

Thu 22/04/2021 09:18

Dear Colleagues,

### **Free Home Testing Kits in Scotland**

The Scottish Government announced that from Monday, lateral flow home test kits will be available to anyone in the wider population who does not have COVID-19 symptoms. They can be picked up from local walk/drive-through test sites for people to test themselves twice-weekly. Testing kits can be ordered for home delivery through the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website for specific reasons at the moment, but I expect that this will be updated by Monday. A similar service is already available in England and I can confirm that it works.

### **Updated Guidance on Residential Reopening**

There is [no news yet](#) on the public health guidance that should settle the pressing issue of room occupancy in either England or Wales, but in Scotland the guidance has been updated. Subject to confirmation in the w/c 3<sup>rd</sup> May residential visits will be allowed from 31<sup>st</sup> May but with significant caveats including single occupancy of rooms and in most cases single school occupancy of centres. The mood music is clearly seen in the final line "Schools and local authorities have autonomy in planning residential visits, however educational visits that necessitate an overnight stay but where the residential aspect is not central to the learning experience are not advised in the summer term." Our concern is that England and Wales will follow suit although the sector and the small but active group of MPs that has been supportive throughout will continue to push against this inconsistent and quite frankly misguided approach.

### **Impact on Admin and Sales Staff**

The ongoing uncertainty is tough on all of us, including those still furloughed. But the admin and sales teams and all those dealing directly with customers are finding it incredibly difficult. I am acutely aware that you often bear the brunt of frustrated customers ire. Customer relationships have been carefully nurtured and maintained over the last year as you have sorted cancellations, rebookings, helped with insurance claims and worked hard at keeping customers informed. Some of these relationships are now strained and I know that this hurts your professional pride and it's not much fun. There is very little we can do to change the situation we are in, but the impact on staff has not gone unnoticed. Please do make use of all the help and support that is available from your managers or informal networks, slack channels or WhatsApp groups. Over and above that, there is a lot of useful help and advice on the [staff webpage](#) or the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) which can also be downloaded to phone your (User Name: Zurich Password: Assurance).

### **Staff Talk**

Yesterday's All Staff Talk introduced the new business development team to us, and provided an update on the work of the Education Team. You can catch up [here](#). I'd recommend taking the time to either attend or catch up with the staff talks if you can. It's a really good way to keep up to date with so much that is happening across FSC and it's a way to put faces to names in a way that we have not been able to do before. Don't be shy about [putting yourself forward or suggesting others](#) for a talk. What's business as usual for you is always interesting to other colleagues. FSC is a charity of many moving parts and particularly at times of upheaval and change it's good to hear some good news stories from across the organisation.

## Highlights from the Biolinks Annual Report

And here is one such good news story. The Biolinks project in 2020 faced huge disruption to the planned programme. Quick thinking and flexibility saw a significant change agreed with the funders and a new virtual training programme took off. It was a huge success and is a real positive to come out of a very challenging year. The project is on track to generate a profit for FSC and also underwrite the £158,000 match funding commitment that we made to the funders when applying for the grant. Over 5,500 people took part in 39 live webinars, a further 21,000 viewed the webinar recordings on You-tube and 2,000 have signed up for 18 newsletters. This year will see the development of more virtual training products and a return to place-based delivery.

### New major study shows importance of nature in hitting net zero

Natural England have produced a report that shows the vital importance of the full range of our natural habitats in capturing carbon. It not only highlights the big hitters such as peatlands and native woodlands, but the role played by sea grass, meadows, orchards and hedgerows. It is the most [comprehensive report](#) produced and there is a shorter news story [here](#).

### Oak Processionary Moth

Most of us do not need to welcome another acronym into our lives, but now many of us are out and about, the Forestry Commission have asked members of the public to look out for the caterpillars of the Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) which is a pest particularly in London and some surrounding counties. The caterpillar hairs can cause some nasty side effects for people and pets so if you see a procession don't touch them. More information on the OPM and how to report a sighting can be found [here](#).

### Special Mentions

I thought that our planet deserved a special mention today as it has to put up with a lot. Today is Earth Day <https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2021/> . Every year on April 22, Earth Day marks the anniversary of the birth of the modern environmental movement in 1970. Earth Day 1970 gave a voice to an emerging public consciousness about the state of our planet. In the decades leading up to the first Earth Day, Americans were consuming vast amounts of leaded fuel through the use of massive and inefficient vehicles. Industry belched out smoke and sludge with little fear of the consequences from either the law or bad press from the media. Air pollution was commonly accepted as the smell of prosperity. Until this point, mainstream America remained largely oblivious to environmental concerns and how a polluted environment threatens human health. However, the stage was set for change with the publication of Rachel Carson's New York Times bestseller *Silent Spring* in 1962. The book represented a watershed moment, selling more than 500,000 copies in 24 countries as it raised public awareness and concern for living organisms, the environment and the inextricable links between pollution and public health. The theme for this year is 'restore our Earth' which focuses on natural processes, emerging green technologies, and innovative thinking that can restore the world's ecosystems. More detail can be found [here https://www.earthday.org/toolkit-earth-day-2021-restore-our-earth/](https://www.earthday.org/toolkit-earth-day-2021-restore-our-earth/) there is also Earth Day coverage on BBC news round here <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/48010594>

Stay safe and keep well

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