



Office of the Vice-Chancellor

TO: STAFF AND STUDENTS

FROM: PROF O AYO-YUSUF, VICE-CHANCELLOR (ACTING)

DATE: FRIDAY, 24 JANUARY 2020

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENTS ON CAMPUS

First, I would like to again express our deepest sympathy to the families and friends of late Dr Shongile Nkwashu who recently completed her MBChB programme in December 2019 before she met her untimely death, having worked as an Intern for just about two weeks with the Limpopo Department of Health. It is also pained us deeply to learn about the death of Ms Joyce Mokono who as the Cordinator for research support, grants and strategic partnership until her untimely death. May their respective souls rest in eternal peace.

It is important to brief the University community about developments on the campus, including the developments regarding some of the infrastructural challenges submitted to the Council last year at a joint seating of students and staff and, developments related to the restoration of student Cafeteria and alternative arrangements.

Before going into details on the progress related to maintenance activities and new plans, it is important to provide some context as we start the academic year. Following the disruptions in University operations from the prolonged strike action that lasted until about the 26th August 2019, the then Vice Chancellor left the University shortly thereafter. I was appointed the Acting Vice Chancellor by the Chairperson of Council effective 2 September 2019 for a period of three months, with the proviso that appointment of an acting Vice-Chancellor for longer period would be after the Chairperson's consultation with the Senate, Institutional Forum and the Council as prescribed by the University's Statute. Following these consultations, the Acting Chairperson of Council at that stage decided to extend my appointment for a further six (6) months. I wish to therefore thank the University community and the Council for the trust bestowed in me to continue to steer the affairs of the University through this transitional period.

However, there are long standing challenges facing the University, which will have to be confronted in the coming period, and I remain committed, working together with all of you, to addressing those. I will be meeting all the University stakeholders separately and/or jointly if the situation so demands, shortly to share perspectives on how some of the challenges could be addressed in the best interest of the University.

Following a strategic session with the Council and reflecting on above issues, it became clear that the management needed to have a new pact with council on the one hand, and with

labour, staff and students on the other hand, so as to begin to embrace a new set of agreed values that will inform a new institutional culture and strengthen our resolve to fight any form of corruption and improve staff working environment and student life on campus. We want to hear the voices of ordinary SMU community members. After all, the University belongs to you too. To this end, we propose to hold a **University stakeholder meeting** before the end of the first quarter or early in second quarter of 2020 that would bring together all stakeholders to discuss these issues starting with the findings of the recent culture survey completed by staff and results of graduate survey completed by our 2018 student graduates. A final decision and date would soon be announced once all stakeholders are consulted.

Finally, I am happy to report that the Minister has approved implementation of a large part of our long standing 3-5 year infrastructure plan with exception of the buildings refurbishment projects related to deferred maintenance. The latter was not approved at this stage and we have been advised to provide more realistic cost estimates based on the actual scope of work required and resubmit to the Department before March 2020 for reconsideration for approval.

1 Alternative arrangements to Student Cafeteria

On the same day that my appointment as the Acting VC was announced (2nd September 2019), we received the sad news of the passing of one of our students reportedly as a result of food consumed in the cafeteria. While investigations revealed that the food preparation area did not comply with regulatory standards, none of the stools/rectal swabs tested had any related food pathogens isolated. Given that none of the investigations to date could link the death to food poisoning, we still await the autopsy report from the police to confirm cause of death. This incident taken together with the risks identified led to the immediate closure of the cafeteria and we went into an alternative arrangement as quickly as we could as students rightly requested the immediate availability of a food service provider.

We then started a process to fix the food preparation area, but due to limited capacity in our project management office and simultaneous projects initiated from the strike action, the work could not be concluded as at the time of arrival of the new ED: Institutional Support (IS) on 1st November 2019. We then had to extend the contract of the service provider we had onsite while the ED embarked on a different process to bring the cafeteria to standard, including enlisting the services of a food hygienist/scientist to advice further on what needs to be done in the student cafeteria. We also requested an inspection of the food services under the marque. Upon the recommendation of the food hygienist that the marque arrangement falls short of food preparation environment standards, we decided not to extend the contracts under that arrangements. Furthermore, upon the approval of the Bid Adjudication Committee of Council, we sought for a much cheaper alternative and reputable food service provider (BidVest) until we complete the renovation of the staff and/or student cafeteria planned to be completed no longer than 6 months from now. Meanwhile, as indicated earlier, Bidvest food services would serve meals, prepared in the mobile kitchen on premises, from the kiosk in the cafeteria. This arrangement will stand until construction work starts in the cafeteria when they would then move into a mobile 'front of house' dining hall from where they would be serving.

