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New Student Housing Development Addresses Dire Lack of Student Accommodation in Western Cape

Mowbray, Cape Town: A new residence building on the corner of Rose and Main Street in Mowbray will go some way towards addressing the student housing crisis gripping the Western Cape. Nationally current student housing can only accommodate approximately 18% of the total student enrolments in higher education, according to the Department of Higher Education. Student accommodation across the country and in the Western Cape in particular is in high demand, with new developments needed to match the growing numbers of students entering tertiary education each year.

“The student housing crisis is often ignored and yet it can play a significant role in the success of students,” said Evert Lategan, Managing Director of Integrated Solutions, the project construction management company overseeing the development of the new building. “The focus seems always to be on the costs of tuition, books and equipment and while this is a real concern, the issue of student housing and its impact on the ability of students from all communities to study is overlooked. It is not just a matter of cost; if there are too few accommodation units, where are the students supposed to go?”

According to the Department of Education, 171 755 matriculants achieved entrance to bachelor’s degrees, 173 292 to national diplomas and 94 540 to higher certificates in 2013. Those figures are likely to grow exponentially over the next few years as universities widen access to higher education and demand increases.

Yet student housing provision is not keeping pace. A [2015 survey by the Times](#) found that there were only just over 68,000 spaces for the more than 140,000 residence applications received in 2015. The survey focused on nine universities in South Africa. The figures reported point to the real crisis, the University of Cape Town could only accommodate 6,600 students in residence accommodation, but had received over 21,000 applications. New student housing developments are thus vital. The reality is that there is just not enough residential space within the UCT campus and precincts to provide suitable accommodation.

The new CampusKey building, a redevelopment which saw the previous video store, movie theatre, editing studio, bar and grocery store being demolished, offers accommodation for 610 students in single rooms. A [2012 study by researchers](#) at the university of Limpopo noted “a very low university accommodation capacity amidst quadrupled demand over the past decade; unregulated landlordism subjecting students to squalor and academically inhabitable conditions.” This new development, which is innovative in its use of space, provides safe and secure accommodation close to campus and transport nodes.

As the debate around student fees is once again brought to the fore, the need for student accommodation is often overlooked. “The #Feesmustfall debate often forgets to incorporate the cost of accommodation for students who live in the outlying areas of Cape Town and further afield into the debate,” said Lategan. “Students struggling to pay university fees cannot afford the daily commuting expenses of living in outlying areas.” These new units are planned for affordability.

The central location means lower transport costs, with the building within walking distance from the UCT main campus, approximately 1 km away. There is also a student shuttle that passes the building, offering students an alternative to walking. This can significantly reduce transport costs for students.

In addition, such redevelopments play a vital role in urban regeneration, often transforming previously neglected buildings. Working closely with city planners, the developers have designed a building that meets the needs of the student tenants while also integrating into and uplifting the surrounding community.

Each unit features a kitchen, Wi-Fi, fully furnished bedroom units and security systems with 24 hour monitoring. The security provision is paramount. "Parents and students want to be sure they are safe and do not need to worry about safety while concentrating on their studies," said Lategan. In addition to fencing and monitoring of the building, each room will also have its own security fingerprint access lock. Other facilities will include gymnasiums, entertainment areas, laundry facilities, bicycle sheds and ample parking comprising 258 parking bays spread over three levels.

The almost 16,000m² building situated on 4404m² property has posed its own challenges. "The site is very restricted and there is very little working space around the building," Lategan explained, adding that a tower crane and a mobile crane will be accommodated on site so as to position the materials and equipment that is needed. The contractors are also making use of temporary lateral support gunite walls to retain the sides of the basement excavation whilst the concrete retaining walls are being cast.