

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE LANGUAGE POLICY (2021)

PLEASE NOTE: The answers below explain some aspects of the Language Policy (2021) in simple terms and provide some additional information. However, the Language Policy (2021) itself remains the only formal source to be consulted for details about its principles and provisions.

### **1. Description of Afrikaans (contextual consideration) in the Language Policy: why is Afrikaans described so differently from isiXhosa? Why is the following (local) information not also mentioned about Afrikaans, namely indigenous language, one of the largest language communities in the Western Cape, and so on?**

Extract from Language Policy (2021):

*“isiXhosa is an indigenous language used by one of the largest language communities in South Africa, and in the Western Cape specifically.”*

*“Afrikaans is an internationally respected language that has developed a substantial academic repertoire across a variety of disciplines, to which SU has contributed significantly, and continues to contribute. Proficiency in Afrikaans also aids internationalisation, as it opens doors for learning and research with some of the University’s most solid academic partnerships in the Netherlands and in Belgium.”*

According to the task team for the revision of the Language Policy (2016), this formulation best describes the current context of isiXhosa and Afrikaans at Stellenbosch University (SU). In the essence of the Language Policy (page 3 of the Language Policy (2021) on the language revision website), reference is made to the three languages of the Western Cape as follows: “Without losing sight of the fact that SU also serves continental and global communities, we commit ourselves to multilingualism by using the three official languages of the Western Cape, namely Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa.”

Although SU strongly supports the view that Afrikaans is an indigenous South African language, the institution cannot include provisions in its Language Policy (2021) that are in conflict with the Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions.

In 2018, in its comprehensive feedback on the draft revised Language Policy for Higher Education (2017), SU expressed its strong support for the view that Afrikaans is an indigenous South African language. Universities were not given an opportunity to comment on the final version of the Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions before it was published in October 2020.

SU also brought this matter to the attention of Universities South Africa (USAf). As SU is not aware of other universities that have considered the practical and cost implications of the new framework, the assumption is that few universities have yet had the opportunity to do so. SU remains committed to Afrikaans as an indigenous language as part of inclusive multilingualism.

At its meeting held on 21 Junie 2021, SU Council adopted the following motion regarding indigenous languages: “SU has taken note with concern the Department of Higher Education and Training’s classification [of indigenous languages] in the Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions (2020). SU supports the view that Afrikaans and the Khoe and San languages are indigenous languages. Council requests SU’s management to take appropriate steps to engage with the DHET to address this issue.”

However, the classification of Afrikaans, whether as an indigenous or as an official language, is not a determining factor in SU’s proposed Language Policy (2021). The point of departure in SU’s Language Policy (2016), and now also the proposed Language Policy (2021), is individual and

institutional multilingualism. The essence of the new policy is to increase equitable access to SU for all students and staff, promote multilingualism *and* the appreciation thereof, and facilitate pedagogically sound learning and teaching. SU also serves communities on other continents and across the globe but remains committed to multilingualism by using the three official languages of the Western Cape – Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa – as the policy determines in more detail.

## **2. What is meant by “reasonably” and “reasonably practicable” and how is this measured?**

The Language Policy and its implementation are informed by what is **reasonably practicable**. In practice this means that each situation will be considered on its merit and factors such as the number of students that will benefit from an arrangement; the language proficiency of staff and students; and the University’s resource, timetable and venue constraints.

Relevant factors to consider include but are not limited to: the number of students who will benefit from a particular implementation method; the academic language proficiency of the students involved; the availability and academic language proficiency of staff members; timetable and venue restrictions; SU’s available resources and the competitive claims on those resources; and especially the three normative basic principles of the proposed Language Policy.

The following basic principles must guide the interpretation and implementation of the policy:

- Individual and societal multilingualism should be seen as a resource to facilitate cognitive development, epistemic access, inclusiveness, transformation, social cohesion and respect for all languages. Multilingualism therefore extends much deeper than language proficiency – it is also an attitude that SU wants to encourage among staff and students.
- With its Language Policy, SU strives to broaden access to and enhance success in academic, administrative, professional and social contexts, and to support success. Language should not be a barrier to students or staff.
- All aspects of the Language Policy and the implementation thereof in learning and teaching should facilitate pedagogically sound learning and teaching.

It should be taken into consideration that the composition of students from year to year can differ drastically in terms of language proficiency and language preference, among other things. The aim of the policy and its implementation is to be adaptable and able to respond quickly to changing needs of staff and students.

