

Dear members

If the latest process for student results (see attached) is of concern and / or impacts your work, please be aware the unions have raised concerns with management. The issue was raised during a meeting held between the ED: HR and the three unions on Friday 22 January and followed up with the below message from the union collective. UKSU will keep you updated with the response.

Regards
UKSU Executive

Dear Dr Zulu

We hope this email finds you safe and well during these challenging times.

As mentioned in yesterday's meeting, we would like to bring to your attention the Communique from the DVC of Teaching and Learning which was circulated on Wednesday 20 January 2020.

While we are aware that some of the concerns listed below are outside your immediate remit, we request that you, in your capacity as ED HR (and our first point of contact as labour with management), urgently consult with the CFO, and the DVC T&L on the issues that impact their portfolios.

Our Academic and Professional staff members are very concerned about the sudden changes to the mark system, which would see no students listed as failing in semester 1 2020, and very few in semester 2.

This raises the following questions and concerns:

1. Why the sudden and very late change to the first semester policy after a catch-up period that was extremely trying on students as well as academics and professional staff, most of whom had to forfeit their leave to be able complete what was already asked?
2. Who is going to be doing all this academic and administrative work for both Sem1 and 2 to include these changes when the deadline for marks is 27 January and when registration of undergraduate students is about to start with all the workload pressure this will bring?
3. What budgetary impact will this have on UKZN, given that students withdrawn by UKZN may well demand refunds? This will surely impact on the already tight cash flow of the university, yet staff are still waiting for remuneration negotiations to begin.
4. Academics are going to have very skewed results for the modules they teach. The new policy / decision will result in a first semester pass rate of 100%, and in the second semester, 90%+. Existing policy demands that academics with very high pass rates must justify them. How will that policy apply in this case re changes to the mark system?
5. How fair is this to the students? Some really deserved to fail as they had all the instruments but failed to perform, others had genuine Covid related difficulties. To do this properly would involve interrogating whether each student regularly used Moodle, whether they passed other modules and so on. A blanket decision is too crude a method to address the genuine cases of Covid related disruptions to students' academic progress. However, such a process should have been initiated a long time ago and is impractical just days before marks must be finalized.

6. Every day we are aware that our members are sick or dying and yet the University seems to take absolutely no cognizance of this and continues to impose new tasks at short notice on already overworked academics and T&L professional staff.

7. This policy establishes a precedent and an expectation in students' minds that it will be applied going forward, at least for the duration of online T&L in 2021, and perhaps even after a return to normality. The concern is that students will exploit this system and that henceforth that no student will ever be allowed to fail. This will have a serious negative impact on the perceived quality and integrity of our degrees and in turn, on our rankings, both local and global. It also contradicts the VC's desire to see "professional students" removed from our system.

8) How are we to deal with the impact of this policy/ decision on targeted student numbers?

Given the above issues we call for the retraction of this policy/decision or, at least, the extension of all deadlines and that resources be made available; i.e. funds to hire ad hoc staff to assist overworked staff currently on the ground, so as to prevent negative impacts on their health and ability to continue performing in the job as required.

Regards
Gareth Amery
OBO
NEHAWU-NTEU-UKSU