



University of Fort Hare

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATION

PROF SAKHELA BUHLUNGU
VICE-CHANCELLOR and PRINCIPAL



University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

23 July 2020

Dear Staff and Students

INSTITUTIONAL UPDATE: COVID-19 AND THE UFH RESPONSE

Staggered return of the 1st cohort of students

The gradual, staggered return of students forming part of the first cohort is continuing. We have begun issuing permits over last two weeks, starting on July 13th. The return of each group of students is carefully considered and the return dates for groups are well-spaced to ensure a smooth process.

We are grateful to the Properties and Services and Student Affairs Divisions for the steps they have taken to secure and make available appropriate PPEs to staff and students. This will aid the project of keeping the University of Fort Hare as safe a space as possible.

UFH mourns the loss of a member of staff

Since I last wrote to you, Covid-19 has swept further through the country and our province – in the past three days more than 500 people have died in the Eastern Cape, and health systems everywhere are buckling. Our University community has also been touched in a profound way. Mrs Vele Pule from our Nursing Department died on 16 July 2020. We extend our heartfelt condolences to her family and her colleagues. We are also alive to the fact that members of our University community have been losing close family and friends as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. You are in our thoughts and our hearts during this very difficult time.

Safety first

We remain vulnerable in the face of the pandemic, and have to take the basic precautions as recommended: regularly washing hands, wearing a mask, and keeping proper social distance. These are the strongest defences we have, and are absolutely critical to observe, wherever you are. These behaviours, together with daily online screening, are non-negotiable on campus now that our first cohort of staff and the first groups of students have returned. We need to protect ourselves and each other.

Covid-19 formal reporting procedure

We would like to encourage staff and students who test positive for Covid-19 to make a formal declaration to the University, by contacting our reporting staff at reportcovid@ufh.ac.za, attaching a copy or screenshot of their results. Confidentiality is assured, and staff and students may opt to remain anonymous or have their names made public. Staff members should first report to their line managers. Our Institutional Advancement Division provides a regular update on infections and recoveries, which they make available to the University community.

Teaching and learning support

We are examining and exploring different ways in which to provide support to our students who are studying remotely through online and offline teaching and learning whilst we await the laptops. Currently, our statistics from the University's Blackboard system indicate that the number of average daily users have increased from 10 000 per month in June to more than 15 000 daily users in July.

Our international bandwidth has been increased from 350 megabytes per second to 500 megabytes per second, which will assist students who are able to access online learning and will make downloads faster.

So far, 12966 (81,8%) of students have responded on our system indicating if they require a laptop or not. Of these students, 6401 have indicated they require a laptop, and 5355 indicated that they require a modem. We are keeping close track and will report to the University community as soon as the laptops have been delivered.

We are pleased that 13 241 (83,5%) of students have now provided numbers on which to load data. We encourage students who have not yet done so to update their data.

Student and staff support

For psycho-social support, students are reminded that they should follow the Student Counselling Unit's Facebook page (Student Counselling Unit – Fort Hare University). It is managed by a psychologist on a daily basis. The platform allows for psychologists to participate in live chats and offer one-on-one assistance via private online sessions. Students can also contact Student Counselling Unit (SCU) staff at 043 704 7017 or tmsengana@ufh.ac.za to arrange for tele-counselling. SCU staff will call back students who get in touch in this way.

Staff can access staff support services through our Wellness Unit in Human Resources. Please contact Ms Mandisa Tyanti (mtyanti@ufh.ac.za).

This is a most challenging time, and the Management Executive Committee (MEC) and I appreciate the considerable efforts made by staff – both on-campus and working remotely – in serving the University and meeting the needs of our students during this period.

Sincerely

Professor Sakhela Buhlungu
University of Fort Hare