

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

02 October 2021

Dear staff and students

IMPLICATIONS OF ADJUSTED LOCKDOWN LEVEL I ON DUT OPERATIONS

The DUT Executive Management Committee (EMC) and the Senate Executive Committee (Senex) met yesterday afternoon to discuss implications of Adjusted Lockdown Level I in the National State of Disaster.

TEACHING & LEARNING

EMC/Senex noted the Adjusted Lockdown Level I that was announced by President Ramaphosa on Thursday night. The joint meeting engaged in a discussion to consider mask-to-mask, in person, contact teaching and learning on campus. EMC/Senex took into account the expected onset of the fourth wave of the pandemic that the data scientists have modelled, the impact and the associated risks this would have on the health, safety and wellbeing of all students and staff. Further, EMC/Senex considered the fact that we are nearing the end of the academic programme with examinations being a few weeks ahead. Logistics around resuming mask-to-mask lectures at this stage would pose a challenge.

A decision was then made NOT to implement mask-to-mask, in person, on campus teaching and learning at this time. The University will, thus, continue with online teaching and learning for the rest of the second semester and will also continue to investigate ways in which we could assist those students who require contact support. Updated announcements will be made in the near future.

All Faculties and Departments, via the Academic Executive Management (AEM), will work on a plan with specific criteria for in-person, mask-to-mask, contact teaching and learning for students who have not experienced on campus teaching and learning that could be implemented next year, if the regulations and the environment permit.

ASSESSMENTS & EXAMINATIONS

Following last week's EMC/Senex meeting, further engagement and consultation took place at DUT between the Academic Executive Management (AEM), the DUT COVID-19 Response Task Team, the Registrar's Office, Student Services, the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CELT) and the Centre for Quality, Promotion and Assurance (CQPA). The joint EMC/Senex meeting evaluated the proposal and supported the AEM plan to implement limited, staggered, in-person, on campus contact sessions for assessments and examinations.

However, this will be applicable in specific instances and this decision does not mean a blanket return to in-person assessments and examinations for all. EMC/Senex reinforced that while implementing systems and processes to maintain a COVID-19 free environment on campus, each Faculty and/or Department must develop a detailed Examinations and Assessment Plan, based on the following requirements:

1. To identify the total number of assessments and examinations that will require mask-to-mask, in-person, on campus contact sessions. These mask-to-mask, in-person, on campus assessments and examinations should be confined primarily to exit-level students, those requiring professional accreditation, summative tests for modules assessed by continual assessment and any other "high-stakes" assessments that are essential for the integrity of the assessment process.
2. Quantify the total number of students per module who will be required to come onto campus or another official DUT facility for assessment purposes.
3. Identify the number of venues and days that will be required for these mask-to-mask assessments.
4. To disaggregate students numbers by dividing the number of students required to complete an assessment on campus for each module into several groups to reduce crowding, and to mitigate against the spread of COVID-19 i.e. to stagger the examination timetable.
5. To extend the exam period beyond the current period allowed to make it possible for multiple assessment contact sessions.

Furthermore, to enhance adherence to the guidelines, student ambassadors will be identified and trained, together with peer educators, social workers and security guards, to monitor and to enforce full compliance with the COVID-19 public health guidelines on campus.

The relevant Faculties and/or Departments will inform those specific students who need to attend mask-to-mask, in-person, on campus contact sessions for assessments and examinations.

The integrity of all examinations, class tests and other forms of assessments is critical to upholding the academic standards of Teaching and Learning at DUT and this must be consistent with our ENVISION2030 strategy. The University will implement mechanisms and measures to ensure the integrity of assessments and examinations.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

DUT will maintain the protocols that were approved in the previous meeting, related postgraduate training and academic exchanges. You can access last week's statement by clicking on this link: https://dut-cdn2.azureedge.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/DUT.EMC_Senex_Statement.210921.pdf

DATA

The University will continue to provide mobile data for students to participate in teaching and learning and for assessments until there is adequate WiFi coverage in residences where the majority of our students reside. Staff who work remotely will also continue to receive data.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

The EMC/Senex meeting agreed to maintain the current arrangement of staff working remotely, unless specific staff members are working in essential services or working in laboratories and they are involved in specific, approved, on-campus practical work and assessments/examinations referred to above. Staff members are advised to liaise with their respective Line Managers if they require clarification on working remotely.

HEALTH PROTOCOLS

The COVID-19 Response Task Team will be evaluating and discussing the position of mandatory vaccinations at DUT.

Once the legal implications have been considered and consultations with Higher Health and other experts have been completed, the Task Team will submit a proposal to the various structures at DUT, in advance of a final decision being made by the DUT Council at its next meeting.

Please note that there are important health resources which are available for you:

- DUT Clinics: WhatsApp 067 370 4482 or 083 783 7057 (office hours).
- COVID-19 Hotline: 0800 029 999
- DUT COVID-19 Response Task Team Hotline: 031 373 3760 or 031 373 2223 (office hours), or you can email: covid-enquiries@dut.ac.za.
- Higher Health National Hotline on 0800 36 36 36 or SMS 43336.
- South African Depression & Anxiety Group (SADAG) on 0800 12 13 14.
- Lifeline on 0861 322 322.

CONCLUSION

Whilst South Africa has seen a drop in the number of daily COVID-19 infections, it must be noted that the virus remains active in our communities and sadly, people are still passing on from complications related to the disease. Therefore, we remind all staff and students that it is mandatory for you to wear your face mask, which must securely cover your nose and mouth. Remember to abide by the social and physical distancing rules, stay a minimum of 1.5 metres away from the person next to you. Avoid large crowds and poorly ventilated venues. You must ensure that you consistently practice good hand hygiene by frequently washing your hands with water and soap and where possible, use a minimum 70% alcohol-based hand sanitiser to clean your hands. Importantly, EMC/Senex advises all staff and students to please get vaccinated. We are grateful to our colleagues and students who have been vaccinated already. The bottom line is that vaccinations work, the science is clear about this and it is a responsible way for us to stop the further spread of the disease and to help avoid an expected fourth wave of the pandemic in December.

We wish you a safe and successful second semester.

Sincerely

DUT Management team