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UCT expands executive short courses to bridge skills gap in labour market

The University of Cape Town (UCT) aims to help the workforce obtain relevant skills by expanding its more than 200 executive education short courses and open up further opportunities for study to school-leavers and recent graduates, as well as to drive continuous development among working professionals.

As technology continues to develop at breakneck speed and unprecedented events seem to take place every day, matriculants, graduates and those already in the workforce are facing a barrage of challenges. While these factors affect labour markets worldwide, South Africa's soaring unemployment rate – the result of skills mismatches, high economic inequality and well-intended but poorly executed labour policies – compounds these issues.

To overcome these challenges, UCT aims to help the workforce obtain relevant skills using its catalogue of executive education short courses to open opportunities for continuing education (CE) and encourage lifelong learning. UCT executive education short courses are in a variety of fields, from commerce and business to health sciences and humanities.

UCT's chief financial officer (CFO), Vincent Motholo, said that CE courses enable those who might otherwise not have had the chance to attend a university to obtain a UCT-backed qualification. "These courses are available to everyone, no matter where you are in the world. They give access to someone who may not have qualified to come to UCT because of their location, or based on admission requirements.

"They're also structured in a way that fits people who are already in the workforce. So, professionals who want to upskill or corporates who want to grow the skill set of their employees can easily enrol and complete the course to remain current with developments in their industries in a targeted way."

Unleashing human potential

Motholo noted that part of the institution's rationale for offering short courses is to provide training that will help to address some of the overarching issues in the labour market.

“Really, this is our way of unleashing human potential. It’s our way of contributing to a fair and just society through education and continuous learning, and creating that environment where people can upskill themselves,” he explained.

He further noted that while a university degree is useful, there are various reasons why three- or four-year programmes may not be appropriate for some. Factors such as time, costs and the specificity of skills sought by those who have graduated from school or university, or who are looking to develop professionally, are the biggest considerations.

According to Motholo, these considerations have been a major driving factor behind the development and expansion of UCT’s short course offering. “The beauty of these executive education short courses being a great enabler is their time frame,” he said.

“You’re able to get the knowledge that you need, it takes less time, and it’s not as expensive as getting a degree qualification. The idea is that most people don’t have time to study for years, and these courses are tailor-made to meet the skills needs that businesses have in your chosen field of work. So, it’s really about upskilling yourself at a much quicker pace and more reasonable amount.”

Convenient, world-class education

In addition to the condensed study period, continuing education programmes offer the benefit of being highly flexible.

The development of curricula is left to the faculty that offers the programme, and as a result, these courses are highly adaptable. This allows more rapid responses to new learning opportunities, as well as significant cost savings in course development and delivery, which can then be passed on to students.

Another clear benefit is that the qualifications gained via these courses are backed by UCT, a future-focused institution that is regularly recognised as a top university in global and local rankings. “We are a top-rated university in Africa and that speaks to the quality of our academics and the quality of our programmes,” said Motholo.

“UCT is committed to finding innovative ways of doing things, and the design of our executive short courses reflects this. The curricula are devised to address current needs, but also have a focus on the future outcomes that could be caused by economic, technological and social changes.”

Of note in this regard is the potential for micro-credentialing. There has been a move towards this practice, which allows students to accumulate and transfer credits to build up the requirements for accredited qualifications over time, at universities around the world.

In South Africa, this approach can help to respond to mismatches between supply and demand in the labour market that have arisen as a consequence of high economic inequality, while ensuring that education remains efficient and accessible.

Story by Nicole Forrest, UCT News.



UCT chief financial officer, Vincent Motholo.
Maduna/UCT

Photo: Lerato

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