

# MSU

Maynooth Students' Union  
Aontas na Mac Léinn Mhá Nuad

# RETURN TO CAMPUS POSITION PAPER



[www.MSU.ie](http://www.MSU.ie)

## What have the Government committed to?

At a minimum, the following can take place:

- Laboratory teaching and learning
- Classroom based teaching and learning
- Tutorials
- Workshops
- Smaller lectures
- Research
- Workspaces
- Libraries
- Canteens – operational in accordance with public health advice on work place canteens
- Sports facilities – operational in accordance with public health advice
- Clubs and societies – operational in accordance with public health advice
- Bars – operational in accordance with public health advice

At a maximum large scale lectures will also be allowed with modifications.

## How should this apply to Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth?

Maynooth Students' Union, and the students of Maynooth, expect Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth to commit to a return to campus plan with a number of key aspects.

These are:

- Teaching and Learning
- Student Welfare and Wellbeing
- Student Life



# PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD

As President of Maynooth Students' Union I have made it our key priority to provide students with as much clarity and communication as possible during this very confusing time. This position paper is an attempt to collate all the feedback we have gotten from you, the students of Maynooth to inform our position so we can make sure we are always representing YOU and what you actually want.

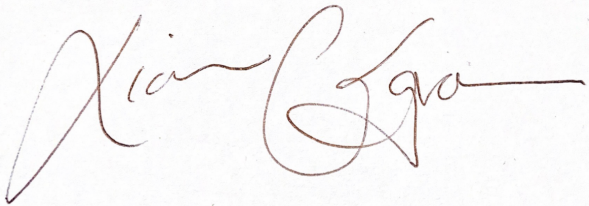
This paper is the result of an incredible effort by all of our officers over the last number of weeks and days. I would like to take the time to thank them and all the incredible staff of Maynooth Students' Union who have continued to go above and beyond to provide for our students during this incredibly difficult time.

Maynooth Students' Union recognises the extreme sacrifice which many third level students on this island have had to make since March 2020. While third level students were overlooked by the Government of Ireland and left out of the conversation in all aspects, we carried on. During what should have been the hardest time of our lives, we got on with it, we moved online and we did our best. Many third level students gave their everything to the people of this country as essential and front line workers, all while studying full time online, and that in itself.

The Minister of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Simon Harris) has committed to ensuring that students are back on college and university campuses in September 2021. The Department have published a plan for what this will look like and claim they are committed to seeing it enacted come September.

As September gets closer and closer by the day, the students of Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth deserve answers. Maynooth Students' Union have committed to producing this position. This is so that, when Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College produce their Return to Campus plan, Maynooth Students' Union can lobby for what the students of this institution want and need.

*Ní neart go cur le chéile.*



Liam Cosgrove

**MSU President 2021-22**



# MSU EXECUTIVE STANCES

## **On-Campus Activity:**

We believe it is of the utmost importance that the Government and Institutions do everything they can to facilitate some form of on-campus activity for students. Students have suffered enough over the past year be that academically, socially or mentally and we fear that if we do not begin to return to some form of in-person activity this could have grave consequences.

## **Vaccines**

MSU has taken the stance that vaccines are what is going to get us out of this pandemic and so whoever can get a vaccine should get one as soon as possible. However, we also recognize people's right to self-determination and that if they choose not to that is their right and that access to education should not under any circumstances be restricted.

**The MSU Executive** is elected annually and act as a collective authority with collective responsible for the day to day operation of the Union, in addition to each officer's own portfolio.

[www.msu.ie/voice/executive/](http://www.msu.ie/voice/executive/)

[Executive@msu.ie](mailto:Executive@msu.ie)



# TEACHING & LEARNING

Niall Daly, VP Education  
education@msu.ie

## Teaching and Learning Polls

On Wednesday 18 August 2021, the MSU Vice President Education (Niall Daly) conducted a number of polls on Maynooth Students' Union's Instagram account (@maynooth\_su) with regards to the teaching and learning aspect of returning to campus during the 2021/22 academic year.

The results were as follows:

- 1. Should a virtual option remain open to students of MU & SPCM once we return to campus?**

YES	NO
909	113

- 2. Should lectures be uploaded to/kept on Moodle?**

YES	NO
1,088	41

**3. Which way do you prefer examinations to be conducted?**

<b>VIRTUAL</b>	<b>PHYSICAL</b>
846	352

**4. Which type of examination do you prefer?**

<b>OPEN BOOK</b>	<b>NON-OPEN BOOK</b>
1,123	124

**5. Should examinations be open book regardless of where they are conducted?**

<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
1,057	142

**6. Have you paid repeat exam fees in the past?**

<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
162	904

**7. Do you agree with repeat exam fees?**

<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
156	1,013

**8. Should repeat exam fees be abolished or reduced?**

<b>ABOLISHED</b>	<b>REDUCED</b>
838	348

## **Teaching and Learning:**

In-person teaching and learning needs to resume in some form to allow students to get the full university education experience. We recognise that different people learn in different ways and so it is important that there is an option available to students for both on-campus, in-person learning and online for those who cannot or do not feel safe travelling to campus.

