



TO: STUDENTS IN THE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

**FROM: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF SENATE
DR JM MABELEBE, REGISTRAR (SECRETARY TO SENATE AND ITS
COMMITTEES)**

DATE: 18 OCTOBER 2022

**SUBJECT: FINAL RESPONSE TO THE MEMORANDUM OF DEMANDS FROM THE
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE STUDENTS DATED 10 OCTOBER 2022**

1 CONTEXT

- 1.1 This memo seeks to communicate the decisions of the ECS to the memorandum of students in the School of Medicine dated 10 October 2022. As a way of providing context, following a series of engagements between the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Research, Prof Tandi Matsha-Erasmus, and the students in the School of Medicine in respect of their demands as detailed in the memorandum submitted on 10 October 2022, an emergency Executive Committee of Senate (ECS) meeting was convened on Tuesday, 18 October 2022 to discuss the demands of students and the response from the DVC. The meeting was also briefed on the developments broadly in the School of Medicine in respect of the delivery of the academic programme.
- 1.2 The ECS noted that subsequent to the response of the DVC to the students, the student leadership in the School requested a meeting with DVC to clarify some of the matters raised in the memorandum. Such a meeting was held on 17 October 2022, and Management was represented by the DVC, Registrar and other select Heads of Departments in the School of Medicine, on the one hand, and student leadership was represented by the Secretary of the SRC, Chairperson of the School and other class representatives for all the MBCHB levels, excluding level 6, on the other. At this meeting, the student leadership gave context to some of the matters and/or demands raised in the memorandum, and the DVC undertook to take their demands to the Executive Committee of Senate meeting to be convened shortly.
- 1.2 Accordingly, the ECS did, on an emergency basis, meet on Tuesday, 18 October 2022 and discussed both the demands of the students and responses of the DVC to the demands in question. Below follows a response from the ECS to each of the matters raised in the memorandum, including those matters that were raised by the student leadership in their meeting with DVC, Registrar and select HODs in the School of Medicine on 17 October 2022 as a way of providing further clarity to some of the demands.

2 ECS' RESPONSE TO MATTERS FROM THE MEMORANDUM

2.1 Application Exemption rule in the School of Medicine

2.1.1 ECS reaffirmed the correctness of the application of the exemption rule by the School of Medicine academic leadership. In other words, the 65% exemption threshold shall remain. The final mark that the student exempted from sitting for a standard assessment obtains for the module shall be capped at 65%. However, the students who choose to improve the final mark obtained (capped at 65%) shall be allowed to sit for a standard examination, but in that instance, the normal assessment rules of the University shall apply for those students. The ECS underscored the following:

- a. The exemption rule in the School of Medicine was benchmarked extensively with other universities offering similar programmes offered in the School.
- b. The University cannot compromise the rigour and integrity of the academic programmes in the School. If anything, the University has an obligation to uphold the academic standards set for its approved programmes in the School by the Senate and the relevant accrediting bodies.
- c. The imperative for the University to remain consistent with the broad guidelines of the accrediting bodies, including the HPCSA cannot be over-emphasised. Any perceived or real violation of the approved academic standards as detailed in the approved programmes, could lead to de-accreditation of our programmes.

2.2.2 With regard to exemption mark for service modules in the School of Medicine offered by academic departments in other Schools, the ECS took a position that, in the ultimate end, the School of Medicine is the one that awards the qualification, based on the approved rules for each of the programmes in the School. Therefore, it would be grossly incorrect and improper for modules which are part of a composite qualification in the School of Medicine, to be exempted differently, on the basis that they are offered by academic departments in School (s). In the final analysis, the qualification is resident in the School of Medicine, and will be awarded by the School of Medicine in line with approved rules in the School. It should therefore be emphasised that the exemption rule applicable to the School of Medicine applies to all modules for all qualifications in the School of Medicine, irrespective of which School is offering the service modules. **In light of the above, the ECS reaffirmed and reconfirmed the correctness of the decision to apply 65% exemption rule and capping of the final mark at 65% to the service modules.**

