



**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL 2021/2022  
PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
MEETING: UKZN SRC PRESENTATION**

**Date: 02 March 2022**

Chairperson of the session; Ms NT Mkhathshwa

Chairperson of Council: Dr L Moja

Principal and Vice Chancellor: Prof N Poku

Members of the Executive Management

President of the Convocation: Dr Q Mlita (in his absentia)

SRC Deputy President: Mr L Shezi (in his absentia)

SRC Secretary General: Mr S Madondo

SAUS President: Mr Y Ndzoyiya

All protocols observed....

Greetings to you all,

My name is Malusi Michael Zuma, I am the UKZN SRC President General

**INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

It is so unfortunate that as the UKZN SRC, we are leading in very difficult times with unfavourable conditions as we are still operating within the period of the pandemic. We are all still trying to adjust to this "online/virtual" life which makes things more difficult for everyone. The University is still trying to adjust while on the other hand, students are finding it very hard to adjust. Our University is situated in a province with the most disadvantaged communities and is dominated by students from quintile 1-3



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schools. You would find that there is a student who has never used a computer in his/her life before but is expected to conclude their registration and study online in the very same poor backgrounds we are talking about, the issue of network coverage is a real struggle for these groups of students. These students are expected to do educational activities fully online and that on its own is unfair and has a potential of academically excluding some of these students as they will be left behind. We are also in a province where there is stigma for almost everything around, hence why we have the lowest number of people who are vaccinated. The full transition/shift to online registration, online learning and other operations of the university has costed us a lot as the students of this university. The university tried to do its best with the system but the fact is, the situation cannot be fixed. The university can fix their systems and try to support the students as much as they can but they cannot fix network coverage challenges in our homes, they cannot teach us how to use a computer online without using the computer that we have never used in our entire lives.

### **THE NATURE AND COURSE OF UKZN UNRESTS**

It is true that there has been a series of cases of unrests at UKZN during this period of registration. While the nature and course of the unrests is as the result of the internal operations and proceedings of the University, it is an obvious truth that most of our issues which has led to the unrests emanate from the National Government level/external which the university and the SRC has no control of. The poor NSFAS administration has let us down big time this year and the situation NSFAS has put us in, is an irreparable damage. The level at which FTENS were given multiple chances to apply for 2022 NSFAS funding is greatly appreciated but the process of finalizing



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funding decisions and releasing 2022 NSFAS guidelines has not been very pleasant but has been devastating and stressful.

Our academic registration commenced on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2022 but our returning students began to receive their 2022 NSFAS Funding decisions 3 weeks later, which had impacted negatively on the general academic calendar of the university. Some of the funding decisions regarding the N+ have been unfair and totally incorrect and that has negatively affected our students as they have been defunded unfairly. Till date, there are students who qualify for NSFAS funding even on their NSFAS portal but have not yet received confirmation of NSFAS funding for 2022 academic year. The further course to the unrests is the issue of postgraduate funding which has been an existing issue that we see that government is not even willing to even to try to fix it.

### **UKZN SRC AND EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ENGAGEMENTS**

The UKZN SRC has been in constant engagements with the UKZN EMC on a number of issues that of which are both internal and external. At some point, we did reach some agreements on some of the issues that we brought forth but some are still outstanding. The issue of residence spaces is currently an issue that of which we are not finding common grounds on with the Management. Amongst the issues that we reached consensus on is the extension of the academic registration period. Initially, our registration period was supposed to close on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 but through engagements, we managed to agree that registration should close on Friday, 4 March 2022 in order give more time for students to register. Moreover, in line with the principle which stipulates that no one must be left behind, the University Management agreed that all special cases related to registration will also be attended and



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considered on a case by case basis even after the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 so as to ensure that no student is unfairly left behind.

This therefore brings us into a conclusion that, most of the unrests some of which presented elements/acts of criminality have been taking place outside the mandate and the name of the SRC as they were opposing the fruitful engagements that we have been having with the Management. It should be clear that some barbaric behaviours emanating from the unrests are not in the name of the UKZN SRC, the SRC has been doing its best to protect its image and the one of the University as we have been in constant engagements with the Management in order to find solutions to our problems. It is true that our SRC exists within a higher political space with highest contestations. As a result, it inevitable for us to experience such instabilities from certain individuals who always want to oppose and overthrow the SRC.

