

PNQ ON EDUCATION

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, MAURITIUS – SECOND CYCLE QUALITY AUDIT REPORT (21/06/18)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research whether she will state if she has taken cognizance of the Report of the Second Cycle Quality Audit of the University of Technology, Mauritius, dated November 2017, effected by an Audit Panel appointed by the Tertiary Education Commission and, if so, indicate –

- (a) if she has sought and obtained the views of the Board of the University of Technology, Mauritius in relation thereto, and
- (b) the measures, if any, her Ministry has taken and proposes to take in relation thereto.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, indeed, I have taken cognizance of the Report of the Second Cycle of Quality Audit conducted by an independent panel appointed by the TEC in November 2017.

I would like, right from the start, to enlighten the House on the importance of quality audits. Quality audits are an international practice which is generally put in place to test the functionality of key core processes at the institution and to ensure that accountability mechanisms are in place for continuous improvement of standards and practices.

Hence, the audit panel probes through an audit trail on the various criteria as given in the Audit Manual or handbook and triangulate with various interviewees to reach consensus on commendations and recommendations.

The general rule is that prior to the setting up of the audit exercise, TEC consults the concerned university to agree on a date for the conduct of the exercise and the themes are discussed and agreed upon at the Quality Assurance Committee of the Tertiary Education Commission or through consultative forums.

In this present case, UTM was apprised by the TEC in May 2017 that the audit exercise would be carried out in November 2017. It was requested to submit its self-evaluation report in the first week of August 2017 in line with practices.

In August 2017, UTM submitted its self-evaluation report and in October 2017, UTM was informed of the constitution of the Quality Audit Panel and it officially confirmed that no individual conflict of interest has been identified with respect to the panel composition which comprises –

- Professor Mark Hay, from Tshwane University of Technology of South Africa as Chairperson;
- Associate Professor Mahsood Shah, University of Australia;
- Associate Professor Dr. Rosidah Kuwah, University of North Carolina, Charlotte;
- Associate Professor Dr. Dinesh Hurreeram, University of Mauritius, and
- Mr Sen Ramsamy, Managing Director, Tourism Business Intelligence.

The draft audit report was submitted by the panel members on 24 January 2018 and contrary to what was reported in some newspapers the draft report was, as per international practices, submitted to the Director General of the UTM for comments relating strictly to factual inaccuracies and typographical errors.

She forwarded her comments back to the Tertiary Education Commission on 20 March 2018. The final audit report was submitted to the Tertiary Education

Board for approval on 31 May 2018 and was placed on the Tertiary Education Commission's website on 01 June 2018.

The House will recall that in reply to the PNQ put to me in May 2017 with regard to areas for improvement at the UTM, I provided the Members with a significant amount of information relating to academic performance, physical infrastructure, financial situation and governance structures amongst others at the UTM. I am pleased to announce here that since then there has been progress in those areas.

Madam Speaker, the House may recall that in my previous reply last year, I had said that there will be a quality audit conducted at the UTM and this was done as mentioned earlier in my answer. The recommendations submitted in the report are now being acted upon. The report highlighted three major challenges currently being faced by the UTM. The first relates to the legacy of underfunding which has over the years impacted negatively on the infrastructure and resources of the institution. The second one has more to do with the attraction and retention of staff and the third is the growth of the institution as a university with a focus on technology.

This is the second time, Madam Speaker, that the TEC is conducting a quality audit for the UTM. The first one was conducted in 2008 and, in fact, in 2008, the Tertiary Education Commission appointed a quality audit panel to undertake a quality audit. At the end of the 2008 exercise the panel members were of the view that although the UTM meets the general criteria of fitness to purpose, it must consider ways and means of addressing several areas of concern.

The report gave 15 recommendations to address in those areas....

(Interruptions)

The same recommendations came back.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you will have ample time to ask your question!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: When this Government came to power, Madam Speaker, and the current management and the Board of UTM took it up from the recommendations contained in that audit report and started putting in place measures to address those areas, I must emphasise that since then the UTM has been actively working on those recommendations. An audit was, in fact, scheduled even in 2013 but it was not carried out.

So, Madam Speaker, I am informed that the report is now available on the TEC website and is in the public domain. I am also informed that the report has not yet been submitted to the UTM Board given that the management is already working on the commendations and recommendations as well as on the strategies to be carried out to improve based on the recommendations received.

