

Studying in Maynooth University in Academic year 2021-22

A guide to COVID responses

21 August 2021

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This document is the Maynooth University guide for students who will be studying with us in 2021/22. It explains what we will do in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how teaching and studying on campus will proceed.

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.

Key dates

Most on-campus teaching starts on 20 September 2021.

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.

Principles

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

1. For most students on-campus teaching and learning offers the best possible experience. Our aim is to maximise 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 students time to make the necessary arrangements.
4. Where we are providing on-campus teaching there may be a minority of students who want a fully online alternative. We do not have the capacity for dual mode teaching, and therefore our policy is that a teaching event may be either on campus or online, but we are not asking staff to do both simultaneously.
5. Where we are using online 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.

Our plan for on-campus teaching

On campus teaching for modules of up to 250 students

Our 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 reason for moving the large lectures to remote teaching is to reduce the overall number of people on campus at any time, and to reduce crowding at lecture changeover times. This is not an absolute limit, and you may find that there are some classes over 250 held on campus. Our general plan can be summarised as:

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

When teaching is on-campus

You should plan to attend teaching on-campus, and make arrangements to commute or relocate as appropriate. Some of you may wonder if you could avoid travel and take all of your modules remotely. We are not in a position to provide fully remote teaching. If you do not attend, you will have access to notes and support materials, but this is not an adequate substitute for attendance.

Students with specific medical issues

If you are in a very high-risk category, your doctor may advise that you take special precautions, or that you do not attend the campus at all. If you are in a very high risk category we will ask you to provide medical documentation from your GP or consultant, to help us to decide how to proceed. Please contact the Student Health Centre for guidance on what documents to provide and how we will use them. Where possible we will make arrangements to allow you to complete your degree. If this is not possible, we will help you to defer all or part of your studies until the situation improves.

Where teaching is online

If you are taking some of the larger modules, over 250 students, you will find that the large lectures are replaced by online teaching or by a blend of online and in-person teaching. Lecturers will use a range of technologies, most commonly Panopto, and Teams. On your timetable the venue will be noted as "online" if the module is delivered entirely remotely. If the module will be delivered using a combination of online lectures and regular in-person attendance in smaller groups, the timetable will note the module as "blended" and will indicate the on-campus venue for the smaller group teaching, e.g. "JH1, Blended".

It is important that you treat online lectures as seriously as you would treat in-person lectures. Ideally you should watch them at the scheduled time. If you cannot do that, you should watch them as close as you can to the scheduled time. If you allow a backlog to build up, you can easily fall behind.

This year, because of COVID, we would like to reduce the number of people on campus as much as possible. We ask you to study at home when you can, and come to campus for your scheduled teaching events.

Some of you will need to study on campus for various reasons. We have wi-fi access and study spaces spread throughout the buildings on campus. You are welcome to study on campus, but if you can conveniently study at home, that will leave the spaces for the people who really need them.

You will have less time on-campus, and yet you will be expected to complete the same modules and achieve the same learning outcomes. This means that you will have to take more of the responsibility for your own learning than ever. This will mean:

- Making sure you attend whenever you are expected to.
- Making sure you keep up with the online teaching and assignments.
- Checking your own progress regularly to make sure that you are up to date with your work.

Playing your part – what we ask you to do

Individual actions are the key to ensuring public health. Over the last 18 months we have been very proud of our students. Most Maynooth University students behaved responsibly, and did their best to comply with the public health measures. This year, we need you to continue to behave responsibly and to play your part in reducing the spread of the virus. These are the main things we are asking you to do:

1. **Stay off-campus if symptomatic:** If you have symptoms that could be COVID, please stay off the campus and avoid contact with others. If you develop symptoms when you are on campus, you should call the Covid Response team at extension 7999 (01-474 7999). They will guide you to an isolation room where you can wait safely. While there you can contact your doctor or the Student Health Centre, and you can arrange to be collected to go home. If there is no-one to collect you, our team will help you to get home without risk of infecting others. If you live on campus, our team may ask you to move to a separate room, to minimise the risk of passing on infection to others. If you are confirmed to have COVID, please let the Covid Response team know – they will use this information to help in contact tracing and other protective measures.
2. **Personal responsibility:** Take responsibility for managing the situation. If you think that you are too close to others, or if you think an event is overcrowded, move away. By doing so you reduce the risk to yourself, and set an example to others.
3. **Vaccination:** We strongly recommend that you get vaccinated as soon as you can, unless you have been advised not to by your doctor. If you are vaccinated, you reduce your chance of getting ill, and reduce the risk of infecting others. If you decide not to get vaccinated then you should take extra care to keep your distance from others, avoid social events and other unnecessary contact.

