



South Lanarkshire College

Students' Association

Board Report

April 2021

YOUR COLLEGE
 **YOUR WAY**

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Student President

Contents

Overview	2
Health and Safety	2
Student Mental Health & Wellbeing.....	3
Free Yoga Sessions for Students	3
Student Mental Health Survey	3
Student Mental Health Agreement.....	3
Covid Resilience Workshops & Guided Relaxation Workshops	3
GBV Prevention	4
Mindfulness Sessions	4
Student Engagement.....	5
LGTB History Month – Purple Friday	5
SA Newsletter & Weekly Emails	5
SA Job Alert.....	6
Drop in Lunch (Every Friday)	6
Student Question Time	6
Training	6
External Training.....	6
Student Support Incentives	7
Free Soup and Sandwich Initiative	7
Smoke Free App.....	7
Student Wellbeing Packs	8
Active Commute Challenge	8
Events	9
Refreshers	9
Virtual Graduation.....	9
Forthcoming Events	10
Student Care Experience Lunch 23 April.....	10
Social Activities.....	10

Overview

This board report will outline what the Students' Association (SA) have covered over the past three months. It will include an overview of how we are engaging with students, the different types of events that have taken place in the January to April period. We will also provide more information about the college health and safety guidelines and what students should expect when coming back on campus.

This year has been very challenging and certainly not the way we would have liked to have engaged with students. We hope in the coming months with the restrictions lifting, we will be able to have more face to face engagement and interaction with students.

Health and Safety

With students gradually returning to campus, we have been closely involved in reiterating the College's Health & Safety Covid Guidelines to the student community. This has involved frequently posting updates on our social media channels, sending a joint statement from the Principal and the SA President to all students outlining what to expect on their return to campus, including the health and safety guidelines. We also worked closely with the College's Marketing team to record and distribute two new health and safety videos for students to view.

The SA video is a message of what we expect from students and staff. It outlines the health and safety rules in place that they must adhere to in order to ensure the safety of all students and staff.

We have come up with **TEAM SLC** as a caption for our students to remember:

- T**ake your face covering and wear it when you leave class
- E**ating in the corridors or common areas is not permissible
- A**im to return to your class as quickly as possible
- M**aintain 2m distance at all times, including the Food Court queue
- S**tay on the left in the corridors, in single file, 2m apart
- L**ook after yourself and one another be kind and respectful
- C**omply with the College guidance to keep everyone safe

The Marketing video shows what we have introduced over the last few months across the College to improve the safety of our students and staff on the return to campus.

Student Mental Health & Wellbeing

With the current pandemic and the resulting stress and anxiety it causes for students, we continue to be fully committed to promoting and supporting student mental health and wellbeing. Below are some examples that highlight to students that we are here to help and support them through this challenging period.

Free Yoga Sessions for Students

In March, we were delighted to introduce free yoga sessions to all students. Free yoga mats were provided to all students who attended the first session. This has seen a great response with over 40 students signing up for the classes. Classes take place virtually on a weekly basis via Teams and all feedback received to date has been extremely positive.



Student Mental Health Survey

Due to the recent additional funds received by the College, the SA thought it would be useful to ask students about new and engaging ways we could help support them. As such, we have created a student mental health survey asking students for comment and feedback on the services available, and asking if there was anything else they feel should be provided.

The survey will remain open until the end of term and will continue to be promoted to allow as many students as possible the opportunity to take part.

Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA)

The SMHA has been worked on collaboratively by the SA and Student Services, with the first draft recently being submitted to National Union of Students (NUS). The SMHA this year focuses on the different initiatives and support services that are available and being introduced in the College. It focuses on several key working areas including student poverty, communications, support services and mental health activities. It is hoped that this Agreement will help students who are struggling with Covid and associated issues linked to the pandemic, finances or studying in isolation. The mental health of students is one of the key issues the SA must address when producing this document so we can be there to support our students during this challenging time.

