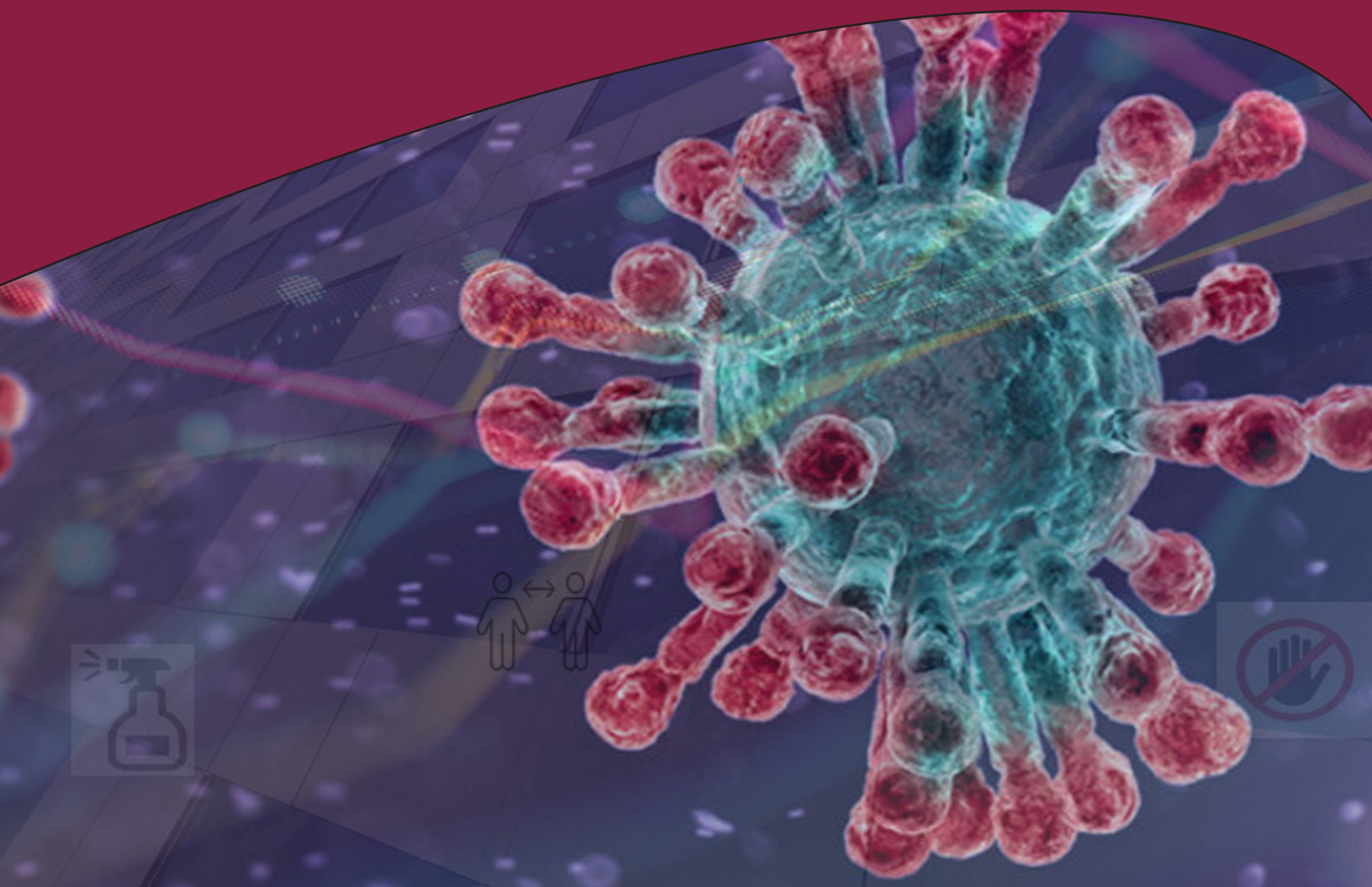


SUMMARY OF UNIVERSITIES' RESPONSES ON SURVEY ON COVID 19 PREPAREDNESS STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES IN HIGHER EDUCATIONS IN ZIMBABWE



Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education

ZIMCHE
Quality Assurance in Higher Education

A decorative background on the left side of the page. It features a vertical strip with a light blue and white gradient. Overlaid on this strip are several microscopic images of cells, some appearing as clusters of red and white spheres. At the top of this strip, there is a faint, light blue icon of two hands with a double-headed arrow between them, symbolizing hygiene or safety.

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Preamble



We are glad to announce that, the ZIMCHE has now prepared a summary of universities' responses on a survey that we conducted in conjunction with all our 21 universities regarding their preparedness against the challenges that they are facing in higher education in the country because of the COVID 19 pandemic. All our universities were very clear as to what needs to be done so that they are prepared to confront the spread and impact of Covid-19 pandemic in our institutions and on teaching and learning.

As indicated in this document, the major challenges that were faced by universities were mainly how to cope with the limited resources for online teaching and learning; and assessing and examining students online. A second major challenge was vaccination hesitancy among some staff members and students in some universities. The report that was produced by the ZIMCHE makes several recommendations which are to be taken up and implemented by higher education institutions and the ZIMCHE.

As the ZIMCHE, we would like to thank, first and foremost, our Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science, Innovation, and Technology Development for supporting the ZIMCHE financially so that we were able to conduct this survey. Secondly, we would like to thank the Vice Chancellors and senior management in universities for allowing us to conduct this survey among staff and students in our universities. Thirdly, we want to thank academics, support staff, and students in our universities who took part in the survey. Finally, we want to thank the Life and Health Sciences Directorate team at the ZIMCHE who led this study namely Ms. F Mutanhaurwa (Acting Personal Assistant), Mrs. B. Nhemachena (Officer), Prof. F. Z. Gumbo (Chief Director); and the ICT Directorate: Mr. S. Mathaba (Technical Assistant) and Dr. G. Hapanyengwi (Director).

What is clear from this survey is that the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the way we teach, and the way students will be assessed and examined in future. Therefore, we are glad to note that, staff and students in our universities have already accepted the “new normal” of virtual or remote teaching and learning in the academy. To this end, all our universities are now taking advantage of the affordances of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in terms of online teaching and learning and how students will continue to be assessed and examined virtually.

We thank the Honourable Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science, Innovation, and Technology Development, Prof. dr. A. Murwira and the Permanent Secretary in our parent Ministry, Prof. F. Tagwira, for their continued support in our universities in terms of funding and the provision of ICT equipment and bandwidth so that universities can cope with the deleterious impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. We strongly recommend that, universities should continue to be innovative and, in the process, change their genetic code inside out so that universities and academics are able to cope with the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the core business of the universities which is teaching, learning, research, innovation, commercialization and industrialization. For our universities to survive in this new era, they must continue to re-think and re-imagine threats and opportunities; and pressures and uncertainties

facing them at the present and in the future. In fact, all our Vice Chancellors have embraced innovation as a key tool in the academy for combating this pandemic.

What all this means is that, the transformation of the Zimbabwean university needs to be accelerated so that academics and managers embrace innovative ways of the utilization of the affordances of ICTs. As opined by Albert Einstein, “problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them”. Therefore, for us to be able to practice what Linda Darling-Hammond and Jeannie Oakes (2019:54) and her colleagues refer to as “deep learning” in the university we need to establish continuous professional development programs (CPD) that prepare academics to cope with the present and the future in terms of the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on university education. This means developing a vision of professional practice which focuses on a critical approach to pedagogical discourse practices that enhance, inter alia the following:

- The academics’ knowledge of their students and how they engage with online content, the academics, and students amid the COVID 19 pandemic; and
- Knowledge of subject matter by academics in the university with a focus on curriculum transformation and renewal considering Education 5.0 and issues related to epistemological access by students and how the COVID 19 pandemic has disrupted the way students learn traditionally.

