

# **Covid-19 Impact Survey: NUI Galway Undergraduates, Taught Postgraduates, and PhD Students**

## **Online Survey of NUI Galway Students**

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The Dean of Students convened a group to design a rapid online survey of NUI Galway students. The group included views from Student Services, NUI Galway Students Union, and researchers who specialise in surveys of youth and young adults. The survey went live on May 18<sup>th</sup> and closed on May 29<sup>th</sup> 2020.

The Dean sent an email invitation to all students which included a link to an online survey form. Other members of the organising group such as the Students Union sent the link to their contacts.

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Responses to the survey are outlined below in content covers the following sections:

- Reflection on March-April 2020
- Access to Resources
- Preferences for Teaching and Learning
- Personal Wellbeing and Adjustment
- PhD Students

*Participants:* 1,001 undergraduate students, 98 postgraduate taught students, 113 PhD students. 34% of the undergraduate group are in First Year, 32% in Second Year, 34% in Third Year+. 14% are final year undergraduate students – who were not asked about preferences or concerns for the academic year 2020-21.

Nearly three quarters of the respondents are females. 79% of the undergraduates are aged 21 or below. 17% of the undergraduates came to college through a non-traditional route (20% of postgraduate taught, 12% of PhDs), 10% have a disability, 13% have caring responsibilities (children, people who are ill, etc.).

The majority of students describe themselves as living at home at the moment. Apart from this, 13% of UG Year 1 students are living in rented accommodation, as are 18% of Year 2 students, 21% of students in Year 3+, 37% of PG Taught students, and 46% of PhDs.

### **Breakdown of undergraduate students by College**

	<u>%</u>
CASSCS	34
Engineering / Science	19
BPPL	33
MNHS	13

Figures below are reported for UG1 (First Year), UG2 (Second Year), UG3 (Third Year+), PG (Postgraduate taught), and PhD students.

## Reflections on March-April 2020

Between **24-29%** of UG students by year reported being *significantly behind or not studying at all* during March-April 2020.

### How did you keep up with your study / learning from March-April 2020? %

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
I kept up as well as I did before	23.5	30.7	27.7	30.5	20.6
A bit behind, but still making progress	47.1	45.3	46.6	45.3	52.9
Significantly behind	24.1	20.3	19.9	21.1	23.5
Not studying at all	5.3	3.7	5.7	3.2	2.9

From **25-30%** of UG students by year reported difficulty *with online learning and assessment at the designated times*.

### Did you have difficulty with accessing online learning and assessment at the designated times? %

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Yes	30.3	25.7	28.0	25.3	8.8
No	69.7	74.3	72.0	74.7	91.2

First Year UG students were the most positive about exams and assessment in Semester 2. There was a difference of approximately 10% between them and Year 3+. Around half of the UG students thought the process was well organised and received the information they needed to help prepare. Figures were somewhat lower on perceptions of perceptions of support and fairness. **61%** of Year 3+ students thought the process was *more stressful than normal*.

### Perceptions of the exams and assessment process Spring 2020 % Percentage in Agreement

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
The assessment / exams process was well organised	55	49	44	45	20
I received the information I needed to help me prepare for the changes in assessments	62	53	52	45	31
There was good support available to me leading up to assessments	42	38	37	33	16
The assessment process this semester was fair to students	35	36	27	25	17
The assessment process this semester was more stressful than normal	43	52	61	50	30

## Final Year Students

Final year students only were asked questions about their intentions for postgraduate studies and graduate jobs. Half of them are considering postgraduate studies and a further 18% are uncertain about this. 11% had considered postgraduate studies but are no longer doing so, and 20% are uncertain about this. 6% had the experience of having a graduate job offer withdrawn, with another 5% uncertain about this.

### I am considering Postgraduate Studies

	Yes	No	Uncertain
I am considering Postgraduate Studies	51	31	18

### I had considered, but am no longer considering, Postgraduate Studies

	Yes	No	Uncertain
I had considered, but am no longer considering, Postgraduate Studies	11	69	20

### I have had a graduate job offer withdrawn

	Yes	No	Uncertain
I have had a graduate job offer withdrawn	6	88	5

## Access to Resources

Just over half of the UG students reported good quality internet allowing for video calls and streaming. Up to 20% of Year 3+ UG students said their Internet connection was unreliable.

### How good is your internet connection?

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Good internet (video streaming, etc.)	55.5	54.3	54.7	68.4	63.2
Medium internet	27.4	30.0	25.4	18.9	25.3
Unreliable internet	16.4	15.7	19.5	12.6	11.6
No connection where I am staying	.6	0	.3	0	0

About 40% of students said their access to a suitable space to study is fair or poor.

