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Prioridade Alta



Universidade do Minho
Rector's Office

Informative Note

To the Community of University of Minho

Last week brought new and major changes in the conditions under which the University develops its activity.

On the 18th of March, the President of the Republic, after the authorization from the Assembly of the Republic, declared the state of emergency, on the grounds of a situation of public calamity.

On the 20th of March, the Government published the decree-law implementing the declaration of the state of emergency, establishing a set of exceptional and temporary measures related to the epidemiological situation of the new coronavirus, which had an important impact on the life of the University.

- a) In order to ensure the regular functioning of the University, several rectoral orders and circular letters were published, which:
- b) established the possibility for the University bodies to work using conference call;
- c) assumed teleworking as the preferred mode of work provision and set the conditions for technological support to teleworking;
- d) determined the elaboration of plans to reorganize the services of the University and the identification of essential services;
- e) postponed deadlines for the submission of reports in the scope of quality assurance;
- f) proceeded to an exceptional extension of the deadlines for requesting masters and doctoral public exams;
- g) set exceptional conditions for the digital processing of academic exams requests, as well as for the holding of juries and public exams by videoconference.

These measures were publicized to our units and disseminated through the page <https://www.uminho.pt/EN/student-life/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx>, which is our privileged channel for aggregating and disseminating the most relevant information about the epidemic crisis as well as the governmental and the institutional actions.

These are exceptional measures for an exceptional time.

The University of Minho did not stop, but changed, quickly and effectively, the way to fulfil its mission.

It did so with the commitment of its lecturers and researchers, its technical, administrative and management staff, and its students.

It did so by guaranteeing online teaching activities, naturally with adjustments in the curriculum development. It did so by guaranteeing the continuity of the research activity, with the exception of that which requires intensive laboratory environments. It did so by finding new ways to promote the interaction with society. It did so by maintaining its services in full operation, with the overwhelming majority of our workers performing their activities through teleworking.

In the field of research, contacts have been maintained with funding agencies in order to postpone several deadlines for projects and scholarships. The confirmation of the eligibility of missions expenses associated with cancelled events within the scope of FCT projects has been assured; additional measures were adopted to dematerialize the hiring processes of new scholarship holders, which will now be carried out entirely by digital means; contingency plans related to ongoing research activities and to the needs of the infrastructures that support them were promoted.

In the field of education, the technologically mediated teaching activities currently cover about 75% of the curricular units planned for the current semester. Meanwhile, the assessment of classroom learning was suspended, and the curricular units in which it is not possible to adopt distance learning, as well as the activities of courses aimed at active health professionals were re-scheduled. The creation of pages on Facebook and Twitter and of a blog made it possible to expand the sharing of online teaching experiences; in this domain, training actions were developed and instruments to support teachers were made available, namely for assessment activities, using BlackBoard. An area for course directors to be able to communicate with students was created at BlackBoard. Aiming at directly supporting the students, an exceptional book loan service was implemented by the [Documentation Services](#).

The situation of mobility students has been of critical concern; incoming and outgoing mobility students have been regularly contacted by the University, to assess their well-being, transmit information about the situation in the country, as well as to know their intention to maintain, suspend or cancel the mobility; information was made available to all students on the SOS Psychological Support Line - Covid-19 - a joint initiative of the [Association of Psychology](#) of the School of Psychology and [P5](#) of the School of Medicine; the University has been contacted by several embassies and responded to requests for information about students from the respective countries. Meanwhile, the teaching and training mobility missions scheduled for April were cancelled.

Our cultural units maintain their activity mainly by teleworking. The [Lúcio Craveiro da Silva Library](#), closed to the public, continued to develop initiatives to promote reading, by carrying out online activities aimed at citizens, by distributing books, namely at the University residences, where there are about two hundred international students and some students were quarantined, and by providing home loans; the services of UMinho Editora remain active and preparations continue to launch the **online** services of the Loja (Store) do Paço.

The technological infrastructure of the University has received particular attention. Thus, new servers were installed to accommodate the new VPN license technology (eduVPN) and to reinforce the capacity for telework from remote accesses with secure connections; the hosting of critical data from the organic units (OU) was provided in the UMinho data processing centre, allowing for remote access authenticated by the Presidents and Secretaries of the OU. Equipment to support the teleworking regime of workers that guarantee essential services were made available; special remote accesses in terms of cybersecurity were set up for technical, administrative and management workers that ensure the minimum services of UMinho. Technological support is being ensured in the assessment and installation of the computational and data communication resources necessary to enable the availability and exploitation of new distance learning technologies. Priority was given to the strategy of software development projects by DTSI in order to dematerialize critical activities in the context of UMinho's operation in teleworking. The resources of the data processing centre and data traffic are constantly being monitored to ensure controlled levels of telework support.

In the field of infrastructure, the University's cleaning and disinfection measures were reinforced and

the conditions for reopening the buildings closed in Gualtar were met. Despite the current difficulty in purchasing personal protective equipment, an urgent order for gloves and masks has been placed in order to try to ensure the safety of the most exposed workers and researchers; the Contingency Plan continues to be developed, through the preparation of a new volume that aims at guaranteeing the functioning of the University in the event of partial or total closure of the facilities, paying particular attention to biosafety issues, namely the operation and maintenance of bioteriums as well as biological collections and cultures.

In terms of social support, it is important to mention that the Lloyd Braga and Santa Tecla residences (Blocks B and D) have ceased to function under a prophylactic quarantine, as of the 23th of March; currently, the food units are being used for the production of takeaway meals, for students housed in university residences.

Over the past few days, UMinho has received requests from several health care providers, asking for support, namely in terms of protective material for health professionals. In order to quickly respond to such requests in an organized manner, the Rectorate has interacted with the OU and the research centres so to collect the relevant material available, which is being centralized and distributed by the School of Medicine. In a significant number, individual protection materials and laboratory reactants have already been sent to the Hospitals in Braga and Guimarães. Contacts are being made with ACES in the region in order to collaborate with Primary Health Care.

A lot has been done in the past week, a lot lies ahead of us to be done.

To this end, the commitment and availability of all is essential, in order to ensure that the University continues to fulfil its irreplaceable mission.

We have a role to play in containing the pandemic. I therefore call on everyone to scrupulously comply with the rules enacted in the context of the state of emergency, namely the general duty of social withdrawal and distancing.

I thank the lecturers, the researchers, the students and our technical, administrative and management staff for the way they have been able to act in the very difficult circumstances that we are living in. I thank you for the serene attitudes and the additional responsibilities that you have taken in your hands, which have allowed the University to continue to carry out the essence of its mission.

As on many other occasions, the University of Minho will be able to overcome the difficulties of the present, continuing to assert itself as a relevant player in the development of our region and our country.

Rui Vieira de Castro

Rector

24th March 2020

