

# REGIONAL BOARD REPORT

<b>Subject:</b> COVID-19 Exit Strategy	<b>Purpose:</b> <b>For Approval</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>For Discussion</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>For Information</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Prepared by:</b> Hazel Robertson, VP - Finance & Corporate Services	<b>Date:</b> 9 June 2020
<b>Purpose:</b> To update the Regional Board on the phased move out of lockdown.	
<b>Linked to Strategic Goal 1: Respond to the needs of our region.</b>	
<b>Executive Summary:</b>  <p>On 9 March 2020 the College Executive team invoked our Emergency Planning arrangements in response to the global spread and impact of coronavirus COVID19. We successfully transitioned to a model of working from home and remote learning, at a very rapid pace. The move out of lockdown will be much more complex with many variables to be considered.</p> <p>This paper provides a summary of activity to date and sets out where we are in relation to responding to the Scottish Government route map for the phased exit from lockdown.</p> <p>Our management arrangements were highly responsive and effective in leading the move into lockdown. Our IT arrangements have proved supportive of the switch to home working and remote learning. Our managers and staff are highly engaged in the process and we are working on detailed planning for moving out of lockdown.</p> <p>We are working to ensure as positive outcomes as possible for our students. Some students will not be able to complete in this academic year, which will impact on 2020/21.</p> <p>SFC have guaranteed our Credit funding for this year and next and this takes a great deal of pressure off from a financial perspective. We have also secured funding from the job retention scheme.</p> <p>Risk assessment and service planning is ongoing to implement the phased re-opening of our campuses, based on the public health advice for social distancing and hygiene.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to and movement within our campuses will be constrained and robustly managed.</li> <li>Hygiene arrangements will be paramount.</li> <li>We expect travel arrangements to be challenging.</li> <li>We expect to retain significant volume of working from home and remote teaching.</li> <li>There will be significant impact on the delivery of the curriculum, which will be reflected in the College calendar and the curriculum plan for 2020/21</li> </ul>	

We are well placed to re-open the buildings when possible and to adapt our working and teaching arrangements to live within the constraints and dependencies outlined in this paper.

**Recommendation:**

Board members to discuss the report and seek any further assurances as required.

Board to note our preparedness for the phased move out of lockdown when permitted to do so, which will involve a significant continuation of working from home and remote teaching delivery.

**Previous Committee Approvals:**

none

For publication ☒

For publication with redactions ☐

Not for publication ☐

## **1. COVID 19 – EXIT STRATEGY – 08 JUNE 2020**

On 9 March 2020 the College Executive team invoked our Emergency Planning arrangements in response to the global spread and impact of coronavirus COVID19. We successfully transitioned to a model of working from home and remote learning, at a very rapid pace. The move out of lockdown will be much more complex with many variables to be considered.

This paper provides a summary of activity to date and sets out where we are in relation to responding to the Scottish Government route map for the phased exit from lockdown.

Our management arrangements were highly responsive and effective in leading the move into lockdown. Our IT arrangements have proved supportive of the switch to home working and remote learning. Our managers and staff are highly engaged in the process and we are working on detailed planning for moving out of lockdown.

We are working to ensure as positive outcomes as possible for our students. Some students will not be able to complete in this academic year, which will impact on 2020/21.

SFC have guaranteed our Credit funding for this year and next and this takes a great deal of pressure off from a financial perspective. We have also secured funding from the job retention scheme.

Risk assessment and service planning is ongoing to implement the phased re-opening of our campuses, based on the public health advice for social distancing and hygiene.

- Access to and movement within our campuses will be constrained and robustly managed.
- Hygiene arrangements will be paramount.
- We expect travel arrangements to be challenging.
- We expect to retain significant volume of working from home and remote teaching.
- There will be significant impact on the delivery of the curriculum, which will be reflected in the College calendar and the curriculum plan for 2020/21

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## **2. PART ONE – MOVING INTO LOCKDOWN**

### **2.1. Command Structure**

Under our Emergency Planning arrangements, an Incident Management Team (IMT) was convened on March 9. On March 11 the coronavirus outbreak was declared a pandemic.

