

Board of Management

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 15 June 2022
Paper No.	BoM4-I
Agenda Item	4.2.3
Subject of Paper	Scenario planning: Operations
FOISA Status	Disclosable
Primary Contact	Dr Sheila Lodge Depute Principal & Chief Operating Officer
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Action	For approval

1. Recommendations

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

2. Purpose

2.1 This paper outlines for the Board's consideration the operational plans in relation to the coronavirus pandemic for the following scenarios:

- Pessimistic
- Realistic
- Optimistic.

3. Consultation

3.1 Consultation on these scenarios has taken place widely over recent months within the Health & Safety Committee, Senior Management Team and Executive Leadership Team.

4. Key Insights

4.1 The three scenarios envisaged below relate to the impact that further variants of the COVID-19 virus might have on the operation of the College.

4.2 Pessimistic scenario:

In this scenario, a further variant of COVID-19 is discovered and it is of sufficient severity to warrant an extended period of lockdown, or several shorter but equally disruptive periods of lockdown and reopening. The existing vaccines are ineffective, and new vaccines need to be developed.

In this situation, the College buildings close when lockdown is required, but the College remains open for business with fully online delivery of learning and teaching and online working for support staff wherever possible. The situation is better than in March 2020, when the need for emergency response teaching required staff to develop online teaching materials more or less from scratch; to learn how to teach using the VLE and TEAMS / Zoom; and to support students who had to adjust to an entirely new way of learning. With the experience and developments of the last two years, both staff and students are much better placed to make a seamless transition to working from home, and to minimise the loss of learning that inevitably results. Perhaps even more importantly, all members of the College community are confident that a compassionate approach will support everyone, and of the ability of City of Glasgow to maintain learning and teaching through even extended periods of lockdown. Nonetheless, any period of lockdown has negative effects, and plans are made for higher withdrawal and deferral rates.

Having learnt from the experience of 2020, the College is equipped and prepared to move swiftly in terms of ensuring students and staff have the connectivity and equipment they need to work from home. Records of the dispersal of College assets are kept electronically and audited regularly. (Arrangements for the return of assets in due course are made more explicit from the outset.)

The most significant losses are financial, with income from accommodation, catering and external lets being worst affected. Scottish Government support is less generous than in the first two years of the pandemic, due to the economic slowdown and rising inflation.

When conditions allow the reopening of College buildings, protocols fitting the particular Government guidelines in force at the time are drawn up quickly, drawing on the bank of exiting protocols to speed up the process. These are communicated easily via the channels developed over the last two years, and the necessary modifications to the Estate are made more quickly because stocks of kit such as temperature sensors, hand sanitiser, face masks, signage templates, and so on, are in hand and ready to go. LFT testing kits are currently in stock too, but prove not to be suitable for the new variant and so orders are placed as soon as updated versions become available.

4.3 Realistic scenario:

In this scenario, a further variant or variants of COVID-19 appears, necessitating greater restrictions than at present on people travelling and gathering, but with very short or no periods of lockdown. The existing vaccines require only minor tweaks that are done quickly, and are then rolled out to the population in age order, which means that the College has to maintain a higher level of precautions than other settings and for a longer time.

This is perceived negatively by some staff and students, and withdrawal and deferral rates, though lower than in the pessimistic scenario, are higher than in the optimistic scenario.

As in the pessimistic scenario, the College is well prepared for whatever level of lockdown or other restrictions are necessary. Fully online learning is in place, and staff and students maintain learning and affiliation online until practical classes, and then all face-to-face classes, can resume on campus. Modifications to the Estate are made quickly due to the early delivery of protocols, the experience of staff and quantity of materials held in stock.

In these circumstances, the wider populations is also more confident of the efficiency of the revamped vaccines and returns to more usual levels of activity more quickly than in September 2020. This is expected to enable income streams to recover more quickly as catering, accommodation and external lets improve: however, the broader effects of further lockdowns on the economy as a whole, and growing inflation, counteract this positivity and income levels fail to grow.

4.4 Optimistic scenario:

In this scenario, no new variant of COVID-19 requiring a return to full or partial lockdown is discovered. The vaccinations which have been developed and delivered to date remain effective in keeping the incidence of illness at a manageable level in

the population at large and in the College community (with an R-rate of less than 1), and the prevalence of serious illness and death from COVID remain very low.

In this case, the College continues to deliver learning and teaching as it is doing in June 2022. Blended learning and hybrid working reduce the numbers on campus each day, but there is capacity to have more people on site than the current figure of c. 3,000 daily, which allows for: the delivery more practical classes; additional sessions for induction and to build affiliation amongst students with a greater proportion of online learning in their blend; more reskilling and upskilling; and more income-generating events. All these facets contribute towards successful outcomes for our students and stronger income generation, so reducing the projected financial deficit for 2022-23.

5. Impact and Implications

5.1 Financial implications

In two of the three scenarios, non-SFC income levels remain low, so making it difficult for the College to achieve the deficit currently projected for 2022-23. Consequently, further reductions in staffing and non-staff expenditures are necessitated.

5.2 Implications for the quality of academic provision and / or the student experience

Any period of lockdown affects the quality of the student experience to a greater or lesser extent. Although the College is now well placed to mitigate the effects of lockdown, some learning loss will occur in the pessimistic and realistic scenarios and withdrawal and deferral rates will rise.

5.3 Technological implications

In the pessimistic and realistic scenarios, the successful operation of IT systems and support are essential to the successful operation of the College, and may require additional investment. It is anticipated that Scottish Government resources would be made available, if at all, at a lower level than in 2020-22.

5.4 Health, mental health and wellbeing

After two and a half years of the pandemic, the College will start AY22-23 with many staff and students wearied by the personal, economic and societal effects of the virus. The College community recorded 290 cases of COVID in March, 76 cases in April and 81 cases in May 2022. Even in the optimistic scenario, the College will need to plan for the continuation of the current increased levels of staff absence, and for the financial implications of this. Students who experience illness will also need support to catch up with their studies.