2.2 Cumulative test as a pseudo-examination and the weighting thereof

2.2.1 It is hereby noted that cumulative test is in essence an integrated assessment. This is an assessment design that seeks to combine students' learning from multiple modules and/or levels into a single assessment. Such assessments are synoptic in nature, and require of students to connect knowledge gained and learning that straddle multiple topics in a module or a number of modules. In these assessments, students are expected to demonstrate higher order learning in respect of application of knowledge through analysis, synthesis and critical enquiry. The allegation that a cumulative test is a pseudo-examination is grossly incorrect.

2.2.2 The final response on this matter is that the authority to determine the weighting of the cumulative test vis a vis other tests or assessments in the determination of the final mark for the module is the responsibility of the School's academic leadership, and cannot be

decided upon by the ECS. However, in the spirits of fairness and transparency, the Dean of School is directed to ensure that whatever weighting is agreed upon within the School for modules for which integrated assessment is applicable, based on sound pedagogic principles, should be applied consistently across modules, and communicate the final position of the School to all eligible students across qualifications and year levels.

2.3 Capping off mark for any boycotted assessments

- 2.3.1 ECS again reiterated its position on the matter, communicated previously by the then the acting DVC: Academic and Research and the now DVC: Academic and Research. The ECS is of the firm view that students who have boycotted assessments, out of their own choosing, without a reasonable cause, should have received 0% for those assessments.
- 2.3.2 However, upon considering a whole host of factors, the ECS accepted the decision of the School Board to offer the affected students, one final assessment opportunity, and the final mark obtained for the module(s) in question be capped at 50%. This is the best the University could do under the circumstances considering that the affected students in question should have received a 0%. In the final analysis, the decision to give the students one final assessment, and the final mark capped at 50% is reasonable, rational, defensible and balanced, in the interests of the students, considering that the default position of 0% could have had adverse implications for the affected students. In addition, it should also be underscored that the (mis)conduct of the affected students is totally at odds with the professional code they had all signed with the HPCSA, and such a (mis)conduct a reportable offence.
- 2.3.3 Noting the endemic challenges experienced in the School of Medicine and other Schools across the University in respect of class boycott of scheduled assessments, the ECS mandated the Senate Academic Rules Committee chaired by the Registrar to initiate, on an urgent basis, a process of strengthening the assessment rules in the general calendar and school rules, and bring proposals to the Senate, through the ECS. In addition, the Registrar will present a framework document to the ECS on the clarification of the decision-making authorities of the academic leadership in the School, including the role of Dean of School and Heads of Department in the decision-making authorities in respect of assessment matters.
- 2.3.4 The ECS reiterated that the culture of boycott scheduled assessment in the School of Medicine has now reached alarming and intolerable levels. This culture has to be uprooted as a matter of urgency, as it affects directly, or indirectly, the reputation of the University and, by extension graduates who are holding a qualification from SMU. Such a culture, the ECS emphasised, brings into question the validity, reliability and integrity of the assessment processes of the University. As a body responsible for safeguarding the integrity of the academic project of the University, it will be dereliction of duty on the part of the ECS, acting on behalf of the Senate, to allow such a culture to take root and go unpunished.

2.4 Issues from MBCHB I students

- 2.4.1 The issues related to the proportion of standard assessment and quizzes (90:10) cannot be adjusted to 60:40 ratios as proposed by the students. The responsibility to assess knowledge, skills and attitudes against the exit level outcomes of programmes as provided for in the accredited programme resides exclusively with the lecturers and HODs, subject

to the University rules and policies. This adjudicative academic responsibility cannot be outsourced to the students, who are neither competent nor authorized to exercise such an authority.

