

Shared communication from the POSITS Forum (Partnership of Stakeholders in the Technological Sector)

11 March 2021

The Partnership of Stakeholders in the Technological Sector (POSITS Forum) has met in a series of concentrated sessions over the past days and is today issuing a record of the informing principles as agreed. It is working closely with the Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science (D/FHERIS) and is informed by public health advice in what it has agreed. The members of the POSITS Forum have worked collegiately to reach this consensus and they support this communication, the core Principles Paper, and the accompanying information statement.

The Governmental framework COVID-19 Resilience & Recovery 2021 - The Path Ahead published on 23 February 2021 confirmed that the technological sector remains within the enhanced Level 5 restrictions. The related guidelines continue to apply, and our institutions continue to operate primarily online with emergency remote learning remaining the primary mode of delivery for most activities with remote working encouraged.

As they have done up to date, institutions will continue to use their discretion, taking account of the public health situation nationally and locally, to restrict onsite attendance, only allowing the most essential and time critical activities to take place onsite in particular practical, studio, and laboratory-based learning & skills essential to programme completion for this year's graduates, including in relation to apprenticeship (Phase 4 & 6). To give effect to this, the POSITS Forum was established to ensure that any marginal increase in onsite activity has been the subject of consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The purpose of this collaborative approach is to afford learners certainty and opportunity for completion of the academic year within the agreed calendar. It is also consistent with the continuing primacy afforded to public health and care for the welfare and safety of our learning communities. Concerning in-person activity on campus, the focus is restricted to certain award years, vulnerable students, and those with practical activities and elements that are not capable of being delivered through alternative means, and which are time-critical for students and learners in light of the objective to support students in completing the programmes they are undertaking. The shared understanding is that managed onsite activity will be targeted and monitored by each institution. And while acknowledging that institutions cannot be responsible for external factors, the approach will include careful consideration of the relevant transport and accommodation arrangements for students.

The D/FHERIS is pleased to confirm that the planning for the marginal increase of onsite attendance is in accordance with the current public health advice. Given the evolving nature of the health situation, a further strengthening of the current prevention and intervention measures by health authorities will be undertaken. In response to the outcomes of this work the Department will revisit the guidance previously disseminated to higher education institutions during 2020 to ensure its consistency and alignment.

The POSITS Forum will remain in place to assist in the implementation of these principles. This will confirm that overall onsite activity will be managed and monitored carefully and undertaken in a phased and gradual way over the course of the period ahead. The framework that is provided here is intended to inform local consultation in the autonomous institutions within the technological sector and the commitment is to keep these principles as a dynamic document which will respond to prevailing public health advice. The Forum has determined that the Union of Students in Ireland will be invited to nominate a member to ensure an inclusive approach to implementation.