It is important to note that the meal costs to the students are subsidised by the University so as to make food as affordable as that which the students paid for at the University's cafeteria. The fact that the then food services arrangements and the marque was requested on an emergency basis might have come at a premium price, we nevertheless had chosen the

marque provider on our database who had been providing same service during annual registration period and we appointed the cheapest food service provider from those who quoted to assist the University within the very short period that we needed the services. Furthermore, the Cafeteria has reportedly been operating at a loss per year thus the cost on the alternative arrangement makes savings on costs of food stuff that would have otherwise been bought over those months and any associated losses. We are nevertheless currently exploring models to deliver more efficient food services in the long-term. Meanwhile, we are also investigating a complaint alleging that staff member(s) might have had a vested interest in the appointment of the food service provider under the marque arrangement. Anyone with any evidence is therefore encouraged to submit same to the office of the Director: Internal Audit & Risk Management. Meanwhile, we again apologise for whatever the inconveniences this alternative arrangements might have caused and request for your patience and corporation as we work through this difficult period of transition.

4 Infrastructure challenges facing the University identified as priority after the strike

Council and management acknowledged that the state of the student residences is less than ideal (evident in dysfunctional geysers, showers, toilets and level of uncleanliness and recently leaking roofs). While we are still awaiting the approval of the remainder of the 3-5 year deferred maintenance plan and thus the release of associated funds to comprehensively address renovation of all residences, council had requested management to urgently address critical issues such as ablution facilities in 1A and 2B; kitchens in 2B, Geysers installation in 1A & 1B. We also decided to put generators in all academic areas so that load shedding doesn't disrupt the operation of the academic enterprise and particularly to ensure that laboratories in BMS and NSB servicing the School of Science and Technology do not have interrupted power supply. Plans are also advanced to appoint a panel of companies that can be called upon in a short time to supply generators to residences on a rental basis until we procure generators for all residences in the medium-term as per our now approved 3-5 year infrastructure plan. I hereby provide summary of progress on various key ongoing projects and planned projects:

(a) Replacement of 22 Lifts on campus

The following progress has been recorded on site:

Phase 1 consisting of 11 lifts have been completed as scheduled and additional 7 were also already installed leaving us with only 5 to be installed. The last installations are scheduled to be completed on or about the 31st of January 2020. I have requested that the contractor immediately begin clearing all rubble in the parking area of the CP building.

(a) Deferred Maintenance activities (Short-term pending DHET's approval of refurbishment plans)

Residence 1A: Service Provider appointed has completed 60% of work, but had to stop to allow for students to go through the exam period. However, the contractor has not returned to site despite the agreement to return to site in the second week of December 2019 and to work through the holidays. We have commenced the process to terminate his contract and appoint a new service provider to complete the rest of the work over 4 weeks;

- Residence 2B:** Service provider has completed 90% of work but was delayed because they also had to stop to allow students to complete their exams without workers interrupting their studies. The service provider subsequently resumed work after exams were concluded and worked through the holidays. About 55 new showers (previously had only about 12 showers 22 bath tubs) and new kitchens with stoves on every floor (didn't have kitchens) have now been commissioned.
- Residence 1C:** The priority was only recently added to address the leaking roof so as to have the students who had to be urgently removed after the floods to return to 1C. The service providers have worked through the holidays to ensure that the waterproofing is completed before the students resumed. In addition, we have appointed a service provider to assess the roof conditions of all other residences as part of our efforts to promote preventative maintenance going forward.
- Geysers:** Work has been completed with installations of new geysers in the identified residences, but we continue to monitor the pressure pumps to ensure consistent hot water supply;
- Generators:** New generators have now been installed at the Library, BMS/NSB and the sport complex; discussions are underway with the Gauteng Department of Infrastructure Development to supply additional generators to the Dental Building and secure a panel of service provider to provide generators to residence on demand as when we have interruption of power.
- SMU Electrical Substation:** This power station upgrade is now 90% completed. We are only waiting for Eskom to deliver the transformer to connect our line. The completion would mean we would have less power interruptions as a result of higher voltage supply to the University.
- Campus Clinic:** Efforts are underway to recruit two new nurses. We also plan to improve the equipment in the clinic and the ambulance. Security installations are also planned for the clinic.
- Security upgrades planned:** We have prioritised a number of security measures. We plan to erect 5 new street/mast lights, and begin to roll out more CCTV camera's prioritising the residences that renovations have been done and the Dental building. We also plan to begin the process to put up boundary walls prioritising areas with boundary with the township so as to improve campus security.
- Road rehabilitation planned:** We plan to begin rehabilitation to another portion of our roads in the coming months. However, we have planned to defer upgrade

to the portion of our roads that would be used often by heavy trucks during the building of the 2000-bed residence.