This is going to require a lot of work and resources to figure out from the technology to the legal issues of recording lectures and people, however, we believe this is a priority and the time should be taken to do this.

## **Maynooth Students' Union expect:**

### **1. All students of Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth to have time on campus this academic year:**

All students of Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth deserve time on campus this year after the sacrifice they have endured. We expect both Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth to facilitate a safe environment on campus which their students can utilise either academically, socially or both.

We expect Maynooth University to facilitate lecture sizes of up to 250 students. This means that any module over 250 students (41 of the 1,000 ran by Maynooth University last year) will have to take place online. While we are calling on a return to campus, we recognise that it must be safe and comfortable for students and in line with public health advice. That is why we believe 250 students is a fair ask.

## **2. Virtual option to remain available to students of Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth:**

With all the terrible things that COVID-19 brought, it also opened our eyes to an education system that is easier to use and more accessible for all students. Virtual learning provided a system that was more equal and fair for vulnerable students, students with disabilities, commuters, student parents, students facing financial difficulties and more. We expect this option in some form to remain open for all students.

As we begin what will be a very expensive academic year, it's important that every student of Maynooth is given an equal opportunity to avail of an accessible education.

## **3. Lecture Recording Policy:**

Another opportunity provided by the COVID-19 learning environment is the lecture recording software which Maynooth University has invested in. It is essential that Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth employ a coherent lecture recording policy that provides our students with every opportunity to avail of a Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth education, whether able to be in Maynooth or not. Lecture recording should never breach a student's right to privacy or wider GDPR regulations and so must be facilitated in a way that takes this into consideration.

Recorded lecture material should be uploaded to Moodle for a period from (at least) the time it is recorded until the the examination period during which semester that module took place, if not longer.

#### **4. Phased return to on-site examinations:**

In March 2020, COVID-19 rocked our entire higher education system to its core. Almost overnight, students in Maynooth, the nation and worldwide were forced from one extreme to the other; what we knew as “normal”, to what became our new normal. Completely online in all aspects. Lectures, calls, events, meetings and, for better or worse, examinations. Students have already been asked to go from one extreme to the other and we simply can't ask them to do it again. As it stands, we are looking at 2nd years who have never set foot on campus, 3rd years who have been on campus for a semester and a half and 4th years who have seen three and a half semesters on campus. This combined with incoming 1st years, many of whom may have opted for grade prediction in the Leaving Certificate this year, means that Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth simply can't ask our students to do their next set of examinations on-site in the traditional sense.

Having proposed, and successfully passed, a policy calling for a phased return to on campus examinations at the Union of Students in Ireland's National Congress 2021, Maynooth Students' Union stands strongly behind this call.

It is our belief that Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth should take this into consideration when planning examinations and provide students with the opportunity to avail of an open book option, a virtual option, or gradually reintroduce traditional examinations in a blended sense (e.g. some exams virtual, some exams open book and some exams traditional).

## **5. Open book examinations:**

From our poll results, there is a clear majority in favour of open book examinations. Maynooth Students' Union strongly support open book examinations however recognise that the term "open book" can look different for each department based on assessment type, accrediting body, etc. Maynooth Students' Union feel that open book examinations are more of a test of a student's knowledge and third level skills, rather than their memory, and are committed to ensuring the issue of open book examinations is adequately explored within Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth.

## **6. Repeat examination fees:**

For two years now, repeat exam fees have been waived by Maynooth University due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe that repeat exam fees are yet another way for Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College to disadvantage students when it comes to examinations. It is a priority for our Vice President Education, and by extension Maynooth Students' Union, to lobby for their abolishment moving forward.

We will be placing a Freedom of Information request with Maynooth University to identify where the money for repeat exam fees is used. Our polls give us yet another mandate by an overwhelming majority to lobby to abolish these fees.

Now, just as much as last year, the students of Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth need as little barriers as possible when it comes to the ability to progress to their next year of study.



**For any questions you may have about the Teaching & Learning aspect of this position, general academic-related issues or for information regarding becoming an Academic Representative, email Niall at: [education@msu.ie](mailto:education@msu.ie).**



# WELFARE & WELLBEING

Luke Buckley, VP Welfare & Equality  
welfare@msu.ie

## Student Welfare and Wellbeing Polls

On Wednesday 19 August 2021, the MSU Vice President Welfare & Equality (Luke Buckley) conducted a number of polls on Maynooth Students' Union's Instagram account with regards to accommodation, services and support aspects of returning to campus during the 2021/22 academic year.

