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**Technological University of the Shannon:
Midlands Midwest**

Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Sionainne:
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**TUS Policy on Academic Governance for Deviations from the Approved
Programme Schedule Programme Delivery Modes 2021-2022**



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1.0 Introduction and Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed unprecedented demands on Higher Education providers to adapt established operating procedures and norms in order to enable the continued provision of services in a safe manner in line with public health obligations. In June 2021, the Government published a plan entitled “*A Safe Return: Plan for a Safe Return to Onsite Further and Higher Education and Research in 2021/22*”. A key principle of the plan is “*prioritising the immediate health and safety needs of students, learners and staff and the health and safety of the broader community in conjunction with the key objective “to achieve an overarching planning framework within which institutions and providers can plan for consistent significant increases in levels of safe and sustainable on-site activities across further and higher education”*”.

The Safe Return Plan includes “*an expanded discretionary framework of necessary on-site activities*” with a significant increase in on-site teaching and learning activities and research. The Expanded Discretionary Framework includes ‘proposed maximum activities’ and proposed ‘minimum activities’. There is a requirement within the proposed maximum activities to make “*adjustments to the timetable to reduce the overall population on-site at any one time*” and that planning would ensure that overall numbers attending on-site may be moderated.

The Safe Return Plan states that the “*intention for 2021/2022 is for a predominantly on-site learning experience for all students and learners*” but notes that “*Institutions and providers can continue to use their discretion when deciding between on-site and remote for the scheduling of particular activities*. It envisages in its Overall Approach that there would be detailed planning and contingencies undertaken by higher education institutions and the communications of these to students and learners with a “*a blended model of teaching and learning and research that is significantly on-site, with discretion for variance at a local level by institutions in accordance with local context and needs, and with scope to respond to changes in the public health environment*”.

The Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) has agreed, in September, with the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) a document entitled *Emergency Remote Teaching for the Academic Year 2021/2022*^[2]. This agreement notes that “*the intention for 2021/22 is for a predominantly on-site learning experience for all students and learners in line with the commitment given by Government*” in the Safe Return Plan. It notes that “*the health, safety, and wellbeing of students and staff is the paramount concern for the sector*” and that “*Institutional leaders will ensure that the planning for the delivery of programmes in 2021-22 is informed by this principle at every stage*”. It

notes that “each Higher Education Institution is best placed to evaluate its operational needs in consultation with staff and students, and the possibilities and limitations of its facilities, resources and academic needs, in delivering its academic portfolio” and that “the parameters for planning and delivering the 2021/2022 academic year are necessarily fluid and will change over time in accordance with national public health expert advice”. The agreement further states that “it is expected that a blended learning approach may be necessary in certain circumstances in 2021/2022 to maintain the quality of the student experience, preserve academic integrity and to ensure the safe delivery of programmes. This may entail replacing some face-to-face or in-class delivery with online through emergency remote teaching if for example, approved nationally agreed mitigation measures cannot be met”. It is also acknowledged that the relative volumes of face-to-face and emergency remote delivery will vary across Institutions, and will be dependent on a range of factors broadly encompassing health and safety considerations, bespoke pedagogical and teaching and learning issues with respect to specific cohorts, the safety of rooms, offices, physical spaces and communal spaces “in the context of the necessary risk assessments as determined by the HE”.

Therefore, taking account of this overall context, there will be a range of factors that may require deviations from the programme delivery modes specified in the Approved Programme Schedules (APS) and approved programme documentation during the 2021/2022 Academic Year.

2.0 Scope of the Policy

The policy specifies the academic governance and oversight mechanism for recording of deviations from the Approved Programme Schedule (APS) Programme Delivery Modes during 2021 – 2022 in line with the *Government’s A Safe Return: Plan for a Safe Return to Onsite Further and Higher Education and Research in 2021/2* ^[1].

The policy includes a template and procedures for recording and approving changes to the published timetable that are Semester long in duration.

This Policy does not deal with short term changes to delivery. Such changes to delivery are managed locally through the Head of Department taking account of the Health and Safety Assessment processes of the Technological University and in conjunction with Human Resources and other Technological University Offices as appropriate.

It is also noted that *'nothing in this Policy is intended to prevent Lecturers using their academic judgement in relation to pedagogical developments as they would have prior to COVID-19'* and this principle is in accordance with the equivalent position stated in the THEA/TUI Agreement.

3.0 The Context and Approach for 2021/2022

During the 2020/2021 Academic Year, Individual Lecturers, Programme Boards and Department Boards played a central role in adapting delivery modes in a manner that aligned with relevant public health measures. Given the continuing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic it is of fundamental importance to continue this approach during the 2021/2022 Academic Year. This policy supports this process and provides a framework for the associated required due diligence in the context of Programme Delivery. This provides the necessary protection to Students, Staff and the Institute in the context of required deviations from the Approved Programme Schedules due to Covid-19 related factors.

