

Finance Community of Practice – Steering Group Update

December 2009

The purpose of this note is to provide a summary of developments on a range of matters that we've been working on. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me (godfreyj@dumgal.ac.uk or by telephone 01387 734007) or another member of the Lead Group. Contact details for the Lead Group are available via the following link:

<http://www.scotlandscolleges.ac.uk/organisational/communities-of-practice/finance-cop-steering-group-members.html>

Community of Practice Events

The final Community of Practice event of 2009 took place on Thursday, 10 December 2009. Copies of the speakers' notes are now available on the Scotland's Colleges website:

<http://www.scotlandscolleges.ac.uk/organisational/communities-of-practice/finance-cop-event-presentations.html>

The next Community of Practice event is scheduled for Tuesday, 16 March 2010.

Planning for next year's conference is now well underway. The event will take place at Stirling Management Centre on Thursday 20 and Friday 21 May. Please put the dates in your diary.

The Steering Group have taken the decision to change the format of the event compared to previous years. The event will commence with lunch on Thursday and will conclude after lunch on Friday. There were a couple of reasons behind this change:

- The Friday morning event was not well attended last year and there was a perception the conference was too long.
- Given the current economic climate, and difficult financial times, it was felt that a shorter event was a more effective use of time and resources.
- The opportunity to network with colleagues is considered to be an essential element of the conference. It was therefore agreed that the best format was two half-days, with an overnight stay. This would allow people to travel to/from the conference on Thursday morning and Friday afternoon.

It was also agreed that the evening meal would be informal with entertainment to be organised by our resident compere (Ben McLeish)!

We have several ideas for themes and topics for next year's events (including those suggested by CoP Members). Please let the Steering Group know if you have other 'hot topics' that you would like to see on the agenda next year.

Remember there is no cost to individual Colleges for your attendance as all costs are met by the CoP. We are very grateful to our sponsors for helping to sustain this policy.

Principals Convention, 16 November 2009

The Finance CoP were asked to provide an update of the work of the group to the Principal's Convention. Jim Godfrey attended the meeting on 16 November to provide a short presentation and answer questions from Principals. The presentation was well received and positive comments were made. It is hoped that the opportunity will arise again in the future as this is a valuable opportunity to promote the work of our Community of Practice.

Scotland's Colleges

As part of the review of Scotland's Colleges, Gayle Shotton (Finance Director of Scotland's Colleges) is now supporting the work of the Community of Practice. The Steering Group believes that this is a very positive move and is looking forward to working with Gayle in the future.

Procurement Capability Assessment – Workshop, 9 December 2009

APUC hosted a workshop for Scotland's Colleges and Universities on 9 December. The purpose of the workshop was to examine the progress of the Procurement Capability Assessments to date and gather feedback in terms of how the process could be improved. The event was attended by a small number of Colleges and most universities. The event was generally positive and a number of actions agreed. A further update was provided at the Finance CoP event on 10 December.

FE Technical Group

The FE Technical Group met on 14 December at Donaldson House. One of the main issues on the agenda was the future role of the group. A useful discussion took place and it was agreed that a suggested way forward would be considered by the Finance CoP Steering Group on 8 January.

Other substantive items on the agenda included:

- Future of UK GAAP – the Accounting Standards Board has issued a consultation document and is seeking responses by February 2010. A copy of the consultation paper is available via <http://www.frc.org.uk/images/uploaded/documents/Consultation%20Paper%20Policy%20Proposal%20aug%2009.pdf>
Members of the Finance Community of Practice are invited to review the consultation paper and provide comments by 31 January to Jim Godfrey. Based upon feedback received a Scotland's Colleges FE response will be collated.
- Environmental Accounting – you may have already received letters relating to the implementation of the Carbon Reduction Commitment in 2010. SFC provided information in respect of the impact on Colleges and the Group agreed that this information should be issued (by SFC) to all Colleges as soon as possible. SFC also proposed that a workshop be held in March 2010 to consider the issue of Corporate Sustainable Reporting. It is intended that this will build upon the work led by James Gow (John Wheatley College) and the short-life working group in 2009.

- Financial Forecasts – a paper has recently been considered by SFC's Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee reviewing the Financial Forecasts of Scotland's Colleges. A summary of this information will be distributed to all Colleges shortly.

Procurement Strategy Group

The Procurement Strategy Group is a joint meeting of managers responsible for procurement in Universities and Colleges. Within Universities, representatives tend to be Directors/Heads of Procurement and the majority of Universities are represented. In Colleges, the sector is represented by a small number of procurement professionals or finance staff.

It is intended that there will be occasional meetings of the whole group and regular meetings of the sub-groups for each sector.

A copy of the draft minutes should be available shortly on the APUC website.

Enhanced CoP Workshop 11 November 2009

At the workshop, the possibility of joint projects between Finance/Secretaries to the Board/HR CoPs were discussed. It was agreed that the broad topic of Environmental Issues/Accounting would be taken forward. This would cover areas like reducing carbon footprint (impact on estates), equality and diversity, employment law impacts, the human and financial cost of these etc.

It was also agreed that best practice visits would take place (which would meet a condition of the grant). This would be followed up more specifically by having EAUC coming to talk to the Enhanced CoP to develop the proposal.

Finance Policies and Procedures

As mentioned in last month's update (and the recent CoP event), David Anderson, is progressing a project to identify best practice and provide a library of finance policies and procedures. These policies will be available via the website and open to others to use them as appropriate.

It would be greatly appreciated if all Colleges could complete and return the questionnaire to David at your earliest convenience.

Communications Update

As reported previously, we have implemented a number of measures to enhance communications with the Community of Practice. We are continuing to implement other measures.

One of the actions was to increase communication with other Communities of Practice. Therefore, we invited, Margaret Tierney (Chair of the HR Community of Practice), to present at our most recent CoP event. Margaret provided an insight into the 'hot topics' facing HR which produced an interesting discussion and identified topics for joint development. We intend to build upon this work into 2010.

With the help of Scotland's Colleges, a list of all Finance contacts in Scotland's Colleges has been collated. The list is available via the following link:

<http://www.scotlandscolleges.ac.uk/organisational/communities-of-practice/finance-cop.html>

We hope that the list is useful to members of the CoP. Please help us to keep the list current by informing Barbara Slater (Barbara.Slater@scotlandscolleges.ac.uk) of any changes.

Next Meeting of the Finance CoP Steering Group

The next meeting of the Steering Group will take place at 10.30am on 8 January. As always, members of the CoP are very welcome to attend this meeting and/or raise items for discussion.

The Steering Group met last Thursday (10 December) and the draft minutes will be circulated this week.

<http://www.scotlandscolleges.ac.uk/organisational/communities-of-practice/finance-cop-steering-group-meetings.html>

With very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year

Jim Godfrey

On behalf of the Steering Group