

Thu 07/01/2021 11:30

Dear Colleagues,

May I begin by wishing you a Happy New Year. I was pleased to join nearly a hundred of you on Tuesday for the Zoom session and to listen to the updates from those presenting (more below). Sitting once again at home I'm sure we all have a sense of déjà vu. I wasn't really expecting after Christmas to have a house full of grown up children working or studying from home and a teacher (my wife) doing on line lessons from our kitchen, it certainly puts pressure on our Wi-Fi not to mention the grocery bill. I know that the sudden closure of schools has added extra responsibilities for a number of staff and please do let us know what we can do to help. Having been through this before, the C-OPT group responds like a well-oiled machine. Much of the communications material, documentation and detailed guidance can be called upon from previous lockdowns although the added complexities of subtle guidance changes and keeping track across the UK continue. All that hard work and learning from earlier in the year is still paying off, but I don't want to underestimate the impact of the lockdown on our admin and sales teams as they work with customers to change the bookings yet again.

Implications of Lockdowns

The immediate impact is I'm sure obvious to you all. Our detailed planning had assumed very little income for these first few months of the year although it's no pleasure to be proved right. It is particularly disappointing because our alternative offers including day visits were proving popular with our customers. The latest lockdown has meant an estimated loss of business of £569k between now and April. Some customers rebook, but that is not guaranteed. Our marketing and sales messages remain focussed on FSC being available right now to offer support to schools, teachers and learners, even when face to face learning is not possible. We are making it clear to customers that FSC is very much in business and looking to the future.

I have tried to ensure throughout this pandemic that I keep you informed about the financial position and will continue to do so. In Tuesday's all staff meeting (details below for those who were unable to attend) you will have heard Sam state that there was £2M in the bank, but our debt has increased by £4M since January 2020. The cash outflow between the 18th December when we broke for Christmas and the 4th January when we came back to work was £700k. Fixed costs such as rent, rates, minibus rental, internet, insurances and payroll continue at a rate of £600k per month. So you can clearly see with no income coming in, how quickly our cash reserves can dwindle.

Furlough and Annual Leave

As I outlined above it will come as no surprise to you that FSC needs to make the most of all possible financial support. We will be maximising the use of the government's furlough scheme again and this includes looking at furloughing Senior Leadership Team members for the first time. If you have not already had discussions with your manager about how we can maximise the use of this government support without jeopardising our planning and preparation for the future, these meetings will happen shortly.

In keeping with this, we should all take 25% of our 2021 leave by the 31st March and also any leave that we have carried over from 2020. We are also asking those that were awarded additional days for working through the lockdown to use 25% of these by 31st March. One reason for this is that we will need staff for what we think will be a busy time when schools reopen. Another reason is that if you are on furlough but book some of those days as annual leave, you will be paid 100% for those leave days instead of 80%. By using your annual leave entitlement in this way, you are not only maximising your own pay but also helping to contribute towards FSC accessing legitimate government aid that will help to make up the gap in our income.


Tuesday's All Staff Talk

The first all staff zoom of the year kicked off with a quick fire round up from members of the Senior Leadership Team setting out their key priorities for the year. There was a lot to take in and if you missed it or any of the other talks first time round you can catch up [here](#). To view, you'll need to sign in to Office 365 with your FSC email address and password. I know that you appreciate being able to find out about other areas of work and it's a way to feel connected to the bigger picture especially with lockdown and furlough possibly adding to a sense of isolation. If you'd like to speak at an upcoming staff talk please put your name down [here](#). Talks are supposed to be short and they do not need to be about big projects or strategic issues. Sometimes helping us all make sense of the everyday workings of FSC's many moving parts is just as interesting. It is also one way to help new staff that are joining us and make them feel more at home.

Issues other than Covid-19.

Domestic policy has understandably been focussed on BREXIT and Covid-19 and as a result many policy initiatives have been delayed. As we emerge from the crisis there are a number of threads that FSC expects to be picked up that will offer opportunities in the medium term. The roll out of green jobs, the International Education Strategy, a full government response to the Glover Review's call for a new national ranger service, the new T levels, the further embedding of the new Welsh Curriculum, work in Scotland to close the attainment gap and post Brexit agriculture policy across the UK to mention just a few. Government and public interest in combating climate change should remain high in the media as COP26 approaches. FSC has done a lot of preparation to get us into a place where we can make the most of these and other opportunities

Are you sitting comfortably?

With the 'stay at home' instruction in place across the UK and the added complication of many staff having to now find somewhere for home schooling, it's a good time to check that your set up for working from home is as safe as possible. If your situation has changed in any way please read the checklist and risk assessment which are in the Home Working folder  [here](#).

New Scientist Magazine

As part of their response to Covid-19 the New Scientist Magazine offered free pages to charities to explain what we do. So we were particularly pleased to hear that our pitch for a spot was successful and an article focussing on FSC's charitable objectives should be in the new year edition. It's an opportune time when the education disadvantage gap is very high on the news agenda. You never know, it may flush out a rich benefactor.

Special Mention

I have been asked that Owain from digital be nominated for Super Star status because he stepped in during his holidays to solve an internet problem at Slapton. Slapton was hosting a bubble of self-catering international students who were unable to travel home for Christmas so when the internet went down on Christmas Eve you can imagine the difficulties that this caused. After emailing digital on the off chance that someone might pick up a plea for help after Christmas, Owain responded on the Sunday and kept working with Kate until the issue was fixed. With so few bookings coming in, it's much appreciated when people go above and beyond to look after the few visitors that we are allowed to host. The students are now looking at the possibility of staying for longer as their university accommodation may not be available.

Keep well and stay safe

Mark