



REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE REVIEW OF ACADEMIC EXCLUSIONS AT UCT MARCH/APRIL 2017

SUPPLEMENTARY AND FINAL REPORT

Background

The initial report on this issue was published on Friday 7 April 2017. It dealt with the reasons for this review exercise, the process followed, the systemic issues in the readmissions appeal process which need attention, as well as the substantive findings in regard to almost all appeals decided in the Faculty of Science. As was explained, these appeals were attended to first, as they were the most numerous, as well as the most contested. From about 80 such appeal decisions, eighteen were referred back to the Faculty, to facilitate readmission of the students concerned, possibly from the second semester of 2017, or the beginning of 2018, given two factors: the lateness of the review outcomes given the stage of the academic year, but more importantly the deficit in many respects (social, economic, health, accommodation, financial, etc) which the appellants had experienced in 2016, which had materially contributed to their academic woes, and which needed time to come to terms with, or to remedy.

In that report, I mentioned that the remaining appeals across the rest of the faculties were less in number and that the Readmission Appeals Committees (RACs) in those faculties had readmitted the overwhelming majority of those who had been refused readmission initially, so that there were relatively few such cases which had raised questions in the minds of the panel which had assisted me in this task, which needed further clarification. This was the method used in regard to the Science RAC, and it was followed in the same manner with the other faculties.

Outcomes

I referred the following numbers of cases (out of the total number of appeals against the refusal to readmit in each faculty) to the Chair of the RAC and Faculty Manager (Academic

Administration) or servicing officer of the RAC, over the weekend of 8/9 April. The cases in respect of which questions were asked were determined as the result of the views of the members of the panel which assisted me, and my own assessment of the documentation:

Commerce: 2 (out of 25)

Engineering and the Built Environment: 3 (out of 12)

Health Sciences: 0 (out of five)

Humanities: 0 (out of 20) (a number of cases had been questioned initially, but it was subsequently discovered that the students concerned had been readmitted under concessions).

Law: 2 (out of eight)

[**Note of Caution:** because of the way in which the RAC process works, some students' names appear more than once, because a student is asked in the RAC application form to indicate whether, if their appeal fails to their home faculty, they would wish their appeal to be referred to another faculty, to which they may be keen to transfer. Some of these students in fact indicate more than one such alternative choice of faculty. Most faculties experience being nominated as the "second choice" of students refused readmission by their home faculty, but Science and Humanities seem to be the chief destinations for most such students. This inevitably inflates the figures above.]

I received detailed responses on all such referrals by the end of the day on Monday 10th April. In each case, I was left in no doubt that the student appellant had been heard fairly as regards procedure, and that the outcome had been reasonable.

However, there were two situations which remained unclear. First, a student who had started their studies in Health Sciences in 2015, had fared well academically, but had then elected to continue their studies in Science, and had been refused readmission after a poor academic performance, had applied to be readmitted to the Health Sciences programme in which they had started. This request had not been granted. I raised it again with the faculty, as it seemed unreasonable, and the student concerned has now been readmitted.

The second case involved a student who had started their studies in EBE, had fared poorly academically, but indicated in their appeal that they wished to be considered for admission to a programme in Health Sciences. Again, this student's appeal appears not to have been

processed in time, but as a result of this review, they were admitted to that programme with immediate effect.

In addition, in the Humanities Faculty, ten appeals were received after the cut-off date by which they should have been submitted. Due to administrative incapacity, as well as the unavailability of the Chair of the RAC, only two of these appeals have been processed to date. This matter has been raised as a procedural concern with the Faculty, in that the date by which appeals could be lodged had been extended on two further occasions, and the Faculty has undertaken to seek a means to consider these appeals, at the latest in time for possible readmission (if the appeal succeeds) at the beginning of the second semester 2017. As a result, therefore, two further students have been readmitted (in addition to the 18 identified in the interim report) as a result of this general review of all refusals to readmit students on academic grounds in 2016/17.

To this figure must be added the seven students (from 17 applications) readmitted as the result of individual applications which reached me as VC's nominee before the process of general review started. Two further such cases reached me while the general review was underway, and after due consideration I have found that the decision in one of them has impacted disproportionately on the student concerned, and so have decided that they must be readmitted.

Conclusion

As mentioned at the outset of the Interim Report, this has been a complex and troubling undertaking, which has, I believe, shown that serious introspection and anxious reassessment is needed in regard to the readmission appeal process. I thus refer this and the earlier report formally to the Senate Readmission Review Committee, for its urgent attention. I will assist wherever possible.

I want again to record my appreciation to the members of the panel which advised and assisted me, as well as the two student observers, for their contributions. This review could not have been carried out without the willing and extensive co-operation of the RACs in the faculties, as well as their servicing officers: I want formally to record my gratitude to them. And finally, the extraordinary hard work and wisdom of the Deputy Registrar, Dr Karen van Heerden, need to be formally acknowledged: without her constant assistance, I would not have been able to complete this work in the time it took.

Hugh Corder

Professor of Public Law

VC's Nominee to Review Academic Exclusions

11 April 2017