How a NoWAL Community of Practice works

Neil Sprunt, a Teaching and Learning Librarian who runs the Copyright Guidance Service at the University of Manchester, and the Chair of the new NoWAL Copyright Community of Practice answered some questions from Nicky Freeman, NoWAL Operations Officer, on his thoughts about the CoP so far.

Question	Answer
You are leading NoWAL's first Community of Practice (CoP) – what do you see as the purpose of the CoP?	• To promote and share good practice by acting as a platform through which NoWAL copyright practitioners can share experiences and ideas, and seek support if required.
What made you decide to volunteer to lead the CoP?	• I'd been considering organising some kind of copyright group for NoWAL for a while, but due to work commitments and studying a PG Diploma in UK, EU and US Copyright Law last year, I didn't really have the head space or time to set one up. • I'd heard about the success of other CoPs through colleagues on the Universities UK/GuildHE Copyright Negotiating and Advisory Committee (CNAC), and since the NoWAL copyright group (of which I was also a member) had not met in a while, I decided that this summer (after completing my course) was a good time to organise a CoP for copyright practitioners in the Northwest. • My work on CNAC, particularly with the likes of Jane Secker and Chris Morrison had also confirmed to me the importance of copyright literacy, not just for staff and students at my own institution, but for the Library profession in general.

So far you have set up different mechanisms for the group to communicate with each other – is one working better than any others?
Do you have a personal preference?
	• Communication channels include
	    ○ a mailing list
	    ○ a Slack group
	    ○ quarterly face to face meetings.
	• I've also created a number of Google Docs to help share information but also encourage collaboration and sharing.
	• I think the mailing list and the meetings have both been very effective, with the Slack Group less so. I'm not surprised by this and will review usage of Slack going forward as traditional channels may be enough for the group.
	• I find face-to-face meetings the most effective form of communication overall, however we did not want to arrange too many and the mailing list is great for communicating in between meetings.

The group has met twice so far. What do you think are the benefits of face to face contact for the group?	• It's difficult to have a true dialogue online, be it via a platform such as Slack or by email, so face-to-face discussion is really important. • Discussing and sharing experiences in a group, with everyone in one place helps build solutions to issues copyright practitioners may be experiencing. • It helps develop a support network and demonstrates that you are not alone with the challenges you face. • Having a sounding board to talk through various issues, problems and ideas definitely helps me in my role, and I'm sure it benefits others on the group too.
Do you find being the Chair of the CoP is a benefit to you personally or to your role – or both?	• Both. On a personal level it helps me to develop my copyright knowledge in a sort of 'use it or lose it' kind or way, as copyright guidance is only one part of my job. • Charing the group also helps me develop my organisational skills, which is a key part of my role at the University of Manchester Library as well, where I line manage and help develop our various programmes and services. • Meeting new people and developing new contacts is also incredibly beneficial on a personal level, it also helps develop a wider community via my work with CNAC.
Have you got any examples yet of how being part of the CoP has assisted you in your role?	• Something that came out of the meeting we had in July was how we all should investigate how to collaborate with colleagues within our own institution who are also affected by copyright. As a result I'm meeting with colleagues in Research Services next week to discuss where our work overlaps and how we can work together to make our resources and training more effective.
Have you got any ideas on the direction in which you would like the group to go in the future?	• It still early days, and at present I think we need to focus on the group being an effective forum for sharing best practice. • However, our current terms of reference do also point to the idea of coming up with collaborative solutions to copyright issues within the HE sector, and actively contributing to the training and guidance to the wider NoWAL community, but I think we need to focus on the exchange of experience and sharing of best practice in the first instance.
Can you suggest other ways we might be able to use the skills and experience of staff in the CoP in the way NoWAL develops in the future?	• As mentioned above, the CoP or possibly a separate steering group could look into developing some training, resources and guidance, but that is something we should look at further down the line.

Do you have any advice about running or being part of a CoP that you'd be happy to share?	• I'm still new to the experience myself to be honest and therefore still learning on the job, however I think in general CoPs shouldn't be too formal and have a light touch format. • We are all busy and have enough meetings in our day jobs to deal with, so CoPs should be more about creating a relaxed environment to discuss shared interests, ideas and issues. • Sometimes just talking something through in itself is really valuable and that is what the CoP, in the main, should be there to facilitate.
Is there anything else about the CoP that you would like to share with your NoWAL colleagues?	• Cake and/or biscuits always helps.

A big 'Thank You' to Neil for his time and thoughts.