

Council lays law down for varsity departments

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Some of SA's leading universities are in danger of losing their accreditation for undergraduate law degrees.



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The Council for Higher Education has downgraded the University of Cape Town's (UCT's) LLB programme to "notice of withdrawal of accreditation".

The council has withdrawn Walter Sisulu University's accreditation to offer LLB degrees in its law faculty, effective from January 2019.

The council assessed 21 universities and found that Walter Sisulu's LLB programme had underqualified lecturers and its lecture halls were not suitable for use, among other concerns.

Walter Sisulu said it would make an effort to submit a new programme for accreditation before the end of 2018.

Under current rules, only programmes accredited by the Higher Education Quality Committee can be offered by a higher education institution.

UCT's LLB programme has been criticised for failing to enhance throughput and graduation rates, and addressing race and gender equity issues.

"There is no indication of proper and sound planning, no clear targets and timelines provided to convince the Higher Education Quality Committee of the urgency and commitment to address the stipulated conditions," the council said of UCT's law programme.

The council gave UCT six months to deal with the issues raised. Should the university fail to deal with the issues raised, its LLB accreditation will be downgraded from "notice of withdrawal of accreditation" to "confirmation of withdrawal of accreditation".

UCT's law faculty said last week that it was surprised and concerned by the outcome of the review of its programme.

"As a global top 100 law school and as the top law school in SA, we note that our graduates are in high demand from law firms across the country, and the findings are at odds with the performance of our graduates. This long-standing reputation stands in stark contrast with this first-ever accreditation process of law degrees by the Council for Higher Education," the university said.

"UCT further notes with concern that as this process is not yet completed, the releasing of this information needlessly places the institution in a bad light which could have been managed with greater sensitivity in these troubled times ...

"We will certainly address the concerns raised in the report and we look forward to further engagement."

The council also announced last week it had lifted the notice of withdrawal of the accreditation status of the University of the Free State's LLB degree.

The University of SA's LLB degree has also been revised from "notice of withdrawal of accreditation" to "reaccreditation subject to ... meeting specific conditions".

Source: Business Day

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