

Board of Management

Performance & Nominations Committee

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| Date of Meeting | Monday 24 January 2022 |
| Paper No. | PNC3-F |
| Agenda Item | 4.4.3 |
| Subject of Paper | Scenario Planning: Operations |
| FOISA Status | Disclosable |
| Primary Contact | Dr Sheila Lodge Depute Principal & Chief Operating Officer |
| Date of production | 10 January 2022 |
| Action | For Discussion |

1. Recommendations

1.1 The Board is asked to discuss the scenarios outlined in this report.

2. Purpose

2.1 This paper outlines the operational scenarios for the following periods:

- spring term from January to Easter holidays (10 January – 2 April 2022);
- Easter to the start of the summer holiday period (1 July 2022);
- summer (4 July – 8 August 2022, when teaching staff return);
- autumn term to Christmas holidays (22 August – 23 December 2022).

3. Key Insights

- 3.1 The following scenarios are based on the best information available at the time of writing. The experience of the omicron variant of COVID-19 has shown that progress out of the pandemic is unlikely to be even or straightforward. Now that all adults in the UK have been offered multiple opportunities to be vaccinated, political factors will weigh more heavily as governments decide what level of restrictions they will impose in response to the prevalence of the virus and the presence of any further variants at any one time.
- 3.2 Nonetheless, with the experience gained over almost two years of managing full lockdown, Level 2, 3 and 4 restrictions and the cut-back on face-to-face teaching in December 2021 -January 2022, the College has proven that it is able to pivot to accommodate any restrictions the Scottish Government may decide to introduce, even at very short notice.

3.3 Scenarios

3.3.1 *Spring term from January to Easter holidays (10 January – 2 April 2022)*

In response to the massive rise in case numbers in the UK from the spread of the omicron variant, the College decided that from 20 December 2021 to 14 January 2022, when the situation will be reviewed, most learning and teaching would move online. Further details are given in the Learning & Teaching scenarios paper for this meeting. The College remained open online and the College buildings were open, but only teaching activities deemed to be critical would occur on campus.

Decisions on which activities are critical were based on the matrix created for this purpose by the College earlier in the pandemic. The matrix allows Deans and Associate Deans to reach a judgement on whether an activity is critical, and this judgement then had to be endorsed by the VP Student Experience. Such activities were only allowed to proceed if the Health & Safety team, working with our Trade Union Health & Safety representatives, had reviewed and agreed any amendments to the risk assessment, in order to ensure that all possible steps to protect the safety of our staff and students were taken.

During this period to 14 January, staff were told that they should work from home where possible, unless their role does not allow this or they were needed for critical activity on site. (College staff remain essential workers for this purpose.) A number of Student Support staff were on site to assist students with particular needs, and the

Libraries were open and staffed for those who wish to study or just to be in a safe place. Staff were welcome to work in the building if they so wished.

Staff and students who were coming on campus were asked to follow the existing mitigations with renewed vigour, including:

- Taking a Lateral Flow Test before coming into College. Tests are available from Reception at both campuses, and people should not come onto campus if they get a negative result or have any COVID symptoms. In addition to the established symptoms of fever, a new continuous cough and loss of the sense of taste or smell, the omicron variant can present with severe cold symptoms including a sore throat, headache, aches and pains and a choked nose.
- Wearing a face covering before entering either building, unless exempt. Face coverings should be worn in all public spaces (corridors, cafeterias, lifts etc.) and when moving around the buildings. Concierges and security staff will be monitoring the use of face coverings and enforcing this message, but all staff are asked to support compliance with this legal requirement.
- **Wearing a face covering during all learning and teaching sessions, unless exempt. This was a change from the previous protocols.** Staff could choose to wear a visor instead of a face covering while teaching if they so wished.
- Keeping a safe distance apart. To date, the guidance to stay at least 1 metre apart had not been updated: but there is evidence that the omicron variant is more highly transmissible over larger distances, so everyone was encouraged to maintain the distance from others at which they feel safe.
- Washing their hands or using hand sanitiser frequently.
- Sanitising their computer keyboard, workstation and any other equipment before and after use.

