



## VICE-CHANCELLOR

Professor Rufus Black

**This letter to staff covers the following key topics:**

- A focus on non-salary costs to prioritise our workforce;
- The importance of annual leave and introduction of COVID-19 leave;
- Maintaining our core research strengths.

Dear colleagues,

I know we are all thinking about the profound impact of COVID-19 on communities around the world, as well as closer to home. From the early signs of the virus in late January, we have been mapping out scenarios for how the situation might play out, to help us determine what we need to do to steward the University through this period of disruption.

Today I want to update you on the further steps we are taking to navigate these difficult times. They are measures designed to support our people, prioritise our workforce and make sure we are strong when we emerge from this most difficult period.

Recently we talked about what we need to do accelerate our strategy, such as having a much simpler course structure and highly distinctive Tasmanian offerings, which will attract students, and simplifying our ways of working. This work remains critical to our long-term sustainability and helps us with the challenge today. However, during the period of the COVID-19 disruption there are further measures we will need to take.

Our most immediate challenge is that the guidelines restricting travel will significantly reduce the revenue from interstate and, particularly, international students. That is impacting us now. This will increase in second semester and very markedly for 2021.

**A focus on non-salary costs to prioritise our workforce**

As an institution, about 60 per cent of our costs are in salaries. The remainder covers expenses from travel to infrastructure to utilities.

The University's leadership team has approved a range of measures to restrict these non-salary costs and increase our resilience during this period of high

disruption. While we cannot commit to preserving our entire existing workforce, we can and will commit to prioritising the measures that protect jobs.

With those principles in mind, targeted non-salary budgets will be removed at an organisational unit or project level and quarantined in the college or division office. These will only be accessed in rare circumstances, where the activity is deemed absolutely necessary.

The following non-salary expenses budgets will be adjusted immediately:

- International and domestic operating travel budgets will be removed, and research travel budgets will be deferred;
- Entertainment, events and catering budgets will be removed.

All credit cards will be suspended, unless approved by an Executive Director Operations or Chief Financial Officer. For all other non-salary expenses, we request staff prioritise expenditure that is essential to core operational activities and our strategy. All non-essential expenditure will be cancelled or deferred.

The majority of consultancy and capital budgets will be removed immediately. This will not apply to the consultants contracted to deliver the \$300 million Northern Campus Transformation in Launceston and Burnie, or The Hedberg in Hobart. It is even more vital that these works proceed as scheduled to support these regions.

However, we have identified the need to pause master planning for the Southern Campus given the difficulty we will face engaging our community while Tasmania's focus is on the social and economic challenges presented by COVID-19.

In all our activity, we support Tasmania. Where we have continuing non-salary expenditure, to the greatest extent possible, we will aim to spend it in Tasmania and especially with our small to medium-sized businesses.

### **The importance of annual leave and introduction of COVID-19 leave**

In coming weeks and months, how we use our annual leave will be central to both our own personal health and wellbeing, and the sustainability of the University.

We know there is a heightened level of concern in our community about the challenge presented by COVID-19. These are difficult times. Taking breaks, days off and periods of leave helps people be healthier and well during times of challenge. We encourage you to take time for yourselves and your families.

In addition, the more people take leave, and reduce their banked leave, the less pressure there will be on our salaries budget. It is very much a personal decision but stewardship of the University and prioritising the jobs of our colleagues would see everyone taking their full leave entitlement for this year within the year.

We also are investing in supporting our people. This week, our leaders endorsed a provision of two-weeks special COVID-19 leave to help people manage the impacts of the pandemic on their working and family lives, impacts that fall far outside the norm. Further details on leave during these times is available on the [staff intranet](#).

### **Maintaining our core research strengths**

We are acutely aware that being a university *of* and *for* Tasmania must inform our financial decision-making, as well as decisions about our teaching and research. We must maintain our core research strengths through this time so that we can make our important contribution locally and globally.

Within the limits of research funding agency decisions, we need to focus and invest on those things which align with our strategy and mission, and to retain those strengths which will be vital to our future.

These are not easy times and more challenging ones may yet lie ahead. But together we can get through this and we can help Tasmania, the community we were founded to serve, to do so as well.

Kind regards,

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Vice-Chancellor



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