

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
RESPONSE TO THE MEMORANDUM OF DEMANDS
13 NOVEMBER 2025

On Tuesday, 11 November 2025, the Dean of Student Affairs received a memorandum of demands from protesting students in relation to gender-based harm. The University's response is set out below.

Introduction

Wits University condemns all forms of gender-based harm and reaffirms its unwavering commitment to creating a safe, inclusive and socially just environment for all members of the Wits community. The University has a zero-tolerance policy on gender-based harm and encourages all members of the Wits community to report incidences of gender-based harm as soon as possible, either in-person, or online. Gender-based harm/violence, bullying and discrimination undermine human dignity, erode trust and compromise the ability of staff and students to thrive academically and professionally.

The University established the Gender Equity Office (GEO) in 2013 as a dedicated Office to manage incidents of gender-based harm that are reported. The Office adopts a complainant-centred approach, and all matters are managed confidentially to protect the complainant.

It is within this context that the University responds to the students' demands as follows:

DEMANDS

1. Provide the name and details of the organization or individual responsible for receiving and processing complaints, including all relevant qualifications, certifications and affiliations.
2. All GEO employees who have demonstrated incompetence or negligence in handling complaints must be held accountable.
3. There must be clarity and transparency on all GEO policies and procedures.
4. Full transparency and regular updates must be provided to students on all ongoing investigations, interventions, and institutional actions.
5. The University must establish and maintain safe spaces for students – including the reconfiguration of GEO offices to ensure accessibility, safety and confidentiality.

RESPONSE

All gender-based harm related matters must be reported to the Gender Equity Office. The University established the Gender Equity Office (GEO) in 2013 as a dedicated Office to manage incidents of gender-based harm that are reported. The Office adopts a complainant-centred approach and all matters are managed confidentially to protect the complainant. The staffing complement of the GEO comprises of staff members who are appropriately qualified including legal advisors, social workers and staff with experience trained to manage matters related to gender-based harm.

Any matters related to the non-performance of staff are managed in terms of the relevant University policies.

All GEO policies are available on the GEO website at www.wits.ac.za/geo/. The GEO also runs information sessions, training workshops and other activities to share these policies with students and to train students, student leaders and staff on these policies and processes. The GEO regularly reports on gender-based harm related matters via the relevant University structures, including the Student Services Advisory Committee.

The Gender Equity Office is committed to addressing all forms of gender-based harm and violence allegedly perpetrated by Wits-affiliated respondents. The focus of its scope focuses on matters including verbal, non-verbal and physical sexual harassment, sexual assault, gendered discrimination, gendered bullying, rape and grooming, amongst many other types of harm.

With regards to the reporting of complaints, complainants have several reporting options which include walking into the Office to report incidents in person, telephonic reporting, reporting using the office's email address, and the new online reporting portal. To make reporting more accessible to students and staff, the Office has recently implemented the online reporting platform which is continuously monitored and responded to timeously as matters are reported.

While anonymous reporting is accepted, the GEO's policy recognises that anonymous reporting does limit the GEO's ability to adequately investigate matters and creates challenges in relation to disciplinary processes where the complainant is not known. This is because, without identifying the complainant, one cannot always formulate a legally sound charge that would enable disciplinary steps to be adequately taken. In the ordinary course, once reports are received, the GEO consults with the complainant and informs them of the protective measures that can be actioned in support of their needs as well as the investigation and disciplinary processes that can be pursued. Complainants are also informed about the available external remedies such as reporting their matters to the police. Depending on the decision taken by the complainant on how to proceed, the GEO then actions the support requested by the complainant. In the case where complainants elect to report their matters to the South African Police Service; the GEO arranges their

transportation and psychosocial support to meet the needs that may arise from the criminal justice process. It is important to note that matters are complainant centred and driven and the GEO cannot process matters outside of the wishes of the complainant. This will no doubt cause more harm and the re-traumatisation of the very complainants which the GEO seeks to support.

The GEO has processed eight times more matters than in the past within the timelines required in terms of the GEOs rules unless there are extenuating circumstances. This shows increased trust in the Office and its processes.

DEMAND

6. Security personnel who were seen laughing at students or showing unprofessional behaviour must be immediately removed from the venue and investigated.

RESPONSE

The University requests further information about this incident to ensure that this matter can be investigated fully and so that appropriate action is taken.

DEMAND

7. Campus surveillance cameras must be repaired and functional. The current state of non-functional cameras allows cases to fall through the cracks. The University must provide a timeline for fixing all cameras.

RESPONSE

Cameras form an important part of the University's strategy to ensure a safe campus. An audit of the cameras is done on a regular basis to ensure that they work at all times. Members of the University community are requested to report any broken cameras that they may be aware of to assist the University in ensuring that these are fixed as soon as possible.

DEMAND

8. All relevant footage related to reported incidents must be released to the public as soon as it is found.

RESPONSE

The University cannot concede to this demand. Surveillance footage is used by the University and the GEO as evidence to supplement complaints. It is further shared with the South African Police Services (SAPS) and other relevant entities, where necessary, especially so that the complainant is protected. In line with the victim centred approach, the public sharing of this footage has the potential to re-traumatise a victim.

