

MESSAGE FROM THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE TEAM

Dear Colleagues and Students

Following the announcement by the President of a national lockdown from midnight on Thursday, 26 March 2020, for three weeks, we all need to follow the directive of the President and take responsibility to stop the spread of the coronavirus. Despite the lockdown only coming into effect on Thursday, we still urge staff members to work from home as far as possible. Staff should **only go into the office under exceptional circumstances**. Once the lockdown is in effect, line managers will inform essential staff directly if they need to be at work and will provide them with a requisite letter in case they are stopped by authorities.

All students have left the residences aside from those who have made special arrangements with the Dean of Student Affairs (including senior medical students). The precise date on which the University will reopen and the format in which the academic programme will commence, will be announced later this week. Faculties will communicate with students as the academic programme transitions online.

Many staff members and students have also requested to know more about the technology and software available to enable them to work from home. We hope that this Q&A will assist you in working remotely from your mobile device.

Q. What software is available for staff and students?

A. The following software systems are available to staff and students:

1. [Wits-e](#), also known as Sakai, is the official learning management system (LMS) at Wits University. This platform can be used to create virtual classrooms, to post lecture notes and reading lists, and to upload podcasts and videos. It can also be used to collaborate online with students in a particular class or group, and can be used to accept assignments and manage assessments.
2. All students and staff have access to [Microsoft Teams](#), which is ideal for conducting and recording online lectures, and which can also be used for online staff meetings. [Learn more](#) about how you can have online team meetings and make calls, etc. Wits ICT has created [videos to assist staff](#) to host and record online lectures. To access all the Office 365 tools from home [click here](#). This includes Word, Outlook, Excel, Teams and more. You will need to log in using your [StaffNo@wits.ac.za](#) and your normal password.
3. The third platform, Canvas, is used for fully online courses.
4. Moodle is also used in a few schools.

Q. What if I do not have access to data?

A. Vodacom and Telkom have zero-rated Microsoft Teams in order for staff and students to access it free of charge. Vodacom, MTN and Telkom have also [zero-rated other Wits sites](#).

Q: What other support is available?

A: The Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development (CLTD) team is developing support material to help academics create meaningful online learning interactions. These resources will be shared in the "Dealing with Disruption" [site on Wits-e](#). Academics can [enrol](#) themselves onto this project site. There are also faculty specific sites such as the "CLM Rapid Online Teaching Toolkit". Please enquire with your respective Faculty Teaching and Learning Units on what specialised resources are available. The [Microsoft educator community](#) has many useful lessons and guides. Please sign-up to the community using your Wits credentials.

Q: How do I access SIMS and the iWits suite?

Staff members can access [SIMS and iWits](#) remotely, but must install a link to Wits' Virtual Private Network (VPN).

Q. What is a VPN? Why do I need it? How can I access it?

A: Wits' Virtual Private Network (VPN) allows staff and students to access private e-resources at Wits, which would otherwise not be accessible via commercial internet connections from their homes or mobile networks. To install the VPN, [click here](#). Select the appropriate operating system for your computer or device to download a *.zip file* containing an installation package, as well as instructions.

Q: How do staff access email and the Intranet?

A: Staff can access these via the [staff ICT resources section](#) on the main Wits website. Use your normal login credentials. Please note that access to the Intranet requires a VPN.

Q. Who can I call for support?

A: The Wits ICT helpdesk is available via ithelp@wits.ac.za. You can also call the helpdesk on (011) 717 1717 or log a ticket online via [Wits ITSM](#). Both staff and students can email the wits-e@wits.ac.za for help with wits-e.

Conclusion

Deans will be stewarding the transition to online teaching and learning in their respective faculties in the coming days. We understand that some staff and students may have anxiety whilst transitioning online. Wits ICT, CLTD and faculty staff will also be available to assist staff and students where required, albeit remotely. More details will follow later this week.

Keep safe.

SENIOR EXECUTIVE TEAM
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