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Regional Board Report

Subject: Hub & Spoke Network Update	**Purpose:** **For Approval** ☐ **For Discussion** ☐ **For Information** ☒
Prepared by: Kirsty Robb, Vice Principal Finance & Corporate Services	**Date of Committee: 09 March 2023**

Purpose: The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with an update position of the Hub and Spoke Network which was developed in partnership with Dumfries & Galloway College (D&G) and Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

Executive Summary:
Following a successful funding bid to SOSP, in 2018, the SFC awarded funding to D&G and the College to implement several projects including the implementation of a Hub & Spoke Network across the south of Scotland. This project saw the installation of equipment in 12 spokes, with one further to be installed. The project was established to provide video conferencing and remote learning sites across the region.

Key items:
During the pandemic the speed of development of software such as MSTeams accelerated at an unprecedent pace. There were also during this time several additional changes which included Scottish Borders Council supplying iPad to students and Borders College providing laptops to each student who requested one.

A survey of the sites found the equipment is currently only being utilized in a couple of the Community spokes for zoom meetings and to watch videos. The curriculum has also confirmed due to the changes mentioned above they will not require the network for future delivery of courses.

Following the survey results and discussions with the spokes, the decision has been taken to remove the equipment no longer required from the spokes and repurpose it within the College Campus. This will ensure the equipment is fully utilized and assists with the replacement programme of the AV equipment, which is due for upgrade.

The attached report provides further detail.

Questions that Members should ask themselves when reading the paper:
Paper is for information.

Linked to Strategic Ambition(s):
Create high quality learning and training opportunities which are relevant, enabling and flexible

Take a leading role in enabling an inclusive, resilient and sustainable Scotland **Performance Measures:** Delivery models are personalised focusing on individual & business need Recogise nationally as a progressive organisation	
Linked to Strategic Risk Register: 3a - Information Management 1c - Learners Needs	
Recommendation: To note the update position and decision agreed by the Executive to repurpose the equipment no longer require in the Spokes.	
Previous Committee Approvals:	
For publication ☒	**Not for publication** ☐ **If not, why not?**

Regional Board

9th March 2023

Title of Paper
Hub & Spoke Network Update

Introduction
This paper provides an update to the Hub and Spoke network delivered as part of a wider project with Dumfries & Galloway College (D&G), Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and South of Scotland Economic Partnership (SOSEP). The paper provides the current position and details the next steps agreed by the Colleges Senior Leadership Team.

Background
In July 2018, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) provided funding for The South of Scotland Skills and Learning Network: Globally Connected, Regionally Focused Project and Get That Degree – Articulation Project.

The projects goals were to create a shared Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) platform to host courses created in collaboration between Dumfries & Galloway College (D&G) and Borders College (BC). The outcomes to be delivered via serval developments including the below:

- Development of the Borders Technology Enabled Care Hub (BTECH) including a Clinical Skills Lab and Smart House
- Expansion of STEM provision and the STEM Hub
- The South of Scotland Hub and Spoke Network
- DigiSkills Scotland web platform

Both the South of Scotland Hub and Spoke Network and the DigiSkills Scotland web platform were joint developments with Dumfries and Galloway College to enable access to learning across the full South of Scotland region. The BTECH and STEM hub were specific to the Scottish Borders area with Dumfries and Galloway also developing resources to meet the needs of their locality. The projects ran over financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 with a projected completion date of March 2020.

The Borders College Hub and Spoke network included the delivery of 13 spokes within secondary schools and identified locations within the community. The delivery of the service required a dedicated software package, which was specified by Digiskills Scotland. The software provider Ajenta Ltd was appointed to provide a video conferencing website that connected multiple participants using web browsers, designed solely for the education sector, via V-scene.

Prior to COIVD the equipment and software were used successfully for a number of functions including Higher Psychology delivery to school students remotely from the College campus, and to facilitate both internal meetings across multiple campuses.

