



Monday, 18 February 2019

MANAGEMENT STATEMENT ON THE ACADEMIC PROGRAMME AT DUT AND ON THE OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING WITH THE SRC

THE SUSPENSION OF THE ACADEMIC PROGRAMME IN DURBAN

The Executive Committee of Senate at DUT has decided to suspend the academic programme at all five DUT campuses in Durban until further notice. The academic programme at the two campuses in Pietermaritzburg will continue as normal.

The decision was reached following renewed student protests in Durban whilst engagements between University Management and the SRC was taking place this morning. Although the suspension of the academic programme in Durban is disappointing, the University cannot jeopardize the safety and security of all staff and students. The unacceptable levels of intimidation is not conducive to a learning environment. The threats made by certain members of the SRC has to be taken seriously, especially following the levels of violence that we have witnessed two weeks ago and the challenges faced by some of our sister Universities today.

Whilst we increased the security presence in Durban today, student protestors still disrupted classes, intimidated staff and students and the protestors violated the rights of others, by publicly issuing threats against members of the DUT community.

Following our engagements with the SRC, we have been informed by the DUT Midlands SRC that they are satisfied with the progress made on addressing their concerns and they want lectures to continue on the Indumiso and Riverside campuses in Pietermaritzburg. However, it would seem that some student leaders in Durban are not interested in agreements that take us closer to solutions. It is this group that is spreading fake news, issuing threats and promoting disruption and disorder in Durban.

So, considering the overall safety of our staff and students, SENEX has decided to suspend the academic programme in Durban until further notice. The academic activity in the Midlands will continue as planned.

ON MEETING WITH THE SRC

The delegation of Executive and Senior Management met with the SRC this morning at 08H00. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss mainly two issues: (i) unblocking of students and (ii) student accommodation challenges. This was against the backdrop of the renewed calls made over the weekend by the SRC that classes would not resume until all issues are resolved. The SRC also added the issue of security on our campuses to the agenda, although this was tabled towards the closure of the meeting.

At an outset, Management thanked the SRC for having honoured the invitation to the meet. 13 of the 15 members of the SRC attended the meeting, although one left before the meeting had concluded. All parties agreed that the meeting could continue, as the structure was quorate in terms of the SRC Constitution, despite the notable absence of the SRC President.

ON NSFAS AND BLOCKED STUDENTS

The Financial Aid Manager presented the progress that has been made since the submission of the memorandum of demands to the Vice-Chancellor on 4 February 2019. Of the 1443 original list that was submitted to the NSFAS for feedback, it was found that there were some duplicates, which reduced the number to less than 1000 once data was cleansed. 267 in this group did not meet the academic criteria for continuation of funding. Financial Aid will notify these students and will also share the same list with the SRC. This category will have to go to Finance to sign the Acknowledgment of Debt (AOD) for them to be unblocked. The meeting reached consensus on this category.

The NSFAS Rapid Response Team was on campus today to meet with the DUT Financial Aid staff in an attempt to resolve the remaining number of about 600 students. There were several students who were unblocked during the course of the last week, which in part would explain the increasing number of registered students. There was a commitment from NSFAS and DUT to finalise all outstanding queries within the next 72 hours, or by Friday at the very latest.

ON STUDENT HOUSING

The team comprising both the officials from the University (Durban) and the SRC Accommodation Officer (Durban) presented a preliminary verbal report on the buildings they visited last week for inspection. The meeting also noted the program of inspection visits as previously resolved and communicated under the stewardship of the Dean of Student Services. The final report will be tabled for further engagement with emphasis that the student voice will be given the necessary weight when it comes to decision-making.

Students used the opportunity to once again raise their dissatisfaction about Baltimore and Hertine Court residences. Management acknowledged that these residences have serious challenges. The SRC was made aware that Management had already made an application to the Department Higher Education and Training (DHET) for the total refurbishment of these two residences following the assessment that was done about 5 years ago. Unfortunately, these buildings would cost no less than R50 million rand in order to get them fully livable. Regrettably, our funding application was not approved.

