



F/T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

TO: CLD Organisations

30th April 2020

WORKING TOGETHER TO RESPOND TO COVID-19

I am writing with an update on the Scottish Government's response to the COVID-19 crisis in the college, university and community learning sectors.

In order to take a joined up, system level view of managing and recovering from this crisis, you will be aware I have established a high level leadership group across the sectors. The purpose of this group is to bring together stakeholders from across the sectors with Government and its agencies to share intelligence, utilise collective expertise and join up efforts in responding to key challenges. We are considering both the ongoing response and planning for the future, working together and supporting each other through this challenging time.

The remit and focus of the group was approved at the first meeting on Thursday 2 April and this together with its membership is attached as **Annex A**.

At this first meeting I was pleased to hear about the ongoing commitment and flexibility your organisations are showing in supporting the national effort as well as the great work being done across our tertiary system which I referenced in a recent Herald article included as **Annex D**. I am delighted that in his capacity as Chair of CLD Standards Council Alan Sherry is a member of the Group, and we are already benefiting from his experience and insights in supporting in particular vulnerable learners in our communities. I know that Alan has also established a stakeholder reference group for the sector, which will ensure that the sector is pulling together all of the intelligence and evidence needed to understand and respond appropriately to the wide range of challenges we are encountering.

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In addition to advising you of the Group's work and the place of CLD within that, I thought it might be helpful to outline the ways in which the sector and the Scottish Government are working together at this time to meet the needs of learners and communities.

Community Learning and Development

Officials are working to mitigate the impact on community learning provision for young people, vulnerable adults and communities. The CLD Stakeholder Reference Group membership of which can be found attached as **Annex C**, which as I mentioned was established to inform my high level leadership group, includes sector representative from Youthlink Scotland, Learning Link, the CLD Standards Council, College Development Network, CLD Managers Scotland and Education Scotland. They are collaborating to gather intelligence and ensure communities and third sector organisations are aware of the support available, and to maximise uptake of the investment of £350 million announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Communities on the 18th March

Digital Poverty

I understand there are a number of challenges being faced for learners across the country who do not have digital access as a result of not having a device or internet access or not having the skills to utilise the device they do have. To combat this the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) is establishing an emergency response team to source equipment, train individuals and support households which lack access to the internet. They are working in partnership with SG, Scotland IS, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Disability Alliance and others.

The CLD Stakeholders Reference Group is currently contributing to discussions around creating a coherent and cohesive digital learning offer to support learners throughout their journey. Together with SDS and the Open University, this has involved swift action to coordinate access to an online learning offer for all furloughed workers and those seeking advice and opportunities to retrain

Colleges, universities and students

Colleges and universities have been engaging closely and constructively with SQA and partners to discuss alternative approaches to this year's exam diet and assessment more broadly. I continue to be impressed by the sector's commitment to ensuring that this year's cohort of learners are not disadvantaged by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Officials continue to work with institutions and the SQA to support learner continuity and to support those who are intending to move into higher or further education from school this year or to move from college to university or into employment. I know that many young people who have applied to attend college or university this year may be feeling anxious about the many uncertainties arising from the pandemic in relation to their education, and the Scottish Government will continue to communicate with learners and those who support them, to keep people abreast of latest developments and signpost them to support. Such information is posted on our [Student Information Scotland](#) website.

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SQA are also in regular contact with sector bodies and other stakeholders to discuss alternative arrangements for subjects which cannot be adapted to a holistic approach. This work is ongoing and should encompass work based learning requirements which are being carefully considered by regulators, sector bodies, professional bodies and training providers themselves. Do please use your contacts with my officials and through the Ministerial Group to highlight any issues specific to the CLD sector in this context should you have concerns about any matters not being progressed.

Student Support

I recognise that this is an unprecedented situation and in order to support students experiencing hardship as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Scottish Government has made emergency funding of £5 million available to support students across Further (FE) and Higher Education (HE).

On Wednesday, 8 April 2020, we announced a £5 million package of emergency financial support to help students facing increased financial hardship as a result of Covid-19 or the social distancing and isolation measures that have been introduced to slow its spread. This extra funding will be made available immediately to institutions to support students that are most in need, and help alleviate concerns around accommodation costs, living costs, mental health and wellbeing.

We have also recently launched a new Student Information Scotland website to provide information on both FE and HE student support, including a dedicated Covid-19 section. Attendance requirements for student support have also been updated to reflect online studying or students self-isolating.

