

Feedback: Special Departmental Bargaining Chamber (DBC)

Guidelines for return to work and to TVET Colleges

Members are aware that the President placed the country back onto lockdown level 3 on 28 December 2020. The adjustment in the lockdown level necessitated discussions with the employer on how TVET Colleges will start with the academic year. This resulted in the approval of the *attached* circular.

Members must please familiarise themselves with the Circular in terms of which Colleges will be individually assessed to determine their readiness and whether the College can open and remain open. Only 50% of employees and students will be allowed to return to the campus at any given time. Members are requested to monitor compliance with all COVID-19 regulations and report any transgressions to the College Steering Committee. The PSA demanded that labour representatives at the respective Steering Committee meetings co-sign reports to which the employer agreed. These reports will be escalated to the national negotiator to ensure that Colleges are adhering to the regulations and making decisions in the best interest of staff, the College and students.

Members will be informed of developments.

The PSA wants to take this opportunity to wish all employees who are unwell owing to COVID-19 a safe and speedy recovery.

GENERAL MANAGER

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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TVET LETTERED CIRCULAR: ME

DATE: 17 January 2021

**RE: GUIDELINES FOR THE RETURN TO WORK AND TO TVET COLLEGES BY
TVET COLLEGE STAFF (LECTURERS) AND STUDENTS RESPECTIVELY.**

TO: Principals (*Distribution of Circular by Office of DDG: T*)

Deputy Principals (*Distribution by Principals*)

Middle Managers (*Distribution by Principals*)

CC: Regional Managers (*Distribution by Office of DDG: T*)

Acting TVET Regional Directors (*Distribution by Regional Managers*)

TVET College Councils (*Distribution by Principals*)

Dear Colleagues

On 28 December 2020, the Honourable President, Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa announced that due the resurgence of Covid-19 and declaring that the country is in a second wave of the pandemic, the country had- to be placed in adjusted Alert Level 3 of the Disaster Management Act. The Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal and Free State Provinces were declared as being high risk areas/ hot spots.

The high rising infection and death rates necessitates a relook at the return-to-work (RTW) of TVET college staff members and return-to-college (RTC) for physical teaching and learning of students. The Department is increasingly receiving enquiries as to which regulations and procedures need to be followed by TVET colleges in managing the RTW and RTC, and concerns about the impact of the new variant of Covid-19 on both staff members and students. Similarly, the SACPO Office Bearers also received such enquiries and concerns. Discussions ensued and a small team of four comprising of two DHET representatives and two SACPO (Representatives) set out to develop a discussion document in preparation for a bigger meeting between the Department (including Regional Management) and SACPO Executive Committee / Office Bearers.

The Covid-19 regulations of Alert Level 3 captured as “Mandatory protocols when in public place” in the Government Notice 44066 from section 34 imply that:

- Wearing of Face Masks by all persons is compulsory;
- An employer may not allow any employee to perform any duties or enter the employment premises if the employee is not wearing a face mask while performing his or her duties;
- Strict adherence to social distancing; and
- Monitoring of compliance to all Covid-19 regulations at all times.

A joint meeting between the Acting DDG: T, Regional Managers and SACPO Office Bearers representative was held on 13 January 2021 to discuss the initial draft document on the RTW and RTC. SACPO conducted consultation with Principals on 14 January 2021 while some Regions did the same also on 14 January 2021. Further consultation was done in the GPSSBC and ELRC FETC Bargaining Units on 15 January 2021.

Feedback from consultations with Principals indicated support for the principles and guidelines. The labour unions in the GPSSBC FETCBU supported the principles and guidelines, in principle but prefers the RTW and RTC be delayed and to rather follow the Department of Basic Education approach of delaying reopening until 15 February 2021. On the other hand, the ELRC FETCBU supported the principles and guidelines and the approach to reopen as per the approved 2021 academic calendar with a proviso that regular meetings will be held for reporting on monitoring the progress of the implementation of the principles and guidelines.

The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) issued the Circular 1 of 2021 that speaks to remote working arrangements; administrative controls; leave management; resources required for remote working; security and confidentiality; and performance management (*see attached Circular*). While the TVET college lecturers are mainly providing

education services, they are also employed in terms of the Public Service Act and the principles in the DPSA Circular 1 of 2021 will equally apply to them.

RTW and RTC considerations in relation to Covid-19 Regulations

The following were noted, acknowledged and confirmed:

