

Q&A

**ON MEASURES TO PHASE OUT
THE LOCKDOWN AND PHASE IN
STRATEGIC FUNCTIONS IN
THE PSET SECTOR**



#SaveLives

#SaveTheAcademicYear



higher education
& training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



1. When did PSET institutions go on recess?

The Department placed all post-school educational institutions on early recess on 15 March 2020, effectively suspending academic activity from the moment the President declared the COVID-19 pandemic a national disaster.

2. Now that we're at Level 4 of the lockdown period, what does it mean for the PSET sector?

The Department has decided not to resume with campus-based academic activity throughout the PSET sector, including all universities, CET and TVET colleges - both public and private - during this level of the lockdown. The PSET sector's collective effort during this period from 1 May 2020 remains that of putting appropriate remote learning support systems in place, while preparing all institutions for the eventual return of students and staff, once conditions permit. The only exception will be the controlled return of final year Clinical Training (medical and related disciplines) students, under strict conditions, to also directly assist with the health management campaign of the Department of Health. Any plans to reopen universities for contact learning over the coming months will be calibrated within national COVID-19 health and safety parameters, considering issues of physical distancing, biosafety and other risks.

Students are therefore requested to stay-home during this period. Further communication in respect to returning to campus and residents shall be communicated by the Department and respective institutions.

3. What informs measures implemented in the PSET sector in response to COVID-19?

The sector's response and measures find context in the national COVID-19 measures announced by the National Command Council on 29 April 2020. All the measures follow the logic of the national COVID-19 risk adjusted strategy.

Whatever we do in the PSET sector, our responsibility is to lower the infection curve and then save the 2020 academic year but not at the expense of the first consideration. We have therefore adopted the theme **#SaveTheAcademicYear #SaveLives**.

4. What do all the measures mean for the universities 2020 academic year?

The universities' 2020 academic year will be reorganised to enable students to complete academic requirements, with the prospects of extending into early 2021 depending on the epidemiology and impact of the pandemic. The completion of the university 2020 academic year and the start of academic year 2021 will be aligned with the plans of the Department of Basic Education in terms of the completion cycle of the National Senior Certificate exams, and the release of the results.

5. How do you ensure that the PSET sector has feasible strategies to respond to COVID-19?

Given that there is a national framework in place, each university will put plans in place to ensure its specific programmes, resources, and capacity are adequate to offer various forms of remote and flexible learning from 1 June 2020 until a full return to contact teaching and learning is feasible. Institutions will continue to offer training and support to academic staff and students in respect of the necessary technologies and mechanisms required to support teaching and learning.

6. What are the challenges that confront the PSET sector in implementing its strategy?

The essence of our challenge as we implement measures directed at COVID-19 can be summed up as ***“We are constrained by the very same challenges we seek to address; poverty, inequality and unemployment”***. As a Department, like the rest of our country, we have entered uncharted territory and we will draw on our long history of the struggle against these triple ills as we address this unprecedented challenge. The Department and the entire sector will ensure that there is ***“no student left behind”***. This commitment includes poor students from working-class backgrounds, regardless of how far removed they might be from urban centres, and students living with disabilities.

7. What does the phrase 'no student or institution will be left behind' mean?

The Department is advocating for the implementation of effective multi-modal, augmented remote learning systems (digital, analogue and physical delivery of learning materials) to provide a reasonable level of academic support to all students during the COVID-19 lockdown paradigm. As we are in an unprecedented emergency, all available tools and blended methods will be used to support effective learning and teaching, however, we are mindful of the fact that these efforts will not substitute contact learning when conditions permit. Institutions are developing supporting measures to cater for all the categories of students regardless of the level or year of study. This means there is a differentiated approach.

8. Please explain the concept 'multiple and flexible methods of teaching and learning'.

Within the national framework currently in place, each university will be putting plans in place to ensure that each specific study programme, resources and capacity (both human and infrastructure) are adequate to offer various forms of remote and flexible learning from the beginning of June 2020 until a full return to contact teaching and learning.

Our institutions will continue to offer training and support to academic staff and students in respect of the necessary technologies and mechanisms required to support teaching and learning.

9. As one of the components of teaching and learning, how will the Department ensure that it supports remote learning?

The Department is working to secure a universal access deal with the major Mobile Network Operators around data and connectivity to support remote learning. Plans are afoot to provide students with instructional materials in areas where there are no immediate digital means.

We are finalising the plans for the procurement and distribution of laptops for all NSFAS students. All students are encouraged to register their correct cellphone numbers with their institutions so there will be seamless migration when the educational rate for data is determined at the conclusion of the negotiation with Mobile Network Operators.

10. Are all the measures and interventions going to have an impact on the quality assurance of qualifications?

The Department is working seamlessly with all education quality assurance bodies in South Africa. It must be noted that all the COVID-19 measures will not temper or affect the quality of qualifications offered by all our PSET institutions. The measures have only affected the methodology of offering programmes by institutions, to what is known as “augmented” learning using multi-learning methodologies.

11. Are there plans to support other students and institutions who might be in distress?

There are interventions implemented by institutions to assist students who are not NSFAS beneficiaries. Students are encouraged to contact their institutions and sponsors that support their studies financially for institutional-based or sponsor-based support. Broadly, the Department will ensure that it secures possible relief/stimulus/emergency funding for all public institutions in distress. Historically Disadvantaged Institutions that already demonstrate shortage of financial capacity will be prioritised throughout the processes of securing added financial support.

