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UCT spent R1.4 billion on student funding, another R30m set aside for historic debt

The University of Cape Town is aware of the issues that have been raised by the student representatives, some of which are at national level while others are institutional.

Most of the issues are receiving attention at national level through the Department of Higher Education and Training. These include issues relating to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

At institutional level, the UCT executive has engaged with the SRC over the issues raised. The executive remains committed to this engagement process.

UCT has, as has been the case in preceding years, put measures in place to assist eligible students with historic debt. In February 2021, UCT put out an open call for any student with historic debt to apply through the annual financial aid appeals process. UCT has set aside around R30 million for this purpose.

The university has about 1 655 students with historic debt, amounting to R88 million.

UCT, like all other universities, is awaiting NSFAS funding decisions for 2021 applicants. NSFAS handles all funding applications and these are outside the control of the universities. The pending NSFAS outcomes do not necessarily prohibit students from registering for the 2021 academic year. UCT does not charge any registration fee. Students can register without having to make any payment, including the minimum initial payment.

The provision of financial assistance to eligible students at undergraduate and postgraduate level is one of UCT's key priorities. In 2020, preliminary (unaudited) estimates show that a total of R1.4 billion went towards student financial assistance. This total comprised R970 million (undergraduate) and R460 million (postgraduate funding).

Over a number of years, undergraduate students have been assisted with funding from a variety of sources – which include NSFAS, corporate sponsorships, donations and UCT’s own funds. UCT has also made substantial investments in supporting postgraduate students, including additional UCT funds over the last three years. This investment is in addition to funding from the National Research Foundation (NRF), departmental scholarships and other external parties.

There is no doubt that 2020 had an impact on all students and their families, with some losing their livelihoods as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The university was also impacted in terms of its operations and responsibilities.

The budget approved by the UCT Council for 2020 had to be substantially reduced. Despite these financial and related pressures, UCT has made available limited funding to provide some financial assistance to students who still have outstanding fees for the 2020 academic year and who are at risk of being unable to continue with their studies in 2021. The university’s funding remains limited, and only students who meet specified eligibility requirements can be considered for funding.

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