

**Rapid Response Task Team Newsletter
Number One
January 2017**

In terms of [the agreement signed on 6 November 2016](#) between members of the UCT executive and the Shackville TRC / SRC Candidates, the executive committed to “establishing a Rapid Response Task Team (RRTT), comprised of representatives of the executive task team, the student formations and the SRC, to monitor the implementation of the agreement and to ensure that any obstacles that may impede the implementation of the agreement are removed as a matter of priority”.

In November 2016 the RRTT consisted of Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) Professor Anwar Mall (chair), DVC designate Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, DVC designate Professor Loretta Feris, Sinoxolo Mbayi and Lindiwe Dlamini (Shackville TRC / SRC Candidates), and Rorisang Moseli (SRC president). In 2017 Professor Feris assumed the chair and Lindiwe Dlamini was replaced by Mlingane Mawane. Ms Judy Favish is serving as the project manager for the task team.

Initially the focus of the RRTT was to unblock barriers to completing the 2016 academic year and addressing problems which could potentially have re-ignited conflict, such as the continued presence of private security, in particular Vetus Schola, on campus.

The student members of the RRTT used their networks to alert the task team to problems that were being experienced by students with regard to applications for deferments. They advised the RRTT and the deputy registrar on ways of simplifying the procedures and improving the accessibility of information, which defused tension among students.

The RRTT also addressed queries related to admission into residences for students writing deferred exams or participating in mini-semesters and the costs thereof. It worked with students and staff in Student Housing to deflect a number of potential hot spots.

Institutional Reconciliation and Transformation Commission (IRTC)

The agreement paved the way for setting up an IRTC process that will

- consider all Shackville-related protests of 2016, including disciplinary procedures and interdicts; and
- invite submissions from all constituencies on clemencies that were granted and whether clemency should be turned into amnesty, and make recommendations on how the university should deal with pending cases and other such matters in the future.
- Make recommendations on institutional culture, transformation, decolonisation, discrimination, identity, disability and any other matters that the university community has raised over the past 18 months, or may wish to raise.

With regards to clemency, the RRTT secured clemency applications from students who had been subject to Student Disciplinary Tribunals as several of the students no longer had internet access. To date all but one of the students have signed the declaration to apply for clemency.

The parties to the agreement also expressed a commitment to establish a multi-stakeholder steering committee to oversee the proposed IRTC. The process of setting up the steering committee was launched in December and its first meeting was held on 26 January.

[See the statement from the chair...](#)

The successful conclusion of this first meeting constituted a major milestone in the RRTT's efforts to generate solutions to the longer-term challenges that the university faces, which we hope will contribute to building a new, inclusive identity in a transformed, decolonised UCT.

A coherent policy on funding higher education and advocacy for free, decolonised higher education

A large focus of the student protests both at UCT and nationally is the call for free, quality, decolonised higher education. The students have challenged universities to engage government to fund the higher education sector appropriately. The RRTT convened a meeting on 7 December to initiate a process within UCT to facilitate engagement between students, staff, workers and alumni around the call for free, quality, decolonised higher education in a manner that builds deeper understanding of the issues; and to assist with research into funding frameworks for higher education. The aim of the meeting was to start planning activities for the first quarter of 2017 with the aim of broader participation when the 2017 academic year begins. An interim planning group and two subgroups dealing with research and engagement have been set up within the RRTT.

The Research Group is currently putting together a student research team to review the current literature, conduct interviews, explore models and present research in accessible formats. [See the advertisement for positions on the research team...](#) This will feed in to discussions which will commence on and off campus when the university year starts. More long-term research on free education, as stipulated in the agreement, is still to be discussed.

The Fee Free Engagement Group plans a wide variety of all-inclusive, multi-stakeholder platforms commencing at the start of the academic year. Sessions will take place both on and off campus as well as throughout the region. The overall objectives are to create greater awareness about a range of existing and alternative economic models to fund higher education.

All members of the university community are welcome to participate in the Research or Fee Free Engagement groups. Please contact judy.favish@uct.ac.za if you would like to participate. She will forward your name and contact details to the conveners of the groups.

Financial exclusions and fee blocks

In principle, the agreement reflects support, as far as possible, to enable students on financial aid and/or eligible for financial aid (inclusive of GAP students) who are academically eligible to graduate or to progress to the next academic year of study, but who are prevented from doing so due to affordability, to graduate or progress.

The RRTT, together with staff from the Finance Department, the Undergraduate and Postgraduate funding offices and Financial Aid Office, have reviewed guidelines for making decisions about appeals for financial assistance in line with the spirit of the agreement. In addition, the finance staff have collated statistics on the number and profile of undergraduates and postgraduates affected by degree blocks and the number and profile of postgraduates who have been excluded on financial grounds and the amounts owed. Further consultation is needed among students about the need to engage with these reports.

The achievements to date demonstrate a serious commitment on the part of the executive and the representatives of the students to make the agreement work. We have identified some areas needing improvement, particularly in relation to communication and accessibility of information needed by students, and will be formulating strategies for improving on our current processes to make them more student-centred.