



**Vice-Chancellor's address to UCT Convocation,**

**Thursday 15 December 2016**

Ladies and gentlemen, members of convocation,

It is my pleasure to give you the report of some highlights of the past year. I want, first, to talk about the protests linked to the national crisis in higher education; and second, to talk about the University's really outstanding academic year – the core business that we do: teaching, research and social responsiveness.

**The National Crisis in Higher Education**

It seems to me that the agendas of the campus tensions are really at three levels: the first is the national call for free education, a campaign which is really aimed at government policy to have free education for all. It's not something that is really in the hands of the vice-chancellors or the universities to address, as I think most students also understand.

There are two tendencies or groupings within the national student movement that have adopted slightly different strategies. One is a group that argues that since they don't have a direct impact on government to change policy, the only way that government can be affected, that pressure can be put on government, is to shut the universities down, particularly the major universities, the ones that are in the public eye, the ones that get the news. That shutdown, they believe, will eventually put so much pressure on government that government will make the change.

The second group, which I believe is the majority, is seeking rather for the universities to align themselves with their call for free education for all. Their goal is not the shutdown of the universities, it is a broader protest around the funding of higher education. Most of the student protestors that I have met and that I have engaged with are students who are serious about their studies, they are students who want to complete their degrees and they want to complete their degrees in the minimum time. Long-term disruption and shutdown does not work for them – their goal is to get the university to stand united with them against the government.

Is this simply an ideological campaign – perhaps mobilised by external parties with other agendas? Generally no. For many of these students we need to understand that higher education has become unaffordable. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), as you know, covers reasonably, adequately, the students who are below a certain income threshold around R120 000 per year. For students above that (other than at UCT, in fact), there is no funding system. The so-called missing middle are people who are above that R120 000 but still the costs of education are going to be more than they can afford. They come from salaried households, hence the income is above R120 000. They often find that in the first and second year of study, they can get loans from banks to cover the tuition fees, but then when they get to third or fourth year, their banks, and their credit is 'maxed out' and they cannot get further loans. They are forced to drop out of university because there is no funding for them. And this is where the main call for free higher education originates.

The question of whether the University can and should align with that call is not straightforward, because while many of us, in fact I think all the vice-chancellors, agree that the missing middle students should be covered adequately by a financial aid system, we do not think it is feasible or desirable for wealthy people to be subsidised to the same extent that they are, and that the higher education system can benefit from having income from that group. Hence, there's not been widespread support in this environment, in the current economic environment, on what this country can afford for free education for all. But it is a long-term goal, an ideal that we'd aspire to. Something which a stronger economy might be able to afford when most of the other urgent needs have been taken care of – such as early childhood development, housing, free schooling.

So that's the first level of agenda.

### **The impact of national politics on campuses**

The second agenda is really the spillover of national politics onto our campuses: an ANC that is divided and, some would say, tearing itself apart. COSATU is divided, with new and breakaway unions competing to recruit membership from amongst the significant group of workers and employees on the UCT campus, particularly since in-sourcing, who used to be represented by NEHAWU. NEHAWU is weak in the Western Cape, and other unions sometimes aligned against COSATU are jockeying for positions within the workforce, and so we have union issues spilling into the campus. We have political parties; EFF, PAC, groups within the student bodies such as SASCO, PASMA and DASO, contesting Student Representative Council (SRC) elections along what are often party-aligned lines. That general ferment, the service delivery protests in the communities that our students come from, spilling over in a way, into the campuses because this is a place where there is visibility, where the issues of accommodation and unemployment and poverty can be made highly visible. So we have the national situation, on the campuses, which of course is not something that the campuses can easily address or solve.

### **Campus specific issues**

And then at the third level the agendas are often domestic, around campus specific issues. We have, for example, on the Afrikaans language campuses, the language policy issue, which has become the major issue and focus of protest. On some campuses, accommodation, the quality and the amount of accommodation, the fact that students are sleeping rough or sleeping in classrooms or in libraries because there isn't enough accommodation, is often the source of conflict. In many campuses the so-called financial exclusions that I have already mentioned, have been key. On our campus we've had financial aid for the missing middle for a long time, and so that's much less of an issue here, but it's an issue on many other campuses.

