



INFLUENCE OF THE SARS-COV-2 PANDEMIC ON THE VEE AND ACTIONS TAKEN

DIPARTIMENTO DI MEDICINA VETERINARIA,
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI SASSARI, ITALY



Addendum

Influence of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic on the VEE and actions taken

Introduction – The University of Sassari, to counter and contain the spread of the Sars COV-2 virus throughout the national territory, applied the measures indicated in the Decree of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers - DPCM - of 4 March 2020, with DR 775/2020 starting from 6 March 2020. Specifically, all teaching activities were suspended until 15 March 2020. Subsequently, further measures were introduced by the Authorities and therefore by the University.

With the D.R. of 10/03/2020, the University adopted the "University Protocol for distance learning" which defined the methods, tools and parameters for the provision of distance learning and for the delivery of exams and graduation. There were 3 delivery methods:

- Synchronous: through the use of Microsoft Teams, available free of charge to students and staff;
- Asynchronous: through the use of the University Moodle platform.
- Mixed: through the use of both platforms.

From that date, the teaching activities of the Department of Veterinary Medicine were carried out remotely, until the end of the semester, during which, given the restrictions imposed by the Government, it was impossible to carry out the practical activities in the teaching laboratories, in the ODV and in the external companies. The lockdown drastically reduced the activities of the DMV and the ODV until the end of the health emergency on 31 March 2022. Given the variability of the epidemiological situation, the University has issued various decrees indicating the measures aimed at regulating the provision of the training activity of the Department (DR 1334 of 23/04/2021-DR 1773 14/05/2021-DR 1971 31/05/2021). The end of the health emergency has led to a gradual return to the ordinary, in fact practical teaching activities have been resumed and other alternative activities have been organized to allow students to continue their studies, and in particular to minimize the difficulties, and any delays in obtaining the degree. The University has initially organised, in collaboration with the University Hospital of Sassari, the mass anti-Covid-19 screening aimed at the entire student population. Subsequently, to face the common fight against the Sars-COV 2 infection, it provided for the inclusion of all students from the Health, Medical and Veterinary Areas in the national vaccination plan. All the provisions (Decrees, Guidelines, Measures, etc.) adopted by the University of Sassari during and after the emergency are available at the [link](#).

Standard 1 - Objectives, Organisation, and QA Policy.

Following the DPCM March 4th, 2020, containing the measures concerning the contrast and containment throughout the national territory of the spread of the Coronavirus, on March 5th, 2020 UNISS [Rectoral Decree](#) of suspension of the "in presence" didactic activities was issued. All the teaching activities were suspended. Then, remote teaching and assessment activities started on March 9th, using the windows platform Teams. Professional practical training, external practical training, laboratory activities, access to libraries and study rooms, were totally suspended. The diverse committees/bodies started to meet remotely, technical and administrative staff started smart working, and all front-office activities turned into distance ones. The VTH, without the presence of students, remained open for urgencies as these were legally allowed. On May 4th, 2020, Phase 2 began, and teachers, researchers and technicians were allowed to access to laboratories. The DVM adopted precise procedures for accessing the buildings of each scientific disciplinary sector, to

regulate the flow of people and ensure no work environment overcrowding. During that second phase, lectures, exams, graduations were still carried out remotely, while libraries and study rooms remained closed. In order to allow doctoral students and undergraduates to be able to carry out the experiments underlying their thesis, these students were granted entry to the laboratories, always regulating the number of people present at the same time, calculated by the UNISS Protection and Security Service based on the size of the workplace. Furthermore, the activity of students at the VTH also resumed, albeit in small numbers, for the aforementioned reasons. In the 2020-2021 academic year, teaching activity resumed in mixed way (hybrid), in order to limit the simultaneous presence of a large number of students who did not guarantee adequate distancing. The practical activities also required the hybrid modality and, when in presence, a further reduction of the number of students in groups. From 30 April 2022, once the state of emergency ended, both the committee members and the governing bodies of the DVM and lessons resumed in presence, with precise rules regarding the possession of the Green Pass, FFP2 masks and adequate distancing in the classrooms.

Standard 2 – Finances.

During COVID-19 pandemic several resources were allocated for the implementation of remote teaching and assessment tools; moreover, specific budget was allocated for individual protection devices. In response to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 emergency, the MUR has introduced a “no-tax area”, exempting students meeting specific requirements (see Standard 2.1, Annual tuition fee for national and international students) from the payment of the all-inclusive annual tuition fee. UNISS also purchased and made available to students on a free loan basis IT device (digital divide bonus), such as PCs, smartphones, and tablets.

Standard 3 – Curriculum.

Since the first lockdown on March 9, 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has involved various areas with a lot of difficulties both for the teaching staff, on one hand, and for students, on the other hand. Following national rules, face to face lessons were substituted with online courses, during periods when the increase in infections suggested a precautionary approach (precisely from March to June 2020, from October 2020 to June 2021, and from January to March 2022). The University faced the changes through acquisition of the license to activate Microsoft Teams platform, which was used for distance teaching activities, meetings, and to guarantee the student/teacher relationship (tutorship and/or teachers' consulting hours) during all aforementioned isolation periods. During the latter, all face-to-face interactions were replaced with online services and synchronous online lessons were delivered similarly to face-to-face lessons. Video recordings of synchronous and asynchronous lessons remained available to students on the web platform. Some practical work was adapted to be carried out online (e.g., desk- and computer-based work), when possible, and some other activities (laboratory work, non-clinical animal work, clinical animal work and EPT) were suspended, according to national laws, and rescheduled to take place after the end of the lockdown. Compulsory activities related to graduation theses were carried out following appropriate safety protocols. Examinations and final graduation thesis discussion were conducted online and an extension of the academic year 2018/2019 was granted by the Ministry (MUR) to permit students to graduate on course despite the possible delays in carrying out the curriculum due to the health situation. By this way, the last graduation session date for that year was moved from April 30 to June 15, 2020. Also, professional qualification exams (PQE) for both session in 2020 (July and November) and 2021 (June and November) took place online.