12. Will NSFAS continue with students' financial disbursements?

NSFAS funding for all students will continue throughout the 2020 academic year regardless of the COVID-19 Government regulations and conditions. Given that all universities have already disbursed learning material allowances to their NSFAS-supported students, students who have not utilised the allowances are encouraged to buy appropriate electronic learning devices.

13. What other pressures are being brought on the PSET sector by the COVID-19 virus?

The DHET is aware that the COVID-19 pandemic has created new significant financial pressure on universities and colleges. One such aspect is the stalled infrastructure projects on our various campuses, including student residences. Government has since made provision for controlled relaxation of some regulations to enable stalled infrastructure projects to resume in May 2020, subject to adherence to strict health protocols. Universities and colleges have been urged to negotiate reduced liability terms with contractors.

14. What about the 2020 academic year for TVET students?

The 2020 academic year for TVET students will be restructured in line with the continuity of the lockdown under Level Four national protocols. This will therefore affect the restructuring of TVET Colleges national examinations for the trimester, semester and full-year programmes. TVET colleges will reorganise their academic year to enable students to complete trimesters 1 and 2 for Engineering Studies, both semesters for Business Studies, and the full-year NC(V) programmes. Trimester 3, which was initially planned to take place from August to November 2020, will be deferred to a date to be determined after consultation with stakeholders. This is to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the exams. A calendar detailing the commencement and end of classes, the examination sessions, as well as the short recess period will be released in due course.

15. How will TVET students be supported as most do not have devices, data, or network infrastructure?

The DHET is exploring various options while working on acquiring devices for all NSFAS students. Students have been encouraged to continue studying from their textbooks as this will offer them a fair chance to pass exams. Radio and TV broadcasts have begun in key subjects, and are in the process of being expanded, and will continue for six months. The use of e-Guides, past question papers, and uploaded YouTube videos, is strongly advised. Students are also supported through text messages and WhatsApp groups set up by lecturers. Find more info on the resources to catch up on lessons on www.dhet.gov.za

16. What plans are there for the Community Education and Training Colleges?

The resumption of teaching and learning in the CET sector will be staggered in accordance with the revised DBE academic calendar. Priority will be given to students doing the General Education and Training Certificate: Adult Basic Education and Training (GETC: ABET) and the Senior Certificate in preparation for the October/November 2020 examinations. The lower level classes, (AET 1-3) will resume on a later date aligned to the phasing in of grades in the school system. The writing of CET May/June General Education and Training Certificate: Adult Basic Education and Training examinations which were to commence on 20 May 2020 will take place at the end of the year. To recoup the number of days lost during the lockdown, the number of CET college holidays will be reduced for June and September 2020. The revised calendar will be issued in due course. Minister Nzimande is appealing to faith-based organisations, churches, traditional leaders, NGOs and community leaders to be open to engagements with the Department and CET colleges on the utilisation of infrastructure for CET tuition and exams.

17. What are plans for Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs)?

SETAs, working with social partners, will ensure that during the months of May and June, learners will return to the workplaces and training institutions in line with Level 4 guidelines. Minister Nzimande has extended the due date for the submission of the Workplace Skills Plans (“WSP”) Annual Training Reports (“ATR”) by the employers which are submitted on 30 April every year to 31 May 2020 in the light of the lockdown.

18. What about SETA stipends?

All Sector Education and Training Authorities will continue with the payment of learner stipends during the lockdown period.

19. What about INDLELA trade tests?

INDLELA, where trade tests are conducted, will curb the risk of infection to everyone entering their premises by strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols and requirements.

20. What about the National Skills Fund plans?

The National Skills Fund will be engaging the public and private Skills Development Providers on the dates and modalities of resuming learning as soon as such decisions are made.

21. What health preparation work is being done before students return to regular campus life?

The Department, in partnership with HIGHER HEALTH, is working to ensure that all required healthy preparations are made. All our PSET institutions will be deep cleaned in accordance with biosafety protocols to ensure readiness for eventual return of students and staff.

22. What should students and lecturers expect upon their eventual return to campus?

When students return to campuses, health and hygiene protocols will be in place for the maintenance of physical distance, access to hand sanitisers and protective masks, and continual deep cleaning of facilities. Reopening will entail the 360° screening/testing of staff and students, with environmental cleaning of campuses and residences. The Department will also identify sites for quarantine facilities in or near our institutions should these be required. Students and staff will also be given the necessary psychosocial support. Higher Health, which is supported by the Department of Health, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, USAf, SACPO and other organisations, have developed a comprehensive set of PSET guidelines on managing COVID-19 post the lockdown.

23. Is there a training plan for frontline workers?

Trade union Nehawu made a request and the DHET together with the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) and the Health and Welfare (HW) and the Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) SETAs are developing concrete plans on the training of various categories of frontline workers, particularly those working in the health facilities and other industries, as part of the COVID-19 awareness campaign. Funding has been set aside for the training of 17 750 frontline health workers, the leadership and membership of trade unions, shop stewards and other workers who are dealing with Occupational Health and Safety within the context of the pandemic. Together with the Department of Social Development, 1210 unemployed social workers will be recruited and placed on a 12-month internship to work with communities to tackle social distress and other psycho-social challenges.