

24 January 2023

## **COVID-19 Update**

Independent College continues to monitor the Covid-19 situation very carefully. We are formulating plans with regard to the start of the next semester in Spring 2023, in-line with the Government's Practical Guidance for Further and Higher Education for Returning to On-site Activity in 2020.

This **may** mean widespread changes on campus, with measures including, but not limited to:

- A rotated blended (or similar) approach to the delivery of classes
- Providing socially distanced face-to-face classes
- Wearing of face coverings/masks
- Implementing an effective teaching timetable
- Ensuring there are adequate sanitiser stations
- Instigating a rigorous cleansing programme throughout the campus.

Independent College will continue to provide our existing academic and professional programmes online and support services on a 'remote access' basis (streamed live and recorded). We will be adhering to Irish Government guidelines and QQI instructions in terms of operation. Please monitor this page, [Moodle](#), emails from the College and our main social media channels for further updates.

### **What happened when the College moved to rotated blended learning?**

- The College developed a contingency plan when it was possible to move to a rotated blended delivery.
- From the outset, all lectures were streamed and recorded in the case that a learner needed to self-isolate.
- As per the previous semester, the delivery timetable remained the same, regardless of the method of programme delivery.
- The College continued to invest in additional sound and camera technology, and every teaching space has the capability for face-to-face delivery, live streaming and recording of learning events. The College has enhanced its use of Moodle and Zoom, as well as the integration of these systems. All lecturers have suitable IT equipment and connectivity to deliver their learning with fully licenced Zoom accounts.
- Monitoring of engagement regardless of face-to-face or online attendance was developed.
- The College updated both staff and students on a regular basis and sought feedback as to the experience of moving to rotated blended learning

### **What will happen for the next semester?**

- Independent College will continue to deliver our existing academic and professional programmes and support services using a rotated blended model when appropriate.
- Our primary concern is supporting students to complete their course work for the semester and to revise and prepare our learners for their end of semester assessments.
- All final assessments e.g. end of semester exams in June 2023 and resits will be delivered face to face.
- Access to the campus Library to take out books, use PCs and to study will be permitted in adherence to COVID-19 guidelines. Please see <https://independentcollege.libguides.com/library>

- For information on visas visit <http://www.inis.gov.ie/> or contact the team at [learnersupport@independentcollege.ie](mailto:learnersupport@independentcollege.ie)
- For student support related issues, learners can contact the team at [learnersupport@independentcollege.ie](mailto:learnersupport@independentcollege.ie)
- The College will update this page regularly, should there be any developments.

#### **What is the academic calendar for Spring Semester 2022?**

- [Please view the Spring 2023 calendar here](#)

#### **When will Independent College reopen?**

- We are still enrolling for the 2023 academic delivery of our undergraduate and postgraduate courses, commencing on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023.
- For all admission inquiries, please contact our admissions team on [admissions@independentcollege.ie](mailto:admissions@independentcollege.ie)
- For enquiries about the delivery of our professional courses, please contact [profcourses@independentcollege.ie](mailto:profcourses@independentcollege.ie)

#### **Health Information**

- The most important information we can share with you is the recommended best practice that will help to prevent the spread of Covid-19.
- Continue to pay attention to handwashing, cough etiquette etc as outlined by the HSE Guidelines.
- If you are unwell with symptoms such as cough, fever (high temperature) shortness of breath or breathing difficulties, please stay at home and contact your GP or the HSE Helpline on 1850241850.
- Students who have any concerns regarding their health are welcome to contact the support team on [learnersupport@independentcollege.ie](mailto:learnersupport@independentcollege.ie)

### **Independent College - Contingency Plan/Arrangements - Coronavirus COVID-19 – Update 6**

In accordance with the QQI Coronavirus COVID-19 Update (QQI, 2020), this document sets out Independent College's (updated) overarching contingency plan/arrangements to be adopted as a result of COVID-19.

