



ICON College of Technology and Management

COVID-19: Academic year 2020-2021 updated Plan May 12 2021

INTRODUCTION

This updated statement should be read in conjunction with the two already submitted statements issued by the College.

The College has continued to follow central government and National Health Service (NHS) guidelines in addition to those guidelines issued by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Office for Students (OfS) and such other agencies as have given input as to how best provide protocols for both staff and students during the ongoing period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The College COVID-19 Response Team (CRT) has been replaced by the COVID-19 Advisory and Action Group (C19AAG). This group was established at the beginning of 2021 and meets every ten working days to discuss and advise on matters relating to how the College should address COVID-19 issues as they emerge and change – for example, with an outbreak of the Indian COVID variant in the Borough of Tower Hamlets in recent weeks, a decision was made to cancel the return of some students to face-to-face teaching on 10th May 2021 and to re-schedule a return to practical class face-to-face teaching until a later date, depending on the virus spread in the Borough. The most recent announcement by the Minister of State for Universities that higher education institutions ‘may’ resume face-to-face class teaching from 17th May now changes the yet again and at short-notice as to how the College will provide the correct protocols relevant to its own circumstances – for example consideration is now being given as to how to collect data as to how many teaching and administrative members of staff have had one or two vaccine jabs and the extent to which students have received a jab. Given the fact that the vaccine roll out has been age related the College needs to determine (now on-going) the extent of the mix of staff and student involvement.

The Student Welfare Officer, and other staff, has taken part in DfE and other webinar seminars to consider the latest thinking from the NHS, the DfE, et al. However, it must be noted that although general items of interest have been useful, much of the content of the webinars has related to large-scale public sector universities and those institutions that have large onsite student accommodation.

ICON College does not fall into these categories.

Before any kind of re-opening of campus facilities takes place, the College management wanted to ensure that the facilities were as COVID-19 secure as is reasonably possible for both students and staff to enter the buildings. Watson & Watson, a health and safety and COVID-19 external consultancy based in the Midlands and with many years professional standing in their area of expertise, were asked to undertake an on-site visit of the ICON College facilities and provide feedback following their 27th April 2021 visit. The Watson & Watson report is attached.

As central government now begins to further 'unlock' movement restrictions, the College is in the decision making process of deciding how best to proceed. Such progression will vary from institution to institution, depending on the programmes it offers. Some of ICON's programmes, such as the Higher National Diploma (HND), are coming to their close where student attendance is not particularly necessary. The recently introduced Falmouth University degree programmes can reintroduce face-to-face teaching over time.

STAFF AND STUDENTS

It is crucial that staff and students remain safe. Despite the fact that numerous people have now had their first or second vaccine jab it is incumbent on the College to determine, as far as is possible prior to re-opening, which people (staff and students) are more vulnerable than others in terms of possible virus transmission. It is noted that one in three people, even if they have received a vaccine inoculation, may still be unaware that they may have the virus and be capable of passing it on to others. The College is about to embark on a process of collecting data to ascertain which staff and students have already received a 'jab' prior to re-opening the College facilities. It is important to note that the Minister of Education for Universities recent letter to institutions, indicating that they may open from 17 May 2021 for face-to-face teaching, does not state that institutions must open! Indeed, in an earlier letter to institutions, the Minister indicated that it is up to each institution to decide for itself the best way to proceed in returning to 'normal' campus/teaching practice.

Teaching:

ICON College has offered online teaching up until the present time. Face-to-face classes will, hopefully, begin within the coming weeks, once all the safety standards recommended by the Watson & Watson health and safety experts have been implemented. Where there is an insufficient capacity to accept all students on site online teaching will continue. The College is fortunate in terms of the way its timetable, and the way in which its recruitment is organized, that there is a great deal of flexibility before mass on-campus teaching can resume.

The College has made the campus facilities as secure as can be. The College was allocated 80,000 face masks by central government on the assumption that no more than 120 staff will be on campus at any one time. The recent announcement by central government that school pupils will no longer be required to wear masks in class needs to be considered in terms of higher education institutions and the College will come to its own conclusions about this matter by the end of May 2021.

In addition, the College needs to ascertain the data about vaccination to make a judgement as to who can and cannot be on campus and as to the number of people who can reasonably be accommodated to ensure safety precautions are sufficiently satisfactory to enable the College to open. Arrangements have now changed in that staff and students may, seemingly, use home kit lateral flow testing to determine whether or not an individual may have the virus. The College is considering how best to monitor the use of this system.

Memos and other documents that have been, and are being, considered by the College are attached to this paper.

Student Assessment and Induction:

This continues as previously indicated – that is, all is at present conducted online and Induction processes are currently being considered.

Social distancing:

For the time being, the College will continue with social distancing measures. There is no clear data, from any source, to suggest that to remove this restriction is acceptable, especially in educational settings.

Staff and student COVID-19 Testing:

Staff and students have been made aware via text message on website links as to the availability of various testing sites including the new guidelines issued from the DfE as to the use of later-flow tests and how people using such tests should register their results. The College is currently looking at how it can introduce its own recording system of both staff and student test results.

On-campus safety measures:

In addition to the measures the College itself has already put in place, the College is implementing the advisory measures recommended by the external health and safety consultants (Watson & Watson) who visited the campus on 27th April 2021. The measures previously identified in the College's submission remain in place.

Advisory measures:

Those measures indicated in the previously submitted documents remain in place.

General note:

All previously indicated measures remain in place subject to the over view of the College Covid-19 Advisory and Action Group (CA19AAG) which meets every ten working days. At its next meeting it will determine what measures now need to be introduced, if any, to ensure compliance with local health authority and DfE/NHS suggestions. As the College is now entering into its summer season it is able to take a 'step back' and reconsider how best to offer student programmes and staff safety before the commencement of the next academic session. In addition to complying with local health authority requirements, the College will also make its own decisions as to what is best to do in terms of staff and student safety. The 'unlocking' of society means that institutions have, in actual fact, an even greater responsibility to ensure the safety of everyone because the epidemic is far from over and the College recognises the need to be vigilant and open to being able to respond to external guidelines. All information students and staff must be aware of, including the use of COVID testing kits and how to use them and monitor their use, is posted on the College website and staff and students and students are sent individual test messages, and sometimes emails, to alert them to website notifications.

Note: This update guideline should be read in conjunction with previously submitted documents and the attachments to this document.

12 May 2021