

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

7 October 2020

Dear staff and students

UPDATE: Alert Level 1 of the Risk Adjusted Strategy

Earlier today, the Executive Management Committee (EMC) and the Senate Executive Committee (Senex), met to discuss University operations following the recent commencement of Alert Level 1 in the National “State of Disaster.”

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives and challenged us in many ways. The University is extremely grateful to all staff and students who continue to follow the published public health guidelines as we all strive to prevent the further spread of the disease. We remind the entire University community that the use of a face mask is still compulsory on campus and in communal areas in residences. All staff and students who access the campus must complete the daily **HealthCheck** online screening form before arriving on campus. Here is the link to access the form:

<https://healthcheck.higherhealth.ac.za>.

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
INVUVESI YASETHEKWINI YEZOBUCHWEPHESHE**Student Tuition Mode Preference Survey**

As a University guided by the principle of stewardship as reflected in our ENVISION 2030 strategy, the joint EMC Senex decision to action a student survey last month, was prompted by an urgent need to capture a vital and data-driven snapshot and to heed the student voice, in response to the reported low student attendance at mask-to-mask lectures during Alert Level 2. This survey indicates student preferences for what they consider to be the most suitable mode of tuition, as the University works towards successfully concluding the academic programme. The survey provides clarity on how we could proceed at Alert Level 1 regarding teaching and learning and how we could deal with full contact lectures vs online lectures at DUT.

The survey has helped to confirm some of the information that was already available from Faculty-based data with regard to full contact classes and low student attendance, witnessed since June 2020 when the first cohort of students returned.

The survey confirms student preference for blended multimodal online teaching and learning. In addition, the results indicate that a substantial number of students who have practical and laboratory sessions wish to have access to campuses for those purposes. The University has to consider how to provide access to all levels of students who need to use laboratories, complete practicals, access computer labs and to visit our libraries.

Blended/multimodal and online teaching and learning versus contact-based tuition

Given the survey results as summarized just above, DUT's default position for the rest of the academic year 2020 is, therefore, blended multimodal online teaching and learning.

Given the need to provide physical access for students who need to complete practicals and access laboratories (labs) and libraries and students who do not have home environments that are conducive to blended multimodal teaching and learning, especially online learning, these groups of students will be allowed access to campuses, for which permits will be issued. However, the University needs to better understand the number of computers available in labs, in relation to the number of students who need to access computers on campus. The University will consider more surveys in the future, to better understand student and staff preferences regarding teaching and learning.

Implications of Alert Level I Restrictions on teaching and learning.

We note that the Minister for Higher Education, Science and Technology has already announced and published guidelines that allow 100% of students to return to university. We also note that given the capacity of our venues for lectures and meetings and considering that we are in a Level I lockdown, there are firm restrictions that govern the number of people in a venue. We also have to abide by social and physical distancing rules, together with other important venue-based logistics. It is clear that the university would not cope with physical meetings and lectures for all students.

As stated above, there will, therefore, be prioritization of groups of students who require access to our campuses for practicals, laboratories and libraries, for blended, multimodal, online teaching and learning.

In addition to the above-mentioned groups of students, students who experience challenging circumstances at home or at their place of residence, which, in turn make it difficult to participate in online learning, will need to use campus computer labs. This group of students will be allocated to specific computer labs. There will be a system to manage the booking of the computers in the labs, so that students can use the facility in a structured and safe manner. A booking system will be implemented for the computer labs and access to the facilities in our libraries.

The date of return for this group of students will be communicated in the days ahead. Further announcements on logistics relating to all of the above will be made by the Teaching & Learning portfolio in collaboration with Student Services and our Real Estate section.

Return of students to residences

We would like to confirm that for Alert Level 1 – students who were allocated beds in university and leased residences may return to their residences. However, as explained above, this does not automatically imply they will have wholesale and condition-free access to campuses. Their return to physical campus attendance will depend on whether they belong to groups that are prioritized for such in keeping with COVID-19 related restrictions.

Student Services will announce further details relating to permits and the date of return for students in this category. The return date for this group of students will be made in consultation with the DVC: T&L and it will be communicated with all students via the DUT4life email account and published on our COVID-19 page on the DUT website.

WiFi Access

The WiFi improvement project across our campuses has already commenced and will be completed by 31 October 2020. The Student Housing Department has liaised with all landlords of out-sourced residences, to inform them about the WiFi audits that should help to confirm WiFi availability in leased residences. The ITSS Department has been engaged to conduct the WiFi audit in the out-sourced residences. The audit findings will then inform any required WiFi improvements in the out-sourced residences.

Data provision – October 2020

Data provision for students: It should be noted that since June 2020 when the University started to provide mobile data to students, and as more and more students were allowed back to enjoy access to DUT's WiFi network, the need for data provision has been waning. The only reason we have considered continuing to provide mobile data are the delays in the WiFi improvement process. These delays do not mean WiFi access is not available; but limited. In line with the principles developed for data provision to students over the last few months, the University will provide data to those students deemed to need it under the changed circumstances to cover the end of October, when the WiFi network will have been improved.

Within the next few days, the DVC: T&L, DVC: RIE, the Executive Deans and the CIO, will determine which group of students require mobile data. A final decision will then be communicated to students regarding data provision for October.

Data provision for staff: Those members of staff who have offices and facilities that abide by the public health guidelines, should return to campus and use all the facilities available including WiFi access. Data provision will depend on whether there is an absolute need for a member of staff to work remotely. If there is no need but there is an agreement with the Sector Executive for that staff member to work remotely; that will be done at the staff member's expense. Colleagues with comorbidities (who have already declared this and provided written evidence to HR) and those who are above the age of 60, will be provided with data for October 2020.

Staff return to campus

The default position for DUT staff members is that they should return to the University on Monday, 12 October 2020. However, departmental line managers must ensure that physical distancing and spacing in offices is within the public health guidelines. As a result, Sector Executives will make assessments with respect to staff members who may still have to work remotely, as a result of the limitations of the restrictions, that we are still under, impose. For example, there might be an open plan office whose capacity is six people, three of whom may have to continue to work remotely. Colleagues with comorbidities (who have already declared this and provided written evidence to HR) and those who are above the age of 60, may continue to work remotely under Alert Level 1. Those who do not need to work remotely must return to campus and help serve our students and fellow staff members.

Conclusion

The University is grateful to all staff and students who continue to follow the public health guidelines that will help to prevent the spread of the COVID-19. Whilst the rate of infection in our country has reduced since the peak in July, there continues to be new infections country wide at about 1000 people a day. Thus, the enemy has not been vanquished as yet. The entire University community must, therefore, remain alert and abide by the published guidelines. Please stay safe and help protect the health and safety of all staff and students at our University.

Sincerely,

DUT Management team