

**UNIVERSITY PLEDGE ON ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION:
DECLARATION BY THE CHANCELLOR ON
FRIDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2016**

The University of the Witwatersrand holds General Assemblies at crucial times in South Africa's history. We are gathered here today in order to present a united University position with the aim of contributing to resolving South Africa's ongoing higher education crisis.

The Wits community agrees that free, fully funded, quality, decolonised higher education is possible. We are committed to finding effective measures to achieve this goal.

South African education, including higher education, is in a systemic crisis. It is a crisis that is born of our colonial and apartheid history, but has been exacerbated by poor policy choices in the post-apartheid era. Since 1994, South Africa has been growing its higher education system, expanding the student base from 420 000 to just over one million. Yet the per capita subsidy for higher education has declined in real terms. This has forced universities to increase fees in an effort to maintain quality. The net effect has been to price higher education outside of the hands of ordinary South Africans.

This is a systemic challenge that has to be addressed, in part because it will enable us to heal our fundamental divides, including the poverty and inequality of our society. Education and higher education is one mechanism through which to draw individuals, families and communities out of the poverty trap, and to provide people with opportunities to fully participate in society and the economy. It is a basis on which to heal and create an inclusive society. The quest to enable access to universities for all of our students is a noble cause.

The University of the Witwatersrand therefore pledges our support for the goal of free, fully funded, quality, decolonized higher education. We pledge to approach government with a united voice for the realisation of this goal. We pledge to deploy our intellectual resources towards finding the best solutions. We are also prepared to support peaceful advocacy activities in this regard.

Ultimately, our efforts will be part of creating a new educational pact for South Africa that will be premised on a single principle: No student should be prevented from continuing and completing their studies because of a lack of finance.