The IMT rapidly moved to MS teams meetings, before closure of the campus buildings. We established an MSteam for sharing of documentation, external intelligence, and communications. This was supplemented by daily Executive and WLT meetings as required. In emergency planning terms this command structure is defined as follows:

<b>Level</b>	<b>Responsibility of commander / team</b>	<b>Membership of team</b>	<b>Leadership</b>
Gold	Highest level of decision making – understand sector and wider strategic context - steer our strategic response	Executive team	Principal
Silver	Wide leadership team covering all relevant aspects of the business – tactical response	Incident Management Team comprising SLT members plus additional support (communications, project management, student association) Deputies also invited	VP Finance & Corporate Services supported by Estates Manager
Bronze	Operational team meetings to progress operational detail to deliver the response	SLT members and WLT managers	Estates Manager supported by PMO Manager

The key features of this command structure are effective communication, clarity of decision making, delegation and monitoring of completion of tasks.

### **2.2. Transition to home working and remote learning**

Responses to the daily COVID19 emails and questions raised through the website were continuously monitored and helped to inform our Frequency Asked Questions which we maintained on the website. All emails to the COVID19 email account received an individual response.

During week commencing 16 March we issued 65 student loan laptops, 29 monitors to staff and 30 headsets to support use of MS Teams. We encouraged staff to take home items of moveable equipment which they would need to work from home. Many staff were able to take home their laptops, screens and other peripheral items. A small number of staff took home their chairs and desks. Staff were unable to take home printers as these are networked. We had already adopted VPN technology to support home working and issued more tokens to those who requested it.

We pushed for rapid adoption of MS Teams as our preferred collaborative and communications tool, with one of our staff running drop in awareness sessions across the College over 2 days. MS Teams adoption is easily our fastest adoption of new technology, with over 480 teams now in place.

We bought a licence for the Blended Learning Consortium, which provides access to a wealth of materials to support remote and blended learning.

The Command structure successfully managed the transition to working and studying from home including the closure of all our buildings on Friday 20 March. The IMT stood down on 27 March.

We closed the College for the two week period over Easter (from 6 April). This was to recognise the huge effort that had gone into closure of our buildings and the transition to home working and remote learning. This allowed staff time to recuperate and return refreshed and ready for the new way of working. All staff took annual leave.

### **3. PART TWO – POST LOCKDOWN**

#### **3.1. Operational management**

From 20 April we commenced a revised meeting structure. We established an extended SLT, meeting weekly, including the Communications Manager, and the PMO Manager.

We implemented a weekly performance matrix with key indicators that provide an overview of how the organisation was responding to and coping with home working and remote teaching delivery. The matrix covers student, staff and financial issues. Board members receive an update on key indicators as a separate agenda items. There are no concerns at this time.

#### **3.2. Further enabling home working and remote learning**

MS Teams has been a critical enabler, being used for official and team meetings, and keeping in touch with staff and students. We are beginning to use ZOOM, and are considering its further use.

We have made reasonable adjustments for staff to be able to work effectively from home. We have delivered 155 items of equipment to 73 staff (desk, chair, monitor, mouse, keyboard). We have received a very small number of specialist requests, which are under review.

#### **3.3. Funding support for students**

We are supporting students to apply for financial support through discretionary funding.

In line with SFC and SAAS guidance, bursary, education maintenance allowance and pre-existing discretionary fund awards have continued to be paid during lockdown. We have used student support funding to provide additional assistance. We are anticipating an underspend in this funding due to the lock down (no longer paying travel costs and reduction in childcare costs). Some of this underspend has been transferred to the discretionary fund, which gives more flexibility in its use.

Some examples of the use of student support funds are data packages for internet access and emergency payments as an alternative to students having to use local food banks. Through student support funding, we have rolled out an additional 175 laptops for students. We have had some requests to support students financially over the summer period however this is not straightforward under the current SFC and Department for Work and Pensions rules. We are hopeful that there will be some relaxation of the rules. In tandem with the rest of the sector we have requested carry forward of any unspent funds to next academic year.