Madam Speaker, the said Audit Report contains six commendations and 29 recommendations. Briefly, Madam Speaker, the commendations relate to –

- affirmation of the University as the University of Technology;
- commitment of academic staff;
- quality of teaching and support;
- close working relationships with industry;
- international professional accreditation, and
- work based learning.

Madam Speaker, the auditors have in the recent 2017 Report commended the UTM for the serious efforts made to address the chronic mismatch between academic qualifications of graduates and the specific requirements of the world of work as well as the integration of work-based learning in the programme.

Madam Speaker, quality audits cannot be looked in isolation as it is a continuous process. These audits are a learning tool for universities to improve

their procedures and processes. For this reason, we need to look at what the 2008 Quality Audit Report have found and how such improvements have been put in place by the UTM. In terms of process, when a quality audit report is released universities then draw up an action with their Boards and these are presented to the Tertiary Education Commission.

The Tertiary Education Commission then monitors the actions through its sector-wide quality assurance committee where the quality assurance representative of the University reports on the progress achieved by the institution on the recommendations made by the Audit Report. Moreover, the Audit Panel in the next audit also reviews these actions to see if they have been addressed fully.

Madam Speaker, the 2008 Audit Report recommended that UTM should have greater visibility among its stakeholders. Since 2015...

(Interruptions)

... a number of strategic decisions have been taken by the UTM in that direction...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, can I kindly request you not to make comments while...

(Interruptions)

Please sit down! You have got a point of order on what the hon. Minister is saying.

Mr X. L. Duval: The hon. Minister deliberately addresses the 2017 Report. We have half an hour and the Minister is going on and on about a 2008 Report, which has nothing to do with the 2017 Report. I will kindly request you to ask her to stick to the point.

Madam Speaker: I will just ask the hon. Minister to be brief on the 2008 Report and then to go lengthily on this one. But should the Minister take more

time than required, I will give the hon. Leader of the Opposition additional time for his PNQ.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, I have just explained that the Audit is a continuous process and relates to the other previous Audits. That is why I was giving some information. But if it is not required, I will try to avoid giving the information.

Madam Speaker: Because of time limit.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: That could have been helpful to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. It was specifically highlighted in the 2017 Report that the linkages formed by UTM with specific industry players have enabled the employability of its graduates in sectors related to technology and hospitality management.

The 2017 Report equally mentions the positive reaction of both staff and students who were interviewed on that issue and who confirmed that the early contact of students with employers as part of the work based learning, has resulted in students securing jobs prior to graduation. Compulsory work placement to improve employability of graduates is now part of all new and revised courses. Work placement is overseen by the Student Affairs Department through the Work Placement Committee and the School Work Placement Committee.

Madam Speaker, as regards academic leadership and administrative leadership, the panel recommended that the Board considers ways and means to strengthen the human resource aspects of the University to build consistency, continuity and stability.

Madam Speaker, I am informed that the University is making progress for the recruitment of staff to fill vacancies at various senior positions, which include Registrar, Head of Finance, Head of Information Services and Assistant Registrar.

Madam Speaker, with regard to good governance, after the issue of the 2017 Audit Report, I had a meeting with the Director General and the Chairman of the UTM Board to ensure a complete review of the corporate and academic governance structures, with a view to identifying the lacunae and the shortcomings of those structures.

This exercise will assist in coming up with clear demarcation of responsibilities and will, for accountability purposes, ensure that appropriate lines of reporting be established with the organisation.

I wish to highlight here, Madam Speaker, that Audited Certified Financial Statements for years 2000-2009 have now been incorporated in the Annual Reports and have been tabled at the National Assembly in May last. As regards Audited Certified Financial Statements for period July 2009 to December 2010, these have been received in ...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: I am really sorry. I have to once more draw the attention of the hon. Leader of the Opposition not to interrupt the hon. Minister. I told you that you would have ample time to ask your questions. I said, and I am going to repeat it, that should the hon. Minister take more time than required, I will give you additional time for your questions. So, be patient, because I think you should be in good temper and you should be moderate in what you are doing. Please!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, I was saying that as regards the Audited Certified Financial Statements for period July 2009 to December 2010, these have been received in 2017 and will be tabled in the National Assembly soon. The Annual Report for 2010 is being finalised and will be submitted for printing next week. The House will appreciate that the current management is now catching up on more than a decade of backlog.

