University to champion workers’ rights

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STELLENBOSCH University (SU) has committed to ensuring that all workers are well taken care of and to protecting their dignity.

University spokesperson Martin Viljoen says the university has been giving priority attention to the implementation of decisions agreed to following protests by workers of external contractors last year.

These decisions include a once-off payment to workers in December, negotiating with contractors on behalf of workers and establishing a reporting line that workers can report issues on.

In a communiqué to staff in December 2015, rector and vice-chancellor Prof Wim de Villiers said: “To our mind, the fundamental issue is one of human dignity. We regard this as non-negotiable and we also expect our external service providers to adhere to this value. We do not wish to be associated with or enter into agreements with any external service provider that does not have regard for the human dignity of its workers.”

A committee consisting of representatives from the external workers, students, unions and senior university staff members, assisted by external mediators, came to an agreement in December 2015 and the university has since focused on the implementation of various decisions.

This includes formal interaction with all external contractors requesting that they should treat workers who participated in protest action without resorting to criminal acts with compassion.

A formal letter from the rector to external contractors repeating the above appeal will be written and a once-off payment of R2 000 will be made to all workers of external service providers who were designated to university campuses and were affected by the protests.

Also, an independent help line that these workers can lodge any complaints or issues, which the university will then take up directly with their respective employers, will be established.

Acting rector and vice-chancellor while De Villiers is abroad, Professor Leopoldt van Huyssteen, has appealed to all parties involved to avoid any actions that could jeopardise the agreement.

“It would be to the detriment of workers and their families,” he said.

“The university acknowledges the right of workers to engage in peaceful protest action without impacting on the rights of students to register or disrupting the academic project.”

“The human dignity and just treatment of workers are being addressed by the university in partnership with the various role players.

“It would be an injustice to students to prevent them from registering and starting their academic year.”

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