### **Decoloniality**

And on the historically White, English campuses, the key issues have been around transformation and what has come to be called decolonisation: the sense that the campuses still have a White, Eurocentric culture, the sense that African, Black students and staff feel alienated in this environment. It's a task for all of us to understand why that is and to be able to hear it, to understand the realities of that experience. In some ways the Rhodes statue symbolised the 190-year colonial heritage of the university. It has roots in, and is modelled in some ways, on the Oxbridge models of the universities. You look at the architecture of the University, it tells you to some extent what the University aspires to be. If you walk through the passages of most of the buildings, the portraits or the photographs on the walls will be of the previous heads of departments, the previous deans, the previous professors, and not surprisingly over the last 180 years they are almost all White males. So the message for

students coming from other backgrounds, particularly Black students and staff, is derived from what is reflected back to them; reflected back as role-models, as examples of excellence, as examples of the culture of this institution – and it is a White culture. And so a sense of alienation is pervasive. And it has many manifestations, whether it's about people's accents, it's about the stereotypes we all carry around with us and how we instinctively react to people who don't fit the various stereotypes. These are the issues that have been dominant on our campus. And these are the issues that we have needed to address.

### **Expulsions and interdicts**

And on our campus a particular issue has been the issue of disciplinary action against students. In February this year, we had a night of the so-called Shackville protests, when art works and portraits were burnt, when a bus and bakkie were burnt, and my office was petrol bombed. Following that protest, 12 students were disciplined, and were expelled or rusticated, were given significant sanctions and there were also interdicts against some students.

That has become, throughout the year, a source of protest and an issue which has prevented us from engaging. It came to a head around the SRC elections when one of the students who was interdicted, but had not yet been through a disciplinary tribunal and therefore had not been found guilty, was allowed to be an SRC candidate, but was not able to campaign. And that led to a protest where the other SRC candidates expressed solidarity with this candidate and became the leaders of the so-called SRC Candidates protest.

### **Perfect storm in September 2016**

So, in a sense there was a perfect storm that came together in September, with the Minister announcing how he would deal with fee increases, with the judicial commission saying that it would only report next year instead of this year, and a local UCT disciplinary tribunal announcing its guilty findings in regard to the last three protesters, and the SRC elections being suspended.

### **Conflict resolution strategies**

In dealing with the disruptions and declared intentions to shut down the university, we had a number of options. The campus and the Senate have been divided about the extent to which we should increase security and try to discipline further and prevent any disruption from happening, versus the extent to which we engage and talk and try to find a way forward. In our view (and we tried it) security at some point escalates resistance, escalates the noise and the disruption on campus and doesn't create an environment in which you can study. If you have a lot of security around, you may still have a peaceful protest with toyi-toying outside of the lecture theatre and the lecture doesn't take place.

Most of the protestors were *bona fide* students and would be allowed in to the lectures to participate and would then disrupt the lectures from inside. And there would be significant numbers of such *bona fide* students wishing to disrupt. We are not talking about 100 students. Because there are many different agendas on our campus, there has been an alliance of different causes but under a common protest banner. Those causes have therefore included financial issues, free education, some of the political issues I mentioned, the 'bring back our cadres': the campaign for those who had been disciplined; also the rape survivors raising issues around sexual harassment on campus, the LGBTI community, the transgender community. In addition there were issues that were specific to faculties. We had an occupation of the Health Sciences' Faculty offices where students raised numerous issues around assessment and around other perceived unfair practices that they believed had racial

dimensions. And at the Hiddingh campus and at the College of Music, similar occupations took place around their own issues.

The point that I am trying to communicate is that this is not a small, radical, extreme group that is holding the campus to ransom. This is a widespread range of issues, with significant support. And while I believe there are only a few students who actually want to shut down the University, and invoke disruption, there were many who aligned themselves with the cause.

Now I want to make it clear that there was much protest behaviour which was completely unacceptable. There was violent activity, there was intimidation, forcing people out of their offices, preventing people from studying or going into the libraries or computer laboratories, setting off fire alarms in the residences at night, disturbing people who wanted to study.

None of that protest activity, in my view, is acceptable, and it should not go unpunished, but we also need to find a way through that. Our strategy has been to engage the students who do not support that sort of activity, but who want to find solutions to the real issues, in order to reduce the support for those who want to shut the University down and disrupt it as an end in itself. So our strategy has been to engage, to address the issues that could be addressed, to show that we are listening and that we understand the concerns of students who are feeling alienated. But also, as far as possible – and I gave an example of the disciplinary cases – to say that we have to take action. And, of course, to bring private security onto the campus when the rest fails, if we can't keep the peace with our own security.