Hence the need for a multi, intra and transdisciplinary approach to curriculum renewal and Education 5.0.

These challenges call for an approach to change by Vice Chancellors and university leadership in which they adopt a change management model as argued for by Lyman and Daloisio (2017:17) in which the leadership takes an “outside-in approach to change”. Here the Vice Chancellor and her or his management team sets the direction and pace of the organization, identify critical goals, and set the strategic priorities of the change to achieve the desired results as opined by Lyman and Daloisio (2017:17).

For us as the ZIMCHE, this study has revealed that, universities have developed ways of coping with change and able to assist students so that they get to a zone of proximal development where they are able to engage in what Waghid (2014:67) refers to as rhizomatic pedagogical encounters which enhance situated learning and the development of communities of practices among students and academics. Almost all the 21 universities have had to re-invent themselves so that they can cope with institutional transformation as required by the provisos of a heritage-based Education 5.0. The focus is to continually reinvent the university so that it is ahead of changes in its environment if it is to remain relevant.

References:

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2. Lyman, K. R. and Daloisio, T. C. (2017). Change the way you change. 5 Roles of Leaders who accelerate Business Performance. Austin, Texas: Greenleaf Book Press.
3. Waghid, Y. (2014). Pedagogy out of bounds: Untamed Variations of Democratic Education. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

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Seven Universities responded to the survey on COVID 19 preparedness for universities. These were : Arrupe Jesuit University; Harare Institute of Technology; Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University; National University of Science and Technology Reformed Church University; Midlands State University and Great Zimbabwe University.

Universities indicated that they had methods of disseminating COVID 19 information to students and staff before they returned to campus. Methods cited included: Communication with students and staff on the universities' online platforms on information to do with guidance on navigation of students and staff during the pandemic. Other universities explained that they use the email platform; offices responsible would take the official information and disseminates it through the dean-of-students' WhatsApp channel with students; some institutions explained that they made use of SMS, emails, website, e-learning platforms ; social media platforms such as Facebook.; and university campus radios; information sent by social media to students was said to have running statements on COVID 19 information.

Universities indicated that they had the following COVID 19-related plans for students returning to university coming to sit for physical examinations and other physical activities; some indicated that they have policy documents, institutional structures and procedures and protocols that were implemented before and are constantly being reviewed; they also indicated that they were mostly operating online. For those who needed to visit campus, specific guidelines were to be followed were set; the universities ensured high levels of hygiene in all spheres of activities, they also ensured that students and staff put on masks at any point on campus, temperature checks, social distancing, hands washing , sanitization and some would go to an extend of making background checks on students and staff. All Universities indicated that they followed the national COVID 19 protocols.

Universities indicated that they used a variety of strategies with regards to allocation of accommodation to students taking into cognisance the COVID 19 pandemic. These include: enforcing a minimum physical distance of 2 meters between beds in shared hostel accommodation so as to avoid congestion. Preference for accommodation was given to students from outside Harare for some universities in Harare. Some were reducing room occupancy and enforced strict hygiene practices and quarantine suspected cases. Some institutions were staggering occupation of accommodation facilities.

With regards to strategies to monitor the attendance of students and staff in the university, the universities indicted that: for students' attendance, registers would be used as well as online records and staff attendance would be monitored by their supervisors. Some institutions were using attendance registers for students and clocking registers for staff. In some institutions Departments had duty roasters for staff reporting for work. In essence all institutions indicated a system put in place.

In order to monitor activities on campus, the universities indicated that they were ensuring that organizers of meetings in institutions were following national COVID 19 protocols and WHO guidelines. Some universities have Health and Wellness representatives in each building to monitor the adequacy of COVID 19 mitigation procedures as well as the supply of sanitisers.

