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UCT puts travel measures in place to support students

The University of Cape Town executive has put immediate measures in place to support students requiring assistance with vacating residences within 72 hours from 16 March 2020 due to the Coronavirus disease.

These measures include:

- Ensuring immediate payment of allowances to all students who are on financial aid,
- Working with external travel agencies on possible travel plans for students,
- Working with the Department of Home Affairs in cases involving international students, and
- Making provision for the safe storage of students' personal belongings.

In the context of the declaration of a national disaster by the State President, Cyril Ramaphosa, UCT has decided to close residences as a precautionary, proactive measure to minimise the risk of spreading the virus. UCT took a decision to break immediately for Term 1 vacation as from and including Monday, 16 March 2020.

UCT recognises that decisions of this nature, while taken under rapidly changing and entirely unforeseeable circumstances, could lead to inconveniences. The university emphasises that all decisions are taken out of recognition of the most important public health principle – to ensure containment of the disease as far as possible.

However, it is important to state clearly that UCT is not closed. Although the term break has been bought forward, university activities are continuing in a different way.

The UCT executive engaged with the SRC on Monday, 16 March 2020 to discuss concerns that arose following the decision to close residences.

The decision to close residences was taken following extensive discussions with experts in the field. The residences, where large numbers of students live in close proximity, pose a high risk in terms of spreading the infection. In addition, it presents a risk of a mass

outbreak and this could add enormous further strain on a health system that will be stretched to capacity in the next weeks. By all accounts, the prevention of the virus is key to fighting the pandemic and avoiding disaster. Keeping the residences open would not be responsible and would have added significantly to the risk of the virus spreading rapidly. Furthermore, UCT is aligning with the state President's decree restricting public gatherings of more than 100 people.

A number of measures has been immediately put in place by the university to support students in vacating residences.

All students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels who are on financial aid – including NSFAS funded-students – are receiving their allowances with immediate effect on 16 March 2020. This will assist any students who may be facing financial challenges with regards to arranging transport.

UCT is also working with external agencies on possible travel solutions for students where there is a need. This may entail students being assisted with travel arrangements, or group travel being organised for departure on campus.

The university is further working with the government through the Department of Home Affairs to assist international students who have to travel home.

UCT has at this stage had only one confirmed positive COVID-19 case. The number of people that the staff member had contact with on campus is estimated at 30 or less. The staff member and all the UCT contacts who have been traced will remain in self isolation for 14 days. The process is managed by the Western Cape Department of Health.

ENDS

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