

Teaching in Academic year 2021-22

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This document is the Maynooth University plan for teaching in the first semester of the 2021-22 academic year. As the country emerges from the worst impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that we re-open on-campus higher education, but that we do so carefully, and in a manner consistent with public health guidance.

We plan to return to on-campus teaching for all but the large lectures, supported by a series of additional measures to reduce the risk of transmission. This document sets out these plans, with the aim of allowing a consistent and transparent approach across all academic departments.

Principles

Our teaching next year will be guided by the following principles:

1. For most students and staff, on-campus teaching and learning offers the best possible experience. The aim is to maximise the on-campus teaching as far as possible.
2. We will be guided by the public health guidelines. If there are instructions issued about how we can operate, we will comply, even if these arise at short notice.
3. We will not increase on-campus teaching at short notice. If and when public health measures are relaxed, we will give several weeks' notice of intention to change to more on-campus teaching. Where possible the change will be aligned with a mid-term break or a semester break. This will give staff and students time to make the necessary arrangements.
4. Where we are providing on-campus teaching there will be a minority of students who want a fully remote alternative. This is an additional burden we do not want to impose on staff, and therefore our policy should be that a teaching event may be either on campus or remote, but we are not asking staff to do both simultaneously.
5. Where we are using remote teaching, we will want to ensure that wherever possible a student has a weekly on-campus experience in the subject. This is intended to provide students with an opportunity to meet in person with others studying the subject, and to discuss the academic content they are engaging with. This may not be possible in all subjects, but we would like to commit to students that we will do it wherever we can.
6. When teaching activities are on campus, the students are expected to attend.

If you need to clarify anything in this document please contact Aidan Mulkeen registrar@mu.ie or your Faculty Dean.

Key dates:

- Most on-campus teaching starts on 20 September.
- First year undergraduates have been delayed by 1 week because of the late release of Leaving Cert results. They will have registration and orientation in the week of 20 September, and start lectures on 27th September. This will reduce the number of teaching weeks for first year students to 11 for the first semester.

On-campus teaching

On campus teaching for modules of up to 250 students

The aim is to have on-campus teaching for almost all modules, with the exception of large modules with over 250 students, most of which will be taught remotely.

The purpose of this measure is to reduce the overall population on campus at any time, and to reduce crowding at lecture changeover times. It is not an absolute limit, and some on-campus teaching for groups of over 250 may be considered if there is a good reason to do so. If there is a need for an exception (for example a lecture over 250 students to be taught on-campus), please discuss this with the Dean to seek approval.

The general plan is:

Practicals	On-campus
Tutorials	On-campus
Lectures for modules expected to be 250 students or less	On campus
Lectures for modules expected to be over 250 students	Remote

Rationale for moving large lectures to remote

Last year we had approximately 1,000 modules in semester 1. Of these modules, only 41 were over 250 students. There were 17,125 students registered to these 41 modules (this of course includes duplicates, as a student could be registered for more than one large module). These large modules typically had 2 or 3 lectures per week. This resulted in approximately 40,000 scheduled student contact hours per week.

If a lecture is moved to remote, the impact on student behaviour is varied. A proportion will not have to come to campus at all that day, and others will come later or leave earlier. Others will be on campus in any case, such as those with lectures before and after, or those using commuter transport which runs once daily.

If half of the students scheduled for a lecture stay off campus for a half day because it switched to remote, this would remove 20,000 "half days" of presence, or an average of 2,000 fewer students on campus at any time.

Of course the impact will be unevenly spread across times and buildings, but the overall effect is likely to be a noticeable reduction in the on-campus population.

This measure has two other beneficial effects:

- a) It reduces the crowding at lecture changeover, especially in the largest venues.
- b) It frees up the large lecture theatres. Some medium size lectures can be scheduled in the large theatres, and some smaller lectures moved up to the mid size venues, reducing congestion at all levels.

Where teaching is on-campus

Students should plan to attend on campus for the duration of the academic year, and make arrangements to commute or relocate as usual. Some students may seek to avoid travel or relocation by seeking fully remote teaching. We are not asking staff to provide a fully remote option for modules which are taught on-campus. As usual, students who choose not to attend may

have access to the material made available on Moodle, but this is not a substitute for attendance, and is not recommended.

There may be a small number of students who have unusual medical situations, and for whom attendance presents an undue risk. We will work with those students, and their doctors, to seek an individual solution for them. This may involve additional protective measures, or some additional supports. It may also involve deferring a year, or deferring some modules.

Where teaching is remote

Where a module is expected to be over 250 students, it should be taught remotely. Those teaching remotely should not assume that the students can all watch at the same time, and therefore the material should be made available asynchronously for a period of at least a few days.

Some students will watch the remote lectures live while off campus, some will watch at a different time, and some will watch live while on-campus. However, the number of on-campus study spaces is limited, and not all students will be able to watch from on-campus.