Canteens and Libraries were said to maintain maximum numbers of people as required by Statutory Instruments on COVID-19 preventive measures. Lecturers and students were trained so that they would minimize face to face teaching. Currently eLearning teaching and learning soft-wares were being used to support online teaching and learning in institutions. In some institutions student COVID 19 Task Force were set up for peer monitoring and staff from Student Affairs and Security also ensured COVID 19 regulations compliance.

In case of increased prevalence of infection in the Universities, in case of infection, universities have developed protocols to guide students and staff in the event of any infection on campus. Some institutions indicate that they would liaise with District Nursing Officer(DNO) to activate the local district COVID 19 rapid response team. Some institutions had to decongest the campus by maximizing online lectures; and quarantine suspected case in consultation with the supervision of the DNO/Provincial Medical Officers(PMOs)/other Government health experts. Where cases increase, some universities indicated that they would inform the parent Ministry and would be closed at the behest of the MOHTEISTD and MOHCC.

Institutions have different strategies to provide targeted COVID 19 health education, which include; regular communication update from the VCs' offices under the PR directors/officers and also sharing new material on COVID by email, online workshops, posters and pamphlets and constant reminders of all members of the National COVID guidelines. Some universities disseminate information through education communication by trained Peer educators, conducting online counseling and use of university website

In addition to strategies indicated in the preceding paragraph, in some institutions, Lecturers were urged to utilize at least 5 minutes of their lecture times to disseminate current information regarding the pandemic.

Universities indicated that they had the following plans to mitigate against localized COVID 19 outbreaks in students sitting examinations who might be inflicted by the illness; use of online examinations and strict observance of National COVID19 and WHO guidelines .

Universities explained that they developed Covid19 examination procedures to deal with writing of examinations under the COVID 19 pandemic. The following SOPs were presented by some institutions to assist in running of exams during this pandemic:

1. The presence of Health Staff, Security and Invigilators at all exams venues to check temperatures;

ensure ALL individuals either properly hand sanitize/hand wash on arrival at the exam venue and also ensuring that ALL individuals (staff and students) properly wear face masks covering their mouth and noses outside and inside examination venues.

2. Physical distancing of at least 1meter to be maintained in between individuals.
3. Provision of multiple hand sanitizers inside the exam venues for regular hand sanitisation as and when students and staff interact/exchange additional answer sheets.
4. Lecturers to ensure that they constantly remind students to properly wear their face masks during lectures/ examinations.
5. Provision of multiple hand washing facilities outside of all teaching and learning venues; inside the lecture venues regular hand sanitisation to be encouraged for students using own sanitisers.
6. Physical distancing of at least 1meter to be maintained in between individuals.
7. Fumigation of all venues to be done as per Central Services Protocols.
8. All students group discussions to be carried out at designated areas with full compliance of all covid19 prevention measures – “mask wearing, physical distancing and hand washing. “

With regards to COVID 19 guidelines for students in off-campus student accommodation organized by the University, some universities which organize off-campus accommodation for their students indicated that their COVID-19 preventive, responsive and containment measures were communicated to accommodation owners by the Dean of Student Affairs/directors of off-campus accommodation. For off-campus university-owned accommodation the same protocols as on campus were to be observed. For off-campus accommodation some institutions mooted that Students should only have access to single rooms inspected and approved by the Dean of Students. The rented rooms were to have WIFI and power.

Universities indicated that students and staff were to report results that they suspect or are infected with SARS CoV 2 to Nursing Staff in the Health & Wellness Centre, health, and wellness advisers, to their lecturers, to Health Crisis Management Task Force members, to Hostel Wardens, to Security Staff, and to the student-managed Health Club members.

Students and staff suspected to have exposure to SARS CoV 2 would be encouraged to self - isolate / Self quarantine and be tested according to national guidelines. Some institutions have dedicated quarantine facility set aside to house patients/students under investigation while waiting for results away from the rest of the university community as well as house those with positive results and mild disease as they will be referred to medical facilities for further treatment or referred to a medical facility for PCR testing.

