

REGIONAL BOARD REPORT

Subject: BCSA Update Paper April 2020	Purpose: For Approval For Discussion For Information X
Prepared by: Ann Letham	Date: 3 rd April 2020
Purpose: To provide an update on Students' Association activity.	
Executive Summary: Overview of engagement activities based on BCSA's operational themes; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1 – Education • Theme 2 – Health & Wellbeing • Theme 3 – Student Community 	
Recommendation The paper is for information only	
Previous Committee Approvals: N/A	
Signed: <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 20px;"> Author Principal </div>	

Student Presidents/Officers Update

April 2020

Operational Theme 1: Education

- The second Student Experience Committee was rescheduled to Thursday 20th February. There was a large amount of really positive feedback and a few areas for improvement. Action was taken by APs in these areas. Class rep feedback has now been received for the third SEC which has been postponed.
- Students have been well looked after in the lead up to lockdown. Most are very appreciative of the action the College took to ensure access to laptops for as many students as possible. Some introductory level courses need additional support as they were not first priority to receive equipment but we are working with the College to explore the options available. BCSA has suggested Alumni members are approached to help in the first instance.
- The student representative system is working well, with class rep conferences taking place. Class reps have now moved onto Teams and are able to share their experiences with each other.
- There is some concern at the time of writing over how exams and assessments will take place. At present students feel quite concerned with SQA exams due to start in 4 weeks and no assurances to what format the awards will be given.

Operational Theme 2: Health and Wellbeing

- Student Mental Health Agreement – this has now been approved.
- Further partnerships were developed prior to lockdown with Co-op Earlston to reduce food surplus. At the start of the COVID-19 measures we were able to continue to collect and distribute food, however this is no longer viable. We have worked with Student Services to become an approved referral agency for foodbanks during the lockdown and we will resume working with Co-op, Asda and Tesco once college buildings reopen.
- Big White Wall – we continue to promote this service for all students. It is an extremely useful resource in the current climate.
- Students attended Scottish Mental Health First Aid training with See Me. We are working with the College to procure purple lanyards to identify Mental Health First Aider Staff and Students in college. This was a project we started with the support of Kevin Drum and it seems fitting to prioritise this now.
- April is Stress Awareness Month and we are giving students the opportunity to join in with 30 days of free online yoga and Tri Fitness workouts via our social media platform.

Operational Theme 3: Student Community

- Regular clubs – These have now become challenging in a different way but we hope to continue Move-it-Mondays.
- Teams have been created for various different interest areas. Most of our socialising as a student community now occurs on Teams.
- We supported the College Enterprise Coordinator in her series of programmes around enterprise.

- March was Women's History Month. We ran an awareness campaign on social media and a Move-it-Monday takeover.

Looking Forward

This is a challenging time due to all of the uncertainty. However, we feel the Students' Association has made steps forward in all of the operational themes this year and we hope to continue in a similar manner, through different means in these uncertain times.

A very close run election resulted in Ann Letham being voted in for a second term as Student President.

An Appendix with more detail is attached. It records BCSA action taken between lockdown and 31st March.

Appendix A.

BCSA UPDATE

Projects and activities since the College Buildings Closure on 20th March.

FOOD

Prior to the closure of college buildings, our foodbank was very well supported by staff and a great help to students. Anticipating problems delivering food to students during the lockdown we did a shop for long life goods and with the help of L1 Catering students, created packs of fruit and veg from the college kitchen, as well as portioning up dried goods. Students were encouraged to take what they required in the final week of buildings being open.

Since closure we are finding it increasingly difficult to manage the practicalities of both the saving food from landfill and the foodbank projects. We are working with Student Services to become an approved referral agency. Then the College can direct students in need to already established foodbanks. We have achieved this with one foodbank in the region but there are another seven to approach.

Border Eggs donated twelve dozen freshly laid eggs to students. Most of these were double yolkers to the delight of students. These were very well received in the run up to the bursary payment date of 27th March.

We are also sharing easy recipe videos and other cheap meal ideas on our social media channels.

