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14 October 2021

Cocooned: UCT study shows SA students poised for post-COVID bounce back

Over 80% of South African students surveyed say they are ready to bounce back once the pandemic subsides. This is according to new research conducted by the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Liberty Institute of Strategic Marketing.

The survey found that the activity that students were most looking forward to in a post-pandemic era was a return to face-to-face learning. This was followed by attending parties and concerts.

Despite high levels of optimism, it is also clear that South Africa's students have been hit hard by the pandemic. According to the study, which interviewed over 1 400 students, nearly two-thirds of those studying felt that their ability to learn had worsened during the pandemic.

Commenting on the findings, one of the study's authors, Dr James Lappeman, said: "Many students are clearly struggling. Besides the obvious practical challenges associated with online learning, many are also recognising the importance of the social aspects of learning and interacting with peers."

A recent study by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) found that 65% of students were experiencing mild to severe psychological distress. Anxiety and stress were also evident in the institute's own study, which found that financial pressure, difficulty adapting to online learning, and COVID-19 related fears were contributing to anxious states.

The study also found much dissatisfaction with online forms of learning with many also feeling that the quality of education had deteriorated.

According to Paul Egan from the UCT Liberty Institute of Strategic Marketing, students felt like they were missing out on a time when in pre-COVID times lifelong memories were being made, milestones reached and important friendships forged. "Instead they find themselves in relative isolation, struggling to remain motivated and get into a routine. Some students even said they had become socially anxious."

Despite the hardships and challenges presented by COVID-19, most students remained positive about their futures.

- 78% believed they were still on-track to meet their aspirations
- 71% believed they will be more successful than their parents
- 61% believed they will be happier than their parents

Summarising the results of the study, Lappeman said: "In spite of everything most students remain optimistic and don't be surprised once COVID restrictions are lifted to see students and young people generally keen to make up for lost time."

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