Independent College closely monitored the situation regarding COVID-19 and began liaising with QQI regarding possible impacts on 02 March 2020. The College subsequently made preparations regarding contingency planning and arrangements should a case of COVID-19 be confirmed on campus or should the campus be required to close.

It is worth noting that Independent College has the latest version of Moodle and is very experienced in supporting its QQI learners via its virtual learning environment (VLE) and its professional learners via the VLE in the form of rotated blended delivery. For example:

- All teaching and learning materials are made available to learners via Moodle.
- All assessment requirements are detailed on Moodle.
- All appropriate assessments are submitted electronically via Moodle (with inbuilt inspection by Turnitin).
- End of semester examinations for ALL modules have returned to in-person assessment.
- Learners can communicate with lecturers via Moodle or email.
- Lecturers have the facility to create forums and quizzes (etc.) on Moodle, as required.
- Independent College's Moodle instance is cloud based therefore it is robust and can be supported off campus.
- Independent College has delivered, and supported learners on its FE1, Certificate and Diploma in Professional Legal Studies and Diploma in Data Analytics programmes via blended delivery since October 2019.

Learners have been able to contact College staff via email and Moodle during the closure (in particular, the Learner Support Team). Staff have and continue to keep learners updated via a weekly newsletter, direct communications from the Dean and the various social media platforms, as appropriate.

College staff may contact the Dean, Programme Leaders and the Exams Officer via electronic means and mobile telephone in case of queries.

Senior Management within the College continue to monitor the situation carefully and will be guided by the Framework for Restrictive Measures.

**Preparation for Spring 2023 Semester (please see Appendix 1)**

The College will return to face-to-face delivery on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2023 with (re)induction sessions for staff and learners taking place the week before. Below is an outline of the College's plan:

<b>Key Topic</b>	<b>The plan should include</b>
Alternative programme delivery methods	The College will begin face-to-face delivery on the 20 <sup>th</sup> February 2023. Delivery to learners takes place face-to-face and online on an alternating basis. This is guided by advice provided by QQI and other relevant appropriate bodies (i.e. HSE). The College has a contingency plan should it be necessary to move to online only delivery (for example, all lectures will be streamed and recorded from the outset). As with the previous semester, it is intended that the timetable of delivery will remain the same, regardless of method of programme delivery.
Alternative assessments	In light of the current situation, it has been agreed by the External Examiners at the Summer Exam Boards and by Academic Council that all assessment will return to face to face for the Spring 2023 semester. An ongoing review of the assessment methods has demonstrated that all assessments either transferred online appropriately or the alternative assessment was deemed suitable by both staff and learners. In summary, the methods of assessment which will be used will be normal continuous assessment, online presentation, recorded presentation, extended timed assessment and open book exam, all submitted via Moodle. Online practical's will also be used, which will be recorded.
Alternative arrangements for work placement	Not applicable.
Resource implications	<p>The College has continued to invest in additional sound and camera technology and every teaching space has the capability of face-to-face delivery, live streaming and recording of learning events. The College has enhanced its use of Moodle and Zoom, as well as the integration of these systems. Each lecturer has their own personal college email account, Moodle account and fully licensed Zoom account.</p> <p>All lecturers have suitable IT equipment and connectivity to deliver their learning remotely, if required.</p> <p>The College agreed a discounted price for laptops with an IT provider and this has been communicated to existing learners. Each new applicant is asked to confirm that they have access to a computer, business software (e.g. MS Office), a webcam and broadband.</p>

