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By email

To

Members of the Advanced Learning Covid
Recovery Group

Copy to

College and University Principals

07 October 2022

Dear Members of the Advanced Learning Covid Recovery Group,

Winding-down Advanced Learning & Science work on Covid Response

As promised at the CRG meeting on Tuesday 4 October, I am writing to confirm the decision to wind-down Covid Response work in the Advanced Learning & Science (ALS) Directorate, including standing down the Covid Recovery Group (CRG).

Whilst Covid has not gone away, and there is no guarantee that we won't face a deterioration to the relatively positive situation at present, the encouraging start to the new Academic Year, together with the need to increasingly focus on other priority issues, means that the time is now right to wind-down the Covid work.

It is essential for us all to remain vigilant and ready to act should the Public Health situation require it. We will not hesitate to reinstate the CRG, the Covid-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Colleges and Universities, and the other forums established over the last two years to help guide us through the pandemic, should that become necessary.

The Guiding Principles that CRG worked to develop, and which were informed by the expert advice provided through the Covid-19 Advisory Sub-Group, will remain in place. The principles were designed to apply in a wide range of potential scenarios, but they will be kept under review to ensure they stay relevant and aligned to the Scottish Government's Coronavirus Strategic Framework. They will continue to support your proactive local action and underpin the high standards that you set.

Within the Advanced Learning and Science Directorate, work is moving forward to prepare an internal ALS Covid-19 playbook, drawing lessons from the experience of the last two and a half years. The Playbook will facilitate a rapid and organised re-establishment of structures and processes which have proven of real value in this period, and will set out the priority issues that will need to be addressed in the early phase of that work. My officials will be in

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touch with you this month, to seek your thoughts on what the document could usefully include.

Remaining vigilant and ready to respond at the institutional level will continue to be crucial, and I would anticipate that the local, collaborative approach taken to date will continue. Maintaining good and close relationships with local Public Health teams will be particularly important.

As we all know, the impact of Covid-19 is far-reaching and potentially long lasting. I am pleased that CRG has more recently been able to hear about some of those impacts across all Four Harms. Standing-down our work on Covid Response should not be taken to mean that this is the end in our efforts to tackle these lasting impacts. Work underway elsewhere in ALS and in the SG more widely, with which many of you will already be involved, will continue. For example, the Student Mental Health Action Plan, the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and our collective efforts on reform, will all continue to consider how best to address the legacy of Covid-19.

As also mentioned at CRG, consideration is being given on how best to engage more strategically with stakeholders. The views set out by some of you at CRG about the importance of ongoing, collective engagement will be helpful in those considerations.

In conclusion, I would like to once again thank you for all of your active engagement, collaboration and constructive challenge since CRG was established in May 2021. The guidance shaped by the group has undoubtedly supported the progress of teaching, learning and research with a clear focus on providing a safe environment for staff, students and learners at a time of mass uncertainty.

It is hoped that with an improving Covid-19 landscape, together with a progressively adaptive approach towards living with the virus, that there will be no future requirement to re-convene the CRG. However, as I mentioned above, if it is required in future, I know you won't hesitate in re-engaging.

I look forward to continuing to work with all of you on other issues and in other settings.

I am copying this to all University and College Principals.

With very best wishes.



JAMIE HEPBURN

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