#### KEY CRITICAL ISSUES AFFECTING UKZN STUDENTS

##### **POST-GRADUATE FUNDING**

This is an issue which has been always there and forever remaining unsolved, the unfortunate part about this issue is that we see no actions towards solving it from the Government and DHET. The only exclusion the postgraduates are facing is the financial exclusion because our Post Graduates do not have funding that is designated for them. We call upon this committee and government to resolve on sourcing more funds to fund the Post Graduates and design a well-coordinated funding model for our Post Graduates.



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## **STUDENTS' HISTORICAL DEBTS**

The issue of students' historical debt is mostly the main course of unrests in our institution. Our students have serious historical debts and as the registration is closing on Friday the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2022, we will have a vast majority of students who are at verge of financial exclusion. The historical debts of students amount to a very huge amount of money, the university is in deep debts and the most contributing factor in that debt/deficit is the students' historical debt. If ever there was someone to be blamed for that issue is the Department of Higher Education and Training. DHET must scrap all the historical debts of UKZN students so that we avoid vast financial exclusions in this university. We call upon this committee and government to resolve on removing all the students' debts.

## **NSFAS MATTERS**

NSFAS has always given us as the students the hard times but this year it has gone above board, they have excelled in causing us problems. We are having these instabilities and property damages in our university just because of the NSFAS and its failure in handling the administration for students. We are all aware of the delays on the list of funded students for 2022 academic year and that issue is still standing as they submit lists of NSFAS funded students in batches.

We are very much understanding that all matters related to NSFAS cannot be resolved within the University and that is why we are bringing them up to this committee because it is a relevant platform to do so. However, in as much as they are not to be solved within the university, NSFAS matters are a major contributing factor to the



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unrests in UKZN at the moment and students tend to blame the SRC and Management on these kind of issues.

Students who qualify and meet all the NSFAS requirements have not yet received confirmation on their funding decision but our registration is closing on Friday. We have a group of students who were told by the university to reapply for NSFAS which they did, but NSFAS has not yet confirmed their registration even though they are funded according to their NSFAS portal.

Medical School final year students were incorrectly coded to have exceeded the number of years required to remain funded. The NSFAS N+1/N+2 rule was incorrectly applied to most 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year Medical School students, they are defunded, some are not yet registered and registration is closing soon.

The incorrect application of the NSFAS N+ rule was also made in our Augmented and Extended Programmes/curriculum (BSC4, BSS4 & BCOM4). Final year students in these programmes have been coded to have exceeded of years to remain funded which is incorrect.

There are students who qualify to appeal but there is no appeal button/turb on their portals

The NSFAS close-out project is long overdue, it is now high time that NSFAS take accountability and resolve this matter as urgent as possible.

We call upon this committee to resolve the issue accordingly.



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## ISSUENG OF DEGREE CERTIFICATES

It is very much painful to experience the pain of our UKZN graduates as they lose numerous job opportunities just because UKZN requires them to pay ALL their historical debts before they can give them their certificates. Holding the degree certificates for our graduates makes it pointless as to why they even completed their degrees in the first place if they are not going to receive them at the end of the day. The Department of Education and Training needs to grant our graduates a special concession on this matter, all graduates with historical debts must be given their degree certificates. We challenge the South African Parliament and DHET to design and develop a financial strategy or rather a module which will allow our graduates to receive their degree certificates despite their historical debts while not causing a possible deficit for the university. How are these graduates expected to settle all their debts if they cannot seek job opportunities because their degrees are held by the University?

## RESIDENCE MATTERS

The ongoing crisis on the demand for student accommodation/student residences is inevitable and it has also been the main course for distractions and instabilities/unrests on our UKZN Campuses. The university budgeted more than 20 000 beds for 2022 academic year but never prepared enough residences to accommodate our students. Most residences were closed due the fact that they did not meet the University and DHET standards but the unfortunate part is that, the university did not replace those residences with the ones that meet the standards in order to accommodate students who need residences. As a result, many of our first year students have been sleeping in temporary residences because of the shortage of



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residences. This temporal process of accommodating students is not healthy and it is psychologically damaging and devastating to our fellow first year students. The process has been taking place for about two weeks and it is so painful to see students suffering that much and it reflects a bad image for the SRC as well as the university which is not a good thing at all.

