

# BOU BULLETIN

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## BOTSWANA OPEN UNIVERSITY REMAINS FOCUSED IN THE MIDST OF COVID – 19

Botswana Open University Vice Chancellor Dr Daniel Tau, On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2020 through a Ministry of Tertiary Education Research, Science and Technology's initiative, shared with the nation his organisation's response to the COVID- 19 pandemic through an address on Botswana Television.

The address was necessary to share BOU's response and position given the decision by the Ministry of Tertiary Education Research, Science and Technology's to close all institutions of learning following the announcement of the State of Emergency (SoE) and the imposition of extreme social distancing on all non-essential employees and the public. This platform gave the University a chance to show case the need and viability of ODL

In his address, The Vice Chancellor stated that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) became the most viable alternative for learners to "safely progress their learning goals amidst the lockdown situation" and that entities which relied more on the use of technology like BOU would be disrupted much lesser than those which relied less on technology in offering their services. The Vice Chancellor shared with the nation that despite that, the pandemic had affected some activities or events which the institution had scheduled. These included two conferences that had attracted experts from near and afar. The pandemic had also affected the end of the 2019/20 University academic calendar which had to be extended by a month which in turn affected the start of the subsequent academic year.

Motswana says "maano ga a site go sita a loso", loosely translated it means there is always a way of overcoming challenges. The VC explained that despite COVID-19, BOU students continued to learn, submit assignments, and sit examinations online. Prior to COVID 19 most assessments were venue-based and all students were expected to present themselves at these venues for examinations. The VC stated that BOU further extended a helping hand to students at other public universities and at basic education level by making the learning content freely available to them online. To further show its commitment to the spirit of improving access to education, BOU engaged internet service providers like Mascom, to assist in facilitating access to its (BOU) platforms through provision of free data or zero rating. Mascom came onboard to provide free access to all Mascom simcard holders to BOU platforms until the end of the SoE. The Vice Chancellor also stated that through BOU over 350 Batswana got enrolled in COURSERA programmes which were offered free of charge. This was through the BOU, Commonwealth of Learning and Coursera Workforce Initiative that enabled over 1000 Batswana Children to access over 3800 courses stretching over four hundred disciplines. He highlighted that at the time 31 had already completed at least one course and that one had completed seven short courses which was a clear sign of a person who was determined to self-develop.

The BOU Vice Chancellor shared with the nation BOU's plans post COVID – 19. Dr Tau, though acknowledging the challenges the adoption of ODL methodologies may



Dr D. Tau - BOU Vice Chancellor

bring in the conventional system, advocated for the expansion of the scope of ODL facilitation to the conventional education system to address the changing nature of education. He further emphasised BOU's plan to campaign for the development of a National Open Educational Resource (OER) Centre. According to Dr Tau BOU would mobilise all public higher institutions to contribute to Higher Education Content development of selected programmes with Ministry of Basic Education robbed in to contribute to the development of Secondary and Primary School content (e-books, digital videos etc. He said BOU was in the process of undertaking concretising its thoughts and thereafter undertaking consultations locally and globally to drive this progressive thought to reality.

The VC also shared with the nation that though the University in its 2019 – 2023 Strategic Plan had planned to have increased technology utilisation later in the plan period, this had to be implemented before the scheduled time to address the current situation.

Dr Tau emphasised that "given the sad reality of COVID – 19, virtual learning is inevitable and is the alternative".



BOU team and TT &amp; TE team from the Ministry of Tertiary Education Research, Science and Technology

### DEPARTMENT OF TEACHER TRAINING AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION ACKNOWLEDGES BOTSWANA OPEN UNIVERSITY

Botswana Open University (BOU) hosted a team of officers from the Department of Teacher Training and Technical Education (DTT & TE), a unit within the Ministry of Tertiary Education Research, Science and Technology (MOTE), on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2020. The Team of six officers was led by the Deputy Director in the Department, Ms Dorcus Phirie. The BOU team led by the Director of Centre for Instructional Technology included the Dean for School of Science and Technology, Directors of Information Technology, Partnerships and Business Development, Corporate Relations and Marketing, as well as the ELearning Specialist.

