

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

10 September 2020

Dear staff and students

Return of staff and students in line with Alert Level 2 of the Risk Adjusted Strategy

Earlier this morning, a joint meeting of the Executive Management Committee (EMC) and the Executive Committee of Senate (Senex) was convened to discuss, review and assess university operations and readiness in line with Alert Level 2 of the “State of Disaster.”

Blended and multi-modal teaching and learning

The joint committee noted feedback from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning, that student attendance at mask-to-mask contact lectures, was low in relation to the numbers of students that were expected to return under Lockdown Level 2. It does appear that the majority of students from the 66% cohort, favour the blended/online learning approach, rather than attending physical (mask-to-mask) on-campus lectures at this time. The reason for this seems to be largely related to concerns pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic and more familiarity and flexibility with blended/online learning. In view of the apparent low numbers of attendance at mask-to-mask lectures, consideration must be given to managing the situation appropriately, so that the University does not over-extend its resources by spending funds on the incorrect assumption that all students who are authorized to return under the revised lockdown regulations, have done or intend doing so. The meeting also noted that the university was still awaiting the final protocols, logistics and systems that will ensure venue management takes place in a manner that assures health and safety and adherence to lockdown regulations.

Taking all of the above factors into consideration, it was resolved that:

- I. All mask-to-mask (or face-to-face) teaching and learning will be stopped until further notice, except for practical, laboratory work and other essential academic support facilities like the library and computer laboratories that students and staff have no alternative to conduct/engage with in any other way but physically. Given this resolution, access to the latter set of facilities will be granted sparingly only to those who absolutely need them. Protocols with regard to how they will be accessed including how applications/bookings will be lodged for such restricted access will be published in due course.

2. Given that 90% of DUT students have been active in the blended/online mode, and given recorded low attendance at mask-to-mask lectures since June 2020, all teaching and learning will continue in the blended/online mode until all protocols, systems, capacities and resources to assure health and safety and all the lockdown restrictions have been finalized. DUT will continue to support the 10% of our students who could not participate in online learning. Such students should contact their faculties and departments in this regard.
3. Demarcations for physical distancing at specific campus venues has been implemented. However, as resolved under the paragraph numbered 1 above, the focus of Facilities Management will shift strictly only to venues for practicals, laboratory work (and other essential academic support facilities). The relatively few staff and students that will use these venues and facilities are reminded to strictly observe the physical distancing and other related guidelines. Facilities Management have also adopted cleaning and venue management protocols to ensure that the set of venues as identified above are safe for use.
4. Facilities Management will be implementing an electronic monitoring system for meeting and lecture venues, libraries, laboratories and halls to ensure we are able to adhere to lockdown health and safety restrictions, without putting much of a burden on our academics regarding administration or implementation of protocols and systems. This will be completed in the next few weeks; hence our inability to just unleash everyone into lecture rooms and other venues before logistics and systems are in place.
5. The number of permits granted to students does not automatically translate to the same numbers of returns by students. Even as students with permits return to their place of residence, as noted above, attendance at mask-to-mask lectures is very low. To ensure we are better informed in these respects, a survey will be conducted for the University to fully understand the related dynamics and only deploy resources and capacities accordingly. In particular, the survey will probe how many from this cohort prefer continuing online, how many are forced by circumstances to attend full-contact lectures, and how many students require access to laboratories, libraries and venues for practicals.

It must be noted that despite the regulations allowing 66% of students to return in specific categories, students who were not previously allocated university arranged accommodation at the commencement of the academic year, cannot expect that they will now be provided with university residence. Students must continue to occupy the spaces that they were residing in pre-lockdown.

COVID-19 Response Task Team

DUT has signed an agreement with the School of Clinical Medicine at UKZN and the Global Health Initiative, to get access to a saliva-based test, for COVID-19.

In addition to this, the University has received a generous donation of 50 000 masks from the Tianjin Vocational Institute in China. The meeting thanked President Liu Bin and his Management Team for their generous donation. These masks will be distributed via our Department of Health and Safety on campus and some of the masks will also be used in our campus clinics. DUT records its sincere appreciation for the donation of the face masks.

WiFi and data provision

A WiFi audit in our student residences was conducted by the Student Housing Department. The audit revealed that all DUT residences have WiFi access. However, the audit uncovered that the strength of the WiFi signal in certain areas needed to be increased. ITSS will be assisting to upgrade WiFi access in DUT owned residences and on campus, to prevent WiFi blackouts in identified areas. The University will inform all landlords of out-sourced residences, that if students living in the out-sourced residences experience WiFi challenges as a result of poor connectivity, those students will be given mobile data and the costs will be deducted from the landlord's account. All out-sourced residences, as per the approved lease agreement, must provide adequate WiFi access for students.

The meeting resolved that in order to assist and to support students whilst the WiFi access is improved on campus and in residence, mobile data will be provided to all DUT students for the month of September 2020, to give the University time to attend to the problem areas.

Please continue to stay safe and follow the published, public health guidelines, to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Sincerely

DUT Management team