### Do you have access to a suitable space to study?

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Excellent	19.2	21.3	16.3	23.2	27.4
Good	39.3	42.3	41.7	31.6	33.7
Fair	28.6	24.4	26.0	23.2	29.5
Poor	12.9	12.0	16.0	22.1	9.5

**95-97%** of students agreed they had access to *online learning resources*, whereas only 30% or less had access to hardcopy and book resources. **32%** of First Year UG students do not have access to a *printer*, with even more Year 2 and Year 3+ students reporting they have no access. The percentage of PG taught and PhD students with access to a printer is less than 50%.

### Do you have access to the following? (% of those who agreed)

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Online learning materials	95	95	96	97	95
Books and hardcopy resources	32	30	33	21	29
Printer	67	59	61	49	42

## Preferences for Teaching and Learning Autumn 2020

The most preferred options for teaching and support were for *pre-recorded video or screencast* (69-72% of UG students by year). Fewer students rated live broadcast as highly. Teaching materials delivered through Word or PowerPoint were rated highly by 52-62% of UG students, approximately the same as preferences for PowerPoint with audio recording.

**What are your preferences for the forms of teaching and support that would be most effective for you?**

(High/Very high)	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Text materials (Word / PowerPoint)	52	62	62	55	54
PowerPoint with sound	62	56	56	64	44
Video or screencast – Live broadcast	52	47	50	72	55
Video or screencast – Pre-Recorded	69	67	72	75	61

There was a clear difference between UG and PG students in preferences for Microsoft Teams meetings to engage with tutors or lecturers, only 20-25% of UG students rated this highly compared with 60% of PhDs. The highest ratings were for *email engagement*.

**What are your preferences for engaging with lecturers and tutors**

(High/Very high)	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Email	62	75	77	69	68
Blackboard chat open at a specific time	23	27	26	37.5	19
Meetings on Teams	21	20.5	25	46	60
Q&A Sessions at a specific time	43	32	47	51	28
Virtual Office Hours	38	31	33	50	44

The *live tutorial* option was the preferred method for delivery of remote tutorials.

**What are your preferences for remote tutorials?**

(High/Very high)	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Blackboard forum open all week	46	48	44	42	20
Blackboard chat open at a specific time	28	28	28	28	30
Live tutorial	54	57	62	66	50

Receiving *emails from one source* was the single most preferred method of receiving communications related to Covid-19, followed by emails from multiple sources.

**Please indicate your single most preferred method of receiving communications**

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
NUI Galway COVID-19 Alerts Page	7.0	8.5	5.9	4.4	10.1
Email from one source	63.4	63.7	63.7	64.4	74.2
Email from multiple sources depending on topic	22.5	19.6	23.1	21.1	14.6
Blackboard	6.0	6.7	5.5	7.8	0
Texts	1.0	1.5	1.8	2.2	1.1

There is a very high level of agreement with including *information / skills sessions* in such a way as to reach most First Year students, reaching approximately **80%**. These figures are comparable with responses students in previous NUIG surveys have given. For First Years, the top priority was information / skills on *Finances*, followed by *Managing Stress, Sexual Health, and Skills for Learning in College*.

**Percentage agreement with information / skills sessions integrated into First Year**

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Mental health, alcohol and drugs	78.2	80.1	81.7	83.2	74.2
Sexual health, consent, and safety	81.6	82.0	83.2	83.2	71.9
Finances	87.6	84.8	88.3	88.7	70.8
Managing stress	84.2	85.2	85.4	89.9	83.2
Physical health / diet	76.8	77.9	77.0	80.8	64.1
Skills for learning in college	81.9	87.1	85.4	93.3	78.7

## Thinking ahead to Autumn 2020, what are your main concerns about returning to University?

A number of items were presented to gauge which issues provoke the most concern thinking about Autumn 2020. The responses cluster into two groups – the highest priority group registered concern from **80% or more** students overall. These are mainly in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on social bonds (socialising, daily interactions) and the impact it may have on the learning experience through social distancing and online learning. The next set still have **50% or more** of students concerned or very concerned, and relate to more specific aspects of the academic experience such as contacting lecturers, access to support services, access to space and accommodation.

