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UCT enters second week of the academic year

Council's approval of fees proposal brings university back on track

The University of Cape Town (UCT)'s second week of the academic year commenced with no glitches on Monday, 24 February 2025.

This comes a few days after the UCT Council approved a joint proposal tabled by the executive and the Students' Representative Council (SRC), aimed at addressing the 2024 fee debt issues affecting financially vulnerable students. The decision was taken at a special Council meeting held on Thursday, 20 February 2025.

The approved proposal would benefit financially vulnerable but academically eligible students whose debt exceed the R10 000 threshold.

UCT Chair of Council, Norman Arendse (SC) said the joint proposal would also ensure that UCT remains financially sustainable.

"Council was impressed at the commitment demonstrated by the SRC and the executive to intensify fundraising efforts as well as to ensure that students and fee-payers who can afford to pay, do so. These are among the measures that will be taken towards minimising the university's historic student debt, which currently stands at R864 million," he said.

The joint proposal approved by Council covers five categories of students as follows:

1. Academically eligible but financially vulnerable students who lost financial aid funding subject to debt owed being limited to the 2024 academic year.

This category comprises 235 vulnerable but academically eligible students, who owe a combined R26 million in fees. Priority will be given to students entering their final year, which this group specifically including 96 students with a combined outstanding total debt of R10 million.

2. Students who have made significant partial payments towards their 2024 debt.

Within this group, there are 458 students who owe a total of R18 million. The proposal focuses specifically on 178 students who owe R4.3 million. Those who will be prioritised fall into one of the two categories below:

- students who have settled at least 40% of the outstanding debt, or
- those whose remaining debt is below R50 000.

3. Students who had bursaries in 2024 and have historic debt.

In this category, 76 students are full bursary students who owe a combined R6 million while 38 partial bursary students owe R2.8 million. This category will be considered provided that they either settled at least 40% of the outstanding debt, or they reduce their remaining debt to below R50 000. Priority will be given to students in their final year who have lost their bursaries, based on proven financial vulnerability or significant partial payment.

4. Students who have secured funding for their 2025 studies.

UCT will also consider students who have obtained approved loans or verifiable bursaries on a case-by-case basis.

5. Students who are self-funded and have made 0% payment.

In this category, there are 1 189 students owing R123 million, which presents a high risk to the university. This group of students will be considered based on proven financial vulnerability or significant partial payment.

Arendse added: "The total threshold for implementation will be limited to R30 million. It is however important to emphasise that the university is not covering or waiving this debt; each student will remain responsible for settling their outstanding fees."

He said students from all five categories would also need to have a confirmed crowdfunding account (Feenix, BackaBuddy, etc) and sign an acknowledgment of debt.

According to Arendse, Council was encouraged by the cooperation between the executive and the SRC leading to the joint proposal. However, Arendse said individuals who had breached the student Code of Conduct and violated the May 2023 Western Cape High Court interdict in the events prior to the executive and the SRC's joint proposal would be held accountable.

"We remain highly appreciative of the patience, understanding and fortitude demonstrated by members of the university community over the past few days, and we deeply regret the inconvenience caused.

"In approving this joint proposal, Council has brought the university towards a path where the academic year is back on track, while ensuring that the university lives up to its commitment of enabling access to all academically eligible students irrespective of their vulnerable financial backgrounds," Arendse said.

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