



## From the VC's desk



*Dear Students,*

Following a much-needed interface with the NUST Student Body, I would like to issue this note in response to the concerns that you raised after I delivered my Address.

It is important to first give a summary of the key points highlighted in my address which clarify some of the concerns that were raised, before I actually respond to the questions.

The highlights of all my addresses to the NUST community rest on seven strategic pillars as follows:

A. **Infrastructure Development:** We must resume construction and complete the unfinished buildings as swiftly as possible. This refers to the Campus Library that will also house Information and Communication Technology facilities as the nerve centre of our intellectual life. The Campus Services Centre will be the social and commercial hub of the main campus; it will be the first of such commercial centres, as we develop the main campus into a university town in our lifetime. The developer promises delivery of the first phase of the centre by December 2019. The Applied Chemistry and Chemical Engineering buildings are now slated for completion by one of the investors. So are the student hostels. In addition to completing the original hostels, which will now house postgraduate students, new three-to-five storey hostels will be built for housing the first eight thousand or so undergraduate students at two students per apartment. In addition, each hostel block must be a self-sufficient community centre with state-of-the-art communication and catering facilities, along with high-quality commercial service points. Residential areas, whether for students or staff members, are planned as self-contained suburban communities. We are in the process of detailing and quantifying these investor-proposed plans. Each investor develops the entire set of hostels in the agreement at its own cost, and recovers its cost-of-investment through rental charges that maintain the range of amounts that current students are

paying. Those are the NUST terms and conditions for the partnership agreements. The investor, in turn, operates the hostel so constructed for the agreed number of years to realise a return-on-investment and then hand the hostel back to NUST. At the same time, this investment must go hand-in-hand with developing some teaching or other student space on the campus that might not have any lucrative commercial value in itself. That is called corporate social responsibility and based on this approach, we plan to complete the core campus within the next couple of decades. The development must also include a transport network and alternative energy sources that are next to none, that we can then roll out to other communities as an income-generating business.

**B. Business Development:** NUST, though a public university will, from this point forward, be run on business principles. It has started partnering with private sector investors as a viable alternative to the defunct Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), which is responsible for the incomplete state of our infrastructure. There is such urgency here that we will pursue a policy of “the first-to-start and complete their projects” gets a head start on other investors. When the next investment opportunity comes along, will preferentially be available to them. The overall business development strategy involves spotting potential business opportunities arising out of both undergraduate and postgraduate research in the NUST laboratories, service opportunities arising out of the needs of the NUST community and surrounding communities, and even further afield in line with the competency hubs that the NUST research community is rapidly developing. In research terms, a university’s competency is a set of knowledge, skills and attributes that set it apart as a centre of excellence in a particular field of research. For instance, we may regard the Genetic Testing Centre in the Department of Applied Biology as the up-and-coming NUST competency in that field. As Zimbabwe is now open for business, we can count on the international scholarly community finally recognising the leading role of this centre.

**C. Innovation:** Innovation has been the missing link between academic research and industry in Zimbabwe for some time. Through the Innovation Hub, we are starting to close that gap in that we will shortly be taking promising results from our laboratories to the hub for piloting as viable products or services jointly with potential investors as partners. In the process, we will protect the intellectual property of each inventor in partnership with NUST, encouraging successful spin-offs to realise dividends and royalties for all registered shareholders in the IP. The Innovation Hub under construction is only the beginning. The entire NUST suburb we are developing within the next ten to twenty years will be crawling with innovation hubs, business parks, entertainment parks and science parks. All of these will be backed by rigorous research results that will make them commercially successful.

**D. Research and Internationalisation Support:** We encourage academic and managerial collaborations within Zimbabwe and beyond our borders, especially with successful and influential Zimbabweans in the Diaspora. The Research Office must, in the shortest time possible, evolve into a Research, Innovation and Internationalisation Office, with three distinct divisions depicted by such a title. That calls for a significant reorganisation to buttress the necessary competencies to empower the office to adequately support NUST to have a greater impact in carrying out its mandate. The Research Support Division must provide timely information on funding opportunities, and also go in search of such sources of funding that fit into the NUST vision as a self-sustaining centre of excellence in perpetuity. The Innovation and Legal Affairs Division would be the custodians of NUST contracts, responsible for registering NUST-generated intellectual property (IP) and keeping up-to-date records of all the inventors of such IPs. It would also give legal support to the university right across the spectrum of its areas of interest.

