

A message from the
**Vice-Chancellor
and President**
FEDERATION UNIVERSITY



17 March, 2020

Dear colleagues,

As you are aware, the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation in Australia is evolving rapidly. I understand you may be feeling anxious about the virus outbreak and I wish to reassure you that the university is well prepared to respond to the situation as it develops.

As outlined in my message to staff last week, the outbreak has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation and the state of Victoria has now declared a state of emergency due to the outbreak. This gives government a greater suite of measures to control the outbreak. It is important that as a community we do not panic in response to this news.

Government advice

This is a public health issue and as a public sector entity, we will continue to follow the advice of government health authorities and other agencies, and will not act independently of official government advice.

This means our campuses will remain open unless the sector is directed by government to close. Yesterday I chaired a meeting of Victorian Vice-Chancellors in relation to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and this position is unanimous for all Victorian universities.

Universities have an important role to play in combating the spread of the virus. Some universities will be carrying out medical research to address the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Others, including our own university, have an important role to play in completing the training of next year's medical, nursing and allied health professionals.

Business continuity planning

We are of course preparing for a variety of situations in our business continuity planning. Whilst we will continue with face-to-face teaching, we are preparing to increase online and alternative non face-to-face methods of delivery. Campuses will need to stay open to support online and face-to-face delivery to students, and to continue to provide essential services safely, even with potentially reduced staffing levels. This includes the maintenance of research infrastructure and the curation and storage of research data. The goal is to keep laboratory facilities open, subject to occupational, health and safety requirements being met.

In line with government advice to cancel gatherings of 500 or more people, we will be postponing all semester one graduations ceremonies planned for March and April until later in the year. We have also cancelled the UniSports Open Day event planned for Ballarat this Sunday as we could not be certain of the number of attendees. We are reviewing all up-coming university events to assess whether they will be cancelled in line with government advice and we will continue to update staff and students on this. Schools

and business areas within the university should not be acting independently to cancel events or close facilities.

Advice to staff

You will have received an email from our Chief Operating Officer yesterday with information for staff about work arrangements and leave entitlements. I encourage to speak to your manager and our Human Resources team about your individual circumstances should you have any questions or concerns.

At this stage, we do not have any confirmed staff or student cases of coronavirus (COVID-19). A domestic student at our Gippsland campus has been tested for the virus after returning from a trip to the United Kingdom with flu-like symptoms. They are currently in self-isolation awaiting results. All students and the one academic staff member who were in contact with that student have been notified and we are following the advice of health authorities. Arrangements have also been made to clean and disinfect the classroom. I wish to stress that at this point, it is a **suspected** case only and the university will notify staff and students if the case is confirmed. However, as the virus continues to spread across the community we can expect to see an increase in both suspected and confirmed cases. We will continue to follow the advice of health authorities should this occur.

Further support

I understand some staff may be feeling anxious about coronavirus (COVID-19) more broadly and I remind you that our free and confidential counselling services are available to staff through the [employee assistance program](#) should you have any concerns you wish to talk through.

We will continue to keep staff and students updated on our response to the outbreak and I encourage you to visit our [website](#) for regular updates.

I would like to stress to you that now is not the time to panic. It is the time to plan and be prepared, which we are. It is a time to follow the advice of experts and the authorities leading the national response, which we are. It is a time for the community to remain calm and come together, which I urge us all to do.

Thank you to all of our staff who have been working hard to ensure that we are well prepared for all eventualities as this situation continues to unfold.

Please continue to check the regular [website](#) updates. I will keep you informed of developments as they unfold.

Best regards

Professor Helen Bartlett
Vice-Chancellor and President