#### **3.4. Job retention scheme**

Following guidance from the UK Government, Scottish Government, the SFC and Colleges Scotland the College has identified, to date, 65 staff who have been furloughed under the Government Job Retention Scheme. The decision to furlough staff was taken in consultation with the EIS FELA, UNISON and the Support Staff Non Union Representative and further to a meeting of the Chair's Committee of the Board to seek approval to access this additional funding. The first claim to the scheme for the months of March and April 2020 has been submitted and £38,548 has been received.

The scheme is open until October 2020 and the College will continue to access this treasury funding for those staff who continue to be unable to fulfil their job role due to the COVID19 crisis. Re

Receipt of these additional funds has mitigated part of our forecast deficit, and thus will ultimately reduce the requirement for savings (much of which would inevitably come from the staff budget).

### **3.5. Staff engagement**

SLT approved the use of Great Places to Work to undertake a short all staff survey to gain feedback as to the impact of lockdown and homeworking. The survey was run within the first two weeks of lockdown and again at the beginning of May.

The feedback in the majority was favourable with most staff indicating that they felt:

- the College had done everything it could to make the transition to homeworking as easy as possible.
- in the main that they were well informed and that they were able to work in this new way.

Key themes were picked up by SLT, addressed in the College E-Magazine and by line management.

The E-magazine is a key communication channel with a readership of approximately 275 staff each month. It started as a 4 page with the recent edition being a 12 page document including lots of good news stories from around the College.

### **3.6. Union engagement**

The Principal and the Head of HR and Development are meeting with Union Representatives every 2 weeks in addition to the normal formal LJNCC and JCCP meetings. The informal meetings allow for transparency and sharing of ideas, challenges and up to date information, thus enabling increased partnership working. Though these meetings we have addressed matters before they become issues and we shared the financial challenges the College is facing. The Unions have appreciated this interaction, are able to understand the challenges and anticipate actions that we may have to take to achieve a phased exit from lockdown.

The Health and Safety Reps are working closely with the Facilities Manager to ensure that our buildings are safe to enter, and that safe systems of work will be in place before staff return to the buildings when it is safe to do so.

### **3.7. Equipment loan**

We loaned the two new beds and smaller equipment from BTECH to the Louisa Jordan field hospital. These items will be required to be able to deliver curriculum from the BTECH area. We have been in touch with APUC who have advised that the equipment will be returned. Should the crisis require use of the Louisa Jordan hospital we have committed to re-loaning the equipment when required.

#### **4. PART THREE - ROUTE MAP THROUGH AND OUT OF CRISIS**

Given the progression of the UK and Scottish lockdown exit plans, we resumed IMT meetings from 25 May, to manage our transition through the phases of the Scottish government [route map](#).

At this time we moved the SLT to fortnightly, with the WLT also meeting fortnightly (as the bronze command levels) to oversee progress and achievement of deadlines, to ensure that we learn from each other and that consistency of approach is maintained.

##### **4.1. Scottish Government advice**

The government route map gives an indication of the order in which we will carefully and gradually change current restrictions. It provides practical examples of what people, organisations and businesses can expect to see change over time. The phasing table will continue to be updated. An extract of the phasing table (as at 4 June 2020) is attached at Appendix 1.

The virus continues to pose a significant public health threat. Core requirements in all phases are:

- Hand hygiene
- Cough hygiene
- Physical distancing
- Face coverings in enclosed spaces including public transport.

In response to this guidance, our campuses will look and feel very different when we return to the buildings. It will be more, not less, complicated than the way we are currently operating. Guidance to staff and students will evolve and the importance for us to be providing clear and consistent messages will increase.

Overarching advice throughout the process is:

- To stay at home unless there is a requirement for essential work that can't be done at home
- When you do go out, stay two metres apart from people from other households
- Undertake thorough and regular handwashing.

##### **4.2. Delivery issues**

Remote delivery cannot provide a solution for all subject matter.

The portfolio areas have been undertaking detailed review of the progression of students so that we can understand what gaps there will be by the end of this academic year. There will be students who have been unable to complete due to the inability to undertake practical work and assessments.

Curriculum planning is ongoing, with the added complications of social distancing and hygiene.

Once the gap analysis and curriculum planning is complete, we will have a quantification of the delivery challenges going into the 2020/21 academic year. The early part of the new year will need to be a blend of continuing and new students, remote, blended and onsite. The College calendar will reflect this requirement.



