Notes from the Principal’s office

6 April 2020

Easter wishes, update on the completion of courses

and praise for NESCol volunteers

Dear Student,

As you begin your well-earned Easter break over the next two weeks, I am keen to provide you with a round-up from across the College and notably on the progress in relation to the completion of courses..

Before I do that, I must take the opportunity to wish you and those closest to you a very happy Easter. I hope you can make the best of it in the difficult circumstances we face this year.

It is important for you to take this holiday period and to rest and regroup at home before we return on 20 April. The regular updates will resume after the holidays and in the meantime I send my best wishes to you on behalf of the College.

Completion of courses

It’s important as you break for Easter that you have reassurance about the completion of your coursework for this year and the progress towards your qualification.

As I mentioned in my note last week, NESCol is working hard on behalf of all students to confirm arrangements with each of the awarding bodies we work with. There are 109 awarding bodies across the college sector, so it is a significant piece of work and the discussions with each organisation are continuing.

What I can say is that we are moving forward at pace and when you return for the new term there will be further information to share about the next steps.

Our simple goal is to ensure no student is disadvantaged and that you receive the recognition your work over the year deserves.

On Thursday evening the SQA, one of the main awarding bodies, issued guidance in relation to College courses, which underlined the ask of colleges across Scotland to make use of internal assessments, the progress of each learner in their course and achievements to date to support certification this year. This is similar in many ways to the approach being taken in relation to school qualifications, but adjustments will be required to reflect the differences between schools and colleges.

Across the many awarding bodies we plan to work on the basis that we as a College will be central to evidencing and assessing the achievements and work is already underway behind the scenes to support the process.

Whilst you may have seen different reports in relation to the SQA’s approach to evidence generation for school qualifications, please be aware that the requirements for college qualifications are different. You will therefore, in almost all cases, be required to continue to provide evidence up to the end of your course.

**Your role as a student is to continue to engage in your courses in our new online environment and to complete the work set by your tutors in the new term**, which will be tailored in each course area to ensure it meets the requirements of each awarding body.

We will guide you through the months ahead and support you to complete your studies. Please be confident staff across the college are working hard to prepare for what promises to be a busy and productive final term.

National effort continues

Two weeks ago we were coming to terms with the new national guidance and the very necessary restrictions that had come into play. Now, it already feels a familiar way of life.

Can I once again thank all students as part of the NESCol community for playing your part in saving lifes and protecting our NHS. The actions we all take as individuals are essential to the national effort. The advice has not changed and remains simple: stay at home.

The positive action being taken in every village, town and city is helping to manage and limit the spread of Coronavirus on our shores.

Recognising the contribution of our student volunteers

I want to take the opportunity to recognise the contribution of students who have taken the decision to offer their services at a time when resources in the care and health sectors are under such strain.

Seventeen students from the care faculty have volunteered in response to a direct appeal from the NHS. They will lend their skills, knowledge and experience as required and I commend them for their dedication and commitment in answering that call.

We also have a number of ESOL students who are volunteering with a variety of different groups, including Helping Hands Aberdeen, and making a fantastic contribution.

That is a snapshot of the ways in which NESCol is playing its part – I know there are many more examples, particularly on a personal level, which we can take great pride in.

Continued support during the Easter holidays

Although the Easter break is upon us, it is important to stress that support for students is unaffected.

Student Advice Centre teams will remain available throughout the holiday period by email, live chat and Skype. The team are able to provide advice and support across a wide range of areas – from money matters and course applications through to simply being available for a friendly chat. I know it is a service being well used and I hope that continues.

You will also have received notification that funding applications for 2020/21 are now open through SAAS. Information and guidance is available through **www.saas.gov.uk** and the advice team are on hand to provide local support.

Vigilance key to combatting cyber threat

In times of great challenge there are always opportunities – and unfortunately that’s not always something to be thankful for.

Reports of increased cyber security threats, as opportunists use the Coronavirus outbreak as a vehicle for phishing activity, are something we should all take note of.

Colleagues in IT&TS have issued advice to all staff and students – please take the time to familiarise yourself with that guidance. Your vigilance is a very effective tool in the fight against cyber criminals.

Creativity brings some spring cheer

It was wonderful to receive the latest edition of Write It! last week – a collection of creative work from our talented students, packed with inspiring and thought provoking work.

It dropped into our inboxes on Thursday and if you haven’t already, I’d encourage you to take time out to enjoy the work of some of our NESCol creatives – it’s a fantastic example of the talent we have in our College.

A flavour of things to come

On a lighter note, plans are taking shape for some fun to keep the social media engagement we have had through ***#NESColAtHome*** running over the Easter break. If you haven’t already, you can get involved by trying out some of the store cupboard recipes and home-based holiday activities that will be shared across our Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts. Our social media engagement in recent weeks has increased significantly and that’s a good indication of the positive attitude that has been so important.

The spirit and camaraderie throughout the College has been wonderful to see and long may that continue in the face of such adversity.

Once again, best wishes for Easter and thank you for your hard work over a term unlike any before.

Neil Cowie

Principal