



**SFARS Position Paper -**

**COMPENSATING TEACHING CONTRIBUTIONS**

**October 2009**

This position paper addresses compensating Soft-Funded Academic and Research Staff (SFARS) for their teaching and supervision contributions.

**Background**

Although not well recognised, SFARS contribute extensively to teaching activities at UCT, including preparation and contact time with undergraduate and postgraduate students, setting and marking coursework assignments and exams, and supervising honours, masters and doctoral dissertations. As an example of the magnitude of these contributions, SFARS in one division of one academic department (Public Health) contribute over 5,000 hours of time to teaching activities per year. At present, SFARS are either not or inadequately compensated for their teaching inputs. Most SFARS' salaries are funded from insecure research grants and it is unsustainable for them to dedicate this amount of time to training activities on an unfunded or underfunded basis.

Any teaching activity contributes to generating revenue for the University in the form of student fees and the 'student subsidies' paid by the Department of Education (DoE). The financial benefit to the University of these Contributions can be illustrated in terms of the supervision of doctoral students. The costs involved per doctoral student include fees paid to external examiners of R9,000 and supervision costs ranging from about R38,000 to R80,000 (depending on length of registration, but assuming a maximum of three years, and the level of staff providing the supervision – e.g. senior lecturer, associate professor or professor)<sup>1</sup>. In total, costs range from R47,000 to R89,000 per PhD student. Assuming only 3 years from registration to graduation, UCT earns about R30,000 in fee revenue, R30,000 in DoE 'teaching input' subsidies (a subsidy earned per year of registration) and R300,000 in

---

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that we are of the view that this is an underestimate of the costs involved in supervising a PhD student. These costs are based on the current University 'points system' which assume that 60-75 hours is required per year to supervise a PhD student (and only 30 hours per year if the staff member is a co-supervisor). However, our own assessment is that at least 100 hours of supervision time is required per year per PhD student (for very experienced staff at the Professorial level) and up to 150 hours for less experienced staff (at the Senior researcher level). At these supervision intensity levels, the annual cost of supervising each PhD student is approximately R37,000. Even at these higher cost levels, UCT would earn a surplus of over R240,000 per PhD student.

DoE ‘teaching output’ subsidies (a subsidy earned per graduate). There may also be other subsidies, such as for any journal articles published by the doctoral student. UCT will earn a minimum of R360,000 revenue. Thus, even if UCT paid the full cost of the time of soft-funded staff who supervise PhD students, they would retain a surplus of R271,000 to R313,000 *per student*.

If SFARS did not contribute to teaching activities, many UCT programs, particularly at the postgraduate level, would be under threat and the number of postgraduate students registered at UCT would undoubtedly decline given the dissertation supervision inputs of SFARS. It is recommended that as a first step, a full audit of the teaching inputs of SFARS should be undertaken. There could then be a process of determining appropriate levels of compensation for each type of teaching input (e.g. per hour of preparation and contact time, per year per PhD student supervised, etc.). A mechanism for funding these teaching inputs should also be explored (e.g. Faculty level recurrent teaching budget allocations, or more specific earmarking of a portion of DoE subsidy revenues for funding these inputs). The key issue is that each Department and each Faculty should carefully document the training contributions of GoB funded staff (& joint-appointed staff in the Health Sciences Faculty) and SFARS and budget appropriately for these inputs.

An option that may be worth considering in future is to adopt the funding model used by a growing number of universities internationally, namely that all university staff (irrespective of historical classification or funding source) receives central university funding according to their teaching contributions (and sometimes also research outputs) and all are expected to cover the remainder of their salary requirements from research grants<sup>2</sup>. Such a funding model is particularly valuable in providing flexibility in responding to changes in the relative demand for different courses and it encourages Departments and Faculties to regularly and carefully assess demand for existing and potential future courses.

The following are the **main recommendations** for compensating SFARS teaching and supervising contributions to UCT:

- Develop a clear set of principles for compensating SFARS for teaching and supervising funding model that is uniform across faculties.
- Conduct research profiling SFARS teaching contributions and income generation from fee and subsidy incomes in order to promote job equity and transparency.

---

<sup>2</sup> Staff carrying a very high teaching load would be able to maintain their salaries being fully funded from central University resources, much as GoB funded staff currently do.