### **The Agreement**

I do not have time to elaborate the agreement, which is available on our website - [https://www.uct.ac.za/usr/downloads/2016-11-07\\_UCT\\_resolution.pdf](https://www.uct.ac.za/usr/downloads/2016-11-07_UCT_resolution.pdf). I just want to emphasize that the clemency offered to the 12 who had been expelled or rusticated in order to enable over 20,000 to write exams, was contextualised in the framework of restorative justice that enables them to come back to complete their degrees on condition that they sign a declaration admitting to their wrongdoing and undertaking to abide by the student code of conduct in future, with the clemency being withdrawn should they breach those conditions.

### **The strategy and agreement have worked**

I must conclude this part of the talk by saying I am very pleased that we managed to get an agreement at the twelfth hour, after midnight on the day that exams were going to start. My assessment, and the assessment of our Executive team, was that the exams would have been put at serious risk if we did not have some sort of agreement. We would have needed lots of security; we would have had police and private security inside and outside of every exam hall and across the campus. They would have had to stop groups from coming onto campus, since we have no access control. They would have struggled to identify which students were *bona fide* exam writers and which were not, because some students who may not have had anything to lose could still have come into the exams. And then, as has happened at other campuses, they could disturb other students, tear up scripts, make a noise. And to clear those disruptors out of an exam - we would have done that if we had to – would have been very disturbing for those writing. At University of the Western Cape and Cape Peninsula University of Technology, ultimately they had to bus students off to military sites to write their exams. At Wits and Rhodes they had security to frisk students down as they came into the exam hall. We could have managed the exams under those circumstances; it would have been much more unpleasant for the exam writers. They would have performed more poorly; many would have chosen not to write; some exams would have been disrupted and would have needed to be rescheduled.

Through the agreement that we achieved, we were able to write all of the exams without disruptions, without the threat of disruption. And I want to acknowledge the student protest leaders for being able to create the accountability that was necessary in order to do that. The residences were quiet, students could study, the exam halls, libraries and computer labs were open and peaceful. So I will not say that we completed the year successfully, because as you know we suspended classes, we had to move on to online learning, which was not a good substitute. Some courses are going to be taught in January next year because they involve practical classes which could not be completed, and some of those exams will be written at the end of January. But some 16 000 students wrote the exams. Eighty to one-hundred percent of the final-year students are qualifying and moving on and into the workplace. Those who are not final years are progressing to the next year of study.

### **Successful year for UCT's core business**

I now want to turn to the second part of my report, which is to comment on the successful year we have had in terms of our core business— teaching and research and having an impact. Unfortunately, that does not catch the headlines, lacking sensation and frisson. But it is what we spent 90% of our time doing. And in that regard we once again had a hugely successful year.

### **Research**

In terms of our research, we have five new A-rated scientists. We had another four A-rated scientists have their ratings renewed. That brings our total to 40, which is one-third of all the A-rated scientists in the country. There are 26 universities – we would have 7 instead of 40 if we were average.

If we include all the rated scientists, the number went up from 481 to 514 in one year, and has doubled since I became Vice-Chancellor in 2008. We have just released the research report, which is on the web. It reports on some of the huge successes of our researchers this past year. The number of publications reached a record high. Citations, which measure the impact of our research, how often it is quoted by other scientists, are also at a high and up on last year's.

The research grants that we have raised through contract research increased by 30% in the last year, exceeding the R1 billion mark, going to R1.3 billion. A significant number of foundations have supported new research initiatives. Earlier this year the AXA Research fund, a European insurance company foundation, endowed a Chair, held by Professor Mark New, Pro-VC and Director of the African Climate and Development Initiative. Just last week the Wellcome Trust announced its new Centres of Excellence and a Centre of Excellence was awarded to UCT. There are 11 in the world, 10 of them are in the UK, only one is outside of the UK, viz. here, in Infectious Diseases. The funding is in the region of R85 million over the next five years.

UCT remains the top ranked university on the continent and amongst the top in the world. In the most recent report of *Times Higher Education*, of BRICS and emerging economies, UCT is ranked fourth in the world, out of 300 universities. In April this year we were admitted to the International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU), a group of what was 10 universities, all from OECD countries, and we are the 11th university, the first addition since IARU was established 10 years ago. And they chose UCT because of what we bring to that august group. We bring a hub that connects into the continent, and we are a peer in research which has many strong relationships with those universities.

