



Dear International Partner

I understand that you will likely have concerns in relation to your students who are studying in Ireland during these uncertain times. I appreciate that this may be a difficult and frightening time for anyone who is away from home and who is separated from family and friends. I would like to assure you that we are doing our utmost to ensure the safety and well-being of all international students who have decided to remain here in Ireland.

These are also uncertain times for students from your country who have been looking forward to continuing their education by incorporating an international experience to their studies. We in Ireland are presently finalising our delivery models for the 2020/2021 academic year, so that our international education offering will continue to the greatest extent possible.

In order to alleviate concerns that you and your students may have, I wish to update you on the measures we have taken to assist your students who are currently registered in Irish higher education institution. I'll also provide you with the measures we have agreed thus far for international students who wish to study in Ireland for the 2020/2021 academic year.

COVID-19 Control Measures

Ireland has responded very comprehensively and effectively to the COVID-19 challenge through significant health measures, very substantial legal restrictions on movement and gatherings, social distancing and economic and social retrenchment to minimise the impact of this virus. More details of specific actions are available at www.gov.ie/covid-19.

In addition to our national economic and social efforts, and at a very early stage of this crisis, Ireland recognised that there were certain issues that would specifically affect international students remaining here. My Department very quickly established a Working Group focused on issues and challenges for International Education, particularly those faced by international students who were here in Ireland when the virus arrived.



This Working Group has representatives from across the International Education sector and includes student bodies, higher education institutions and all relevant State departments and agencies. This has resulted in the following actions and supports for international students.

1. Health Care Provision

The Irish Government has put measures in place to ensure the availability of health care services for international students. All international students studying in Ireland can receive public health services for the testing and treatment of the Covid-19 virus. These services are being provided free of charge.

2. Education Provision for current international students

My Department has been working tirelessly with our higher education institutions to implement alternative teaching and learning delivery methods to ensure the successful completion of the current academic year.

Our higher education institutions have finalised alternative assessment arrangements, with options including online exams, written assignments or rescheduling/deferral. New assessment arrangements have been communicated to all students, which has given a significant level of comfort to international students. I would like to reassure you that our high standards are being maintained and a clear pathway to qualification is still available, even in these challenging and unprecedented circumstances.

3. Financial Supports

We are aware that a large number of international students would have worked in Ireland to cover living costs and may have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic. A special COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment of €350 per week is available to any international student who lost their job as a result of the outbreak. For those international students in Ireland who had not yet engaged in employment while in the State, and are in need of assistance, our Government is providing financial supports under an Exceptional Needs Payments scheme.



4. Student Accommodation

The Irish Government has enacted legislation to protect those availing of rented accommodation in Ireland. This legislation includes rent freezes and prohibits evictions while Ireland is fighting the COVID 19 pandemic.

These supportive measures of income and accommodation certainty have given the international students that you have entrusted in our care reassurance during these difficult times.

5. Immigration Issues

The Irish Government reviewed the arrangements in relation to Immigration and International Protection permissions to reside in our country for international students. All permissions that were due to expire during the pandemic have now automatically been renewed. These extended permissions are on the same basis as existing permissions and the same conditions will continue to apply. This gives certainty of status to international students who have remained in Ireland.

The 2020/2021 Academic Year

Ireland has introduced new initiatives to overcome some of the barriers that have been identified to us by students who wish to return to study in Ireland or indeed who wish to study in Ireland for the first time in the 2020/2021 academic year.

So far, we have:

- Agreed to accept a number of online English proficiency test results, for those students that are wishing to study in Ireland and who can't engage in face to face English language exams, due to restrictions on mass gatherings in their own country.
- Agreed to extend the English language certification that students presently hold for an additional year, as a contingency measure.



- Reviewed the immigration arrangements which apply to all non-EEA nationals currently holding a student permission (Stamp 2), who wish to avail of the Third Level Graduate Permission scheme. As a temporary measure we have introduced an online applications facility to ensure that those wishing to avail of the scheme can do so in a safe and stress-free manner.

I will communicate all other decisions we take on the delivery of international education for the 2020/2021 academic year once these are finalised. You can rest assured that the delivery models we decide upon will be taken in line with the advice of our National Public Health Emergency Team, to ensure that the health and safety of all international students, researchers and academics, are at the forefront of any decisions made.

Ireland has always prided itself as a trusted international education partner, who can be relied upon to look after those who travel to Ireland to study. The Irish Government would like to assure you that it is doing everything it can to make this current situation as easy to navigate as possible and that the safety, health and well-being of our residents, whether temporary or permanent, is our number one priority.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Mary Mitchell O'Connor', is written over a horizontal line.

Mary Mitchell O'Connor
Minister of State for Higher Education