



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

Dear Unisa Staff and Students

RE: UNISA IS FOCUSED ON ENSURING THAT THE ACADEMIC PROJECT SUCCEEDS

In recent weeks, both the mainstream and social media platforms were flooded with news reports and complaints about the university, whose intention and effect were to cast a negative spotlight on the ability of our university to deliver on its mandate (Teaching and Learning, Research, Development and Innovation and Engaged Scholarship) with the requisite efficiency and effectiveness.

On the mainstream media front, we have seen several reports about the dispute between the university and one of the members of the executive team, who has been placed on precautionary suspension pending finalisation of the matter between him and the university. These reports distort the facts and thus paint a negative picture about the University. UNISA's policies on dealing with disputes and the disciplining of staff are fair and lawful; and are applied consistently to every staff member, irrespective of rank and without fear, favour or prejudice. The same treatment is being given to the executive in question. As you know by now, the matter of the executive in question has now been placed before the courts and is therefore *sub judice*. We will thus not delve into the merits of this matter, particularly in the public domain; and will deal with it through the courts.

Linked to the above, certain reports which have allegedly been undertaken in 2020, prior to my assumption of duty as the Principal and Vice Chancellor; have also begun to emerge in the mainstream media. In the main, these reports allege malfeasance, maladministration, and corruption in some of the colleges and/or departments within the university. It is quite disheartening that these reports are seemingly based on leaked information/documents of the university, which are still in draft form and therefore not formal or official positions of the university. In all these cases, the university is carefully applying its mind including ascertaining whether these investigations were themselves properly and lawfully sanctioned by the university, or whether they are simply the work of some amongst us who are on a frolic of their own and acting above and outside their delegated authority. We are doing so to ensure that when we do take a final position on these matters, we do so in a manner that does not violate the rights of anyone and that ensures that we exercise our fiduciary and legislative responsibilities with the necessary diligence.

We have cautioned staff on several occasions against the leaking of confidential university information/documents; and warned them about the consequences of this obvious serious misconduct. In this regard, we have commissioned an investigation to establish the sources of the recent leaks; and ordered that appropriate action be taken against anyone found to be responsible for unauthorised distribution of University information and/or reports.

On the social media front, we have also witnessed some of our students taking to social media platforms to air their dissatisfaction about the agency and quality of students' services, relationship management and student support on some aspects of our service delivery to students. We do not take this lightly as a university and, as Principal and Vice Chancellor, I have directed that all the outstanding student issues must be attended to speedily and efficiently, and that a lasting solution to these persistent problems must be found. I therefore would like to implore all Unisa Academic, Administrative and Professional Staff to ensure that they do their work in support of the success of the academic project. In this regard, any staff member who will be found non-productive in their area of responsibility and duty will be subjected to the university labour processes.

Whilst we encourage our students to engage directly with us through the available channels of communication, we respect the social media platforms as crucial spaces to interact with the University. We also encourage them to communicate through the formal channels of the University.

To facilitate improved communication between the University and the students, I have directed (i) that a contact list of all relevant university contacts/staff be placed on our website for students to access, (ii) that a multi-disciplinary technical team headed by the Registrar and CIO be established to immediately look into and address all student queries and complaints as they arise, as well as solving the persistent historical complaints/queries and (iii) that all staff dealing with student queries be compelled to answer their phones and emails; and to respond to student queries on time and no less than 48 hours.

We are continuously pushing for improvements in this regard and will not rest until we get it right. As Principal and Vice Chancellor, I am determined to ensure that the academic project, especially, ensuring that Teaching and Learning, Engaged Scholarship and Research, Development and Innovation becomes a resounding success. I am equally committed to working with all of you to ensuring that student support and communication are placed at the centre of the business of the university. Hence, I am currently in the process of engaging with all stakeholders, including the student leadership structures; to ensure that we all have a common and shared goal of restoring our university to its rightful standing.

I am deliberately emphasising the above two areas to demonstrate and assure you, our staff, and students; that despite the challenges facing us, we are determined to ensure the success of the academic project by continuously improving on our student support services and communication with students.

I also invite you, as our critical partners and stakeholders; to also play your part by supporting and cooperating with us in our quest to making UNISA a resounding success.

Together, we must rise above anything that is designed to defocus us and make us concentrate our energy and effort on matters unrelated to our core academic agenda. Equally, as partners, we must jointly work on finding solutions to the problems confronting us, so that we can succeed in the mission of producing quality graduates for our country, continent, and the global knowledge arena. We must be aware that “the sky is no longer the limit but a frontier of research and knowledge”, and thus constantly invest our talents, work, research, teaching and engaged scholarship toward the advancement of UNISA’s contribution to the knowledge project and innovation systems of South Africa, the African continent, and the global community.

I wish you and your families wellness and wellbeing as we grapple with the challenges and complexities of COVID-19 and its discontents.

Thank you and Best regards,

Prof Puleng LenkaBula

Principal and Vice Chancellor