### 80%+ of Students Concerned / Very Concerned

<b>The impact COVID-19 conditions might have on daily interactions with peers in University</b>					
	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Not at all concerned	1.7	3.0	3.2	6.3	9.0
Not concerned	3.3	3.0	4.5	7.8	3.8
Neutral	8.0	7.8	6.4	23.4	16.7
Concerned	29.4	33.6	32.7	35.9	39.7
Very concerned	57.5	52.6	53.2	26.6	30.8

<b>The impact COVID-19 conditions might have on socialising with my peers outside University</b>					
	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Not at all concerned	3.0	4.9	2.6	9.4	9.0
Not concerned	2.3	3.7	5.1	9.4	9.0
Neutral	8.7	10.8	8.3	23.4	26.9
Concerned	27.8	28.4	34.0	28.1	29.5
Very concerned	58.2	52.2	50.0	29.7	25.6

<b>Uncertainty about how COVID-19 conditions will impact my University experience</b>					
	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Not at all concerned	1.3	.7	.6	3.1	3.8
Not concerned	4.0	2.6	3.2	3.1	6.4
Neutral	6.4	7.5	3.8	21.9	20.5
Concerned	36.1	31.7	31.4	29.7	39.7
Very concerned	52.2	57.5	60.9	42.2	29.5

<b>The impact that online learning might have on my learning experience at University</b>					
	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Not at all concerned	4.3	6.7	4.5	6.3	16.7
Not concerned	5.0	4.1	1.9	9.4	28.2
Neutral	7.4	9.7	8.3	23.4	21.8
Concerned	25.8	25.7	23.1	29.7	15.4
Very concerned	57.5	53.7	62.2	31.3	17.9

<b>The impact that social distancing might have on my learning experience at University</b>					
	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Not at all concerned	1.0	2.2	2.6	4.7	5.1
Not concerned	6.4	3.7	3.8	10.9	15.4
Neutral	11.4	11.2	5.8	26.6	25.6
Concerned	34.4	34.0	34.0	26.6	26.9
Very concerned	46.8	48.9	53.8	31.3	26.9

**Approximately 50-60% of students Concerned / Very Concerned****Access to space and the right conditions for learning and study**

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Not at all concerned	10.0	12.3	10.3	9.4	10.3
Not concerned	17.4	12.7	11.5	15.6	21.8
Neutral	18.4	19.8	9.6	25.0	17.9
Concerned	31.8	32.5	37.2	31.3	24.4
Very concerned	22.4	22.8	31.4	18.8	25.6

**Access to lecturers and tutors**

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Not at all concerned	5.0	5.2	6.4	7.8	14.1
Not concerned	10.7	9.7	10.3	15.6	25.6
Neutral	24.7	22.8	19.2	34.4	23.1
Concerned	31.8	37.3	37.8	25.0	21.8
Very concerned	27.8	25.0	26.3	17.2	15.4

**Accommodation and living conditions**

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Not at all concerned	20.4	15.3	16.0	20.3	21.8
Not concerned	17.1	16.8	21.2	10.9	29.5
Neutral	14.7	13.1	16.0	21.9	17.9
Concerned	19.4	26.9	17.9	23.4	23.1
Very concerned	28.4	28.0	28.8	23.4	7.7

**Access to the support services that I need to function well**

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Not at all concerned	7.4	10.8	12.8	10.9	15.4
Not concerned	17.4	19.8	14.7	15.6	29.5
Neutral	21.1	23.5	23.7	34.4	21.8
Concerned	25.1	24.3	27.6	26.6	21.8
Very concerned	29.1	21.6	21.2	12.5	11.5

**Access to computer / internet facilities**

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Not at all concerned	21.1	18.7	22.4	14.1	19.2
Not concerned	24.7	28.4	27.6	23.4	29.5
Neutral	25.4	21.6	16.0	35.9	24.4
Concerned	19.1	21.3	21.2	17.2	14.1
Very concerned	9.7	10.1	12.8	9.4	12.8

## Personal Well Being and Adjustment

The School of Psychology and Student Services have conducted yearly surveys of student depression, anxiety, and stress among undergraduate students at NUI Galway since 2016, using the DASS measure that is used widely in the international research literature. This gives us a solid basis to consider whether rates of these issues are higher in the aftermath of Covid-19.

The figures for depression indicate the highest figures yet recorded on severe-very severe levels of depressive symptomology in 2020. The percentage of students in this category exceeds earlier years by 5-7%.

### Severe-very severe levels of depression

	2017	2018	2019	2020
UG Year 1	16	21	15	26
UG Year 2	21	16	20	28
UG Year 3+	16	17	18	24

The figures for severe-very severe levels of anxiety for NUI Galway students in 2020 is comparable with levels recorded in earlier surveys.

### Severe-very severe levels of anxiety

	2017	2018	2019	2020
UG Year 1	21	25	22	24
UG Year 2	27	23	28	23
UG Year 3+	24	25	26	21

The level of severe-very severe stress appears to be running slightly ahead of previous years, recording the highest level yet recorded among Year 2 and Year 3+ students. It was the second highest level recorded among Year 1 students.

