



SPECIAL BULLETIN

May 4th, 2023

The state of our city and unending municipality service delivery challenges, including intermittent water and electricity supply, poor roads, poor ablution and old sewer pipes place the University and the entire Makhanda community under immense pressure. However, even with our challenges, our campus is still one of the best in the country.

Let us remember that Rhodes University is 119 years old, and many of our historic buildings are ageing all at the same time. This, and financial pressures have caused an infrastructure maintenance backlog of over 25 years which requires a substantial amount of money. Our increasing student fee debt and dependence on DHET for funding have incrementally added to financial pressures. Despite this, a lot of work has been and continues to be done by the Division of Facilities and Infrastructure which we need to acknowledge.

Several new residences have been built at the Hilltop in recent years. New laboratories (BioSciences and LifeSciences) have been built/refurbished. Many of our buildings have been refurbished and connected to generators to mitigate the adverse impact of load shedding.

Currently the following major projects are underway or have been completed:

MAJOR PROJECTS

1. Institute for Nanotechnology Innovation (INI).
2. The ChemPharm building refurbishment and upgrade.
3. A new undergraduate female residence.
4. The refurbishment of Salisbury House residence.
5. Completion of Phase 5 of the Multi-Voltage Ring feed upgrade.
6. Completion of Phase 4 of the Electrical Compliance Project, which includes several academic, residential and support buildings.
7. Some of the academic buildings that were upgraded in the past three years include, the Politics, Anthropology, Sociology, Struben, Hamilton, Environmental Education, and Botany building, to mention a few.
8. Several lecture venues were upgraded in the past two years, Barratt Lecture Block (new led light fittings, replacement of broken seats, replacement of old carpets, painted internally and externally), Eden Grove Blue and Red (new aircon systems, new led light fittings), Arts Major (new led light fittings, upholstery of the seats, sanding and varnishing of the table benches), the Graham Room at the Law Faculty (upgrading of the electrical network, new escape fire door, raked seating, painting internally, widening of entrance door), Botany lecture venue (total upgrade).
9. The GLT lecture venue will undergo a total upgrade during the June/July 2023 break.

The major projects are progressing and are within project timelines. Salisbury House has reached practical completion and has been handed over to the University and we are busy completing the furnishing to the residence. Students who were temporarily accommodated in Canterbury House will be relocated back to the refurbished residence (Salisbury).

REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE

Maintenance and repairs are done on a continuous basis. Facilities & Infrastructure Division works on a priority list of residence maintenance issues extracted from Archibus (the RU Facilities Software Management Software). These issues have been stratified per residence.

The Facilities & Infrastructure and the Residential Operations (ResOps) Divisions did a walkabout recently to monitor progress and assess outstanding minor and major maintenance issues in the residences and have prioritised accordingly. A group of maintenance staff will be deployed to each Hall to address these issues.

The detailed 2023 Residence Maintenance Budget and the Implementation Plan for the outstanding maintenance requests will be shared with all stakeholders within the coming two weeks. Implementation of this plan is with immediate effect.

WATER

The inability of the Municipality to provide water to the University community and City is impacting terribly on the quality of student and staff life in Makhanda and on campus. While these challenges are beyond us, the University has put in place several mitigation strategies. Water tanks have been rolled out to the ground floor ablutions in tall residences and many other areas on campus. Our tankers fill these tanks continually, but at times this can be challenging, especially when the alternative sources for water also go dry. Priority is given to dining halls, then residences and academic buildings.

The University is in constant discussions with the Municipality to find long-term solutions to the water problems and the state of the City, roads and old sewer pipes. The University is also investigating the usage of borehole water and the implementation of greywater systems to alleviate our dependency on the Municipality for our water.

ELECTRICITY – LOADSHEDDING

Most of the lower campus has been connected to generators and more dining halls will be connected to generators in the course of the year. These dining halls can be used as study spaces during load-shedding.

As part of the load-shedding mitigation plan, several buildings were connected to the spare existing generator capacity. (The entire St Peters Campus, Politics, CSD, Drostdy Dining Hall, Graham House, School of Languages), Psychology, Management, Economics, (Anthropology, Sociology, ISER will be connected by 8 May 2023).

New generators were ordered for the following buildings: St Mary's, Founders, Cortney Latimer Dining Halls, the Hamilton Building, The Hanger, F&E Stores, Old Housekeeping Building, Sculptor Building, HKE, Mullins Hall, Building Maintenance. Installation is scheduled for the second week in June 2023.

To increase the safety and security of students during load-shedding we are in the planning stages of a campus lighting project that will include flood lighting in strategic areas to improve the night lighting, especially during power outages. The Grounds and Gardens Section has started removing or pruning trees and shrubs to increase visibility on campus.

