

*CARMEN – Co-operative for the Advancement of Research
through a Medieval European Network*

Business Meeting, 28 and 30 September 2007
Palazzo Vaj (Monash University Centre), Prato

Resolutions agreed at the Business Meeting, Sunday, 30 September 2007:

1. Responsibilities of Standing Committee members, and nominations for positions:

The Leeds Round-Table (July 2007) minuted: "It was agreed that SF should solicit people to form a Standing Committee, for approval at the meeting in Prato."

Issue: To broaden the decision-making process, ensure that policy-making is shared and can react collectively at any moment, and is not overly-centralised.

Proposal 1: To establish a Standing Committee comprising an Executive Director, Academic Director, Conference Manager and General Secretary, for a two-year from September 2007 to August 2009.

Proposal 2: That the task descriptions for these four offices for the above period shall comprise:

1.1 Executive Director

- To consult and develop overall strategies and policies for CARMEN
- To work with other officers to pursue the policies of CARMEN
- To take final responsibility for all implementation
- To call and minute meetings as required
- To ensure that the CARMEN website is maintained and accessible, and to develop the 'community' aspect of the site, via the Discussion Board.

1.2 Academic Director

- To define a strategy for CARMEN in terms of large-scale, multidisciplinary, multinational research projects
- To identify funding opportunities at a multinational level for institutions and scholars
- To foster good relations with other research-oriented academic associations or societies
- To maintain the Research Projects and Job Opportunities sections of the CARMEN website.

1.3 Conference Manager

- To identify locations on a rolling-basis for coming three annual meetings
- Liaise with local hosts to deliver the conference, in practical terms
- Liaise with Academic Director and Executive Director to establish a programme for the annual meeting
- To maintain the Activities section of the CARMEN website

1.4 General Secretary

- To keep an up-to-date list of participants, their institutions and contact details

- To establish criteria for participation, and to work with colleagues and other participants in maximising participation in the CARMEN network
- To establish a method by which the Executive Officers can consult with representatives of the entire network, in order to establish policy proposals
- To prepare and chair business meetings at the annual meeting
- Establish, oversee and scrutinise all appointments and the processes and terms under which appointments are made
- Maintain the Partners and Links sections of the CARMEN website.

Proposal 3: That the initial Standing Committee of CARMEN comprise Simon Forde as Executive Director, Dick de Boer as Academic Director, Claire McIlroy as Conference Manager and Mette Bruun as General Secretary.

2. Funding for central functions of CARMEN:

The Leeds Round-Table minuted: "Funding for an Executive Director was discussed, and DdB pointed out FP7 funding was theoretically available and that requests for funding should also be included in research proposals, as has already been done in Neven Budak's proposal. Another option for an Executive Director discussed was that of electing a retired academic."

Issue: The current organisation of CARMEN places a great deal of financial and other burdens on volunteers working outside their normal 'day-job'. To put CARMEN onto a more sustainable footing, allow it to grow faster, and to help development in less rich areas, it might be preferable to create some central infrastructure supported by medium-term funding.

Proposal 4: That CARMEN explore the possibilities of providing administrative and financial support for itself, in order to facilitate the more rapid growth of the network, in particular:

- An office address and support, email account and computing support
- A part-time officer (e.g. 20%FTE)
- Budget for travel to represent CARMEN to national or other groups
- Financial support to groups or countries that cannot afford to participate in CARMEN meetings.

Apart from assistance-in-kind, it is estimated that this would cost €25k-30k per year.

Fundamental questions:

- a) Do we wish to make this step, or remain voluntary, with duties shared among volunteers? Do we seek retired scholars or others who have more free time?

- b) Is it appropriate for an informal network to have an office and a central budget?

- c) If we opt for an office, how would one seek possible ways of funding such an office?
 1. By making a contribution a requirement for projects supported by CARMEN;
 2. By subscription – e.g. 50 institutions paying €100pa = €5000;
 3. By inviting interested universities to host the office for a 3-4 year term;
 4. By applying for funds from national or other agencies.

Proposal 5: That CARMEN explore funding through XXX

3 Participation:

The Leeds Round-Table minuted: "The issue of whether or not CARMEN should limit the number of representatives to its meetings occasioned a great deal of comment. Some felt that no limits should be set; a large number of participants reacted very forcefully against a general suggestion that representation should be selected nationally, and explained the various difficulties that this would produce in a range of countries. Others argued that a hierarchical structure of national representatives ran counter to CARMEN's purpose and would be detrimental to its initiatives. RM argued that the problem of an overcrowded meeting should be solved once that problem actually materialised; it very well might not. This position was unanimously agreed by those present."

Issue: The current participation is heavily skewed towards northern Europe and English-speaking countries. This is not desirable for anyone; it is paramount that Germany, France and Italy have central roles in CARMEN and that committed countries (e.g. Portugal or east-central Europe) can participate, when finances restrict their abilities to do so.