Management agreed that these two buildings will be closed down, until funding is sourced towards renovations. An urgent Request for Proposals on student accommodation will be issued out this week for service providers to submit their bids, in order accommodate students that are currently allocated in the two inhabitable residences. Students in these residences will then be moved out to new buildings that will be secured through this process. Given the urgency of the situation, special arrangements will be made to ensure that normal tender process is accelerated. We are hoping to finalize this process before the end of March 2019. This process will also cater for shortfall in the Midlands.

The meeting noted and welcomed the fact that majority of students in the Midlands were allocated to residences last week.

We must point out that matters of student housing feature prominently in the 2019 Extended Annual Performance Plan (EAPP). We must also remind the University community that Council approved the multi-pronged student housing strategy last year having realized that this is a big national challenge, particularly for inner city-based universities like DUT.

ON THE RESUMPTION OF ACADEMIC PROGRAM

At the start of the meeting, some members of the SRC had expressed concern about the accuracy of the statement released by Management yesterday. They claimed that they never agreed with a decision to resume lectures. They were reminded that the SRC President is the one who suggested in a meeting of 08 February 2019 that classes should resume today. No single member of the SRC differed with the fact that the SRC President made that suggestion, although some suddenly added conditions which were not attached when the meeting took the recommendation to SENEX. Although a few members of the SRC registered their dissent, the meeting largely agreed that the condition to only start lectures once all problems are resolved was unreasonable.

We made the point that everyone has a responsibility to think about the 28932 students who are already registered, while we all act in concert to resolve pertinent challenges affecting those who still need to register. Given the mood of the meeting, we were likely to witness the continued disruptions as it was evident that the demand made has got nothing to do with the interest of returning the functionality of the University.

ON SECURITY AND XCELLENT COMPANY

The SRC demand that the University immediately terminates contract with Xcellent Security Company. They were made aware that the Management had already initiated a process towards the long-term appointment of a service provider. This process started last year and is not connected to the recent unfortunate incident that resulted in the loss of a loss of life of one of our students. At the termination of services of Mi7 in June 2018, the University decided to conduct security assessment in all campuses of the University, in order to inform a new tender. The assessment was concluded in December 2018, and a tender document is being prepared. In the mean-time, the current security company has been providing services on a month-to-month basis while procurement processes are being finalized.

ON THE SRC STATEMENT PUBLISHED OVER THE WEEKEND

The SRC released the statement on 16 February 2019 with regard to resumption of classes today. In part, the statement read “**We will deal decisively with those who will be found in classes. We just want to make them aware that it won’t be business as usual**”. The statement co-signed by the President and the Deputy Secretary-General.

The SRC was given an opportunity to confirm the ownership of the statement, and they live by this quotation. No member of the SRC, other than the Deputy Secretary-General, took ownership of the statement. The Deputy Secretary-General claimed not to have been aware of this part. This part is incendiary and borders on the violation of the inalienable human rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic. It also violates DUT rules contained in the General Handbook for students. As a result, the University reserves the right to hold the signatories to the statement individually liable for any violence and subsequent injuries to staff or students and damage to the University property.

The Deputy Secretary-General was advised that he and the President should publicly withdraw this part of their statement today, failing which the University will be forced to consider legal options. The SRC was reminded that while the right to protest is protected by the national constitution, it also goes with the responsibility to respect the right not to protest by other students. It was emphasized that this is not strangulation of the autonomy of the SRC or victimization of student leaders, but the University has a moral and legal obligation to protect staff and students.

IN CONCLUSION

Management wishes to call for calm during this period of unrest and tension. We sincerely apologise to all students and staff who have been directly affected by reported incidents of threats and intimidation. We further extend our apologies to the parents and guardians of students who would have hoped that classes in Durban would have started by now. We are working indefatigably behind the scenes to ensure that the situation returns to normal.

We will continue to monitor the situation daily and take appropriate decisions. We have appealed to the SRC to be readily available as and when they are needed because the problems bedeviling the University require the enthusiastic participation of all stakeholders. We once again remind all staff and students to only access official University announcements via the DUT PinBoard email system (staff) and *DUT4life* (students) accounts and to view the official statements on the DUT website.