

A Restorative Approach to Supporting Students

Maynooth University School of Law and Criminology

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In the School of Law and Criminology, basic restorative practices training is made available to all lecturers and administrators on a voluntary basis. Staff who have received this training can use restorative practices in one-to-one settings to support students who are seeking a conversation about an issue they are facing.

The School also hosts a Restorative Practices Officer with advanced training in restorative practices, whom students or staff can contact if they want to explore the possibility of a restorative process involving more than one person. From 2024, the Restorative Practices Officer is Dr. Ian Marder (ian.marder@mu.ie).

This document describes what a restorative approach to supporting students means in the School.

What is a restorative approach to supporting students?

Taking a restorative approach to supporting our students means that:

- We actively build positive relationships and a sense of community among students and staff that makes people feel welcome and helps prevent interpersonal issues from occurring.
- When a student approaches us to discuss an issue they are facing, we aim to listen and help them identify how best their needs can be met. This may involve signposting them to other persons and services – such as those linked below – to whom they might wish to speak.
- When that issue involves another student or a staff member, an option we can explore is whether a colleague with advanced training in restorative practices could help those involved to participate in a voluntary restorative process to address what happened. This could include a face-to-face or indirect dialogue among those involved. In the first instance, the Restorative Practices Officer, Dr. Ian Marder, [can be contacted](#) by anyone who wishes to ask questions about restorative processes. A restorative process can only take place following assessment and preparation, and with the free and informed consent of all parties.

This aligns with existing School and university policies and procedures. It does not inhibit any person from accessing formal complaint processes, or any other existing mechanisms. Students may contact [Maynooth University Student Services](#), which can provide supports in relation to [counselling](#), [health](#), [sexual violence prevention and response](#), [budgeting](#) and [general student advice](#), among [others](#). Students may also access the [Student Complaints Procedure](#) to express dissatisfaction about any aspect of the university's services within the scope of the Procedure. Students and staff may also formally report behaviour that they believe constitutes a breach of the Maynooth University [Code of Discipline](#).

Nothing in this policy should be taken to imply that it takes priority over university policies, that restorative processes should be used when they are not appropriate, or that any person who considers or participates in a restorative process forfeits their ability to access any other support, process or service.

What does this look like in practice?

While the School cannot typically provide practical assistance with personal issues (aside from by granting extensions as appropriate and by signposting to other services), the restorative approach can help to guide any conversations we have about the problem and the options available. A restorative approach does not replace supports available within the university as listed earlier, and we will never ask a student to provide any details of their personal lives or experiences that they do not wish to share.

If a student contacts a person who is trained in restorative practices, that person may offer to ask a set of questions that aim to help the student express themselves, identify their needs, and determine how best their needs can be met. That person could ask the student to describe what happened, what they thought about it then, what they are thinking now, and who was affected and how. They could then ask the student to consider what they think needs to happen next and, if the problem involves another student or member of staff, whether they would like to speak with the Restorative Practices Officer about the possibility of a voluntary, facilitated conversation with the other person(s). This conversation would only take place after assessment and preparation, and with the free and informed consent of all parties. It may take place face-to-face, online or indirectly (i.e., where the Restorative Practice Officer speaks to each person individually and passes views, questions or answers between them, without any direct contact between the parties).

Any conversations must be based on the willingness and capacity to problem-solve through constructive dialogue, with respect for everyone involved to be listened to in relation to understanding what happened and what needs to happen next. If the parties cannot guarantee that the conversation would take place in this manner, the restorative process is not appropriate.

In such meetings, all conversations must be confidential, unless the parties agree otherwise, or there is a risk of further harm or breach of discipline that must be disclosed. Where others need to be informed that the matter is or is not resolved, the parties will agree what, if anything, beyond that is communicated. If an agreement is reached, the Restorative Practices Officer will work with all the parties to ensure they are clear about the timeline and reporting of any outcomes, and any other follow up to the process.

How can students and staff access or explore a restorative process?

Current School policy outlines the processes for a student to follow when they wish to contact the School about a problem. If a student is seeking information about a module or has an issue relating to a module, they may contact the Module Lecturer. If their issue transcends modules or is of a minor pastoral nature, they may contact the Programme Chair. If the issue is of a more serious pastoral nature, they may contact:

- The Director of Undergraduate Teaching or Head of Criminology (if an undergraduate student).
- The Director of Postgraduate Studies (if a master's student).
- The Director of Postgraduate Research (if a PhD student).

Students may also or alternatively contact the Head of School. They may also contact the School Office if they would like help to identify the best person to contact about an issue. As is current practice, Module Leaders and others in the School are in a position to identify when to refer any issue that a student raises

to their Programme Chair or to another person in the School or in Maynooth University. This will continue, with all staff in the School of Law and Criminology aware that they may contact Dr. Ian Marder at any time to seek advice or ask questions about restorative processes. This can also require liaising with the School's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee or Athena Swan Committee, and with any other persons who could provide advice or assistance in Maynooth University, as appropriate and with the permission of the parties. When an incident involves a sexual element of any kind, this requires engagement with the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Manager in the decision on next steps.

In addition, [students may contact Dr. Ian Marder](#) to explore the possibility of a restorative process, or may ask another lecturer or administrator to contact Ian on their behalf.