

Dear all,

I am sure you will agree that it was a real boost to hear the Taoiseach outline the Government's plans to reopen society yesterday evening. This is being driven by Ireland's successful vaccination programme which significantly mitigates the risk of infection or serious illness from COVID-19.

During his speech, Mr Martin gave some key dates including the 22 October by which time nearly all remaining restrictions will be lifted.

While the news yesterday was welcome it does not affect UL's immediate plans to welcome all students bar first years back on campus next Monday 6 September, based on the guideline from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) that our sector should be offering students an on-campus learning experience.

All lectures and other classes will be taking place on-campus from this date except where scheduled numbers exceed 300 students.

Third level education has always been an essential activity under the Government's COVID-19 guidelines, and the University's focus is on ensuring that the staff and services required to support the on-campus functions are available.

Over the past week, additional questions have been raised by staff about returning to work on campus, teaching, and remote (blended) working. Attached are answers to these, which have also been added to the [New Academic Year Guide](#) on the COVID-19 SharePoint site. The detail in some of these answers may alter in response to changing public health and / or sectoral guidance over the coming weeks as Irish society continues to reopen. I will keep you informed if and when this occurs.

Work Safely Protocol

The [Work Safely Protocol](#) is the set of Government guidelines that UL continues to follow to ensure that we return to work on campus in a way that minimises any potential infection from coronavirus. The Business Response Plan is part of these protocols and thanks to everyone who has submitted or is working on a plan for their area. It is not as daunting a prospect as it might seem once you start on it and Health and Safety (H&S) and Buildings and Estates (B&E) continue to prioritise the processing and approval of these plans.

B&E will assess the office and other spaces in relation to best practice guidelines indicated by the Work Safely Protocol. Any changes required will be made and / or communicated to Plan owners. Once a Plan is approved, all the necessary online forms and training links will be sent to line-managers by H&S to circulate to their staff for completion before returning to campus.

Worker Representatives

A key element of the Business Response Plan is the need to appoint Worker Representatives and their duties as outlined in the Plan have not changed. A Worker Representative needs to be on site at all times so you need to consider how many staff you may need to appoint to this role.

COVID-19 SharePoint Site

The [Return to Campus Working](#) folder on the COVID-19 SharePoint site is a staff resource for documentation, guidelines and procedures relating to getting back on campus for the new academic year, including:

- Events & Visitors
- PPE

- Managing a suspected case of COVID-19 (isolation rooms, guidelines)
- Business Response Plan template / Pre-Return to Work information sheet / Worker Representatives/ and more.

The contents on this site are updated regularly in line with changes to sectoral and national guidelines.

COVID-19 Website

The website is a staff, student and UL community resource for current information about University operations in line with COVID-19 Public Health guidelines. Generally, the information here is presented in a Q&A fashion. Again, this site is regularly edited in line with current recommendations and over the next few days we will be adding detail for students about their return to campus next week.

Historical Leave Validations

Please note that the closing date for receipt of validated historical leave balances is 31 October. In June, the HR team distributed information to managers relating to historical leave balances for their respective staff, requiring managers to provide the appropriate validation of these records. Upon receipt of validated historical leave balances to date, the HR team have updated the approved values to the CORE system where employees may now book Historical leave as they require.

Navigating the Transition Back to Campus Workshop

Due to demand, additional places are now available on this workshop from HR Learning and Development on Monday 6 September at 0930. The workshop looks at how we can best approach navigating the uncertainty surrounding the return to campus. The facilitator will share current research and insights based on working with other organisations who have already navigated this change. Contact hrbookings@ul.ie to book a place and for more information about this and other courses available in the Learning and Development schedule, please go to: [Training Programmes and Schedule](#).

Finally, [An Irishman's Diary](#) in yesterday's *Irish Times* gives a very interesting potted history of Nenagh native, John Desmond Bernal after whom UL's own eponymous institute is named. It is well worth a read.

Best wishes,

Eoin