Pharmacy labs planned: With the recent approval of our infrastructure plan, we have now secured funds to immediately start with refurbishment of the old diary unit and addition of adjacent new building to accommodate the pharmaceuticals and pharmaceutical chemistry laboratories, which would support our undergraduate and postgraduate training.

5. Pharmacy Building

As you might be aware, we evacuated everyone from the building in June/July 2019 following the report by an engineering consulting firm who apparently as part of preparing a quote voluntarily undertook an assessment and presented same outlining the seriousness of the structural defects that are occurring at the building. The University then took a decision to approach the DHET for approval or condonation to use the interest accrued on the Infrastructure and Efficiency Grant to repair the building. The Department, in its own view, felt that the problem was too exaggerated and that the estimated R20m was exorbitant. The Department then commissioned its own review/assessment of the building as part of its due diligence. A preliminary report was submitted with suggestion on what needs to be done, but the University awaits the final report and the resolution of the Department.

Meanwhile, understanding that the accountability for compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act and for continued accreditation of the Pharmacy programme lies with the University, the planning and resource committee of council has advised that we also get an independent engineering firm to give an opinion and to also manage the retrofitting process originally planned. According to the developed project schedule, construction work would start about mid-February and conclude about mid-July 2020. We would therefore be updating the pharmacy council on progress and the project schedule in coming weeks in anticipation of the planned accreditation visit at end of March 2020. It is our hope that the pharmacy council would at least take comfort in the fact that construction would have started by the time they are on campus for the accreditation visit. I again wish to request for patience from students and staff and apologise for any inconveniences this might have caused. It was however necessary to ensure we give the time and space to ensure the proper work to be done is determined and adequately implemented so as to prevent any reoccurrence and pose any risk in future.

6. Additional student accommodation

We have now for the first time developed a 5-year student accommodation plan aligned to our current 5-year student enrolment plan so that in future there would be better planned execution of student accommodation procurement so as to prevent the possibility for unscrupulous landlords with or without collusion, to unduly take advantage of the fact that we are under pressure to procure and thus inflate prices.

As communicated earlier, after almost two years of effort, the application for consent use ('rezoning') of our campus as a 'place of instruction' has now been approved by the municipality, which now allows consideration of the approval of our building plans for the 2000-beds residence. We are cautiously optimistic that the building of the 2000-beds would

therefore be able to start about the end of February 2020 and would be delivered in Phases for use by students as from 2021/22.

The Council has reiterated its decision to have the lost city demolished because of concerns over the safety of the buildings, with possible further instability created by the uncondusive soil conditions in the area it is built. We have however made provision for the senior students to be allocated single bed residence as a matter of priority on campus accommodation. Furthermore, we have been able to secure additional 80-beds at the old Nursing residence of Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital (DGMAH) and efforts are ongoing to clean up this facility so that it can be available towards the about 600 additional beds we need to accommodate existing and mostly new first years. After two previous attempts to secure additional bed through Request for quote (RFQ) to local suppliers and to those on our database was not approved by council committee, we had to put out another request for proposals for these additional accommodation in Newspapers during December 2019. We plan to have this procurement process concluded this week before we reach the registration of the second half of expected 1000 first year students who would mostly be needing these additional bed spaces.

We remain committed as University to providing accommodation to the vast majority of our students and we continue to work with NSFAS to ensure no financial exclusions. As detailed in previous communication from the Registrar, we have allowed all NSFAS-qualifying students to register and we have provided all allowances to qualifying students even though we are yet to receive all funds from NSFAS. We have also had great success with online registrations, but we have been experiencing 'teething' problems with the online admission process we deployed for the first time. Although these challenges are being addressed, it has caused delays in the finalisation of the first year admissions in some of our programmes.

While a lot has been achieved within the last three months of the new leadership as enumerated above, it is to be noted that the new management team of eight (five are new to their portfolios), needs to be given space and support in order for more to be achieved. We nevertheless understand the pressures to urgently address these long standing challenges of deferred maintenance at the University.

It is commonly said that the road to success is always under construction and so let us work together take lessons from past failures in order to turn our setbacks to resoundingly successful comebacks! If there is ever a time, this is the time to come together as one SMU community. We need a united front to stand against any forces that might threaten interruption of the University operations and the academic programme.

Finally, let us use every day to stand up against Gender-based Violence!

I thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,



**PROF O AYO-YUSUF
VICE-CHANCELLOR (ACTING)**