

INFORMASIE TECHNOLOGIE

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MICROSOFT TEAMS EMPOWERED STUDENTS AND STAFF TO STUDY AND WORK FROM HOME

In response to the declaration of a national state of disaster on 15 March, Information Technology immediately started preparing emergency remote online learning technology contingency- as well as work from home plans, to prepare for off-campus operations - and the possibility of a national lockdown, which was later announced by the president from midnight on Thursday, 26 March 2020.

Students

There are 4678 SUNLearn users who have activated Office 365 user profiles from within the Learning Management System. Academic Staff have used Teams to create class group channels where conversations and online meetings are hosted with tutors and lecturers. An example of where this is working well is in Economics 114. This is a class with 1752 students enrolled in the module. It has been sub-divided into channels by the module team each with its tutor. The tutor hosts the channel and from what we can see, has been very active in communicating with students.

The added feature of having each module now linked to an Office 365 group creates a data set, which to date we have not had available anywhere else, i.e. knowing who the lecturers are that are attached to specific modules and specific student groups. As each Team is activated on SUNLearn modules, an Office 365 group is automatically created. The lecturers become owners of the team and students become members of that team. Once a lecturer or student is no longer a participant in a SUNLearn module attached to an MS Team, they are automatically removed from the Team.

Staff

Office 365 overview / training sessions and assistance for Staff, with the focus on Microsoft Teams and associated applications, intensified, in order to assist users and environments, who had not at that stage adopted these new Software-as-a Service tools, to be prepared for the sudden work-from-home situation.

The challenge for staff was to rapidly adopt new ways of working and acquire knowledge and skills to utilise Microsoft Teams, in order to stay operational, while working from home.

Information Technology's Service Desk and Office 365 specialists made a large effort to assist and support users. A portion of the staff population was very eager to take advantage of the Office 365 capabilities and went to great lengths to help themselves, by making use of the following comprehensive Microsoft Teams and other Office 365 Help & learning sites:

[Microsoft Teams help & learning](#)

[Microsoft 365 Training](#)

[Planner Quick Start](#)

[OneDrive help & learning](#)

[OneNote help & learning](#)

The usage of Microsoft Teams increased exponentially since the national lock down came into effect. Statistics from the Microsoft Teams Administration Centre for the University are as follows:

Teams Daily Active Users:

Microsoft Teams Unique Active Users at start of lock down	< 9000
Microsoft Teams Unique Active Users at 24 June	25500

Teams user activity report

Date Range: 27 March 2020 – 24 June 2020

	Channel Messages	191 064
	<i>Number of unique messages that users posted in a team chats during the specified time period.</i>	
	Reply Messages	121 874
	<i>Number of unique reply messages that users posted in team channels during the specified time period.</i>	
Messages	Post Messages	44 750
	<i>Number of unique post messages that users posted in a team channels during the specified time period.</i>	
	Chat Messages	697 543
	<i>Number of unique messages that users posted in a private chats during the specified time period.</i>	
	Urgent Messages	63
	<i>Number of urgent messages that users posted in a chat during the specified time period.</i>	
	Meetings Organised	60 136
	<i>Number of scheduled meetings users organised during the specified time period.</i>	
Meetings	Meetings Participated	65 095
	<i>Number of scheduled meetings users participated in during the specified time period.</i>	
	Group Calls	17 035
	<i>Number of group calls that the user participated in during the specified time period.</i>	
Calls	1:1 Calls	45 457
	<i>Number of 1:1 calls that the user participated in during the specified time period.</i>	

Using Microsoft Teams, staff were able to adopt excellent new ways of work, e.g. to conduct and record online video meetings, conferences and even oral examinations. The use of Microsoft Teams also enhanced team productivity and - collaboration. It enabled staff to make Team calls, have online discussions and co-author documents in real time. It also allowed staff to chat and check-in with colleagues, just to say hello.

Microsoft Teams also allows for collaboration with guests, outside of the University.

Staff have quickly learned to use all the above features - meetings are well organised and structured and they are also making good use of the content management and workstream collaboration features.

Microsoft Teams has improved over the past three months and the following additional features were added, e.g.:

Raised Hand feature

Download attendance reports

Use of Live Captions in Team Meetings (transcribing spoken English to text)

Microsoft Teams can now show 9 participants simultaneously in video meetings.

Stellenbosch University is participating in Microsoft's Technology Adoption Program for Teams, whereby the limit of number of people in a Teams meeting were raised to 350 – this limit will be further increased in the near future.

According to Gartner, organisations that fail to exploit new digital tools paradigm and foster workforce digital dexterity, are at a substantial risk of falling behind.

The national lock down forced a dramatic change in our normal operations, but also provided an excellent opportunity to accelerate digitalisation, including the adoption of Microsoft Teams and associated Office productivity tools, to substantially improve productivity and outcomes for the university.

We are transitioning to the digital workplace!

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