

Thu 26/11/2020 12:28

Dear colleagues,

At the time of writing I do not know what form the tiers are going to take as we emerge from this second lockdown, but the media chatter would seem to be preparing us for some pretty strict guidelines in the run up to Christmas followed by some equally strict guidelines after Christmas to make up for the intervening relaxation when Santa is allowed to enter our bubbles. The good news, and probably the best Christmas present, has got to be the roll out of vaccinations and suggestions of a return to near normal around Easter.

Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS)

Some good news for FSC came this week with the safe arrival of the £2.5M CBILS loan into our account yesterday. This, in addition to the £1.0M overdraft facility secured from Barclays, will provide the vital support to get us through the next few months until our customers can fully return. The support provided by Barclays demonstrates that they support our plans for recovery and are confident in our ability to come through this crisis as a going concern, whilst also reaching a position where we will be able to pay back what we have borrowed. Whilst the loan is welcome news the impact of Covid-19 on our business has been huge. We know that this week there are difficult conversations going on across the organisation and this will continue for some time. A senior member of staff who has been involved on both sides of the discussions in recent days wanted to pay tribute in this catch up to the professionalism of all involved. Giving and receiving bad news is never easy, but the way in which everyone has behaved brought home again the calibre of our staff.

Maintaining Political Pressure

Blencathra MP, Neil Hudson managed to get a [question](#) into the PM's Covid Winter Plan debate earlier this week. Due to technical problems, Matt Hancock stepped in to answer and there are some reasons for optimism. One is that Neil Hudson was able to get across the point about the ability to deliver Covid secure learning in bubbles and the second is that the response was one up from being a regretful flat refusal to change the guidance but instead to continue working with Mr Hudson to see what progress can be made. North Shropshire MP Owen Patterson has also been [campaigning](#). At the time of writing, there is no news yet on the changes to the school guidance.

GCSE in Natural History The proposed GCSE has caught the imagination of the media allowing FSC and others another way to talk about both the need and demand for the subject and the opportunities for first hand outdoor learning. I did a piece for Radio Shropshire which you can listen to [here](#) (1hr 17 mins in), there's a very positive write up in the [School Travel Organiser](#) along with some of my memories of a school trip which I went on. The interest in the new GCSE is particularly timely when green jobs and a green industrial revolution are being put forward as one way to get us out of the Covid hole. We have to keep campaigning to ensure that these two parts of government talk to each other which is always a challenge.

FSC Shop – the alternative to Black Friday

Don't forget to visit the [online shop](#) for your Christmas essentials. It's had some great reviews and I can recommend the Christmas cards.

Staff News Pages

Extended lockdowns, darker evenings and disrupted Christmas plans can all take their toll on health and wellbeing and the government are acutely aware of the issues as set out in their plan [Staying mentally well this winter](#) Since the start of the pandemic the [staff health and wellbeing pages](#) have provided lots of links and ideas and these will continue to be updated. There is a wealth of good material, advice and tips. Even if you didn't feel the need to take a look during the summer, or you are boosted by the news of a possible vaccine there are some really good ideas to look after your mental health. Nobody is invincible.

Staff vacancies are being uploaded [here](#) for a range of different jobs across FSC and also a new secondment opportunity for a Digital Education Officer.

Special Mentions

Chris Price, on top of taking on a lot of extra work since Maggie's departure, has been able to find a new supplier for wood pellets for the biomass boilers at PM and Head Office. This will save us £5k over a 12 month period. Paul Alston, Julie Bowen, Lee Dennison and Rhys Davies have also been put forward for pulling out all the stops to find the paperwork necessary to draw down the £2.5m CBILS loan. If they had not done this, FSC would not have got the money we needed on 25th November, well done all.

Stay safe and keep well

Mark