with multiple realms. We have outlined below each theme's strategic contribution to the Collaboration's operations and the expected member benefits, along with a related action.

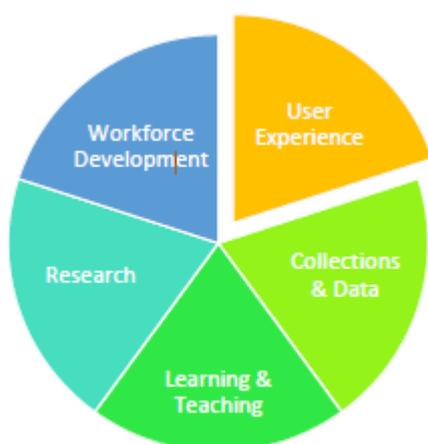


Figure 1: Mercian Collaboration Strategic Themes 2020-2024

Theme 1: Workforce Development

Upskilling, reskilling and expanding the knowledge capital of the collective staff of Collaboration members is crucial in delivering effective library services and meeting future challenges.

The shifting expectations of the Covid pandemic has placed a particular emphasis on agile and flexible staff to achieve service success.

Member libraries benefit from collaborative support for skills development, along with facilitated access to a collective knowledge base. Member libraries will benefit through an economy of scale when faced with increasing diversity of patron need, as individuals gain personal employability advantages, which enhances the recruitable regional talent pool.

The Collaboration will support the development of member staff's efficiency, experience, expertise, employability and excellence through facilitating knowledge exchange, skills training and professional development.

Theme 2: Collections

Collections and resource access are at the core of the contributions academic library services make to their institutions. These include physical stock, building infrastructure, online materials and the facilitated access to all three. All member libraries can benefit through regionally adjacent

collections, alongside various potentially beneficial consortial opportunities including: disaster management, preservation, archival access, data quality, digitisation, and purchasing.

As the relationship between physical space and effective use of library collections has particularly come to the fore in the response to the pandemic, we will actively reflect on what this means for our collections and the way we access them.

The Collaboration will explore how access, discoverability and content within regional collections can be developed to the mutual benefit of its members and their communities.

Theme 3: User Experience

User experience (UX) resides at the heart of what academic libraries deliver to their institutional communities. Within a competitive higher education environment, maintaining satisfactory, tangible and acknowledged quality services to these communities is crucial. Our member libraries will benefit through shared recognition, adoption and enhancement of effective UX through the championing of regional exemplars.

The very varied experiences of library users during the pandemic have given a new prominence to issues of equality and diversity in user experience, which we intend to examine and address.

The Collaboration will continue exposing and espousing exemplary user experience practice to enhance member reputations, enrich organisational service delivery and address inequality.

Theme 4: Learning & Teaching

Libraries have a core role in facilitating learning and teaching, enabled through a rich diversity of pedagogy and practice. Members facilitate the achievement of critical institutional educational goals, while additionally enhancing the student learning experience. Our member libraries will benefit through a shared enrichment of library educational skill portfolios, and a broader understanding of accommodating evolving patron learning needs.

The Collaboration will seek to reinforce library staff's contribution to enabling learning and development, through facilitating sharing of best practice, pedagogy and techniques.

Theme 5: Research

The role of the library is not simply the enabler or supporter of research practices, but the instigator of original work, projects and enquiries at a collaborative scale. Our member libraries will benefit from engagement with questions of research support, research practice, knowledge discovery, exploration and experimentation through Collaboration membership.

The Collaboration will support efforts between members and their staff engaged in research support and practice and will contribute to the development of original knowledge and insights

Implementation

The Steering Group, supported by the Board, Executive Officer [*Title to be agreed*] and SIG Chairs, are responsible for realising these aspirations.

Evaluation

The Strategic Plan provides an evaluative lens to assess how the Collaboration's aspirations are being met through its operations, enabling appropriate action to be taken to address any identified shortfalls.

Impacts

Anticipated impacts from will likely include:

- Standing Steering Group item reviewing current operations against strategic aspirations
 - SIG activity alignment against the themes within planning processes and evaluative reporting
- Revisions to the Terms of Reference to align them with the direction of travel

- Consolidation of issues concerning member obligation and member recruitment
- Director highlighting of Collaboration commitments, obligations and benefits within local managerial structures

Revision & Review

The plan will periodically be amended by the Steering Group to account for developments, with an end of life review in 2024 informing any future strategic planning. See however note: **Caveat: Covid-19 Pandemic.**

Document Control

Format revised and content amended to take account of the Covid pandemic under Chair Chris Porter, Feb 2022

Final version revised May 2020 following Steering Group approval.

This follows an earlier major revision (Jan/Feb 2020), following input from Directors, SIG Chairs and Steering Group in 2019.

The original version of this document was initiated during the 2017-2019 Steering Group, under Chair David Parkes. It was passed to the Steering Group (2019-2021), under Chair Diane Job, to finalise and implement.

Acknowledgements

The Chair notes thanks to the Board and SIG Chairs for their input.