

Thu 21/01/2021 13:56

Dear Colleagues,

“Blue Monday”, the third Monday in January, started off as a marketing ploy to encourage us to book holidays in order to cheer ourselves up. Depending on your place in the vaccine queue you may well be hesitating over clicking on a holiday deal, but one positive action you can take is to respond to the short [Staff Wellbeing Check In](#) survey if you haven’t already done so because it closes on Friday. Some better news for FSC is that we have successfully sold two small properties which will help in the short term with our cash balances. The high court ruling on business interruption insurance for small businesses is positive news in terms of direction of travel. FSC isn’t a small business however and we suspect that it will still take considerable time, effort and political pressure to secure any kind of pay out but work on this is continuing.

Patrick Gordon-Duff-Pennington OBE

Many of us were saddened to hear of the recent death of former FSC Vice-President Patrick Gordon-Duff-Pennington. Patrick was incredibly helpful with raising funds for work at Flatford and he led the Blencathra Appeal which raised the funds necessary for the Centre to be built. He was an unstoppable force with amazing contacts which he deployed widely to raise both money and greater awareness of FSC. This included using his connections with both HRH Prince Charles and even the Transport Secretary to complain about his train being late. Patrick was huge fun to be around and without him FSC Blencathra may not have happened. Staff who met him talk of him as being a wonderfully eccentric character who was a warm, caring person. He spoke his mind but with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. FSC was just one of his interests so if you wanted to read more about the man who lived in the castle used in Monarch of the Glen, or whose name was assumed by the Russian Embassy to be a hoax, there is a very warm obituary [here](#).


FSC BioLinks online course and virtual talks

We have 6 new free virtual talks that are now open for bookings. These talks are free and FSC staff (both furloughed and non-furloughed) are welcome to attend. Upcoming subjects are oyster restoration in the UK, beetles that are attracted to light, invertebrates in zoos, butterfly and moth defence mechanisms, invasive plant species in gardens and hedgehogs on roads. In addition, Keiron has launched an additional run of the Discovering iRecord online training course – delivered through the exciting new FSC virtual learning environment. Subsidised spaces are available to the public, but FSC staff can have free spaces if they email Keiron at biolinks@field-studies-council.org.

Exam Alternative Arrangements

As with so many Covid-19 government decisions, the four UK nations have ended up in exactly the same place of having to cancel the summer exams, but all chose different routes and speeds to get there. In England, OFQUAL is currently consulting on the proposals for teacher based assessment towards the end of the school year. The consultation runs until the 29th January so it will be a little while before the final system is agreed. Northern Ireland’s alternative assessment system is due out shortly. Wales is further ahead with their plans, having abandoned the summer exams quite early. The approach is to use “teacher-managed assessments including assessments that will be externally set and marked but delivered within a classroom environment under teacher supervision” which wisely gives a lot of wriggle room. More details are due out this week. Scotland will be using an algorithm free model based on teacher assessment and quality assurance. We will be keeping a close eye on any implications for FSC.

Updated Annual Leave Guidance

The revised guidance documents have just been posted on the intranet and can be found here  [04 HR docs](#)

Volunteering Opportunities with St John Ambulance

Lizzie Chaplin-Brice brought my attention to this [appeal for volunteers](#) to help with the vaccination roll out. Feedback from those that have taken part highlighted the excellent training and also the sense of purpose from being involved. It's perfectly OK for staff to undertake voluntary work whilst on furlough and if you do get involved with this or with any part of the national effort do feel free to share your experiences.

How a school fieldtrip inspired a top scientist

Radio is a good friend in lockdown and [this programme](#) from the World Service is a good listen. Top plant scientist Dale Sanders talks to Jim Al-Khalili about his career and how plants can help to feed a growing global population as the climate changes. Dale Sanders talks about a school fieldtrip at the age of 17 being the moment that inspired him. Having lived an urban existence, a trip to the countryside where he experienced the wide variety of plants got him curious as to why they grew where they did. An illustrious career followed, and he has some really interesting things to say about plants (obviously) but also scientific debate, public engagement, GM crops and also equality and diversity issues.

Special Mentions

Paul Alston has been nominated for responding quickly to a colleague's home printing crisis by rehoming one of his own printers so that school work can now continue uninterrupted.

Keep well and stay safe

Mark