

University of Zululand staff faces criminal charges

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Fifteen staff members and students at the University of Zululand are facing criminal cases and disciplinary action after a forensic investigation into the university's affairs has been concluded.



(Image: GCIS)

The Minister for Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, has warned that more might follow suit.

This follows the release of the findings of the forensic report by the audit team appointed by Nzimande in April last year. Nzimande tasked the team with conducting a comprehensive institutional audit on the university's affairs, including areas of procurement, the admission and registration of students, management and governance.

During an investigation led by Professor Chris de Beer as Administrator for the university, the team reported serious and repeated transgressions of the university policy and procedures relating to:

- Various aspects of academic administration and access to official student data;
- Process and protocol for the issuing and auditing of blank degrees and diploma certificates, leading to university employees being in possession of large numbers of blank certificates, which could have been used to manufacture false certificates;
- Irregular admission and registration of students, who do not meet the minimum admission criteria at the university; and
- Repeated infringement of the procurement policies and procedures leading to preferential treatment and self-enrichment by some members of the council and staff.

Releasing the report on Monday, Nzimande warned that there would be no mercy for those who have been fingered during the investigation.

"Criminal cases will be opened with our law enforcement agencies, criminal proceedings will be instituted and we will call on our courts to impose the maximum sentence where cases are proven," Nzimande said.

Collusion

A concerned Nzimande said there were clear indications of collusion between some students and staff in unacceptable practices that undermine the educational mission of the university, with devastating consequences for the academic stature and credibility of the institution.

"This should not be allowed to continue. It should be noted by those who do not carry the interest of the institution at heart, that it is easy to break down the academic stature of an institution and to engage in practices impacting negatively on the credibility of its qualifications and institutional culture and yet very difficult to rebuild the image of the institution."

During the interviews carried out by the forensic auditors, it also emerged that some students admitted they were irregularly registered and were required to pay a 'facilitation fee' ranging from R1500 to R3900.

While two of the students, who were admitted without meeting the criteria, have since left the university, the department said the law would take its course and cases have been opened against them.

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