The SOSEP project was completed and the end of project report was jointly submitted in January 2021.

Current Position

As of December 2022, 12 of the planned Spokes have been installed with one remaining Spoke to be installed at Eyemouth Marine. This has been delayed due to Covid19, delays in building works and logistical issues within the partner organisations. The table below details the spokes installed.

Site	Type
Earlston High School	School
Eyemouth High School	School
Selkirk High School	School
Berwickshire High School	School
Kelso High School	School
Galashiels Academy	School
Hawick High School	School
Jedburgh Intergenerational School	School
A Heart for Duns	Charity
Farne Salmon	Business
Innerleithen Church	Charity
Newcastleton Community Centre	Charity

However during the pandemic, the development of other packages such as MSTeams accelerated at an extraordinary rate and there are able to provide users with the same functionality at a much reduced costs. Ajenta were unable to keep pace with the changing market and ceased to trade in September 2022. The functionality and speed of development of MSTeams is greater than V-scene and also has greater accessibility.

The equipment installed at each site includes an interactive display, video conferencing pc, camera, microphone array, control equipment, rack mounted hardware and cabling.

A recent survey of the usage of the equipment has highlighted the lack of usage due to a number of reasons

- All Scottish Borders Council school students are now issued with their own iPad which allows them to access online courses via MSTeams as standard. The Director of Education and Life Long Learning has indicated due to the iPad

provision and the launch of their Inspire Learning Academy the equipment is not required.

- All College students who request a lap top are provided with one, which includes MSTeam.

The survey of all the Spoke sites found the only sites currently utilizing the equipment is Innerleithen Church and Heart of Duns who were utilizing it for zoom calls and videos. Farne Salmon and Eyemouth Marine have also confirmed they would like to keep an element of the equipment for similar purposes. These functions could be facilitated via the screens only and their own devices, as they currently doing. Scottish Borders Council have indicated they have no use for the equipment within the schools.

Way Forward

The curriculum and the Department of Business Innovation (DEBI) of the College have confirmed they will not be utilizing the network for future delivery of courses.

To ensure the equipment is fully utilized and thus providing value for money for the public purse, it is proposed the equipment is partially removed from the Spokes. The touch screens would remain within spokes for Community Groups, who require them, to facilitate virtual meetings or presentations, using their own lap top or other devices. The ownership of the screens will formally transfer to the spokes, who are already responsible for the maintenance and would cease to be supported by the Colleges IT Department.

The equipment no longer required at the spoke sites can be repurposed for use within the College campus. This will mitigate costs required to upgrade of class room AV equipment.

Implications and Considerations

Financial Implications:

The ongoing maintenance and costs for equipment retained at spokes, will be met by the individual spokes. This reflects the agreement made with each spoke site. The College currently however provides IT support which requires staff to travel to the remote locations. The transfer of the assets would eliminate this requirement and costs. There may be some one-off costs to reinstate rooms following the removal of any equipment but will be minor.

Learner Implications:

There are no negative implications for learners who can now access any virtual teaching via their own devices issued by either Scottish Borders Council or the College. The repurposing of the equipment will provide an enhanced learning experience within the class room and reduce the risk of class rooms being unavailable due to failed AV equipment.

Equality and Diversity Implications/Equality Impact Assessment:
An impact assessment has been completed and no adverse implications have been identified.

Staff Implications:
There are no direct staffing implications from this report.

Sustainability/Environmental Implications:
The retention of equipment in the Community spokes will enable the communities to participate in virtual meeting, reducing the travel requirement and carbon emissions.

Conclusion
Although the overall delivery of the project has been successful, the unprecedent evolution of virtual technology during the pandemic has made the facilities obsolete. The equipment is no longer required to provide on-line teaching but can be utilized on campus to replace AV equipment due for upgrade.

Recommendation

To work with the individual Spokes to confirm future utilization of the equipment and remove equipment no longer required. This equipment would be repurposed within the College Campus.