

# Planning for the Remainder of the Academic Year 2020/21 Principles and Messages



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ETBI has drawn up this document in consultation and collaboration with Staff Representatives<sup>1</sup>, informed by public health advice and supported by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and SOLAS.

This document provides guidance on Further Education and Training services provision for December 2020 and planning for the remainder of the Academic Year 2020/2021.

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<sup>1</sup> The TUI, SIPTU, The AHCPS, FÓRSA

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## Glossary of Terms

**ETBI:** Under the Education and Training Boards Act 2013, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) is defined as; An association established to collectively represent education and training boards and promote their interests, which is recognised by the Minister for the purposes of this Act.

**ETB:** Education and Training Board.

**Emergency Remote Learning:** A set of combined delivery methods and tools used to facilitate teaching and learning while responding to a shift in content delivery and instruction operating along changing circumstances.

**FET:** Further Education and Training.

**FET Institutions:** term refers to FET facilities i.e. campuses, colleges, and centres.

**FET Senior Manager:** FET College Principal/Training centre Manager/AEO.

**Staff Representatives:** The TUI, SIPTU, The AHCPS, FÓRSA.



## Guiding Principles

Communication of accurate and consistent messages to stakeholders, especially to learners and staff, in the Further Education and Training sector is key in managing the impact of COVID-19 on the sector and the people within it.

The key message in relation to the provision of Further Education and Training services is that the [Level 5 of the Plan](#) guidelines document pertains through December 2020 until the commencement of the new term with the Further Education and Training provision remaining at the current level where insofar as onsite presence is required and such education activities cannot be held remotely. At the commencement of the next term, Further Education and Training stakeholders will meet to discuss the phased step-down process from level 5 to the appropriate level: 4, 3 or 2 as per public health advice at that time. A considerate collaborative approach will be taken, which may lead to an increased onsite activity on the phased basis.

Surveys commissioned by the Department of Health show that while many people still describe themselves as feeling stressed and lonely at this time, there has been a recent increase in the number of people reporting that they feel hopeful. It is important, to communicate positivity and the concept of “this too shall pass”. The OECD has highlighted that the pandemic poses considerable specific risks for young people (15 – 24) in the fields of education, employment, mental health and disposable income, and that building trust among this cohort is a significant factor for the remains crucial the success of response and recovery measures in the long-term.

Sharing as much information as possible, as early as possible, is vital in engendering trust and belief that the process is managed and is working. It is our shared intention to optimise the learning experience, both online and face to face, for the remainder of the academic year, aligned to the public health restrictions in place at any given time. Our shared messages are also intended to support the specific priority of seeking to enhance face to face onsite learning for learners, on a phased and incremental basis as public health conditions permit, so as to fully meet the essential learning requirements of learners, insofar as is possible in the circumstances.

Messages must ensure that while they are positive, they do not create unrealistic expectations. It is important to recognise and continue to be clear that public health and safety is the most important thing, and that the learning experience, especially the onsite learning experience, will, in order to keep learners and staff safe, continue to be constrained by the restrictions put in place by Government. As the trajectory of the disease is continually changing, it must be expected that the level of restrictions will also change consistent with the prevailing public health circumstances.

The benefits and capacity of the Further Education and Training sector, institutions and providers to communicate well and clearly, understanding the requirements of their own specific learners and stakeholders, is recognised. The statements below are intended to assist the sector, institutions and providers to create tailored communications, using audience-specific language in ways that can speak to and reach their own stakeholders, especially their learners and staff.