Covid Resilience & Guided Relaxation Workshops

Covid resilience workshops were delivered by the Counselling & Wellbeing team (Student Services) for the whole of September and were brought back for Refreshers in January. We realised that the impact of Covid has been quite significant and has brought a wide range of additional struggles and challenges for students. We were delighted that students were able to benefit from this engaging workshop and the feedback received has been incredibly positive to date. Building on this, the

Counselling & Wellbeing team are developing a further workshop - Guided Relaxation. It is hoped these will be ready to roll out May of this year and last for 6 weeks.

Gender-based Violence (GBV) Prevention

We continue to work collaboratively with the College and external agencies to support those who have been impacted by gender-based violence and to raise prevention awareness. The College already delivers a wide range of support services and activities in relation to the prevention of gender-based violence and we are keen to work closely on progressing future initiatives.

We are fully committed to the College's vision of providing a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environment for all students and staff. As part of this ongoing process, we have been using social media channels to highlight the support available within the College and from external specialised support organisations.

Mindfulness Sessions

The College continues to provide free weekly mindfulness classes which are very well attended via Teams. The SA is committed to promoting these excellent sessions on a weekly basis to encourage as much uptake as possible.

Student Engagement

Student engagement continues to be a key aim for the SA, particularly during the enhanced blended learning period. We are keen to highlight to students that even though many classes are working remotely we are still here to support them. This has been achieved through a wide range of communication methods to ensure we are reaching as many students as possible and that there is increased accessibility for all.

LGBT History Month – Purple Friday

February is LGBT History month and the SA joined in with lots of great activities to highlight awareness of LGBT+ Equality. We are extremely proud to have achieved the LGBT Silver Charter Mark Award last year, highlighting all the fantastic support available within the College.

As part of Purple Friday, we attended a virtual LGBT lunch where members of other local colleges and schools talked about their LGBT strategies and support services. Alongside this, staff and students across the College showed their support by sending in photos of themselves wearing purple and we created a photo rally showing our support for LGBT+ Equality.



SA Newsletter & Weekly Emails

The SA continues to connect with students by sending out weekly update emails highlighting information we feel that will be beneficial to students. These emails provide a perfect opportunity to recap what has taken place during the previous week and to promote upcoming initiatives. This is an area we will continue to focus on throughout the term.

In addition to the emails, we recently sent the SA Newsletter to all students. Topics highlighted in the most recent newsletter included the Virtual Graduation, Loaves & Fishes Appeal, Virtual Refreshers, Student Yoga Classes, Festive Week, the Student Mental Health Survey, upcoming virtual social activities, the student feedback process and how to take part in the Active Commute Challenge. This is a fantastic opportunity to highlight all the great work that is being undertaken by the SA and across the wider college community.

SA Job Alert

Due to the challenges for many students finding part-time employment, we thought it would be helpful to create a job alert channel where we can highlight opportunities. To do this, we set up a new Teams channel on the SLC Student Wellbeing Teams Channel where we will regularly post links to new job postings and job search websites. To date, we have already had positive interactions from students regarding this new initiative.

Drop in Lunch (Every Friday)

The SA have created a channel on the SLC_Student Wellbeing and Health Teams page called 'Student Friday Lunch'. We will be hosting a lunch every Friday between 12-1pm in order to allow students to engage with the SA and each other. The format is an informal chit chat session. This will be promoted on social media channels and in the weekly emails. We hope to encourage as many students as possible to attend to help tackle social isolation.

Student Question Time

On 24 February 2021, students and staff gathered on Teams for the annual Student Question Time event. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions of senior management and representatives of the Board in relation to all aspects of college life. The questions were led by the SA President and staff clearly provided answers to all the student questions and enquiries.

This was a great event for the College to host as it will greatly benefit students in their future learning and student experience at the College. By providing clear and concise information to students, it provides an opportunity to improve the overall learning experience and learn more about what is taking place across the College.

