

Over 60% of students to return to campus

A maximum of 66% of students will be allowed to return to university campuses, in line with the country's shift to Level 2 of the national lockdown.



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Briefing the media on Wednesday on the department's plans for Level 2, Higher Education, Science and Innovation Minister, Dr Blade Nzimande, said the return of students will be done in accordance with Covid-19 management plans to keep students and staff safe, while allowing for greater access to campus teaching and learning for more students.

The categories of students who will be able to return under Level 2 include:

- All groups that had been prioritised to return in Level 3, but couldn't be accommodated 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), and
- First-year students in all undergraduate programmes, will also be allowed to return to their campuses.

Nzimande said all other students will continue to be supported through remote multimodal teaching learning and assessment, until they can return to campus.

The Minister acknowledged that each institution will determine the implementation of these criteria in terms of their own academic programme plans and strategies.

“I am aware that there have been different approaches and strategies for completion across the system, and some institutions have faced difficulties in implementing their teaching and learning plans effectively.

“However, we have been doing everything possible to ensure that we support institutions to respond in the best possible way to the many challenges that have arisen during the pandemic.

“This has included the re-prioritisation of funds to support the Covid-19 response at our public universities,” Nzimande said.

Institutions have been requested to submit updated plans to safely accommodate students and staff.

International students studying at South African universities, who are currently outside the country, will only be able to return to their campuses during Level 1, once international travel resumes.

Nzimande said priority may have to be given to registrars and senior medical students in this category, should international travel be permitted under Level 2.

Risk identified

According to the latest report, 14 universities are deemed to be low risk, six medium risk and six high risk for the spread of Coronavirus.

The 14 universities deemed to be low risk include Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), Nelson Mandela University (NMU), North-West University (NWU), Rhodes University (RU), Sol Plaatje (SPU), University of Cape Town (UCT), University of Johannesburg (UJ), University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), University of Pretoria (UP), University of South Africa (UNISA), Stellenbosch University (SU), University of the Western Cape (UWC), University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) and University of Zululand (UNIZULU).

The six universities deemed to be medium risk include Durban University of Technology (DUT), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), University of Limpopo (UL), University of Mpumalanga (UMP), University of the Free State (UFS) and University of Venda (UNIVEN).

The six universities deemed to be high risk including the Central University of Technology (CUT), Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), Sefako Makgatho University (SMU), University of Fort-Hare (UFH), Vaal University of Technology (VUT) and the Walter Sisulu University (WSU), are deemed to be at high risk.

Nzimande said the department is currently engaging with all medium and high risk institutions identified to secure commitments and actions to lower risks and expedite operational capabilities to ensure the successful completion of the 2020 academic year.

“Special support measures will be put in place to ensure academic activities resume at an accelerated pace at these universities,” Nzimande said.

Academic year to be completed in February 2021

Nzimande said he has met with both the Covid-19 Ministerial Task Team and Vice-Chancellors last week to agree on a fixed period within which all institutions must complete the current academic year and a fixed period of starting dates for the

2021 academic year.

“As it stands, we are targeting all institutions to complete the 2020 academic year by the end of February 2021, with starting dates for the new 2021 academic year ranging from 15 March to 15 April 2021. All efforts will be made to ensure that outlier institutions get up to speed to meet this requirement,” Nzimande said.

The detailed management of the two processes across the system will be communicated by the department once all the necessary consultations have been completed.

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