- 2.4.2 With regard to consultation of students on dates of assessments, ECS reiterated its long standing position that the dates for assessments are set and confirmed by Heads of Academic Departments, taking into account the curriculum imperatives and the general calendar of the University. Once confirmed, assessment dates should be communicated to the students at the commencement of lectures in the module study guides or related documentation. If it not happening already, the Dean will ensure that going forward, this position is applied across the academic Departments.
- 2.4.3 Relating to the viewing of POME scripts, ECS has ruled that all students who wish to view their previous POME scripts and the related memoranda must follow the applicable University rules to do so. Students should approach the Dean's Office or module coordinators for assistance in this regard. In this regard, it should be noted that:
- a. Students receive a learning guide with outcomes stipulated for each section and a time-table at the beginning of the year.
 - b. In general, students can approach the facilitator/coordinator for each section, and if problems prevail they can approach the year coordinator.
 - c. The year coordinator was only approached on 6 October 2022 with a request from the class to view scripts for test 1, 2 and 3.
 - d. All POME 1 students are expected to write the standard examination as POME is clinical and exemption rule does do not apply, as this is a clinical module.

2.5 MBChB II Students

2.5.1 Membership of APCDC and the role of the students

The Charter for the APCDC was approved by the Senate recently, and spells out the membership of the APCDC and its responsibilities. Students are invited to APCDC meetings in accordance with what the approved Charter provides for. If students feel that the Chairperson of the APCDC is conflicted on any of the matters in the agenda because s/he has made a ruling on some of the matters on the agenda previously, they have the right to formally bring that to the attention of the APCDC meeting. If the meeting agrees that the Chairperson is indeed conflicted on the matter under consideration, the Chair of the APCDC, will be left with no choice but to recuse himself or herself not from the meeting, but the item s/he is potentially conflicted on. If s/he refuses to recuse himself, for whatever reason, the students can lodge an appeal with the Dean of the School, who will make a final ruling on the matter. The arrangements above is consistent with good governance principles.

2.5.2 High failure rate in Anatomy and Physiology module

Anatomy and Physiology are year-long foundational modules in medical education. Their intensity requires that students to apply themselves fully to the content of the modules in question, punctuated with a series of assessments. It is therefore not within the remit of the ECS to decide on the number of assessments for each module, and neither can ECS rule on which of the nine tests written should be considered for the determination of the final mark. ECS is of the firm view that any assessment has a specific knowledge, skills, attitudes that it tests, and cannot be unilaterally removed in the computation of a final mark. **From the information provided, the**

average pass rate in 2022 for Block1-5 has been over 80%. The above notwithstanding, ECS has directed the Dean of the School to investigate further the veracity of the high failure rate claims in these modules, and decide on the appropriate course of action, if necessary.

2.5.3 Postponement of scheduled assessments

In respect of the request for postponement of scheduled assessments, this is a matter that the DVC and the School have already ruled that no postponement of scheduled assessments will be allowed for this week. There is absolutely no time left to squeeze all these demands for the postponement of assessments in the calendar of the University, and the ECS has mandated the Dean to draw the line in the sand, and students who do not avail themselves for scheduled assessments out of their own choosing and without a reasonable cause, or on the basis of a communique by a fellow student, class representatives, school chairperson or any other student for that matter, should individually face the consequences of their own decisions. Students should be reminded that the ECS takes a dim view of a developing culture in SMU of boycotting scheduled assessments

2.6 MBChB III matters

2.6.1 With regard to the selective modules, ECS noted that these modules are offered by various departments, and students do have the right to choose the departments they wish to be attached to in line with their interests. In order to ensure this research module is delivered consistently and effectively with due observance to the inherent quality imperatives, the School will investigate the concerns of the students further and respond accordingly.

2.6.2 Clinical Psychology module and allegations of the unavailability of the lecturer, and that the allegation that only one assessment was granted for a year-long module is not true. Students have two tests to write annually, first test was in August and the 2nd test is due to 31st of October. However, given the seriousness of the allegation, the ECS directed the Dean to investigate this matter further, and take appropriate disciplinary action if the allegation is found to be substantiated by evidence.