With regards to universities having a relationship/MOU with a medical facility in case there was a need for hospitalization some institutions indicated that their students were on CIMAS Medical Aid hence CIMAS would manage. Other institutions particularly outside Harare indicated that they had MOUs with major Govt Hospitals in their cities to attend to their students.

Universities expressed that where meetings and other events were concerned, their strategies included limiting number of physical meetings. Where they were done, they would observe strict National COVID 19 Guidelines otherwise conduct virtual meetings.

Where meetings involved physical interactions with contractors coming to work on campus, Institutions said the contractors were told to wear face masks, they would be sanitized with temperature checks. In some institutions contractors were treated as employees subject to signed agreement between the institution and the project leader for the contractors, they would be subject to the same procedures as the rest of the employees in the institution. Some institutions indicated that it would be important to reduce number of people doing work onsite and ensure compliance to COVID 19 regulations and guidelines.

Where there are queries concerning COVID 19, students and staff were expected to seek guidance from The University Health and Wellness Centres, some institutions indicated that they would direct their students to the University information or their Student affairs office via Health Services Department.

Strategies used by Universities to disseminate the latest facts about the COVID 19 were : the University website, social media platforms, posters on notice boards, exhibitions and word of mouth by fellow students in the Student-managed Health Clubs were used to disseminate latest facts about COVID-19. Some institutions said they would use blended methods encompassing physical and electronic means.

Universities were using the following strategies for disinfecting the campus; at the peak of the lock down disinfection was done every 2 weeks and disinfection now done once a month in some institutions. The cleaning teams were said to be clearly guided. Student hostels, classrooms, laboratories, workshops, the canteen, the library, admin offices, and campus roads would be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before the arrival of students on campus.

Some universities said they had detailed cleaning protocols. Cleaning and disinfection practices, have been adapted to mitigate the spread of pathogens. Particular attention would be paid to environmental cleaning of these high-touch surfaces and items which was to be performed frequently. However, all touchable surfaces would be disinfected plus regular fumigation. Disinfectants were to be applied with a cloth. Cleaning practices and cleanliness would be routinely monitored. Some institutions recommended daily classroom and laboratory fumigation when students were on campus and weekly fumigation for other university premises

Challenges being faced by the Universities with regards to COVID 19 related issues:

1. The major challenge was that of staff transport during lock down.
2. A need for more infrastructures such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops, a fit-for-purpose and larger Library facility, as well as the provision of adequate resources for the purchase of lecture-capture equipment, more laptops and data bundles for staff and student use in online

teaching and learning

3. Limited resources for online teaching and learning
4. Lack of donors specific to COVID 19 resources.
5. No health education information about vaccine effects.
6. Still short of equipment e.g. sprayers. No ambulances and vaccine hesitancy among some staff and students.
7. Financial inflows slow down most initiatives.
8. Challenges in reaching out to students in the remote areas.

Recommendations

1. Higher Education Institutions

- To formulate clear Policy and guidelines on SARS CoV 2 prevention and management.
- Establish health education platforms for disseminating important information on SARS CoV 2 prevention through vaccination.
- Allocate resources for SARS CoV 2 prevention according to National guidelines
- Support students and staff with resources for online teaching and examinations.

2. ZIMCHE

- Establish a portal for dissemination SARS CoV 2 prevention guidelines for institutions
- Assist/train HEIs staff in designing blended learning curriculum in all disciplines through discipline specific webinars
- Disseminate ZIMCHE guidelines on SARS CoV 2 prevention for HEIs through the ZIMCHE website.

3. Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation Science, and Technological Development

- Support HEIs with infrastructure and resources for online teaching and learning
- Develop universal ICT Policy for use of all HEIs in Zimbabwe



