AIT announces plans for reopening its campus for the new academic year

President of AIT commits to delivering an exceptional academic and student experience, despite the challenges of COVID-19.

Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) has today, Tuesday, 16th June, announced plans for the institute to reopen to all students on a phased basis for the new 2020/21 academic year.

From 14th September, second, third and fourth-year students will return to campus and recommence their studies. Incoming first year students will begin on 28th September in line with all other institutes of technology. Taught postgraduate students will return to campus on the 5th October; other postgraduate students will be advised of their start date for their programme by their respective faculty.

The current global public health pandemic has impacted all and has shaken confidence and occasioned concern as to the future. This is particularly true for third level students who want to know what the coming academic year will look like and how, in a time of restriction with limited economic opportunity, they can best progress with appropriate study toward careers that will be essential as we forge a path through recovery.

The quality of the student experience is of paramount importance and AIT aims to protect that experience as much as possible while delivering academic programmes in a way that is safe, inclusive, supportive, and effective. The plans, which have been under preparation with some time, note that the health and wellbeing of students and staff in the institute is of primary importance in both preparing and planning for the delivery of the 2020/21 academic year.

As part of its reopening plans, the institute announced that it is committed to providing students with face-to-face, on-campus learning interaction. President of AIT, Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin said: "We are known for our close-knit campus community and having approachable and supportive staff, so having our students on campus will allow for this one-to-one interaction which is essential."

"The world has changed considerably over the past few months since the start of the global pandemic and the physical closure of our campus on Friday, 13th March. It has been inspirational to see how our students and staff have adapted to our change of delivery in order to complete the semester," he said. "It has shown great flexibility and our institute and its community adapted very well at a time of crisis. However, I also note that it has been

an anxious time for students who are uncertain of the future. Our plans for the upcoming academic year will alleviate those concerns and show the strength of our commitment in getting students back on campus."

As part of the plans announced, the priority for academic delivery from September 2020 will include on-campus learning for lectures with practicals and laboratories also taking place on campus. Where face-to-face lectures are not possible due to social distancing requirements, lectures will take place via interactive remote learning and the virtual classroom. AIT's learning platforms enable real-time engagement with lecturers, interaction with class groups and will replicate the live classroom environment.

"Students will primarily experience traditional on-campus learning, as face-to-face interaction with lecturers and peers is an integral part of the student experience. As most of our class sizes are small, this will allow for this level of interaction. Our practical classes, such as tutorials and laboratories,will also take place on campus with social distancing applied," Professor Ó Catháin added.

"The student is at the core of Athlone Institute of Technology, and we are committing to ensuring the delivery of an exceptional academic and student experience for the new academic year, despite the challenges of COVID-19. We will take every measure necessary to ensure that our campus community continues to thrive."

The announcement today coincides with a joint statement issued on behalf of the presidents of the institutes of technology of Ireland who are collectively encouraging incoming students to start and existing students to continue their higher education in the 2020/21 academic year. In addition, the statement sets out how the sector will support students and communities over the coming months and throughout the coming academic year.

In a statement issued by THEA on behalf of the sector it noted that the presidents of the institutes of technology are particularly mindful of new students entering higher education for the first time. This is a cohort that has had its anticipated transition pathway significantly disrupted and our determination is that these students will be supported and assisted through the coming months in order to establish a positive student experience, despite the turbulence they have experienced in recent months.

As part of their reopening plans, AIT published a document for students entitled "Our commitment to you - bringing you a safe, supportive and welcoming student experience in 2020/21" which outlines their approach to learning, student supports and the student experience for the new academic term. The document additionally sets out enhanced hygiene and safety measures and notes all advice and guidelines from the CMO, NPHET, HSE and the Department of Education and Skills are guiding the physical reopening of the campus.

Timetables for returning students will be available at online registration on the 13th July, noting these timetables are subject to change. Students are advised to visit www.ait.ie for a detailed range of FAQs concerning the new academic term and reopening of the campus.

Athlone Institute of Technology is a contemporary third level institute distinguished by academic excellence in teaching, learning and research. The institute was awarded The Sunday Times 'Institute of Technology of the Year 2020, 2018 and Runner-Up in 2017. The institute also tops Ireland's official league table for research and was listed in U-Multirank's 'Top 25 Performing Universities in the World for Interdisciplinary Research' in 2018 and 2019. For information relating to the institute's undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, visit www.ait.ie. #ChooseAIT #DiscoverYourStory