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REGIONAL BOARD REPORT

Subject: Principal Report	Purpose: For Approval <input type="checkbox"/> For Discussion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> For Information <input type="checkbox"/>	
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Purpose: To update Board on key areas of activity and performance.		
Linked to Strategic Goal 1: Respond to the needs of our region.		
Executive Summary: This report provides an update on: COVID 19 College Response Staff Engagement External Engagement		
Recommendation: Board are asked to note the paper and ask any questions they might have.		
Previous Committee Approvals: No		
For publication <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	For publication with redactions <input type="checkbox"/>	Not for publication <input type="checkbox"/>

Principals Report – April 2020

In light of our changing circumstances, the SLT have created a Performance Matrix that is reviewed weekly in our SLT meetings. This has been designed to give us an early indication of any emerging issues that we need to respond to with regard to Staff, Students and Finance.

For the week ending 3rd April the key data is as follows:

- 93% of students engaged with their course tutor and/or learning during that week.
- 471 Achievement Coach interactions with students
- 29 Mental Health support interactions
- 858 engagements with Moodle
- 67 new student interviews conducted
- 171 new student funding support applications (2020/21)

Staff Survey

We have engaged with Great Places to Work to survey our staff in order to gauge how well we are doing in communicating with and supporting them during this extraordinary period. We intend running this survey monthly to identify areas of risk through any change in responses.

Overall, the results are very positive to the period up until 1st April and we will agree a number of actions as an SLT on 22nd April after the team have had an opportunity to review the data and the supporting comments.

Question	N size	% Fav	% Neutral	% Unfav
I feel my concerns are being listened to by my organisation.	173	82%	12%	6%
Should I need to take time off, I feel my organisation would treat me fairly.	173	93%	5%	2%
My organisation's approach to COVID-19 is to put people first.	173	89%	9%	2%
My organisation actively encourages me to focus on my personal health and well-being.	173	85%	12%	3%
My manager gives our team clear direction.	169	85%	11%	4%
When working remotely, it is easy for me to be as effective as I am when working where I usually do.	173	43%	20%	37%
I have the equipment and resources I need to do my job effectively.	173	68%	20%	13%
It is easy to work with the people I need to in order to get the job done.	173	70%	17%	13%
When working remotely, our technology enables me to have enough social interaction with my colleagues.	173	87%	9%	3%
I feel trusted to do my job.	172	90%	8%	3%
I am confident that my organisation is managing the impact of COVID-19 effectively.	173	87%	11%	2%
I feel we are meeting customer expectations at this time.	173	66%	26%	8%
I receive the support I need from the organisation at this time.	170	88%	8%	4%
Management keeps me informed about the impact of COVID-19 on our organisation.	172	91%	5%	4%
I believe that we are pulling together as an organisation to support each other through COVID-19.	172	90%	8%	3%

There were 3 key themes in the comments in areas that we can work on as well as a lot of very positive feedback. These were:

- The difficulty of balancing Home/Work in the current climate and the expectations we have as the employer and those of our students. In addition to many of our staff having fractional contracts, many also now have Childcare and Caring responsibilities.
- Confidence in using technology and accessibility of information including WIFI/Broadband availability and the practicalities of remote working.
- Concerns raised around the practicality of students achieving their qualifications and the need for more mental health support as the period of lockdown extends.

Trade Unions

Locally we are meeting with our EIS and Unison representatives on a two weekly basis. We also invited them to our Wider Leadership Team (WLT) meeting when we agreed to close the campus on 20th March. The dialogue has been supportive with members queries based on us waiting for national responses before we can communicate with staff.

Unison have registered a **national dispute** regarding the right for their members to carry over leave entitlement for up to two years. This is based on revised ACAS guidance produced for Key Workers who either are asked to cancel their leave or are unable to take their leave because of work commitments. We have reviewed the guidance and we do not consider any of our employees to be Key Workers. Therefore our current procedure stands. This is that all staff are asked to use all of their leave entitlement by the end of August with an agreement with their line manager to carry forward up to 5 days if necessary. Sector dialogue is taking place through the Employers Association.

We did make the decision for all our staff to take the two weeks holiday over the Easter break (8 days) because we recognised how tired everyone was mobilising the college over a very small period of time. This was agreed in the WLT meeting when the Trade Unions were present. The vast majority of staff have enjoyed this break but there are a small minority of staff who had to work for a few days to respond to sectoral requests so it wasn't the complete closure we first anticipated.

