

Thu 12/11/2020 13:41

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome news doesn't usually come along like buses, but the announcement of the extension of the furlough scheme (which came just too late for last week's catch up) and now the news of a potential vaccine has led to a collective sigh of relief. The first will help with our cash flow although the detailed guidelines always lag behind the announcements, and the second is in line with our business modelling. It's a relief of course, but the enormous amount that we have borrowed to survive will still have to be paid back. To repay it we will need to generate levels of business never experienced by FSC before, so this means that there can be no reversion to "business as usual" for us. Post Covid, we need a vibrant and reinvigorated business that supports an innovative and highly relevant charity. That is what will ensure that we are still here in two years' time. We have already started gearing up for those changes. This week's Finance and Administration committee will be considering this in more detail as we progress towards presenting the budget and business plan for next year to the Board of Trustees meeting in early December.

The Future of I&F

This was the subject of this Tuesday's all staff talk which you can see [here](#), but I want to highlight what is quite a big change for FSC and one that demonstrates what we will look like post covid. I&F is being replaced with two areas – Eco-skills courses and Leisure Experiences and Holidays. The first will be structured training courses focused on biodiversity, taxonomy and environmental art based on previously popular courses and also on where we see additional market demand and opportunities. The focus of these courses will be on progressing skills and knowledge.

Our Leisure Experiences and Holidays will be focused on experiences and environmental awareness and will include both family and individual wildlife and nature holidays, Eco Camps and Duke of Edinburgh groups, art holidays and painting breaks, walking holidays and wellbeing breaks. These changes will offer a much more joined up approach for our customers and will also improve the opportunities to cross sell other courses, experiences, and FSC publications. FSC has looked at the growing demand for green Jobs, continued concerns over climate change and a desire to do something about it, and the upsurge in those valuing connecting to nature for their own health and wellbeing so we are responding accordingly.

FSC BioLinks

The BioLinks team have completed their Progress Report and Project Activity Report which are submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. There is so much good material in here that there are plans to make it the subject of an All Staff Zoom, but I just wanted to pick out in particular the Virtual Meetups which were set up very quickly in response to the pandemic. The team smashed the target of engaging 3,000 participants when over 4,100 took part in the 31 events and over 2,900 have since viewed the events on line. Most of the sessions, which covered topics as varied as bees, migratory species, hedgehogs and hornets, can be seen [here](#). The feedback has been really positive with the course usefulness and enjoyment getting scores of 4.4 and 4.6 out of 5 respectively. Comments from participants have also shown how welcome such easy access courses were at a time when so many other opportunities were prevented. There is a genuine desire to see them continue after lockdown, particularly from those who find accessing or traveling to courses difficult. Here are just a few: *"You have no idea just how much these brighten up my week"* *"Well done for finding such inspirational speakers and on adapting so seamlessly to the current situation"* and *"this online format is brilliant please continue!"*

DfE Guidance on Residential

Meetings continue with DfE officials as we try to get the blanket ban on residential changed to allow schools to be able to make the decision. The myth that the sector cannot deliver teaching in appropriate bubbles continues to be peddled. In preparing for the meetings, FSC crunched some numbers and we have safely welcomed over 11,000 visitors and guests since reopening, about half of whom stayed overnight whether on holiday or as part of a university or DofE course. We know that it can be done. Thank you to all who have contacted your own local MP. We have had some good responses and it's worth bearing in mind a government change of heart (or U turn to put it more bluntly) such as the extension of the furlough scheme only came about because so many people and organisations including FSC campaigned, wrote and lobbied for the support that will see us through until we can reopen fully.

Special Mentions

Trevor from HR has been nominated by three separate people for a special mention (which is a first) for his tireless work in answering lots of questions that have arisen from all the changes relating to furlough, take home pay and leave calculations. It has been greatly appreciated by those who received his timely and accurate answers, especially as this was done on top of the already extra-complicated work the payroll team are dealing with.

Rachael Nicklin has been nominated for her work in trying to ensure that all unallocated credits on account are worked through before the year end. This is so that finance can get things straight and we can identify which bookings require further investigation. So far she has sorted out about £200,000 worth of bookings.

Using some wonderfully festive resources from the tutors at FSC Amersham, Team Christmas has been able to roll out a number of school and family [Winter Wonderland events](#) at some of our Centres. The family events are already very popular at Amersham and bookings started to come into Juniper Hall just hours after sending out the email.

Keep safe and stay well

Mark