



## ***“Iminingo”***

### VICE-CHANCELLOR'S COMMUNIQUÉ

Wednesday, 3 March 2021

#### **Well wishes for 2021**

Let me take this opportunity to wish all Durban University of Technology (DUT) people a successful, a productive and a happy academic year 2021!

Some may opine that this message is rather late given that we are in the third month of the year already. Our academic year 2021 only started this week, essentially, on 1 March 2021, owing to the inevitable amendments we were forced to make last year in response to the national lockdown.

I warmly welcome all our people – new and old, student and staff - to one of the most vibrant and exciting university communities that DUT is.

Recently, I published a message to our first year students on the occasion of their orientation to the university. I hope each one of the more seasoned members of our community will make an impactful contribution in our little corners to ensure that we create a climate conducive to creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship for our first year students.

Their success as they begin their exciting, yet difficult, journey towards becoming resourceful, innovative, adaptive and impactful glocal (globally inspired; but locally relevant) citizens must be our collective focus. That way, they will join us without hesitation as we contribute towards improving the lives and the livelihoods of our broader society.

I also warmly welcome back our senior students. Together with many other young people in the world, they became the first generation of DUT students who remained stoical in the face of arguably the greatest educational challenges (including multi-modal learning) brought about by the global tragedy that afflicted humanity from the beginning of 2020. They also had to demonstrate a sense of agility and adaptiveness that transcended mere survival. They had to continue to be academically productive. They still had to live up to the values and principles we hold dear at DUT such as excellence, responsibility, accountability, honesty, integrity and compassion. It is this generation of our students that reminded all of us about the beauty and strength of humanity: the innate spirit of resilience, agility and adaptiveness.

Welcome back! Continue to work every day on tiny actions that will one day be attributable to the story of your remarkable success and the story of a DUT that dared to soar to greatness.

I am glad to welcome back our staff members across the university. Without their selfless toiling, our academic calendar 2020 would not have been completed successfully. Our internationally celebrated university strategy would not have started to be implemented in 2020. The innovative plans and strategies we have and the systems and processes we have designed for internal efficiency would and will not be possible without them.

We are often told that employees are the most valued and priced resource. At DUT, we argue that people are the source of everything that happens and propel societies and its constitutive institutions forward. Sometimes people can and do actually hold organisations back. And, partly for this reason, we argue, further, that it's not just people; but, the right people in the right seats and playing their roles right.

In May last year, I argued that we had managed to maintain organizational success measured in terms of three dimensions viz. legitimacy, results and durability. It was an assessment of how we nimbly, but cautiously, reacted to challenges spawned by Covid-19 and the consequent national lockdown. The communique that I published at the time was essentially a tribute to our unsung heroes and heroines, our ordinary staff members who hold no fancy titles but have internalised the core values of living the DUT-Way. Welcome back!

Like with our first year students, I also produced a dedicated message to our new staff members. I am hopeful that they bring with them an accumulated wealth of values and principles, qualifications and experience, that will help to, at the least, maintain DUT at its rightfully earned position in the top 5 group of universities in South Africa. I call upon all employees who have been at DUT for longer to warmly welcome our new colleagues. Let us show them how we do things the new DUT-Way, which is really the reason why we have been consistently soaring higher and higher towards greatness.

On behalf of management, staff and students, I welcome back our members of Council who have steadily steered the DUT ship calmly and without fanfare over turbulent waters we sometimes find ourselves dawdling in. The investment in DUT we have seen over the last few years is unparalleled in the university sector. For this, we will forever be thankful to our Council. We, again, look forward to the visionary leadership of the Council collective as we navigate our journey to greatness.

## **Overview of the year**

The year 2021 marks the second year of the implementation of ENVISION2030. We intend to move steadfastly to introduce measures to deepen understanding and widen ownership and fervent implementation of ENVISION2030 following what we termed Year-Zero last year. We will be rolling out an institution-wide marketing campaign on it throughout the year starting in the next few weeks. This will build on the workshops that were held last year that focused on cascading down the Living Values Project, a project that will continue as long as we are at DUT.

