14th October 2020

COVID-19 Update

Dear students, parents and guardians

We have been asked to attend two Outbreak Control Meetings with Public Health officials and St Helens Local Authority this week. Whilst positive test numbers still remain relatively low at college, we now have nearly 200 students self-isolating and there is a concern around asymptomatic transmission amongst college students in the community. Rather than a full closure we have compromised on finishing face to face teaching this Friday (16th October) and going to online lessons next week for all students, followed by the scheduled half term holiday. This would create a 2-week ‘circuit-breaker’ for the college community.

The expectation is to fully re-open again on Monday 2nd November. You will appreciate the concern from Public Health - as a student goes through their week at Carmel they are, in effect coming into contact with over 60 different households. Whilst there is still no evidence of transmission in the college we are obviously seeing no reduction in the rise of the disease in our local area (Carmel students are travelling to and from all the Liverpool City Region high risk areas). Significant numbers of college students are also having to travel some distance on public and college transport, which again poses a high risk.

I am also concerned about the level of teaching and learning that we are providing to the 200 students currently self-isolating. By teaching everyone remotely does mean that we can be much more consistent in delivering an outstanding experience to all our students next week.

Please be reassured that we expect this to be a short-term measure and all lessons and planned sessions next week (e.g. tutorials, one to ones, catch up workshops, learning support) will continue online. All students’ lessons will run at the same time as per their timetable and will be delivered live through Microsoft Teams. We have ensured that all our staff have the equipment to deliver online lessons and many of them will continue to work from the college next week. We also have external A-level resit exams continuing all next week and these students will still come into college.

We will build in two long weekends to allow 72 hours of natural cleaning over the next two weeks. College will remain open for staff if they want to or need to work from college.
We have worked very hard to keep the college open to all students for the last six weeks and are aware that many of our neighbouring colleges have only been offering face to face teaching every other week so far. If we are able to provide a safe and secure environment for learning for all our students, community and staff then we will continue to offer full time face to face teaching and this is the plan for when we start the new half term on Monday 2\textsuperscript{nd} November. However, it may well be that we have to put in place stricter restrictions especially around the use of our social and study areas next half term.

I know this will be disappointing for many students and parents. We have worked so hard this term to try and make up for the lost learning all students suffered in the first wave of this pandemic. I do ask that you support us, our local public services and NHS in helping to try and put the brakes on the spread of this horrible disease.

Best wishes

Mike Hill
Principal