

Thu 22/10/2020 13:25

Dear Colleagues,

I've just been tuned in to the chancellor's latest announcements. It is too early to assess but that 'enhanced rescue deal' coupled with the plethora of local restrictions and the implications of them mean that this continues to be a fast paced and highly challenging environment. We will ensure that we will interpret, assess and exploit any opportunities that favour our charity and you, our staff.

Returning to work and working from home

A lot of intense effort is going on to sort out the post furlough working arrangements from 2nd November. It's essential that staff are ready to return to work and this includes completing the Covid-Secure training. In order to maximise the financial support available from the government and make our cash last longer, we need staff to be prepared to work 40-80% of the time or take leave. The work also has to be meaningful in order to qualify for the support and this means that there will be opportunities to get involved with projects across the organisation as well as centre based initiatives. This might be new work or dealing with some of the backlogs that have built up.

What has thus far characterised FSC's response to the pandemic has been the willingness of staff to get stuck in and take on all sorts of tasks that needed doing, from joining new teams, becoming a hostel team leader, delivering live You-tube teaching and dealing with film companies. It's this flexible mindset that will help get us through the next few months. Into the mix of matching staff, work and the fallout from today's announcement of changes to government support comes the added complications of additional lockdowns at either local or national level. I hope that you will be able to seize the opportunities that might come your way to do something slightly different and see a different side of FSC's business.

It is probably worth me reminding you that the default remains that staff should be working from home. There are some roles that cannot be done from home, but please don't just turn up at your usual place of work on Monday 2nd November unless you have received specific instructions to do so.

Thank you to staff who have taken leave whilst on furlough. It all plays a part in helping FSC keep costs low and do the critical work that is needed over the lean winter period when we will need to survive on almost no income until schools return at some point next year. Please try to take your remaining leave entitlement by the end of the year. If you have been given bonus leave then you can carry this over. (I will be off on leave next week too, so no catch up I'm afraid)

TV, Radio and lobbying work

This morning saw some good news, the Scottish Government announced that it will provide £2 million of funding to mitigate the financial challenges facing the residential outdoor education sector as a result of the coronavirus crisis. More details on how the scheme will work are due out later but this has been the result of relentless lobbying and campaigning. FSC and the wider sector continue to press the UK government for support and for the guidance to be changed in both England and in Wales as it is due to be reviewed shortly. We have to be sensitive to growing health concerns and mindful of local restrictions and this is why FSC continues to make the case that schools should be allowed to make the decision so that all of the appropriate risk assessments and restrictions can be taken into account at the local level. Tim Foster appeared on BBC Look North (sorry that the episode is not available) and BBC Radio Scotland gave the issues a really good airing with Liz Smith MSP and Pete Higgins, which you can hear 1hr 23 minutes into the [programme](#).

Early Day Motion Support for outdoor education centres – your chance to contact your MP

Early day motions (EDMs) are motions submitted for debate in the House of Commons although they don't have a day fixed for that debate. Most don't get a chance to be discussed but they are useful for generating interest and a way in which FSC can see which MPs are supporting our sector. It's also a relatively simple thing to ask an MP to sign one so if you wanted your voice heard by your local MP as an employee or trustee in the sector, you can just drop them an email and ask them to support 'Early Day Motion 986 Support of Outdoor Education Centres'. If you are not sure who your MP is, you can [find them here](#) by putting in your postcode. Centre Managers have already been asked to contact their MP on behalf of their centres. This EDM was set up by Castle Head MP Tim Farron (so Castle Head staff don't need to email unless you want to thank him for his support) and is relevant to all Westminster MPs because although the Education Guidance a devolved, support for the sector or more general support for impacted businesses is not necessarily a devolved issue. The EDM is as follows:

That this House recognises the importance of outdoor education and residential centres in developing young people's confidence and teambuilding skills; understands the severe plight that jobs and businesses in the sector are facing as a result of the covid-19 crisis; urges the Department for Education to review the current policy of no residential visits as they are an essential part of children's education and establish a clear timeline for when residential visits are likely to resume; urges the Government to provide a Leisure and Tourism industry specific funding package, including residential outdoor centres for when the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ends in October 2020; and urges the Government to help protect outdoor education charities with financial support in 2021.

Fundraising

FSC Christmas Gifts from Publications

Before reaching for the Amazon option, FSC Publications can sort your Christmas gift dilemmas in one go with our new range of gifts, charts and packs for all ages. The new Christmas cards will be going on the [online shop](#) later today. With increasing lockdowns and travel restrictions, getting outdoors locally is likely to rise in popularity again as other options close down. Our gifts can keep people interested and entertained and offer an alternative to more screen time and let's face it you wouldn't want to be seen shopping without one of our butterfly bags, would you?

FSC have joined [AmazonSmile](#) as one way for those that shop on Amazon to support FSC. I am aware that Amazon is a bit of a marmite company. Views ranging from those outraged at the idea, to those that see it as a lifesaver during lockdown and a way for some small business to have route to market when the shops were shut. Some customers have raised concerns although quick thinking by the marketing team has persuaded some to donate to us direct instead. However, if you are an amazon shopper please click the link for FSC [here](#) it is really easy, and every little bit helps.

Zoom subtitles

We are still pursuing making Zoom meetings better for those who are hard of hearing. Zoom offer a closed caption service which sounded hopeful until we found out that it's basically finding someone who can type very fast as people are speaking. This Wizard of Oz option (along with all the endless possibilities for amusing typos) isn't quite up to scratch so we are exploring others.

Special Mentions

Staff reps have played a vital role in the staff consultation and I want to thank them for all their hard work. It's not an easy task and they have carried it out with great diligence and professionalism.

Keep well and stay safe.

Mark