

Finance Community of Practice – Steering Group Update

March 2010

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 website.

In terms of news items the last couple of months have been fairly quiet. However, there has been a lot of work behind the scenes preparing for our next two Community of Practice events.

Community of Practice Event – Tuesday 16 March

The programme has been agreed and hopefully you will have seen this already. We have managed to persuade several speakers to come along. We are particularly fortunate to have Detective Chief Superintendent Allan Moffat from the Scottish Crime & Drug Enforcement Agency. Allan will be speaking about organised crime and how it can infiltrate organisations.

Martin Fairbairn (Senior Director at SFC) will also be joining us to provide an update on current developments at the Funding Council.

There are also sessions on Financial Capability Project, Sharing Financial Best Practice and the work of the MIS CoP. We look forward to seeing you next week.

Annual Conference – Thursday 20 and Friday 21 May

A huge amount of work has been spent planning this year's conference. Again we have secured a range of high profile speakers from both within, and outside of the sector. The full programme is in place and will be circulated next week by Scotland's Colleges.

The Conference theme is 'Robust or Bust' and will focus on how Colleges can place themselves to meet the challenge.

This year's event will commence with lunch on the Thursday and end with lunch on the Friday. The conference is shorter than previous years because we know that time away from the office can be problematic. We also felt that by structuring the conference in this way we would be able to keep the costs to a minimum.

Our conference is being sponsored by Zurich Municipal, Wylie Bisset, APUC and Capita and, as a result of this sponsorship, we are able to keep the cost to delegates at just £100 (the majority of which will cover the overnight accommodation). We very much look forward to seeing you at the conference but please reserve your place at the earliest opportunity.

CIPFA – Good Governance in Scotland’s Colleges

Angela Scott from CIPFA outlined progress made by the Governance Steering Group, who are aiming to develop a new and more appropriate Governance Framework based on combined code for the sector. Progress has been slower than anticipated as a result of the changing Corporate Governance climate in the UK with the on-set of best value 2, the Walker Report and the like. It is anticipated a consultation draft will be available late summer 2010.

A copy of Angela’s presentation is available via our website.

FE Technical Group

As reported in the last Update the future of the FE Technical Group has been discussed. It has now been agreed that:

An extract the note of the FE Technical Group meeting (14 December) is attached below:

“The Group considered the future role and structure of the Technical Group. The Group had been established in 2004 and it was agreed that this was an appropriate time to review the Group’s role given that many routine technical accounting issues are discussed in other forums. There was support for continuation of the Group particularly in light of the forthcoming International Financial Reporting Standards convergence. It was also agreed that the Group encourages consistent accounting treatment across the college sector and is a useful forum for comparing college and university practices. It was noted that similar groups exist in other sectors.

The Group also noted that the Finance Community of Practice is represented on several other technical groups and it was suggested that it may be more appropriate for college finance representatives from these groups to participate in future meetings of the Technical Group. It is also possible that arrangements for administrative support for the Group could transfer to Scotland’s Colleges though it was envisaged that the Group would still benefit from HE, audit and Funding Council representation.

It was agreed that a suggested way forward would be considered by the Finance Community of Practice, following which further liaison would take place with the Funding Council and the other Technical Group members.”

The Finance CoP Steering Group recently considered this matter and it was agreed that, given that routine technical matters are considered on other groups on which the Finance CoP is represented, that the Technical Group does not need to meet per se. However, the Steering Group also recognised that, from time to time, it may be useful to reconvene the Technical Group to consider significant technical issues e.g. IFRS convergence.

From the Funding Council’s point of view, it would also be helpful to continue to gauge the views of the Technical Group members on the accounts direction and other technical guidance and it is suggested that this could be best done by email.

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.

The first meeting of the College Procurement Strategy Group took place on 1 March 2010. A copy of the draft minute of the meeting is available on our 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 you know David Anderson has been working on this project which is nearing completion. The outcome will be that examples of finance policies and strategies will be available for all finance colleagues. Hopefully, this will provide a starting point when you need to write, or update, a policy.

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.

We are continuing to work with other Communities of Practice. In this regard we have invited, Angela Wells (Chair of the MIS Community of Practice), to present at our next CoP event.

We are also working closely with Lesley Whelan (Scotland's Colleges) and the Enhanced CoP to develop further work that will benefit the Finance CoP. For example, we are looking at commissioning a series of specific briefing papers which will examine key issues facing the sector

Next Meeting of the Finance CoP Steering Group

The next meeting of the Steering Group will take place at 10.30am on 31 March. As always, members of the CoP are very welcome to attend this meeting and/or raise items for discussion. We are pleased that members of the CoP have joined us at our recent meetings

The Steering Group met on Friday 5 March and the draft minutes will be circulated shortly. Copies of previous meetings are also available via the website

Jim Godfrey

On behalf of the Steering Group