The DTT & TE team had come to benchmark on the achievements of BOU with regard to online teaching and learning. Ms Phirie explained that they had realised that BOU's teaching and learning processes were not seriously affected by the emergence of COVID-19

and the lockdown which was effected. She hinted that with them all systems regarding the operations of the colleges came to a complete halt at the announcement of closure of schools/colleges and the subsequent lockdown, as they had not planned for such an eventuality.

In briefing the DTT & TE team Mr Molelu explained that the University was not drastically affected by the lockdown though there was still a lot that still needed to be done. He told the team that the University had initially planned to have venue based assessments that did not happen because of the pandemic. Luckily as the institution had already commenced its strategic change dimension of operational efficiency and incorporation of innovation through the strategic use of technology, the University was able to quickly arrange for online summative assessment and subsequently all assessment



Ms Phirie, Ms Balopi, Mr Molelu and Mr Bashe



TT&amp;D Deputy Director Ms Phirie presenting

for tertiary level students was done online. This was a great success on the part of the University as this had not been planned and was done ahead of schedule.

The DTT & TE team wished that BOU could assist to get their Department utilise ICT especially for the management of college students teaching and learning activities. The two Teams agreed that it would be beneficial to both institutions to collaborate to improve on each Department's delivery of their mandate and as this would also encourage the sharing of limited resources which Government advocates for. The two Teams were to have further meetings after consulting their principals for formalised collaboration.



Deputy Vice Chancellor - Academic Services, Professor Frank YoungmanTT

### BOU PIONEERS HUAWEI CERTIFIED ICT ASSOCIATE COURSE

The Department of Computing and Information Systems in the School of Science and Technology launched its inaugural group of students to train on the newly introduced Huawei Certified ICT Associate Course - Routing and Switching. Students comprised ICT professionals from various organisations like Botswana Police Services.

When welcoming guests, the School of Science and Technology Acting Dean, Dr Lekopanye Tladi, said Botswana Open University signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Huawei Technologies Botswana in 2017, which was recently renewed. The MOA culminated with the Huawei ICT Academy being housed here in BOU. "The course on offer is fully accredited by Botswana Qualifications Authority" noted Dr Tladi.

The Deputy Vice Chancellor - Academic Services, Professor Frank Youngman, told students that he is a witness that indeed Huawei is a global leader in technology as he personally had an opportunity to tour their exhibition centre in Beijing which displayed their most advanced technologies. He said because of its Research and Development it leads in many fields and recently it has become the number one seller of mobile phones globally. The DVC said he was highlighting these characteristics of Huawei to show students that this is the right course to advance their career, learning from a global leader. He said he was aware that Huawei has been involved in the safer city project here in Botswana and have now embarked on smart technology and the establishment of 5G networks. He noted that the course

was aligned to BOU's strategic intentions and is part of the University's contribution to the national transformation agenda and its support for the implementation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Prof Youngman assured students that all the tools they needed for their training were available in the campus laboratory and online and they will be able to practically explore the equipment and software they will be working with before certification. He said this will make it easier for students when they go back to their workplaces to fully utilize the equipment and software they have.

In his address the Vice President of Huawei Technologies Botswana, Mr Frelimo Fred Kebopetswe, informed students that Huawei operates in four facets, namely, Enterprise Business, Equipment, Mobile Devices and Cloud Solutions. He said the Huawei ICT Academy is an integral part of their end-to-end solutions as they need people who understand the technology and are able to use it. He told students that this switching and routing training is a window to a lot of opportunities. "It is possible to set up businesses and provide these Routing and Switching solutions all around the country and in doing that Huawei will register you as a partner, said the Vice President, Mr Kebopetswe.

All students who were to commence the training in the course as well as representatives from BOU and Huawei leadership attended the launch at the Gaborone Regional Campus.