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Alleged arson incident of 2018 in the Faculty of Humanities

The University of Cape Town (UCT) has noted recent media articles claiming that the university is protecting a professor who is accused of starting a fire in an office and who was allegedly caught using illegal substances.

The incident in question occurred on 4 October 2018 and there were two separate investigations into the matter. Both were inconclusive in their findings and offered no recommendations for action.

The first investigation was done internally by UCT's Campus Protection Services (CPS) in 2018. The second investigation was conducted by an external party in 2023. UCT reiterates that both reports were inconclusive as to the facts of the alleged arson and possession of illegal substances by the staff member.

The internal CPS report states that the investigating officer was "unable to find the exact cause of the fire and who was responsible for the fire".

The external investigation found "that there is no prima facie evidence that (the accused academic) had unlawfully and intentionally set fire to room 4.14". The report recommended "that UCT not take or initiate any disciplinary steps and/or proceedings against (the accused academic)."

One of the media articles states that there was an 'investigation' by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). UCT's CPS was contacted by DHET in August 2023. The university shared all the relevant information in response to the questions asked by the department. UCT has not yet had any feedback or report from the DHET. The university awaits this report, and will take such action as may be appropriate once the report has been received and studied.

The university would welcome any further action by any relevant external authority into the matter to determine the facts conclusively and would take the necessary course of action based on the established facts in accordance with UCT's own rules and South Africa's laws.

ENDS

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