2.6.3 With regard to the viewing of scripts, students are encouraged to make their requests in line with the applicable University rules. Students are also urged to make contact with the HODs and Dean if they want to view scripts for any of the modules they are registered for.

2.6.4 In respect of the Observation of 10 normal deliveries as part of the Obstetrics and Genecology module, the request to move the observations to 2023 cannot be exceeded to by the ECS. Students were given this assignment to perform at their leisure for 10 months from the beginning of the year 2022. Quite a substantial number of students have submitted their assignments, and will be grossly unfair for the University to be held to ransom by the minority of the students who have chosen not to comply with the requirements for the assignment, fir their own reasons. The ECS directed that the School grants those who have not submitted their observations, one last and final two-week extension period to comply, and assist them in any way possible with customized letters to ensure that they are able to do the requisite observations, and submit by the deadline, to be determined by the School.

2.7 MBChB IV Students

2.7.1 Selectives form part of MBCHB programme accreditation, as they introduce research

competencies at undergraduate level. Accordingly, research cannot be standardised as this is dependent on the discipline, research topic and the employed methodology, and the host departments.

- 2.7.2 In respect of the observation of 10 normal deliveries as part of the Obstetrics and Gynecology module – the request to move the observations to 2023 cannot be exceeded to by the ECS. Students were given this assignment to perform at their leisure for 10 months from the beginning of the year. Quite a substantial number of students have submitted their assignments, and will be grossly unfair for the University to be held to ransom by the minority of the students who have chosen not to comply with the requirements for the assignment. The ECS directed that the School Dean grant those who have not submitted their observations, **one last and final two-week extension period/opportunity to comply, and assist them in any way possible with customized letters to ensure that they are able to do the requisite observations.**

2.8 Sicknotes for missed assessments/application of leave letters

- 2.8.1 The ECS noted that the School of Medicine deals with an increasing trend of sick leave abuse by students and this creates some numerous problems for the departments. If the University has a reasonable suspicion that a sick note submitted has been fraudulently obtained, it reserves the right to investigate the authenticity and validity of the sick notes. It is vital to ensure that when students obtain a sick note/medical certificate, it must be issued and signed off by a healthcare practitioner who is registered with a professional council, failing which the department has the right to reject the sick note/medical certificate. A sick note maybe refused if:
- a) it does not comply with the legal requirements.
 - b) the health care practitioner who supposedly issued the sick note, may not actually exist.
 - c) there is suspected abuse and misconduct.
- 2.8.2 Our rules make provision for **deferred summative assessment** to student who has been prevented from taking assessment by illness or domestic circumstances such as death in the family. Students can contact the head of the department and/or the office of the Dean if they experience challenges.
- 2.8.3 The above notwithstanding, if there are genuine cases where the Departments have rejected sick notes without valid reasons, such should be brought to the attention of the Head of Departments or the Deanery for further investigation.

2.9 APCDC Meetings

As indicated earlier in respect of this matter, the ECS is of the firm view that the APCDC terms of reference have been approved by Senate to regulate the mandate and composition of the Committees within the School. The membership of the APCDC is determined in the Terms of Reference, and cannot be changed without a valid and/or compelling reason. The University remains committed to ensuring that the voice of the students is not muted, and for these reasons, students are being invited to the APCDC meetings, but they do not have voting rights.

2.10 Roles clarification in the School

The role and responsibility of the Dean, HoD and coordinator are clearly defined in their job descriptions. Role clarification in the School cannot be changed without the concurrence of the School Board, and the approval of Senate and, in ultimate end, the Council of the University.

