

Chair's Report

Since the last general meeting there have been three Steering Group meetings (July, September and December) plus several more ad hoc meetings and informal discussions. The purpose of this report is to provide a general overview of Steering Group activities during my first six months as Chair. The major issues affecting members will be covered in more detail as separate items on the agenda, but it may be of interest to note some of the other topics we have discussed on your behalf including some proposals we have aired but decided not to proceed with.

Governance, Finance and Strategy

At present the Consortium comprises three linked, but financially separate, entities - the M25 Consortium generally, CPD25 and the Systems Team. Each member thus receives three separate invoices. After seeking advice from external financial consultants about potential tax liability we intend to bring these together into a single financial entity with effect from the 2008/09 financial year. This should simplify financial management and ensure that the financial and administrative structure reflects the fact that we are a single organisation providing a range of services, including staff development and resource discovery tools, to all of our members. At the same time we will be seeking charitable and company status and for this reason members are being asked to approve a revised memorandum of association and articles of association. There are no major changes to constitutional arrangements, but the intention has been to simplify where possible to provide more flexibility e.g. in the way that working groups operate.

Over the next few months a small task group of Officers will be reviewing the Consortium's administrative support to ensure that we have enough staff, organised in the most appropriate way, to cover general administration, the organisation of CPD25 activities, systems support, web pages and so on.

Members' Services

While governance and financial arrangements provide the necessary underpinning for an effective organisation, it is the services to members that provide the *raison d'être* for its existence. One of our key projects over the next 18 months - which we have added as a new section to the Strategic Plan - will be to support M25 Consortium directors and representatives in their work and personal development by developing secure web-based services such as a directory of expertise and opportunities to engage in confidential debate and share documentation. This is being taken forward by a task and finish group set up by Anne Poulson, who recently left us to join CURL, and now chaired by Rosemary Lynch. If we can get this service right, with input from members, it will be a major benefit to M25 representatives, giving more meaning to the strategic objective of providing "mutual support".

Regional Collaboration

Following the resignation of Mary Davies, who devoted a considerable amount of energy building up links with other sectors, we have a new chair of the Collaboration and Partnership Working Group – Adam Edwards. During the last six months there have been significant changes to the organisation of NHS health libraries and, after discussion at the Steering Group, we decided to liaise with this group through the C&P WG, disbanding the London Health Libraries/M25 Consortium joint WG. The work that that Group had done in meeting the library needs of students on NHS placements will of course continue.

In the summer we took the decision not to continue our subscription to LLDA (London Libraries Development Agency), although we will continue to work with the Agency on joint events and activities where these are useful for our members.

Quality Matters

Following Adam's move to the Collaboration and Partnership WG, Julie Howell took over as Chair of the Quality Group. The potential remit of the Group is very wide – almost everything we do has a link with “quality” - but at the same time it is sometimes hard to find projects which are distinctly “regional”. The Group had previously proposed a service level definitions benchmarking scoping project but this was shelved after concerns about VFM given the cost of the consultancy. The Group has now come up with several ideas notably, in support of and dovetailing with the SCONUL Vamp project, working with colleagues in Estates on a detailed study of space utilisation and related costs in libraries and establishing some PI's for a benchmarking exercise (as set out in the Strategic Plan).

Externally Funded Projects

WAM25 (Walk in Access project) is covered separately on the agenda, but it is worth highlighting the fact that in addition to spending members' subscriptions, the Consortium also bids for external funding, in this case from HEFCE. The amount of money involved (£37,500) is significant, although this follows a lot of work by Maureen Wade, as Secretary, in drafting the bid and negotiating with colleagues in HEFCE.

Ongoing Activities

As reports tend to focus on “what's new” it becomes easy to forget how much work goes into maintaining those services for which the Consortium is perhaps most highly valued. The staff development programme managed by CPD25 is one of our flagship services and during the period from August to mid-December (when the last regular report was submitted to the Steering Group) over 250 library staff from Consortium libraries benefited from CPD25 seminars, chartership events or visits. During this period we welcomed Suzy Ball as the new CPD25 Administrator and expressed our thanks to Dave Puplett who moved to another job at LSE.

The Systems Team, which comprises John Gilby, continues to maintain the suite of InforM25 services and, at the start of December, there were 45 catalogues on Search-catalogues, with others in the process of being added. The Steering Group is aware that we are very dependent on John's expertise and potentially vulnerable with

such a small “team” and ensuring that we have sufficient back-up will be part of the review of administrative and technical support noted above.

The Marketing and Communications Working Group, chaired by Frances Norton who took over this summer, produced an excellent annual report with a very professional feel including some first class photographs of your naturally camera-shy Steering Group colleagues.

Finally, thanks to Genein, our Administrator (now Genein Cox-De Sousa after her marriage this summer), for organising a very enjoyable Consortium networking event one evening in mid-September at Regent’s College in the lovely setting of Regent’s Park.

Other Ideas

Not every issue that is discussed at the Steering Group meetings results in an action and sometimes we explore ideas but decide that, on balance, they are not worth pursuing. During this period we considered the merits of an M25 guide to research collections but felt that we should instead focus on enhancing InforM25 e.g. with links to MASC25. We also discussed the suggestion, from the Marketing and Communications Working Group, of an M25 prize but agreed instead to focus on promoting the existing CPD25 award.

Nick Bevan

Chair, M25 Consortium

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