

Thu 16/09/2021 12:59

Dear Colleagues,

Schools back and Prime Ministerial announcements to consider this week. We can see at first hand the continued impact of Covid at our centres with some schools having to cancel visits at short notice and some staff absent suffering from covid. The PM's response on Tuesday of boosters, testing and refreshed public health advice is being called the plan A solution to keeping the virus under control with a fairly light touch, plan B is a ratchet up to the more familiar restrictive measures should they be necessary to protect NHS. The key message for us all is that the pandemic is not over and that we need to remain vigilant to avoid the imposition of plan B.

Much of the justification for plan A has been the success of the vaccination programme, so moving the vaccines Minister Nadhim Zahawi to education secretary should be a 'shot in the arm' for the DFE, excuse the pun. A letter is already on its way welcoming him and reminding him about the importance of outdoor education.

New Apprentices at FSC

We will be welcoming ten new apprentices to FSC at the end of September. They will be with us until October 2022, working towards their Level 3 Outdoor Activity Instructor Apprenticeship. It has been a huge task with tight deadlines, led by Vicki Wood and involving many others. The apprentices all have slightly different backgrounds but Vicki and the team have managed to match their skills, degree subjects and preferences to particular centres and it looks as if everyone has ended up exactly where they wanted to be.

During the autumn term the apprentices will be seeing as many FSC courses and programmes as possible and helping with education work and delivery. They will also be trained in manual handling, COSHH, food hygiene, fire warden duties, mental health awareness, child protection and GDPR. We will be preparing them to be able to deliver sessions in the spring and to be teaching solo in the summer term. This is part of FSC's work to grow and develop our own talent. Our hope is that the apprentices will want to apply for seasonal and permanent posts with FSC in the future and that we will be able to employ experienced young people that are already trained up to teach at our centres.

Status of FSC Trading Staff

The SLT have been busy visiting centres and gathering feedback from staff. I find it invaluable and I hope that staff have too. One issue that has arisen is some apparent confusion about our charitable status and that of the staff employed by FSC Trading. Setting up a trading arm as we have done is common practice for charities. It was also recommended to us by our auditors. FSC Trading is wholly owned by FSC and the staff therefore sit within the charity. It is no different to any of the other departments. Everyone is ultimately employed by the FSC, all parts of which have charitable purposes and the accounts are treated as one charity. What it does do however is allow FSC Trading to gift all of its profits to the charity but with no corporation tax to pay. As our income both grows and diversifies, the tax liability could have also grown to a significant amount. This way, 100% of the trading profits get ploughed back into the charity, rather than 80%.

Manager's Update

A cloud recording of the recent department heads and managers meeting held on 1st September can be found on the All Staff meeting channel [here](#). Members of the SLT each give a quick update of the key issues. The group will be meeting again in early November which will be a chance for us to meet the many new staff in person for the first time.

New Staff rep

I am pleased to let you know that Liz Cain (Centre Manager at Rhyd-y-creuau) has volunteered to become one of the staff reps for the Finance and Administration Committee. She will share the role with existing rep Di Warren and I'd like to thank her for stepping forward.

Extension of the Ivory Ban Consultation

FSC responded this month to a short and encouragingly straightforward consultation on whether the UK should take an international lead on extending the current ban on the trade in elephant ivory. The option that FSC supported was to extend the ban to other species. Some of these species are under threat from the ivory trade but also climate change and habitat loss. This precautionary approach also acknowledges that data on some of these species is poor. The proposal is for the ban to extend to cover hippos, narwhals, killer whales, sperm whales and walrus. The results of the consultation will be known later in the year.

Bounce Back Media Coverage

FSC's media work has recently included a piece on how outdoor learning is bouncing back after the pandemic. Good news stories are welcome at the moment and by talking up demand we are also hoping to get schools to commit and book as soon as possible whilst spaces are still available. Bookings are doing well despite (rather than because of) the changes to mandatory fieldwork. This allows us to be able to point to the value that teachers and schools put on outdoor learning even when it isn't mandatory. National coverage was in the [School Travel Organiser](#) and press work is now being regionalised.

Special Mention – Andy McDonald, Digital Development Officer

Andy is leaving FSC and I want to pay tribute to his work. In particular Andy was instrumental in our rapid response to Covid-19 when Biolinks [moved online](#) within two months of the start of the pandemic. From initiation to present day delivery of internal training, Eco-Skills and BioLinks courses, the new Digital Hub and more, he has been actively involved. FSC has extended our reach to thousands of learners from all backgrounds in just over a year of operating Moodle throughout the pandemic. Andy's team have told me that he explained his role as being all about "learning, helping people, using technology, and building better worlds" I would say mission accomplished. Thank you and good luck in your next adventure.

Keep safe and stay well

Mark