Proposal 6: That CARMEN focuses on increasing participation from institutions in Germany, France and Italy, in particular through XXX

Proposal 7: That CARMEN explores methods of assisting participation from countries where finance is short by XXX

4 Consultation:

The Leeds Round-Table minuted: "There was some discussion of the various difficulties faced in different countries in disseminating information about CARMEN."

Issue: While some have argued for a streamlined network restricted to a limited number of representatives elected by each country (perhaps through national associations), there seems to be widespread (at Leeds 'unanimous') opposition to this. Notwithstanding, CARMEN needs to find a way by which national associations can disseminate information to its grass-roots. Equally, CARMEN needs some sort of representative, consultative body to advise the Standing Committee; all of this without creating a bureaucratic structure that goes against CARMEN's ethos.

Proposal 8: That the General Secretary be mandated to discuss these issues with all interested parties and report to the next CARMEN meeting with proposals or options

The issues to be examined include:

1. Is the role of national associations limited to dissemination of information downwards to individual institutions? Do they have additional roles – in general or on a country-by-country basis?
2. Can national associations be permitted to represent all institutions in their country (in other words, individual institutions would not be represented in their own right – e.g. NEER, OsM, MAA)? Do we have a general policy or country-by-country?
3. What do we do when there are more than one relevant national associations (e.g. which represent one medieval discipline; or where there are competing bodies, such as in Poland)?
4. How can we identify or appoint people to represent regions in a consultative layer between the executive and individual participants in the network?
5. What regions do we identify as being able to contribute one or more representatives onto some consultative group?
6. Does CARMEN have any formal relationship to international academic societies which focus on single-disciplinary interests (e.g. sermons, drama, philosophy, particular authors)?
7. Should we institute an 'Observer Status' category for organisations, such as FIDEM, that do not wish to be formally associated with CARMEN nor play an active role in it. If this is an organisation's standpoint, should they be part of the network at all?

5 Future meetings:

Issue: CARMEN's declared policy is not to organise its own conferences but to meet alongside existing ones. Till now we have identified locations and dates in a rush, based on willingness and adaptability of possible hosts. We need to plan further ahead, with greater consultation.

Proposal 9: That the Conference Manager be mandated to identify locations for annual or biennial meetings for the coming three years and to present proposals at each meeting of CARMEN on a rolling basis

Proposal 10: That the Conference Manager ensure that CARMEN organises informative or promotional meetings or round-tables each year at Kalamazoo and Leeds, and also that suitable representatives from CARMEN attend meetings organised by key national associations (e.g. CARA, Mediävistenverband, SHMESP, etc.)

Aspects to be considered in identifying meetings to attend include:

1. Constructing a three-year rolling programme
2. Targeting countries where CARMEN needs to increase its participation
3. Finding amenable hosts, prepared to accommodate the sort of working-meetings developed at Budapest and Prato
4. Suitable location and dates
5. Promotional meetings at Kalamazoo and Leeds each year
6. Profile-raising and communication with key national associations.

6 Other concerns expressed:

The Leeds Round-Table minuted: "The question of CARMEN's legal status was raised, and it was decided that it is an informal organisation that does not in itself constitute a research body that would apply for funding. It may need to achieve formal legal status later on, but there seems to be no need for that now. It serves as a think-tank and offers mutual support to participating entities."

Issue: The light, informal network structure of CARMEN is welcomed by many; but certain key groups, particularly in under-represented countries, have expressed reservations (about status, legitimacy, lack of structure), while others have urged CARMEN to take on additional roles (as an advocacy group, or in promoting best practice in teaching).

Proposal 11: That the General Secretary include these concerns within the task outlined in Proposal 8 above

Proposal 12: That the Executive Director discuss further with key people in the network the desirability and possible remit and objectives of someone or some group to create (i) an advocacy group to represent medieval studies with governments and international bodies; and (ii) a teaching-and-learning group to identify and promote best practice in teaching, learning, curriculum design and the development and use of teaching resources

7 Miscellaneous:

Issue: Given that CARMEN participants are bidding for large amounts of public money, we should ensure that we do so ethically and without any perceived or real conflicts-of-interest.

Proposal 13: That the General Secretary draw up guidelines to address ethical and legal practices, in particular in relation to subcontracting to publishers, commercial parties and other 'service providers', and gender issues, and any positions within CARMEN which have access to finance

Issue: CARMEN's aim is to facilitate the success of medieval institutions, against other non-medieval competitors for limited resources. That precludes in-fighting amongst medievalists.

Proposal 14: That the Academic Director be mandated within the task description to 'foster good relations with other research-oriented academic associations or societies'

In particular:

1. The meeting should consider whether a formal reply is required to the letter from Jacqueline Hamesse of 22 September. If so, a draft is provided overleaf, in response to a series of points extracted from the letter by Mette Bruun.
2. The Academic Director should engage with representatives of the Mediävistenverband, the French and Italian national associations of medieval historians (SHMESP and SISMED), to clarify concerns and encourage greater input.