EIS- FELA nationally are campaigning for all students to be certificated or not based on work completed by 3rd April. This message has not been helpful in trying to keep our least engaged students motivated. I have distributed a message to all our students via our Student Association Social Media Channels on Monday to encourage them to keep progressing with their studies and evidence collation.

EIS- FELA have also issued a student survey which prompts students to describe how difficult it is for them to continue to study from home and the need for additional mental health and hardship support. Some colleges have issued a strong message to their staff requesting that they do not email this to students and indicating that this could be considered a breach of GDPR. Staff will use college student email accounts to circulate and it is not asking them for any personal information therefore we do not currently see this as a risk. We will keep abreast of the national position and review our current position if necessary.

Curriculum Learning Managers

Whilst we are still managing the current situation, we are also starting to plan for next academic year. We have made the decision to progress with the interviews of our two CLM vacancies in Sustainable Construction and Business and Visitor Economy.

We will be conducting these using our usual format involving different stakeholders but virtually.

Other posts have been put on hold until we are back on the premises.

External Engagement

There has been a range of sectoral engagements co-ordinated by Colleges Scotland. Principals and Vice Principals have been involved in preparing sectoral asks and responses.

The **College Principals Group** is meeting every Tuesday and has had various conversations as a sector with SFC Chief Exec Karen Watt, our FE Minister MSP Richard Lochhead and DFM John Swinney. We have also split into subcommittees to engage with other key stakeholders including SDS and SQA.

Hazel has contributed to dialogue held with SFC in ironing out what the detail means under the broader assurances. Heather and Janet have been contributing into the SQA discussions and I have been working with the Business Development Directors group in leading the discussions with SDS.

South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) is now formally up and running but their efforts at this time will primarily be responding to the immediate economic challenges that the South of Scotland faces. A high level Phase 2 bid (included in Board papers) has been submitted by Borders and Dumfries and Galloway Colleges to progress with a single and more agile learning platform and for additional 'spokes'. This was being considered by the Board on the 16th April. Some email dialogue with Russell beforehand highlighted that there was now a risk around the funding split, although I am confident we would spend the full amount by 2021.

I have been attending the weekly conference calls with the **Scottish Council for Development & Industry** (SCDI), South of Scotland Board. It has been useful in gaining intelligence on the local economic context. Karen Jackson, Director of Strategy SOSE, attended the last meeting. Key issues highlighted are Digital Poverty, Food Chain and Logistics issues, Food Production (lack of labour for picking) and the longer-term impact on Hospitality & Tourism.

I have been in regular contact with **Borders Council** offering our support. To date we have donated (along with Heriot Watt) over 6000 items of Personal Protective Equipment, Hospital Beds and are co-ordinating the home delivery NHS Pharmacy service with 16 volunteer staff members. We have also started to produce protective visors using our 3D Printer that will be donated to our Care services.

Some discussion has also commenced regarding a co-ordinated approach to school to college transitions. This will be picked up by Heather as part of our Exit Plan (outlined below).

The four Principals involved in the **Edinburgh and South East City Region Deal** have had an initial meeting virtually to discuss collaboration on common systems and platforms that would improve how we operate and longer term efficiencies.

The Principal of Dumfries & Galloway College and myself met with the SFC to discuss how we move forward with developing a **Tertiary model for the South of Scotland**. The SFC will lead on a desktop exercise of pulling together all the data and intelligence pertaining to FE and HE provision and outcomes from the Regional Skills Investment Plan and Skills Alignment. It was also agreed that the SFC would look to recruit an independent strategic lead to work with the key stakeholders in developing a model. Timelines will now need to be amended in light of the COVID 19 crisis.

I had a meeting Richard Williams, Principal at **Heriot Watt**, to encourage a more strategic and open dialogue between both organisations. The conversation included long term estate planning and a future HE offer in the Borders. A follow up meeting is scheduled for 28th April.

I have a meeting scheduled with **Napier University** for 22nd April to discuss our involvement in the Downhill Mountain Biking Innovation Centre, funded by the Borderlands Growth Deal.

COVID 19 Lockdown Exit Plan

SLT are currently thinking through different scenarios which are being pulled together into an exit plan.

The timeline and approach to any lessening of the current lockdown measures are presently unknown but it is likely that this will be a phased approach dependant on priority groups.

The Executive team will continue to gather intelligence from Borders Council, Scottish Government, SFC and SCDI in understanding the local economic and public sector priorities and constantly review our outline plan as a result.

All of SLT will input into the outline plan but a number of leads will be responsible for the overview of the overarching themes. The plan will be reviewed weekly in SLT.