

NEW OPENING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE 2023 FIRST-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE COHORT

1. INTRODUCTION

The Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST) wishes to inform generic students who were selected in 2023 for various undergraduate programmes at the University that their studies will commence in July 2024. While the University would have preferred this student cohort to have already commenced their studies, various logistical challenges, mostly beyond MUST's control, have made this impossible. The main challenge has been inadequate accommodation and classroom space. Management empathises with the students and their guardians for this long delay.

2. ORIGIN OF THE CURRENT CHALLENGE

It is worth noting that MUST's academic calendar was hugely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic from January 2020 and the University has been trying its level best to recover. A recovery plan was designed and immediately put into action in 2022 but right from the start it was realised that the success of this plan heavily depends on the availability of additional classroom and bed space. The University is currently hosting two cohorts of second-year students on campus. This arrangement began in 2023 when these students were in their first year of studies. With the inclusion of additional classroom and bed space on campus or remote facilities, this approach was expected to enable the University to fully recover its academic calendar by 2025.

3. WHY THE CHALLENGE IS UNIQUE TO MUST AND HOW WE HAVE BEEN MANAGING

Firstly, the University is in a rural setting where appropriate private accommodation is not readily available. In the past years, to temporarily address the accommodation problem, the University increased the number of students accommodated in its hostels and converted a facility previously used by contractors into a makeshift accommodation wing. Secondly, to address the shortage of classrooms, the University also converted some facilities originally meant to serve other functions into classrooms. However, even after making all these changes, classroom and accommodation space is still not adequate. Currently, MUST is pursuing Private Sector initiatives to create more student accommodation and is also getting

support from the Government of Malawi to construct more teaching and laboratory facilities.

4. EFFORTS MADE TO GET THE 2023 FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS START CLASSES

To get the first-year cohort commence their classes on 12th February, 2024, together with the continuing students, the University came up with an idea to establish a satellite campus within Blantyre where it could have had access to adequate teaching space and let the students find their own accommodation in the surrounding locations. A very conducive facility was identified in August 2023, negotiations progressed well, and the two parties were close to signing a lease agreement for the use of the facility which would have allowed the first-year students to start their studies in February as planned. Everything was on track to bring the first-year class to the facility by 12th February. However, this plan was later postponed to 5th March 2024. Recent developments indicate that any deal between the two parties will take more time than was initially anticipated.

5. RESOLVED WAY FORWARD

Having failed to secure the teaching facility located in Blantyre, and with the MUST campus already overloaded until end June 2024 when final year students will have completed their studies, the only feasible and practical way forward is for the University to wait until this cohort of final year students has completed their studies and have vacated campus, thereby creating space that can be used to accommodate the first-year cohort.

Once again, MUST would like to emphasise that every effort is being made to re-align the recovery plan, aiming to have the new students commence their studies by July and prevent any recurrence of this situation for future cohorts. MUST expresses sympathy towards the first-year students and their guardians who have patiently waited for the commencement of their studies. We deeply regret any inconvenience caused.

For additional information, please feel free to contact the University Registrar's Office on registry@must.ac.mw.

University Registrar 25th February, 2024