Financial situation - in terms of funding, the Audit Report of 2008 noted a heavy reliance on student fees and recommended that the UTM considers alternative sources of funding. The 2017 Audit Panel does acknowledge...

Mr X. L. Duval: Madam Speaker, on a point of order again, if I may. The TEC Report does not deal at all with financial figures. Not at all! And so, again, the hon. Minister is wasting our time dealing this time with Audit Report dating back 10 years ago. So, I will ask you to call her to order so that we can stick to the question that is being asked; otherwise, it makes a mockery of the PNQ.

Madam Speaker: Can I give a ruling on this? I have studied, in fact, the question that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has asked, and I see in (b) that he has asked 'the measures, if any, her Ministry has taken and proposes to take in relation thereto.' So, I understand it is in relation to this report. So, if ever there has to be any reference to previous reports, I will just ask the hon. Minister - because sometimes she has to make reference to previous reports to say what is being done now; this is what I understand from her reply - to be very brief because of the time limit that we have for the PNQ.

Mr X. L. Duval: Madam Speaker, if I may insist, this is a second quality audit on the academic and management. Nothing to do at all with financial performance!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Having taken cognizance of this significant funding issue, this Government has gone the extra mile to gradually increase the grant allocated to UTM over the past few years. It is interesting to note, Madam Speaker, that the recurrent grant provided by the previous Government for the period January to December 2012 was only Rs1 m. compared to the grants of Rs11 m. and Rs20 m. provided by this Government for the past and current financial years, while a grant of Rs28 m. has been earmarked for the next Budget. As for capital grants, the amount provided in 2012 by the previous Government was of Rs4 m. only, compared to the figure of Rs7 m. and Rs32 m. provided for

the last and current financial years respectively. For the coming financial year, the amount of Rs32 m. will be maintained. This is a clear indication, Madam Speaker, of the commitment, this Government has, to meet the tertiary education mandate and assist the public tertiary educational institutions to provide quality education and research in line with the national 2030 economic, social and educational objective.

In terms of revenue generated by UTM, the amount stood on an average of Rs167 m. for years 2012-2014 compared to an average of Rs173 m. for the past three financial years. This includes revenue from sources other than student fees, which stands at Rs20 m. for 2017-2018 compared to a figure of only Rs7.2 m. for 2012. This increase in revenue has been possible because of new collaborations with private institutions.

As regards Quality Assurance, a Board's decision taken in August 2015 now enables the Quality Assurance Officer to sit on the Academic Council as a co-opted member. Other committees such as the Research Degrees Committee and Disciplinary Committee already make provision for Quality Assurance Officers to be a full-fledged member of these committees. All new and revised programmes are now mandatorily vetted by the Quality Assurance Officer prior to submission to the Academic Council for consideration.

I am informed, Madam Speaker, that the Quality Assurance Framework, including benchmarking is being enhanced in respect of both academic and infrastructural support, as recommended by the Panel members in their 2017 Report. The UTM is actively working on this recommendation.

Madam Speaker, the aim of Government is to position Mauritius as a quality education hub in the region and, for that matter, measures have recently been taken by my Ministry to raise the admission requirement for students willing to join public universities. As such, the Ministry took the decision in March 2017

to enrol students with a minimum requirement of three 'A' Levels, one subsidiary or two 'A' Levels and two subsidiaries for undergraduate degree programmes.

To do away with the '*nivellement par le bas*', this Government has, in addition, taken the decision to phase out Foundation Courses run by public institutions. In spite of the fact that the decision has been endorsed and is now fully implemented, the number of students enrolled at the UTM has not decreased. We have increased the entry requirements and still there has been no decrease in the students' intake. This is a clear indication of the sustained interest of students to enrol for studies at the UTM.

Taking into account the worldwide concept of late developers and the official mandate of the University to recognise prior learning and experience, the University has also formalised the requirements for stepwise entry through the APL/APEL route into undergraduate programmes. Students are now required to clear Certificate and Diploma levels, prior to progressing through the undergraduate programme, in order to ensure the suitability for the programmes of study.

It is worth noting here, Madam Speaker, that in the 2008 Audit Report, the TEC noted with concern a decision of the Academic Council taken under the previous regime, allowing applicants with three "O" levels at School Certificate to join a Foundation Course for undergraduate programmes.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, can I know for how long you have for your reply because we have already taken 20 minutes from Question Time and I would have wished to know? I can give a certain leeway, additional time for additional questions, but then, according to the Standing Orders, Question Time is limited to 30 minutes. Can I just ask you to try to be very brief and wrap up your reply, so that we can respect the time limit?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It is worth noting, Madam Speaker, that TEC noted with concern a decision of the Academic Council, as I have just said, where students were allowed into the University with only “O” levels. Now, this is the past; we are no longer accepting this.

