

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

20 March 2021

Dear staff and students

RESPONSE TO SRC DEMANDS

We once again take this opportunity to welcome you to the 2021 Academic Year. A special welcome to all of our first-time entry (FTEN) students. We wish you well in your academic career with DUT. On Monday, 15 March 2021, the Student Representative Council (SRC) submitted a letter with a list of their demands. The Executive Management Committee (EMC) met on Thursday, 18 March 2021, to discuss the demands. Please find our response detailed below.

ALL STUDENTS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO RETURN TO CAMPUS

The University's decision is based on current regulations and COVID-19 restrictions. Therefore, we are guided by the multiple restrictions that we all have to follow in the country, for example, a limit on how many people could be in a venue, even in open air spaces. Unfortunately, the SRC does not explain in its submission why all students should be allowed to return to campus during a pandemic and does not spell out how the COVID-19 protocols could be handled without the University being complicit in committing a crime under the current COVID-19 legislation.

In any case, the University has already agreed to allow FTEN students – who constitute a manageable number of less than 9000 - onto campus, so that they can get exposed to the teaching and learning platforms and familiarise themselves with the University systems and processes, upon commencement of the annual orientation programme from Wednesday 24 March 2021.

In addition to the concession mentioned above, a concession was made with regard to students who have difficulties with our online registration system. In a controlled manner consonant with our COVID-19 protocols, such students will be given permits to come physically to our registration venues. The SRC leadership has been aware of this since 10 March 2021 and even earlier, when a joint EMC-Senex meeting made this concession. In fact, representatives of the SRC attended this and previous meetings of this structure.

The University reminds all students who may be experiencing challenges related to online registration, to please report these challenges to the Department of Student Admissions on the telephone number 0313735005. Alternatively, you can contact Student Admissions via WhatsApp using one of these numbers: 0834451282, 0834460459, 0834541495, 0834543477, 0834516751 or 0834413766.

First year students can email: lstyrstudentreg@dut.ac.za and visit the DUT website for guidance related to online off-campus registration:

https://www.dut.ac.za/student_portal/student_registration/

Management reiterates that on the merits of the challenges reported by individual students, the relevant university officers will grant permits to those students who will then gain access to registration facilities.

As a result of COVID-19 restrictions and protocols, DUT will not allow any unannounced visits and access to any person without permits having been granted in advance. DUT will not be accepting walk-ins, since applications for admission in 2021 closed last year. Those students who are granted permits to access registration facilities will need to adhere to the COVID-19 public health guidelines.

These include the compulsory use of face masks, observing social and physical distancing guidelines and using the HealthCheck online screening form <https://healthcheck.higherhealth.ac.za> before arriving on campus.

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UNBLOCKING OF ALL STUDENTS DESPITE FINANCIAL STATUS

The government's National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) bursary system is a funding scheme that assists qualifying students. Universities can only act on the basis of funding decisions made by NSFAS as part of this scheme. We are not aware of government making any commitment to pay towards all existing student debt. In the absence of that commitment by government and/or NSFAS, all that we can do is unblock NSFAS funded students.

In that respect, about 5000 FTEN students have been approved and unblocked and 10000 returning students have been approved by NSFAS and unblocked. Our recent communiqué made it clear that all qualifying NSFAS funded students will be unblocked and this remains our position.

You can access the statement on our website:

https://www.dut.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/DUT_statement.EMC_Senex_110321.pdf

HOD'S AND FACULTY DEANS TO FAST-TRACK REGISTRATIONS

The call by the SRC does not provide sufficient information as to where the alleged problems may be located and which Faculties and departments are being referred to.

In the absence of any clarity as to where the problem might be, we wish to confirm that there are arrangements in every department and/or Faculty, to receive every query, via phone or email or permitted mask to mask engagement.

Should there be any information, documents and/or registration material that needs approval by an HOD or an Executive Dean, we can assure the students that this will be done, either physically or electronically.

The SRC should remember that we issued a communiqué in October 2020, which we reconfirmed earlier this year, where we reiterated that during Lockdown Level I, DUT cannot allow all staff members to return to campus, since there are gazetted restrictions in place. When colleagues have declared medical comorbidities and they can work remotely, we will continue to support them working remotely, as per the COVID-19 protocols.

