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UCT appoints Professor Phakeng to second five-year term as VC

The Council of the University of Cape Town (UCT) voted on 31 March 2022 to appoint Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng for a second five-year term as Vice-Chancellor (VC).

Professor Phakeng said of the appointment: "I came to UCT to serve not just this university but South Africa and the continent. My personal mission has been to develop African leaders who can inspire their own communities and the wider world. I'm humbled by the support I have received over the last four years and am proud to continue in office until 2028."

- [Read the full announcement by the Chair of Council, Ms Babalwa Ngonyama.](#)

The Vice-Chancellor is chief executive of the university. When Professor Phakeng took office on 1 July 2018 the university needed inspirational leadership to recover from the previous three years of upheaval when universities across South Africa, including UCT, were facing overwhelming protest by movements such as #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall and #PatriarchyMustFall.

In her first few months of office, Professor Phakeng with her leadership team focused on mobilising UCT in new directions to build transformation and sustainability for the institution. In the second half of 2018, she initiated:

- The Advancing Womxn for Change Awards: five substantial grants worth a total of R22.5 million were announced in 2018. The following year, they were awarded to women researchers to advance new women graduates in sectors that have been dominated by men and to support research in areas that affect women's health and wellbeing.
- The 2030 Future Leaders programme to develop young, up-and-coming researchers who are leaders in their fields and have been handpicked by the UCT executive.
- The Futures Think Tank, coordinated by Professor Alison Lewis, the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering & the Built Environment, to respond to the question: "How should UCT and the way we work change to shape, lead and make the future in a rapidly changing world?" The Futures Think Tank developed UCT's Vision 2030, which was introduced across the university community in 2019.

Other notable accomplishments for the leadership team under Professor Phakeng in the last three years include, among many others:

- Shifting the focus of a formal robing ceremony for the newly installed VC to support some 100 inspirational and special graduands from all six academic faculties, many of whom were able to graduate thanks to donor funding which cleared their student debt.
- Appointing a Director of Environmental Sustainability to increase water and energy efficiency, human health, green investment and good citizenship across the institution and to build green objectives into UCT's teaching, research and governance.
- Addressing the needs of students whose financial resources would normally prevent them from continuing their studies.
- Leading UCT during the country's state of emergency responses to COVID-19. In the first few weeks of lockdown, UCT academic teaching was shifted online and students were supported to study remotely, even to the extent of providing laptops, negotiating with service providers for free data, and delivering study materials in the form of paper documents or thumb drives to students in remote rural areas. Students were closely monitored and by the second semester, their performance was at the same level as the previous year.

Chair of Council Ms Babalwa Ngonyama said: "UCT has a mission to solve some of the most pressing challenges in our society. We need a Vice-Chancellor who does not just have execution skills, but who ensures that we have a meaningful long-term impact in South Africa. The feedback that I have received in consulting with key stakeholders, along with the strength of the endorsement given by Senate, demonstrates that despite the many challenges she has faced in her initial four years as Vice-Chancellor, Professor Phakeng continues to be the right person to lead our university, and that Council should appoint her for a second term in office."

The decision is the culmination of normal university process, which includes five key stages of consultation:

- performance review, focusing on key performance areas;
- informal consultation with members of Council, the Chancellor, the Senior Leadership Group, the Students' Representative Council, the Minister for Higher Education and Training, Universities South Africa, UCT's representatives in Australia, the UCT Foundation, NEHAWU, the Employees' Union and the Academics' Union;
- an interim report to Council, with a proposal for the extension of the contract to be put before Senate;
- consultation with members of Senate, where members have the opportunity to speak on the proposal followed by a vote via electronic ballot; finally,
- verification by the Institutional Forum that the process has been followed in full, in alignment with the Higher Education Act.

Senate support for extending Professor Phakeng's term of office was 78%, with 17% not in favour and 5% abstaining.

A Vice-Chancellor is initially appointed for five years. There is no limit to the number of contract renewals, which are subject to performance assessments.

ENDS

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