

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

05 August 2023

Dear staff and students

UPDATE FROM THE JOINT EMC-SENEX MEETING: 4 August 2023

Members of the Executive Management Committee (EMC) and the Senate Executive Committee (Senex) met to discuss campus operations, following the recent protests that impacted our university community.

Over the last few days, we have faced unwarranted protests that disrupted lectures and more distressingly, led to instances of intimidation and threats aimed at our dedicated staff and non-protesting students. We understand that these events have caused concern and anxiety within our university community. However, we want to assure you that we take these matters very seriously. The university has already identified some of the protestors who had violated our rules and policies. They have since been charged and suspended and they will face a disciplinary hearing. To date, four suspensions have been confirmed. Two hearings are scheduled and another four suspensions are imminent.

DUT is a place of open dialogue, constructive engagement and the pursuit of knowledge. We fully respect and support the rights of individuals to express their opinions and concerns but we also believe in upholding the rule of law and the values and principles as enshrined in ENVISION2030. The recent disruptions, threats and incidents of intimidation certainly do not align with living our values and principles.

The joint EMC-Senex meeting, which includes the SRC who are members of Senate, received updates from the Registry, Student Services and Protection Services. The main issue raised by the protestors relates to direct payments that recipients of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) receive. NSFAS has adopted a direct payment system called eZaga. It must be noted that NSFAS appointed their own supplier to manage the eZaga payments. DUT was not involved in the payment process, nor were we involved in the appointment of the supplier.

Some students have experienced challenges with receiving their funds from NSFAS. When the university was informed of this, DUT immediately engaged with NSFAS and urged them to speedily resolve the issues that were raised by their recipients. The university had timeously informed and updated the SRC on these developments.

INTERVENTIONS BY STUDENT SERVICES

Since eZaga took over the payment of allowances, many students have been complaining about the system not being user friendly. Others complained about being unable to register on the eZaga App. Our Financial Aid unit has been in contact with NSFAS to resolve the eZaga inefficiencies. The following facts were gathered:

- A total of 21 165 students were paid allowances on Tuesday, 01 August 2023, according to a report received from NSFAS.
- According to our records, 1051 students were not paid by NSFAS. Financial Aid is in the process of engaging with NSFAS to establish reasons for the non-payment.
- The names of the affected students were collated *via* the SRC and a link was created for students to enlist their names, which was issued on Wednesday, 02 August 2023. A further enquiry was made with NSFAS yesterday, 04 August 2023, about payments of the outstanding allowances and we still await their feedback.

DUT Student Services and the SRC intervened to assist the students who were affected by the delayed NSFAS eZaga payments. The issue concerning the WiFi network in some of the residences is acknowledged and our ICTS unit has confirmed that they have started installing an upgraded WiFi6 network.

As we have detailed above, the university did not ignore the issues related to NSFAS and the WiFi network. Therefore, we believe that the protests this week were purely designed to disrupt our academic activities, perhaps, in pursuit of garnering political support for the forthcoming SRC elections. It seems some groups of students have a rather convoluted view to the effect that threats, intimidation and violence are the best ticket to SRC leadership. I hope our students are discerning enough to understand that our country's degradation on all fronts is partly because of this ruinous notion.

INTERIM ONLINE LEARNING

There is no certainty when the current round of protests will end. The disruption of lectures is likely to continue during the SRC pre-election period. Things are volatile and the protestors intend to make the university ungovernable. Since we are often dealing with rogue elements who border on criminality, we understand that there is a real threat to our safety and security on campus; and to the current infrastructure development projects taking place.

Therefore, taking our safety and security into account, EMC-Senex resolved that from Monday, 07 August 2023;

1. All learning and lectures will take place online. This interim measure will ensure that the academic programme is not compromised any further. The interim, online learning will be in effect until further notice and will be implemented for all programmes, on all campuses.
2. Laboratory work and research that cannot be deferred will continue and if students have any questions, they should please liaise with the relevant Head of Department. We urge academics and students in this category to exercise extreme caution in the choices they make between continuing and postponing such work.
3. EMC-Senex also agreed that there will be a two-week moratorium on tests/assessments during the interim online learning phase.

Please note, the university is not closed. Our offices will be open and staff remain on duty.

In the days ahead, university executives will update you on matters related to:

1. WiFi network coverage in residences. (ICTS and Student Services)
2. Online learning and mitigating the risks related to academic fraud. (Academic Executive Management)
3. Security and access control on campus. (Protection Services)

The university is aware of misinformation that often gets circulated, primarily on social media, by some protest leaders. This is designed to create chaos and to intimidate you. Therefore, we remind you to only access official university statements *via* these platforms:

- DUT PinBoard (staff email system)
- DUT4life (student email accounts)
- DUT website (Highlights – on the homepage)

Wishing you a safe and successful second semester.

Sincerely

DUT Management team