



Royal University of Bhutan

RUB Response Plan for COVID-19

March 2020

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**Office of the Vice Chancellor
Royal University of Bhutan**



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Preface

The Royal University of Bhutan joins the nation in responding to COVID-19 with its preparedness and response plan to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the University staff and students.

Since 19 March 2020 all students have left the campuses to be at home until the Government issues directives for reopening the Colleges. The responses of the academics have been swift in transiting to online teaching through Moodle (Virtual Learning Environment) and varieties of other applications such as ZOOM, Big Blue Button, Google classroom, H5P, telegram, group chats, Skype, etc.

While assessing this new mode of teaching, many staff and students have shown satisfaction while a few expressed for the need to get acquainted to this way of teaching-learning. The University is supporting the students with data charges to facilitate online learning but there are a few challenges faced by some students such as not getting internet connectivity in their villages, not having access to laptop computers or smart phones, and being engaged in activities to help their parents. Therefore, the University is challenged to continuously explore possible support services to make online learning more effective to meet the teaching-learning goals.

For ensuring the safety of staff, the work-from-home alternative has been planned and implemented to provide uninterrupted services to the students. The staff are advised to be conscious and mindful of the situation and maintain physical-distancing protocol both at work and elsewhere.

In this time of crisis the least we can do is to protect ourselves from this dreaded disease, for it is in protecting ourselves that we protect others. With His Majesty the King selflessly leading on the front to protect the country and people, we can be confident that we will overcome the situation soon but each one of us have to play our part with full consciousness.

On behalf of the staff and students of the Royal University of Bhutan, may I extend our best wishes in responding safely to this crisis and for a quick end to the pandemic.

Nidup Dorji
Vice Chancellor



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1. Objectives

As part of the preparedness and response plan for the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications to teaching, research and service in the Royal University of Bhutan, the University will:

- 1.1 Continuously explore ways to respond to the emergency situation of COVID-19 to safeguard the safety and wellbeing of staff and students;
- 1.2 Ensure that all staff (teaching and administrative) will continually support students' learning online and ensure that no student is left behind in terms of her / his learning needs, level of engagement and participation;
- 1.3 Ensure that all academic, research and logistics services of the Colleges continue uninterrupted (e.g. programme development, validations, reviews, IWPs, capital activities, online professional meetings, etc.), which will keep the students engaged in meaningful learning;
- 1.4 Provide teaching and learning resources to the students according to the online learning and teaching schedules set up by each College and ensure that the students take full ownership of their learning;
- 1.5 Set up strategies for all academic staff to deliver their programmes by tapping into the dynamic features of Moodle and adapting to other digital tools; and
- 1.6 Contribute to the national efforts to overcome emergency situations.

2. Institutional Arrangements

- 2.1 The University will use the Executive Forum comprising of all executives as the University Strategic Response Committee (USRC) and will meet fortnightly through online forums to discuss emerging developments in COVID-19 and RUB's response strategy. The emergency meetings could be held on short notice as and when required;
- 2.2 The Office of the Registrar will be the Secretariat to the Committee and shall:
 - 2.2.1 Carry out follow up activities of the decisions of University Strategic Response Committee;
 - 2.2.2 Communicate with the Colleges to monitor new developments in COVID-19 and facilitate response efforts;
 - 2.2.3 Act as the nodal point for disseminating information and updates regarding the University's responses to COVID-19 and its strategies;
 - 2.2.4 Liaise with other sectors of the Government to collaborate and, if required, represent the University in any emergency situation;
- 2.3 A University-wide Academic Task Force will be established comprising of Deans of Academic Affairs led by the Director of Academic Affairs at the Office of the Vice Chancellor (OVC). The Academic Task Force shall, among others, carry out the following activities:
 - 2.3.1 Formulate broad guidelines related to online teaching-learning, assessment, examinations and attendance. The guidelines should be broad to address the diverse needs of all the Colleges, while at the same time harmonize and synergize practices across Colleges. The guidelines should also enhance creativity and innovation that allows flexibility and suppleness from College to College at the time of implementation;