As activity on each of these areas progresses I will ensure that I continue to keep you updated.

Once again, I thank you for your continued support during this unprecedented time and please do not hesitate to get in touch with me or my officials on any issues.



Richard Lochhead

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FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION COVID-19 MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP GROUP – TERMS OF REFERENCE AND REMIT

Terms of Reference and remit: Established March 2020

Background

1. The Covid-19 Response: Further and Higher education Covid-19 Ministerial leadership group (Ministerial Group) was established in March 2020 by the Scottish Government.
2. The group was established by the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science as a key part of the response to managing the Covid-19 situation.
3. The Minister established the group to bring together the leadership of key stakeholders across the sector with Government and its agencies to provide collective leadership and continued collaboration to support each other and take necessary action in the weeks and months ahead both to deal with the immediate crisis and to plan the recovery phase.

Purpose and remit

4. The Ministerial Group will be an action focused leadership forum for Government and its agencies to come together with the sector and:
 - a) Share information, gather intelligence and discuss the response to key challenges across the tertiary sector as a result of the Covid-19 situation;
 - b) Unblock any issues where Government can help do this;
 - c) Enable us to progress, align and support the communication of the response across the tertiary sector;
 - d) Corral the sector's contribution to the economic and broader civic response; and
 - e) Begin planning beyond the immediate term/for recovery.
5. The group will consider the following areas:
 - a) Teaching, qualifications, admissions;
 - b) Student wellbeing (financial and other);
 - c) Staff/worker wellbeing (financial and other);
 - d) Institutional financial sustainability;
 - e) Supporting economic and civic society recovery; and
 - f) Indirect impacts and contributions
6. The Ministerial Group does not replace existing governance and decision making mechanisms at Government, agency and individual organisation level.

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Reference /stakeholder/sectoral groups

7. In order to enable focused discussion on priority issues at meetings and make progress on the most significant issues, individual sectors or organisations may wish to form reference groups to agree issues for escalation to the Ministerial Group. Existing mechanisms can be used for this purpose.

Lifespan

8. The Ministerial Group will operate as long as required, initially meeting weekly for two weeks. It will then move to fortnightly and frequency will remain under review.
9. Membership is determined by the Scottish Government, and regularly as will the remit of the Ministerial Group, to ensure that it continues to add value to the evolving situation. The Scottish Government will provide secretariat function. Current membership can be found at **Annex B**.
10. The Group will be chaired by the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science.

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Further and Higher education Covid-19 Ministerial leadership group Membership

- Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Chair)
- Shona Struthers (Chief Executive, Colleges Scotland)
- Carol Turnbull (Principal, Ayrshire College)
- Lydia Rohmer (Principal, West Highland College)
- Paul Little (Principal, City of Glasgow College)
- Alastair Sim (Director, Universities Scotland)
- Andrea Nolan (Principal, Napier University)
- Sally Mapstone (Principal, St Andrews University)
- Nigel Seaton (Principal, Abertay University)
- Mary Senior (Scotland Official, UCU)
- Deborah Shepherd (National Officer, EIS)
- John Gallacher (Scottish Organiser (Further Education Lead), Unison)
- Liam McCabe (President, NUS)
- Fiona Robertson (Chief Executive, Scottish Qualifications Authority)
- Karen Watt (Chief Executive, Scottish Funding Council)
- David Robb (Chief Executive, Student Awards Agency Scotland)
- Neville Prentice (Senior Director, Service Development and Delivery, Skills Development Scotland)
- Alan Sherry (Chair, Community Learning and Development Standards Council)
- Susan Stewart (Director of The Open University in Scotland)
- Dr Ailsa Crum (Head of Learning and Enhancement for Scotland, QAA)
- Lorna Gibbs (Director of Advanced Learning and Science, Scottish Government)
- Linda Pooley (Deputy Director Colleges, Young Workforce and SFC Sponsorship, Scottish Government)
- Roddy Macdonald (Deputy Director Higher Education and Science, Scottish Government)
- Danielle Hennessy (Ministerial Group lead, Scottish Government – secretariat)

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CLD Stakeholder Reference Group membership

- Dominique Carlisle-Kitz (Vice-Chair, CLD Managers Scotland)
- Tim Frew (CEO, YouthLink Scotland)
- Mhairi Harrington (Chair, Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland)
- Jackie Howie (CEO, Learning Links Scotland)
- Anne Kirkwood (Innovation and Partnerships Lead, Employability and Key Sectors, College Development Network (CDN))
- Avril Nicol (Chair, CLD Managers Scotland)
- Alan Sherry, OBE (Chair, CLD Standards)
- Jackie Halawi (Regional Advisor, Education Scotland)
- Nicola Sykes (Senior Education Officer, Education Scotland)
- Jonathan Gray (Head of CLD Policy and Post 16 Programmes, Scottish Government)

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Universities and colleges are vital asset in Covid-19 fight

SCOTLAND'S 19 universities and 26 colleges are rightly world-renowned for innovation and creativity – and their leadership and willingness to step up is saving lives in the face of the unprecedented challenge we all face.

