

Universities to re-open between March and April

Higher education is the latest sector to delay its re-opening dates with 16 universities still finalising their academic year.



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Addressing the media on Monday, Higher Education, Science and Innovation Minister, Dr Blade Nzimande, announced that universities will start the academic year between early-March and mid-April.

The re-opening of higher education institutions is also aligned with the start of the 2021 academic year for first-time entries with the availability of Department of Basic Education National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results, the Minister said.

“I will provide further information on plans for 2021 at a later stage, following engagement with institutions and aligned with the release of the Department of Basic Education NSC examination results,” he added.

Nzimande said it was critical to ensure that the necessary health and safety protocols are in place for the registration period at universities and this will require clear and timeous communication with returning and new students.

Meanwhile, he said significant efforts have been made across all institutions to ensure that a fair opportunity has been

provided to all students to complete the 2020 academic year.

“This has included an inevitable extended period into the 2021 calendar year for the majority of institutions.”

In addition, the department has provided support to institutions through the re-prioritisation of funds into a Covid Responsiveness Grant.

This grant supported universities to implement multimodal teaching and learning plans and campus safety plans.

“As a department, we are continuing to monitor institutions to keep track of academic and health and safety matters.”

He applauded all academic staff and management teams of universities who put in additional efforts to support the necessary changes to the academic year.

“I also commend the many students in the system who have pushed hard to complete their studies, sometimes in very difficult conditions.”

Finalising academic year

While many institutions have completed the formal teaching programmes for the academic year, Nzimande said some are still finishing academic programmes and providing catch-up opportunities for students.

“In some institutions, assessments and practicals are still to be completed in some programmes, and in other supplementary examinations are underway.”

He said 10 institutions have already completed all teaching and learning activities, including the examinations in 2020, finalising special examinations, and some practical assessments.

The remaining 16 will wrap up the academic year at different times and forms, depending on their own academic timetables, and utilising a variety of methods to support students to complete.

Nzimande urged all institutions to continue to communicate their detailed programmes with all their stakeholders, particularly with students, prospective students, parents and employees.

“I am confident that with the support of all stakeholders we should successfully complete the academic year by the end of February for the vast majority of institutions and by March for all institutions.”

In addition, students who can continue studying from home are requested to carry on.

“However, many students who have to complete their academic programmes and have difficulty doing so away from campus have returned.”

He pleaded with all students and staff to continue staying safe to reduce the spread of the virus and abide by the necessary protocols at university campuses and in residences to ensure that they remain safe during this challenging time.

NSFAS students

National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) beneficiaries continued to receive their funding during the academic year, which provides vital support to many students.

“Although the available funding at NSFAS is severely constrained, we will continue to provide living allowances to those students who qualify for the period of the extended academic year.”

Meanwhile, the national framework on tuition and accommodation fees has ensured that additional costs for students have been kept to a minimum.

CET colleges

Teaching and learning at Community Education and Training Colleges (CET colleges) will now take place on 15 February 2021, when the schools open their gates again.

“Given the changes from DBE, as a department, we will provide the CET colleges with a revised academic calendar after consulting the revisions in the DBE’s calendar.”

The Minister also announced that the National Treasury has approved R45.7 million to be transferred to CET colleges during the 2021/22 financial year as an earmarked allocation for cleaning services.

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