# Approach Moving Forward

## Safe Return Plan

The Safe Return Plan, published on 15th June, has made it possible for approximately 400,000 learners to return to on-site activity across all our further and higher education institutions. The Plan, supported by the Chief Medical Officer, has helped institutions make arrangements to ensure the continued safety and safety of staff and students as they returned.

## Government Announcement 19th October 2021

The Government set out a gradual approach to the easing of restrictions on 19th October. Not all restrictions can be lifted at present due to the rising incidence of the virus in the community. The announcement can be accessed [here](https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/58d28-statement-on-covid-19-public-health-measures-19-october-2021/).

## The Approach to This Phase

Along with the rest of society, the further and higher education and research sector will continue to move forward carefully to increase on-site activities for students, learners, researchers and staff in a safe way. This is possible due to the extent of preparation, planning and work of the sector to date in ensuring a safe return to on-site which underpins the public health view of institutions as controlled environments. Additionally, the success of the national vaccination programme and the recent vaccination campaigns across the higher education sector and the continued support of the sector with the rapid antigen testing pilots currently in progress further supports the approach going forward.

### What to Expect

The approach taken to date by the sector is consistent with the Government’s Roadmap and public health advice and this will remain to be the case. So in moving forward into this phase, the following themes will continue to guide the return to onsite activities consistent with the principles and approach set out in the Safe Return Plan:- -

* The easing of measures in the same way as is taking place in wider society
* The lifting of measures to allow on-site facilities such as sports, clubs, bars, societies and canteens open on the same basis as wider society
* The management of precautionary measures and gradual easing of restrictions based on risk assessment and management systems and engagement with staff and students with associated increases in on-site activities linked to these
* Continued communication and engagement with staff and students

### Public Health

There will be continued engagement with public health, promotion of the vaccination programme and promotion of personal protective behaviours.

Personal behaviours such as physical distancing, wearing of face masks, ventilation of indoor spaces, covering our coughs and sneezes, keeping our hands clean and acting fast, isolating and getting tested if we have symptoms, will continue to be important to help keep you and those around you safe.

In this way, institutions will enable and support their staff, students, learners and researchers to ensure their own personal safety and protection.

### Contingency Planning

Given the unpredictable nature of the pandemic, ongoing contingency planning, monitoring and reviewing will continue which will allow institutions to respond any local and regional increases in incidences of the virus.

Institutions will continue to be flexible and adaptable in response to any changes in the public health environment.

This will be possible with the assistance of the frameworks, guidance and protocols provided for under the Safe Return Plan.

### Communications

Ongoing communications at a local institutional level will continue to be very important as we navigate this phase.

Local engagement on an ongoing basis with staff representatives and clear, consistent communication with students, learners, staff and researchers will be key to sustaining the safe return to on-site activity.

The national Steering Group, which includes Department, sectoral bodies, staff and student representatives, will continue to meet to support the sector in this phase. Though meeting less frequently, their meetings will continue until at least the end of 2021.