Regarding the review of Regulations related to plagiarism, supervision of dissertations and responsibilities of Supervisors, the report recommended that these Regulations be reviewed and mention has been made of such a review in the recent audit report. So, the review has already been made.

The House may wish to note, Madam Speaker, that the review of Regulations with regard to plagiarism was initiated in 2017 and have been reviewed in February 2018. The approval of the Academic Council was thereafter obtained for the renewal of the Turn-It-in and anti-plagiarism software. With regard to the duties and responsibilities of Supervisors, this falls under the regulations for MPhil/PhD studies which have been under review at the level of the Research & Development Committee since 2017 and the revised version is now under consideration at the level of the Academic Council. With respect to the supervision of undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations, administrative supervisors have been introduced since 2016 to improve quality of supervision by part-time staff.

Since 2015, the UTM has been taking measures to constantly review the examination regulations and policies to improve security measures. The oath of confidentiality and non-disclosure agreement as well as declaration of interest forms are now in full use. Examination booklets will now be stamped with the date, upon issue to students for examinations. Regulations regarding cheating cases have been reinforced and the penalties are strictly implemented. The number of cheating cases have decreased from 63 in 2012 to 36 in 2016.

Madam Speaker, I now come to the aspect of Research, which is not only critical to the economic and social development of our society, but is also critical to the mission of our University. If we aim at positioning our Universities...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, I am really sorry, and here I will make an appeal, once again, to those who draft replies also. PNQs are limited to 30 minutes. I give certain leeway to Ministers to reply to their questions, but then, I have a certain leeway and I cannot give more than that. Now, we have already taken almost 30 minutes. The whole time devoted to the PNQ has been in the reply of the Minister.

(Interruptions)

I will have to give you additional time.

I am sorry, hon. Minister, I asked you to wrap up, but then, I will have to ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition to ask his questions now.

Mr X. L. Duval: I do hope that you will give adequate additional time otherwise I will go home because this makes a mess, a complete mockery of the PNQ system.

Madam Speaker, I am very, very disappointed at the reply of the hon. Minister. Very disappointed! *Un gouvernement nivelé par le bas*, Madam Speaker, nothing more than that.

The hon. Minister has told us apparently that the report has been addressed in some way. This is the worst report I have seen in my career on any public institution. I will ask the Minister first, whether the Board of Governors has not got a right to discuss this report - now you know, it's November 2017, seven months later. Is she aware that the Board of Governors has not been allowed to discuss this report?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, I have just explained that the panel was set up in November 2017, but the final report was submitted only on 31 May and we received it on 31 May. Now, it is the usual procedure for the institution to work under recommendations made and then to present it to its Board. So, the work is on. They will have to discuss with the Board, but now the management is working on the recommendations and are coming with strategies, which will be presented to the Board and it is obvious that it has to be discussed with the Board.

Mr X. L. Duval: Madam Speaker, the draft report was submitted in February and good governance would have dictated that it was shown to the Board. Is the hon. Minister aware that the Acting Registrar of UTM refused to call a Board meeting at the request of the President of the Board? And this is the email here asking the Acting Registrar who is the Secretary to the Board of Governors, and he did not convene the meeting for Tuesday 19 June as requested. And, in fact, only this morning, Madam Speaker, the email sent from the President to one Mr Aukbur who is the Chairman of the Staff Committee, and it says here –

“Several emails were sent to him and he elected not to communicate with me on this issue. Subsequently, the Board could not take place. The Acting Registrar is Secretary to the Board and his failure to convene an official Board following firm instructions by the President has impeded upon the business of the Board.”

And he is asking for immediate disciplinary action to be taken against the Acting Registrar. Are you aware, therefore, that the Board has been prevented all along from looking at this damning report by the Tertiary Education Commission?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, the Chairman of the Board did talk to me and told me that he wanted to have a meeting which was not scheduled. When we went for the information, I was told that the Chairman was informed that the work was still on and that the Management wanted to complete

the work being done on the recommendations before presenting it to the Board. So, they wanted time and they had asked to postpone the meeting and they did not refuse to have a meeting, as far as I understand.