We launched new start-up and spin-out companies; there were more patents issued. This excellence attracts further financial support.

The Department of Alumni and Development receipted more than R328 million in philanthropic donations in the last year. Some of those philanthropic donations come from our convocation and

alumni members and I want to take this opportunity to thank you all for your loyal support and for your ongoing contributions.

We launched a capital campaign called Distinguishing UCT, which is to raise our endowment from R500 million to R1 billion, so in other words we have to raise R500 million, and to date we have raised more than R100 million. We raised a significant amount of money, about R85 million so far, to launch a neurosciences institute from philanthropic money, with renovations to a building which will create a new home for neurosciences at the Groote Schuur campus.

### **Teaching**

Moving from research to teaching, we continue to invest heavily in our academic development programmes and that has manifested in our first-year course pass rates, showing an increase amongst all students, those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from advantaged backgrounds. We implemented a new admissions policy in 2016. We admitted the first cohort of students in this new policy, which balances the race targets that we've had for a long time with affirmative action that targets socio-economic disadvantage. So we now have a set of criteria that looks at first-generation admissions, which looks at families who are dependent on social grants, kids coming from low-quintile schools, and they all get extra points now, regardless of race in the admissions process. It's too early to judge exactly the impact of that, but it is an important leadership signal nationally towards a non-racial, more equal society; towards indicating that it is not only about race, it's also about class and we want to address issues of inequality as well.

### **Transformation**

Transformation has been the number one item on our agenda. It has been the focus of the strategic plan, approved by Senate in November and signed off by Council on 10 December. We have established a number of task teams that are looking at specific issues, such as the naming of buildings, the question of artworks, and, very importantly, the curriculum change working group that is stimulating interrogation of curricula across the university. We have had assemblies in all the faculties and many departments and engagements where people are hearing about the experiences of 'the other', sometimes for the first time, and are taking on board this sense that we all have to take on the responsibility and own the process of transformation and decolonisation.

Financial aid has been stepped up and we can be proud that we are not turning away any students who are academically eligible, and we support missing-middle students right up to the R600,000 threshold.

Perhaps one of the most significant issues is that a year ago we announced that we were going to insource the workers of six companies that had been outsourced in the 1990s. That has been a major project, successfully completed in record time. Five of the companies were insourced by 1 July, and the last, the catering company, in November. These employees are now part of the UCT family; their incomes have increased and in many cases by more than 60% as a result of this insourcing. Students certainly played a role and so did the workers and their unions. The point is that it is a significant element of transformation and, once again, something that we are proud of.

### **Changes in leadership**

There is much more to tell you about our successes, but I also need to report on the changes that are happening at the leadership level, because they are so significant that it would be remiss not to make mention of them. In 2016 we welcomed our new Registrar, Mr. Royston Pillay. We welcomed our new Dean of Law, Professor Penny Andrews; Dean of Commerce, Professor Ingrid Woolard; Dean of Health

Sciences, Professor Bongani Mayosi; and we appointed, to take office in January, the new Director of the Business School, Professor Mills (Milford) Soko. We've also appointed, to take office in January, two new Deputy Vice-Chancellors: Professor Kgethi Phakeng, who will be the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Internationalisation; and Professor Loretta Ferris, who will be taking up the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Transformation, which also covers Student Affairs.

I want to point out that amongst that leadership group, two Deputy Vice-Chancellors and four Deans and the Registrar, seven new senior people, there are three Black men, three Black women and one White woman. Together with the first woman Dean of Engineering the year before, I think the record shows that at the senior level, we are making great strides in transformation – something we can all be proud of.

Some of our successes are unfortunately bittersweet successes. We have recently been informed that two of our leaders have been appointed as vice-chancellors at other universities. The Dean of Humanities, Professor Sakhela Buhlungu, is going to become the vice-chancellor at the University of Fort Hare, and one of our deputy vice-chancellors, Professor Francis Petersen, is to become the vice-chancellor of the University of the Free State. And just a year and a half ago, Professor Wim de Villiers, the Dean of Health Sciences, became the vice-chancellor at the University of Stellenbosch. So we are the nursery for the leadership of the country's universities and we are very proud of that, of course, but the gains of others are undoubtedly our losses.

So, President of Convocation, thank you for giving me the time to give a full report. It's been a very full year, a difficult year for all of us, but I think a year that we have shown our mettle and we look forward to further progress next year.

Dr Max Price  
Vice-Chancellor