There has been growing evidence over the last six weeks that although the omicron variant is more transmissible than earlier variants of COVID it is less likely to cause serious disease, hospitalisation and death, particularly where people have been double jugged and have had a booster shot. While this is obviously welcome, and would support our wish to have more students on campus from 17 January, the sheer number of staff and students who are off sick with COVID may make this difficult to achieve in the next few weeks.

Having to restrict the number of students and staff on campus in December and January has inevitably led to a backlog of practical classes which cannot be delivered virtually. The extent of this backlog will, of course, depend on the

duration of restrictions. However, should the number of infections stabilise and start to drop, our intention would be gradually to increase the numbers of staff and students on campus, with particular efforts being made to cover practical classes in order to keep students on track. We know from the experience of the last two years that students taking courses with a large practical element are more likely to drop out if the practical sessions cannot be delivered, and we will be seeking to minimise this. We would, of course, prioritise the health and safety of our College community at all times and keep in line with any new guidance provided by the Scottish Government.

3.3.2 *Easter to the start of the summer holiday period (1 July 2022)*

If conditions allow for larger numbers to be on site after Easter, the College will continue to prioritise practical sessions, especially, for those who are due to complete this year; but we would also be able to welcome student on campus, perhaps just occasionally, for reasons of affiliation and socialisation. It is clear that students benefit from some face-to-face contact with their lecturers and peers, even when the academic materials for their course can be delivered online; and often it is peer group support which keeps a student on track when progress is more difficult.

If it were necessary to extend the opening hours for the buildings on weekdays -- and perhaps over weekends -- to let these activities take place, that could be arranged at relatively short notice.

Unless further restrictions are required, the buildings will continue to remain open and staff who cannot work from home because of the nature of their role will continue to be on-site. Student Support and Counselling and Library provision will continue to be available on site as well as online to all students during this period, and study space will be available for any student who needs. Staff also preferring to work on site will be able to do so.

3.3.3 *Summer (4 July – 8 August 2022, when teaching staff return)*

Over the summer, the number of people on campus will be lower, although some cohorts will be attending to practice skills which could not be developed to the point of proficiency due to missed classes earlier in the academic session.

Unless further guidance is issued by the Scottish Government, it is anticipated that our existing protocols will continue to be enforced. We will continue to distribute Lateral Flow Tests for as long as Holyrood continue to supply them. The protocols will still apply equally to contractors and visitors brought in for the usual rounds of maintenance work over the vacation period, and for any

additional work to be done as we continue to adapt to the hybrid model of working. This will allow us to release office space for more innovative teaching approaches, and to introduce more hot-desking spaces for those who are on campus only for one or two days each week.

3.3.3 *Autumn term to Christmas holidays (22 August – 23 December 2022)*

Forecasting the situation becomes much harder as projections are extended: but if all goes well, it might be possible to remove more of the existing mitigations progressively through this period. For instance, the removal of social distancing requirements altogether would allow the return to full class numbers, so making the delivery of on-site sessions much more efficient and preventing any further build-up of student deferrals

Further decisions can be taken only much nearer the time: but the College is now well-placed and prepared to respond agilely and rapidly to developing situations.

4. Impact and Implications

4.1 The focus of the College's operational planning is on supporting the learning of students through our blended learning model, and in on making the College buildings as safe as possible when staff and students are on site.

4.2 Unless the virus subsides markedly and all restrictions can be withdrawn, it is unlikely that the College's usual levels of commercial activity on site can be resumed in the coming year. Similarly, income from catering and accommodation is likely to continue to be greatly reduced. This loss of income makes the College's financial position much less comfortable than it was before the pandemic, as shown in the Financial Planning scenarios paper.

4.3 Ongoing communication campaigns will be needed throughout the coming year to maintain awareness of the protocols under which the College is operating at any given time.

4.4 While the scenarios envisaged for 2022 cannot be definitive, the experience of the last two years has raised the awareness of everyone in the College community of the need to be prepared for sudden and major change, and to respond flexibly and effectively while maintaining City's values.