**E. Staffing and Client Service Charters:** The vision requires that we aggressively push for adequate staffing for optimal delivery of services to students and any business clients NUST may have, based on its University 5.0 model. The model in question has Teaching and Learning, Research, Community Service, Innovation and Business Development as its focal points of corporate activity. Every department of such a

university must consider itself as having a vision-driven mission with a service-level agreement (SLA) with its client base, whether internal, external or both. That means that every office of NUST must develop and prominently display its client service charter and its associated Key Results Areas, in line with the Integrated Results-Based management System. This approach serves as a reminder of each unit as to its responsibilities in realising not only the mission but the vision.

**F. Student Housing and Learning Spaces:** Student housing is an integral part of a Uni-City concept of campus development. It is not merely a charitable service to students, but a service based on sound business principles that enhance students' extramural experiences. In turn, such experiences evolve into long-lasting memories in the alumni phase of career paths. The goal here is that social spaces be turned into fund learning spaces for students and staff alike. University spaces as a whole must inspire inquiry and not be drab and boring in any way. As we design and plan student hostels and classrooms, we have this objective in mind. These plans are being detailed by the developer that will also finance the planning and construction.

**G. Staff Housing and Suburban Planning:** Staff that want to live on campus must find a conducive environment for a brilliant lifestyle, complete with commercial services, health and wellness facilities, sports and entertainment centres for all ages, as well as shopping malls in a self-contained suburban format. A NUST city or town must not necessarily separate student suburbs from staff suburbs, but provide for them in a mixed development format, just like a typical well thought-through self-contained suburb of the metropolis called Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. These plans are still at a nascent stage of development, through a revision of the original site plan.

### **Some Questions asked by Students:**

Not all questions raised after the VC's address need to be answered here just because they have been addressed above. While some concerns would benefit the current student population by being immediately solved, such solution strategies might not have a lasting desired effect. It would take resources to effect temporary solutions, yet on large scale projects, temporary solutions tend to become permanent replacements for holistic versions.

#### **1. On Quality of Service, students raised concerns about:**

**Question:** off-campus security

**Response:** When I arrived here some six months ago, there was a proposal on the table about building NUST student hostels across the Gwanda Road in Matsheamhlophe Suburb. NUST turned this offer down on the principle that we want student hostels to be built in the secure on-campus environment, not in the suburbs that are not owned or controlled by the university. Instead we readily accepted offers for building hostels on campus, where NUST can beef up security as we roll out more hostels. We already lost students through car accidents as they crossed the Gwanda Road, and we want to avoid that.

**Response From Security Office:** Also note that, in an effort to assist students, mostly those staying in the Selbourne Park area, the internal security requested the ZRP to establish a Police Base and it is now functional at Bobs Garage, thus, bringing the Police closer to the hot spots.

(b) **Question:** landlords charging rent-per-head instead of rent-per-room,

**Response:** Quickening the pace of building on-campus housing will get the unscrupulous landlords out of our hair. The Department of Student Affairs (DSA) negotiates the terms of your off-campus accommodation, and drops uncooperative landlords, as far as that is feasible. For effective monitoring of landlords' practices,

we depend on you reporting any unethical behaviour on their part to the DSA. Criminal behaviour that puts your health at risk must be reported directly to the police as soon as practicable.

(c) **Question:** availability of busses for student transport

**Response:** The university repaired broken down busses and bought two new ones over the Winter Break to bring some relief to transport woes. The busses provide mass transport to the whole campus community instead of following a two-campus model of transport in which student facilities are separate from staff facilities through-and-through. As we increase the fleet size, we will be able to provide scheduled bus routes for all that need transport. In addition, both staff and students will be able to charter a bus to attend events as groups.

(d) **Question:** intermittent electric power cuts by the supplier

**Response:** We are at the pre-implementation stage of installing a 0,25 MW-Hour solar back-up energy plant to provide power for current NUST needs, reducing our dependence on the national grid. At the same time, we intend and plan to expand the plant to 5 MW-Hours and start selling the excess to the grid, reducing the cost of providing solar energy to NUST. Most preparations for installation have been completed, according to the contractor.

(e) **Question:** instances of industrial attachment fees still being charged at 100% instead of 60% as stipulated by government.

**Response:** Please report such occurrences to the fees office as they are unintended. At an urgent meeting with the bank providing the online fees payment solution, we learnt that the testing phase has been completed and students would be shortly notified that it has gone live. It is meant to address the 40% fees cut for industrial attachment as well as the convenience of online payments as a technological solution to shortages of cash.