2.11 Confidence in the Dean

2.11.1 The ECS noted the concerns raised by the students in respect of the person of the Dean, particularly in so far as the pending withdrawal of MMED Psychiatry programme by the HPCSA is concerned. The MMED (Psychiatry) matter is on the agenda of both the Senate and Council, and efforts are being made by the University, with the Dean's active involvement, to secure reaccreditation of the programme. To this end, measures have been put into place to mitigate the impact of the possible accreditation withdrawal on the undergraduate MBCHB programme, which includes the following, amongst others:

- a. Appointment of six (6) part-time psychiatrists who give online lectures to the MBCHB classes.
- b. Dr Molete, who is one of the part-time psychiatrists, is doing ward rounds daily in the mornings with registrars and students who are affected by the challenges in the Department of Psychiatry.
- c. Consultants from Weskoppies Hospital are doing outreach to DGMAH and supporting our registrars and students.
- d. The University has made representations to the HPCSA for the conditional reaccreditation of the MMED Psychiatry and feedback is awaited.
- e. The MBCHB programme remains accredited by the HPCSA, and the University is doing everything in its power to adequately ensure that the withdrawal of MMED (Psychiatry) does not adversely affect the undergraduate programme.

10.11.2 ECS reaffirmed its confidence in the capacity, capability and leadership experience of the Dean of the School, Prof Mofolo. It is the view of the ECS that the Dean has invested sufficient time, energy and effort in addressing the long-standing challenges in the Psychiatry Department, which pre-dates his assumption of duty at SMU. Rather than distracting him from the executing the tasks at hand, we urge all students and staff to join hands with him and his management team to bring the challenges in the Psychiatry Department to a speedy resolution. Any perceived or real motion of no confidence in the person of the Dean is irrelevant, devoid of truth and is not substantiated by shred of evidence. At this point in time, all the stakeholders in the School are called upon to unify their efforts to secure a speedy resolution of the challenges in the Psychiatry Department for the greater good of the University. No amount of finger pointing, accusations and counter-accusations is going to help the resolution of the challenges in the Department.

2.12 Emergency Medical Care (EMC) Students' Swimming Pool and related matters

2.12.1 Swimming Pool for EMC students: The SMU pool which is currently non-functional is being addressed by Management of the University. An investigation has been launched on the reasons for the perceived or real poor workmanship for the swimming pool, and the final report is awaited. In the interim, the School has opted to use external pool facilities for students as part of their training i.e. University of Pretoria's swimming facility although pool access numbers are limited, students have access to Hillcrest swimming pool and in fact the University students had a full month (July 2022) heated pool access. The school is currently in the process of arranging student membership at Ladium swimming pool facility

with independent swimming instructors to support EMC students with swimming and search and rescue knowledge and skills.

ECS was assured that there is a commitment from Management to address the SMU pool issue as a matter of urgency, and the concern of the students should be addressed as part of the short to medium term plan of the University.

2.12.2 Transportation to clinical facilities: EMC students are provided with transport from Lebone College of Emergency Care to SMU every Mondays and Fridays of the week. Trip authorization signed by the Dean is submitted to Transport Department together with roasters provided by their clinical coordinator for transport to clinical facilities. Transport pick and return them at Lebone College. They are not excluded, and transport arrangements caters for them as well.

2.12.3 Uniform: The University has issued half of the uniform to students and the supplier was given two weeks from 07 October 2022 to supply the remainder of the uniform. Constant communication with procurement and the supplier is continuous and the supplier had challenges that led to some delays in the issue.

2.13 Special Exams and carrying of modules

The approved School Rules stipulates that modules that are prerequisites for progression cannot be carried over to another year level under any circumstances. Any decision to allow for the carrying over of modules, would be at odds with the dictates of the approved curriculum and will certainly lead to the de-accreditation of the MBChB programme, an outcome the University cannot support.