VOLUNTEERING

An open Facebook group has been set up for students – “BCSA Students help each other”. There are now over 80 members and we post volunteering opportunities and messages of support.

We have shared the Prescription Delivery Service on the group, the BCSA page and in an all-student email. Students have also been encouraged to sign up at Volunteer Scotland if they are able and some have already responded.

TEAMS

We are making use of Teams to catch up with any student who would like to have breakfast with us at 9.30am every weekday. We have a core of 4 students who have attended every morning and others who come and go. This is an important resource to keep students in a routine as much as possible.

We are also using Teams to have weekly BCSA Exec team meeting and to keep up with Student Support. Class rep teams have been made for each curricular area and a lead rep team has been created. These channels are being used to collect important feedback on the availability of Wifi at home for students and any problems with lack of equipment or lack of data for home study. We hope to utilize these channels further to inform student reps on help available with these issues.

NEWSLETTER

We have put together a newsletter to be circulated on Fridays. The first edition received a good response so we are hopeful that further issues will receive similar engagement.

NUS UPDATES

NUS updates occur on Skype every Tuesday afternoon. Although the immediate concern has been for students in halls, it is useful to have information regarding how transport budgets are reallocated to discretionary budgets and to keep up to date with communication between NUS and senior civil servants. It is also an opportunity to let NUS know how we are getting on and what our priorities are.

ALUMNI INITIATIVE

A few students have been in touch to let us know about trouble they are having around connectivity and additional phone data required to complete college work. We were inspired by the University of York who launched an initiative whereby alumni members could contribute to a fund to ensure students were not disadvantaged by distance learning. Clare Nairn has worked with BCSA to come up with a paper outlining how the system might work.

At the time of writing we are unsure of how this was received by Senior Leadership Team. We are not optimistic that they will approve the crowdfunding option laid out but we are hopeful that some good may come of the mentoring or laptop donation options. At present we are assured that there is adequate money available in the discretionary fund to cope with the increased requirement of data bundles but our opinion is that it would be wise to pursue all avenues to ensure that learning is not adversely impacted by the lockdown due to financial hardship.

EXERCISE

We are hoping to use 30 Days of Yoga on YouTube every day in April. April is Stress Awareness month. We will schedule posts for through the Easter break and encourage students to complete one session every day. We do not anticipate that uptake will be high but highlighting online workouts is key when opportunities to exercise outdoors or in team sports is restricted or prohibited.

Billy Brogan, VP Activities, is putting together a criteria for online “Isol-ympics”, similar to SSS, where students can submit their videos into a virtual competition.

ELECTION

Student President Elections took place between 23rd-27th March. Ann Letham has been elected Student President for a second term.

To ensure elections were able to continue under the current circumstances, the process was moved to online-only. SA staff worked with the Returning Officer to develop alternative processes to support online campaigning. Five candidates ran in the election with a total of 109 votes cast. Although voter turnout was lower than the previous year (-16%), the SA considers this a positive outcome. Last year candidates

had the opportunity to engage in face-to-face campaigning for 2 weeks, as opposed to this year's week of virtual campaigning. Voting numbers indicate good awareness of the SA, and good engagement with the SA's virtual communications.

Borders College has become the first college in Scotland to run an online-only election. Colleges throughout the sector are keen to learn from our experiences to deliver their own online elections. The Students' Association Support Officer has been sharing best practice at SA staff network meetings.

CONCLUSION

It has been a very busy period for the Students' Association and there have been hundreds of messages from students – from those just wanting a chat to those concerned about connectivity, to those concerned about providing food for their children. It has been recognised by the college that this will be a difficult time for students' mental health. Re-engaging students after the break is going to be a large challenge for the college.

In general though the experience has been as smooth as possible for most students at this point. Students have been made aware of all of the different help available to them and we are working to make them aware that additional discretionary funding is in place if it is required. Some students are getting in touch with the Students' Association who have never been in touch with us before. Often this is because they need assistance but in some cases they are sharing positive experiences of life in lockdown, to help other students.

Our priority remains to represent students and enhance their experience.