

UNISA MEDIA STATEMENT ON 2017 FEES ADJUSTMENT

1. BACKGROUND

Unisa has a long and honoured tradition of providing access to higher education to *all* South Africans, including persons marginalized, disadvantaged and otherwise prejudiced by reason of race, gender, disability, geographic, socio-economic, and political factors.

During this highly significant period in the higher education milieu - with a pertinent focus on access, equity and justice to higher education - Unisa remains committed to supporting the disadvantaged and marginalized to achieve dreams and goals, development and upliftment that is contingent upon achieving professional and academic qualifications. According to the Chairman of the Council, "Unisa's vision statement - the African university shaping futures in the service of humanity - sets the standard for the university's approach to the fee increases for 2017. It has been the compass that has guided the decision-making of the Council. I must add that the Unisa Council is conscious of the socio-economic constraints facing students accessing higher education deeply cognizant of the historic imbalances that continue to influence social empowerment."

Historically, Unisa's fees have been the lowest in the country and this has been a conscientious decision by the Council. "Unisa is proud that it has always been able to provide quality and relevant qualifications, whilst maintaining the lowest possible fee structure and we are determined to continue to follow this trajectory," said the Chairman of Council.

Based on the recent publication of the Statistician-General, it is clear that Unisa is one of those universities that depends profoundly on student fees for its income-generation and concomitantly its short-, medium- and long-term sustainability. There was a deep and open discussion at the Council on the issue of the 2017 fee increase and whilst the sentiment was strong in favour of a pro-poor mandate, there was also a reasonable



understanding for the need to ensure that Unisa meets its income-generation requirements and is able to meet its financial obligations in 2017 and beyond. These two critical challenges had to be balanced as Unisa decided on the 2017 fees.

It is also crucial that the unique character of Unisa be noted so that readers understand the further factors underpinning Unisa's decision on its fees for 2017. These include footprint, typology, and the character of the student population.

Unisa acknowledges the difficulty of identifying the missing middle. However, notwithstanding the uncertainties of the moment, Unisa has opted to forge ahead in a responsible manner that will enable it to provide support to its students registering in 2017. There is a general understanding that most of Unisa's students will fall into the categories of either being NSFAS-funded and/or fall into the missing middle - and its fee calculation for 2017 is premised on this reasonable assumption.

2. 2017 FEE INCREASE

Taking all of the above into account in determining its 2017 fees, the following principles were applied: social justice and fairness; affordability; financial sustainability, and quality, globally competitive, Africa-centred, decolonized, and transformative university education.

Accordingly, Unisa Council at its meeting on 11 November 2016 approved the following fee increase for 2017:

Undergraduate students

There will be a differentiated increase ranging from R40 (minimum) to R80 (maximum) per module. The increase per module is informed by (i) the composition of course enrolments; and (ii) current enrolment data, especially looking at which modules reflected the highest numbers of economically vulnerable students. Almost 80% of the total undergraduate course enrolments are for modules with 12 credits - and in these modules with a 12-credit value, Council approved an increase of R80 (or 5.9%). The maximum cost for an undergraduate module with 12 credits in 2017 will thus be R1 470. (Pro rata increases will apply for modules with different credit values. For example, the fee for a 6-credit module will be increased by R40.)



Postgraduate students

- HONOURS: A differentiated increase ranging from R65 (minimum) to R200 (maximum) per module will be applied, calculated as follows:

54% of the modules in the Honours programmes are modules with a 24-credit value. The increase per module in this category will be R200 per module, translating on average across the funding levels to a 6.4% increase/module. The fees of modules with other weights will be increased pro rata with a capped maximum of R200. On average, these other modules will be subject to a 4.7% increase.

- MASTERS COURSEWORK AND RESEARCH: A differentiated increase ranging from R120 (minimum) to R300 (maximum) for coursework Masters and an increase of R800 for the research Masters will be applied, calculated as follows:

The same differentiated approach has been applied as with the Honours programmes. For students in the 36 credit category representing the majority of Masters coursework enrolments, the R300 increase equates to a 2.7% increase from 2016, whilst the R800 increase for Masters research in the major category equates to 6.4% increase from 2016.

- DOCTORAL: An increase of up to R480 per module for the doctoral proposal and R900 for the doctoral qualification will be applied. The average increase in categories with the majority of enrolments equates to 6.3% from 2016.

Postgraduate students who choose to receive materials electronically only will receive a further 5-10% discount, based on the costs saved by not printing materials.

3. UNISA BURSARY FUND - 2017

Unisa Council has budgeted an amount of R99million in 2017 to provide financial support for registered South African students who do not qualify for NSFAS funding and/or other support.



4. FOREIGN STUDENTS

The increase for foreign students will be the same as that for South African students. However, the foreign students' levy that is charged by the university will be calculated on a differentiated basis taking into account geographic location, applicable currency exchange and fluctuations, mode of delivery to foreign students (paper versus e-tutorial materials) etc.

5. INCENTIVES TO IMPROVE THROUGHPUT

Unisa Council at its meeting on 11 November 2016 has also resolved to offer the following incentives to students to promote throughput:

- For students in their FINAL SEMESTER OF STUDY – with up to 7 modules to complete their qualification – if they complete their qualification, Unisa will refund 30% of the study fees in the modules registered for the last semester.
- For students completing their Masters and Doctorate qualifications **within the minimum prescribed period** of time, the university will incentivise them by refunding their student fees (30%) because the throughput subsidy from the state is more attractive. This promotes throughput AND (hopefully) quicker generation of income (throughput subsidy) from the state.

The Unisa Council at its meeting on 11 November 2016 also approved that the student bursary allocation (the R99m referred to above) be utilised as follows -

- 50% of the 2017 budgeted funds to be utilized as follows:
 - At the end of 2016 the University will look back at all the students who could complete their qualification but are being blocked because they have fees outstanding. Use the 2017 Unisa bursary allocation to support these students.
 - Unisa will also look at students who cannot proceed with their studies (after first year and up to the penultimate year of study) and use the 2017 bursary funds to support them to enable them to pay off the outstanding debt. There must be



criteria and only students with a 55% average and/or who have passed their modules but cannot pay the fees will be supported.

- 50% of the 2017 budgeted funds to be utilized as follows:
 - To support new students entering Unisa who cannot be supported by NSFAS or any other means.

In summary, "Unisa's fee increase remains affordable and socially responsible and - on average - below the projected CPI," says the Chairman. The reality is that Unisa cannot be compared with other universities and a 6% increase at Unisa is significantly lower than a 6% increase at many other universities, given the lower fee cost baseline from which Unisa operates. "This must be factored into any understanding when we interpret and compare universities," said the Chairman. Unisa's fee structure has always been the lowest with the deliberate intention of ensuring that the University remains accessible to as many disadvantaged and marginalized students as reasonably possible. "The imperatives of access, equity and justice have been critical to the decisions of the Council particularly when considering annual fees," said the Chairman of the Council. "We are determined to continue to support students who have been disadvantaged through no fault of their own. It is a deep and profound mission of Unisa and the Council to provide the appropriate enabling environment that opens doors to progress and upliftment. However, we must also be responsible in ensuring the sustainability of Unisa, ensuring its space as a home for future generations of students, as well." Unisa remains profoundly supportive of all universities in South Africa, and believes that its approach to the 2017 fee increase is a further critical component of complementarity in the sector.

