



5th May 1980

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

VARSIY FOCUS

A General Information Sheet from the Vice-Chancellor

STATEMENT MADE TO THE PRESS BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

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UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

PRESS STATEMENT MADE BY PROFESSOR JOSEPH MAINA MUNGAI,
VICE-CHANCELLOR, ON 5 MAY, 1980.

1. Introduction

The University of Nairobi was closed on 27 February, 1980 following disturbances which had started in the Central Catering Unit. The University Council has recently met and recommended to Government that the University reopens on 2 June, 1980 to complete the rest of the 1979/80 academic year. The recommendation has been accepted.

Meanwhile, it has been found necessary to initiate changes to improve the services that have been associated with these problems. At this time attention will be focused on the Central Catering Unit.

2. Central Catering Unit

As far as the Central Catering Unit is concerned, the two major problems have been that, first of all, it was not meant to be a dining place, and secondly, since its establishment it has been made to serve very large numbers of meals.

The Central Catering Unit was meant to serve as a cook/freeze service area for distribution to all the other dining halls. The reason the University was persuaded to use it as a dining centre was the then planned expansion of University enrolment. By centralising massive catering services, the necessity was avoided of building extra kitchens and dining halls for the new halls of residence which had to be put up. Indeed, the University of Nairobi has grown from an enrolment of 3384 students in 1971/1972 to an enrolment of 5590 students in 1979/1980. To cater

for this rapid expansion, the Central Catering Unit has been serving half of all the meals served to students in the University.

The chronic problems of the Central Catering Unit were pointed out by the former Catering Manager, Mr. P.C.G. Berale, in his letter of 8 September, 1970 to the Vice-Chancellor. He termed the proposed Unit as "...so costly a project which offers absolutely nothing by way of advantage in catering here". As a result, he resigned, as he said, to avoid further embarrassment and conflict. Although he was persuaded to stay on for another two years until 30 June, 1972 to help in supervision of its construction, he made it very clear to the University that it would be associated with serious problems.

His successor, Mr. L.A. Ng'ethe has since 1972 operated the service which has been bedevilled with problems from the beginning. When the University was closed for 5 months in 1974, the Central Catering Unit featured as one of the major problem areas.

However, in spite of these inherent and chronic problems of running the Central Catering Unit as a dining place, and in spite of the special problems of food and water shortages experienced during the December-March dry periods, everything has been done to meet the food requirements of students.

However, it has now been found necessary to change the catering system altogether to minimise these inherent problems of large-scale and congested catering. The aim of making these changes is to improve the quality of food and catering services.

The main changes being undertaken are decentralisation of catering from the Central Catering Unit and restructuring of the staffing and catering units. All in all,

the 5,500 students of the University will be fed in 9 dining units scattered in the various campuses and which will be identified with different colours and numbers. Each dining unit will serve a specified group of halls of residence. Two extra dining halls are being revived. These are the old dining hall on the upper floor of Kitchen 1 which will be re-opened to feed 682 students and Mary's hall dining hall which will feed 116 students. The lower floor dining room of the Central Catering Unit will feed only 869 students instead of 1250 while the upper floor dining room will feed only 726 students instead of 1250. The women's hall dining room will continue to feed 734 students, Kabete campus 339, Medical School Hostel 363 and Kikuyu campus dining hall 60 students.

In order to undertake these changes in an organised and rational manner, the University sought the services of an institutional management consultant from the Kenya Polytechnic. As a result of his recommendations, the following changes are being undertaken during the month of May.

3. Staffing

There will be a complete restructuring of the staffing with new job titles and responsibilities clearly laid out. Where there is over-staffing there will be a redeployment in other parts of the University. Staff qualifications are being checked. Inservice training is being initiated. Management and supervisory staff will be appointed and assigned on the basis of defined qualifications and experience.

Each kitchen and dining unit will be serviced by its own team consisting of a catering supervisor responsible for the planning and budgeting of the menus, assistant catering supervisors, head cooks,

assistant cooks, kitchen assistants, dining room assistants, and storekeepers. The number of each of the categories of the staff will depend on the number of students to be fed.

In the long run the two floors of the Central Catering Unit that have been used for 8 years as dining halls will be converted to other uses. However, the other facilities of the Central Catering Unit will be retained as the main purchasing and delivering area for all the catering units of the University. These functions will be carried out by a team consisting of a catering manager, deputy catering manager, purchasing officer, 9 butchers, accountant and drivers working under the direct control of the Registrar and Finance Officer. Mr. Daniel Gacheru is the Acting Catering Manager and is supervising the current changes.

This system is expected to be more efficient and to facilitate operating within the approved budget as well as avoiding any mismanagement of funds. Increased production of food on the University farms is also being undertaken with a view to reducing the overall cost of food.

In spite of these changes, the question of the quantities of food to be purchased, processed and served will remain a problem to be taken into consideration, especially during the December-March dry period.

4. Quality of Food

Menus will be better planned to enable costs to be controlled accurately and full use to be made of the seasonal fluctuations in price as well as quality and quantity of foodstuffs. It is hoped to offer better choices of dishes.

However, in order to achieve these improvements, a request is being made to increase the student ration allowance from Shs. 16/50 to Shs. 18/50. per day.

5. Environmental Sanitation

Each of the catering units will be cleaned up and a programme for regular inspection and cleaning drawn out for ensuring maintenance of levels of hygiene expected of catering facilities. Regular medical checks are also being undertaken on the catering staff.

6. Uniforms

The problem of failure to supply uniforms to catering staff applies to all other staff in the University who are supposed to have uniforms. Hitherto, tenders have been given out but for the last three years either the uniforms have not been delivered or there has not been enough money to buy them. It has, therefore, become necessary to find alternative ways and means of ensuring that proper uniforms are supplied and at the right time.

Towards this end the University has consulted the National Youth Service with a view to starting a tailoring unit within the University. The unit has now been started with the recruitment of 4 fully-trained tailors from the National Youth Service to make uniforms for the catering staff as well as for other staff in the University who are supposed to wear uniforms at work.

7. Crockery

With regard to crockery, the manufacturers have admitted that a lot of the crockery which had been supplied to the University had been manufactured with faulty materials which inevitably changed colour

quickly after use and washing. Fortunately, the manufacturers have agreed to replace the faulty crockery free of charge. The manufacturers and their agents are also being consulted on the right processes and materials to use in cleaning the crockery.

In view of these findings, it has been decided not to charge students for the damage caused at the Central Catering Unit. This does not, however, in any way condone the action taken by students for expressing their grievances, and especially when they also extended the violence and damage outside the University.

8. Equipment

A re-arrangement of equipment from the Central Catering Unit to Kitchen 1 and Mary's Hall kitchen is being undertaken. With regard to maintenance of the equipment, the Department of Mechanical Engineering has undertaken an inspection and is assisting in setting up a maintenance team.

9. General comment.

These immediate changes are only a small part of major and long-term changes that are contemplated to enable the University to continue to serve its objectives, provide the necessary facilities for its academic operations and orientate its services towards the welfare of its students, staff and society in general. There are many other problems facing the University and whose solutions are also being worked out. It must, however, be appreciated by students, staff and the public that all these steps will continue to be taken within the limits of the resources that are made available to the University. On its side, however, the University will ensure that those resources are managed with efficiency.

MAY 5, 1980