### Severe-very severe levels of stress

	2017	2018	2019	2020
UG Year 1	12	16	11	14
UG Year 2	15	15	18	19
UG Year 3+	18	19	18	21

Between 36-45% of UG students by year were not in employment pre-Covid. Many students lost their job or were laid off, with between **42-48%** of UG students *losing their job or having decreased hours*.

### Percentage of students in each employment category associated with Covid-19

	UG 1	UG 2	UG 3	PG	PhD
Increased hours	7	5.5	5.3	8.2	9.3
Decreased hours	9	11	7.2	8.2	8.3
Laid off / lost my job	33	37	34.5	27.8	3.7
No change	6	10	12.9	12.4	48.1
I wasn't in employment in March 2020	45	36	40.1	43.3	30.6

There is a marked contrast between the two items below. Between **80-86%** of students felt *stressed motivating themselves to get work done on time*, significantly higher than when we used this item in previous surveys. The figure for stress 'being responsible for myself' is by comparison lower than on previous occasions when we have used it in surveys.

### Percentage reporting stress with being responsible for yourself and for motivating yourself to get your work done on time

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Being responsible for myself	35.4	38.9	39.3	34.5	35.0
Motivating yourself to get your work done	81.4	81.3	84.4	86.2	80.0

The next set of items refer to experiences of loneliness. We see between **47-54%** of UG students reporting problems with *companionship*, somewhat higher than PG or PhD students. Among all students, **60-65%** reported feeling *isolated* from others at least sometimes. Approximately 1 in 5 students do not feel they are part of a group of friends.

**Percentage agreement with items on Loneliness, ‘Sometimes / Often’**

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
I lack companionship	46.5	54.4	53.9	42.5	42.4
I feel part of a group of friends	81.7	89.0	80.9	83.2	71.9
I feel left out	49.6	49.4	45.3	74.7	52.2
I feel isolated from others	60.5	63.8	62.5	60.9	64.1
I feel unhappy being so withdrawn	65.1	65.7	61.7	51.7	47.4

The top rated stressor for students in the past two months was *exams and assignments*, followed by *studies in general*. The next highly rated relate to managing daily life – *employment, relationships, living situation, and finances*.

**In the past two months how many of the following issues have been difficult or traumatic to deal with**

	UG1	UG2	UG3	PG	PhD
Exams / assignments	69.1	74.7	71.2	66.7	11.3
Studies in general	62.5	65.0	70.0	64.4	66.3
Employment problems	42.5	48.6	48.2	49.4	17.5
Relationships	41.1	42.0	42.0	36.8	41.3
Living situation / accommodation	37.9	42.0	40.5	36.8	38.8
Finances	34.0	35.4	42.8	42.5	30.0
Family obligations	33.0	28.4	28.0	31.0	40.0
Health problems of a family member	28.8	26.5	26.8	24.1	31.3
Personal health issues	23.5	26.8	27.6	24.1	31.3
Childcare	2.5	2.3	1.9	8.0	7.5



## PhD Students

Several items were presented to PhD students only. These show that information on fees and scholarships were most likely to be said to be not going well, and that nearly 70% of PhDs reported Covid-19 represented a moderate or extreme interruption in their studies.

### **Please indicate how the following aspects of your research are going for you at the moment**

	Not well at all	Not very well	Fairly well	Very well
Access to your supervisor(s)	1.4	8.1	41.9	48.6
Clarity with regard to academic matters (e.g., progression, modules)	13.5	24.3	33.8	28.4
Information on fees and scholarships	25.7	20.3	36.5	17.6
Access to internet or technical resources	5.4	18.9	35.1	40.5
Planning changes to your thesis	9.5	24.3	48.6	17.6

### **What level of interruption has taken place in your studies due to the Covid-19 pandemic?**

	No interruption	Minor interruption	Moderate interruption	Extreme interruption
What level of interruption has taken place in your studies due to the Covid-19 pandemic?	8.1	21.6	32.4	37.8

### **Do you have access to sufficient online supports and resources to complete work relevant to your research (e.g., write up thesis chapters, lab work, contacts and networking)?**

	Yes	To some extent	No
Do you have access to sufficient online supports and resources to complete work relevant to your research (e.g., write up thesis chapters, lab work, contacts and networking)?	33.8	58.1	8.1

### **Has your funding body or School / Institute research support offered advice on research timelines or extensions?**

	Yes	No	I don't know
Has your funding body or School / Institute research support offered advice on research timelines or extensions?	41.9	39.2	18.9

### **Have you experienced an increase in your teaching / marking workload since the university closure**

	None	Minor increase	Moderate increase	Large increase	Not applicable
Have you experienced an increase in your teaching / marking workload since the university closure	50.0	9.5	16.2	2.7	<b>21.6</b>