We invite the SRC to raise specific problems that they may have identified and then, provide us with specific details through Student Services that reports to the Registrar. Student Services and the Registry can engage with the relevant department and/or Faculty to have the issues dealt with. We have been informed about Multi-Role-Player Engagements that the SRC has been invited and have refused to attend. These are meant to thrash out all sorts of technical issues that EMC is not in the best position to tackle; but relevant units/departments/offices/Faculties.

SCRAPPING HISTORICAL DEBT

DUT does not have the resources to allow students to incur debt and then have no one taking responsibility for that debt. Hence the scrapping of 'historical' debt is not within our capabilities. As noted above, government and NSFAS do take care of debt incurred by NSFAS-funded students.

As a result, the qualification and certificates of those who owe funds and are not NSFAS-funded, will be withheld due to outstanding fees. Qualifying NSFAS funded students will have their funds settled by NSFAS and their qualification and certificate released accordingly. It must be noted that qualifying students with historical debt are allowed to graduate and to attend the graduation ceremonies, when physically held.

HIGHER CERTIFICATES

The University has been clear on its position related to the issue of Higher Certificates. Please visit our website: <https://www.dut.ac.za/higher-certificate-statement/> In short, higher certificates are terminal qualifications and do not automatically lead to enrolment into diploma and degree programmes. Minimum requirements that all other students registered for diplomas and degrees must be met before any student with a certificate enrolls for a higher qualification. We cannot treat holders of higher certificates differently. We cannot risk compromising the quality of diplomas and degrees through wholesale admissions.

SUSPEND HOD: Emergency Medical Care and Rescue (EMCR)

EMCR is one of those programmes whose curriculum includes physical training because of its nature and its requirements, including national ones. A student in the Department of Emergency Medical Care and Rescue collapsed during a physical training exercise earlier this year. The student was treated on the scene by qualified, trained paramedics. The student was then admitted to hospital and sadly, the student passed on a week later. An investigation is currently underway and we await the findings of that independent process. The University has a specific disciplinary code which needs to be followed should disciplinary action be warranted, after a preliminary investigation.

The DVC: Teaching and Learning is compelled to adhere to the rules and laws that are applicable to all staff and students. It is just unfortunate that adherence to our laws, regulations, rules and procedures is being personalised. We consider this as attempts to isolate and victimise our DVC. We simply cannot condone actions that may violate any of the policies, rules and regulations of the University and the law in general.

WITHDRAWAL OF SUSPENSIONS

If any student feels that he/she has been suspended unfairly, a specific process, clearly articulated in the Student Handbook and other associated official documents, must be followed. Students who are suspended are suspended for specific reasons, some of which include grievous bodily harm to staff members and damage to equipment/property. Our values and principles do not allow us to look the other way when conduct that is unbecoming of a university student, or any human being for that matter, is committed. A comprehensive response on the matter has been provided to the SRC by the University's Legal Office.

FREE REGISTRATION OF ALL STUDENTS

The government's position is that it cannot afford free higher education in South Africa. Government currently assists qualifying students via NSFAS. As a result, NSFAS funded students do not pay registration fees. Self-paying students will have to continue to pay a registration fee. Until government informs universities that the services that we provide are free, we cannot accede to free registration without approved fee payments.

Given high student debt levels at DUT of about R850 million – almost R1 billion – Management would be derelict not to expect payments that assist it to run the University. In a substantial number of cases, the registration fee is the only money the University receives for the rest of the year to ensure that teaching and learning continues to take place.

DUT is not an accredited credit provider. The National Credit Act does not allow us to provide credit options to students. Further, even if DUT were accredited to provide a credit facility, that would be deemed 'reckless credit' since there would not be evidence that students/parents to whom credit would be extended, would be in a position to repay.

DEMILITARIZATION OF CAMPUS



The University has a right and obligation to protect its staff, students and property.

Our campuses are not militarized, and the security arrangements are there to protect all students and staff.

In 2019, our security efforts were under attack by student leaders, who later accused the University of not having adequate and sufficient security. The current security situation is as a result of the improved safety and security efforts on campus. We will continue to do everything that we can to secure the lives of the DUT community on campus and to protect University property.

