

MEDIA RELEASE

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University of Pretoria's Centre for Entrepreneurship launches free National Support Portal for SMMEs

PRETORIA: The Centre for Entrepreneurship at the University of Pretoria (UP) has launched a National SMME Support Portal (NSSP).

The portal was established to support and enhance small business continuity in South Africa during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The portal offers free professional services and resources via an online portal, with all the automated functionality needed to fulfil its objectives. More than 320 professionals are already offering their valuable and specialised services for free on a weekly basis.

The announcement of the enhanced launch of the NSSP comes after the release of the results of the Wave 2 survey conducted by Stats SA on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment and income in South Africa.

According to the survey, which was conducted between 29 April and 6 May, almost nine in ten (89,5%) of those who were employed before the lockdown remained employed during the lockdown, while 8,1% reported that they lost their jobs or had to close their businesses, and 1,4% became unemployed.

Professor Alex Antonites, a member of the Centre for Entrepreneurship's steering committee, said they felt it was important to contribute towards the efforts to rescue the country's economy.

"We believe small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), a sector already in distress, will show very high failure rates in the short and medium term due to the impact of COVID-19," Prof Antonites said. "Our economy can't afford further failure, as a significant section of our GDP is driven by the SMME sector – not to mention its role in job creation. We saw it fitting for the Centre for Entrepreneurship to dedicate the knowledge and expertise we have to work towards assisting SMMEs to recover from the damage caused by the pandemic."

He added that the services that SMMEs would benefit from include: a general chatroom to help ease the burden of social distancing through online proximity; professional counselling services that will be provided by UP alumni and will cover a variety of areas, from psychological distress to HR specialists; strategy consultants; digital marketing and communication specialists; technical assistance in establishing an online presence; a distress test to determine strategic and operational risk areas; professional assistance in turnaround strategies and business model innovation during and after COVID-19; and a resource room that will be filled with links to relevant free business ebooks and literature, business templates, free software and applications useful to enhance business productivity.

With SMMEs being especially in need of funding support to get through this crisis, Prof Antonites said the portal will also work to provide this. "The portal could serve as a preliminary selection tool for funders, providing comprehensive information and guidance on all the new financial resources formed to assist entrepreneurs during these times."

Webinars and training will also be made available, covering an array of short and relevant topics during the pandemic.

The portal can be accessed by any registered SMME in South Africa. In order to register to get access to the free services of the the National SMME Support Portal (NSSP), visit:
smmeportal.up.ac.za

Ends.

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on the Hatfield Campus, Pretoria. This 112-year-old institution is also the largest producer of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country that has a Faculty of Veterinary Science which is ranked top in Africa, and overall has 120 academic departments, as well as 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 55 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes.

UP is one of the top five universities in South Africa, according to the 2019-2020 rankings by the Center for World University Rankings. It is also ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology and law), and among the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences).

In June 2019, the annual UK Financial Times Executive Education Rankings once again ranked GIBS as the top South African and African business school. The University also has an extensive community engagement programme with approximately 33 000 students involved in community upliftment. Furthermore, UP is building considerable capacities and strengths for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by preparing students for the world beyond university and offering work-readiness and entrepreneurship training to its students.

As one of South Africa's research-intensive universities, UP launched the *Future Africa Campus* in March 2019 as a hub for inter- and transdisciplinary research networks within UP and the global research community to maximise 4IR innovation and address the challenges and stresses our continent and world is facing. In addition, UP also launched the Javett Art Centre in September 2019 as a driver of transdisciplinary research development between the Humanities and other faculties. In 2020 UP will launch Engineering 4.0. as a hub not only for Smart Cities and Transport, but also to link the vast resources in technology and data sciences to other faculties via Future Africa. These initiatives are stimulating new thinking at the frontier of 'science for transformation'.

For more information, go to www.up.ac.za
