

**Subject:** COVID-19 UPDATE (31) – THE PHASED RETURN OF STUDENTS AND STAFF TO CAMPUSES

**Date:** Friday, 29 May 2020 at 20:35:17 South Africa Standard Time

**From:** Shirona Patel on behalf of VCO News

**To:** VCO News

Dear Students and Colleagues

We trust that you are well.

The phased, coordinated and safe return of students and staff to the University from 8 June 2020 was deliberated on this week, following the announcement that South Africa would move to level 3 of the COVID-19 lockdown from June, which will allow for some groups of students and staff to return to campuses across the country.

The wellbeing and safety of our students and staff is paramount and it will take our collective effort, courage and determination to keep the coronavirus at bay. After consultation with the Deans, academics and student leaders, it was agreed that a staggered approach will be adopted with the first cohort of students returning from the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, followed by a second cohort in mid-July.

The following **student groups** will return from the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 2020. The exact dates and schedules for each cohort will be communicated by faculties:

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| <b>Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management</b>          | <p>Certain courses in the Faculty's executive education programme in the Wits Business School and Wits School of Governance will be offered on campus.</p> <p>The Faculty will reintegrate a percentage of the student body in Phase 2 from July onwards, as and when appropriate. Further details will be communicated in due course.</p>                  |
| <b>Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment</b> | <p>PhD and MSc students who require access to laboratories will return.</p> <p>Selected graduating classes and progressing students (including third year students who need access to laboratories) will return.</p>  |
| <b>Faculty of Health Sciences</b>                       | <p>Clinical students and students in their final year of study (MBBCh, GEMP and students on the Mandela-Castro programme) are already on campus.</p> <p>Pre-final year students with a high clinical load will return.</p> <p>Undergraduate students with clinical training needs and postgraduate students with laboratory-based research will return.</p> |
| <b>Faculty of Humanities</b>                            | <p>The Faculty will reintegrate a percentage of the student body as and when appropriate in Phase 2 from July onwards.</p>  |

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| <b>Faculty of Science</b>   | <p>PhD and Research Masters Students will return.</p> <p>Honours students who require access to laboratories will return.</p> <p>A very careful selection of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students will return.</p>   |
| <b>Residence students who do not live in an environment conducive to learning and who find it extremely difficult to study online</b> | <p>Students in this category will be brought back to residences incrementally, to enable them to continue with their studies online from their respective residences. As per regulations, not more than one third of Wits' residences may be occupied at any given time. This means that the number of students who are able to return to residences are limited. The Dean of Students will communicate the process to be followed for the phased return of students in this category early next week.</p> |

Details of student groups that will return from July onwards will be communicated in the coming weeks. Please do not return to campus unless you have been given permission to return.

### **Level 3 lockdown: Implications for staff members**

The phased reopening of our campuses will necessitate the return of some academic, professional and support staff to our campuses. A comprehensive workplace plan has been developed by the Senior Director: Human Resources, which includes guidelines for the preparation of the workplace before employees arrive, the responsibilities of managers, health and safety officers and employees before returning to work, whilst in the workplace, and processes to follow if issues arise.

The SET has also agreed to the following principles:

- All academic, professional, administrative and support staff who can work from home, should continue to do so, and should only come onto campus if necessary;
- Staff members who are required to be at work should report for duty (line managers will make this request to staff members);
- Staff members over the age of 60 or those living with co-morbidities (see below) should stay at home;
- All staff who are unable to work during this period, should, where possible, be redeployed to areas where they could make a contribution.

Staff members who have co-morbidities (like cancer, diabetes, asthma or other respiratory illnesses) should voluntarily declare these illnesses to their line manager or provide a valid doctor's letter that indicates specifically why they cannot report for work. Where line managers believe that it is necessary, a second opinion may be obtained from selected healthcare practitioners based at the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre.

Line managers should work with health and safety officers, Services and HR to ensure that the following measures are in place:

- Physical distancing of staff and students;
- The adequate provision of sanitisers and/or soap and water;
- The regular cleaning of venues and work spaces;
- The provision of cloth masks (two per student and staff member) and other personal protective equipment for specialised areas; and
- Protocols to prevent the spread of infection.

It is the responsibility of every staff member to ensure that the self-screening form (paper or online or via the app) is completed in full every morning. The paper-based screening form is being converted into a mobile application to reduce congestion at entry points. Details about the app will follow early next week.

**Conclusion**

Students and colleagues, we are living through a difficult period, but it is time for us to put our shoulder to the wheel and to move forward, in the interests of the broader Wits community. This is a true test of our Ubuntu - our personal actions, behaviours and choices impacts on those around us, and it is up to each and every one of us to act responsibly for the sake of our collective humanity.

Keep well and safe.

**SENIOR EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**29 MAY 2020**