Practical work will require the most careful scheduling with social distancing and hygiene being key considerations.

We will need arrangements for the return of loan laptops from students who are not continuing into 2020/21. This could be through the drop off service we have already implemented (operating as a pick up service) or potentially implementation of a hub for students to drop off equipment, with the support of local partners (council, health services).

Having gone live with on line admissions, and developed online enrolment during the past three months (a year ahead of plan), we are further progressing our digital delivery plan. We are working on implementation of on line induction for the coming academic year. Some elements of induction will continue to be on site however we can reduce the requirement substantially.

We have temporarily reconfigured the online admissions system to enable telephone/digital interviews, and further reconfiguration is under development to enable us to communicate the impact that the current measures will have on applicants at a course specific level. We are dealing with completers, January starts, remote learning, and courses not running, so we need to make sure the right applicants are getting the right message.

#### **4.3. Service planning**

We convened a WLT meeting on 1 June to focus on implementing next steps.

- how to ensure that staff could continue to work from home, and to identify any exceptional requirements to access the buildings
  - how to manage start and finish times
  - how to comply with maximum occupancy restrictions
- what does a reduction in on site staff / students mean for your service
  - social distancing
  - transport planning
  - no social space
  - different catering provision.

The group were very engaged and provided high quality feedback, evidencing that they are actively considering the challenges (and opportunities) ahead. The results, along with the gap analysis, curriculum plan, and risk assessments, form the basis for the very detailed planning required.

#### **4.4. Moving out of lockdown – factors to consider**

1. There will be an expectation of a significant level of consistency across the sector in terms of the dates for opening buildings, restarting services, and approach to the curriculum. Our Estates Manager is on the sector wide group which is developing the FE guidance with the Government and Trade Unions.
2. A significant programme of estates works is required before we can re-enter the buildings. This includes legionella checks along with making sure that when systems such as air conditioning and heating are turned back on, there are no significant problems. Our systems are never switched off for this length of time. A minimum of a week will be required to undertake these checks and remedy any issues.

3. When we get back into the buildings, as a rule of thumb, implementing social distancing will reduce our space capacity to one third of normal levels. This figure may be lower for some areas due to specific layout of spaces and the level of practical activity.
4. Implementing social distancing will require physical modifications along the lines of what you may have seen in shops and pharmacies. The Estates team have begun these modifications week beginning 8 June.
5. There will be restrictions in movement around the campus. We will operate a one way system to minimise social contact. Signage has been developed to implement the one way flow.
6. We need to consider staff start and finish times, class start and finish times, and whether we need to have evening and/or weekend opening to reduce the potential for social contact.
7. Hygiene and cleanliness standards will be paramount and this will constrain access to toilets and lifts. Additional cleaning will be required. We may face shortages of supply in cleaning products, materials to support social distancing and any PPE that may be required. If we have to rely heavily on PPE then we probably have not implemented sufficient physical and operational measures to protect staff and students.
8. The model of catering provision will change, and our catering provider will largely dictate what format of service we are able to operate. This model will likely run at a loss rather than the current model whereby surpluses from the service are returned to the College and then shared between the two student associations.
9. HWU are looking for earlier access to the campus as university research can begin in phase 2. We are in discussion with HWU about what this might mean and how we can restrict and control access to a small part of the site (including consideration of tightly controlled opening hours). We have convened a fortnightly campus management meeting to ensure a coordinated response.
10. We have engaged a Health and Safety Manager to cover our existing vacancy, who commenced 8 June. Risk assessments will be undertaken for every service area. These will be more critical in the areas of practical delivery such as Hair and Beauty, Construction, Engineering. Maintaining hygiene and social distancing is paramount. This will affect (a) the number of students who can be on premises at any one time and (b) the time which students can be on premises.
11. We will have to prioritise completing students before new students, and will need to be able to advise students of start dates.
12. We need to decide when we will open services, such as the restaurant and the salon, to the public.
13. Travel issues are going to be challenging for our students and staff. Use of public transport will be significantly constrained by social distancing requirements. If we decide we need to run curriculum areas in the evenings or weekends, this will further compound the travel challenges. Changes will be required in relation to student travel arrangements.
14. Because of all the above factors we will want to continue staff working from home and students learning remotely if at all possible. Staff groups will need to robustly argue why it is essential for them and students to be on site at the beginning of this process.

