

COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

STATEMENT ON CONTINUED STUDENT PROTEST ACTION AT UNIVERSITIES AND DISRUPTION OF ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) has observed with deepening concern, the descent of student protests at some of our universities into wanton acts of violence, student intimidation and the destruction of university property. The instability and escalating costs that continued disruption of university activities imply are unwarranted. The CHE is of the view that the issues raised by the student protests have been given genuine and committed attention by university leaders, the Ministry of Higher Education and Training, and the Presidency, leading to no fee increases for 2016.

The continued disruption of academic activities will impose a huge cost on institutions, individuals and parents when it has been made plain that we can ill afford this. It is the view of the CHE that this is a time when all university students should be busy writing exams and consolidating their studies. A small minority would appear to be bent on disruption at all costs, and without regard for the consequences. The CHE strongly condemns this behaviour. It is our view that there is no justification whatsoever for it. All leaders have shown a genuine commitment to engage, to hear, and address the concerns of protesters. Demonstrable attempts have been made to find remedies. While this process is underway, it is imperative that there be a return to normality in academic activities.

As the custodian of quality in higher education, the CHE is particularly concerned about the impact that a failure to put a stop to disruption will have on the successful completion of the academic year, and on the depth and breadth of learning. A continuation of the violent protests will not only have an effect on students' emotional and intellectual preparedness for year-end examinations, but also have a detrimental effect on academic performance. It is of vital importance therefore that universities ensure that all campuses provide a safe and secure environment for students and staff members that will allow for the successful preparation and writing of examinations.

The CHE has also become aware of various independent protest groupings that have emerged at universities to advance various causes such as outsourcing. While we acknowledge that students have a right to express their grievances with regard to tuition fees and related issues through legitimate protest action, the academic project should be sacrosanct, and never be subject to the vagaries of politics as we have come to witness.

The CHE urges students, management of the universities, and all other stakeholders to find an amicable and pragmatic solution to the crisis that will allow academic activities, including examinations, to proceed unhindered, while using proper channels of engagement to continue

working towards finding a lasting solution to the challenge of student funding. There should be zero tolerance for violent, destructive and criminal behavior. Perpetrators should be brought to book speedily.