

Dear Colleagues,

As I am sure you know, changes to public health guidelines and support to business are being released sporadically, and are often preceded by speculative media interpretations. We, through the great work of the Covid 19 operational planning team (OPT), will continue to monitor and follow the definitive guidelines and take appropriate action. The OPT have been working very hard to understand the impact of 'social distancing' on our operations and have today published the OCoP W09 as a live trial as our response to these guidelines.

Changes in furlough annual leave arrangements

The government have updated leave arrangements for furloughed staff. The changes allow FSC to ask furloughed staff to take leave as long as the appropriate notice is given. Furloughed staff have been sent more details in a letter being sent out today. The changes will allow us to manage leave more fairly across the organisation, crucially ensuring that we have staff available when our customers return. I would also like to take this opportunity to encourage non-furloughed colleagues to take a break. I know how hard you have been working, so do take some of your annual leave while the sun is shining. Can I send a big thank you to Lottie Storey in particular. She hasn't had a break from answering calls to Head Office since this started and has also picked up calls diverted from several Centres, making a huge difference to our ability to keep up with customers' enquiries and safeguarding our reputation.

Variations on a national theme

Much has been made of a variations across the UK on moving out of lockdown. England has gone for four steps with (now tentative) dates, Northern Ireland has five steps but with no dates, Wales has a traffic light system with no dates although it's actually still four steps: lockdown and then red, amber, green. People in Scotland will be allowed to meet friends outdoors, sunbathe and start shopping at garden centres from today. Whilst this variation just adds to the workload of the OPT, group and centre staff the thinking and phases that are likely to unfold with regards to schools reopening is still broadly similar. The only thing we can be fairly certain about is that it will be patchy and uncertain for some time to come.

Publications

While people can't get to our Centres, FSC Publications is still busy helping people get to grips with their garden wildlife. The warehouse staff are busy sending out over 200 orders a week (and bringing income for the FSC). Top seller for May were Garden Safari and Garden Wildlife Packs, as well as, the ever popular foldout guides to Bees, Butterflies and Plants of Walks and Waysides. Social media is a huge help for sales and great way to interact with our customers, so don't forget to retweet @FSCPUBLICATIONS and share your #FSCfinds on Twitter (https://twitter.com/hashtag/fscfinds?src=hashtag_click) and Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/fscfinds/>).

Best regards and stay safe

Mark