15. Staff will need to modify their work patterns around the requirement for social distancing and hygiene.
16. NHS Borders have contacted us to enquire about being able to use our premises for face to face training. We have not been able to establish whether we can support this request.

#### 4.5. Physical planning

In order to support the safe return of staff and students to the campuses, the table below sets out our current thinking with regard to the phased approach to re-opening of the buildings.

Phase	Action	Staff on site
One	Develop operational adjustments to Campus, discussing with contractors and raising orders for materials and stock	Only FM staff to complete adhoc staff deliveries of home working equipment and essential maintenance.  And IT staff on Monday am to perform essential backups and maintenance.
Two	Begin to install social distancing measurers on all Campuses including signage and physical barriers, classroom alterations. Develop departmental risk assessments and safe systems of work within high priority areas such as workshops. Develop Support services risk assessments and safe systems of work within high priority areas such as help desk/Student advice. Compete all essential maintenance to ensure all systems and process are safe to occupy, inc, Legionella, Air Con, heating and ventilation plant.	FM Team  H&S Manager and Departmental manager or CLM  H&S Manager and Departmental manager or designate  FM staff and Contractors  Possible requirement for HWU research staff to be on site subject to risk assessment. And IT staff on Monday am to perform essential backups and maintenance.
Three	Complete the installation of works identified in Phase 2 based on risk assessments.	FM Team and Contractors  Possible Curriculum return in high priority areas to complete.  Support staff occupation of work areas post completion of any modification works. Envisage very small numbers on a needs must basis maintain social distancing measures and home working as a priority.  And IT staff on Monday am to perform essential backups and maintenance.
Phase Four	Plan phased return based on risk assessment and gap analysis	To be determined

#### **4.6. Other sectoral considerations**

We are continuing to receive updates from our partner organisations and regulatory bodies in terms of their response to the COVID19 pandemic, the impact on their own functioning and planning, and in particular changes to their planned engagement with us into the next academic year.

On 27 May, SFC and Education Scotland jointly communicated the decision to delay the requirement for submission of the Evaluative Report and Action Plan until further notice. We still plan to undertake a self-evaluative exercise, to recognise the steps taken through the year and in particular the rapid acceleration over the past few months. However, we will adapt our approach to enable us to undertake this remotely, at a high level, offering the opportunity to WLT to participate whilst ensuring it remains proportionate, given the priority of COVID19 planning.

SFC has provided reassurance and additional guidance on 29 May, on how the Outcome Agreement cycle for 2020/21 will be completed, and we await further communication in July on refocused sector commitments and priorities.

**APPENDIX 1**
**SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT ROUTE MAP (EXTRACT)**

	<b>Lockdown</b>	<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Phase 2</b>	<b>Phase 3</b>	<b>Phase 4</b>
Seeing other people	Within own household No social gatherings	Meet small numbers outdoors with social distancing	Meet larger groups outdoors with social distancing Meet people from other household indoors with distancing and hygiene	Meet people indoors from more than one household with distancing and hygiene	Further relaxation Public health measures continue
Getting about	Stay at home Essential travel only Public transport physical distance Face coverings	Consistent with opening of businesses If home working is not possible – manage travel demand through start and finish times, and flexible working	Consistent with opening of businesses If home working is not possible – manage travel demand through start and finish times, and flexible working Public transport operating increased services but capacity strictly limited	Public transport operating full services but still restriction for social distancing	Public transport full services Physical distancing may remain in place
Schools, Colleges and Universities	Schools and childcare closed  Universities and colleges closed – remote learning and research	School staff return to schools Increased number of children accessing childcare	  On campus university lab research restarted subject to physical distancing	Children return to school under blended model. Social distancing in place. Expected to open on 11 August  Universities and colleges phased return with blended model of remote learning and limited on campus learning where priority. Public health measures (including physical distancing) in place.	Schools and childcare provision, operating with any necessary precautions.  College and university campuses open – including key student services with any necessary precautions.