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Council approves proposals on 2020 student debt

The University of Cape Town Council has approved the proposal by the executive for students with 2020 debt to be allowed to register in 2021.

With immediate effect the student registration fee block in respect of 2020 debt will be lifted for South African students and students from the rest of Africa. The lifting of the fee block for students from Africa is consistent with UCT's Vision 2030, which positions it as a leading university in and for Africa.

The fee block decision applies to both undergraduate and postgraduate students, excluding students from the Graduate School of Business. The lifting of the fee block does not extinguish the existing debt.

Council also resolved that UCT will make every effort to support students in the process of servicing their debt, with R30 million made available to support criterion-based debt appeals for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

These decisions were taken at Council's virtual meeting held on Saturday, 13 March.

Chair of Council, Babalwa Ngonyama, said universities needed to work collaboratively to find creative and innovative solutions to the funding crisis, and the UCT Council remains committed to supporting all such efforts to ensure that academically eligible and deserving students are not denied the opportunity to study due to lack of funding.

"The funding crisis is a national crisis. No university can solve it on its own – the higher education sector urgently needs intervention from the South African government. We must put the students who are in desperate need of financial aid at the forefront of our thinking and planning, in order to support the future and sustainability of higher education in South Africa.

"We therefore welcome the recent pronouncements by the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation to review the National Student Financial Aid Scheme in the best

interests of students whose higher education funding is totally dependent on an effective, efficient and adequately-funded government financial aid programme,” said Ngonyama.

She added that the UCT executive will engage stakeholders across the higher education sector to take up a sectorial approach to the Minister of Higher Education to work towards a long-term solution to the funding crisis in the sector.

Council noted the inordinate challenges inflicted on the South African education system by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“UCT is deeply concerned about the crisis in the higher education sector, which has been compounded by the pandemic, as well as overall budget constraints. The university believes that there is a need for national consultation on the impact of these factors on the sector. There is also a need for a national action plan to address both the crisis and the future skills development needs of South Africa,” said Ngonyama.

The UCT Council also noted with concern the disturbing events unfolding at universities in the country and the heightened tense atmosphere on some campuses.

“Council extends its condolences to the family of Mthokozisi Ntumba for the tragic loss of his life during the events related to the student fees protests in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, earlier this week. The loss of life under such tragic circumstances is deeply regrettable – our thoughts are with the family during this time of personal loss.”

Ngonyama added that Council reaffirmed the value of the right to protest – to do so lawfully and peacefully and without fear of reprisal.

“Council also calls on all those concerned, including the South African Police Service, to exercise the necessary restraint. The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc, compounding the many challenges that governments and institutions have had to face. Universities are not exempt, and the impact on staff and students has been profound. This is a time that calls for sensitivity, care and a humane approach to the funding crisis.”

Council embraced the commitment of the UCT leadership and the sentiment of the Institutional Forum in their solidarity against violence, their affirmation of the constitutional right to protest peacefully, and their active support for ongoing efforts to enable wider and continued access to higher education.

- [Read the full communication by the Chair of Council.](#)

ENDS

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