**9. REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING ON ITS OVERSIGHT VISIT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN (UCT), DATED 09 MAY 2018**

The Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training having conducted an oversight visit to UCT on 09 November 2017, reports as follows.

**1. Delegation list**

**1.1 Members of the Committee**

Hon C September: Chairperson (ANC), Hon D Kekana (ANC), Hon R Mavunda (ANC), Hon M Wolmarans (ANC) and Hon A van der Westhuizen (DA) and Hon S Mbatha (EFF).

**1.2 Support staff**

Mr A Kabingesi: Committee Secretary, Ms M Modiba: Content Adviser and Mr S Maputi: Parliamentary Communications Officer.

**2. Introduction and background**

The University of Cape Town had been experiencing ongoing student protests which began on 25 October 2017. The student protests were accompanied by violence and clashes with the police and also threatened to disrupt teaching and learning at the University. The students were demanding, amongst other things: a zero percent fee increment for 2018; immediate release of the Fees Commission Report; inquiry into the deaths of students over the past two years that related to suicide; substantial financial report on expenditure on private security on the campus over the past two years; clearance of historical debt and no financial barriers to registration for 2018 and a draft framework that will address the residence and housing intake for the academic year 2018 for students who do not get residence offer.

The Portfolio Committee was seriously concerned about the situation at UCT and resolved to undertake an oversight visit to the University to gain more insight from the management, council and student representative council (SRC) about the impasse at the institution. The Portfolio Committee undertook the oversight visit with the aim of engaging with the University and its stakeholders to restore stability so that teaching and learning may continue without further disruptions and to ensure that the academic year is completed successfully.

**3. Summary of the presentations**

**3.1 Student Representative Council**

Ms K Khakhau SRC President and Mr M Mlandu: SRC Postgraduate Head made the presentation which highlighted the following: The notion of free education for the poor had been a conversation for a long time and students were concerned about the delays in the release of the Fees Commission Report. The University was planning to adjust its fees for the 2018 academic year and students, especially from the poor family backgrounds were concerned about their access to the institution. The higher education system in South Africa was a preserve of the privileged, while the majority of the poor struggled to have equitable access.

Mr M Mlandu indicated that the main challenges at the University include: racism, institutional culture that is not conducive to all different races; academic exclusions, especially of black students; high failure rate of black students; cultural shock; Eurocentric curriculum; students and staff demographics which did not reflect the South African society; high rate of suicide among black students and outdated residence placement policy.

Mr M Mlandu indicated that the University management had not adequately addressed the demands put forward by students and it was mainly concerned about the completion of the 2017 academic year. Moreover, the notion of free education for the poor was not the sole responsibility of government, but a societal issue and the private sector had a huge role to contribute towards free education for the poor, given its control over the economy. Government had the responsibility to encourage the contribution of the private sector towards free education.

**3.2 Management**

Dr M Price: Vice-Chancellor made the presentation which highlighted the following: Management had been engaging with the student leadership and other movements on campus in a wide range of issues that affected students. Council approved a new strategic plan in December 2015 which prioritised inclusivity. Management prioritised transformation at the University and also produced reports that were submitted to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) on implementation of transformation annually.

The protests at the University began when management started the negotiations for fee increases for the 2018 academic year. The students demanded a zero percent fee increment for the 2018 academic year. Management was concerned about this demand since the salaries of the University employees were expected to increase based on inflation, and the budget for 2018 had to be finalised before the end of December 2017. The University had two main streams of income; student fees which made up to 60 percent of the total income and government subsidy which was 40 percent. The 2018 government subsidy for the University was expected to increase by four (4) percent, which was below the inflation rate and way below the higher education inflation that stood at 8 percent. The University planned to increase fees by eight (8) percent to meet the increasing costs of running a higher education institution.

Dr Price reported that the University took into consideration the predicament of disadvantaged students and those who were funded by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) in its negotiating for fee adjustment. The fee increment would not affect NSFAS recipients and other disadvantaged students. NSFAS contributed R150 million to poor students at the University and the University raised funds from private donors to assist students with family income of up to R600 000 per annum, and R250 million for post-graduate funding mainly from the National Research Foundation (NRF). The University spent R600 million on bursaries for undergraduate students. This was to ensure that there is no academic exclusion based on financial predicament for students. The challenge was the missing middle students who were not funded by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme.

The University engaged with the former SRC about the fee increment and their proposal to management was that the negotiations should be halted until the release of the Fees Commission Report, which was expected to make a determination on a sustainable funding model for higher education. This demand by students was beyond the University’s control.