2.14 Clinical Pre-Covid 19 and Post-Covid 19 rules/Clinical levels

The University and the School of Medicine has introduced Post-Covid 19 dispensation after the Covid 19 restrictions were lifted on the 22nd of March 2022. The clinical Pre-Covid 19 arrangements no longer applies. This was communicated to the students. It should be emphasised the pre-covid 10 dispensation cannot be applied in a post-covid 19 dispensation. COVID-19 pandemic has subsided so significantly.

2.15 Obstetrics' MBCHB IV

As part of training and programme accreditation of the MBChB and its year levels, students must observe normal uncomplicated deliveries at a primary setting and not at tertiary setting where most of the deliveries are complicated. The learner/student guides issued to the students at the beginning of the year and through the department makes provision for:

- a) letters to be issued to students – addressed to facility managers in all PHC facilities – seeking consent to complete this activity.
- b) The timelines to complete this assignment is January to October. The closing date has already been moved back (as requested by students).

So far over 250 students have already fulfilled this requirement, compared to 40 students. Furthermore, at the last APCDC 4 meeting, the district was requested to assist the students with access to the surrounding delivery sites in Sub-District 1. **Again, as already indicated elsewhere**

in this response, the Dean of School was mandated to grant students who have not submitted a last and final two-week extension opportunity to submit the requisite observations.

2.16 Selectives

Selectives form part of MBCHB programme accreditation, as they introduce research competencies at undergraduate level. Research cannot be standardised as this is dependent on the discipline, research topic and the employed methodology. As indicated elsewhere in this response, and in order to ensure this research module is delivered consistently and effectively with due observance to the inherent quality imperatives, the School will investigate the concerns of the students further and respond accordingly.

2.17 Discrimination of minority groups in clinical settings

The University does not tolerate any acts of sexual harassment. Any form of intimidation or discrimination of any student based on their race, gender, creed, religion, sexual orientation is frowned upon as such a discrimination or intimidation is inconsistent with the fundamental human rights of citizens enshrined in our Constitution. The University and Hospital have channels that students can use to report acts sexual harassment, intimidation and discrimination anonymously so that they can be investigated. In respect of acts of discrimination and intimidation, the students can report the matter anonymously through the University whistleblowing arrangements. They can also report the matters to the Dean's office for investigation. If they are not comfortable reporting alleged incidents of sexual harassment, such can be reported to the Manager: Gender Based Violence in the HR Department (Ms V Maupye) of the University.

2.17 Mental Health Support for our Students

The University acknowledges that there is growing concern over mental health issues affecting students, and that University has limited resources to deal with the demand. However, the University through its Campus Health Unit has been raising awareness of services they render and has partnered with other organizations to increase access to mental health care services by students. Such organizations and partners include among others: Suicide Crisis Line, SADAG Mental Health Line, SA Depression and Anxiety Group, LifeLine Southern Africa.

ECS mandated Management to strengthen the delivery and access to mental health services to the University.

4. FINAL REMARKS

- 4.1 The ECS decisions above are **final and binding to all registered students in the School of Medicine**, and no any other structure of the University can set aside these decisions, including the person of the Vice-Chancellor. **Accordingly, students are advised to resume their academic activities with immediate effect as time is no longer on their side.** Any single day lost, brings into serious jeopardy, the possibility of the academic year being concluded on 15 December 2022, and by extension, the very future of each of the students.
- 4.2 The decisions above where taken in the best interests of the University and the current and future students of the University in the School of Medicine. Furthermore, the ECS was

resolute that these decisions are informed by imperative to safeguard, defend and protect the integrity of the academic programmes of the University. The continued boycotting scheduled lectures, classes, clinical sessions or *practicums*, will not in any way or form force the ECS to change its position on these matters. With that said, and in the final analysis, it is now really up to each individual student to self-introspect and be guided by their own conscience, in deciding whether they would like to complete the 2022 academic year by 15 December 2022 or otherwise.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JM Mabelebele', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

DR JM MABELEBELE
REGISTRAR (SECRETARY TO THE SENATE AND ITS COMMITTEES)