2. **On the Quality of Experience for students on the NUST campus**, the students listed six concerns, including the need for a full SRC, repairs to broken facilities, provision of well-cared-for sporting facilities, providing hygienic conditions for vendor stalls, and making online registration accessible. On the state of the SRC, students need to assume some of the responsibility for the SRC not being fully staffed by elected leaders. That might explain in part why some questions showed that nobody among those leaders had reported back from whatever committee or board the student government is represented. The Registrar's Department, the DSA and the SRC need to address this at the next election. The dilapidated physical plant of NUST is clear evidence of the economic hardships that we have come through in recent years. When the cash crunch hit, the budget for maintenance, repairs and replacements was drastically cut, forcing the Department of Physical Planning, Works and Estates to fail to carry out preventive maintenance, timely repairs and preemptive replacements of obsolete or malfunctioning fixtures and facilities. The rest of these concerns were addressed in the VC's welcome, meet and greet speech and the notes on it.

3. **The question on the bus levies was interesting**, coming from a member of the SRC, a governing body that sits in the Resource Allocation Committee, the Senate, the Finance Committee and NUST Council. The question has been addressed in great detail there and it is incumbent on the SRC representatives to report back in full on such crucial matters instead of trying to grand-stand the VC on such nitty gritty details in a public meeting. What called the motive into question was when journalists at the subsequent alumni association meeting also raised that same question while the student body awaited the VC's answer, given that the media had not been invited to the meet and greet meeting between the VC's office and students. This

question is well documented through minutes that are fully accessible to the SRC and will be left to them to convey the details to their constituency.

4. **The SRC sensitised the VC on challenges with expensive medical aid** that still has shortfalls on coverage, the dusty campus, the make-shift medical campus at Mpilo Central Hospital, and irregularity of transport between campus and the library. On medical aid, the challenge lies in having such a small provider pool to select from, such that true competition is compromised. The university tries to negotiate a good deal for both students and staff, but challenges still remain even for the VC's package. Efforts will continue. As part of the maintenance, repairs and replacement budget, as well as the building completion agreements for the Campus Services Centre and the Library, we hope to have the centre pavilion paved and marked properly for traffic circulation and parking, as well as some outdoor ceremonies. In fact, once that is achieved and the lawns around it added, there is no reason why we cannot find a sponsor to put up state-of-the-art outdoor screens and public address systems, extending graduation attendance from the Ceremonial Hall to the pavilion. That will be accompanied by the sprucing up of NUST boreholes, drawing water from the large gorge at the North end of the campus, and setting up a recycling plant. The big plans for the Health Sciences campus and Specialist Hospital are backed by the funds sourced by the government for this purpose and investor interest. We will accelerate the pace of investor commitment on this crucial project as our health services providers need to have been trained in proper premises. Provision of transport to the current library is one of the constraints we still face, even after boosting the maintenance and transport operating budgets in the mid-year budget review.

5. **Problems with the current state of the Medical campus:** We are painfully aware of hazardous living conditions and housekeeping together with maintenance services will see what can be done in the short term. During the holidays, management thought that once the available vehicles had been repaired or replaced, we would provide a dedicated bust to the Medical campus at strategic times agreed with the Faculty of Medicine. If that has not yet been effected, it must be corrected right away. The issue of where to study, will be looked into through the VC's office in terms of acquiring existing facilities or some other solution. We are taking similar initiatives for faculties based on the main campus as well, as the current completed rooms and halls are grossly inadequate there.

Lastly, I would like to thank you the students for forwarding a Paper titled "Presentation of Student Woes and Proposed Solutions" by a student group ONE NUST MOVEMENT.

The highlighted solutions have been taken into account by the different sections concerned. However, the following need to be communicated to the student body immediately:

#### 1. **Registration Problems**

Indeed there was a temporary technical glitch in the online registration system and was swiftly resolved by ICTS technicians. ICTS have seconded a technician who is permanently stationed at the Admissions and Students Records Section, to promptly attend to students with system registration challenges. Extension of the registration deadline is therefore not necessary since the problem has been resolved. In any case registration is still open until the 1st of October 2018.

#### 2. **Absence of a Full SRC**

The suggested solution on the issue will be a contravention of the SRC constitution if implemented. The current SRC Executive is seized with with the task of amending the Constitution and this is an opportune time for the students to incorporate the suggested solution in the new SRC constitution. Extension of the registration deadline will negatively affect the SRC election process in that it will delay the election of new SRC. It is important that a new SRC is in place before the current SRC term of office expires and a new Pres

ident and Vice President are elected before the Graduation Ceremony scheduled for the 9th of November 2018, to lead the academic procession. The election process requires three weeks.

**Closing Note**

Building NUST and ensuring it is functional and is a pleasurable University to be in, takes you and I to join hands and work together. As we live up to our Motto, “think in other terms” lets engage and see NUST grow!

Best Regards,

*Mqhele Dlodlo*

**Prof. Eng. Mqhele E. Dlodlo**  
**Vice-Chancellor**