



UNIVERSITY *of*  
TASMANIA

Monday 16 March 2020

## **Next steps in the University's response to COVID-19**

The University of Tasmania will communicate with staff and students today that it is beginning a staged transition to online course learning and working from home as part of its ongoing response to COVID-19.

The University initiated a formal response to the emergence of the illness in January and has worked closely with Public Health, rigorously following national guidelines.

The safety and wellbeing of our students, staff and the wider community is our highest priority.

In a message to staff and students, today we are outlining important next steps in our risk-mitigation strategy and advice, including:

- A staged transition to delivering our teaching online where possible;
- The introduction of a split-teams model of staffing, with parts of our teams working from home on a two-week rotation;
- A case-by-case review of events where people gather – in line with new national guidelines – which may affect occasions such as graduations and Open Day;
- Public Health advice that our shared facilities on campus are safe to be continued to be used;
- Cessation of international travel and guidance that interstate travel should be undertaken only if strictly necessary.

A copy of the staff and student message is attached.

**Media contact:** Ben Wild – 0438 510 616

**Information released by:**

Communications Office  
University of Tasmania  
+61 3 6226 2124

[Communications.Office@utas.edu.au](mailto:Communications.Office@utas.edu.au)

[Twitter.com/utas\\_](https://twitter.com/utas_)



## VICE-CHANCELLOR

Professor Rufus Black

**This email covers the following key points:**

- A staged transition to delivering our teaching online where possible;
- The introduction of a split-teams model of staffing, with parts of our teams working from home on a two-week rotation;
- A case-by-case review of events where people gather – in line with new national guidelines - which may affect occasions during the year such as graduations and Open Day;
- Public Health advice that our shared facilities on campus are safe to be continued to be used;
- Cessation of international travel and guidance that interstate travel should be undertaken only if strictly necessary.

Dear staff,

I am writing to update you on our University's response to COVID-19, knowing that developments of recent days will be weighing on many people's minds.

The safety of students, staff and the community continues to be our first priority. The risks in Tasmania of contracting COVID-19 remain very low, but the risk of increased person-to-person transmission continues to increase.

As person-to-person transmission does increase, we need to ensure we are operating in a way to keep people as safe as possible and to reduce the rate of spread in our and the wider community, while enabling education and research to continue. Therefore, today we will begin the transition to full online delivery and staffing, on the basis of our model of split teams and working from home.

By beginning the implementation now, we can do so in a progressive way, that means it can be orderly, issues that arise can be addressed without undue time pressure and when we have people available to assist in person as needed.

### **EXPANDING ON ONLINE DELIVERY**

The advice from Public Health is that it is safe for the University to operate in the way we usually would and for people to be coming to lectures, tutorials and using the libraries. However, to prepare for the time when that may not be the case we are going to progressively move to online delivery for all subjects where that is possible.

Making that shift will start today. Our first priority will be the delivery of lecture content online and, once that is working, to add online tutorials. We are

beginning to undertake the move to online delivery from today, moving quickly towards a full-scale, whole-of-institution test on Friday, March 20.

The move to online delivery will happen in a sensible, staged manner, with lectures the first priority. This project is being led by the Director of Digital Futures, Tyson Wienker. The Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) will be your primary contact for information regarding online delivery.

For any activities where online delivery is not possible, alternative approaches are being developed, including, for example, intensives once it is possible for students and staff to physically gather.

The model for online delivery will enable academic staff to work from home. The Academic Division will work with the colleges to co-ordinate the sequencing of the shift to online delivery. The objective is to start with the delivery of larger first-year classes. We will be using Blackboard Collaborate as the key tool for delivery.

You should expect to hear from college leaders in relation to the details of the transition over the next two days.

As academic staff move to online delivery, where possible, we are encouraging people to work from home. Before people do that, it is important that we make sure those places are safe and suitable. A working-from-home procedure for this will be provided to all staff.

There are a range of reasons why working from home may not be suitable. If that is the case, it will still be possible for academic staff to work from campus, but work practices will be changed to enable appropriate social distancing. Arrangements are being made so that there will be no data charges for accessing University websites when working from home.

## **PROFESSIONAL STAFF WORK-FROM-HOME ARRANGEMENTS**

Starting this week, we will introduce a split-team model for professional staff. This approach is based on the experience of countries such as Singapore, which is doing a very good job managing the COVID-19 risk. It is based on the professional staff work groups being organised around a 14-day rotating work-from-home model for those in a position to do so.

For those operating on campus, to ensure the workplace is safe, we will have heightened cleaning regimes, social distancing and adopting those practices which are known to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This approach will minimise the risk of the spread of illness and maximise the likelihood of having staff well placed to maintain the critical functions of the University. The model also enables us to move to increasing levels of working from home, should that prove necessary.

We are aware that working from home will not work for everyone and so the focus will be to ensure the workplace is safe for those people.

A pack has been prepared for organisational leaders and team members to ensure this transition is made in a safe and orderly way and it will be distributed later today.

Your team leader will be in touch with you to co-ordinate how your team will operate through this phase of our response.

### **GATHERINGS OF PEOPLE**

The national guidelines now include limiting gatherings of large numbers of people.

This will potentially affect a range of events run by the University, such as graduations, conferences, Open Days and AgFest.

We will need to review each of these on a case-by-case basis.

The Sydney graduations in April will not proceed. Students will be graduated *in absentia* and there will be the opportunity for a formal 'walk-through' ceremony when it is safe to do so.

### **SHARED FACILITIES**

The Public Health advice is that shared facilities such as the libraries and on-campus catering services do not present a heightened risk at present, so these will remain open for those who want to use them. We will follow Public Health advice in relation to these facilities remaining open.

### **TRAVEL**

We will no longer be authorising any international travel on University business. Interstate travel should now only occur if it is absolutely necessary.

### **NEXT STEPS**

We are a large organisation, and we need to make this transition in an orderly way while there is time to do this safely, and to allow for the inevitable issues that will emerge to be dealt with as we progress.

Part of our moving to online delivery and work-from-home arrangements is to reduce the risk of transmission in the community. An important lesson from other countries where things have not gone so well is that people who are no longer in the workplace or a place of study should avoid increasing social contact outside those places, or it just shifts the risk somewhere else.

People also need to continue good hygiene and preventative practices at home and work, as per the advice of the Australian Government.

Given the scale of our population, of 40,000 students and 3,000 staff, along with all of our families, we can make a material contribution to good management of COVID-19 in Tasmania if we work together to manage this well.

Kind regards,

**Professor Rufus Black**  
Vice-Chancellor



**Professor Rufus Black**

Vice-Chancellor  
Office of the Vice-Chancellor  
University of Tasmania  
Private Bag 51, Hobart, TAS, 7001  
T: +61 3 6226 2003  
[vice.chancellor@utas.edu.au](mailto:vice.chancellor@utas.edu.au)  
CRICOS 00586B



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