DEMAND

9. When a case is confirmed, the University must report this information to the student body immediately.

RESPONSE

The GEO's approach is a complainant- centred one and as such, all cases are managed in a confidential manner and in the best interests of the victim as discussed with them. The University can thus not make such information widely available. It must however again be noted that the GEO regularly reports on cases via relevant University structures including the Student Services Advisory Committee where students are represented.

DEMAND

10. The University must open a criminal case immediately against any confirmed perpetrator if one has not already been opened.

RESPONSE

The GEO works with the complainant to open a case with the SAPS if the complainant so wishes. In the case of a rape incident, this is an automatic step as part of the medico-legal process. However, given that the GEO adopts a complainant-driven approach, the decision as to whether to open a case with the SAPS or not, is the prerogative of the complainant. The complainant is free at any time to open a case with the SAPS and does not need the University's permission to do so.

DEMAND

11. All previously closed cases must be reopened for review and transparency.

RESPONSE:

The GEO's processes allow for cases to be reviewed and appealed in line with the University's parameters, rules and policies. Again, this is the prerogative of the complainant. The GEO adopts a complainant-centred approach. Where complainants want to move forward, we follow the relevant disciplinary processes. The University is happy to look into specific concerns about specific cases but cannot respond in the abstract.

DEMANDS

12. The SRC cannot include perpetrators or those who enable them within its structure.

13. The SRC President must be removed immediately due to failure of leadership and enabling misconduct.

14. A student leader must be removed immediately as there are multiple victims and unresolved allegations.

15. All SRC members must be re-vetted, from residences to all SRC portfolios, to ensure no perpetrators or enablers remain in leadership.

16. All identified perpetrators currently in the SRC must be immediately removed.

17. The SRC must be dissolved if necessary, and a new vetting and investigation process must be implemented before reconstituting.

18. The SRC must serve as a safe space for students, not a structure that protects perpetrators or rape apologists.

21. The SGO vetting process for all student leadership structures, including house committees, student councils, and residence leadership, must be reviewed and strengthened to prevent perpetrators from assuming position of power.

23. The University must clarify what transitional structure will replace the SRC if it is dissolved.

RESPONSE

The SRC is a statutory structure established in terms of the Higher Education Act, the institutional statute and is further regulated in terms of the SRC Constitution. The SRC functions in terms of this regulatory framework, together with applicable University rules and policies. This framework governs how the SRC is elected including the eligibility criteria for students wishing to serve on the SRC, the manner and grounds for the removal of an individual from the SRC, and the dissolution of the SRC.

All SRC candidates, including members of the House Committee and School Councils are vetted before being confirmed as candidates for election. All incoming SRC members were vetted and no complaints had been laid with the GEO, Legal, Academic or other University structures when the SRC members were elected. University rules allow for the removal of SRC members (and student leaders) on the basis of misconduct, including GBV, should such members be found guilty in an appropriate disciplinary forum. We therefore encourage all members of the Wits community to report incidents of gender-based harm to the GEO, so that the University can keep a track of these matters and respond appropriately against found guilty of an offence, should this be required.

We would also welcome suggestions on how the vetting process can be strengthened.

The SRC was elected by students to their current positions. It would be unconstitutional to remove all SRC members based on an allegation of rape that has been made against one member of the SRC.

DEMAND

19. The Gender and Transformation Officer must be empowered to work closely with SAPS and to act promptly on complaints.

RESPONSE

The University agrees that it should be compulsory for all SRC leaders to receive training on gender-based harm. We look forward to working with students and student leaders to ensure that this is rolled out. It must be remembered that all gender-based harm matters should be reported to the University's Gender Equity Office, and not just the SRC, so that they can be tracked, investigated and managed appropriately.

DEMANDS

20. It is unacceptable that nine complaints were received with only one external referral. This failure must be investigated.

22. The Off-Campus Accommodation Representative must investigate reports of gender-based violence and misconduct in private accommodation including Gateway, Crescent Studios, and other external residences.

RESPONSE

Again, we encourage all members of the Wits community to report incidents of gender-based harm to the Gender Equity Office (and not just the SRC) via the portal or in-person, so that the University can keep a record of, and thoroughly investigate these matters.

DEMAND

24. A university wide email must be sent to all student addressing these demands and outlining the steps to be taken.

RESPONSE

An email to all students has been sent including this detailed response. The GEO, however, reports through the appropriate University structures. An email will be sent to all students advising them of the role of the GEO, how to report incidents and how they are managed in line with the University's rules and policies.

DEMAND

25. Students demand a complete cultural and structural reform to ensure that leadership is about service and safety, not ego and power.

RESPONSE

The University agrees to initiating a process in partnership with students to ensure that student leadership is about service - this includes ensuring that student leaders and students in general receive appropriate training on servant leadership, ethics and integrity.