The demand by students for a zero percent fee increment would lead to job cuts and increase in operational costs. The Vice-Chancellor also noted that the students demanded that debts owed by students be written off. The University could not commit to the demand because those who owed were from families with earnings above R600 000 and they should pay for their own fees. Management did not accept the proposed disruption of the academic programme by students as this would have devastating consequences for the University as well as the country. The University had 28 000 students and it was a group of less than 100 students that caused disruptions. The disruption of the academic programme would impact on: 6 000 students that were expected to graduate in 2018 and some of them had already secured job opportunities in law and accounting firms.; 5000 Matriculants would not be admitted to the University in 2018 and the University would incur a financial loss of approximately R600 – R800 million.

Prof M Phakeng: Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research & Internationalisation indicated that transformation and unwelcoming institutional culture to both black academics and students were challenges experienced at the University, but such unwelcoming practices were not allowed by University management. Prof L Ferris: DVC Transformation added that there was a commitment to address transformation and processes to engage on the decolonisation of the curriculum was set in motion through faculties. The University was also committed to engage further with students and also to seek for mediation in case a deadlock in negotiations was reached.

**3.3 Council**

Prof E Ramugondo: Member of Council representing the academics indicated that the academics’ experiences, especially of Black academics at the University resonated with the students’ experiences at the institution. The institutional culture was hostile towards certain races from students to workers. It was concerning that Black academics felt isolated at the University. The University experienced a high attrition rate of Black academics. Students and staff on the ground should feel the commitment of transformation by management. The high number of suicides among black students at the University remained a serious concern.

The Council was concerned that the staff unions did not form part of the meeting with the Portfolio Committee and they were committed to be part of the negotiations to restore stability at the University, because the current situation at the University impacted adversely on the staff. The University shed 230 jobs in 2016 and the majority of these jobs were administrative and professional staff. The staff at the University had not been enjoying their leave and family time owing to demanding work pressure for the past three (3) years. The University was also planning to shed more jobs in 2018 due to financial pressures and this was a serious concern for staff since it would not be easy for them to find alternative employment given the current economic difficulties.

**4. Observations**

The Committee having interacted with UCT made the following observations:

4.1 The Committee expressed a concern about the plans by students to disrupt the academic programme given the commitment by management to attend to their demands.

4.2 The University was commended for being the number one ranked higher education institution in the country and Africa, and was urged to implement transformation to further improve its rankings.

4.3 The Committee observed that there was a good relationship between management and stakeholders of the University, and management was willing to engage with other influential structures at the University although they were not formally recognised. The University was also cautioned that engagements with other structures should not delegitimise the democratically elected structures.

4.4 The Committee reiterated the importance of teaching and learning to continue without further disruptions given the devastating consequences that might result in the postponement of exams due to be written from 15 November 2017.

4.5 The Committee appreciated the openness shown by the University management and stakeholders in dealing with their differences and other issues affecting the institution.

4.6 The Committee expressed a concern about the exodus of Black academic staff owing to an unwelcoming institutional culture.

4.7 The Committee expressed a concern about the Council not scheduling a special meeting with management to discuss the impasse at the University. The Committee noted that the Council had important governance responsibilities as stipulated in the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997), and should account on the latest developments at the University.

4.8 The Committee expressed a concern about the use of private security personnel to manage student protests as well the police action towards protesting students.

**5. Summary**

The oversight visit of the Committee to UCT afforded members with an opportunity to gain more insight and facts about the real cause of the impasse at the University. The Committee undertook this oversight visit with the objective of mediating between students and management to find consensus on their differences so that the core business of the University, teaching and learning may continue with no further disruption.

The Committee welcomed the manner in which the management and SRC were open about their differences. The Committee also observed that there was willingness and commitment from management and council and SRC to find common solutions to the demands of students. The Committee expressed its apology to the staff unions and institutional forum who could not be afforded an opportunity to be present at the meeting due to the nature of the agenda and time constraints. The Committee undertook to have continuous dialogue with the University to also deal with other matters that could not be sufficiently addressed at the meeting.

**6. Recommendations**

The Committee recommends that the Minister of Higher Education and Training consider the following:

* Transformation at the University is of concern as expressed by stakeholders. The Committee should get a briefing on the University’s annual report on implementation of transformation that what submitted to the Department. This is to assist the Committee to get an understanding on the extent of the implementation of the University’s transformation plan and where challenges exist so that it can request the Department to intervene where necessary to ensure the acceleration of the transformation agenda of the university.
* The Committee should have a discussion with the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) on the work that they are conducting at the University.
* The Committee should revisit the University and engage with stakeholders

Report to be considered.