

SENATE MOTION ON COVID-19 VACCINATION

The Senate of the University of Cape Town ('the Senate'), meeting virtually as a consequence of COVID-19 on 17 September 2021:

NOTING

- The immense damage wreaked by the SARS-CoV-2 virus and its associated COVID-19 disease on the lives and livelihoods of all, and especially in the communities of our staff and students across South Africa;
- The largely negative effects on members of the University community more generally, including parents and guardians (who are simultaneously staff, in some cases) who faced significant challenges in the shift (first) to emergency remote teaching (in 2020), and physically-distanced learning (in 2021);
- That the burden of this shift has been felt mostly, but not exclusively, by the poorest and most disadvantaged members of our community;
- The fact that these challenges presented both in forms that the University could partially mitigate, such as the provision of data and laptops and other devices, but also in ways where the negative effects are often invisible, and perhaps long-term, such as harms to the mental health of our staff and students as a consequence of alienation from, and unfamiliarity with, remote teaching and learning as well as working and researching remotely;
- The particular vulnerability to severe disease that confronts many members of the UCT community as a result of comorbidities, weakened immune systems, or age;
- The development and availability of vaccines that, through hundreds of millions of administered doses, have shown themselves to be both safe, and effective – especially at preventing particularly adverse consequences of (re-)infection;
- The overwhelming preponderance of scientific evidence, some of which has been produced by our own staff and students, that points to the additional burden placed on our healthcare system by patients affected by COVID-19;
- The evidence that the risk and rate of severe disease, hospitalisation and death is much reduced through vaccination which serves to both unburden the health system but also significantly reduce COVID19 related morbidity and mortality;
- The evidence suggesting that rapid vaccination roll-out may help to prevent new variants emerging and taking hold; and
- The recent launch of a vaccination site, the *UCT Community of Hope Vaccination Centre*, as a joint initiative with the Western Cape Department of Health, to make COVID-19 vaccines more accessible.

AND RECOGNISING

- The central role played by the University's clinical and medical staff as frontline caregivers, as well as the work by researchers from numerous academic units in the university that has aided the national response to SARS-CoV-2;

- That the health, safety, and well-being of all is enhanced when all eligible persons are vaccinated against the virus;
- The obligation on the University as an employer to provide a safe workplace; and
- That while the University must continue to pursue other measures to mitigate the risk of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 in our teaching, learning, research, and communal environments, the cost and/or logistics of doing so, in combination with the aerosolised mode of transmission of SARS-CoV-2, mean that these other measures will be inadequate to properly protect staff and students.

AND BELIEVING

- That a third year of disruption to the University's pedagogical and research endeavours will be extremely damaging, particularly for those who most need the support of the structures available in a fully functioning academic environment, and that UCT has an ethical obligation to the current generation of students who have entrusted the University with their education, to re-open safely as soon as possible;
- That low rates of vaccination serve as an obstacle to creating an environment that protects the health of all members of our community, and one that allows for an optimal working, teaching, learning, and research environment;
- That every effort must be made by the University and national, provincial, and local authorities to encourage voluntary vaccination of staff and students through meaningful and respectful engagement, public information, and advocacy role-modelling and peer support; and
- That the near-universal vaccination of all staff and students of UCT will serve (i) as a public health measure to reduce the frequency and severity of infections and prevent COVID-19 related deaths within the University Community; (ii) contribute to promoting vaccine roll-out more broadly in our communities and thereby facilitate reduction of transmission at a population level; (iii) provide a mechanism to support the orderly and safe return to campus of all our staff and students, thereby enhancing the education of our students in allowing for contact-based learning and collegial scholarship; and (iv) allow for research activities that are currently interrupted to be resumed and thereby reduce further negative impacts on the university's scientific outputs.

AND FURTHER RECOGNIZING

- That the provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act of 1993 impose a duty on the University to provide and maintain an environment that is safe and without risk to the health and safety of the university community, and authorise the University to adopt a vaccine mandate as provided for in Directions issued in terms of the Disaster Management Act on 28 May 2021; and
- That any ensuing limitation of rights will be reasonable and justifiable in accordance with section 36 of the Constitution, given the overwhelmingly important purpose served by the measure and the minor nature of any limitation imposed by it.

THEREFORE MOVES

That the Senate urgently

- Recommends to Council that Council resolves, at its October 2021 meeting or sooner, to institute a mandate from 1 January 2022 requiring that all staff (as a condition of being able to perform their duties) and students (as a condition of registration) provide acceptable proof of having been vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2;
- Recommends to Council that Council mandates the executive officers of the University and the Senate, by no later than 1 November 2021, to constitute a panel comprising of eminent domain-specialists and members of the general staff and student bodies to
 - establish the logistical and operational features required to implement this mandate, including access to vaccination facilities as well as communications to staff, students and the wider University community;
 - establish systematic principles, rules, and guidance relating to the permissible grounds for exemption from, or specification of alternatives to, the COVID-19 vaccination mandate;

and thereafter to

- act as the body that receives and adjudicates with compassion applications for exemption from the COVID-19 vaccination mandate;
- monitor the effectiveness of compliance with and outcomes of this mandate, both at baseline and on an on-going basis;
- continue to review the evolving medical evidence with regards to COVID-19 vaccination risks and benefits, and to revise and revisit this mandate should it prove necessary; and
- Calls on all members of the University community to promote voluntary uptake of vaccination, through carefully-crafted public health messaging in the case of the Executive, and awareness-raising by both them as well as other members of the community.

Proposer: Professor Linda-Gail Bekker

Seconder: Professor Ntobeko Ntusi

And supported by a further 131 members of the Senate (in alphabetical order):

Prof Rebecca Ackermann

Prof Isabelle Ansong

Prof Cally Ardington

Prof Jeffrey Bagraim

Prof Igor Barashenkov

Prof Karen Barnes

Prof Stefan Barth

Prof Bruce Bassett

Prof Bruce Biccard

Prof Anthony Black

Dr Kerrin Begg

Prof Hans Beushausen

Prof Haroon Bhorat

Prof Marc Blockman

Prof Ed Boje

A/Prof Barbara Boswell

Prof Susan Bourne

Prof Adrian Brink

Prof Andy Buffler

Prof Shadreck Chirikure

Prof Alan Cliff

Prof Brandon Collier-Reed

Prof Malcolm Collins

Prof Michael Cramer

Prof Mary-Ann Davies

Prof Pierre de Vos

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Prof Lawrence Edwards
Prof Timothy Egan
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Prof Graham Fieggen
Prof Anthony Figaji
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Prof Janet Hapgood
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