There may be some modules where all of the students will be required to be on campus at the time of a large lecture. This might arise if, for example, the lecture was followed immediately by break-out sessions involving the whole group. In such cases, it may make more sense to have the large lecture on campus. Any such exceptions should be identified as quickly as possible, to allow approval by the Dean and the necessary timetable adjustments.

Our message to students

The key to dealing with the public health situation is in individual actions. Over the last 18 months we have been very proud of our students. Most behaved responsibly, and did their best to comply with the measures. This year, we need students to continue to be responsible, to protect themselves and others. The key things we are asking students to do are:

1. **Stay off-campus if symptomatic:** Students with symptoms that could be COVID-19, should stay off campus and avoid contact with others.
2. **Personal responsibility:** Students should take personal responsibility for their behaviour and avoid risky situations.
3. **Vaccination:** We recommend that students get vaccinated unless advised otherwise by their doctor. The evidence is that this protects them and others. If they decide not to get vaccinated, they are increasing the risk to their health, and should take extra care with their behaviour.
4. **Sanitisers:** We will provide sanitisers in corridors and at the entrances to buildings. Students are asked to also carry their own sanitiser, and to wash their hands and sanitise frequently throughout the day.
5. **Face covering:** Students are asked to wear a face covering when indoors on campus, except when eating or drinking. This requirement may be adjusted if the public health advice on face covering is changed.
6. **Cleaning:** We will provide wipes in computer rooms and labs, and students are asked to wipe the surfaces on equipment they use.
7. **Data sharing:** Students are required to consent to limited data sharing with the public health authorities for the purposes of contact tracing and similar health measures. Students will consent to this at registration.
8. **Recording of attendance:** Students are asked to comply with measures to record attendance.

Infrastructure measures

The following infrastructure measures will be put in place:

- 1) **Ventilation:** In rooms where there is mechanical ventilation, the ventilation system will be set in accordance with guidance. Naturally ventilated rooms have been checked against ventilation guidance for window openings. CO₂ levels will be monitored. Additional measures put in place if needed. In some cases, additional air extraction (i.e. fans) will be installed to increase the air changeover. These additional ventilation measures may make the rooms a bit cooler.
- 2) **Lecturer spaced from students by 2 metres:** In teaching spaces, the lecturer will normally be spaced 2 metres from the nearest student. The rationale is that the lecturer is facing the students and speaking, and therefore presents a greater transmission risk.
- 3) **Extra-spacing seats:** In larger venues, a small number of seats will be arranged with extra spacing. These seats are intended as “priority for those who feel vulnerable”. We expect these to be self-policing, like the seats on buses.
- 4) **Capacity assessment:** There will be a review of each room to assess the capacity based on alignment with ventilation guidelines and the measures above. In some cases, this may result in a reduction in room capacity.
- 5) **Staggered starts:** Lecture times will be reduced by 5 minutes. Each venue is marked as “5 past” or “10 past”. Lectures start at 5 minutes after the hour or 10 minutes after the hour, depending on the room designation. Lectures will finish at 10 minutes to the hour (when they start at 5 past) or 5 minutes to the hour (when they start at ten past). This means that adjacent rooms will exit at slightly offset times, reducing congestion in building circulation areas. Note that this measure applies to lectures, and is not required for practicals and tutorials.
- 6) **Open sided tents:** A number of open-sided tents will be installed on campus for the first weeks of the semester, to provide rain-protected outdoor spaces for students to meet. The aim is to reduce the population indoors in the early weeks.
- 7) **External tables:** Outdoor tables and seating will be provided on campus, to allow students to meet outdoors where possible.
- 8) **Behaviour reminders:** Desktops and screen savers in teaching spaces will be changed to provide health and behaviour messages.

Actions for teaching staff

Staff who are teaching on campus are asked to assist with these measures in the following ways:

- 1) **Punctuality of teaching times:** Staff who are teaching are asked to ensure that they start and finish on time, and where appropriate follow the “5 past” and “10 past” indications on the venue. This will reduce congestion at changeover times.
- 2) **Removal of attendance requirements.** Departments will be asked to remove attendance requirements for teaching, to avoid pressuring a student to attend when feeling unwell. There may be some exceptional cases, such as professional accreditation requirements, which mean that attendance requirements are essential. However, with these exceptions, penalties for non-attendance should be removed. This will place greater responsibility on students to manage their own learning, and is consistent with the “personal responsibility” message.
- 3) **Behaviour reminders:** Slides with health and behaviour messages will be distributed to staff before the start of the semester. These can be used at the start of lectures if appropriate.

Laboratories, practical activities and longer teaching activities

Laboratories, practical classes and teaching activities that are longer than 60 minutes can proceed, but require certain additional measures.

- a) **Recording attendance:** Teaching activities longer than 60 minutes should maintain a record of attendance, in case it is necessary for contact tracing.
- b) **Equipment:** Where students are using equipment, they should sanitise their hands before starting, and wipe down the equipment before use. If students are sharing an item of equipment, they should ensure that they know the name of the person they are sharing with, for contact tracing purposes.
- c) **Discussions and group work:** Where students are working together on equipment or in a group discussion, extra care should be taken with wearing of masks. If a student is unable to wear a mask, they should remain at least 1 metre from the others in the group.

