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UCT Vice-Chancellor strengthens ties with local high school principals

The University of Cape Town (UCT)'s Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, has renewed the university's commitment to nurturing relationships with high schools from across the metropole.

During an interactive engagement at Oude Molen Academy of Science and Technology in Pinelands recently, Professor Phakeng shared her vision for UCT's future, and invited principals, Western Cape Education Department officials and other stakeholders to continue participating in open dialogue with the university.

Professor Phakeng emphasised that the university cannot exist in isolation, and that building a community on and off campus is of utmost importance.

"As a university, we don't exist on our own. We don't just take students – they come from elsewhere. They exist in a community and we as a university are also part of a community, you should see UCT as an extension of your school," she told the principals.

Reflecting on the tumultuous journey that higher education has taken since #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall in 2015, Professor Phakeng came out in strong support of mindful student activism that does not negatively impact the rights of others.

"We believe that activism is important because it's very easy for us to get too comfortable and not to consider difficult questions."

While UCT's leadership doesn't necessarily condone all the ways in which students have advanced their struggle, Professor Phakeng said that the questions at the heart of the resistance are what is important.

With student protests focused on the question of transformation, and on how after 24 years of democracy many still feel a sense of alienation on campus and in their curricula, the action calls into question not only the past, but also what the future should look like. This offers the leadership an opportunity to revisit the very reasons why the university exists.

"We've decided to reclaim the university as a place of ideas, a place where ideas grow and are encouraged; where ideas sharpen one another, and are not silenced but are instead allowed to exist," she said.

Professor Phakeng encouraged principals to communicate this to their learners, and to emphasise that the luxury of having their ideas honed by the sometimes contradictory ideas of others is that doesn't exist in many places outside the academic space.

Allowing ideas to flow freely, she added, is key to building a university that is truly inclusive, engaged and research-intensive. Ultimately, Professor Phakeng hopes to communicate to new recruits from schools across Cape Town, the province, the country and the continent that success has many different faces, and that UCT would like to be a space in which every individual can thrive.

Supporting this vision for UCT's future are the three pillars Professor Phakeng has been driving since taking office on 1 July 2018 – excellence, transformation and sustainability.

[Watch the VC's speech](#)



UCT VC Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng addressing the principals.

Pic: Je'nine May

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