# Mercian Website Audiences

While the Mercian Website was launched in January 2017, questions have remained as to its intended audiences, beyond those library staff working within member organisations. This document seeks to explore, and resolve that question, while also reviewing the options for future development.

Preamble

Since launch the Mercian Website[1] has averaged 87 user access per week, or ~4 access per Mercian member organisation. While this represents a low, but steady, level of access, questions as to developing the site's content have led to discussions within the Steering Group concerning which individuals or organisations are envisaged as its disparate audiences. Being clearer on these audiences will not only help to steer editorial tone in news articles and general content, but also aid in envisaging where future effort should or could be expended in developing new content or ancillary features.

Core Audiences

Figure 1: Mercian Website Audiences

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[1] https://merciancollaboration.org.uk/
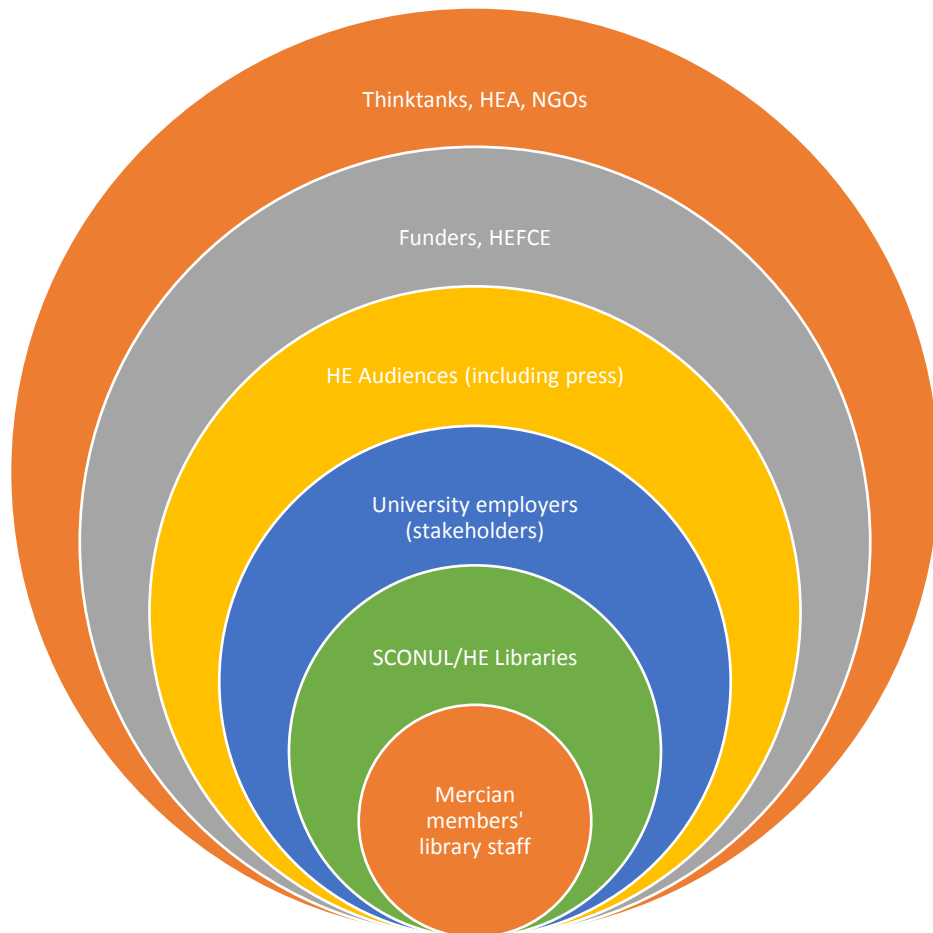
Following discussions with the Mercian Chair and Steering Group (11th May 2017, 17/13(a)) an outline of the anticipated audiences for whom the site is configured was agreed (see *Figure 1*). While this retains the core remit of the site in providing information for and about the activities of staff within the Mercian Collaboration's member libraries, it recognises there is a wider readership whom should be considered when developing areas of content.

In terms of content provided, it can be intuited that, at most, the first three audience circles' needs will have been accommodated to date. Library staff can learn of events or the activities of Mercian subgroups. Likewise, SCONUL and other HE library staff can plainly derive activities and outputs from the Mercian. Additionally, both these groups may deserve information on the governance of the MC and its SIGs, which are well represented through the extensive transparency that has been embraced throughout the Collaboration's operational life. Meanwhile, senior institutional management, should they be so inclined, can also gain a sense of the ROI their staff receive from their membership of the Collaboration, although to date the sites content has not been explicitly crafted or targeted to meet their informational requirements.

Enhancing & Evaluating

Were the Mercian Collaborations ambitious to forge partnerships, alliances or collaborations beyond their immediate region or sector, then effort will need to be expended to extend the site's utility and information to meet these broader audiences' requirements. For example, the section describing the MC's aims, merely reworks the Collaboration's terms of reference, and does not provide a practical indication to those audiences less conversant in the 'library lexicon' of the Collaboration's outputs or function. Likewise, the section on *Collaborations* is only a stub entry, two lines long. While this represents a place holder for ambitions, it is far from adequate in clearly outlining to potential collaborating organisations the benefits which linking with the Mercian could achieve.

Any efforts to enhance the site to overcome these informational deficiencies may, or may not, also incur development costs should additional site features be deemed desirable. They would certainly require additional labour on the part of the MCDO, and to a lesser extent the Steering Group's members. Such efforts may also require consultative labour, in identifying what features or content would be of value to such audiences. Notably, summary documents such as annual reports, may serve to satiate the needs of some of these broader audiences in aggregating key information about the MC's activities and outputs, with a minimum of additional effort. Repurposing, editing and reformatting key information about the MC would represent the least labour intensive satisfier of anticipated wider audience needs for digestible, high-level information.

As an additional consideration, some thought and effort may need to be expended in terms of evaluating the site against member staff's needs, desires and expectations. However, given the relatively low level of site engagement to date, such efforts would seem to currently offer a poor ROI in terms of time resource committed to resolving this question. Furthermore, it can be assumed such evaluative endeavours would also struggle to engage sufficient numbers for a representative assessment to be derived.

Conclusion

The MC Website recognises and answers the main informational needs of its immediate, recognised audiences. Nevertheless, its current content likely does not adequately satisfy the needs of the broader and more peripheral audiences, although the planned annual report should alleviate these needs to a degree. Should the MC wish to engage with these audiences, content and features will require developing. Should the Collaboration also wish to develop further features and/or content for its core audiences, some evaluative practices should be adopted to provide an empirical basis on which to build, before any development effort or outlay is committed.

Gareth J Johnson, Mercian Collaboration Development Officer, May 2017