



**19 May 2020**

## **UCT will follow a four-phase approach to students' return to campus**

Three groups of students – final-year medical students, academically vulnerable students and those needing to access campus labs to complete their 2020 studies – will be the first to return to campus in a phased process. This was announced by Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Transformation and Student Affairs, Professor Loretta Feris during a special online special assembly hosted by Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng on Thursday, 14 May.

In line with the government's COVID-19 guidelines, UCT will follow a principled, four-phase approach to students' return to campus, Professor Feris said. This will consider current state regulations governing health and safety; risk management; and equity and fairness.

### **Three-pronged, principled approach**

Elaborating on the approach UCT would adopt to pave the way for students to return, Professor Feris said that, first and foremost, health and safety were paramount.

"For instance, we need to ensure we can continue practising social distancing, which means that we can't use all the beds in residences. We also need to have screening and personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff and students to return under sanitary conditions. The medical students will need to have a period of quarantine.

"All of these are necessary measures to ensure the health and safety of all us. This is why it is important to emphasise that we have a collective and shared responsibility to ensure we contain and manage the spread of the virus together."

Second, it is critical that UCT follows the current regulatory framework that is part of the national State of Disaster management mechanism.

"In this we depend on the national- provincial- and local- or district-level directives that balance the health risk with the risk of the university opening," Professor Feris added.

Third, all decisions regarding the phased return would be underpinned by equity and fairness, taking into account the deepening of inequality as a result of COVID-19.

The return of students is being planned as follows:

- Phase 1: final-year medical students
- Phase 2: vulnerable students
- Phase 3: students who need to be on campus to complete the academic year
- Phase 4: the return of all other students to campus (circumstances permitting).

### **Medical students**

Two weeks ago, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology Dr Blade Nzimande indicated that final-year medical students needed to return to campus to access clinical platforms and complete their academic year. Conversations are ongoing about the return of other final-year Faculty of Health Sciences students, said Feris.

While the faculty has worked on a realignment of the academic programme and negotiated with Groote Schuur Hospital about the return of students to clinical platforms, the Department of Student Affairs has worked on a plan for the return of these students to residences.

“The Department of Student Affairs has identified the residences we can use. They have also put a screening protocol in place, PPEs have been procured and an appropriate staffing plan is in place and will be consulted on with labour unions.”

### **Vulnerable students**

The second group are those students who the university believes are vulnerable, based on their ability to learn remotely under current conditions, among other considerations.

Once the national regulatory framework permits UCT to do so, the intention is to return these students to residence – not for face-to-face learning, but to continue remote learning in residence, with tutorial support.

“But we need to identify these students,” Professor Feris added. “We need to understand what vulnerability means in reference not only to a student’s ability to learn remotely because of issues such as connectivity, but also because of their socio-economic circumstances. A small task team that includes colleagues in the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching is busy developing these criteria. This is ongoing.”

The third group of students who will return to campus are those that may not be able to complete their academic year without being on campus, with access to laboratories and studios.

“Guided by the revised academic calendar, we’re working to understand who these students are, and what their numbers are, so that we can develop a plan to accommodate them,” Professor Feris noted.

“Finally, we hope that all other students will also be able to return to campus, but we will be guided by the national directives in this regard.”

***ENDS***

***Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department***

**Nombuso Shabalala**

Head: Media Liaison  
Communication and Marketing Department  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch

Tel: (021) 650 4190  
Cell: (076) 473 5882  
Email: [nombuso.shabalala@uct.ac.za](mailto:nombuso.shabalala@uct.ac.za)  
Website: [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)