Training

External Training

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) confirmed the allocation of funds from the Scottish Government to provide additional support for Students' Associations and unions in colleges and universities for the current financial year.

We will be using some of these funds to carry out social media training for the SA to build upon our communication plan with students. We are aware digital fatigue is a potential current issue so it would be useful to learn how to work around this. It is also one of the reasons why we are introducing new social activities to bring some fun back to our students.

We are also looking into different software packages that will benefit the SA. One we have in mind is a publishing software that we would benefit our newsletter and

hopefully attract more students to read the newsletter in the new format. The training is due to take place in April.

Student Support Incentives

Free Soup and Sandwich Initiative

The SA's free soup initiative was part of the Vice President's manifesto to tackle the issue of student poverty, particularly due to the current circumstances.

Distributed just prior to Christmas, we have now decided to extend this offer to include a free soup and a sandwich to all students at the college from March onwards.

This will be available from the Food Court, one day per week, with the day changing each week to allow as many students as possible access the initiative.



Smoke Free App

The College and SA have partnered with NHS Lanarkshire to provide additional support to students and staff who want to quit smoking, via free access to the Smoke Free app.

The app is available to download via Google Play or App Store, and those granted their free license will be able to access the app and its features for 12 weeks. The app would usually cost up to £50 per person.

Features include:

- Guidance for managing cravings and withdrawal.
- Advice on stop smoking medications.
- Displays on how long participants have been smoke free.
- Progress tracking including money saved and health improvements.

We are delighted to be working on such an important initiative to help support student health and wellbeing.



Student Wellbeing Packs

We will be using some of the funds received by the SFC to purchase wellbeing packs for our students. These packs will include reusable face coverings, hand sanitiser, pens, notepad, and a branded SA water bottle.

The SA feel that it is important to issue these to students as some students may not be in a financial position to purchase these items for returning to college.

Active Commute Challenge

The SA are working closely with the College's Cycling Officer to present a new project called the Active Commute Challenge. The aim of this project is to encourage staff and students to get active by reimaging their daily commute. This could be by walking, jogging, cycling, running, etc.

There will be an incentive for students to join in with this fun, new challenge by participating in a photo competition showcasing their new activity using the hashtag #activecommuteSLC. Participants would be drawn at random to ensure fairness.

Funds have already been secured for prizes from Cycling Scotland and we will be purchasing Love2Shop vouchers with four lucky winners receiving a £25 each. We look forward to promoting this exciting challenge which is due to launch in May for 4 weeks.

Events

Refreshers

Virtual Refreshers took place over two days in January and it was a great success!

We started the event with an introduction to the SA and what we do to support our students. This was followed by an excellent IT support session and then a presentation from LAMH about positive mental health. Our Counselling & Wellbeing team held Covid Resilience workshops over the two days and our mindfulness practitioner provided mindfulness sessions. Students also had the opportunity to enjoy virtual escape rooms and our SA quiz, with three students each winning £30 Amazon vouchers each!



Virtual Graduation



On the 2nd of February, we were excited to host our first ever virtual graduation ceremony. A record 800 graduands participated at this year's virtual graduation ceremony, recognising the hard work and sheer brilliance of the Class of 2020!

It was a heart-warming event and great to still be able to give the students a graduation event in the current circumstances. It was so important to celebrate the student's achievements as they had to quickly adapt to a new way of working as this particular academic year was when blended learning

was first introduced. It was a challenging time and the graduates deserved to feel a real sense of achievement.

Forthcoming Events

Student Care Experienced Lunch 23 April – This virtual lunch will be hosted on Teams. This will be an opportunity for all care experienced students to get together again and build relationships. These lunches have been great fun in the past and we are looking forward to catching up with everyone again.

Social Activities - Over the next few weeks the SA will be introducing fun, new social activities for students to join in with such as virtual bingo, quiz time and sing-along sessions. We will be sharing more information on when and how to join these events as part of our weekly emails for students and via social media.