

## **MESSAGE FROM THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE TEAM**

Dear Colleagues

We live through uncertain times and the full impact of COVID-19 on our country and our campus, will only be felt in the days ahead. These are extraordinary times, requiring extraordinary measures that require our commitment to work together in order to ensure our collective interest and safety.

The Senior Executive Team (SET) met today and discussed the working conditions of staff over the next ten days (20 March – 30 March 2020). The SET determined that:

- essential staff are required to come into the office,
- academic, professional and administrative staff are required to work from home where possible, and
- due to the nature of the work that they do, recognise that some staff may be unable to work during this period.

**The SET also clarified the following questions received from staff.**

### **Q. Is the University closed?**

A. No. The University is not closed – the mid-term recess has been brought forward and runs until 30 March 2020. We are responding to a national public health challenge, and we must continue to work, albeit from a different location where possible. The reason for the closure is not to stop work, but to ensure that we have the least number of people congregating in one place as possible.

### **Q. What happens from 30 March 2020? Why is this date not aligned to the announcement made by the Minister of Higher Education and Training?**

A. The University is currently in recess until 30 March 2020. The precise opening date and the form in which we open is dependent on the evolution of the pandemic, engagement with others in the sector, and the preparations for the academic programme to be delivered online. We will communicate with staff and students within next week around the precise opening date, and the form in which we open. For now, notwithstanding communication from other parties, the University is officially in recess until 30 March 2020.

### **Q. Who needs to report for work in person?**

A. All essential staff are required to report for work as required by your respective line manager and/or SET member in order for essential services to continue (like payroll functions) and to prepare to take the academic programme online next term.

### **Q. Who are essential staff?**

A. A list of essential staff has been developed by managers and has been shared with SET members. The SET members will share these lists with the relevant Heads of Schools and line managers who will communicate directly with those staff members required to come onto campus, and those required to work from home. If staff members are requested to come onto campus by their line managers, they should heed these instructions. If staff do not adhere, the normal employee relations processes will apply. Academic staff members are required to

continue working from home.

**Q. Should I work from home?**

A. Yes. The University is not closed and this is not a paid holiday. Anyone who is able to work from home, is encouraged to do so as per the agreement with your line manager and the relevant SET member.

**Q. I am an academic. Should I come in?**

A. Academics are required to work on preparations for the second term from home and to plan for the academic programme to go online if required in the second term. Researchers who have time-based or sensitive experiments or the like can come in but must understand that there will not be any cleaning, catering and other support services available.

**Q. Are staff required to apply for leave?**

A. Not yet. However, all managers are required to keep a roster of all those who come into the office and to record evidence of the work that their staff undertake from home. All matters related to leave and working conditions during this period will be addressed by our Finance, Human Resources and Legal Divisions, in consultation with unions and other stakeholders, and with the approval of Council.

**Q. I have applied for leave. How will it be affected?**

A. The leave remains and will not be impacted in any way.

**Q. Will I be paid at the end of March 2020?**

A. Yes. You will be paid on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. Stipends and associated claims will also be processed. Thank you to those who will come in to make this happen.

**Q. What happens to administrative services at Wits University?**

A. All administrative services within the University will resume from 30 March 2020, in a form still to be determined. All administrative deadlines due in the next ten days will be extended into April, or as appropriate.

**Q. What technology can we use to work from home?**

A. Look out for a communique from Wits ICT tomorrow on the relevant systems available to staff and students including learning management systems, Microsoft Office 365 (Teams is useful), Wits' virtual private network and the online meeting technology available to staff and students.

**CONCLUSION**

We are living through a difficult time and we are doing all that we can to keep members of the Wits community and our society as safe as possible. We have an opportunity to be part of this collective project, to give of ourselves during this time of need, to bridge the divides that keep us apart, and to come together as a community to beat this pandemic. Let's all play our part.

**SENIOR EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**19 MARCH 2020 (17:00)**

