

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

22 May 2020

Dear Staff and Students

UPDATE ON UNIVERSITY OPERATIONS

The COVID-19 infection rate in South Africa continues to soar and we must all remain vigilant in the fight against the spread of this highly contagious disease. Last Thursday, 14 May 2020, the number of infections in our country was 12739 and sadly, 238 people had passed on. Yesterday, Thursday 21 May 2020, the number of infections had escalated to 19137 and tragically, 369 people had passed on. That's a total of 6398 new infections in one week! This war that COVID-19 has declared on humanity is certainly heating up by the day and by the week.

As a result, we continue to urge all students and staff to please adopt the relevant health guidelines as published by the Department of Health, in particular, regular washing and sanitizing of your hands, to use a face mask whenever you leave your place of residence, to observe physical distancing, to clean and sanitize frequently touched surfaces and to avoid large gatherings.

On Wednesday this week, our University started with a phased return of staff onto campus. This number so far is less than 20% of our staff and they were screened before entering campus. There may have been some hiccups in the process before all proceeded smoothly. We apologise for those.

We are very grateful to our colleagues who have returned to campus to deep clean, sanitise and disinfect, where appropriate. Further, there is staff who continue to prepare for our roll-out of blended, multi-modal teaching and learning from 1 June 2020. We also want to remind all staff and students to please use the screening application for the *COVID-19 Workplace Medical Passport* **before** arriving on campus.

You can save and use the *DUT Workplace Medical Passport* by clicking this link:

<https://covid-19.mobenzi.com/6cbeeg>.

Earlier this morning, the Executive Management Committee (EMC), the Executive Committee of Senate (SENEX) and representatives of the DUT Covid-19 Response Task Team, met to discuss plans related to our university operations.

I. STAFF LEAVE PROTOCOLS

The matter pertaining to staff leave, as a result of the extended national lockdown during the “State of Disaster” was tabled at the Executive Committee of Council on 20 May 2020. The Council EXCO did not reach a final decision and the current *status quo* remains. Staff leave has been debited for April and May. In the meantime, as per Council EXCO’s recommendation, the University has lodged an application with the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) for support and once feedback is received, the University will inform EXCO, so that EXCO can consider new and consolidated proposals that will take the UIF’s response into consideration.

2. DEVICES & DATA

Government has not published how they will be dealing with the important matter of data and devices for our sector. We were hoping that Minister Nzimande would have updated the nation yesterday, as had been expected. However, that briefing was postponed to tomorrow, 23 May at 13h00. As a result, we will be moving ahead with our planned interim support, to assist staff working remotely from home, who do not have data allowances in their remuneration package. This process has been delayed, as a result of a huge number of our staff that have indicated the need for data without the line managers and executives having confirmed that they are part of the cohort that is working remotely.

Further, recent changes have to be considered with respect to some staff returning to the university and others having desktops that they could use at home to work remotely. We are sorry for these delays. A relevant task team that will liaise with all divisional executives, is in the process of resolving all of the confusion about which staff members should receive university-supported data.

The University will also be assisting our students, at the University’s own cost, with data for a month, to facilitate the commencement of blended, multi-modal teaching and learning from 1 June 2020.

This is only a stop-gap measure or a concession, to facilitate preparations for and the early start of our blended and multi-modal learning. We hope that this concession gives our government enough time to finalise their plans for data provision for students before the end of June.

Please ensure that your cellphone number is the most current and that the University is aware of this.

- If you are a student, please click the link and go to view, verify or update your details:

https://mercury.dut.ac.za/pls/prodi41/w99pkg.mi_login?numtype=S

- If you are a staff member, please click the link to view, verify or update your details:

https://mercury.dut.ac.za/pls/prodi41/w99pkg.mi_login?numtype=P

Please note that it is your responsibility to ensure that your contact details are updated on the system.

Regarding the issue of devices, as mentioned above, we still await government's direction as to how they will be assisting our NSFAS funded students, and in whatever other ways, our self-paying or sponsored students. The Minister, in his statement on 30 April 2020, announced that government is negotiating with commercial banks for "soft-loans" that could assist self-paying students. We hope to hear more about these schemes when the Minister makes his announcements tomorrow.

3. BLENDED AND MULTI-MODAL TEACHING AND LEARNING

Next week, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning, Professor Nokuthula Sibiya, in consultation with the six Executive Deans, will release the list of blended, multi-modal programmes that will resume from 1 June 2020. The list of blended, multi-modal programmes will be within the guidelines stipulated by government. The list will be published in accordance with the lockdown guidelines and Minister Nzimande's announcements for the Higher Education sector. As a result, we urge all students to monitor their DUT4life email accounts and the DUT website, for further updates during the course of next week.

4. DUT SOLIDARITY FUND

We remain extremely grateful to those who have already donated to the DUT Covid-19 Solidarity Fund. The University values and appreciates your generous support. We remind all staff and students that you can still make a donation to our Solidarity Fund, by visiting the DUT website or by clicking on this link: <https://www.dutalumni.com/dutcovid-19>.

While this fund will contribute to care and support to our students, mainly, it is not substantial to deal with all of their needs. Its existence does not absolve students, especially self-paying and sponsored ones, to seek support from those who supported them to get registered for this academic year.

5. CONCLUSION

The deep cleaning of our seven campuses has commenced. We appreciate the team who are working so hard to sanitize our campus environment. Even as the University takes responsibility for prevention and detection through deep cleaning, sanitisation and disinfection, as the case may be, staff and students must remember that co-responsibility at individual and institutional level is key in fighting this virus.

The University once again reminds all staff and students that the use of a face mask is compulsory, in terms of the national lockdown regulations. It does not demonstrate co-responsibility when colleagues try to enter campus without a face mask, refuse to follow all the health and safety protocols or force themselves back to the University in violation of current lockdown regulations. Staff who are negligent in these respects, including those who will present themselves without masks, will simply not be allowed to enter University property. Please be responsible and ensure that you wear a face mask before arriving on campus.

Finally, please continue to follow the recommended guidelines and precautions that have been published, to protect yourself and your loved ones against COVID-19. Remember, we all share an equal responsibility to fight this disease.

Sincerely

DUT Management Team

