

STATEMENT BY COUNCIL OF RHODES UNIVERSITY ON FISCAL CONSTRAINTS, FINANCIAL CRISES AND FUNDING CHALLENGES

1. We, the Council of Rhodes University, are extremely concerned about the persistence of the funding challenges confronting the post-school education and training sector in general and Rhodes University in particular.
2. The demand for the doors of learning and culture to be opened found resonance amongst all struggling for the liberation of South Africa. This aspiration found expression in Chapter 2 of the Constitution of South Africa which provides for the Bill of Rights. Council recognises and acknowledges that section 29 (1)(b) of the Constitution provides that everyone has the right to education further than basic education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.
3. Council finds it disconcerting that 27 years since the democratic breakthrough of 1994, we continue to remain mired in funding challenges, financial crises and fiscal barriers that serve to constrain and even frustrate the realisation of the right to education for all in South Africa.
4. Whilst noting the progressive efforts of staff, students and management to address the problems generated in the contemporary context and advance solutions, Council is of the view that such efforts cannot ultimately resolve all the challenges of fiscal constraints, financial crises and funding challenges as a single institution of higher education. Rather, Council encourages a wider and inclusive national discourse on resolving these contradictions on a more permanent basis. Council also recognises the effect of persistent and pernicious underfunding of the sector as a whole, the inability to achieve a stated policy objective of a set percentage of gross domestic product to be invested, and the wider array of austerity measure which will cumulatively further depress the economy, lower living standards and further escalate social unrest.
5. Council objects to the budgetary cuts announced by the National Treasury and believes that absorbing such funding reductions is not a trivial exercise. All post-school education and training institutions will be negatively affected, and our public universities cannot be expected to shoulder this burden, especially as it continues to erode their own capacities, capabilities and ultimately their

competences to deliver high quality research and innovation-led teaching and learning that is consistent with public engagements for transformation, reconstruction and development.

6. Council therefore supports the call for a national debate on the fiscal, financial and funding crises that are confronting the sector and society as a whole. Such a national debate must be inclusive of all stakeholders and role-players. It is imperative that decisions about the future are not further postponed but rather resolved at present. Upon the achievement of such outcomes from the national debate, it is important that oversight and accountability be deployed to ensure that the necessary planning and budgeting actually generate sustainable and resilient institutional, structural and systemic results.
7. As a research-intensive institution of the post-school education and training sector, Council also encourages the mobilisation of the research resources and knowledge networks of the students, staff and management of our University to contribute further to resolving the challenges of our times and work towards the achievement of a better life for all within the constraints of the geophysical planetary boundaries of sustainable development.

Gerald H Bloem

Chairperson of Council

Rhodes University

7 April 2021