

South Africa

Disaster Management Act, 2002

Directions Regarding the National Criteria for the Phased-in Return to Campuses of Public and Private Higher Education Institutions Government Notice 652 of 2020

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Directions Regarding the National Criteria for the Phased-in Return to Campuses of Public and Private Higher Education Institutions

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Disaster Management Act, 2002

Directions Regarding the National Criteria for the Phased-in Return to Campuses of Public and Private Higher Education Institutions

Government Notice 652 of 2020

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I, Dr BE Nzimande, MP, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, in terms of the COVID-19 Regulations under alert Level 3 issued in terms of the Disaster Management [Act, No 57 of 2002](#), hereby publish the Directions regarding the national criteria for the phased in return to campuses of public and private higher education institutions from 1 June 2020 onwards, as set out in the Schedule.

Notwithstanding the date of publication of the Notice in the Government Gazette, these Directions come into effect on 01 June 2020.

Dr BE Nzimande, MP

Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation

Risk adjusted strategy for the COVID-19 pandemic for public and private higher education: criteria for return to campuses

1. Background and principles

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the President declaring a state of disaster in South Africa. Government implemented a national lockdown from 27 March 2020. All post school education and training institutions advanced their recess periods from the 16 March 2020 and subsequently closed their campuses and learning centres. A small number of students, mainly international and post graduate students remained in the residences of public institutions, both on and off campus.

A risk adjusted strategy is being implemented to phase-in the reopening of campus activities. This is to manage the gradual opening of activities and to ensure that the gains achieved during the lockdown are maintained. An essential aspect of the opening of institutions is linked to the need to ensure preparedness of infrastructure and teaching and learning spaces; screening of staff, students and the general public entering institutions; physical distancing; and the implementation of hygiene protocols as per government regulations.

The sector recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic will have an effect on daily lives and workplaces for some time to come, that the lockdown will have to be eased over time, and eventually it will be necessary to return to normal teaching and learning and work. However, this must be done based on an understanding that institutions and individuals must act differently.

Different methodologies will have to be explored to ensure that staff and students at higher education institutions (HEIs) are able to access campuses as safely as possible, that the mitigation of health and safety risks must be built into the daily life and work of all institutions (including living and teaching spaces) and that social solidarity must guide all of us in how we conduct ourselves in relation to others, to

ensure that we all do whatever we can as a collective to minimise the spread of the virus. In this way we will be saving lives and saving the academic year.

The return of staff and students to campus, contact tuition and to residences will be phased-in. HEIs must take the following key factors into consideration when developing their plans for the return to campuses and residences:

- In order to enable effective implementation of the phase-in of activities and to regulate the numbers of students on campuses, including in residences, all students and staff who are able to work remotely should be encouraged to stay at home. Students and staff should only come to campuses under exceptional circumstances, for example, when it is essential to visit the library or undertake practical/laboratory work;
- The social impact of the lockdown requires consideration for students whose living conditions at home are such that they are not in a position to participate meaningfully in remote teaching and learning;
- The academic size and shape of the institution, including the numbers of students requiring clinical training, work integrated learning, and access to laboratories and equipment;
- The design of teaching and learning spaces at the institution and their conduciveness for physical distancing and social solidarity;
- The readiness of institutions to practice non-pharmaceutical interventions (such as the wearing of cloth masks, physical¹ distancing, hand hygiene, etc.) to prevent the spread or outbreaks of COVID-19;
- The number, size and distribution of residences for students, particularly the need to minimise sharing of rooms and to ensure that physical distancing in public areas of residences and dining halls² is maintained;
- An assessment of the physical infrastructure of each campus to ensure that reintegration is managed within the necessary protocols;
- An assessment of clinical training platforms and practical placement facilities for students; and
- Transport arrangements for students and staff.
- Students and staff with underlying illnesses must be afforded the opportunity to study and/or work remotely until institutions resume with normal operations.

The criteria in this document are:

- National guidelines for institutions to develop specific phase-in plans for the return of students and staff to campuses and residences.
- Phase-in plans must be submitted to the Department of Higher Education and Training (For public institutions: Mampane.g@dhet.gov.za. For private institutions: Essack.s@dhet.gov.za).
- The implementation of phase-in plans will be monitored by the Department.
- Phase-in plans must be communicated to staff and students and implemented at the institutional level.

Campus readiness and preparation

All private and public higher education institutions must ensure that their infrastructure and facilities meet the requirements for the return of staff and students.

No student or staff member should return to campus or residences until they have received communication from their institution that they are able to do so. Once the institution has confirmed that it is ready for their return, and they have agreed to the necessary code of conduct, then the individuals recalled may do so. They must also ensure that they are in possession of the relevant permit for return before traveling to the campus.

All institutions must have campus readiness plans in place which meet the requirements of the various health and safety directives published by the Department of Employment and Labour on the 29th April 2020 (Government Gazette No. 43257) to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Higher Health has also published guidelines to assist institutions to put relevant protocols in place and these should be adhered to at the institutional level. A check list will be sent to all HEIs to assist them to adhere to the necessary protocols.

