

Varsities warn of difficult year

Vice-chancellors of South Africa's universities have warned that next year may be difficult and have called on the country to prioritise the funding of higher education with urgency.



["The Wits University East Campus \(archived\)"](#) by Samuella99. Licensed under Copyrighted free use via Commons

They warned that while universities did not have the internal capacity to manage violent protests, steps would be taken to protect everyone on campus and university property.

The statement, issued by Wits University vice-chancellor Professor Adam Habib, came as President Jacob Zuma accepted the recommendations of the task team he put together to advise him on short-term university funding challenges.

The university heads acknowledged that mobilising more than R6.5-billion in short-term funding "within a short period in an environment of fiscal restraint is exceptional". However, they amplified the call for better subsidisation of universities by the state, in line with the sector's projected growth.

They also called for adequate financial aid to allow all academically qualified students who could be accommodated in enrolment plans "to enrol at universities . without prohibition".

The zero increase in fees next year would offer some reprieve to students but, given that the higher education system was based on a cost-sharing model, students would still be required to pay their fees.

"Universities are not profit-generating organisations, but do have to be financially sustainable.

"We as vice-chancellors have to ensure that we safeguard our universities so that they can also benefit future generations," they said.

They were committed to ensuring wider access to university study and to the transformation of the sector, but said academic requirements would continue to drive admissions policies.

While they recognised the right of students to lawful and peaceful protest, they asked students to act responsibly during protests and to respect the constitutional rights of others to learn and work.

Reducing the cost of higher education and increasing access constituted a noble cause, but they could not condone some of the methods used during the recent protests.

"We condemn all acts of violence, criminal acts, damage to property and behaviour that impinges on the constitutional rights of others," the university managers said.

"We urge students, parents and other stakeholders to recognise that university management and staff generally do not have the internal capacity to manage violent forms of protest action that place students, staff and facilities at risk."

Source: Herald

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>