



## Haufiku provides context regarding anonymous letters



John Haufiku  
Director: Corporate Engagement and Internationalisation

Over the last three weeks a series of anonymous letters have surfaced on social media platforms. These letters contain accusations of mismanagement at NUST. A similar letter was also written by the Namibia Public Workers Union, addressed to the NUST Council. The NUST Brief (NB) team sat with John Haufiku (JH), the Director of Corporate Engagement and Internationalisation, for an update to the NUST community on this matter.

**NB: There are many letters circulating, how can staff stay sane and know what is true and what is not?**

**JH:** We are a fine academic institution, let us approach these allegations with the same objectivity and freedom of inquiry with which we undertake scientific research. While we might all have formed our own different working hypotheses, let us be slow to conclude our study. Let's begin by collecting data through conversations, observation and facts. As with any good researcher, we should endeavour to eliminate potential confirmation biases and apply a multi-variate analysis of our data before concluding our findings.

In other words, let us keep an open mind, consider that some rumours may be true, but also that they may be conjured or complete misunderstandings. Unless you know something to be a fact through first-hand information, I would caution against repeating unsubstantiated rumours.

**NB: What do these letters say and is there any truth to the claims?**

**JH:** The letters contain different allegations, all directed against Management. They claim financial mismanagement, tribalism, and poor corporate governance in general. Management met immediately after some of these letters first surfaced, and their position is reasonable.

There are issues raised that Management deems relevant and require urgent

attention, but there are also issues raised of a more personal nature, that Management vehemently refutes.

One of the issues that Management acknowledges as critical, concerns some staff who are retained on short-term contracts for several years. This is not a fair labour practice, and seems to have been the norm at NUST before the current Management took office. Management does not dispute that it is their responsibility to resolve this matter. However, resolving this in the best interest of all parties will not be an easy feat, as moving staff from contract to permanent employment requires a careful assessment of the financial implications of such an action.

Depending on the number of people employed on short-term contracts, a balance will have to be found, for example, between affordability and the strategic relevance of the positions.

Another undisputed issue is the job-grading exercise that was initiated in 2019. Management views the finalisation and implementation of this exercise as critical, and resolved to address this in earnest. However, this matter also has various resource implications. There are a few other matters raised that Management agrees with that will be resolved, resources permitting.

Then there are issues of a more personal nature, that accuse certain Management members of specific violations. Management is refuting these claims as baseless and compiled a report to that effect. The report is meant for Council.

**NB: What does Management make of the demand by the Union that they should be investigated externally to determine if these allegations are true or not?**

**JH:** We live in a democratic country, one that is governed by the rule of law. The Union is a representative of staff in the bargaining unit, they only have, according to the country's labour laws, the legal right to represent

staff interests in two scenarios: (a) Disputes of rights, and (b) Disputes of interests. What that means is that they have no legal authority to approach any entity to initiate an investigation into daily operations of the university that lie outside of their mandate.

Their jurisdiction is to address issues such as short-term contracts as mentioned earlier, to negotiate new benefits on behalf of staff and topics of a similar nature. Thus, some of the issues raised by the union are within their domain, but others are not. Assuming, but not conceding that some of the claims of the abuse of financial resources may be true, the Union is by law, not the correct entity to initiate or cause such an action. That is the domain of Management, the NUST Council, as well as the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

**NB: What about the anonymous letters from staff, who claim they have evidence of credit card abuse? What process can be used to hold management accountable without putting staff who raise these issues at risk of victimisation?**

**JH:** There is a basic credit card reconciliation process, whereby receipts are submitted with a brief description of the purpose of the expenditure. This is then allocated to the appropriate budget by the Finance Department. There are internal controls for this, should any receipt be missing, that expenditure needs to be refunded. NUST's finance section has reviewed and reconciled all credit card expenditures of the members of Management and found nothing amiss.

If a staff member holds knowledge to the contrary or has access to evidence, they have two options; raise it with the supervisor of the accused or approach external authorities. Let's assume it is a senior member of Management being accused, then the NUST Council would be the right body to approach. If fears of victimisation are still present with the NUST Council, the ACC should be approached, and they (ACC) will offer guidance on the type of cases they handle

and what is required in terms of evidence of alleged wrongdoings.

**NB: Aside from the technical things you have mentioned, isn't an investigation just the right thing to do, just to make everyone feel re-assured that there is no mismanagement at NUST?**

**JH:** To subject anyone to an investigation based on a rumour alone is not justice. Even if that person is found innocent, their personal character would still have been tainted by the process of a futile investigation.

Before an individual can be investigated, typically they need to be accused of wrongdoing and given the opportunity to respond to such accusations. In law this can be summed-up to refer to procedural and substantive fairness. The process by which we investigate someone of damning allegations is quite regulated to avoid malicious investigations.

Therefore, for an investigation to be initiated fairly, and consistent with the principles of justice, there must be "Reasonable Suspicion" that the accusation is true. Apart from the accusation, there must be an accuser (witness) and, or at the least, evidence to accompany an accusation. A witness or evidence that incriminates a person is usually reasonable cause to initiate an investigation. You can, however, not be investigated simply because an accusation exists by itself. There should be a witness or evidence, something tangible that can be scrutinised objectively.

It is for this reason, that the NUST Management is adamant that staff should make use of a due process to raise complaints, especially some of which are contained in the letters.

Like with all staff, an accused person must be given a right of reply before any action against them can be formally taken. Otherwise, anyone can be investigated or suspended based on accusations alone.