Mr X. L. Duval: Madam Speaker, is it that the Chairman has gone bonkers or what, has he gone mad, he would write a letter asking for immediate disciplinary action, when it is up, apparently, to the Director General to decide when there will be a Board meeting? Madam Speaker, the truth is ...

(Interruptions)

The hon. Minister has spoken enough. Let me ask the question now!

Madam Speaker: Don't make a statement, Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: The truth is that there is a *trio infernal* at the UTM *qui fait la pluie et le beau temps*, Madam Speaker. Therefore, I would ask the hon. Minister what is it that this *trio infernal* has, that they have so much power on you, as a Minister, on everyone...

Madam Speaker: Don't make allegations, please!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... at the UTM, so that, in fact, the hon. Minister fails to see that whatever actions she is taking are against the interest of 3,000 poor, and relatively poor, low-income children, despite what the Budget has put and everything? These children, their whole future is being denied - good future - because of the actions of herself and the *trio infernal!*

Madam Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I just want to draw your attention to the fact that you should try to see how you frame your question in such a way as not to make allegations on the hon. Minister.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, I would like to stress on one point. If a Board is not held and the date is postponed, we cannot say that there has been refusal for setting up a Board. Secondly, if ever a Chairperson has any

problem with the Registrar, it is to the Board that he has to refer the matter. I don't understand that too. The Registrar cannot decide upon the date without talking to the Administration. So, one thing is clear, that there has never been any refusal.

As far as having control on me or any other person is concerned, I am happy to note that if the Director General has control over her staff, I think it would be a positive point in her favour.

Mr X. L. Duval: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether she has taken cognizance of page 19 of the report, all over actually, where it says that the Director General has attempted to interfere with the audit process through her actions to manipulate, to audit process, to derail the audit process and to intimidate staff.

Did she read that part of the report?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, I must state that in the same report it is noted down that the panel thanks the Director General for having been extremely cooperative during the whole session. So, I would like the hon. Leader of the Opposition to let me know which part of the paragraph of the Audit Report, he finds correct and which part he does not find correct.

Mr X. L. Duval: I am referring to page 19. Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister mentioned the commendations. Did she read the commendations and to see that all the commendations are for the academic staff? And all through the report, the management staff, the senior management, are severely blamed by this report.

And, Madam Speaker, that even in her last reply she made to this House to hon. Patrice Armance, she was misled into telling us that so much work has been done, in particular, that the toilet blocks have been renovated. This is taken this morning. Maybe the MBC can take it. Toilet block renovated, that the football pitch had been renovated, it had been upgraded. This is the football pitch, Madam

Speaker. So, even she is being misled into misleading this House as to what has been done. It is a very serious thing when you mislead the House, Madam Speaker.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, I would like to stress upon the point that when we take photographs and pictures, I can also submit photographs and pictures. We have a whole set of photographs and pictures taken at the UTM upon the request of the hon. Leader of the Opposition and I would like, Madam Speaker, to go back on what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has just mentioned. He is stating that the panel had been terribly against the administration there. I would like to take page 10 of the report which states that –

- “the Panel commends UTM for the imagination and aspiration in its Strategic Plan 2016-2020;
- the Panel commends the commitment, passion and enthusiasm of the academic staff, full-time and part-time, in facilitating quality education;
- the Panel commends the academic community for quality teaching;
- the Panel commends the efforts of the UTM academic staff to build close working relationships;
- the Panel commends UTM for receiving international professional accreditation.”

So, if you are getting professional international accreditation for the programmes, you cannot say that the UTM is not working for the good of the students.

Mr X. L. Duval: Madam Speaker, the Minister has confirmed exactly what I said, thank you, that the TEC is commending very much the academic staff, but has been damning against senior management. Madam Speaker, I would like to ask one thing. Everyone in Government, including every staff, including the

Permanent Secretary, when they come in to work, they clock in and they clock out.

Even the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mauritius when he goes to work, he clocks in and he clocks out. Can I ask the hon. Minister why the Director General of the UTM does not clock in, does not clock out and comes to work about 11 a.m. in the morning and often leaves at 2.00 p.m. in the afternoon? Can you ask her why she is one of the only persons who does not clock in in the Civil Service and the Public Service?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, I would like to know if such a question could be asked to the Minister. Does the Leader of the Opposition think that I will go and check the clocking in and the clocking out list of the UTM staff? I think there is a Director for that over there.

