

COMMUNIQUÉ TO STAFF AND STUDENTS

UPDATE ON ACCOMMODATION ALLOWANCES
FOR NSFAS-SUPPORTED STUDENTS

2021 #6

Dear Staff and Students

My communiqué of 20 March 2021 related to the accreditation of private student accommodation service providers, has reference.

Following a meeting between the Management Committee (Mancom) and the Students' Representative Councils (SRCs) of both campuses on 18 March 2021, I submitted a letter to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of NSFAS, emphasising the challenges that CUT is facing due to the changes related to accommodation allowances in the *2021 Guidelines for the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) Bursary Scheme for students in public Universities*. I received feedback from the CEO of NSFAS on 25 March 2021, and it was agreed that a meeting with the DHET will be arranged.

A combined meeting was held on 7 April 2021, which was attended by CUT's Executive and Senior Managers, the SRC Presidents, Senior Officials from the DHET, and the newly appointed CEO of NSFAS and his team. It was agreed at that meeting that the measures and processes put in place by CUT to address the accreditation of private student accommodation service providers were aligned with Rule 6.5.7 in the DHET guidelines, which stipulates that:

For 2021, universities may permit students to access the accommodation allowance for private single-use accommodation based on the provisions of a formal lease agreement, provided that they have put in place an additional layer of verification, which requires all providers, including single-use providers to be subject to a system of formal registration and verification. Institutions must develop a system that is implementable within the framework of the Guidelines, which recognizes the need for improved checks and balances for private lease agreements, that is in line with the university policies.

This means that universities may, upon a process of registration and verification of off-campus accommodation, and the provision of a formal lease agreement, approve the payment of the accommodation allowance, in line with the lease agreement and the university residence fee. Off-campus accommodation, in terms of this particular section in the guidelines, is thus treated as a progressively evolving process, with due regard for the acute shortage of accredited privately owned off-campus accommodation across the entire sector.

Notwithstanding this concession in terms of the relevant DHET guidelines, CUT will continue its efforts to increase its present cohort of accredited accommodation service providers. I have also appointed a high-level project team on 18 March 2021 to enhance our efforts towards the accreditation of outstanding private accommodation providers. It is envisaged that all accredited off-campus student accommodation facilities at CUT will have undergone the accreditation process by the end of this year.

After our meeting with the DHET and NSFAS, the student leadership at the Bloemfontein campus advised the Student Fees and Financial Aid Unit to prioritise the occupancy of accredited accommodation, in order to adhere to the directives from the DHET, as the ultimate goal is that all students should stay in accredited accommodation. This process has been concluded, and the Acting

Chief Financial Officer (CFO) released a directive on 14 April 2021 that accommodation allowances for students staying in non-accredited accommodation should be processed with immediate effect, provided that the requirements stipulated in Rule 6.5.7 above are met. Students can access the following link for information and relevant documents: <https://www.cut.ac.za/announcements/142>

Furthermore, I have noted sporadic student unrests at both campuses during this week, with accommodation allowances being one of the major concerns of students. I trust that since this matter has been resolved, we will be able to continue with academic activities smoothly.

I have received reports that some of our staff members at the Bloemfontein campus were verbally abused, threatened, and instructed by members of the SRC and students on 14 April 2021 to vacate their lecture rooms. Management strongly condemns such incidents, as protests must take place within our Code of Conduct, according to university policy, and in an amicable manner. We, as the CUT community, have proven since 2016 that we are committed to embrace sound student activism and constructive engagements with all stakeholders, and that we are serious about addressing challenges experienced by staff and students. Incidents where employees and students are victimised will, however, not be tolerated. I have requested the Institutional Registrar, as the Executive Manager in charge of Student Affairs, to urgently institute processes to deal with these incidents.

I would like to extend my sincere apology to staff and students for the trauma and victimisation you might have experienced, and the inconvenience caused, as a result of these sporadic disruptions.

In conclusion, Management has a responsibility to safeguard the academic year, ensure the safety of staff and students, and protect CUT property. We take this matter very seriously, and will continue to work together, in collaboration with the CUT Council and all stakeholders, in promoting positive dialogue to ensure that the 2021 academic year continues smoothly.

Kind regards / *Ditumediso tse mofuthu / Vriendelike groete*

Prof. Henk de Jager

Vice-Chancellor and Principal
(15 April 2021)