

Board of Management Students, Staff & Equalities Committee

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 6 May 2020
Paper No.	SSEC3-C
Agenda Item	5.1
Subject of Paper	Managing Impact of COVID-19 Remote Delivery of Student Support and Well-Being
FOISA Status	Disclosable
Primary Contact	Gillian Plunkett Director of Student Experience
Date of production	20 April 2020
Action	For Discussion and Decision

1. Recommendations

The Students, Staff and Equalities Committee is asked to discuss the remote delivery of student support and well-being and endorse current services delivery/make recommendations for services which could be delivered remotely.

2. Purpose of Paper

This purpose of this paper is to inform the Committee of the range of remote services and activities that are currently being delivered and to ascertain if there are other services/activities that could be included to support students at this time.

3. Context and Content

A key strategic priority for the College is **Strategic Priority 2 - To enable individuals to excel and realise their full potential** and during these unprecedented times it crucial that the College support students to allow them to continue to engage with learning and teaching; and to support students who have found themselves plunged into new, challenging and difficult situations.

Student Services are delivering a range of services and activities remotely and/or online. These are outlined in Appendix A

4. Impact and Implications

There are clear benefits in continuing to engage with students both in providing welfare and financial support, and in supporting their continued engagement with learning and teaching.

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Student Services Staff Connectivity

In the week leading up to closure all staff attempted to connect remotely to the college systems either via their own devices or a laptop borrowed from the college. In general there were no major issues with connectivity.

Communicating with Staff and Students

Student Services Staff continue to connect with each other through:-

- Email.
- Telephone.
- WhatsApp Groups.
- Using MS Teams/Skype/Zoom for voice/video chats.

Student Services Staff continue to connect with students through:-

- Incoming Email – Student Services manage a range of differentiated email boxes per service such as learning support, admissions, and student advisors or by function/support theme i.e. counselling, safeguarding, gender based violence, care experienced. Emails are typically responded to within 1-2 days.
- Telephone – Staff contact students by phone, dialling 141 on their home/mobile handset in advance of calling a student so that their number is withheld.
- Video and voice chats - MS Teams/Skype/Zoom.
- All student email.
- SMS Text via the college Enquirer system.
- Social Media –Facebook/Twitter
- FAQs on the college website.

Student Recruitment and Admissions

- **Suspension of Interviews** - Wednesday 11th March ELT/SMT agreed to suspend all interviews from Monday 16th March. Thursday 12th March candidates informed of interview suspension and alternative arrangements put in place for telephone interviewing and direct offers.
- **Evening and Weekend** - Monday 16th March all evening and weekend classes cancelled. The Admissions Team are contacting students to offer full

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or part refunds. Evening and Weekend provision for 20/21 which was due to be published to the website from 23rd March has been put on hold.

- **Admissions Continues** - The Admissions Team continue to assess applications, make offers and process acceptances remotely. At Thursday 16th April, 8,485 offers have been made for 7,283 places with 7,331 acceptances.
- **Weekly Updates** - Weekly reports on applications, offers and acceptances continue to be uploaded to Connected for SMT, Associate Deans and Curriculum Heads to monitor progress related to their curriculum areas.
- **Transitions** - A series of remote 'Get Ready for College' and transitions communications for new students (Fresher's) are in planning.

Student Funding

- **Student Funding** - All student funding continues to be paid directly to students. Staff are able to create payment files remotely for Bursary, Educational Maintenance Allowance and Hardship Fund payments and Finance staff process through BACS.
- **Maximising Funds** - Some elements of support such as payments to taxi companies and childminders have been cancelled and the monies saved vired to the Hardship Funds.
- **Hardship Applications** - A high number of hardship applications continue to be received from students and processed by student advisors, particularly from Higher Education (HE) students who may be more likely to live independently from parents and may have part time jobs which they have lost due to COVID-19.
- **National Decisions** - The Scottish Government have lifted the £4k limit on Hardship Fund Awards which will allow us to continue to support students who have already been awarded the maximum support this year.
- **Connectivity** - A number of students have requested monies to purchase a laptop. Unfortunately we are unable to meet these requests at the moment, but kept Faculties apprised of these students who may have issues engaging without IT.
- **New Applicant Funding** - The College Bursary Application Portal for Further Education (FE) students with places at the college for August 2020 opened on 14 April 2020. Applications and awards will be assessed as usual.
- **Ease of Access** - Services have streamlined process to make these fit for remote processing and reduce anxiety for applicants/students.
- **Monitoring** - Student support funds are being monitored weekly to ensure there is enough funds being pushed out to students keep them engaged with their studies.

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- **Planning** - Scenario planning and discussion at SMT is ongoing to help mitigate any future hardship issues for students from now until the end of term.

Student Support and Well Being

- **Hardship Funds** – A high number of requests have been received by student advisors for funds. Requests are being turned around quickly, processes have been streamlined for new remote working/support arrangements. Help has been provided to ‘stranded’ students from core budget who are not residents and not eligible for support funds.
- **Counselling** - Telephone counselling and listening ear support is continuing to be offered by our 3 full time counsellors and mental health coordinator via mobile devices from home.
- **Well Being** - Students and staff can access The Big White Wall a digital platform which offer help through an anonymous health and well-being community where members can support each other. During the first 4 weeks of launch 481 staff and students have engaged with the service. Benefits and services include:-
 - Access 24 hours a day, 365 days a year;
 - Trained professionals available 24/7 to keep the community safe;
 - Self-assessments & recommended resources;
 - Creative tools to help express feelings;
 - Wide range of self-guided courses to do at own pace.
- **Help for Priority groups** - Care experienced/carers/estranged students have been contacted via email, text, telephone to check their welfare and offer help with accommodation, finance, young carers grant, care experienced accommodation grant, staying safe, signposting for help with course work and supporting well-being.
 - A care experienced student has been supported to set up a care experienced Zoom group.
 - We are working with our partners Action for Children to ensure that students are supported in any way that we can. Action for Children continue to work in the community and supply emergency packs which include toiletries and food vouchers. Help with purchase of laptops and access to Wi-Fi continue to be the main issues.

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- Gender Based Violence - Our webpage 'Report a Concern' focuses on gender based violence and provides a range of organisations that can help. We post regular updates on this via social media.

Student Engagement

- **Student Workshops** - Student Engagement off Campus '8 steps to success' which is an online version of our 8 Steps to Success Workshops which are usually delivered to students face to face.
- **Communications** – Communicating college messages, service messages and providing feedback on student's needs.
- **Class Rep Engagement** – Providing feedback on student needs.
- **Supporting CitySA** – with messaging, service delivery i.e. online yoga and a variety of social media events, upkeep of website and social media, Staff Awards and Green Impact project.
- **Planning** – For CitySA Summit and Handover to new Presidential Team.

Learning Support Team

Depending on student needs - and student and staff access to IT - Learning Support staff have been supporting students in the following ways:

- **Accessibility** - Real time support in online classes by Educational Support Workers as a reader/scribe notes and provision of Sign Language Interpreters for BSL users.
- **Support for Learning** - Zoom and MS Teams video, phone and email communication between LS lecturers and students, such as help with Graded Units and outstanding units. Google Docs support and communication between LS lecturers and students, through file sharing and using the text message function.
- **New Appointments** - Responding to emails and continuing to book appointments for current students.
- **Transitions Work** - Responding to emails and setting up appointments with new students for 20/21.