- 2.3.2 Recommend RUB's overall direction of teaching-learning in the case the situation does not abate as expected. It should provide scope for making situational decisions and long-term plan for any crisis in the future;
 - 2.3.3 Assess the situation of student online learning as some of the students may not have access to computer and internet, and suggest how assessments would be carried out;
 - 2.3.4 Assess the impact of online learning system and the ability to achieve learning outcomes by students;
 - 2.3.5 Explore possible alternative solutions such as readjusting the academic calendar.
- 2.4 At the College level, a Task Force for Online Learning and Teaching comprising the President, Dean of Academic Affairs, Programme Leaders, ICT Officer, Exam Records Officer, Student Records Officer, and Exams Coordinator will oversee the full implementation and success of online learning and teaching;
 - 2.5 The programme committee and College Academic Committee (CAC) to discuss and decide the suitable forms of assessment in terms of convenience, fit-for-purpose, monitoring, evaluation, etc. For Colleges having unit tests or phase-wise tests, similar actions to be taken by maintaining proper documentation;
 - 2.6 The University level ICT Task Force will work closely with the Academic Task Force to support with technicalities and connectivity issues;
 - 2.7 The President shall be the focal point for the response plans of the College to provide information regarding the situation to the outside agencies and community. The President will form special groups based on need for any other parts of response plans outside of teaching, learning and research;

- 2.8 At the College level, the Administrative Section (or any other unit as may be deemed appropriate by the President) will be the focal point supporting the President to:
- 2.8.1 Monitor the situation constantly and update on the new developments of the situation affecting the staff and students;
 - 2.8.2 Implement activities as per the decisions of the committees;
 - 2.8.3 Support the other units to allow uninterrupted provision of services;
 - 2.8.4 Act as Secretariat to organize meetings, record decisions and monitor implementation.
- 2.9 The College / OVC shall develop Incidental Command System at both University and College levels based on the matrix provided at **Annexure 1** with clear flowchart on each response activity including line of command and responsibility;
- 2.10 At the Office of the Vice Chancellor, the Senior Management Team (SMT) will be identified as the University Strategic Response Sub-Committee for OVC staff;

3. Short-term Response Strategy

- 3.1 Upon the directive of the Government, the University has discharged the students from the College campuses to enable them to stay at home until further notice;
- 3.2 Academics are engaged in preparing and conducting online classes to the students;
- 3.3 Academic activities such as programme review, validation, submissions to APRC, PQC, RIC, RDC and APMR shall remain uninterrupted. Proper physical distancing protocol will be observed for any physical meetings;
- 3.4 Meetings will continue to be conducted online to ensure continuity of core services;
- 3.5 Students will be paid stipend to facilitate online learning. Self-financed students will be supported with data package of Nu. 1199.00 per month per student;
- 3.6 All events on grounds will be suspended until further notice. Activities that do not require gathering of people will continue;
- 3.7 Work-from-home alternative will be allowed for staff whose work can be executed remotely. A separate guideline and modalities to support work from home will be developed and implemented by the respective Colleges / OVC based on need;
- 3.8 For staff requiring to come to workstation to provide services in person shall be provided with necessary facilities to ensure safety and maintain proper physical distancing protocol;
- 3.9 While students are sent home, few of them seemed to be staying in and around the campus. The gathering of staff / students outside of their family will be highly restricted unless necessary. In addition, the library and laboratories shall remain closed until further notice although the College WiFi may be used for connectivity;
- 3.10 Staff and students are encouraged to go for outdoor physical workout on their own or with the family. No contact sports and mass participation will be allowed on campus;

- 3.11 College campuses remain restricted for entry to all external visitors unless approved by the College management;
- 3.12 All employees, regular or on fixed term appointment, shall continue to receive their pay, allowances and benefits;
- 3.13 Respective supervisors will identify their employees whose services are suspended / workload reduced substantially to engage them meaningfully by ensuring their wellbeing;
- 3.14 Colleges / OVC shall identify the most vulnerable staff such as pregnant staff, elderly staff and staff with underlying health conditions. They shall be provided preferential relief from work depending on the situation;
- 3.15 International students' services shall be suspended until further notice. However, online teaching and learning support will be provided to them if their home institution / university make an official request;
- 3.16 Staff who are infected by the virus or quarantined shall be granted special medical leave as prescribed by the respective authority;
- 3.17 APA and Strategic Plan activities shall be continued as far as possible. However, consideration will be made on activities that get cancelled / deferred due to extenuating circumstances. The Colleges / OVC Departments shall provide proper justifications with evidences to the IRT during the time of assessment; and
- 3.18 Hostel rooms will be continuously booked for the students' return any time for the classes to resume if the situation improves.