The continued implementation of the National Disaster Act in response to the persistence of Covid-19 has made it impossible for us to organize the annual State of the University Address (SOUA). Since its inception in 2018, SOUA has become an important platform for management to account on organisational performance based on the Council-approved Extended Annual Performance Plan (internal plan) and the Annual Performance Plan (submitted to the Department of Higher Education and Training). We also share plans for the year ahead.

While we will not be hosting the event physically, we will be publishing the speech during the course of March for our people to read on their own. Corporate Affairs will circulate the document on all platforms as they always do. As I have done in the past, in my deliberate attempt to promote dialogue, my office will be looking forward to feedback.

## **Some good news**

DUT is a relatively young university that is rapidly distinguishing itself as an emerging leader in the university sector. Being recognized by the *Times Higher Education's* World University Rankings as one of the top 5 universities in South Africa and 10<sup>th</sup> globally on citations, is no mean feat. This is why to many of us, DUT also stands for **D**ifferent, **U**pended and **T**ransformed. We continue where we left off last year: in February, we received fantastic news from the Association of International Education of Administrators (AIEA) that DUT will receive the 2021 Global Award for Innovation and Excellence in Internationalisation, the first time an African university receives this great honour. AIEA is based in the United States but is a global body in the

field of international education.

This award is based largely on how we have internationalised part of our curriculum through, amongst others, Virtual Engagement (VE), Global Learning and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). These programmes have enhanced the academic project at DUT through deepened partnerships such as the one we have with Flensburg University of Applied Sciences in Germany and many other universities all over the world.

### **Condolences to friends and families of our fallen dear people**

The beginning of this year saw us losing some of our colleagues and students due to various causes, including Covid-19. The frequency at which we have been losing our loved ones has numbed both our souls, minds and bodies. The prospects of our university being decimated are ghastly. The pain and thought are just unbearable.

We are also aware that so many of us lost our own friends and family and are coming back to the university with emotional scars from all this.

We pray for strength and courage, mercy and grace, discernment and wisdom that families and friends, and indeed, colleagues and students who might have worked closely with the departed, could possibly be endowed with. We need these to understand and accept what transcends understanding and acceptance so we could soldier on. Further, we pray that the souls of our departed colleagues, students, friends and family rest in eternal peace.

I wish to make an appeal to all our people to continue to be cautious regarding our behaviour, individual and collective. The return to Alert Level 1 as recently announced by the President does not denote that we can now resort to pre-coronavirus ways of living.

In fact, way back in October 2020, we had this Alert Level 1 in place. Then, Senex/EMC made decisions that probably helped to save many lives we could have lost as the 2nd Covid-19 wave soon set in. The mind boggles at calls from some of our people for new relaxed Alert Level 1 measures as if Senex/EMC did not pronounce on them in October 2020. Let us continue to observe all recommended health and safety protocols for the sake of our individual and collective existence.

To conclude, let me reiterate part of my message to our new staff members. In his book titled “*Atomic Habits*”, James Clear reminds us that:

*“It is so easy to overestimate the importance of one defining moment and underestimate the value of making small improvements on a daily basis. Too often, we convince ourselves that massive success requires massive action.”*

May you commit to contributing towards improving the lives and the livelihoods of our people. May you commit to our values and principles and live by them all the time. Through your ‘atomic habits’ and atomic contributions, may you help to embed an institutional culture and a DUT-Way in which creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship thrive. Ultimately, these ‘atomic habits’ and atomic contributions will, cumulatively, help us to build and sustain a **D**ifferent, **U**pended and **T**ransformed DUT, revered by its peers all over the world.

I wish you all the best for the year ahead. Nothing, but greatness, is our collective destination.

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