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### **UCT executive committed to addressing legitimate student issues**

The University of Cape Town executive recognises the importance of issues that have been raised by the Student Representative Council (SRC).

The UCT executive remains deeply committed to resolving issues facing the student body and is working closely with the SRC and organised university student leadership structures to attempt to find solutions to the issues raised.

Through this collaborative approach, many student issues have been raised and resolved at UCT, others are in the process of being resolved. Some issues can only be addressed by national government.

The most recent issues that have been raised by the SRC include academic exclusions, financial exclusions and the challenges encountered by Zimbabwean students.

#### **Academic exclusions:**

The university received a total of 698 appeals for readmission after these students were excluded on academic grounds. Of these, an overwhelming 87% of the appeals were successful and the students were admitted.

UCT notes that some faculties may have a higher percentage of unsuccessful appeals but note that in all faculties the percentages of successful appeals have increased over the last years.

A greater consistency in the manner in which the Readmission Appeals Committees (RAC) conducted their work has also been highlighted for further investigation, while the issue of attending to late applications for RAC is also receiving attention.

Through engagement with student leadership and the executive we have noted that over the years the number of successful appeals has increased. In 2017 and 2016, the percentage of successful appeals was less than 80% and in 2018 87% of appeals were successful. This demonstrates that the university is ensuring that many of the concerns about the perceived fairness and consistency in the review process are being addressed.

The outcomes of the appeals per faculty for 2018 are as follows:

- Commerce received 109 appeals, of which 8 were declined.
- EBE received 258 appeals, of which 7 were declined.
- FHS received 38 appeals, of which 8 were declined.
- Humanities received 110 appeals, of which 12 were declined.
- Law received 73 appeals, of which 15 were declined.
- Science received 101 appeals, of which only 39 were declined. This represents a higher success rate of appeals when compared against appeal outcomes in 2017.

UCT is giving attention to the underlying causes which leads a student to academic appeals. For example, a study has been undertaken in the maths department with the view of looking at how the throughput rate could be improved.

The executive is preparing a composite analysis of readmissions and deferred examinations for the last four years.

### **Deferred exams**

A total 1150 applications for deferred exams were received in comparison to 5 000 applications for deferred exams in 2017.

In 2018, a total of 712 were approved; 334 were declined and 104 were pending. 61% of the applications for deferred exams were approved.

The Teaching and Learning committee is investigating systemic issues behind deferrals that could reduce stress and anxiety. The committee is investigating options to reduce the credit load and extending the consolidation period prior to the exams were two points under review.

The request by the SRC to be included in the Deferred Exams Committee is also under consideration.

### **Zimbabwean students :**

The university recognises the deeply unfortunate and difficult situation faced by our Zimbabwean students – not only at UCT but other institutions across the country.

On Monday, 11 February, the UCT executive led by the Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, met with the SRC delegation and the Zimbabwean Students Association to discuss issues complicating the Zimbabwean student's academic lives. The university, through the International Academic Programmes Office (IAPO) has been engaging the Department of Home Affairs on the matter as well.

UCT has made a number of concessions to assist the affected students. These include:

- For international students, a full upfront payment of fees is required prior to registration. However, UCT has been allowing Zimbabwean student to register as long as they could provide proof of transaction even without the money being cleared by financial institutions.
- Our Zimbabwean students also have the option of utilising UNESCO coupons, through which they make a payment to UNESCO and the money is later paid to UCT.

- UCT has also exempted all affected Zimbabwean students from incurring the late registration charges.
- The university is addressing each situation on a case by case basis, being sensitive to the fact that different programmes would have different attendance requirements in order to ensure optimum success for the student.
- An updated list of all affected students was expected to be submitted by the SRC to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, Associate Professor Lis Lange, by Wednesday, 13 February 2019.

### **Financial exclusions:**

In 2018, UCT increased financial aid support for undergraduate and postgraduate students to R1.2 billion (preliminary unaudited figures). This increase, from R1 billion in 2017, is a firm illustration of the support offered to needy students. In addition, our Vice-Chancellor raised R5 million last year to cover the historic debt for students, who were then able to graduate last December.

UCT has been in ongoing discussions with a major financial services provider to support students who fall outside current funding parameters.

For 2019, a total of 2 803 students have been confirmed for NSFAS funding and a budget of over R350 million has been secured. A further 1 030 students will be provided with GAP funding.

Through the appeals process, students who lost their NFSAS funding but were in good academic standing have been considered, while NSFAS-funded students who performed poorly in their first year due to adaptation challenges have also been supported. First-year students and final year students who appeal are granted automatic approval.

The university has received and assessed the bulk of financial aid appeals (as at 13 February 2019). Of the 481 appeals assessed thus far 400 have been successful and are broken down into the following categories:

- 215 appeals were successful;
- 106 appeals by first-years were automatically approved;
- 34 appeals by students on N+3 concessions were automatically approved;
- 45 appeals from students who have completed their undergraduate course of study were successful;
- 81 appeals were unsuccessful;

Of the remaining appeals 20 appeals require outstanding supporting documents to be provided, and 86 applications have not yet been assessed.

### **Payment of student allowances**

- The financial aid office has already paid food, rental and travel allowances of R7 million to date for students registered. Students are paid their allowances within three days of registration.
- The next meal, travel and accommodation allowances are due to be paid on 28 February and students have a schedule of payments dates for the rest of the year
- Book allowances have already been loaded on the system and will be paid by end of the month.

### **Grace period applications**

- Grace period appeals applications 158 received
- Grace period approved – 79

- Grace period declined – 31
- Grace period pending – 48 more data required.

**Funding for missing middle students (annual household income of R351 000-R600 000)**

UCT offers GAP funding which is UCT’s financial assistance programme for the “missing middle” – those students who come from families with an annual income above the NSFAS threshold but earn no more than R600 000 and who struggle to pay for their studies. All GAP funding applications are managed via NSFAS, which provides UCT with the data to identify eligible applicants. The GAP funding is exclusively funded by UCT. Therefore, UCT financial offering still extends substantially above the amount that government offers for students in financial need. Furthermore, UCT makes allowance in GAP funding for families where siblings are concurrently registered for undergraduate study at UCT.

**In conclusion:**

The executive is pleased that the SRC is actively raising legitimate student concerns through appropriate channels. The executive’s commitment remains to resolve the issues where it is possible and as soon as it is possible.

***ENDS***