Information to learners	Learners have, and will continue to receive, a regular newsletter via email and a number of communications from the Dean via email regarding the preparation for the reopening of the College and the start of the next semester.
Induction of New Learners	Learners (and staff) will be invited to participate in a (re)induction prior to returning to campus for the new semester. This will be delivered face-to-face, streamed and recorded for later viewing.
Training / Support of Staff	<p>Staff received training prior to the change to delivery method in the Spring 2021 semester. This was quickly followed by a number of weekly sessions regarding changes to assessment.</p> <p>Lecturers have since received a number of online CPD events facilitated by Prof Jo-Anne Murray of Glasgow University and Mr. Andrew Doig, focusing on delivery and assessment in a face-to-face, blended, and a high flex online environment. These sessions were well attended and also recorded for all colleagues who could not participate due to prior commitments, or for review. These sessions have also been shared with colleagues from other colleges.</p>
Monitoring arrangements	Feedback from staff and learners was sought regarding the effectiveness of the alternate arrangements during the Autumn 2022 semester via questionnaire and the Student Senators. Similar feedback was sought in subsequent semesters to ensure the appropriateness of delivery and support.
Involvement of External Examiner	Regular contact has been maintained with the External Examiners. Each appropriate External Examiner was consulted with regard to any change to assessment and, as mentioned above, the decision to return to face to face end of semester examinations was supported by the External Examiners when proposed at the Autumn 22 Exam Boards. Externs continued to support the appropriateness of assessment in the Summer 2023 exam boards.
Approval by Academic Council	Academic Council has approved all appropriate contingencies / modifications / alternative arrangements including this update.

<b>Independent College - QQI Courses Spring 2023 (Subject to change)</b>		
<b>Information</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Additional Info</b>
<b>MADR/BAIB/MSDM Bridging Event / Induction</b>	13/02/2023 - 17/02/2023	<i>Student Induction on 14th and 16th, staff on 15th</i>
<b>Week 1 Teaching</b>	20/02/2023 - 24/02/2023	<i>24/02/2023 Start date for MADR Dissertation</i>
<b>Week 2 Teaching</b>	27/02/2023 - 3/03/2023	
<b>Week 3 Teaching</b>	06/03/2023 - 10/03/2023	
<b>Week 4 Teaching</b>	13/03/2023 - 17/03/2023	<i>17/03/2023 – Bank Holiday Thursday; Learner Feedback I</i>
<b>Week 5 Teaching</b>	20/03/2023 - 24/03/2023	
<b>Week 6 Teaching</b>	27/03/2023 - 31/03/2023	
<b>Week 7 Teaching</b>	3/04/2023 - 07/04/2023	
<b>Week 8 Teaching</b>	10/04/2023 - 14/04/2023	<i>10/04/2023 – Bank Holiday Monday</i>
<b>Week 9 Teaching</b>	17/04/2023 - 21/04/2023	
<b>Week 10 Teaching</b>	24/04/2023 - 28/04/2023	
<b>Week 11 Teaching</b>	01/05/2023 - 05/05/2023	<i>01/05/2023 – Bank Holiday Monday</i>
<b>Week 12 Teaching</b>	8/05/2023 - 12/05/2023	
<b>Revision Period</b>	15/05/2023 - 18/05/2023	
<b>Exam Period</b>	19/05/2023 - 02/06/2023	<i>19/05/2023 MADR Dissertation Submission Deadline</i>
<b>Summer Graduation</b>	02/06/2023	<i>Summer Graduation</i>
<b>MADR Award Board</b>	09/06/2023	<i>Release of MADR final results</i>
<b>Return Exam Grades</b>	16/06/2023	<i>Before 18:00</i>
<b>Prelim Boards</b>	20/06/2023	<i>Learner Feedback II</i>
<b>Exam Boards</b>	22/06/2023	
<b>Release Grades</b>	23/06/2023	<i>Release of grades within 2 working days post Exam Boards. Students moving to semester 3/5 can register upon receipt of results.</i>
<b>Repeat Exam Period</b>	03/07/2023 - 07/07/2023	
<b>Return Exam Grades</b>	21/07/2023	
<b>Prelim Repeat Boards</b>	25/07/2023	
<b>Repeat Exam Boards</b>	27/07/2023	
<b>Release Grades</b>	28/07/2023	<i>Release of grades within 2 working days post Exam Boards. Students moving to semester 3/5 can register upon receipt of results.</i>
<b>* Subject to change</b>		

QQI. (2020, February 12). *Coronavirus COVID-19 Update*. Retrieved from QQI.ie: <https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/COVID-19---Updates-from-QQI.aspx>