



University of Fort Hare

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATION

PROF SAKHELA BUHLUNGU
VICE-CHANCELLOR and PRINCIPAL



University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

7 April 2020

Dear Staff and Students

RECONNECTING DURING THE NATIONAL LOCKDOWN PERIOD

The last twelve days have seen a major change in the way in which our world functions. Thoughts about how our staff and our students are adapting to these profound changes have been uppermost in our minds. We know you are out there and we hope you are keeping well and keeping safe since the national lockdown has commenced on 27 March 2020. It is not just the disruption to the normal University model and anxiety about completing the academic programme that have upended the world as we know it, but there is also the need to come to terms with the threat posed by COVID-19 and concerns for all you hold dear. You are therefore in our thoughts and our planning efforts are focused on making this period as tolerable as possible.

Our ICT Division has arranged zero-rated data for specific university sites through most of the major providers. Our academic staff have rallied together and have made a tremendous effort to make learning materials and resources available through Blackboard and other digital platforms. We want students to engage with these materials as much as they can, but we are very much aware of key challenges with devices and connectivity. To that effect, you would have received communication from Dr Chris Johl with a survey in relation to connectivity. Please take the time to fill this out if possible.

We would have liked to give you more clarity about when the University will reopen, but we are still in national discussions with colleagues from other universities through Universities South Africa (Usaf) as well as with the Department of Higher Education and Training. We are also closely monitoring the national situation and any updates from the Presidency. We are looking at different approaches, and may have to reconfigure the 2020 academic year. Guiding our approach will be the principle of fairness and the need to act in interest of all our students, as we are aware of sharp differences in circumstances.

Your safety and well-being are most important to us now. Please engage with your academic work as far as possible and take any pro-active steps that you can to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in order to flatten the curve.

I also wish to take this opportunity to commend staff at all levels of the institution. Security and maintenance staff have been holding the fort by rendering essential service while the rest of us are operating from our homes. Administrative and support service staff have been working in conditions that are less than ideal to ensure that operations of the University are maintained. Academic staff have risen to the occasion by ensuring that teaching and learning is rendered through online platforms. Staff at all management levels continue to co-ordinate and manage the affairs of our great institution using various modes of information technology.

I urge you to keep yourselves informed about developments and various forms of communication by the President, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation and other government officials.

Sincerely
Professor Sakhela Buhlungu
Vice-Chancellor and Principal