

**M25 Consortium Annual General Meeting
6 June 2008**

Chair's Report

This is my second report as Chair, and the aim is once again to provide a broad overview of Steering Group activities since the last members' meeting. This report is deliberately brief as many of these issues will be covered in more detail at the business meeting. There will be an opportunity for members to submit issues for discussion at the meeting but, as ever, please don't hesitate to contact me, or my fellow Officers, directly if you wish to pass on any views or comments on Consortium activities.

Celebrating 15 years of Collaboration

For me, the highlight of the past six months was the 15th anniversary celebrations held at the House of Commons on 3 April. The party was sponsored by Barry Sheerman, MP for Huddersfield, who launched the event with a short address in praise of libraries and librarians before having to leave hurriedly to give an after-dinner speech a hundred miles away! The former Consortium Secretary, Roy Williams, gave a delightful speech honouring, by name, several previous officers who had managed to get the Consortium up and running despite some initial misgivings from those in the sector who feared that the older research libraries might be overrun by a lower class of student. And like every good party there was a cake, lots of impressive canapés (no wonder so many MPs are rotund) and good wine. Oh yes, good company too. Particular thanks are due to the organising committee, chaired by Maureen Wade. I'm looking forward to the 20th anniversary celebration already!

Steering Group Planning Day

In March the Steering Group held its second annual planning day – this time at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in Regents Park. What better place to focus on effective delivery of targets? After last year's blue-skies reflections on why the Consortium is here – which led to the stimulating workshops at the Greenwich conference on services for directors – this year we focused on the implementation of an agreed plan. I wanted to be sure that we were on target to deliver an Action Plan which was manageable and affordable. Some of the issues we discussed are covered below and the targets we agreed have fed into the updated Action Plan which will be considered at the business meeting.

Services for Directors

As members will be aware from discussions at the past two general meetings, one of the key projects for the current planning period is the development of services to support directors and Rosemary Lynch, as Chair of the Directors' Services Task and Finish Group, will report on this at the business meeting. We plan to recruit an additional 0.5 FTE member of staff in the systems team to develop the members-only web pages over the next two years. Once in place these will significantly improve our networking capabilities and the mutual support that we can give each other as

members of the Consortium. These new services do have a financial implication which I will return to later.

Developing InforM25

InforM25 is one of our flagship services and a great research resource, not only for London but for the whole scholarly research community. Work is already in progress to link InforM25 to AIM25 - so that a subject or keyword search on the former will also search the latter and flag up when there are archives in that field that may be of interest to the enquirer. What we plan to do over the next year or so is review our resource discovery services generally, in particular looking at the possibility of a single user-focused service for a range of collection descriptions. Money has been allocated in next year's budget for consultancy to explore the feasibility, and potential costs, of this Big Idea.

Other developments

I have focused above on a couple of Big Ideas that the Consortium will be developing but, as you will see from the Action Plan, there are several other strands of activity.

CPD25 is reviewing the training programme for next year and Mary Nixon has contacted directors asking for ideas for future training events. At the Planning Day we discussed broadening out the staff exchange scheme (and/or considering short-term placements) and proposals will come to the Steering Group for consideration.

The Quality Group has been scoping out a project to develop a collection of resources relating to space utilisation - another major project with several strands which will come to fruition over a couple of years. We will report further on this at a subsequent members' meeting.

Finally, it is worth highlighting our desire to provide direct support for students through WAM25, the externally funded feasibility study for a project which aims to develop walk-in access to e-resources for visitors. At present we are only at the feasibility stage - we will be asking HEFCE at the end of June to fund a pilot project - so it will be some time before this project reaches completion. But if and when it does then it should benefit all members who will be able to adapt good practice and apply this in their own library. I know from my own institution that there is a concern that as we discard print journals we are disadvantaging potential external visitors and researchers who at present do not have access to our network. Maureen will report on this project at the business meeting.

Funding new developments

As the budget will make clear, we can fund the additional systems post noted above from our reserves, but as we expand services, and the staff to support these, we do have to consider how this can be funded. In recent years we have managed to keep subscription increases within or below the rate of inflation, partly because our membership has gradually increased. One issue that we would welcome members' views on, and which we will discuss at this meeting, is whether, if our services and costs rise, you would be willing to fund this through increased subscriptions or whether you would prefer to see an element of cross-subsidy by charging more for CPD25 training events than the direct costs of running them and using the surplus to

hold down subscriptions. One of the significant developments over the past year has indeed been that of integrating CPD25 so that we are seen to be a single organisation, and, by next year, a single financial entity, so we can look at all of our activities in the round.

Administrative support

Indeed, the need for a clearer and single M25 brand was flagged up at the Planning Day and the Marketing and Communications Working Group will consider the implications for the web site. Part of being a single identity is also having a single administrative team and the Officers have been considering how to move towards this. We are very reliant on both Genein Cox-De Sousa (as M25 Administrative Assistant) and Suzy Ball (as CPD25 Administrator) to keep the day-to-day administration going. There is very little slack in the system, and these clearly defined roles will continue, but if we can at least have some cross-training to provide cover in the event of unexpected absence, this should increase our resilience. I should add that we are also very conscious that we have a Systems Team of just one (John Gilby) – but the recruitment of an additional member of the team should help by providing some overlap and support.

As part of the Planning Day we carried out a simple risk management exercise – what risks do we face and how can we minimise these? We concluded, reassuringly, that there were no major areas of concern, although we did need to pay attention to potential loss of staff expertise and single points of failure. The Consortium is very fortunate in having an agile administrative team – plus the voluntary support given by a large number of people through task groups and working groups – but we should still aim to put structures in place to minimise any potential risks and make best use of the resources we have.

New Steering Group members

Finally, for the benefit of members who did not attend the January meeting, let me introduce the four new faces who joined the Steering Group this spring. Welcome to:

Julie Brittain, Head of the British Library for Development Studies at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex

Sandy Leitch, who recently joined Kingston University as Head of Learning and Research Support

Ann Murphy, Head of Learning Services at the University of Greenwich

Pete Ryan, Head of Library Services at Canterbury Christ Church University.

Nick Bevan
Chair, M25 Consortium
May 2008