

Subject: Government Advice
Date: Friday, 15 May 2020 at 16:13:23 British Summer Time
From: Vicky Maloney
To: Mailing List - Everybody
Attachments: SD Forename.png

Sent on behalf of Stephen Davis

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Good Afternoon Everyone

I hope that you are all safe and well during these unprecedented times. I am writing to you as I know many of you will have seen what has been going on in the press as well as the daily information briefings from Government and the SLT wanted to let you know our current thinking and also let you know how we are generally getting on with meeting the needs of students and staff.

Yesterday the Department for Education published a guidance document outlining their expectations around how Colleges should endeavour to return to some sort of normalcy over a phased period. The document can be found [here](#).

It is a fairly lengthy document and I will return to its contents shortly. However, before doing that I wanted to update you all on the work that is currently being undertaken by the College around the COVID 19 pandemic.

As you may recall we established a series of meetings that now take place weekly to monitor and improve how United Colleges Group is dealing with the day to day issues that present themselves. This meeting is chaired by our CEO, Nick Bell and includes other senior and operational leaders and managers as well as representatives from all of our trade union partners. I know from my perspective they have been constructive and have hopefully made our working lockdown experience less onerous than it may well have been. An example of that has seen over 600 laptops and nearly 100 dongles issued to both students and staff during this lockdown period.

As I have always said there is no absolute right answer for this situation and the same can be said around returning to work. It is with this in mind that CEO established a separate COVID return to work group that I am leading. This has been meeting now for about a month and was tasked around mapping out various options on how we can safely return to work.

Three pillars have been identified by the group that we believed are crucial in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of students and staff as we look to return to the College. These include ensuring to our best efforts the physical, emotional and cognitive safety of our students and staff and a report has been written and shared with the COVID group including trade unions and is going to the Board that outlines how we think we should return. Once again there is no perfect answer but working with our stakeholders we are trying to get the very best solution we can.

However, United Colleges Group does not operate in isolation and government yesterday issued advice that we should from the 1st of June where possible start to allow the college to return. This would see students and staff returning in certain areas which include our vulnerable learners, our SEND learners and those equivalent learners who next year will undertake some form of exam as part of a two year qualification. For us in the main that is our first year A level students of which there are approximately 100 or so. They also indicate in their guidance that those learners who need certification to practice should also be considered for return. This could be our Construction and Engineering students for example.

The issue with government advice in many cases is that they are looking to give advice to a wide range of circumstances where generalities perhaps are hard to translate as instruction. For example, the issues that an inner city multi site college face may be significantly different from a single site college based in Carlisle yet the guidance attempts to capture all.

It is with this in mind that we must be prudent when applying advice to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of students and staff are maintained. This must also be coupled with the fact that we have a public duty to deliver education and training in a manner that adds value to the users of our service.

That is why the work that is currently being undertaken online is so crucial as if we were doing

poorly here in terms of engagement and student feedback then it would undoubtedly influence our thinking on when, who and how we return to College. The quality of our service is also important as you know the government advice continues to state that if you can work from home you should continue to do so.

Therefore given that we feel we are delivering in many cases an offer online that is meeting many of our learner academic needs we can take a more considered view around the June 1st request. However, we are still mindful of those elements of college life that frankly online delivery cannot replicate.

It is important that I am clear, you will be asked to return to work in the near future where appropriate.

Once we have consulted with our Board and Trade Union Partners I will share our outline COVID 19 Return to Work Plan. However, on the balance of probabilities we are not currently planning on a return on the June 1st date as mentioned in the Government guidance.

However, one element we are discussing is a two-week period where we will be looking to test the plan before the end of the summer term. This testing phase will involve all buildings and all appropriate student facing and student support staff returning for a reopening exercise in a phased manner. This "Bite the Biscuit" week will allow us to test our physical distancing plans in a controlled and safe manner for everybody.

Finally, with all things there is a caveat if the DFE move from giving guidance to one of instruction. We will have to respond accordingly.

Best wishes and thanks as always

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'S'.