NATIONAL STUDENT FINANCIAL AID SCHEME (NSFAS)

As you are aware NSFAS has created some turmoil this academic year.

A number of Rhodes University returning students who were in good academic standing did not get confirmation of funding from NSFAS until very late into the first term. The University stepped in and registered many of these students in lieu of the pending NSFAS decision. Students who could not be registered were accommodated temporarily in our residences. Many First Time Entering Students (FTENs) had to wait for a long time for the outcome of their NSFAS funding applications.

NSFAS appeals adjudications were still held right to the end of our first academic term of the 2023 academic year and some of our students are yet to receive the outcome of their appeals. The University prides itself in having a residence system that complies to the norms and standards as promulgated by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). These norms and standards require a level of operation to ensure that the student in residence has access to the amenities required to thrive academically and promote a vibrant campus culture. NSFAS took a unilateral decision to implement a cap of R45 000 on accommodation. This was done without a well-considered and nuanced understanding of the cost drivers of accommodation costs at different universities. Management has engaged with NSFAS since the latter part of 2022 and continues with this engagement this year. We have motivated and requested that Rhodes University be exempt from this cap. We await NSFAS's response to our application.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sizwe Mabizela, has had further engagements with the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, through USAf to discuss matters that affect students, including the NSFAS accommodation blanket capping.

Although we understand the reasons that a cap is necessary for the long-term sustainability of the NSFAS funding, such a decision cannot be taken without the input of universities and consideration of unique contexts of universities.

POSTGRADUATE STUDENT FUNDING

The start of the year saw an influx of postgraduate students in need of funding. This was even though by the end of the 2022 academic year, almost 20% of the postgraduate students had already received award letters of Institutional funding. The main cause of this influx was the uncertainty that students were faced with, as there were protracted delays in application

outcomes from the National Research Foundation (NRF), South Africa's major funder of honours, master's and doctoral students.

These delays stemmed from the introduction of a new IT system by the NRF, which led to unexpected technical difficulties and setbacks on the part of the NRF. This resulted in:

NRF-funded honours students only receiving their outcomes in early March 2023, despite the academic programme starting in early February 2023.

The processing of masters and doctoral awards only commencing in mid-February 2023, at the NRF.

Incorrect award letters being uploaded on the NRF system to the masters and doctoral scholarship holders.

Technical problems leading to a lack of communication from the NRF system notifying students of their incomplete applications, resulting in many of our eligible students not securing NRF funding.

To counter these delays and assist students with funding, Rhodes University, through the Postgraduate Funding, Research Office:

Extended offers of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) Honours Scholarship to all eligible honours students who actively sought to register, in consultation with the Head of Department (HOD) in every department.

Continues to engage with the NRF in appeal for any students who are experiencing technical difficulties with the new system, with their awards, acceptances, deferments, change in beneficiary, and many other NRF-related queries.

Extended offers of the institutionally funded RU Council Postgraduate Study Loan to all eligible students who actively sought to register for their postgraduate studies, not only honours. Continues to audit and reallocate all bursary and scholarship awards that were not taken up by the awardees to other deserving students, in consultation with HODs and supervisors.

Currently, about 30% of the postgraduate student body is funded through the Rhodes University Postgraduate Funding, Research Office.

Postgraduate Funding, Research Office has four mailing lists for postgraduate funding opportunities, split into:

- third year students (postgradstthird)
- fourth year students (postgradsfourth)
- honours students (postgradshons)
- masters students (postgradsmst)
- doctoral students (postgradsphd).

Students who are not receiving funding opportunity communication from any of these lists, should please contact pgfunding@ru.ac.za to subscribe.

At its meeting of April 18, 2023, Council received a comprehensive presentation on contingency plans to reduce reliance on municipal services by the CFO, Mr Riga, together with the Director: Facilities & Infrastructure, Mr van Dyk, and Director: Residential Operations, Ms Pillay.

Council commended the University on its plans which also linked priority areas to the University's eight strategic Institutional Development Plan goals. Three of the top risks identified included the inadequate water supply, the impact of load shedding, and poor municipal service delivery. Council resolved that the related recommendations in terms of identified risks would be considered by the Finance and General Purposes Committee for further processing.

On Tuesday 2 May 2023, the Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and Student Affairs), CFO and the Director: Student Affairs had a meeting with the SRC Executive to discuss the grievances of the student body.

We hope this communique sheds light on some of the efforts of the University to support students and staff and improve the condition of our ageing infrastructure.

ISSUED BY THE DIVISION OF COMMUNICATION AND ADVANCEMENT ON BEHALF OF RHODES UNIVERSITY VICE CHANCELLORATE