If deemed necessary, Staff/Programme Boards may meet to review the delivery mode as specified in the approved programme schedule and programme documentation taking particular note of the expectation in the Safe Return Plan for *"a blended model of teaching and learning and research that is significantly on-site, with discretion for variance at a local level by institutions in accordance with local context and needs, and with scope to respond to changes in the public health environment"*. Such review should take account of the Safe Return Plan and the specific and local context in which programmes will be delivered including taking account of variances at a local level as referenced in the Safe Return Plan and the THEA/TUI Agreement for *Emergency Remote Teaching for the Academic Year 2021/2022*. Similar to the Safe Return Plan, the THEA/TUI agreement also notes that public health measures to combat Covid-19 *"are subject to constant review and adaptation. In this context, the parameters for planning and delivering the 2021/2022 academic year are necessarily fluid and will change over time in accordance with national public health expert advice"*.

Thus, there are a range of potential variances at a local and national level that may necessitate change to delivery modes. These include inter alia:

- a learning space which has had a risk assessment completed by the Health and Safety Assessment Process of the Technological University that resulted in actions which may compromise the optimum capacity of the space for a given intended learning context;

- delivering on a pedagogy that is required for the achievement of learning outcomes and/or the Technological University's Active and Engaged Learning pedagogy while complying with relevant Covid-19 protocols;
- potentially evolving circumstances arising from any revised national health and safety protocols as the semester progresses.

The THEA/TUI Agreement for *Emergency Remote Teaching for the Academic Year 2021/2022* also states that “*it is recognised that emergency remote teaching poses different challenges to staff and that this work is done on a voluntary basis and as a contribution towards the national emergency effort*”. The agreement further sets out the following of principle stating that: “*any actions, arrangements or other undertakings given or operated by employees during this national crisis are on an absolute without prejudice basis and will not be used in any way by THEA or its members as a precedent or example in any subsequent industrial relations discussions.*”

3.1 Procedure for Recording and Approving Deviations from Approved Programme Schedules

- 1) Staff may review the delivery of their modules in light of the Safe Return Plan taking account of any local and specific factors as outlined in Section 3.0.
- 2) If deemed necessary, a Programme Board Meeting may be held to review the proposed delivery from the whole student experience context for any given Stage of a Programme and to identify any local programme/module issues.
- 3) Proposed changes to delivery shall be considered by the Head of Department and where necessary, the relevant Head of Department may approve changes with immediate effect pending approval by the Programme Provision including Flexible Learning Subcommittee of Interim Academic Council.
- 4) If deviations from the delivery as specified in the APS are required and require a change to the published timetable, that is semester long in duration, a *Request for Change of Delivery Mode Form* (Appendix 1) shall be completed for each module as applicable.
- 5) The completed *Notice of Change of Delivery Mode Form* shall be submitted to the Programme Provision including Flexible Learning Subcommittee of Interim Academic Council for approval. Completed forms should be emailed to registrar@tus.ie
- 6) Depending on the evolving context, Staff/Programme Boards may continue to review delivery modes where appropriate, to ensure compliance with relevant

Covid-19 protocols as they emerge while maintaining the principle (of the Safe Return Plan) for as much on-site provision as possible.

(i) Any resulting changes to delivery must be detailed in the *Request for Change of Delivery Form* (as specified in 4 above) to enable their recording and approval.

7) The relevant Head of Department may approve changes with immediate effect where necessary pending approval by the Programme Provision including Flexible Learning Subcommittee of Interim Academic Council approval.

8) Any altered programme delivery modes should be communicated to students at the earliest possible opportunity.

4.0 References

1. [A Safe Return: Plan for a Safe Return to Onsite Further and Higher Education and Research in 2021/22](#)
2. *Emergency Remote Teaching for the Academic Year 2021/2022*. Agreement between the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) and the Teachers Union of Ireland.

5.0 Appendices



Appendix 1: Notice of Change of Delivery Mode Form: Semester 2 2021/2022

Instructions

1. This form is only to be completed for semester long changes.
2. Email completed form to Registrar@tus.ie
3. Please complete all sections of this form. If a section is not applicable insert N/A.

Part 1: Module Details

Module Title	
Module Code	
Programme Title(s) (If Module is common across a number of Programmes please list all Programmes)	
Internal Examiner(s)	

Part 2: Overview of Approved Delivery Schedule

Delivery Activity <i>(please amend activity type and add/delete rows & <u>new</u> activity as required)</i>	Number of Hours Face to Face	Number of Hours Online (if any)
Lecture		
Lab/Lecture		
Tutorial		
Laboratory		
Practical		

Total Hours		
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Part 3: Proposed New Delivery Schedule Requested for 2021/2022

Delivery Activity (please amend activity type and add/delete rows & New activity as required)	Number of Hours Face to Face	Number of Hours Online
Lecture		
Lab/Lecture		
Tutorial		
Laboratory		
Practical		
Total Hours		

Part 4: Rationale

Please Outline the Rationale for the Changes Requested in Part 3 (above)