All institutions must identify isolation and quarantine facilities and develop and publicise protocols for any staff or students who present with symptoms or test positive. Testing and contact tracing will be supported by the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD), the National Department of Health (NDoH) and Provincial Health Departments.

Each institution must complete a risk assessment for the return of employees and students in line with the regulations for each campus/site of delivery.

Provision must be made for: sanitisation; screening of staff, students and general public entering the institution; and the provision of masks and other appropriate personal protective equipment.

Guidance for students/staff regarding age vulnerabilities and the prevalence of co-morbidities must be in place. Campus Health Clinics, where in place, should be guided by the NICD protocols and the NDoH guidelines to handle cases for referral if they arise and in public institutions will be supported by Higher Health with the necessary training and advice.

All institutions must have a COVID-19 Response Task Team in place, in line with regulations, to ensure responsiveness to ongoing issues.

¹ Throughout this document the term 'physical distancing' is used. This is to emphasise the need for all members of the community to ensure that the physical space between them and another person is at least 1.5m at all times; 2m is considered safe. This is often referred to as 'social distancing'. However social solidarity is required for all to work together and cooperate to ensure the health and safety of all. Therefore in this document we emphasise physical distancing and social solidarity.

² Dining halls, if utilised, must be strictly controlled. Seating arrangements must ensure that at least 2m is maintained between individuals. All surfaces must be frequently cleaned.

2. Return to campuses for contact classes

Daily screening (and COVID-19 testing where symptoms dictate) of all staff and students entering the campus must be put in place. Higher Health has developed a mobile application which is available to all institutions and may be utilised for daily screening. They have also developed processes to support public institutions through a volunteer programme.

Hand sanitisers must be available at the entrance of every facility in use. Ongoing cleaning and sanitising of all surfaces must be undertaken at regular intervals in line with the regulations.

High risk areas³, for example the library and laboratories in use, must be identified and regularly monitored. Frequent cleaning and sanitising in these areas should be implemented.

Each institution must utilise the national criteria and develop their own phase-in plan for each level of the risk adjusted strategy.

Control over the return to campus will be through the issuing of permits at the institutional level. Institutions should put measures in place to prevent fraudulent permits being issued.

Each institution will communicate directly with its own students and staff to inform them of the phase-in plan.

Each institution must implement their teaching and learning plan to ensure that physical distancing and other health protocols are observed at all times. This implies the implementation of blended learning methodologies, flipped classrooms, carousel and block contact teaching, and so on. Large class teaching with more than 50 people in a venue is prohibited throughout. Any smaller classes where appropriate physical distancing cannot be observed are also prohibited.

³ For example where entering is through turnstiles; or where there is frequent touching of surfaces such as communal computers in libraries used to search for information.

3. Return to residences (on-campus, HEI# managed/ leased off campus, and private residences)

Plans for the return of students to residences in a phased manner should be in place in line with the following principles:

- Students returning to residences should be identified at institutional level, concomitant with numbers that can be accommodated to enable physical distancing, the handling of communal spaces, hygiene requirements and dining hall arrangements.
- Students identified to return for contact teaching in terms of the phase-in plans may return to HEI managed/ leased residences before classes begin, provided the maximum percentage per residence identified for the level (Level 3 - 33%; Level 2 - 66%) is adhered to and all health and safety protocols are in place. Any deviation above these levels would require approval from the Department, and would need to show capacity to manage the strict protocols necessary.
- Students who live in private rented accommodation close to campuses may return, but their access to campus must be restricted to keep the campus population to one-third of the capacity, consistent with Level 3 risk for spread of the infection. Their access to residence must be managed as with all other students, subject to regular screening when entering residences.
- Students and staff in residences will have to sign a code of conduct to ensure that they adhere to the strict regulations in place.
- Social solidarity must be encouraged to ensure the health and safety of all in the residences.

Institutions must identify the specific students# who may return to residences and provide permits to enable their return.

This will include public universities and private higher education institutions that may have residences.

This implies that some students who may be permitted to return to residences may be supported through remote teaching and learning methodologies and will not return to campus for contact teaching.

4. Risk adjusted strategy for the return of students to campuses/ delivery sites for teaching and learning

At all levels and at all times, screening, the use of masks, hand washing/sanitising and physical distancing is required of all staff and students.

Based on their risk adjusted plan for each Level, institutions will make arrangements for the students identified to return to campuses according to the criteria for the Level. Institutions will have two weeks from the date of the implementation of the Level to ensure that all preparation has been done in terms of the health and safety protocols and that campuses and residences are ready to receive students. This will also enable staff and students to make safe travel arrangements.

International students who returned to their home countries during the lockdown will only be permitted to return to campuses when Level 1 of the strategy is announced. These international students will be supported through remote learning support until they return. Tailored catch up plans will be implemented when they return.

