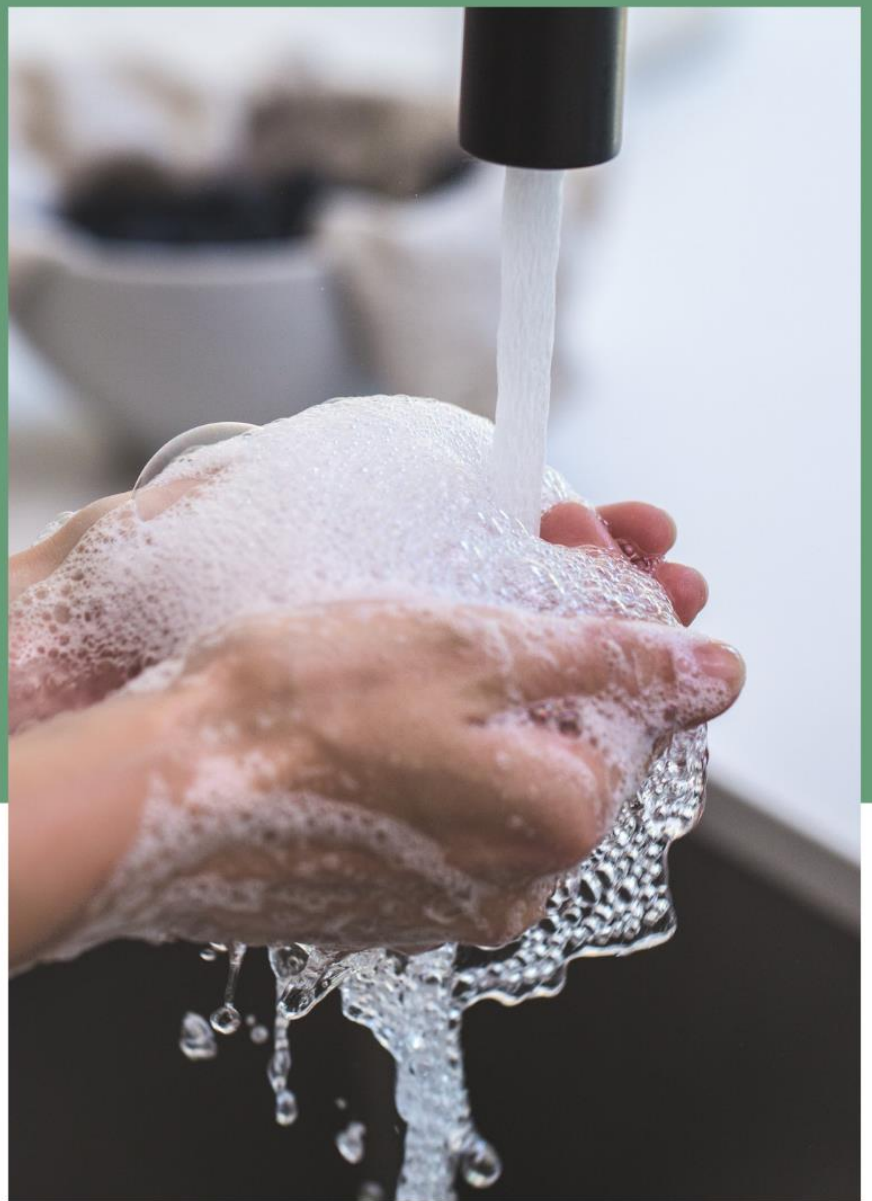


Framework to maintain Physical Distancing in FET Institutions with a Full Return of all Learners for the 2020/21 Year Roadmap for the Full Return to Further Education and Training.

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etbi

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*Boird Oideachais agus
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Introduction

The interim public health advice provided by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC), and the practical application of this advice within FET centres as reflected in the guidance developed by the Education and Training Boards Ireland, is predicated on:

Minimising risk of introduction of infection into the centre through exclusion of learners, staff members and visitors who are ill.

Managing risk of spread if introduced by the following:

- Regular hand hygiene;
- Maintaining physical distancing;
- Application of respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette; and
- Environmental hygiene.

The public health advice makes clear that:

“.. the most critical part of managing the risks of COVID-19 related to centres is doing everything practical to avoid introduction of COVID-19 into the centre. If the infection is not introduced it cannot spread”.

In terms of maintaining physical distancing, measures fall into two broad categories:

- a) Increasing separation;
- b) Decreasing interaction between learners themselves, between learners and staff and between staff when they are together;

Increasing separation

Given that each FET centre setting is different in terms of (i) location; (ii) physical layout (iii) available space within the FET centre; and (iv) learner numbers; FET centres themselves are best placed to decide on the appropriate reconfigurations / operational changes necessary to maintain physical distancing.