4. Long-term Response Strategy

(if the situation does not improve beyond June 2020)

- 4.1 Online Classes will continue, engaging students to learn remotely and carrying out assignments regularly. All modules will be delivered on-line for which a broad guideline will be put in place, on:
 - 4.1.1 The use of VLE and other platforms to teach and interact with students;
 - 4.1.2 A proper grading system will be reviewed in terms of assessing students based on online learning;
 - 4.1.3 Conducting examinations with students' physical presence on campus may be reviewed with alternative online methods explored for assessing and grading students without compromising quality;
 - 4.1.4 Alternatives for on-the-job training / field attachments / teaching practices may be explored and implemented, if necessary.
- 4.2 Facilities will be enhanced to establish classroom(s) with high quality HD video camera and high-speed internet connectivity for live classroom that support live video communication with students. Smartboard may be procured that would be useful for mathematics and science lessons teaching;
- 4.3 Work-from-home will be continued with proper monitoring based on modalities adopted by each college or OVC. The respective Colleges, if necessary, may draw a set of broad guidelines for overall reporting system of works and management of staff working remotely;
- 4.4 Recruitment and selection processes if urgently required may be considered to be conducted online;;
- 4.5 All academic activities such as programme development, programme validations and review, APRC, RIC, RDC and PQC submissions, APMR submissions, and other important academic activities shall remain uninterrupted and will be carried out online or physically by maintaining proper protocol for prevention;

- 4.6 Research services will be continued as usual. Any meetings required for research will be done online;
- 4.7 Student admission schedule and academic calendar will be reviewed and adjusted based on overall change with school education system;
- 4.8 International student enrollment will not be resumed until the situation improves;
- 4.9 Colleges will make available water and soap for washing hands at prominent places wherever possible;
- 4.10 Colleges will make available dustbins / disposal units at prominent places wherever needed;
- 4.11 Colleges will engage janitors / sweepers to ensure occasional cleaning of toilet doorknobs and hand-railings, ATM machine console, etc. on a daily basis; and
- 4.12 Different OVC Departments shall coordinate each of the above activities in detail as per ***Annexure 1***.

5. National Emergency Response

- 5.1 The Colleges will immediately contribute their human resource pool to the needs of local communities or other agencies in case of a national emergency;
- 5.2 The Colleges will form teams to identify areas where they could support in terms of physical tasks;
- 5.3 The Colleges will make available its facilities including academic spaces and guest houses, for quarantines and other purposes, if needed;
- 5.4 The Colleges will allow and mobilise students to provide volunteer services if the need arises.

Annexure 1

Distribution of Roles in RUB's Response Plan for COVID-19

1. Registry and College DAA / Adm	
1.1 Logistics	Responsible persons from OVC
1.2 Updates of student engagement with virtual learning	
1.3 Recruitment and selection of staff / faculty	Responsible persons from each College
1.4 Processing for retirement, promotion, leave, transfer etc.	
1.5 HR actions on retirement, study leave, transfer, service extension, etc.	
1.6 Movement of vehicle	
1.7 Communication with clients	
1.8 News and events updates (under media and communication services)	
1.9 Litigation and Legal services	
1.10 Provide emergency directives to the Colleges	
1.11 Performance evaluation of staff	
2. DAA / DRER and College DAA / DRIL	
2.1 Programme development / validation/review exercises / Submissions to PQC / others	Responsible persons from OVC
2.2 Examinations and online assignments	
2.3 Evaluation of assignments	Responsible persons from each College
2.4 Time tabling of online classes	
2.5 Evaluation modality for extended (duration) COVID-19 pandemic	
2.6 Facilitate international students programmes	
2.7 Continuation of regular publications	
2.8 Facilitate MoU signing / linkage programmes	
2.9 Research project works	
2.10 Interaction with international agencies / people for academic and research purposes	
3. DPR and College ICT / Adm Section	
3.1 Programme submissions to APRC; Salary payment	Responsible persons from OVC
3.2 Develop SOPs for management releases of fund to the Colleges	
3.3 Tender / Award meetings	
3.4 Follow up of construction projects / capital activities in the Colleges and contingency plans to address disruption of works	Responsible persons from each College
3.5 Supporting online services	
3.6 RUB IMS implementation	
3.7 Review strategic plans and signing of APAs (2020-21)	
3.8 Monitoring of FYP activities (Physical verification)	