



6 February 2019

DUT MANAGEMENT STATEMENT ON DEVELOPMENTS AT THE DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

At an outset, I wish to express our sincerest condolences to the family, friends and comrades of our deceased student, Mr Mlungisi Madonsela. Mr Madonsela was shot during a scuffle that happened between students and security guards yesterday. On behalf of the DUT leadership and management, I am truly sorry. I hope we will all give the deserved respect to the late Mlungisi, and his family as it grapples with this terrible loss. We also hope God will endow the family and all of us with the discernment, wisdom, strength and resilience as we deal with this death.

We condemn the use of live ammunition in the strongest possible terms. We will act swiftly once competent authorities have completed their investigations.

I also wish our injured staff members and students speedy recovery, particularly those who are hospitalised as a result of sustaining serious injuries. We will give support to both the family of the deceased, staff and students injured and will certainly provide counselling to everyone affected by the developments of yesterday.

We are saddened by these developments. We profusely apologise to the parents and guardians of our students; students, staff members, alumni, DUT external stakeholders and the entire South African nation.

Over this past weekend, the university management learnt through various social media platforms that students had planned a total shutdown of all universities in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. The reasons for the shutdown, according to the posters that were circulating, mainly revolved around issues relating to NSFAS funding and student housing.

On Monday, 04 February 2019, students held protests in both our Durban and Midland campuses, affecting operations in at least 5 out of our 7 campuses. I received a memorandum of demands from the SRC at about 11H30 on Monday, 04 February 2019. The memorandum contained the following issues:

- all students to be unblocked and be allowed to register irrespective of their circumstances;
- all BTech students to be funded by NSFAS;

- the shutdown of some residences that students are unhappy with;
- insourcing of security and cleaning staff belonging to private companies contracted with DUT;
- DUT to ensure safety of students using our leased transport service;
- the principle of 'first-come-first-served' should replace the system of booking appointments at the clinic;
- end to victimisation of student activists;
- total shutdown of the university until all demands are met.

I called several meetings almost immediately in reaction to the acceptance of the memorandum and the ensuing protests in our campuses. The first meeting was a response to a notification we received separately from our staff members in Student Housing department that taxi operators had prevented students from getting into buses at Smith Street that morning. We called the service providers to an urgent meeting for them to explain the cause for that disruption. They pointed out that they immediately called the leadership of the taxi association to alert them of this disruption in our shuttle service. The shuttle service providers give assurances that the matter had been resolved. The leadership of the taxi association explained to the taxi drivers that they are aware of the buses using their routes to transport our students. We also learned during this meeting that some shuttle buses had also been stopped from operating by protesters.

The second meeting was with the management of the Student Services sector to discuss the process of responding to the students' memorandum. The same meeting recommended that the meeting of the Executive Management Committee (EMC) should be convened the same day to deal with the demand to shut down the university. The EMC met at 15H00 to discuss the demand to shut down the campus. EMC agreed to suspend academic activity for 2 days (Tuesday and Wednesday) in order to allow some time to give attention to issues raised by students as well as lessen the risk of violence and disruptions on campuses. The meeting resolved that it would assess progress made on Wednesday afternoon in order to determine whether academic activity could resume on Thursday. This decision was communicated to the DUT community and the media immediately after the meeting.

Management of Student Services met with the SRC on Tuesday, 05 February 2019 at 08H30 to discuss the grievances/demands. The meeting lasted until about 12H30. Without really getting into details of outcomes of the meeting, agreements were reached on almost issues. There are two issues the SRC remained evidently unhappy about, namely:

- I. The university told them that it is not within its authority to change the NSFAS rules and regulations to fund BTech students.

2. The university also disagreed with the SRC on its demand for cancellation of contracts of some buildings in favour buildings that the SRC itself has identified. However, the meeting suggested a process led by the Dean of Students. The team was set up, comprising of SRC members and relevant officials, that would go verify some allegations that the SRC was making about the state of some buildings.

The demand for unblocking of returning students has to be understood in context as it creates a picture that students are being financially excluded. Every year universities submit enrolment targets to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). For 2019, DUT target is 30 070 made up of all students. 8 314 are First Time Entrants. 26 300 (87%) students were registered by Monday, 04 February 2019. In 2018, almost 15 000 students, about 50% of our student body, were supported by NSFAS. Even though DUT owned residences only accommodate about 3700, only 12% of our student population, through leased residences, we offer over 10 000 of these students accommodation in both Durban and Midland Centres – actually as of last Friday, 9258 beds in Durban and 4010 beds in the Midlands a total of 13 268 beds. In effect, we have organised beds for 44% of our student body, up from 5110 that we offered in Durban, for example in 2017. These numbers are indicative of the fact that majority of students have not been offered financial support and accommodation as suggested by the students' memorandum.

We have been in constant communication with the NSFAS to get its decision on some 1443 students who had been NSFAS funded in 2018 and whose funding is still unclear. We are also still awaiting its funding decision on some FTENs. Once this information is received, we will register additional students towards meeting our target. We also need to point out that registration numbers have been growing on a daily basis. This factual information was shared with the SRC at yesterday's meeting, in addition to the information we have been sharing in our daily meetings until they boycotted the meetings.

This morning we held a special EMC meeting in the presence of Dr Nzimande, representing DHET. We received a comprehensive report on what happened yesterday. It is important to say that investigations are continuing. I will recommend that we allow this process to be concluded. We will release the full details once authorities release it.

The university will remain closed until further notice. The closure of the university does not mean shutdown; it means that all academic and administrative activities will remain suspended in order to allow the university to deal with this pain and the complexities it portends for our academic and administrative work. We will be engaging with all stakeholders, particularly students, during this period of temporary closure with the intention to collectively find a way-forward out of this difficult period.

Professor Thandwa Mthembu
Vice-Chancellor and Principal