Mr X. L. Duval: She is the Director. Madam Speaker, I asked this question a year ago. A year ago, I told her this and it is still the same and still not clocking in. So, the hon. Minister is responsible, she has been made aware.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: No question?

Mr X. L. Duval: What did you do about it?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: No question, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Next question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Madam Speaker, the question is, she was told a year ago that the Director General comes in at 11.00 a.m. and leaves at 2.00 p.m. What has she done about it in the interest of the students?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, I think we have already informed the UTM, the management, that they have to go according to procedures set by the UTM itself and I expect the Director to be doing the same.

Mr X. L. Duval: *Les bonnes intentions* ! Madam Speaker, the University is getting worse. Is she aware that the ranking of the University, as from international websites, Madam Speaker, has deteriorated from 7,000 in rank under her guidance, her control, her supervision - 7,000 a year ago - to 10,000 today?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, I would like to stress on one point. When we take a particular ranking, we have to know for what purpose the ranking was done. The particular ranking being mentioned by the hon. Leader of the Opposition is on the amount of visibility you have of its website. I do agree UTM still has to improve on its website visibility, but this does not mean that we take one particular element regarding the visibility of an institution and we say that it has come down on the ranking list.

I think this is not serious and we need to be very careful while talking about ranking of universities. There is a wide range of ranking criteria that we have to take into account. The one that is being used by the hon. Leader of the Opposition refers to visibility on websites.

Mr X. L. Duval: Give us a better one, she is the Minister! Madam Speaker, we have been told about this University, the School of Health Sciences. Is the Minister aware that out of 15 courses offered in intake 2018, 12 courses found nobody to take and only 3 courses found 6 persons only, the other one, 11 persons, the other one, 18 persons? Is she aware that this is the case and the intake has fallen from 81 in 2017 to only 35 this year?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, when we talk about new courses being launched, it is quite normal that you start and you start getting students coming in. When we talk about health sciences, they are not huge courses, they are small modular courses and short courses. So, obviously, it will take some time, they have just been launched. We need to give time. Now, we are talking of a university which is only 18 years old and by all standards across the world for Universities it is considered to be a very young University. We have to give time to UTM and we must not keep on pointing a finger at our public tertiary institutions because they are doing a good job. I am not saying that everything is right. We need to keep on improving. This is the very idea of having quality audit, what is the importance of quality audit. And I think, Madam Speaker, we have to be careful.

When we are talking about a University, we are talking about Tertiary Education, we have hopes to make of Mauritius a knowledge hub. Now, if we keep on personalising attacks against an individual and trying to bring down an institution because we have a grudge against one person, I think it is totally irresponsible of the Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: Let me remind the Minister, Madam Speaker, that she is denying her own tertiary education report. Madam Speaker, the situation at the University is getting worse and this is confirmed by the Tertiary Education Report. At page 16 it talks of 'erosion of quality culture', it talks of the Board of University being dysfunctional. It talks about usage of outdated software and pirated software.

Madam Speaker: Yes, so your question is asking the Minister...

Mr X. L. Duval: I am going to have to, Madam Speaker, unfortunately, because she cannot read. I have to read it for her. Madam Speaker, it talks about...

Madam Speaker: You should not be...

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker,...

(Interruptions)

On a point of order, Madam Speaker! I want the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw. I have read my report.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the Opposition!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I want him to withdraw this.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun, please sit down. At the beginning of this question time, I have told you that you have as the Leader of the Opposition to keep your temper, to be moderate in what you ask and not to be insolent, please.

Mr X. L. Duval: Madam Speaker, usually I am very good, but today I am shocked at the reply that the Minister has given. It has shocked me, Madam

Speaker. I am disgusted, Madam Speaker, by the way that the reply has been given, but I withdraw, I do not have to be personal.

Madam Speaker, the Tertiary Education Report talks about infrastructure, teaching, research, being allowed to deteriorate on page 22. It talks about low staff morale. It talks about no promotion from 2013 or 2008 for non-academic staff. It talks about falling number of students, Madam Speaker. This is the situation at the University. And the least that the poor children could have expected is not for the Minister to protect political cronies.

Madam Speaker: Don't make statements, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: I am maintaining this!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, don't make statements. Ask your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: It is not for her to protect political cronies, but to take actions to protect these 3,000 poor children who are there and who are paying money and are being served...