Since leading the switch to home and remote learning and teaching – at remarkable speed – our staff, students and alumni have since demonstrated just how important an asset they are to our society and our economy.

As well as looking after their own, keeping staff and students informed and physically and mentally supported, the sector is directly helping save lives on the front line and in our communities.

Final-year medical and nursing and social care students from many Scottish institutions have been quickly moved onto the frontline to help health service staff in caring for coronavirus (Covid-19) patients. Online graduation 'ceremonies' have been as heart-warming as they have been vital to this speedy response.

At the forefront of science, our world-renowned medical research community has shifted into overdrive, with our top universities spearheading the effort to tackle and ease the effects of this global pandemic.

At the very heart are the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. As pivotal members of the Genomics UK Consortium of top scientists, their leading-edge laboratories are being used to sequence the genome of the



ANALYSIS
Further education minister **Richard Lochhead** on how students and staff are key part of Scotland's coronavirus response

virus isolated from Scottish patients. As many as 150 researchers from Edinburgh's Centre for Inflammation Research are now being re-deployed to work on a project that aims to test existing and experimental drugs to find a treatment for Covid-19.

The team believe new therapies could be discovered and implemented before a vaccine becomes widely available by repurposing medicines for other conditions that are already in clinical use or are currently being tested. The new project – STOPCOVID – will focus on the inflammatory pathways that lead directly to lung injury, which is associated with the most severe aspects of Covid-19.

Researchers at Heriot-Watt University are accelerating the development of 'Socially Assistive Robots' to help reduce the spread of infections like Covid-19 among healthcare workers and patients – reducing person-to-person contact in the reception areas of surgeries and hospitals.

“
Our world-renowned medical research community has shifted into overdrive

At the University of Dundee, two KingFisher Flex robots have been donated to the national Covid-19 Diagnostic Centre in Milton Keynes, while another research unit has identified 38 separate proteins in the Covid-19 virus, helping develop antibodies that can fight the virus.

Edinburgh Napier University reacted fantastically quickly, using a laser cutter to produce specially designed visors giving health workers the protection they need when treating Covid-19 patients, and transferring a ventilator from its campus to the intensive care ward at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh.

Ayrshire College is using its expertise and 3D Printers to make additional visors for health workers on the frontline. Glasgow Kelvin College, West Lothian College and the University of Stirling have provided vital medical equipment and materials helping thousands of items of PPE – including beds, masks and sterile gloves – to reach the NHS. Dumfries and Galloway College has provided the NHS with remote working tools so key workers can handle calls remotely.

Our alumni continue to make us proud with the contribution they make with their expertise. Dr Kate Broderick, a former Glasgow University student, is one of many at the forefront of the global hunt for a vaccine, alongside researchers across Scotland's institutions and Scottish researchers further afield.

Gin production lines at operations run by Heriot-Watt brewing alumni – Arbikie Highland Estate Distillery on the Angus coast and BrewDog – have been adapted to produce hand sanitiser. Beinn an Tuair Distillers in Kintyre, owned by a former student of Scotland's Rural University and College, also stopped all gin production in favour of a sanitiser called 'Hogg Wash' – a tribute to the English translation of their name.

These huge adjustments we're all making mean it's vital we look after our mental health, and here too our colleges and universities are leading the way. Jude Kelly, programme leader of Abertay University's Mental Health Nursing BSc, is one of a number of professionals regularly blogging, sharing tips on how to promote wellbeing.

A new online creative community has been kick-started by Glasgow's Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, to help raise spirits and help combat feelings of isolation.

Following last week's review, we now know this lockdown will be in place for at least another three weeks.

Scotland is grateful for everything our colleges and universities are doing to help our country get through this and I know I speak for us all when I say we couldn't be more proud of our world leading sector.

Richard Lochhead is Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science

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