The results were as follows:

### 1. Are you worried about the upcoming year?

YES	NO
1,172	288

### 2. Are you aware of the supports available to you provided by Maynooth University?

YES	NO
481	517

**3. Have you availed of these services before?**

YES	NO
223	733

**4. Do you anticipate that you will need to use these services this upcoming year?**

YES	NO
579	266

**5. Are you planning on renting accommodation this year?**

YES	NO
565	709

**6. Are you or your friends having trouble finding accommodation this year?**

YES	NO
664	414

# **Student Welfare and Wellbeing**

## **Maynooth Students' Union expect:**

### **1. More consistent updates from Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth:**

We believe that regular, consistent updates from Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College are going to be key in easing students back to campus and to ensure that student wellbeing is at the forefront of their agenda upon students' return.

Maynooth Students' Union are committed to representing all students of Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth at the highest level to ensure that consistent communication is present.

Promotion of both institutions' supports available to students must be constant and easily accessible to all students so that no one feels they are alone upon returning to campus. This is a priority for Maynooth Students' Union.

### **2. Effective and well resourced supports from Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth throughout the academic year and beyond:**

Based on our polls, over 50% of participants indicated that they were unaware of the supports they can avail of within Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth. This is worrying and feeds directly into the previous point of a lack of updates and communication regarding the supports.

Ultimately, these supports are of great benefit to our students and it is a priority for Maynooth Students' Union to both promote them and lobby for greater promotion of and access to them on a University level.

### **3. Large increase of first time users of Student Services:**

Based on Maynooth Students' Union's polls, we anticipate a large increase in uptake of the supports offered to students by Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth. We are fearful that these supports won't be accessible to students due to this larger uptake and predict a number of students won't be able to avail of them effectively. This could have a drastic impact on student welfare and wellbeing.

Maynooth Students' Union's Vice President Welfare & Equality has made peer support a priority and has committed to ensuring effective promotion of Student Services on campus as well as working with Student Services to ensure that the services they are offering are as effective as possible and have the largest reach and level of accessibility.

### **4. Surreal uptake in accommodation in Maynooth and the surrounding areas:**

Once the University have provided students with the clarity they deserve, we anticipate there will be a large rush for accommodation, which is already scarce. Student Services have assured Maynooth Students' Union that the Home Finder Service which they operate can offer accommodation (off-site) to any student who will require it.

Maynooth Students' Union's Vice President Welfare & Equality will continue to offer support and referral to students who contact the Union in this capacity.



**For any questions that you may have about the supports available to you, issues with accommodation or any welfare or equality related queries, at any time throughout the year, feel free to email Luke at: [welfare@msu.ie](mailto:welfare@msu.ie)**



# STUDENT LIFE

**Anna Travers, VP Student Life**  
studentlife@msu.ie

## Student Life Polls

On Wednesday 19 August 2021, the MSU Vice President Student Life (Anna Travers) conducted a number of polls on Maynooth Students' Union's Instagram account with regards to events, orientation and the social aspects of returning to campus during the 2021/22 academic year.

The results were as follows:

### 1. Have you ever been on campus?

YES	NO
1,245	314

### 2. Would you say you know your way around campus?

YES	NO
972	577

**3. Would you go on an MSU Campus Tour?**

YES	NO
549	408

**4. Did you attend an online lecture?**

YES	NO
444	627

## **Student Life**

### **Maynooth Students' Union expect:**

#### **1. Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth to facilitate time on campus for non-educational aspects of the student experience:**

Students have been unable to experience student life to the same extent they would have before COVID-19. While we understand the public health aspect of it, we are now in a position to start offering students certain aspects of their student life back and want to ensure Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth do the same.

Maynooth Students' Union believe that as the public health restrictions ease, this should be reflected in student life activities on campus and is a priority for our Vice President Student Life.

## **2. Orientation and Re-Orientation for students of Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth:**

Maynooth Students' Union, at a minimum, expect that Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth will offer orientation events and tours to incoming 1st years. We recognise however that we are in a position where there are 2nd, and indeed 3rd, years who may not have had much campus experience.

Maynooth Students' Union are committed to offering a "re-orientation" to 2nd years of Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth as, really, it is the least they deserve.

## **3. Clarity and facilities for clubs, societies and other interest groups on campus:**

Student Life is just as important as the academic part of college it allows students to develop as people, to make friends and network and is a valuable opportunity for them to diversify their degrees. However, this is just not sustainable online and if it is to return to campus then the proper supports, resources and spaces need to be available to students.

Resources and facilities for such groups need to be clarified and communicated to relevant stakeholders within Maynooth University and St. Patrick's College Maynooth.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognise that we do not have the sufficient space to accommodate such groups however Maynooth Students' Union's Vice President Student Life will aid them via lobbying where needed.



**For any questions you may have about anything mentioned in this position paper, or regarding student life in Maynooth, feel free to contact Anna at: [studentlife@msu.ie](mailto:studentlife@msu.ie)**

# THANK YOU!

For reading and we can't wait to  
welcome you back to campus!

