

Department of Higher Education and Training

Plans for Academic Year 2020 and response to COVID-19 pandemic

Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science and
Technology

21 April 2020



Overview

- Plans to save the Academic Year 2020 (AY2020) for public universities
- Information about students remaining in university residences
- Research and other work of universities contributing to the prevention and management of the COVID-19 pandemic

Principles and framework for completion of AY2020

- All institutions have committed to complete the Academic Year (AY) 2020.
- A re-organisation of the AY is essential, possibly into 2021.
- No Student should be left behind (this means that all should be given a fair opportunity for completion).
- There is commitment amongst universities to work together as a sector, but with allowance for institutional differences. No one size fits all approach is possible.
- Online, remote and flexible learning methodologies to be used as best as possible taking into account institutional differences.
- Consultation with DBE re school year and opening of 2021 year critical. Delays may also impact on completion of AY 2021. Different scenarios under consideration, but will depend on decisions made at national level as advised by Department of Health.
- Large scale infrastructure programmes on campuses must re-commence as soon as possible, given costs of delays currently being incurred.

Overarching plan and guidelines under consideration

- A phased in return to the academic year with a combination of online and remote learning initially, with full return to contact teaching when feasible.
- Scientific advice will be essential for this, as well as following the prescripts of government and regulations in place.
- A return to learning and teaching through primarily online and remote methodologies from 4 May 2020.
- No full return to face to face campus activity until peak of virus is over (possibly September 2020)
- A phased-in of resumption of teaching and learning based on strategic decisions and critical criteria developed at national and institutional level (some students will return to campus).
- Provision/loan of devices to students from institutions where possible (underway).
- Some institutions considering delivery of hard-copy/electronic flexible learning materials to students (data sticks).
- Sector-wide possibilities being explored for access to learning sites on a coordinated basis for students not able to access appropriate study conditions (network accessibility and inappropriate home learning spaces).

Additional Considerations

- 360 degree screening/ testing of any students/staff returning to campuses; environmental cleaning of campuses and residences
- On campus quarantine facilities available
- Modelling of requirements for NSFAS funding given extension of academic year and the need to support students for additional months, possible into first quarter of 2021.
- Communication considerations at national and institutional level – institutions to continue to communicate clearly with their students and staff.
- Mental health support and other forms of support necessary for staff and students throughout.
- The scope of zero-rated URL sites and data bundles; final agreements with data providers critical for the work that needs to be done.
- Possible funding requirements for institutions in distress being explored, including critical areas of financial support that may be required. Universities may lose some tuition fee and accommodation income due to long period of lockdown or semi-lockdown. However, online learning costs initially high.
- Programme collaboration across institutions being explored in some areas.

Students remaining on university campuses

- The following students remain on university campuses at lockdown. The majority of students remaining are postgraduate and international students, with some undergraduate students who could not return home for specific reasons.
- Students remaining have received support for food and hygiene products, essential services are in place to ensure the safety of students, counselling services are available to some students.
- All have been provided with access to information about health care options and procedures.
- Special protocols are in place for safety and social distancing.

Students remaining on university campuses

University	Students remaining
University of Fort Hare	30
University of Johannesburg	940
University of the Western Cape	370
North West University	64
Sol Plaatjie University	0
Mangosuthu University of Technology	6
Central University of Technology	27
University of Pretoria	236
Vaal University of Technology	18
Rhodes University	36
Walter Sisulu University	23
Stellenbosch University	971
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	1853
Wits University	531
Sefako Makgatho University	128
University of Limpopo	0
University of Venda	3
Tshwane University of Technology	0
University of the Free State	119
University of Cape Town	363
Nelson Mandela University	382
University of KwaZulu-Natal	161
Durban University of Technology	9
University of Zululand	0
University of Mpumalanga	0
TOTAL	6270

Universities work related to COVID-19

- Universities South Africa has provided a detailed report of the range of work being done at universities in support of the effort to contain, manage and understand the virus.
- A detailed report on the work of individual universities is provided as an Annexure to this presentation.
- The work is extensive ranging from different forms of medical and biomedical research, engineering and manufacturing of medical equipment and protective equipment needed urgently in the fight against the virus, economic and social research to help understand the effects of the virus on society and the economy, and many others.
- University resources, staff and capabilities are working extensively to support the national response to the virus, and in many cases working with international and global partners.

NSFAS update

- NSFAS allowances have continued to be paid during the lockdown period. Many institutions paid students before the lockdown to ensure that they had the necessary funds before leaving campus.
- Learning materials allowance was paid to all university students by universities early in the academic year once funding and registration was confirmed. Upfront payments from NSFAS to institutions enabled these allowance payments to be made.
- There has been no change to NSFAS funding for qualifying students at this stage. Given the likely extension of the academic year, as mentioned, modelling is being done to determine the costs of the different scenarios.
- According to the latest report received by the Minister from NSFAS, a total number of 5,516 student (first-time entering) appeals have been approved, and a further 1,404 student appeals were unsuccessful. A total number of 24,571 Continuing students appeals have been received from institutions, of which 14,117 have been approved.
- NSFAS has established a virtual contact centre using web platforms and social media and has been able to successfully continue engaging with students.



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Thank You