

Thu 05/11/2020 12:17

Dear Colleagues,

Well here we are in lockdown in England yet again. It is what we anticipated in our planning but doesn't make it any easier, particularly in the manner in which it trickled out of the corridors of power in Whitehall over the weekend. Of course the difference this time is that education continues to be delivered and although the DfE guidance against residential remains, day visits and outreach continue to be delivered and our digital offerings are growing in popularity. It was timely and convenient that we had already scheduled a welcome zoom session for the Monday, and it was good to be able to welcome over 100 of you back on Monday over zoom even though a lot happened since the invite went out. Thank you for the appreciative feedback that we have had on that and on Helen and Nick's contributions. A recording can be seen [here](#), where you can also view the box set of all previous all staff zoom meetings. You need to be signed into office 365 to view these. The username and password is the same as your office 365 / email password.

### **Lobbying and working MPs**

Thank you to those who have been in touch with their MPs. Work continues across the sector and it is making a difference. Don't be put off by a less than helpful response from your own MP because sometimes it only takes one or two to make a difference. A new Outdoor Learning All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) has been set up with RyC MP Robin Millar as chair and CH MP Tim Farron as vice chair. This is no small achievement. APPGs are cross party fairly friendly groups where MPs with a common interest get together and they form a useful focal point for campaigning.

### **Meetings with the DfE to look again at the guidance relating to the ban on residential are due in November.**

We are sending another round of letters to MPs to ask them to help make the case for schools to be the ones to decide so that they can take into account the appropriate restrictions for their area. It's important to also challenge the myths about the sector being unable to offer Covid Secure learning opportunities. The DfE did achieve something truly remarkable this week, in that a spectacularly poor automated response to one of our carefully crafted letters actually rendered Joy speechless. Paraphrased thus: *thanks for your letter, we are really busy. It if was about the guidelines they have probably changed since you wrote and here are the new ones.* We will not be put off however and will continue to chase them.

### **FSC Trading Company**

There have been quite a few questions about the purpose of setting up an FSC Trading Company, so this is a good opportunity to address some of them. As a charity, the surpluses that FSC generates from charitable activity are not subject to corporation tax. However, we have generated non-charitable income for a number of years which is taxable and in 2019 FSC came very close to paying tax on this income. This would have reduced the amount we could plough back into our charitable activities. As we anticipate generating more non-charitable income from our alternative income streams (eg from Stay With Us holidays to using FSC centres as a film location) a trading company has been incorporated, FSC Trading Ltd, through which to channel all of our non-charitable income. Any profits that FSC Trading make can then be gifted back to FSC Charity, without paying any tax, thereby maximising the amounts that can be used for our charitable purposes. FSC Trading Ltd is a wholly owned subsidiary of FSC and it really is quite normal for a charity to have such a trading company.

### **Talking of Tax...**

If you have been working from home, you may be entitled to claim tax relief direct from the government in respect of any additional household expenses that you've incurred, such as heating

or lighting. The tax relief is currently based on £6 per week or £26 per month (£4 per week or £18 per month prior to 6 April 2020). Making a claim is easy, you just need to go to <https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home> and complete the online application. If you are eligible you will receive your full entitlement by way of an adjustment to your tax code. HMRC have simplified the process and there is a useful blog by Martin Lewis on [Moneysavingexpert.com](https://moneysavingexpert.com)

### **Out of Office and Auto Responses**

With staff working patterns continuing to change, now is a good time to check that your email auto response messages are up to date and professional. It's really helpful for people to know when you are available and likely response times. Please take advantage of the options to have different internal and external messages as appropriate, being particularly mindful about how you communicate specific working hours eg on internal responses only.

### **A Natural History GCSE comes a step closer**

The exam board, OCR, has put forward a proposal for a GCSE in Natural History to the Department for Education. FSC has been involved in this for several years, we have a place on the OCR Strategic Advisory Board for the qualification and input into the consultation about the content. The next stage is that the DfE will decide whether to take it forward and if they do, there will be further consultation with stakeholders so we will be looking out for that. In the meantime, the process has generated some really useful stats and opinions - including from young people- on their desire to study more natural history and study it outdoors. You can read more about it [here](#) and the summary of the findings has some [good infographics](#).

### **World Earthworm Day**

To celebrate the role that worms play in composting, the FSC Biolinks team held a mini-conference about vermicomposting with three guest speakers. This 90 minute event was attended by 133 people and generated over £1,200 in revenue. The talks are now publicly available on the FSC Biodiversity Projects YouTube Channel [here](#).

### **Royal Society of Biology Update**

The RSB do a good monthly [Covid-19 bulletin](#) where you can get a bit more in depth science than the BBC is sometimes able to offer.

### **Special Mentions**

Philip and Jennie have put in a huge amount of work to get not one, but four grant applications off to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. They were difficult applications, delivered in a very tight timescale over a time when it was already very busy for those involved. As anyone who has been involved in this kind of process knows, funding applications don't often lend themselves to cutting and pasting from previous projects. Each one tends to be unique, but the team led by Philip put in a lot of hard work and stayed focussed on producing high quality applications. Thank you both for a tremendous effort.

Keep safe and stay well

Mark