

# Higher learning institutions reflect on e-learning strategies

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Students at the Namibia University of Science and Technology working on an assignment. PHOTO JUSTICIA SHIPENA

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During a panel discussion at the Covid-19 Communication Centre yesterday, representatives from several institutions discussed their readiness to welcome students back on campus and reflected on the efficiency of online learning.

Daniel Nyaungwa from Monotronics Success College shared that the college had to develop new policies in terms of quality assurance and come up with Covid-19 educational policies. Nyaungwa admitted that assessments were difficult to carry out on an online basis.

“Online assessments are a disadvantage to other students rather than the traditional way of doing assessments,” he said. He added that the most reliable assessments were assignments and although online tests and examinations had been carried out, they could not be utilised as “summative assessments”.

Although a lot has been achieved with online learning, there were a number of challenges for the institution, including questions whether the outcome of the assessments was actually valid, as well as equity among students.

Upon students’ return to institutions of higher learning, Monotronics Success College will resume with the more practical subjects that could not be effectively taught online.

Institutions of higher learning upon return to face-to-face teaching have to adhere to compulsory compliance checklists from the National Council of Higher Education (NCHE) and the Namibia Training Authority. The NTA has to visit the centres to ensure that they comply with regulations.

Nyaungwa assures that safety protocols are in place, with thermoguns to take students' temperature, enforcement of hand sanitising and even free masks for some students.

Donavan Zealand, the Namibia University of Science and Technology's (NUST) director of student services, said only 7 500 students migrated to the online learning platforms, leaving over 3 000 students without access to online learning.

Dr Zealand said NUST tried to maintain the quality of assessments and remained flexible to accommodate students and provide them with more opportunities for assessment.

"We are constantly changing and improving on assessments," he said.

Zealand admitted that there is still room for improvement but commended institutions for pushing forward. "In the second semester I think we will do much better in terms of providing quality and consistent education for our students."

Geoffry Kiangy, Triumphant College rector, commented on the new learning approach, saying that after a while, a good strategy had been adopted through first establishing an e-learning policy with five elements addressing the desired outcome and concerns with quality and organisational readiness.

"We came to realise that there are certain advantages to e-learning," he said. Taking into account the challenges faced by students, assessments were made available over a period of 24 hours.

This was also a time for institutions of higher learning to rope in the government for assistance when it came to accessibility to online leaning material and platforms.

Kiangy shared that Triumphant College has a plan to ensure that students who were at a disadvantage, having no access to online learning platforms, will be "accelerated" to ensure that they catch up upon their return to campus.

The International University of Management relaxed some of its deadlines to ensure that students who had difficulty accessing online learning platforms could still contribute. In other efforts, the institution opened up facilities to allow students to access computers and internet services to catch up with school work.