

Unisa deficit looms over increases

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The University of SA (Unisa) will have to raise R134m if it wants to meet workers' demands.



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That is what the 10% pay hike for 2017 demanded by workers represented by the National Health, Education and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) would come to.

If the dispute spirals into a full-blown strike, the country's largest university would suffer further delays in its academic year, starting with the registration process.

Union spokesman Khaya Xaba said the university's approach to negotiations sent out mixed messages. While vice-chancellor Mandla Makhanya put a 4.5% offer on the table, the council chairperson proposed a 6% salary increment rise. Organised labour rejected both offers, he said.

The inflation rate, on which most employers base their increases in wages, averaged 6.3% in 2016.

Last week, protests over salary increases erupted at Unisa campuses around the country, resulting in shutdowns that have

delayed registrations.

Unisa spokesman Martin Ramotshela confirmed registration had been delayed, with the university extending the cut-off date to 5 February.

Xaba said on Friday the union initially wanted a 14% salary increase but reduced it to 10%.

Nehawu represents 3,000 of Unisa's 6,000 permanent staff.

In 2016, the university, one of the world's largest distance education institutions, increased salaries by 10%. The university needs to find R134m to cover the gap between its 6% offer and the union demand for 10%.

Unisa management had told Nehawu it would try to raise the R134m after Friday's talks, but the union would continue to intensify protests in the meantime, said Xaba.

Nehawu national organiser for higher education Ntsako Nombeni bemoaned Unisa workers' poor pay, saying many lagged their peers.

Most universities were settling on an average of 8%-9%, said Nombeni.

Basic salaries for non-academic staff at Unisa are around R230,000 a year, while cleaning and ground staff take home R3,500 a month.

Temporary staffers, which include students, earn a monthly wage of about R5,600.

Nehawu also wants Unisa to implement Labour Relations Amendment Act rules for workers who have been on temporary contracts for more than three months.

The union has demanded that those workers' employment contracts be converted to permanent ones.

Nombeni said Unisa was insincere in claiming it was cash-strapped because it had a R350m budget for labour brokers and had donated R50m to the University of Fort Hare.

Source: Business Day

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