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Young grade 9 star has all the qualities of a Future UCT graduate



Vice-Chancellor Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng with Grade 9 learner Keketso Litedu

Photo: Lerato Maduna

The words on Keketso Litedu's T-shirt said it all: Future UCT Graduate. For Keketso, a Grade 9 learner at St Mary's Diocesan School for Girls in Pretoria, that reality may be some years off, but the talented learner has already been scouted by University of Cape Town (UCT) Vice-Chancellor (VC) Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng.

"When other universities approach you, you must say you're taken, you've just got to get the results," Professor Phakeng said at a pre-graduation breakfast for Keketso and her mother, Madira Litedu.

The VC invited Keketso and her mother to Cape Town and to UCT to witness the first day of graduation week when UCT caps graduands at eight ceremonies from Monday, 28 March, to Thursday, 31 March 2022. About 200 doctoral candidates are also expected to graduate.

Although they were invited to attend the December 2021 graduation walk, they were not available at the time and so the visit was postponed to 2022.

Getting good results is what Keketso excels at. Having clinched an academic scholarship to attend St Mary's, the Grade 9 learner has her sights fixed on studying chemistry at UCT.

The connection to UCT started with a video on social media spotted by UCT Council member Mr Ezra Davids. It showed a younger Keketso at her Grade 7 prizegiving, hauling in prize after prize, "everything from maths to English and Afrikaans and all in between", said Phakeng.

Davids alerted the VC, who eventually managed to track down Keketso.

VC Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng hosted Grade 7 learner Keketso Litedu and her mother, Madira Litedu, for a pre-graduation breakfast. Keketso and Madira witnessed the first day of graduation week at UCT.

"I told Mr Davids that Keketso was still in Grade 7 and he said, 'You'd better make sure that when she finishes Grade 12, she comes to the UCT. And of course, at UCT we are looking for that kind of talent.

"This is an exceptionally talented young learner," Phakeng said. "She stood there on stage getting every trophy; so many that she couldn't carry them all. She is now in high school. And we thought to invite her today to our graduation walk, to also launch and introduce our Future UCT Graduate T-shirt.

Graduation walk

After breakfast in the Ben Beinart Room, Keketso was presented with a Future UCT Graduate T-shirt and cap, and Madira with UCT-branded goods. From there it was a short walk to the steps outside Sarah Baartman Hall to witness the excitement of the celebratory graduation walk newly capped students do with their parents, guardians and families.

Keketso Litedu is a "highly talented" learner from St Mary's DSG in Pretoria.

"Last year, we looked at the idea of a graduation walk. It wasn't a graduation ceremony, just a walk where we announce their achievement," Phakeng explained. "And this year we thought, let's formalise it and make it a graduation ceremony. The students will do the graduation walk with their parents and get an opportunity to take pictures in front of the Sarah Baartman Hall."

It was a significant moment for Keketso: to be in the company of so many graduands and absorbing some of their sense of achievement. Phakeng said she hoped to bring her to UCT for a day every year to experience other special occasions such as Open Day and Orientation Week.

Phakeng said, "I wanted her to meet graduates so that she can see herself here so that even after she gets to Grade 12 when other universities start jumping around showing interest in her, she knows her home is here – where we unleash human potential. We cannot unleash human potential if we do not get it to UCT."

The VC added, "It's important for us to reach out to schools, particularly in spaces where they don't see themselves as natural UCT graduates. We want to say to them: This is your university. We want to unleash their human potential, not only for themselves, but for a fair and just society. If we do not reach out to these schools, with these learners who are not so well represented at UCT, we will be unleashing tremendous potential in an equal way."

And what did Keketso think about UCT?

"It's the best!" she said.

Story by Helen Swingler, UCT News

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