

10 January 2015

JOINT STATEMENT FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLORS, PRINCIPALS AND RECTORS OF UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

We, the vice-chancellors representing all 26 universities in South Africa, remain committed to continuing the widening of student access to university study and to the transformation of our universities consistent with the founding provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. A quality higher education system, we believe, is necessary for realising a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and economically and socially inclusive society.

We support the quest for **access to quality higher education** and we have a collective responsibility to safeguard the integrity and credibility of our higher education system. We believe that all students are entitled to the same **quality of education**, regardless of their economic or social standing, and we cannot compromise on this aspect if we are serious about real socio-economic transformation.

We appreciate the work done by the recently appointed Presidential Task Team regarding immediate funding challenges at universities and welcome the **President's acceptance of the Task Team's recommendations**. We recognise that **mobilising more than R6.5 billion** for this purpose within a short period in an environment of fiscal restraint is exceptional.

We do, however, continue to call for **adequate financial aid** to allow **all** academically qualified students to enrol at universities, accommodated within our enrolment plans, without prohibition. We also amplify the call for **better subsidisation of the university sector by the state, in line with the current and projected growth of the sector**.

It is our view that the zero percent increase in fees for 2016 will offer some reprieve to students as government will make a contribution towards this shortfall. However, the funding of a higher education system is based on a cost sharing model in which the state subsidises each student and students, in turn, are expected to pay their own contribution. **Students will therefore still be required to pay their student fees in 2016, even if these have not increased**. This is one of the key revenue streams that keep universities financially sustainable. Universities, in turn, commit to mobilising new funds, where possible, to support financially needy students. It is our contention that universities are not profit-generating organisations, but do have to be financially sustainable. We as vice-chancellors have to ensure that we safeguard our universities so that they can also benefit future generations.

Academic requirements will continue to be a determinant of admissions policies at universities which will allow deserving learners the best opportunities of success. It must be noted that every student who repeatedly fails and remains at university effectively takes the place of someone else.

We recognise the constitutional **right of students to lawful and peaceful protest** and ask students to act responsibly during protests and to respect the constitutional rights of others to learn and work.

While we agree that reducing the cost of higher education and increasing access are a noble cause, we cannot condone some of the methods used during the recent protests. In this regard, we **condemn all acts of violence**, criminal acts, damage to property and behaviour that impinge on the constitutional rights of others.

We urge students, parents and other stakeholders to recognise that university management and staff generally do not have the internal capacity to manage violent forms of protest action that place students, staff and facilities at risk of serious harm. We also do not have the desire to develop such capacity because we do not believe that this should be a normal part of the form of engagement in a university community. However, in the event of violent protest action, we will take whatever steps may be necessary to protect everyone on campus as well as the universities' physical assets.

We recognise that 2016 may be a difficult year and we are willing to partner with all stakeholders, including the student movements and others to work towards **our common goal of access to quality and affordable higher education** in our collective quest for a just society.

The **underfunding of the higher education sector** has been recognised by the state, the Department of Higher Education and Training and other stakeholders. This matter is also highlighted in the 2013 *Report of the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Funding of Universities* chaired by Mr Cyril Ramaphosa which acknowledges that "government funding has not kept pace with the growth of enrolments in the system".

We welcome and will participate fully in conversations around a **new funding formula** for universities, which is expected to take effect in 2017.

We call on all actors in society – the state, the private sector, individuals, civil society and others – to **prioritise the funding of higher education** with urgency, to support one of the best functioning sectors on the continent, and in so doing to invest in developing the high level intellectual capacity that is desperately needed to secure our collective futures.

Issued by:

The Vice-Chancellors of the Universities of South Africa

Enquiries:

Prof Adam Habib

Cell: 083 301 6536

Email: adam.habib@wits.ac.za

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