Extract of key items from the letter from Jacqueline Hamesse to Simon Forde, 22 August 2007
(prepared by Mette Bruun)

With official response to be sent after Prato by the Academic Director in his new function (see Proposal 14) = DRAFT RESPONSE

1. FIDEM must appear as observer rather than partner on the CARMEN homepage.
 - This suggestion is welcome and is addressed above under Proposal 8, item 7. Thus far, CARMEN has made no distinction between categories of interested party. Establishing a hierarchy of members (active vs non-active, participant vs observer) does, however, contradict the ethos of CARMEN.
2. Neither JH nor José Meirinhos or any other member of FIDEM want to be official members of the Standing Committee of CARMEN.
 - This suggestion is addressed above under Proposal 8, item 7.
3. Different signals have been sent concerning the extent to which CARMEN is i) a new organisation, ii) with administrative structures, iii) and members paying membership fees. The minutes from Leeds attest to an intention of institutionalisation which runs counter to what was said in Budapest.
 - with regard to (i) CARMEN was established formally at Budapest in February 2007, having had an Exploratory Meeting in Leeds in July 2007 to consider a range of alternative ways of meeting the aspirations of those present. This included not going ahead or seeking to operate under the auspices of an existing body such as FIDEM. It is therefore new and independent of any other body.
 - with regard to (ii) CARMEN seeks to be informal, non-hierarchical, open to all institutions active in Medieval Studies, with no prior restriction. Nevertheless, in any such body a level of formality, in order to permit some consultative structures, and to share workload, over time becomes essential. That is a continuing tension, and several participants within CARMEN would like far greater formality, though this does counter the network's original intentions and the clear desire of the great majority of participating organisations. But the model is to try and be light and modern, drawing some inspiration from electronic social networking fora. For instance, meetings have clearly rejected any proposal for a Constitution, a supranational Council to direct proceedings, any restriction to participation based on geographical origin, size of institution, or the numbers of institutions already participating from any one region.
 - with regard to (iii) CARMEN has no intention of charging membership fees, not least because that counters the aim of being open and accessible. Moreover, participation at annual meetings have been kept cost-free to participants and as affordable as possible to host institutions.
4. Why does an informal group need a full time paid director?
 - addressed under Proposals 4 and 5 above. In short, a non-hierarchical, collaborative network or enterprise (such as Wikipedia) still needs some central tasks to be undertaken. The question is how can this be done most cost-effectively and efficiently – through volunteers or some centralisation.

- there has never been talk of a full-time paid director. There is talk of ensuring that people who cannot afford to go to meetings (due to finances in their country) or who are paying out of their own pocket, are assisted. Any appointment of a part-time, 20%FTE position would be contingent on the terms of the funding agencies. It was clearly stated at Leeds that “for the interim, the meeting elected SF, by proclamation, to serve henceforward as Executive Director for CARMEN, on a voluntary basis, and to review this position if and when a more permanent and funded position could be created”. In other words, any current officers of CARMEN would work voluntarily up until such time as any position became funded, when the posts would be duly advertised and open to competition.
5. In Budapest, there was no answer to the question how money will be distributed between partners in case a project receives funding.
 - CARMEN is simply a facilitator, bringing institutions together, to foster international collaboration and to promote medieval studies. Allocations of funds between any groups that form is a matter for them. Otherwise, it would require some centralised CARMEN bureaucracy, and some notion that projects were authorised or validated by CARMEN, instead of facilitated.
 - However, it is indeed being examined whether through such projects funds can be set aside to develop the network-function of CARMEN, such as with funds to enable scholars from less well-resourced countries to attend CARMEN meetings. See one of the possibilities being explored under Proposal 4. This would be a voluntary tax given by a successful project, which had benefited from CARMEN assistance, to try and help the network develop and create new medieval projects.
 6. More knowledge seems required as to the new financial guidelines and rules of FP7.
 - This is a clear responsibility for the Academic Director. However, funding from FP7 is just one of the means to the ends, namely of fostering international collaborative projects which assist the development of Medieval Studies worldwide. The Academic Director is responsible, alongside leaders of research lines, for identifying all possible ways or helping realise these projects.
 7. One of the two projects which have applied for EU funding has already received funding and scholars have worked on it for several years. JH finds that the CARMEN-related project ought to be aware of this.
 - It’s not clear why if this is relevant. CARMEN is simply a facilitator; it is to be expected that many projects had an earlier life and that they were not created *ex nichilo* at CARMEN meetings.
 8. If CARMEN were to arrange a workshop at one of FIDEM’s colloquia, they would be welcome.
 - The policy is indeed for CARMEN to hold annual or biennial meetings at existing conferences. The meetings at Budapest and Prato did not meet that goal, for reasons of time pressures. The intention is, as soon as possible, for the Conference Manager to develop a three-year rolling programme of meetings which does overlap with existing, suitable conferences.