



“Iminingo”

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S COMMUNIQUÉ

Thursday, 17 January 2019

AS THE YEAR 2019 STARTS

Let me take this opportunity to wish all staff members, old and new, our new and returning students, members of Council and all DUT stakeholders and partners, a prosperous 2019. I wish everyone excellence in all spheres of our lives, particularly our health.

I trust that the break we had over the festive period helped us to recuperate from the emotionally and physically taxing 2018. I am also aware that some of us may not have had the desired jolly moments with families and friends because of circumstances beyond their control. Whatever the depth of disappointment or sorrow, we find solace in the fact that nothing is permanent; with the passage of time, the wounds – emotional and physical – will heal someday; and, soonest, we hope.

The amalgam of the complex nature of a university and the specific transformation and development challenges at DUT require all of us to have the right energy levels in order to be equal to the task. Our individual and organizational performance are closely tied to our states of energy. Taking a break from work and spending time with our loved ones, listening to our favourite music, leisure reading, visiting exotic or natural attractions are among many activities we need to do regularly in order to boost our energy capacity.

I, therefore, want to encourage each one of us to invest in these activities but within our financial means. While students may not have the means to engage in these activities regularly – unless supported by families – I also want to encourage them to find alternative activities that will relieve them of the many social and academic burdens they carry. Yes, we want our students to excel in their studies and cultivate a great future for themselves, but it should not be at the expense of their mental wellbeing. Inevitably, we need each other to develop and bolster our emotional capacity. Simply defined, emotional capacity is the ability to handle pressure, change, criticism, rejection and all other negative aspects, but, in a positive way. I am hoping that we will work together as staff, students, stakeholders and partners to reduce the number of suicides we had at DUT last year.

LONG-TERM AGREEMENT ON SALARY INCREASES

While I do not wish to remind our staff and students of the strife we all suffered at the beginning of 2018 (and even subsequently) as a result of the labour strike, I have to share some good news this year.

Thanks so much to the Management Team and the Unions' Team in our Joint Bargaining Forum (and their constituencies, too) for the mutual understanding, progressive spirit and collaboration that prevailed this time around. We now have a three-year agreement!

This is a significant achievement. It is always counter-productive, perhaps insane even, to put ourselves in conflictual Management-Staff situations year in and year out. With all of us having the singular purpose to make DUT great, we will not succeed if we rob ourselves of time to build relations and

focus unwaveringly and in unison on changing and transforming DUT. With the 3 year respite we have in this regard, we will certainly have more time and energy to engage and collectively build a great DUT. The engagements planned as reported below are a small start of this process.

CHANGES IN STAFFING

As we start the new year, we have the pleasure of welcoming Professor Theo Andrew as the Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning over the next 6 months. He is holding the fort for Professor Nomthandazo Gwele who is on sabbatical leave to finish off some important research work. With the departure of our two Executive Deans, we appointed Professors Veena Rawjee and Paul Musonge as the Acting Deans of the Faculties Management Sciences and Engineering and Built Environment, respectively.

We also welcome Dr Progress Mtshali, one of our relatively new academics in the Information & Communication Technology Department, as the Acting Director: ITSS after the departure of Mr Soren Aalto as the year ended. Professor Ashley Ross is taking over as the Acting Head of General Education following the resignation of Dr Delysia Timm. The new Dean of Students, Dr Maditsane Nkonoane, will be starting with effect from 1 February 2019.

We wish our former colleagues, who have either retired or resigned, well in their new endeavors. I also wish to thank Mr Malusi Nxumalo for having steered the ship of student services over the past few years. I am confident that all the new appointees will enjoy the support from all of us. In the next few months, we will be moving with alacrity to fill the vacant positions of Registrar and Executive Deans.

AGENDA FOR 2019

On 10 December 2018, we published the end-of-the-year message in *Iminingo* which detailed a number of our operational and strategic achievements in 2018. I shall not repeat those here, except to suggest that it may be important for readers of this edition of *Iminingo* to remind themselves of what we communicated in December. What we communicated then provides an important context of this section. There are important events I wish to bring to your attention, and which require enthusiastic participation by everyone.

- We will host the State of the University Address (SoUA) next month at both our Durban and Midlands Centres. The SoUA provides an important platform for accountability, transparency and collaborative effort at our university. We will share some details on what we achieved last year and all other preceding years as 2019 is the last year of the current Strategic Plan. The event is meant for all staff members, students and our strategic external stakeholders to attend.
- We will be having a series of consultations with staff members and students to share views as part of the process of formulating the new Strategic Plan that will fast-track our collective quest for DUT's greatness. We are committed to consulting the broadest spectrum of the DUT constituency to ensure that all diverse intellectual perspectives inform the final product.
- We will be setting the whole week aside for the orientation of first years for the first time in the last few years at DUT. This should help to enrich the first years' student experience; and, hopefully, this experience will help to lay a solid foundation for social cohesion, academic performance and the realization of DUT's Graduate attributes.
- This year should see us start to engage broader on, and eventually implementing, the findings and recommendations by PSP-Icon and those from other smaller departmental reviews we conducted in 2018. A number of staff members participated in the online survey administered by this company. We, therefore, have a duty to address specific and general issues arising out the survey in order to ensure that we collectively build a solid foundation for a university of the future.

Overcoming the challenges we have confronted since my appointment as the Vice-Chancellor demonstrates the university's capacity to forge strategic pacts required for intra-institutional cohesiveness and collaboration. Moving forward, we need to defend this capacity and ensure that these pacts can stand the test of time. At the moment, they are still fragile and tend to wither away when there are competing interests. This is the cognitive hurdle we will have to deal with without compromising the key values and principles that hold the organisation together.

Universities are known as, arguably, sites of 'organized anarchy'. Like any other university, DUT may have its own peculiar elements that fit this characterization. Some of those may significantly compromise the capacity of this otherwise great university to achieve its ambitions, goals and objectives.

The time is ripe for us to review our state of 'organised anarchy' as evidenced by our lingering propensity to protest action and contestation over the most ephemeral instances of disagreement. I am happy that the majority of our staff members and students alike are beginning to imagine a different DUT. This is part of the cognitive hurdle I am referring to. To this end, we will have to be mindful, of John Maxwell's advice that "*everything worthwhile in life is uphill*". We will need the determination, patience, mental and physical strength and innovation to move the DUT bus uphill.

God bless!

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