In recognition that a ‘one size fits all’ approach would not be appropriate as FET centres themselves are best placed to decide on the appropriate configuration for their FET centre, the recommended measures to ensure Physical Distancing are:

1. Reconfigure classroom spaces to maximise physical distancing;
2. Utilising and reconfiguring all available space in the FET Centres in order to maximise physical distancing;
3. Review Timetables;
4. Reconfiguring Classes;
5. Consider Use of Live Streaming within the FET centre; and
6. Accessing available spaces within the local community

Decreasing interaction

The extent to which decreasing interaction is possible in a FET centre will depend on the FET centre setting and a common-sense approach is required recognising the limits to which this can be achieved between learners. In FET centres physical distancing of 2m is required to be the norm until public health advice says otherwise. In other cases, when required in tuition in practical modules, skills demonstrations etc. at least 1m should be maintained between individual learners or staff.

- As far as possible and practical, learners would remain in the classroom and tutors would move between rooms.
- As far as possible and practical learners would be assigned to a main class cohort which would remain in the classroom for most subjects, with tutors moving between rooms.
- Hand washing and/or sanitising would be required when moving between classes by tutors and learners.
- Physical distancing between the tutor and class would be observed.
- Where movement of class groups between rooms is required, it should be planned to minimise interaction with other class groups.
- Limit interaction on arrival and departure and in hallways and other shared areas.
- Social physical contact (hand to hand greetings, hugs) should be discouraged.
- Where learners need to move about within the classroom to perform activities (access to a shared resource) it should be organized to the greatest degree possible to minimise congregation at the shared resource.
- Staff and learners should avoid sharing of personal items.
- Where teaching and learning involves use of keyboards or tablets, the contact surface of the device should be cleaned regularly, and hand hygiene encouraged.

Physical Distancing

Public health advice states that:

“.. the principle of distancing can be usefully applied in the centre setting, allowing for some flexibility when needed whilst noting that it must be applied in a practical way, recognising that the learning environment cannot be dominated by a potentially counterproductive focus on this issue”.

The public health advice sets out that physical distancing of 2 metres is the norm, and at least 1m in limited circumstances, should be maintained between individual learners and staff.

The public health advice also recognises that:

- the implementation of physical distancing will look different across the various needs and stages of learning;
- care should be taken to avoid generating tension or potential conflict and some flexibility in the implementation of measures may be required at times;

Staff will not always be able to maintain physical distance from the learners and it is not appropriate that they would be expected to do so where this could have a detrimental impact on the learner or the learning and health and safety of other learners. They should take measures to avoid close contact at face-to-face level such as remaining standing rather than sitting beside/crouching down.

1. Reconfigure rooms to maximise physical distancing

- Remove any unnecessary cabinets, furniture etc. to maximise space in the room.
- Rooms should be allocated based on available space with larger classes based in the largest rooms.
- Consider whether a central storage area can be provided in the FET centre for tutor resources which can help maximise the space available within the room.
- Bespoke desk/storage solutions for tutors within rooms can assist with physical distancing arrangements and should be provided where required.
- Some older centres have a plinth around the tutor's desk. The plinth can occupy a substantial area and should be removed wherever possible.
- Room layouts should not necessarily be confined to rows, but arrangements such as diagonals etc. should be considered so as to maximise the available learning space for the maximum number of learners who will use that room.
- Learners should be based in the same room as much as possible.

2. Utilising and reconfiguring all available space in the FET Centres in order to maximise physical distancing

- Review utilisation of all rooms and areas within the centre to maximise occupancy in the centre.
- This may involve utilising all available largest spaces (such as gyms, canteen areas etc.) to accommodate larger classes.

3. Review Timetables

- Review timetables to ensure available space and teaching resources are maximised to the greatest extent possible (for example, taking account of staggered lunch-time and break periods if possible) to maximise the availability of these largest spaces over the course of the FET centre day.

4. Reconfiguring Classes

- Maximise the use of staff resources including any additional resources provided by the Department in response to COVID-19, to achieve physical distance requirements for larger classes e.g. splitting larger classes etc.
- While “team teaching” in the room is generally encouraged, it can impact on capacity of a centre to achieve physical distancing arrangements. FET Centres should therefore consider whether the needs of learners can be met in alternative manner such as in separate smaller class groups – particularly for the 2020/21 centre year.

5. Consider Use of Live Streaming within the FET Centre

- For those larger classes which remain difficult to accommodate consider a live streaming of that class to another room or area in the centre. The small number of learners which could not be accommodated in the main room, could watch live from a satellite room or area in the centre under supervision by a tutor.
- Learners could be rotated on an equitable basis to the satellite room/area.

6. Accessing available spaces within the local community

- Consider accessing available spaces in the local community if practicable.

The above suite of measures provides a practical framework for FET Centres to use to maintain physical distancing in the room with the full return of all learners for the 2020/21 centre year. Physical distancing is an important part of the country's delay strategy to slow the spread of COVID-19 and to limit transmission of the virus. It does this by minimizing contact between healthy individuals and potentially asymptomatic (showing no symptoms), presymptomatic (before showing any symptoms), or mildly symptomatic individuals. In Ireland, this advice has proven to be effective in reducing the incidence of the virus and protecting those most at risk in Irish society.