## Shared messages

The following foundational statements in relation to communications and messaging about the remainder of the academic year are agreed by stakeholders:

- Further Education and Training sector have remained open and operational throughout the 2020/21 academic year, including during level 5 restrictions.
- We recognise that this has been achieved through major change to the learning environment involving very responsive planning, evaluation and implementation by institutions and providers with significant personal adjustments for learners and staff.
- Using a common Framework, institutions and providers have adapted to the restrictions presented by Level 5 by making changes that are best suited to their own context and the requirements of their staff and learners.
- As the public health outlook changes, Further Education and Training remains responsive to changing levels of restrictions using this common Framework and their own monitoring and evaluation to ensure that online and onsite learning are safely planned and managed.
- Despite the Level 5 restrictions, institutions and providers have been able to offer onsite learning in priority areas whilst ensuring public safety.
- If public health circumstances improve, there is an ambition by all for a measured and incremental increase in face to face activities onsite to a greater extent for priority groups (priorities identified in Appendix 1) and to an increasing extent for all groups of learners. However, this will continue to be subject to prevailing public health circumstances and planning and monitoring of the overall activity.
- It is anticipated that for the remainder of the academic year, large scale classes will continue to be provided online.
- But, as restrictions ease, there should be greater opportunity to provide increasing levels of small group learning with scope to consider the recommencement other activities such as sports/physical exercise, clubs and societies and other activities onsite in a controlled manner that limits congregation.
- Such activities will be planned so as to facilitate social distancing and limit congregation.
- We recognise the need to continue to facilitate online learners who cannot present onsite, such as those who do not have accommodation arrangements near institutions, who are not in a position to travel to their institution or who have specific health considerations.
- The sector will continue to work together through a refreshed DFHERIS coordinated structure, to respond to the unique set of challenges presented by the pandemic in way that is inclusive, collaborative, productive and adaptable.
- As the academic year progresses the focus of the shared programme of work will include monitoring the impact and ensuring the effectiveness of changes; promoting learner wellbeing, engagement and participation; and enhancing online and onsite teaching, learning and sports and social activities.



## Next steps

The shared messaging and the priorities listed in Appendix 1 relate to the commencement of the next Academic Year. The FET Sector has maintained provision, albeit in an adapted manner, throughout Level 5.

**As such, the instructions within the document “*What Level 5 of the Plan for Living with COVID-19 means for Further Education and Training*” continue to pertain until further notice.**

Through the DFHERIS structure the stakeholders working group will meet early in January 2021 to commence discussions on the phased step-down process from level 5 to the appropriate level: 4, 3 or 2 as per public health advice at that time to progress our shared programme of work. Advice on the appropriate phased introduction of further prioritised and planned on-site provision will issue from the working group from early January 2021.



## **Appendix 1     Priorities across levels**

### **Level 5**

- teaching and research in laboratories, practical and skills-based tuition, workshops (including training of apprentices);
- engagement with learners whose particular needs require additional support over and above that which can be provided online;
- scheduled access to libraries and other onsite study space for those learners who do not otherwise have suitable facilities or home environment to access learning remotely;
- small group activity to mitigate disadvantage in literacy, numeracy and basic skills provision including the National Youthreach Programme and community and adult education and literacy programmes;
- skills and experiential learning for disciplines related to essential services such as clinical placements and regulated safety training in the construction sector;
- on-campus research activities which cannot be undertaken remotely; and
- necessary onsite support to meet the mental health and welfare needs of learners.

### **Across levels 3-4**

As above plus further on-site provision on a prioritised and planned basis, including:

- orientation, familiarisation and meeting with learners in a manner that limits congregation;
- ongoing direct engagement with learners, particularly in the case of vulnerable and/or marginalised learners. There are learners who face difficulties in undertaking independent study, find it difficult to engage in an exclusively online participatory context, are living away from home and potentially isolated or may be at high risk of dropping out;
- use of innovative approaches and fora to promote smaller scale in-person contact, especially peer engagement, for priority learners including new entrants;
- in-person small group learning and discussion, an essential component of higher-level learning, to balance the more passive information sharing via large groups online;
- access to study spaces and other facilities for learners, including those who have difficulty studying remotely, studying in their home environment or who live on or near campus and away from home; and
- continued mitigation of mental health effects of isolation through some on-site contact.

### **Across levels 1-2**

- Further increase in onsite activities with protective measures.

