Universities tighten belts

Austerity measures implemented as institutions seek alternative funding sources

With continued pressure for free higher education and no fee increases this year, Western Cape universities are turning to alternative sources of revenue to supplement traditional income.

Austerity measures are also being introduced which, at UCT, includes reducing the wage bill.

UCT spokesman Elijah Moholola said the university would renew efforts to raise funds from foundations, corporates, donors and alumni “to ensure that we maintain the highest quality teaching and learning environment”.

“This includes an appeal to parents to donate an amount equal to the originally proposed fee increase (10.3 percent) to UCT’s financial aid fund so that we can sustain the university’s commitment to substantial financial aid well beyond the thresholds set by (the national student financial aid scheme).”

Moholola said the university recently employed a financial liaison coordinator, who will consolidate relationships with funders and explore new grants and donations.

“If we are raising more funds, the university will also be implementing austerity measures through reducing our wage bill and either cutting or delaying some capital projects in the short term,” Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) spokesman Lauren Kansley said fundraising was starting to yield some good returns for the institution.

“Since CPUT is only 10 years old and doesn’t have the legacy that traditional universities have, this has always been a challenge for our advancement department.

“However, this area is seeing a distinct improvement.

“For the first time in our history, CPUT exceeded R30 million received in grants and donations.”

She said CPUT vice-chancellor Prins Nevhuthula had been vocal about cost-saving mechanisms within the university.

“He has urged all campus managers to look closely at their own environments and look at some of the ways we can save.”

University of the Western Cape (UWC) spokesman Luthando Tyhalibong said UWC management was in the process of approaching business leaders and local and provincial government to support students who had performed well academically but had debt and formed part of the “missing middle” - students who do not qualify for financial aid.

“UWC will also kick-start some initiatives in order to support these students.”

Stellenbosch University spokesman Martin Viljoen said universities have for several years been under financial pressure and apply various measures to save money.

“Measures include saving electricity and negotiating better tenders. There is also a greater emphasis on alternative sources of revenue as state subsidies decline.”

All four institutions indicated that they would continue to provide bursaries and other financial aid to students in need.

Last month, the Presidency announced that President Jacob Zuma had appointed a commission of inquiry which will investigate the feasibility of free higher education, among other things.