4. **Sanitisers:** You should wash your hands and sanitise regularly throughout the day, and sanitise before going into each venue. We will provide sanitisers in the university buildings, but you should also carry your own pocket sanitiser, as this will avoid a queue at the sanitisers. We will provide free refill stations around the campus where you can refill your personal sanitiser.
5. **Face covering:** You should wear a face covering (mask) when you are indoors. This will mean wearing a mask during all classes. There may be a small number of people who are medically unable to wear a mask. In that case you should provide confirmation from your GP or consultant. Please contact the Student Health Centre for guidance on what documents to provide.
6. **Cleaning:** We will have enhanced cleaning protocols so that key surfaces are cleaned more often than usual. We will also provide wipes in computer rooms and labs, and we would like you to take a wipe as you enter the room, and wipe down the equipment you will touch.
7. **Data sharing:** We will work with the health authorities to facilitate contact tracing. We may share your contact details (name and telephone number only) with the HSE if needed for contact tracing. We will not share personal data such as your PPS number. This will only be shared for the purposes of contact tracing. You will be required to consent to this sharing at registration.
8. **Recording of attendance:** We will need to keep track of attendance, so that we can trace contacts in the event of an outbreak. We ask that you cooperate with the measures in place to record attendance, and make sure that your attendance is properly recorded. We will also use the classlist to help identify people who may have attended a lecture. Please **DO NOT** attend any lectures or classes that you are not scheduled to attend, unless you have the agreement of the lecturer.

Our part: some of the measures we have in place to help protect you

We have been doing a lot of work on our campus to help reduce the risk of transmission of the virus. Some of the measures in place are:

- 1) **Ventilation:** In rooms where there is mechanical ventilation, the systems have been set to increase fresh air circulation. In rooms with natural ventilation we will be requiring that some windows remain open to increase air circulation. We will be monitoring rooms centrally. These measures will mean more fresh air in teaching spaces, and reduce the possibility of aerosol transmission. Unfortunately it will also make the rooms cooler than usual.
- 2) **Lecturer spaced from students by 2 metres:** In teaching spaces we will have the lecturer spaced by 2 metres from the nearest student. This is because the lecturer will be facing you, and will not have to wear a mask while teaching. Please respect this 2 metre zone around

the lecturer and keep your distance.

- 3) **Extra-spacing seats:** In larger venues, we will arrange a small number of seats at extra spacing from the others. These seats are intended as “priority for those who feel vulnerable”. If you are medically vulnerable, or are medically unable to wear a face covering, please use these seats. Please allow the most vulnerable people priority in these seats.
- 4) **Capacity assessment:** We will review the capacity in each room using the ventilation standards. In some cases you will see a maximum capacity posted on or near the door of the room. Please do not exceed the capacity in a room.
- 5) **Staggered starts:** We have decided that we will stagger the start and end of lectures in some larger rooms to reducing congestion. Here is how this will work. Each lecture will be shortened by 5 minutes. Each room will be marked as either as “5 past” or “10 past”. In a “5 past” room, the lecture should start 5 minutes after the hour, and end 10 minutes before the hour. In a “10 past” room, the lectures should start 10 minutes after the hours and finish at 5 to the hour. Lecturers have been asked to try to be as punctual as they can. We ask you to help by avoiding congregating outside teaching spaces. When your lecture is over, please move away as quickly as you can. Note that this measure applies to lectures, and is not required for practicals and tutorials.
- 6) **Open sided tents:** We want you to stay outdoors as much as possible, so we are installing a series of large “stretch tents” around the campus. These are intended as social spaces where you can meet outdoors, with some shelter. If you want to chat with your friends, please meet outdoors whenever you can. This will reduce the number of people in the indoor spaces and help prevent overcrowding.
- 7) **External tables:** We are also installing extra seating and tables outdoors around the campus, to help you stay outside as much as possible.
- 8) **Behaviour reminders:** We all need reminders from time to time and we will be reminding you about important behaviours like mask wearing, sanitising and maintaining distance. You will see messages on screen savers, and in lectures. We will also have a team of campus concierges who will remind you if they think you are getting too close, or forgetting your mask. We expect you to listen to this advice and to cooperate with these concierges.

Placements

Placements can go ahead wherever the host organisation allows:

- If your placement is not essential in your degree and cannot go ahead, then you will be offered alternative modules to the same credit value.
- If the placement is essential (for example in professional courses), and cannot go ahead, we will work to see if alternatives can be arranged.

The ethical code: proper use of material, proper behaviour online.