The impact of physical distancing on capacity of teaching areas is acknowledged, however, this impact may be attenuated through staggered provision of classes/lectures, a widening of opening hours and other sectoral and context-specific measures approved by Government within public health guidelines.

In line with the current health advice, FET Centres may advise staff and learners that the wearing of face coverings is required at all times and additional measures (e.g., N95 masks and/or visors etc.) are required where it is difficult to practice social distancing, particularly in instances where very close contact cannot be avoided i.e., direct instruction requiring proximity of less than 1 metre. It should be noted that the wearing of face coverings is an additional measure to other public health guidelines which must also be followed such as hand washing, respiratory etiquette, and physical distancing requirements (where possible) and is not a substitute for correct working practices. In addition, the health advice also acknowledges that face coverings are not to be suitable for all individuals, for example those with breathing problems or with special needs. Where such a recommendation is made, information must be widely available, either in the form of information posters or specific training, to inform staff and learners of appropriate guidelines in relation to the wearing of face coverings e.g., washing hands before putting a face covering on and after taking it off, avoiding touching the face covering while wearing it, correct removal and disposal etc.

As highlighted above, the wearing of face coverings is an additional measure to other public health guidelines which must also be followed such as hand washing, respiratory etiquette and physical distancing requirements (where possible).

In specific instances where close proximity to other people cannot be avoided e.g. in small laboratory groups, hairdressing instruction in a further education setting, a recommendation that face shields may also be worn is advised. Where proximity of less than 1 metre is envisaged/required, an N95 face mask and/or face shield are recommended as additional measures. Face shields may also be

considered in place of face coverings in the teaching context, particularly if teachers or lecturers have concerns around voice projection or if there is a requirement for learners to see their face etc.

Any changes in the national public health advice in relation to the wearing of face coverings should be reflected at institutional level and policies revised accordingly.

Physical Distancing outside of the classroom and within the FET Centre

Arrival/ Departure

- Arrangements for arriving to and leaving FET Centres should be organised to maintain physical distancing of 2m.
- Walking/cycling to the FET Centre should be encouraged as much as possible.
- Aim of any arrangements is to avoid congregation of people at the FET Centre entrance where physical distancing requirements may not be respected.
- Staggered drop off/pick up should be considered where practical and feasible.
- If FET centres have additional access points, consideration may be given to whether they can be used to reduce congestion.
- Learners should head straight to their designated learning space/classroom.

Staff

- A distance of 2m is recommended for physical distancing by staff. This is particularly relevant to distancing between adults when they are not engaged in teaching such as the staff room or communal areas and arriving to work.
- If 2m cannot be maintained in staff groups, as much as distance as is possible and updated guidance on face covering should be observed.
- Physical distancing should be observed between staff members within the staff room or communal areas through the use of staggered breaks etc.
- Consideration could be given to formation of staff “pods” or teams who work together and take breaks together.
- Staff meetings should be held remotely or in small groups or in large spaces to facilitate physical distancing.
- Implement no hand shaking policy.
- Minimise gathering of FET Centre staff at the beginning or end of the day.
- Staff can rotate between areas/ classes, but this should be minimized where possible.

Canteen

Indoor service in bars and restaurants reopened on 26th of July 2021. Restaurants in education facilities are regarded as ‘workplace canteens’ provided that they are open to staff & learners only. Therefore, the ‘indoor hospitality’ rules do not apply and there is no requirement to check proof of vaccination or recovery for staff and learners. Indoor dining in the form of canteen or lunch facilities

must follow the industry standards in relation to dining guidelines. Currently, indoor dining is permitted in FET centres.

- A maximum of 6 people aged 13 and over are allowed per table.
- Learners should wear a face covering when not sitting at the table.

Using the canteen in this limited capacity means the following etiquette must be adhered to:

1. Learners must clean their hands before and after entering the canteen area.
2. Maintain a social distance of 2 metres between individuals.
3. Implement a queue management system.
4. Break times should be staggered to ensure crowds do not congregate.
5. Everyone should restrict their non-essential social contact as much as possible.
6. Cleaning & disinfection procedures should be in place for equipment, premises, contact surfaces and touch points e.g., counter tops, tongs, service utensils, open self-service displays, trolleys, door handles and keypads.
7. Staff should not work if they have any of the symptoms of COVID-19 and they should self-isolate and follow HSE guidance.

Corridors and Stairwells

Briefly passing someone in a hall is very unlikely to contribute significantly to the spread of infection if people do not have physical contact and avoid informal group discussions.

Ventilation

Windows should be open as fully as possible when rooms are not in use (e.g. during break-times or lunch-times (assuming not in use) and also at the end of each day) and partially open when classrooms/workshops/laboratories etc are in use.