REVERSALS OF ALL PRE-ALLOCATION – SRC TO VET ALL RESIDENCES

Pre-allocation is dependent on the reports that we receive from the independent and professionally qualified assessor led by DUT's Real Estate Management (REM).

A team has been setup to augment the work done by REM – including Student Housing, SRC Housing Officers, Dean of Students – to do an inspection of residences and this process is currently being adopted. This is a proactive step and the SRC is participating in this project in both Durban and the Midlands. However, it should be understood that whatever Student Housing and the SRC may do in such processes has to be given scrutiny by relevant professionals who are qualified to assess DHET’s norms and standards professionally.

ACCREDITATION OF PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION

The requirement for accreditation of private accommodation is a new condition set by DHET and NSFAS for the 2021 Academic Year.

However, a number of Universities do not have accommodation policies or practices for private accommodation providers. Therefore, Universities have been given a reprieve for 2021 and they can continue to place students with private accommodation providers. A DUT policy is currently in draft form and it should be in place for 2022.

The SRC has been informed of the situation and they are aware of the process that we are embarking upon. Weekly student accommodation monitoring and evaluation meetings continue to be held by a working team comprising Student Housing and the SRC.

As mentioned earlier, a Multi Role-Player Forum has been set up by Student Services as the first port of call, with a view to facilitate constructive engagement between the SRC and other relevant role-players on issues before referral to Executive Management for further consideration and determination, where applicable. Otherwise, operational matters pertinent to Student Services continue to be handled and resolved in consultation with the Registrar, as the Executive in charge of Student Services and the broader Registry. Our Dean of Students and his team will continue to represent Management on all student services related matters.

STUDENT ADMISSIONS MUST STOP CHASING STUDENTS AWAY

No admitted student is being chased away. As noted earlier, we discourage walk-ins who attempt to apply long after our enrolment quotas have been filled up. Those are not our students. As noted above, there are mechanisms currently in place to assist students who have difficulties with our online registration system. It is simply not true to say that students are being “chased away.”

PROVISION OF ADVANCED DIPLOMA AND POST GRADUATE FUNDING

The University is not a funder for the qualifications that we provide. NSFAS funds specific undergraduate programmes to qualifying students. The Minister announced that the NRF does offer limited funding for qualifying postgraduate studies. If government and NSFAS do not fund advanced diplomas and postgraduate studies, the University cannot afford to provide free advanced diplomas and postgraduate studies.

In terms of postgraduate students at Masters and Doctoral level, there are limited funding opportunities provided via the NRF, SETAs and other funding agencies. Students are asked to constantly check their student portals for calls on competitive fellowships. The University continues to make every effort to fundraise and source bursary funding to support tuition and work integrated learning (WIL) placements. In the first quarter of 2021, there are a limited number of Masters and Doctoral fellowships available to support deserving students. For contact details email: grantsadministrator@dut.ac.za. For calls, please use MS Teams to contact bloodlessd@dut.ac.za where you will get relevant links and instructions on how to apply.

JUSTICE FOR MLUNGISI MADONSELA



The University commissioned Justice Mthiyane to lead an Independent Inquiry on the incident that led to the death of Mr Madonsela. The Mthiyane report was submitted to the DUT Council last year. Council asked for further considerations emanating from the Mthiyane recommendations. After that process, the University will be in a better position to respond. The NPA and the SAPS conducted their own investigation and the outcome of this matter is public knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The University, via our various structures, will continue to engage honestly and transparently with the SRC to seek reasonable solutions in line with the existing protocols, rules and regulations. It should be understood how complex administering and managing a university is; hence many units/departments/sections/divisions. These consist of well qualified and experienced officers who assist all of us to give direction in their technical/professional fields. There is no single individual who has knowledge of everything. Engagements among people and relevant structures are important and should not be undermined in preference for some prescient individual that actually does not exist.

We remind all students who have not yet registered that we have extended the registration period by two weeks, to now end on Friday 26 March 2021.

Finally, we urge you to continue to follow the public health guidelines for COVID-19. So, please wear your mask, wash your hands, observe physical and social distancing protocols and avoid gathering in groups. We all have a responsibility to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Sincerely

DUT Management team.

