

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

14 July 2022

Dear staff and students

SUSPENSION OF THE COUNCIL APPROVED VACCINATION POLICY

Last Friday, 8 July 2022, we shared a statement with you that announced the resumption of full contact teaching and learning, research and innovation, and in addition all support and administrative services functions of the University from the beginning of the second semester, scheduled to start on Monday, 18 July 2022.

If you missed the official statement, here is the link to the communiqué which was published on the DUT website last Friday: https://www.dut.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/DUT.EMC_Senex_Statement.08July2022.pdf.

We reported in the statement that we would approach Council – represented by its Executive Committee in between meetings - and recommend that DUT's Three Choices Vaccination Policy be suspended indefinitely.

As of a few hours ago the Executive Committee of Council finally resolved as follows:

“Indefinite suspension of the Council-approved Three Choices Vaccination Policy to allow all staff and students, including those not vaccinated, to return to campus, pending further regular on-going assessments of the COVID-19 pandemic situation.”

Except for some revised and more relaxed guidelines that our COVID-19 Response Task Team may publish in light of the Department of Health's latest regulations, there is, thus, not much anymore that stands in the way of our staff and students returning to our campuses. At last, we will have our academic life back. We, thus, look forward to welcoming all students and staff back to campus on Monday, 18 July 2022.

Subsequent to our 8 July 2022 statement announcing our return to our campuses, a statement was published by people who appear to be students. It raises several matters, amongst which are challenges with accommodation and NSFAS allowances.

At the joint EMC-Senex meeting held yesterday, 13 July 2022, I added the matter of this statement in our agenda. Because of graduations, we did not have time to discuss it then. We then agreed that I would call a meeting of the top leadership to discuss it at a meeting we scheduled for this morning at 10h30.

- **Student accommodation:**

It must be remembered that DUT has never been a residential university. Even as it has grown to about 33 000 students by now, it has only about 3500 student beds in its relatively small suite of residences. Funding for infrastructure that DUT has received from the Department of Higher Education & Training (DHET) since about 2007 when the Infrastructure and Efficiency Grant (IEG) programme started, has focused more on academic infrastructure.

DHET's policy mandates that DUT provide accommodation for 50% of our students. Currently, we have **17 288** students accommodated, which is actually **52%**, and is more than the norm. This number of beds consists of our own DUT-owned beds and those we procure from the open market. Right up to about March/April 2022, Student Services opened applications for accommodation to deserving students and continues to assist them to this day. In fact, **3 405** students beds are still available as we write. And, if these students beds were taken up, we will have a total of **20 693** students accommodated, which will be **63%**, much higher than the 50% norm.

As much as DUT is doing better than mandated in providing student accommodation, there are always limitations to how far we could go. Not every residence from the open market meets DHET's minimum standards. In fact, there are some landlords who dupe the University into sub-standard accommodation. When this is discovered, we always do our best to relocate affected students. Further, we compete with UKZN and MUT for the same available accommodation in the open market. We can simply not provide student beds we neither have nor could procure.

There is a cohort of **4 221** students who, on their own volition, chose the NSFAS option of private/home accommodation and the associated transport allowance. Some now wish to change to full accommodation provided by the University. Student Services continues to engage with NSFAS in this regard with a view to have them change their status to full accommodation; of course, within the constraints of student bed availability we have sketched above. We are not final decision makers in this regard.

In partnership with DHET, the University is currently exploring some Public Private Partnerships (PPP) to increase the number of student beds available only to DUT students by at least **8 500**.

This is a medium to long term project we hope will come to fruition earliest in 2024. It will certainly ease our challenges on available accommodation.

- **NSFAS Allowances**

The NSFAS system and allowances from it is not a DUT, but a national, system. DUT does not make NSFAS funding decisions on this or that student applicant. All NSFAS-approved students do receive their allowances, unless there are hiccups with their details or accounts. We are aware of a group of students who have pending appeals with NSFAS with regard to their funding. With NSFAS' concurrence, the University did register this cohort of students for 2022 and provides them with the allowances on behalf of NSFAS.

Student Services continues to hold Multi-Stakeholder Role-player meetings with the SRC to resolve all sorts of management and administrative matters. When there are strategic matters that are beyond the authority of the Dean of Students and the Registrar, they always get elevated to the Vice-Chancellor & Principal (VC&P). Depending on the nature of the matter, joint EMC-Senex meetings, which the VC&P chairs and directs, are called to discuss and resolve on them. As pointed out earlier, we met on 8 July, 13 July and this morning of 14 July and we dealt with a number of critical issues as we prepare ourselves for our re-opening on Monday, 18 July 2022.

While this report deals with these two major issues, there may be more. With its systems of engagement, Student Services is ready to engage further with the SRC and with the Student Parliament, should there be a need, to resolve them at that level. Again, EMC-Senex is always available for matters elevated there.

We live in a world and a country with many challenges and problems; most of which cannot be resolved on demand and quickly. DUT also has its fair share that cannot be resolved on demand and quickly. A number of them like the availability of student beds and the NSFAS system are actually not even in our total control. However, as explained above, we continue to do our best to assist our students.

There is, thus, a time when our student body in all its stratifications, must seriously consider whether our academic programme must continue to be disrupted at every turn, every quarter and every semester. So much teaching and learning time gets lost in the process. This compromises the quality of the qualifications the same students are pursuing and that they hope to use to secure jobs. Potential employers are watching the space and may judge our graduates harshly.

As we end this communiqué, we remind the members of the DUT community that we live in one of the most violent and crime-infested countries in the world. There is simply no safety in our homes, let alone as we leave them to any place, including DUT. Thus, while Management will do everything in its power to ensure safety and security, there will always be limits to what could possibly be done.

Our appeal is, therefore, that for the sake of our academic project, we must ensure that teaching and learning are not disrupted any further. We are often told that those who disrupt are a small minority and that there is a so-called silent majority out there that wishes to get on with their programmes. In a democratic dispensation that South Africa is, the voice of this silent majority must begin to be heard loud and clear and must preponderate over minority voices. And, if it remains muted, then it effectively aids and abets this disruptive minority.

Wishing you a safe, productive and successful second semester.

Sincerely

DUT Management Team

