

**Towards a Social Compact to
Mitigate the Impact of COVID 19 at South Africa's Universities**

**South African Union of Students
Higher Health
South African Association of Senior Student Administrators
Universities South Africa**

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1. Preamble

Recognising that the world, continent and our country are facing unprecedented uncertainty, turbulence and threat to humanity because of the emergence of COVID-19;

Further recognising that the COVID-19 threat presents an endemic crisis in the organisation and ordering of human, economic, social and political affairs in general and higher education institutions in particular;

Acknowledging that this human crisis threatens to erode the foundations of our institutions and may lead to their demise over time if there is no united response and action against it;

Believing that the crisis is likely to be with us as a society until a vaccine is found and far beyond until we develop herd immunity;

Noting that whilst various measures that have been put in place by government and social partners to mitigate the impact of the virus, the crucial partner in this equation is responsible individual agency to comply with such mitigative measures;

Affirming and recognising measures enacted by higher education and training institutions to save lives and rescue the 2020 academic year, and in ensuring that in reality *no students or staff in the PSET system is left behind*;

Further affirming that there is a greater need for institutional and higher education stakeholders to work collaboratively and in unison in the fight against COVID-19, and to safeguard the future of PSET institutions, by intentionally behaving in accordance with the Covid-19 safety protocols, actively training, developing and collectively advocating life-saving and hygienic practices as a sector.

We therefore resolve to forge a social compact to fight against the pandemic as a united community as we believe that no single individual actor, working on its own is capable of defeating nor safeguarding the future of our institutions from the health crisis and its devastating consequences.

2. Principles

- Relying on Scientific Evidence
- Building on Responsible Citizenry
- Depending on Co-Creation as a basis for joint action
- Using Social Solidarity
- Depending on Servant Leadership
- Ensuring that a Social Justice approach is adopted
- Drawing on the principles of Ethical Behaviour
- Using Compassion at all times

3. Fast Facts about COVID-19 virus

COVID-19 is a respiratory infection which spreads by droplets and aerosols

The virus survives on soft and hard surfaces for a few hours to days, depending on the surface

Older persons with co-morbidities, e.g., uncontrolled diabetes, uncontrolled hypertension, obesity, respiratory infections such as asthma, Tuberculosis etc., are more vulnerable to the virus

Youth with comorbidities are also at a higher risk of infection compared to youth with no comorbid conditions

Infected youth are more likely to be asymptomatic but can spread the virus

4. Clinical presentation of COVID-19

Incubation period

The average time between infection and presentation of symptoms is 5.5 days

COVID-19 symptoms

Most common presenting symptoms have been:

- **fever**
- **cough**
- **fatigue**
- **sputum production**
- **shortness of breath**
- **sore throat**
- **headache and chills**
- Recent **loss of taste or smell**

5. PSET System Scientific Approach to COVID-19:

The following key public health interventions apply for control of spread of COVID-19 on campuses:

- **Physical distancing:** A physical distance of 2 metres must be maintained between individuals in all classrooms, laboratories, libraries, offices, etc.
- **Masks:** Mandatory face masks to be worn throughout by an individual in public spaces on the campus.
- **Handwashing:** Hands should be washed regularly using soap or alcohol-based sanitizers.
- **Routine screening for COVID-19 symptoms:** All staff and students must be screened for CoViD-19 symptoms prior to entering the campus.
- **Daily & Routine Cleaning of surfaces:** Institutions must engage in training of cleaning staff in the protocols established by HIGHER HEALTH on routine cleaning of surfaces. Fogging and fumigating are not advised.
- **Air circulation:** Emphasis has to be placed on keeping doors and windows open, for good ventilation and circulation.
- **Testing symptomatic persons.** Individuals who show symptoms must be tested.
- **Infected and infectious persons must be isolated.** If necessary, infected individuals must be provided with care.
- **Communication of suspected symptoms.** It is imperative that symptoms are communicated timeously so as to ensure that the risk of viral spread is reduced.
- **Avoiding large gatherings.** It is necessary to prevent any large gatherings on or off our campuses. In particular, the holding of social functions and parties cannot be held.

6. Commitments

To advance and to collectively pursue the premises in the preamble and to buttress our praxis in the supporting principles to mitigate the scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic. following actions

The signatories to this social compact make the commitment to adopt the following actions

- 6.1. Champion and actively support the re-integration of students and staff into a safe and COVID-19 free university environment.

- 6.2. Co-create a health and well-being values charter for the university sector to safeguard student & staff health and wellness.
- 6.3. Develop and implement a public education programme on the necessity for each student and staff member to be responsible agents for their own health and well-being and that of fellow compatriots. Set up multiple communication platforms for the dissemination of information and the receiving of feedback from staff and students
- 6.4. Develop, capacitate and train students and staff on guidelines and protocols of preventing the spread of COVID-19 and managing individual and institutional responses to outbreaks
- 6.5. Promote adherence to COVID-19 prevention measures which include donning of face masks at all times, frequent handwashing or sanitizing, observing at least 1.5 metre physical distancing in congregate settings such as places of learning, dining, residences, libraries, dormitories, etc.
- 6.6. Collaborate internally and externally in order to provide the necessary support through establishment of dedicated, routine and specialized services for clinical and social support, including especially psychosocial support to prevent stigma, violence and promote the mental wellbeing of students and staff to enable them to thrive under the new COVID-19 world order.
- 6.7. Promote fundamental changes to the social lifestyle of students and staff that conflicts with and inevitably jeopardises health and well-being.
- 6.8. Co-create and journey together as we traverse and adjust to the new conditions and where necessary enlist external support that will help us achieve our milestones and arrive at our destiny.
To create a monitoring mechanism which will ensure the quality management of this social compact through track and trace of compliance.

7. Joined-up Initiatives

We will create, modify and renew joint structures to co-create, review and implement initiatives that are congruent to the commitments encapsulated in the foregoing.

Global data indicates that COVID-19 will stay with us for many years, we must learn to live with this virus. Dues to the non-seasonal nature of the disease, uncertainties around when and duration of the peak of infections, the best option remains prevention of the spread of the virus.

We need to prioritize and emphasize implementation of the HIGHER HEALTH comprehensive protocols on COVID-19 to minimize infections.

A social compact based upon social solidarity that promotes responsible behavior between and amongst students and staff is key in the successful implementing of the measures put in place to minimize transmission and spread of the disease in the PSET sector.

Ownership and Accountability of this Social Compact is entered between, but not limited to:

- Vice Chancellors on behalf of executive management
- Executive Deans of Student Affairs, Directors/Deans of Student Affairs and Deans of Faculties
- SRC Presidents on behalf of students
- Union leaders on behalf of unions
- HIGHER HEALTH peer educators & volunteers and mentors on behalf of frontline student and staff volunteers