We would be unfair and not be doing justice if we do not appreciate the amazing amount of efforts displayed/portrayed by the whole Management of the Department of Student Residences Affairs within the University in response to the crisis that we are currently having. All members of staff have been overworking themselves, they have been working even beyond business hours just to make sure that our first year students are assisted either with permanent residence allocations if spaces become available or with temporal accommodation where spaces literally becomes unavailable. Despite unrests and instabilities, the department has been working with the SRC in finding more solutions to assist our first year students and such a working relationship is much appreciated.

The UKZN SRC wishes to applaud the efforts of the whole department as led by our Interim Director: Ms Sisana Machi.

However, we do wish that the Executive Management can consider making more residences spaces available for our students before even giving students Private Accommodation options in response to the unavailability of spaces. As the SRC, we believe that there can be more ways to ensure that more spaces become available for our students especially because most of them are funded by NSFAS. Residences are much better for our students compared to Private Accommodation. Private Accommodation usually present poor services to our students. Issues of security, Wi-Fi,



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Transport to campus are amongst issues or poor services that Private Accommodation present to students and it becomes difficult for us as the SRC to fight for such issues because they exist within the Private space. On the other hand, it is very much better to be in student residences because services such as transport, Wi-Fi, study areas are provided accordingly and if they lack, it also becomes easy for the SRC to fight for those issues to be resolved.

We therefore call upon this committee to resolve and pave a way forward in as far as our residences issues are concerned.

### **REMOTE ONLINE LEARNING**

As indicated earlier, our students come from quintile 1-3 schools in deep rural disadvantaged areas and backgrounds. It is therefore an undeniable fact that most of them will never be ready for online learning. The implications of online learning and full online operations of the university are very huge but are being ignored. Studying fully online is affecting our students in a number of ways to a point where our degrees are compromised in a way. Since we started studying online, the process of teaching and learning has definitely been not as effective as it used to be when we were contact. Studying itself has become ineffective indirectly so since students are now only studying to be assessed and to pass rather than to gain knowledge and be able to apply it. We do understand the risks of shifting back to contact learning but the issue of online learning needs to be relooked into especially its effects on the quality and credibility of our qualifications. We may compromise on a hybrid/blended learning but not on only pure online learning. If ever we agree on pure online learning, all students from the disadvantaged backgrounds will not have a fair chance to fight



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for their future in this university but only the privileged ones will be favoured to prosper in this university. We are calling for at least a hybrid/blended teaching and learning approach in this university.

### **MANDATORY COVID-19 VACCINATION**

This is one of the items which had a potential of introducing serious unrests in UKZN, however, the unrests never came from this item because our university has not yet opted for the mandatory vaccination policy. As the UKZN SRC, we wish to categorically state that we are highly against the mandatory vaccination policy in our institution but we are in support on the call for students to be vaccinated. Instead of forcing students to be vaccinated, let us rather encourage them to vaccinate voluntarily through educational programs. We call for effective campaigns for vaccination across our campuses accompanied by vaccination sites for students to be vaccinated should they wish to.

### **UKZN SRC BURSARY FUNDRAISING INITIATIVE**

The UKZN SRC launched an initiative to fundraise money to assist our self-funded both post graduate and undergraduate returning students with registration fees each academic year. Our target for 2022 was to raise 6 Million Rand so that we can assist as many students as possible. Unfortunately we did not meet our target as we fundraised less than 5 Million Rand which is below our target. The donations came from the 30% of our SRC operational budget, 3 Million Rand from University management as well as other sponsors. With money fundraised, we managed to assist



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618 financially needy students. However, there was little or rather no support at all for our UKZN SRC Bursary Fundraising Initiative and I think it is because of the normalized unrests that have been taking place in our university since no one wish to invest where there is always unrests and instabilities.

As the SRC, we call upon this parliament and this committee to assist in our fundraising initiative by supporting and donating to our Bursary as our campaign will run for the whole year. We have a target of 10 Million Rand for the SRC after us so that that can be able to assist financially needy students.

## CONCLUSION

Unrests will always be there in our institution so long as there are no solutions to the financial issue and challenges we have as UKZN students. Such issues must be addressed and resolved so that we can minimize unrests and instabilities on our campuses. Let us all play a role in addressing these issues.

I thank you.

The submission made on behalf of the UZKN SRC by:

**Malusi Zuma: UKZN SRC President**

**Sphelele Madondo: UKZN SRC Secretary General**



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