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17 March 2021

MR OLEBOGENG MOKWENE
President of the SRC
Sol Plaatje University

Dear Mr Mokwene

SOL PLAATJE UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSES TO THE SRC MEMORANDUM OF DEMANDS

On 15 March 2021, the SRC handed-over a Memorandum of Demands to Professor Mary Jean Baxen, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic, who was mandated to accept the document on my behalf and who conveyed my intention to respond to the SRC within 48 hours.

I have considered your list of demands which I note are on several issues which I had already addressed during a meeting with the SRC that was held on 5 March 2021, and on which we have together made tremendous progress.

My responses to your demands are listed below:

SRC Demand # 1:

We demand that Sol Plaatje University desist itself from making university a luxury that can only be accessed by the rich.

University Management's Response:

Sol Plaatje is a national public university and as such caters to students from the Northern Cape Province and to those from other provinces. 85% of our students are state funded which means that most of our students come from poor and marginalised communities. The pursuit of excellence to which I have committed the University is not a luxury but a necessity if we are to achieve social justice and economic development for our people.

SRC Demand # 2:

We have noted that the historical debts are amongst others the major cause of financial exclusion, and as a result student are unable to register. We therefore demand that all students be financially cleared.

University Management's Response:

The clearing of historic debt is foremost a Council decision. The request to clear all historical debt of students is not something that can be addressed in the short-term. The University has a responsibility to ensure financial and long-term sustainability of the institution, and as such, it is not possible to immediately clear all historic debt.

NSFAS students and those who meet the criteria as communicated last week, have already been unblocked for registration. The remaining blocked students include those who have not performed academically but were readmitted after successful appeals but have not provided proof of funding, and those who have not made payment arrangements. It should be emphasised that the University is willing to engage with students to make appropriate payment arrangements.

SRC Demand # 3:

It has come to our attention that first year students have been granted laptops that are on life support, we further demand that their laptops be returned and be given laptops that are fully functional to enable their academic progress and excellence.

University Management's Response:

We acknowledge that there is a problem which arose because this batch of laptops have been in storage for long which caused their batteries to effectively run down and must now be replaced. The new batteries have been requisitioned and will be here within two weeks. The laptops can be used in the meantime if there are plugged into an electrical outlet.

SRC Demand # 4:

We demand that all students receive their allowances as the academic year for 2021 commences in March. That must be effective from the 30th of March 2021.

University Management's Response:

The University can only pay allowances once payments have been received from the funders. At this stage, the University has not received any initial payments and therefore cannot pay allowances by 30 March 2021.

SRC Demand # 5:

We welcome the sober decision of unblocking students according to their various categories. However, the SRC demands all students that does not fall under any of the proposed categories be unblocked effective and immediately.

University Management's Response:

We cannot unilaterally unblock all students. There are students who owe a large sum to the University. We have made an accommodation for their registration which entails the signing of an Acknowledgement of Debt and provided a two-month payment grace period for the upfront payment. But students will be expected to make good on their debt.

SRC Demand # 6:

Further to the above, the SRC vehemently rejects the nonsensical decision to deregister students who would have failed to honour the payment arrangement in April. We further call the university to denounce their decision.

University Management's Response:

If a student signs a contract, then they are expected to adhere to it. Part of this contract means that they should not default on the payment plan.

SRC Demand # 7:

We demand the institution to join the urgent discourse that will deliver us to free decolonized education NOW!

University Management's Response:

This is a public institution, accountable to the public and audited by the Auditor General. We must be impartial and cannot align with any political stance. The curriculum of public higher education institutions is governed by strict quality assurance measures which are commensurate with the skills and knowledge needed for a country at our stage of development.

SRC Demand # 8:

We demand that academic exclusion for the academic year 2021 be put on moratorium. We further urge the students to strive for academic excellence.

University Management's Response:

The issue of a moratorium on academic exclusions for 2021 is a Senate matter and SRC needs to submit a full motivation to Senate to revisit that decision.

SRC Demand # 9:

We demand 100% students return to campus in a phased in approach. Students who are from places that are disowned by connectivity must be prioritised to the core of students return to campus.

University Management's Response:

Senate approved the plan for the phased return to students in the 2021 academic year. We will proceed with this plan by considering the occupational health and safety regulations for the country and the University. We have made provision for students with special needs related to connectivity problems and challenging home environments, and who need to access labs on campus to be accommodated on campus as part of the core cohort in the first semester.

SRC Demand # 10:

We demand that the registration window be left open till the 30th of March 2021.

University Management's Response:

We already extended the normal registration period to 19 March 2021 and have decided to leave the registration window open until 31 March 2021 as late registration for both First Time Entering Students and Returning Students.

SRC Demand # 11:

We demand that prospective students without application status be responded to immediately before the end of this week.

University Management's Response:

Applicants who have No Application Status, are in the main those who did not submit supporting documents. Our Admissions Office staff have written to them to do so but many applicants failed/neglected to do so by the closing date of 31 January 2021, hence their application has the No Application Status notification.

However, when applicants do submit the outstanding supporting documents, the Admissions Office staff processes such applications if they meet the minimum admission requirements. To date, the Admissions Office staff have processed around 320 such applications upon receipt of the outstanding documents and will continue to do so until 19 March 2021.

SRC Demand # 12:

We have noted the failures of the institution to cater for off campus students as such we demand that the university pay the rental allowances directly to the students account.

University Management's Response:

The University can only pay allowances as and when funds are received from the funders. When those funds are received, we pay them directly to the landlords. However, the Senior Management Team, recently agreed to phase out this system over the next three months after which the rental allowances will be paid directly to students.

SRC Demand # 13:

We further warn the institution to stop victimizing student leaders who are on a quest for progressive long term permanent solutions.

University Management's Response:

To our knowledge there has been no action taken against any student leader this year.

I look forward to keeping our avenues of dialogue open and transparent so that we may best serve the interests of all students at Sol Plaatje University.

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR ANDREW M CROUCH
Vice-Chancellor and Principal

cc:	Judge Yvonne Mokgoro	Chair of Council
	Professor Mary Jean Baxen	Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic
	Mr Rathnum Naidoo	University Registrar
	Ms Annalene Marais	Chief Financial Officer
	Ms Nthabiseng Afrika	Acting Senior Manager: Student Affairs
	Mr Olebogeng Tshesebe	Secretary of the SRC