- The importance of TVET Colleges complying with all the regulations of Alert Level 3;
- This is a critical stage for the TVET College sector since the reopening for the new academic year implies new admissions and registrations which if missed, would have dire financial consequences for the TVET colleges;
- There are different views on how to approach the RTW and RTC viz:
 - ✓ The TVET Branch thinking of a possibility to forgo Report 191 Natural Science studies Trimester 1 and manage a delay in the RTC of NC(V) and Report 191 Business and Utility studies.
 - ✓ SACPO got opposing views from members that some would prefer a delayed RTC to avoid high infection rates while others are cognisant of the possible negative impact on the Colleges' finances if the RTC is delayed. The different views were also as per different locations identified as hotspot of their Campuses/Colleges Location.
- The importance of not tampering much with the approved academic calendar for the year because while there is a resurgence and faster infection rates of the disease and increasing death rates, the TVET Colleges are now familiar with the pandemic and thus had an opportunity to prepare for the RTW and RTC by way of online applications and possibly online registrations which will lessen voluminous walk-in and physical application and registration processes;
- As the approved calendar is implemented as is, colleges should be allowed to deviate in special and extraordinary circumstances but must do so in consultation with the Regional Managers' consideration and approval;
- The fact that not all TVET Colleges are on the same level to see through seamless registrations of students;
- The key three cycles viz, Registrations; Teaching and Learning ; and Examinations should at best all be honoured with minimal disruptions;
- The extended/adjusted 2020 academic year necessitated some form of staggered registrations and RTC as also acknowledged by and in the approved 2021 academic year calendar;
- While attendance during Level 3 is at 33% to allow for maximum compliance with the social distancing regulation which have to be carefully managed for maximum benefit of teaching and learning processes, Colleges have a potential to accommodate attendance of warm bodies up to 50% per site of learning;
- While considering a safe RTW and RTC, it is important to balance between saving the academic year and prioritising saving lives;

- The TVET college sector is dynamic. It is therefore imperative to align attendance percentages to programmes as not doing so, might lead to the syllabi not completed in time and students not being adequately prepared for examinations;
- While remote teaching and learning will be could be emphasised, it should be understood that not all colleges are equally capacitated to run remote teaching and learning successfully;
- A big disruptor to successful teaching and learning is the staff (lecturers) with comorbidities who might have to work from home and not be able to provide teaching to students especially where and when a college is unable to provide tools for remote working thus leaving students without lecturers;
- The need to follow all requirements like resuscitating Covid-19 Steering Committees with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders;
- College Management and Governance be afforded flexibility to manage the RTW and RTC based on the unique dynamics of each College; and
- The Department should provide colleges with principles and guidelines, and not prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach, as long as colleges follow and comply with all basic and nationally determined regulations.

Principles to follow to ensure safe RTW and RTC

1. The approved calendar not to be officially amended at this stage in exception of an extraordinary need to reschedule examinations and staggering RTC in unavoidable circumstances.
2. Where Colleges deviate from the approved Calendar, it should be done in consultation with Regional Managers.
3. The Registration cycle(s) be carried out meticulously such that no College loses an opportunity to register to full capacity even if done in a staggered way.
4. Two weeks of physical registration be allowed especially for Colleges that do not have facilities and capabilities of online registration in order to complete registrations in a staggered way.
5. Lecturers are to return to work in line with the approved calendar but this has to be managed in line with the Alert Level 3 regulations.
6. RTC should be conducted in line with programmes and student cohorts.
7. A maximum number of people (both students and staff) present at a College/ Campus at any given time during the Alert Level 3 period, must not exceed 50% in line with the Alert Level 3 regulations and the DPSA Circular 1 of 2021.
8. Priority must be given to the successful roll out of the Trimester 1 of the Report 191 Natural Sciences Studies.

9. Where a Campus offers a combination of Report 191 Natural Sciences Studies and NCV, the NCV L2 – L4 physical teaching and learning be delayed but emphasis be placed on remote teaching and learning to allow Trimester 1 students on site.
10. Where a Campus specialises with either NCV or Report 191 Business and Utility Studies, the approved Calendar must be followed as is.
11. Very clear and definite teaching and learning plans be developed and implemented meticulously to avoid any additional costs that might be caused by catch-up programmes.
12. Report 191 Business and Utility Studies N5 and N6 to commence with classes on 25 January 2021 while N4 will commence on 8 February 2021.
13. Report 191 Natural Science Studies N1 commence with classes on 25 January 2021 but due to the extended 2020 academic year , N5 and N6 will commence with classes on 8 February 2021.
14. Report 191 Natural Science Studies N2, N3 and N4 commence with registration on 4 February 2021 due to the extended 2020 academic year, the commencement of classes will be on 8 February 2021.
15. NCV L2 commences with classes on 01 February 2021.
16. NCV L3 and L4 to commence with registration on 4 February 2021 due to the extended 2020 academic year, with the commencement of classes on 15 February 2021.
17. College plans need to be aligned to the current situation while minimal disruptions are allowed because colleges are now familiar with the implementation of Covid-19 protocols and regulations.
18. Emphasis and support to be placed on remote teaching and learning such that no teaching and learning time is wasted, unless in the most extreme scenario, the country might find itself at some stage in a hard lockdown (alert level 4 or level 5).
19. Regular reporting on the implementation of the guidelines and any incidents relating to the impact of Covid-19 must be done and forwarded to the Department. All the reports must be ratified by the Covid-19 Steering Committees.

For any further clarity, please do not hesitate to contact Mr SL Sethusha on 012 312 5046/ 5756 / 072 137 4416 or by e-mail at Sethusha.s@dhet.gov.za. We look forward to your support during this challenging time, and be assured of the Department's appreciation of your efforts and commitment.

Yours sincerely



Ms A Singh
Acting Deputy Director-General: TVET
Date: 17 January 2021