Level 4

Limited and controlled return of students to campuses:

- Final year students in programmes requiring clinical training return to campuses, starting with medicine (MBChB) and phasing-in of all other programmes (List of programmes included is attached at Annexure A)

All other students are supported through remote multimodal teaching, learning and assessment until they can return to campus.

Level 3

A maximum of 33% of the student population return to each campus/delivery site# for teaching, learning and assessment, in line with the following criteria:

- All groups that have already returned during alert level 4.
- Students in the final year of their programmes, who are on a path to graduating in 2020 may return#
- Students in all years of study that require clinical training in their programmes(provided that the campus and the clinical training platforms are prepared and have sufficient space to accommodate them within the corresponding risk level maximum carrying capacity and any while adhering to the safety protocols).
- Post Graduate students who require laboratory equipment and other technical equipment to undertake their studies return to campuses.

All other students are supported through remote multimodal teaching learning and assessment until they can return to campus.

It is recognised that some institutions may identify other groups of students in line with their particular context. However, any deviation from the criteria identified above must be approved by the Department of Higher Education and Training, and must fall within the maximum of 33% of the student population.

Small private higher education institutions with a student enrolment of less than 50 students, may apply to the Department for exemption from these criteria. Their applications must be accompanied by their institutional plans for the return of staff and students that comply with the regulations published by the Department of Employment and Labour, and the Higher Health Guidelines.

Level 2

A maximum of 66% of the student population return to campus# for teaching, learning and assessment in line with the following criteria:

- All groups that have already returned or had been prioritised to return in Level 3, but couldn't be accommodate due the maximum campus carrying capacity having been reached;
- Students in all years of study who require laboratory and technical equipment to complete the academic year;
- Students in all years of study who require practical placements/ experiential learning/ work place based learning to complete the academic year (provided the work places and platforms are open and prepared).
- First year students in all undergraduate programmes.

All other students are supported through remote multimodal teaching learning and assessment until they can return to campus.

It is recognised that some institutions may identify other groups of students in line with their particular context. However, any deviation from this criteria must be approved by the

Department of Higher Education and Training, and must fall within the maximum of 66% of the student population.

Level 1

100% of the student population may return to campus.

Physical distancing and health protocols will still be required.

Social solidarity will be required.

International students who were residing outside of the country during the lockdown period may return (provided that international travel is permitted).

This should be managed per campus in multi-campus/ multi-site institutions.

It is recognised that during Level 3 blended learning, on-line and other modalities will still be in place due to the need for physical distancing, and therefore it may not be necessary for all final year students to return physically to campuses. Students who are able to work remotely, and only return to campuses when necessary to access the libraries and other facilities should be encouraged to do so. This should be managed at the institutional level and on the basis of controlled access to campuses in line with distancing protocols. The return of final year students to work integrated learning platforms will be limited by the opening up of these platforms in the economy during Level 3.

This should be managed per campus in multi-campus/ multi-site institutions.

Annexure A

Programmes requiring clinical training for phased-in return under Level 4 and 3

Level 4

Final year students in the following programmes:

Bachelor of Dental Science

Bachelor of Dental Surgery

Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery

Diploma: Nursing

Bachelor of Science: Nursing

Bachelor of Veterinary Science

Level 3

Students in the following programmes requiring clinical training, provided that the clinical training platforms are prepared and have sufficient space to accommodate them while adhering to the safety protocols:

Diploma in Agriculture

Bachelor/Diploma: Animal Health

Bachelor of Audiology

Bachelor of Science in Biokinetics

Bachelor/Diploma: Biomedical Technology

Bachelor of Clinical Medical Practice

Bachelor of Health Science in Clinical Technology

Diploma of Chiropractic

Bachelor of Science in Complementary Medicine

Higher Certificate Dental Assisting

Bachelor of Dental Science
Bachelor of Dental Surgery
Diploma of Dental Technology
Bachelor of Dental Therapy
Bachelor of Dentistry
Bachelor of Science: Dietetics/Nutrition
Bachelor/Diploma: Emergency Medical Care
Bachelor of Environmental Health
Bachelor of Science: Health Promotion
Bachelor of Health Sciences
Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery
Bachelor of Sciences (Medical Laboratory Science)
Diploma/Bachelor: Medical Orthotics and Prosthetics
Diploma/Bachelor of Science: Nursing
Bachelor of Science in Physiotherapy
Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy
Bachelor in Optometry
Bachelor of Health Oral Health/Hygiene
Bachelor of Pharmacy
Bachelor of Technology Podiatry
Bachelor of Psychology
Bachelor/Diploma: Radiography/Ultrasound
Bachelor of Speech, Language and Hearing Therapy
Bachelor of Science in Speech, Language Pathology and Audiology
Bachelor of Social Work
Bachelor of Sport Coaching
Diploma: Veterinary Technology
Bachelor of Veterinary Science