



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Department of Residence Affairs and Accommodation

COVID-19 UPDATE

17 July 2020

The Department of Residence Affairs and Accommodation is acutely aware of the financial challenges facing students and parents as a result of COVID-19. We are closely monitoring all developments. At this stage, the safety of students and staff is our priority, and we are currently doing everything we can to ensure their safe return to campus and residence within the permutations of the prevailing lockdown regulations.

Our University is a large and complex institution and re-operationalising the University is no mean feat. It is anticipated that the 2020 academic year may continue into the 2021 calendar year, but it is too early to say exactly what the details in this regard are. It will depend in the largest measure on the behaviour of the pandemic and government's decisions regarding the easing or escalation of the lockdown measures. In the meantime, we will continue the provision of online classes and additional support to our students. Naturally, this has brought its own challenges, including incurring significant additional expenses across the institution.

As far as student housing is concerned, each institution is trying its best to navigate this unknown territory. At the University of Pretoria we provide residence accommodation to approximately 10 000 students. Some of this accommodation is leased from private landlords. In spite of the students not being present in the residences, the University has had to continue paying fixed overheads such as rent for leased properties, as well as full salaries and benefits to staff, including security personnel, cleaning and kitchen staff, maintenance officials, residence heads, back office professionals etcetera. We have also channelled funds to additional psychological and tutoring support for our students, both residence and day students, to help them cope.

While fixed overheads have continued, any savings we have been able to accrue in terms of the variable residence operating expenses have had to be diverted to unforeseen COVID-19 related expenses such as deep cleaning, the procurement of personal protective gear for staff, additional hygiene requirements, equipping quarantine facilities, efforts to courier resident students' electronic devices and learning materials to them across the country, etcetera.

The anticipated extension of the academic year will also mean that the residence year will be extended. The costs that will be incurred in this regard will be offset against the periods for which students were not in residence. Exact details in this regard are as yet unknown. Given this context, it is too early for the Department of Residence Affairs and Accommodation to establish what the full financial impact of these interventions will be on our residence budget and thus on each individual student's residence account for 2020.

In terms of accommodation fees we normally follow to the principle of students paying for what they get and we have every intention of passing on the savings of 2020 to our resident students. Given the uncertainties of exact amounts, we have only offered an across the board extension of the schedule

for the payment of fees at this stage. Please be assured that we will work out the individual student accounts and viable relief and rebates in due course.

In terms of meal fees, residence students also pay for what they actually use. They are required to load credits onto their meal cards before being able to access meals in the dining hall. The residence dining halls were closed for an extended period during the lockdown and students have not been charged for any meals. Residence students also get the benefit of a R14 400 meal loan advance on their meal account at the beginning of the year. This amount is to tide them over in terms of dining hall meals at the start of the first semester while their parents struggle with cash flow or until their bursaries pay out. This loan arrangement is unique to the University of Pretoria and has been a saving grace for thousands of residence students for many years. The balance on the meal card is refundable and will be reversed as credit to the student account on request.

Residence operations and the management of the associated budget in this time of extreme uncertainties have been a mammoth task, and we are appreciative of the extra effort and hours that have been put in by our staff under demanding circumstances.

At the same time we are aware that many students and their families have been negatively affected financially by the COVID-19 pandemic and feel constrained by the financial burden. As a measure of support we continue to advise that you contact the University's Student Accounts division to make arrangements for a payment schedule that is workable within your specific circumstances. Please do not hesitate to make use of this offer.

Please be assured that as soon as the University has clearer timeframes regarding the conclusion of the 2020 academic calendar, a decision on residence fee rebates will be taken and communicated. Any sectoral agreements will be taken into consideration. However, with the huge COVID-19 financial burden on government, we have yet to get an indication whether there will be any additional financial support for the University of Pretoria in this regard. It is thus unfortunate that we do not expect to be able to give you a clearer indication of your final residence account before the end of the year.

Until then we remain committed to providing support and promoting the success of our students in these challenging times.

All the best and stay safe.

Yours Sincerely,
TuksRes Management