As you know, the rules of the university provide guidance on what is considered unacceptable student behaviour, and breaches of these regulations can result in disciplinary action and penalties. You can see the regulations on the university policies page at:

<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/university-policies/university-regulations>

The use of blended learning increases the risk of certain types of breach of the regulations, and so it is important to consider the following:

Improper use of recordings of teaching: All of our teaching materials are owned by the university and the staff who produce them, and you do not have permission to use them for any purposes other than your own study. We do not normally allow recording of lectures, but this year you may have access to recordings. This means you should be very careful not to allow these to be shared with others or used for other purposes. If you find that some material from a lecture is available where it should not be, please report it to the lecturer immediately.

Harassment of staff or students: You may find that you have access to the email address of others in your class, or that you form additional channels through other media, and you may even have access to recordings of student participation in virtual classrooms. Occasionally we find that students misuse these channels to harass or abuse other students, or staff, with abusive material, racist or sexual material, or threats. Any abuse of students, or staff, on-campus or online, is a breach of the regulations and can result in disciplinary action. If you are abused online by a student, please keep a record of the material, and report this to campus security.

Plagiarism and academic integrity: When studying, there might be a temptation to copy material from other sources. Please remember that any work you produce should be your own work, and that copying the work of others is a serious academic offence. The university library has a comprehensive guide on Academic Integrity. In this guide there is broad information on plagiarism and referencing.

You should also have some consideration for the staff who are supporting you in your studies. They often find that they type answers to the same question multiple times, often questions they have already answered in lectures. Please try to watch the lecture and read the material before asking questions. Maynooth University academic staff are very committed to teaching and to supporting you. We are committed to looking after our staff by maintaining reasonable working hours, so please do not expect instant answers to your questions after hours or at weekends.

Questions you may have

What if I do not want to wear a mask?

We expect that you will wear a mask when indoors except in special circumstances where 2 metre spacing can be assured. We understand that a very small number of students may be medically unable to wear a mask. All other students are expected to wear a mask. If you decide not to comply with this we may ask you to leave the building and remain outdoors.

Do I have to be vaccinated?

No, the university does not require vaccination, but we strongly recommend it. Vaccination is a sensible measure and it seems wise for all you to get vaccinated unless you are advised against vaccination by your doctor. However this is a personal medical decision, and the university will not require you to be vaccinated, or prevent you from attending or living in campus residences if unvaccinated.

Can I meet lecturers in their office?

In general you can meet a lecturer in their office if there is 2 metre separation and adequate ventilation. If you or the lecturer is uncomfortable about meeting in person, either of you can decide to meet via Teams.

Do we 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, and the fact that you will be wearing a mask in teaching spaces. Nevertheless, we ask you to take care, and to maintain as much distance as possible.

What if I would prefer to study remotely?

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

What if I am medically vulnerable?

If you are medically vulnerable should ensure that you are fully vaccinated before coming on campus, unless advised otherwise by your doctor. If you are in a very high risk category we will ask you to provide medical documentation from your GP or consultant, to help us to decide how to proceed. Please contact the Student Health Centre for guidance on what documents to provide and how we will use them. Where possible we will make arrangements to allow you to complete your degree. If this is not possible, we will help you to defer all or part of your studies until the situation improves.

Will there be exams on campus in January 2022?

Yes, we anticipate that there will be exams on campus in January 2022.

Further information

A university is a complex place, and we know we have not answered everything here. If you need more information, here is some guidance on who to contact.

Your subjects	If your question is about the specifics of your academic programme, you probably need to contact the academic department. See https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/departments
Registration	For questions about registration, contact the Student Records Office. https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/records records.office@mu.ie
Fees	For questions about fees, contact the Student Fees and Grants office https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/student-fees-grants fees.office@mu.ie
Accommodation: on campus	https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/accommodation residence.office@mu.ie
Accommodation: off campus	https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/student-services/Homefinder homefinder.service@mu.ie
Moodle	https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/centre-teaching-and-learning/technology-enhanced-learning/moodle moodlesupport@mu.ie
Student Services: Counselling, Creche, Student Budgeting Advice, Chaplaincy, Student Support Hub, Homefinder, Student Support Officer.	https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/student-services student.services@mu.ie
Student Health Centre	https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/student-services/student-health-centre HeathCentre@mu.ie 01 708 38 78
COVID Response Team	covid.response@mu.ie 01 47 47 999
Not sure who to ask? If you are not sure who to ask, contact the student helpdesk.	Information and webchat at www.maynoothuniversity.ie/studenthelp Email: studenthelp@mu.ie Phone: 01 47 47 444