Standard 4 - Facilities and Equipment.

The entire activity of the DVMSS was obviously dramatically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic including access to facilities and equipment needed to guarantee quality remote teaching. Specific rules govern the access to work premises since COVID-19 occurred. The VEE provides informative material for different visitors about specific safety procedures. Moreover, personal protection equipment (i.e., surgical or FFP2 facemask) were provided to teaching staff when accessing the DVMSS premises. Capacity of teaching room was also limited to allow to keep interpersonal distance and seats of students were identified with names and surnames, so that each seat could be taken by the same student at each lecture. Disinfecting solutions were also provided to sanitize desks after each lecture. Major investments had to be performed by UNISS to DVMSS to adapt teaching and consulting activities (24H, 24/7): access to tools for remote teaching such as Microsoft TEAMS was granted to the whole academic staff. Wi-Fi connection was potentiated with the creation of a specific one dedicated to teaching. Such reinforced equipment allowed permanently the chance of activating hybrid teaching (in person and remotely) in case of need.

Standard 5 - Animal Resources and Teaching Material of Animal Origin.

Since the first lockdown, on March 9, 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has involved several areas with many difficulties, both for the teaching team and students. Following national regulations, face-to-face lessons were replaced by online courses, during periods in which the increase in infections suggested a precautionary approach (precisely from March to June 2020, from October 2020 to June 2021, and from January to March 2022). The University supported the changes with the acquisition of the license to activate the Microsoft Teams platform, which was used for distance learning activities, meetings, and to guarantee the student/teacher relationship (tutorship and/or teacher consultancy hours) during all the periods indicated above. During these periods, all face-to-face services were replaced with online services and synchronous online classes were delivered, similar to face-to-face classes. The video recordings of the synchronous and asynchronous lessons remained available to the students on the web platform. and some other activities (laboratory work, non-clinical animal work, clinical animal work) were suspended, according to national laws, and rescheduled for the period after the end of the lockdown. The mandatory activities relating to the degree theses were carried out following appropriate safety protocols. In the 2020-2021 academic year, teaching activity resumed in blending mode, in order to limit the simultaneous presence of a large number of students who did not guarantee adequate distancing. The practices also required the mixed modality and, in presence, the further reduction of the number of students in each group. From 30 April 2022, once the state of emergency ended, both hospital activities and practical lessons with educational animals resumed, with precise rules regarding use of FFP2 mask, Green Pass, and adequate distancing.

Standard 6 - Learning Resources.

Following the [DPCM 9 marzo 2020](#) all Uniss libraries were closed, the book loan service was suspended and the student room was closed. Electronic access to learning resources was constantly guaranteed to the entire Uniss community via [UniSSearch](#). Before year 2020, the Library offered 185 seat, but in accordance with Uniss Protocol for COVID control, it currently offers 76 seats and access can be booked via the [App Affluences](#). Admission is checked by staff in the reception area.

Standard 7 - Student Admission, Progression, and Welfare.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic and related containment measures, the educational programmes, learning outcomes, admission procedures and requirements for national and foreign students, progression and certification, tuition fees, academic calendar, collaborations with other

establishments, etc. have been accessed by the students only online. A specific [web page](#) was developed to inform the students about the status of COVID-19 pandemic and related containment measures. Orientation days were carried out through online meetings and students' needs were addressed online. During the COVID-19 pandemic period, access to student hubs and libraries was forbidden or regulated when containment measures allowed it, through the implementation of a system capable to manage reservations and inflow of the students. At this regard, students have been strongly encouraged to use dedicated mobile applications to book their seats in libraries ("Affluences App" available at or [in student hubs](#)).

Standard 8 - Student Assessment

During Covid-19 pandemic, in compliance with behavioral provisions issued by the Italian Ministry of Health against the COVID-19 pandemic, and with regulation issued by rector's decree, as well as to guarantee students regular careers progression, assessment procedures relative to all modules and courses were carried out online through the use of the TEAMS platform. For each module/course, the same platform was used as a dedicated databank in which recording of all classes were saved and were available to students (both live or pre-recorded classes), together with the syllabus and any teaching material provided.

Standard 9 - Academic and Support Staff (person in charge: Prof. Simonetta Appino)

During the pandemic period, the decrees of the President of the Council of Ministers (DPCM) were applied, which set out the measures to combat the pandemic and prevent contagion from COVID-19; as a result, the universities promptly reacted to the adjustment with the suspension of numerous activities. During the first lockdown (9 March - 18 May 2020), an almost total closure of the Department's facilities was imposed and the work was carried out remotely.

Subsequently, the measures to fight the pandemic were applied by both all the technical and teaching staff, following the guidelines defined by the [Prime Ministerial Decree](#).

Standard 10 - Research Programmes, Continuing and Postgraduate Education

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the research activity in the University of Sassari and therefore also in the DVM, has markedly slowed down, especially during the first lockdown (9 March - 18 May 2020). After this period, the research activity slowly resumed, and professors, researchers, Ph.D. students, research fellows, and students working on their thesis, were able to access the research laboratories, adopting all [the procedures](#) to avoid contagion. Considering the specificity of each research laboratory, the maximum number of persons who can simultaneously stay inside the laboratory was defined, in relation to the free surface of the laboratory, the need for movement related to the laboratory work, and the instruments located in each lab. The person in charge on safety in the workplace had to guarantee compliance with all these rules. In the AY 2019/20 postgraduate programmes (PhD School, and Schools of Specialisation) have been conducted by distance learning.