

Georgetown, Guyana

UG Administration chronicles current labour relations at the institution

Due to the current industrial climate at the Turkeyen Campus, The University of Guyana Administration believes it is essential to provide a brief overview on the relations between the Workers' Unions and the University Administration in the past few months and clarifies some misinformation in the public domain.

At its meeting on November 14, 2018, the Finance and General Purposes Committee (F&GPC) considered and approved a proposal from the Administration for salary adjustments in respect of UA and UB Staff for fiscal year 2018 at rates of 3% and 4% respectively, acting on the basis of what was financially affordable. It must also be noted that an adjustment in base salary also triggers a 20% increase in housing allowance. Payments were made in December 2018, retroactive to January 1, 2018 and on a tax free basis.

When this approval was given, the UGWU's representative participated in the deliberations of the Committee and voted in favor of the Administration's proposal. Of importance, the decision was made "without prejudice to any further negotiations between the Unions and the Administration." Subsequent to this decision, the leadership of both Unions objected to the decision of the F&GPC and called the adjustments an "imposition", while requesting that the matter be referred to the University Council for its consideration.

At a Special Meeting of the Council held on December 20, 2018, the decision of the F&GPC was endorsed and approved by the Council. It was further agreed at the Council that the Administration and Unions should immediately recommence negotiations, mindful that the Vice-Chancellor had extended an earlier invitation to the Unions. The meeting, which had been set before the Council meeting, was held on December 18, 2018, and the Parties agreed to formalise an agenda with timelines aimed at moving the process of negotiations forward. It was also agreed that "...should there be any impasse on any agreed item that this would be referred to the Chief Labour Officer whose final decision will be respected by all".

On January 31, 2019, the Administration formally responded to a proposal dated January 11, 2019 for salary adjustments for UA and UB Staff at the rates of 10% and 9%, respectively for 2018. In keeping with the request of the Unions, the Administration submitted the Financial Statement of the Income and Expenditure for period January 1 to December 31, 2018. Further, as there were some Liabilities as at December 31, 2018, the Administration, out of a committed desire for transparency, provided the Unions' Leadership with the "Net Cash Position after Liabilities" as of December 31, 2018. In view of the Statements provided to the Unions, the Administration advised that the University is not in a financial position to meet their demands for 10% and 9% increases.

In response to the Unions' proposal, the Administration gave a commitment to immediately commence negotiations for 2019 and to mutually agree on adjustments that are both affordable and sustainable. In their response of February 4, 2019 to the Administration's letter of January 31, 2019, the Unions conveyed their rejection of the final offer of 3% and 4%, respectively. The Administration also reaffirmed the desire and willingness to negotiate on all other matters raised in the February 4, 2019 letter from the unions. It was further recommended that the matter be referred to the Ministry of Labour for conciliation as was mutually agreed to on December 18, 2018. The Administration subsequently advised the Department of Labour of the desire to have the matter brought to conciliation.

The Department of Labour invited both parties to a conciliation meeting on February 12, 2019. At the meeting Chief Labour Officer advised that in the absence of a signed Collective Labour Agreement between the University and the Unions, the provision of Labour Act Cap 98:01 Section 4 was being triggered to conciliate the matter. The Parties were further advised that once conciliation commences Industrial Action should immediately cease. In response to the guidance provided by the Department of Labour, the unions pointed out that they were neither prepared for, nor amenable to conciliation and would explore other avenues in seeking a resolution to this matter.

It is important to note that given the fact that the Department of Labour is fully involved in seeking a resolution to the impasse, the following points are reaffirmed:

1. That the Administration does not have the fiscal space to meet the demands of the Unions for the 10% and 9% salary adjustment for 2018 in respect of UA and UB respectively;
2. That the Administration is willing to have its financial position, as reflected in the Financial Statements presented to the Unions, be examined by any competent and independent Arbiter with a view to pronouncing on the data presented;
3. That the Administration is ultimately concerned that our students should not suffer and that the Unions are being urged to act responsibly as we seek to mutually resolve the current impasse in an amicable and responsible manner.

It is the Administration's expectation that in the interest of our primary stakeholders, namely our students, that there will be a speedy resolution in the interest of all concerned.

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UG IN BRIEF

With a current enrollment of some 8,000 students, The University of Guyana (UG) has graduated more than 20,000 students who have gone on to successful careers locally, regionally and internationally. The University is also a major contributor to the national economy and to business and industry. Established in 1963 on a part-time basis with shared space at Queens College, UG moved to its own campus at Turkeyen in 1970 and expanded in 2000 with the addition of the Tain Campus. It now offers more than 120 under-graduate and post-graduate Programmes including the Natural Sciences, Engineering, Environmental Studies, Forestry, Urban Planning and Management, Tourism Studies, Education, Creative Arts, Economics, Law, Medicine, Business, Optometry and Nursing. Several online programmes are available and The UG also offers extra-mural classes at four locations through its Institute of Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE). The UG also offers the opportunity for student engagement in debating, sports, and cultural, religious and professional activities.

**Public Relations Division
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