Madam Speaker: So, this is your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...with at least a third class management of University.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Leader of the Opposition on page 8 of the report which states that the TEC expresses its appreciation to the UTM for the cooperative manner in which it has participated in the audit process. TEC also thanks the UTM for providing additional information and access to key documents to the Audit panel during the course of the Audit. The Audit panel would like to thank Dr. Seetulsigh Goorah, Director General, Dr Venethethan, Head of Quality Assurance

and other staff of UTM for their cooperation in the audit process. This is for what he had stated earlier. Now, talking about research, I would like to draw the attention of House, Madam Speaker, that research is an aspect which is extremely important. It is not only critical to the economic and the social development of the society, but it is also critical to the mission of a University. If we aim at positioning our universities in the region and attract foreign students, we have got to promote research. And I would like to say, Madam Speaker, that UTM has made a lot of efforts in this line. The UTM has come up with its research strategy approved by the Board in 2015. And I understand that since 2015, fresh areas for research have been developed for various schools at the UTM and UTM has successfully attracted more than 15 research grants worth more than Rs7.7 m. over the last three years.

Mr X. L. Duval: Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. Minister, at least, she has not read it, that is the only thing that I can say, maybe someone has read it for her because ...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Don't make statements!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, I would like the hon. Leader of the Opposition to withdraw this.

(Interruptions)

I would like him to withdraw this! He cannot keep on ...

Madam Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, please! I think you will have to withdraw this because you cannot say whether she has read or she has not read it. It is not for you to say. Please, withdraw! Withdraw what you have said!

Mr X. L. Duval: It is for her to say whether she has read it or not, Madam Speaker. I am not withdrawing anything.

Madam Speaker: You cannot say this! You have to withdraw that!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am not withdrawing. It is obvious that she has not read it.

Madam Speaker: No, but you are saying, you are making...

(Interruptions)

This is not for you to decide whether she has read or not!

(Interruptions)

Please! Just withdraw this!

Mr X. L. Duval: On what Standing Order, Madam Speaker, are you asking me to withdraw?

Madam Speaker: There is nothing wrong in withdrawing something which you have said.

Mr X. L. Duval: You are asking me kindly to withdraw. I will withdraw it kindly. I have no problem. But it is my choice to withdraw it.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Good!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...and not anyone telling me. Madam Speaker, it is damning against this Director General. I don't want to mention her, but it is there, that she has tried to derail the audit process. Whether at the end, they have thanked UTM, that is another issue, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I want to finish on this.

(Interruptions)

Yes, derail! The Minister wants me to show her where!

Madam Speaker: Don't crosstalk, please! Ask your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Because otherwise I will say she has not read it if she has not seen that bit.

Madam Speaker: Ask your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am sure she has seen it! Now, Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister is saying the 2008 Report, now 10 years later, some of it has been done, some has not been done. But, unfortunately, for her and for the senior management, the report does talk about urgent action being required. If the hon. Minister has not read it, it is in there. It talks about infrastructure. It talks about urgent action on climate of trust, transparency, conflict resolution, human capital issues – urgent all this - filling vacant positions, staff promotions. And it also, Madam Speaker – I will finish on that one – talks about serious lapse in effective and efficient administration. It talks about disciplinary action should be taken in case of inaction, non-responsiveness of staff and management, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Okay! Allow the hon. Minister to reply, please!

Mr X. L. Duval: And it urgently asks to improve administrative system. So, this is, Madam Speaker, the urgent situation of the UTM. I am sorry if I have been disgusted about this because I am truly disgusted about that how the Ministry is treating this issue.

Madam Speaker: That is your question! Whether you are disgusted or not it is another question.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Madam Speaker, while talking about being disgusted, I think we have got a very short memory.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Rutnah!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It is this very UTM that has saved about 22 doctors who had gone, during the previous regime, to the DY Patil.

(Interruptions)

And they have just completed their work.

(Interruptions)

Secondly, I think talking about disgust, we should have felt disgusted for EIILM University.

(Interruptions)

Let me now come, Madam Speaker, to what has been mentioned by the hon. Leader of the Opposition to which I totally agree. Whenever there is inaction, there should be disciplinary action. And this is what the UTM is doing right now. There are certain officers at the University who have been blocking processes to slow down the rate of progress at the University and a Disciplinary Committee is being set up to tackle this. And I agree with him. These are actions that we need to take urgently.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, this is it! Okay. Time is over!