



Iminingo

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S COMMUNIQUÉ

Tuesday, 7 February 2017

Engagements and agreements with the SRC

Yesterday, the SRC held a mass meeting which culminated in a march to Student Housing and the Vice-Chancellor's Office. A memorandum with a set of demands was submitted. The demands relate to NSFAS funding, enrolment/registration challenges, housing, transformation and insourcing.

Immediately after the memorandum was received, Management and the SRC, with the Vice-Chancellor chairing, met for almost 6 hours. This communiqué provides responses to, and agreements on, the demands.

I am sorry that due to the pressure of writing this communicate overnight and this early morning after such a long day, I could not distribute it to the participants for them to suggest additions or subtractions.

I. NSFAS FUNDING

I.1 Students who were means-tested but unfunded in 2016 (MTUI6): DUT has a 2016 agreement with DHET/NSFAS to have this category of students funded. In addition to this group, there is a new group now, which we call MTUI7, that has received messages suggesting that NSFAS does not have enough funds to fund them.

Agreed action: For these two categories, DUT will write to both USAf and NSFAS to remind the latter in the spirit of the 2016 agreement, that these two groups have to be funded in 2017.

I.2 NSFAS Appeals process: Whilst some students wait for the outcome of their NSFAS applications, the appeals process has closed, denying them the appeal opportunity.

Agreed action: All students should be given 10-14 days after the NSFAS outcome has been communicated for them to lodge appeals. The letter to the NSFAS Office will include this proposal.

I.3 NSFAS Officers based at DUT: An agreement was reached in 2016 to the effect that the NSFAS Office would appoint two (2) full-time officers to be based at DUT so they could deal with all NSFAS queries. But, the NSFAS Office has not done this.

Agreed action: The letter envisaged as above will include a plea to ensure that the appointments are made as a matter of urgency.

1.4 DUT's financial aid office sends students to the SRC to make calls to Cape Town about NSFAS problems:

Agreed action: Management will provide a special telephone line service for students to make such calls, until the NSFAS officers are in place.

2. REGISTRATION CHALLENGES

2.1 Students from Quintile 1 – 3 have been blocked and cannot register.

Agreed action: This category of students has already been coded and unblocked as of the last weekend after DHET sent a letter clarifying their situation. They could now register.

2.2 First year students in a number of programmes including Sports Management, Business Information Management, Hospitality Management and HR: with firm offers and necessary payments made; but, who had NSFAS problems and could therefore not register are now being told their spaces have been given to others.

Agreed action: DUT will register this category of students with the proviso that: if there is little or nothing that could be done in their 1st choice programme, other programmes even in other faculties would be considered.

2.3 Final year students who used to be on NSFAS in 2016 who do not have means to register for BTechs. The challenge here is that NSFAS only funds one qualification. Thus, after being funded for a diploma this category of students remains in dire straits when they seek registration for BTechs.

Agreed action: There is a set of BTech programmes, especially in Health Sciences fields that the NSFAS Office funds. Management will identify these and make information available to the affected students. Further, DUT will engage with NSFAS and the NRF. The latter will be asked to expedite the outcomes of applications for funding to it so they are available when students have to register.

2.4 Students who are not yet registered or who may miss classes this week whilst they attempt to sort out registration or housing problems.

Agreed action: All students who have such problems have to notify their faculties about this. Even when they are as yet unregistered, they must show some proof that they are still in the process so they could be allowed to attend classes and be assisted with the relevant academic work/activity they may have missed.

3. HOUSING CHALLENGES

This is the most difficult of our challenges in that DUT was never designed to be a residential university. Neither has it received enough funds from government to increase the number of beds substantially. Currently, it has only 1975 beds available from its own residences. For 2017, the plan was to procure an additional 2802 beds from external providers so we could have a total of 4777 beds available. The total number of beds available in 2016 was 4709.

Currently, 3509 allocations have been made. Several categories of students remain unallocated. To reach our target of 4777, we still need 1268 more beds. This is proving difficult since we continue to compete with MUT and UKZN for these out there. Some of the places that we would be at the point of contracting pull out at the last moment perhaps because of better deals from elsewhere. Some are just too small to allow us to quickly reach the total number needed. We continue to search for these. The SRC has also been very helpful in identifying some of them.

Agreed action:

- a) About 390 beds plus a potential 178 that DUT is in the process of procuring, making a total 568, will be allocated by today. The challenge though with the 390 beds is that they had been allocated to people who had been awaiting outcomes of NSFAS applications. But, since the problem we have is with students who are already here, those beds cannot be allowed to remain unoccupied. The university will continue to look for more additional beds up to the total of 1268 that are outstanding so that those who have had beds re-allocated could be accommodated.
- b) The following prioritisation of allocations will be made: To the 185 1st year students who have not been allocated; then to returning students who were in residence in 2016 and lastly to MTUI6 students.
- c) Management will enquire from the NSFAS Office about giving transport allowances so that those who could stay elsewhere could travel from neighbouring townships and other such areas.
- d) The Finance system will be relooked to ensure that not everybody makes payments to reserve housing without any clearance that there are still enough beds to accommodate them.
- e) Some students have had their applications for housing cancelled somehow. Housing only had a record of 9 such students. Investigations will be made regarding how those cancellations happened so that if there had been an ITS failure it would be fixed and those students could be included in the list for housing.

4. TRANSFORMATION AND INSOURCING

There was not enough time to discuss these matters. However, they are and will continue to be dealt with.

With regard to insourcing/outsourcing challenge, on 2 February 2017, a Special Finance Committee meeting was held at which a proposal was agreed to be submitted to Council. Council's final word is expected on 18 March 2017.

With regard to general transformation as reflected in the memorandum, the Executive Management Committee will deal with the matters at its February 2017 meeting.

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