Placements and International student movement

Placements

Placements can go ahead wherever the host organisation allows:

- If a placement is non-essential and cannot go ahead, the student should be offered alternative modules to the same credit value.
- If the placement is essential (for example in professional courses), and cannot go ahead, the university will work with the Department to see if alternatives can be arranged. If no solution can be found the student may have to defer the placement.

International students – incoming

International students are welcome to come to Maynooth, as long as they comply with the travel and quarantine regulations.

Students may ask whether they can register and then study remotely. This is not something we should agree, as students are expected to attend on campus.

MU students going abroad

MU students can continue to go abroad, as long as the public health regulations allow. If the host university is teaching through remote lectures, or blended approaches, our students should follow those courses. We expect that our students will travel abroad and live abroad, and this is part of the overall international exchange experience.

What if a student goes abroad and comes back early?

- If the student returns in the first three weeks of the semester we will seek to allow them to register for the relevant MU modules, and where relevant switch their registration from the international degree (e.g. from BA International to BA).
- If the student has travelled to the host university and spent a reasonable time there, and is advised to return by the host university and is able to continue to study remotely with the host, we may accept the credits for the purposes of the international degree.
- In some cases, if a student decides to return when it is too late to register for MU modules, and they cannot continue with the host university modules, they may have to de-register for the year. We will then work with the student to identify the best option for completion of their studies.

Questions staff may have

What if students do not wear masks?

Staff are not expected to “police” mask wearing. We know that some students are unable to wear masks for medical reasons, some will object in principle, and others will be forgetful. If you find that a significant number of your students are not wearing a mask, it is reasonable to remind them that it is expected, but there is no need to intervene to enforce compliance. If a student is unable to wear a mask for medical reasons, they should normally sit in one of the “extra-spacing” seats.

If most students are wearing masks, the presence of a small proportion who are non-compliant does not present a significant risk. However, if you think that the behaviour in your class is dangerous, you can call the Covid Response Team and/or cancel the class. If you cancel a class on the grounds of student behaviour, please report this to the Covid Response Team as soon as possible.

Are staff expected to wear a mask?

Yes, you should wear a mask in shared spaces, and when going to teaching venues. You are not expected to wear a mask while teaching, and for that reason the “lecturer space” is separated by 2 metres from the nearest student. Students who are not wearing a mask should not come within 2 metres of you, and it is OK to remind them of this.

Are staff required to be vaccinated?

Vaccination is a sensible public health measure and it seems wise for all staff to get vaccinated unless advised against vaccination by their doctor. This is a personal medical decision, and the university will not require staff to be vaccinated, or prevent unvaccinated staff from attending.

Can I meet students in my office?

Yes, you can meet individual students in your office. You should leave the door or window open as much as practical to increase ventilation, and wear a mask during the meeting if you cannot ensure 2 metre separation.

If you feel uncomfortable meeting students in person, you can arrange to meet them via Teams.

Do students need to be separated by 1 metre in teaching spaces?

No. The guidance for Higher Education no longer includes a requirement for 1 metre spacing. This reflects the high levels of vaccination in society. Nevertheless, students are asked to take care, and to maintain as much distance as possible.

What if a student would prefer to study remotely?

This plan is for mainly on-site teaching, and students will need to be able to access the campus. We are not planning to provide remote learning options for all modules, so it is not viable for a student to assume they can study remotely.

What about students who are medically vulnerable?

Any student who is medically vulnerable should ensure that they are fully vaccinated before coming on campus, unless advised otherwise by their doctor. If there are students who are particularly vulnerable, they should contact Student Services, who will guide them through the necessary medical and risk assessments. If possible, we will make arrangements that will allow them to study safely, but where this is not possible, we will advise deferral.

Can I plan a field trip for students?

At the moment a field trip seems unadvisable, but this may change as the situation improves. Please contact the Covid Response Team to discuss the specific requirements.

What about special events, like music performances, guest lectures, and conferences?

Please contact the Covid Response Team to discuss the specific requirements.

Will there be exams on campus in January 2022?

We anticipate that we will be able to hold exams on campus in January 2022. It is reasonable for Departments to plan for exams as normal.

What if a staff member has some symptoms and is scheduled to teach?

Just as for students, staff who have symptoms that might be COVID or have been told to self-isolate, should not come onto the campus. If you are ill, you can cancel the class, as normal in cases of illness. If you are not ill, but required to self-isolate, you can switch to remote teaching. If you switch to remote teaching, please record the class to make it available to students who were unable to participate at the right time.

Will there be conferrings?

We decided not to have on-campus conferring ceremonies this autumn. They are non-essential events which bring together large a number of people, and generate mingling and multiple social events. We have replaced these with virtual ceremonies on the scheduled dates, and we have also promised that we will have the students back on campus for an in-person ceremony when we think it is appropriate to do so. This is likely to be in 2022.