

Dear student,

We have taken the unusual decision to write to you collectively in these extraordinary times. Your health and safety and that of our wider community is our primary concern, which is why we have all instigated revised at-distance teaching and assessment methods for the coming weeks.

We appreciate that you are all aware of the health implications of COVID-19 and at this stage are taking action to limit its spread yourselves. To restate the advice from the HSE, please follow the guidelines around social distancing, maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres between yourself and other people. We also particularly ask that you stay away from crowded places in the weeks ahead and limit your own social interactions.

This does not mean that you should avoid the company of others completely. In fact, it is important for your mental wellbeing to keep in contact with friends and family; just please maintain social distancing by completely foregoing meeting in groups, especially social gatherings or party environments.

You should also make a point of looking out for each other by checking in with other students who might be lonely or isolated by phoning them, or Facetime, Skype, Zoom, or whatever system you use. You could also offer your services to volunteer organisations to collect shopping or prescriptions for elderly neighbours or walk their dogs.

Small social gatherings with enough space between participants to follow the HSE social distancing guidelines are still possible. But any events or activities that involve crowds should be avoided until further notice.

We ask you to do this for three reasons. Firstly, to protect yourselves from infection. Secondly, to slow down the spread of COVID-19 in order to protect at risk people, some of whom may die if they contract the virus. And thirdly, to reduce pressure on our healthcare system. There are close to a quarter of a million students in Irish Higher Education and we are in a strong position to reduce the spread of the virus by acting collectively.

It is important to remember that if you do contract the virus, your health could be severely affected, and you pose a great danger to the older members of society and those with weak immune systems. You could even be unwittingly responsible for putting others at increased risk.

Scientific and public health advice tells us that it will take some time before COVID-19 can be contained. You can play your part as an individual by keeping yourself healthy so that the healthcare system can continue to function.

As a student, you are in a unique position. You are being taught online in many cases and do not have to come into work as many others have to do. All these precautions mean little if you do not stay away from crowds.

Reputable information that is constantly updated is available from www.hse.ie or from the HSE (@HSELive) and Department of Health (@roinnslaite) Twitter feeds.

Be kind to each other and take care of yourselves and each other. Let's give each other the space to find our way through these challenging times and the time to find humanity and meaning here too.

Yours sincerely,

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Andrew Deeks (President, UCD)
Annie Doona (President, IADT)
Barry O'Connor (President, CIT)
Brendan McCormack (President, IT Sligo)
Brendan O'Donnell (President, IT Tralee)
Brian MacCraith (President, DCU)
Cathal Kelly (Chief Executive, RCSI)
Ciarán Ó Catháin (President, AIT)
Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh, (President, NUI Galway)
David FitzPatrick (President, TU Dublin)
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Michael Hannon (Acting President, GMIT)
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With the support of: Lorna Fitzpatrick, President, Union of Students in Ireland