Faculties may in specific cases motivate an exemption from the policy provisions for learning and teaching (Paragraph 7.1 of the policy), provided that the exemption is in line with the principles of the policy and can be justified by the human and physical resources of SU, pedagogical issues or faculty-specific considerations. However, it is important to note that language planning and reporting on language implementation are part of a formal annual process. The Language Policy (2021) gives broad attention to language planning (paragraph 7.4).

Faculties must also apply for exemptions and cannot randomly deviate from the policy and their respective language implementation plans. Each faculty and responsibility centre have to submit a language implementation plan every year and, as soon as Senate has approved the faculty plans, it has to be posted on their respective websites to inform students about the specific language options for each of their academic modules.

Changes that fall outside the regular annual revision timeline, have to be discussed in the faculty and then be submitted to the faculty board and Senate meetings. In urgent cases requests may be submitted to the Executive Committee of Senate. In such instances students are informed as soon

as practically possible of the changes and the reasons for those changes. Faculties (every semester) and student communities have to report on their compliance with their respective language implementation plans to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Learning and Teaching.

### **3. Who is responsible to ensure that SU's website is 100% bilingual (Afrikaans and English)?**

SU is a complex institution with a wide variety of entities. The Corporate Communications and Marketing Division is responsible for the overarching institutional web pages, while faculties, departments, professional and administrative support services and many other entities take responsibility for their web pages. Staff are expected to comply with the provisions of the institution's policies, rules and protocols, and this therefore includes the Language Policy. Line managers are responsible for ensuring that their staff adhere to the Language Policy.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Learning and Teaching monitors the implementation of entities' language implementation plans and the activities of the Language Planning and Management Committee by means of their reporting.

In academic settings, complaints about non-compliance can be reported via faculties' complaint procedures, or referred to departmental chairpersons, or to the dean. In professional and administrative support services environments, staff must report complaints to their line managers.

Complainants who are of the opinion that their complaints have not been properly addressed, can take up the matter with the SU ombud who will resolve the complaint in consultation with the respective environments: Advocate Rina Meyer at [ombudsman@sun.ac.za](mailto:ombudsman@sun.ac.za) | 0828072994 | 34 Ryneveld Street, Stellenbosch.

### **4. What is the policy on language in residences – for social and formal contexts (such as house committee and house meetings)?**

In student communities, language is used in a way that ensures that, where it is reasonably practicable, everyone is included and can participate in the discussions. Similar to academic environments, the student body in residences and PSO wards also change every year, which necessitates continuous adjustment to meet the needs of students.

One of the foundational principles of the policy states that individual and societal multilingualism should be seen as "a resource to facilitate cognitive development, epistemic access, inclusiveness, transformation, social cohesion and respect for all languages". Multilingualism, therefore, extends much deeper than language proficiency – it is also an attitude that SU wants to encourage among staff and students. Awareness campaigns are repeated year after year and it becomes part of students' development and personal growth.

Read more about the evidence on language implementation in residences at the [Human Rights Commission](#) earlier in 2021.

Read more about [language at SU](#).

### **5. Why was the drafting of SU's language policy such a public process with public participation and so many internal interest groups involved?**

As Stellenbosch University is a public higher education institution, a combination of South African legislation and Stellenbosch University's Statute (2019) and internal regulations determines how the language policy revision process should be conducted. These include the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, 2000 (Act 3 of 2000), the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act 101 of 1997), the SU Statute 2019 and SU's Regulation: Policy and Management Documents.

## EXTERNAL FACTORS

The South African Bill of Rights guarantees the right to 'just administrative action'. Article 33 of the Constitution provides that everyone has the right to just and reasonable administrative action. It is a fundamental human right that is applied through the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, 2000 (Act 3 of 2000). The purpose of the 'PAJA Act' is to ensure that South Africa's participatory democracy continues to grow by holding the administration - therefore also universities and public institutions – accountable for their actions towards people. Among other things, the Act provides for notice and comment in cases where decisions affect the general public. The process administrator is responsible for giving stakeholders the opportunity to comment, and then consider the comments before making final decisions.

## INTERNAL FACTORS

In terms of Stellenbosch University's Statute (2019), Council must determine the Language Policy of the institution with the consent of Senate, in accordance with Section 27 (2) of the Higher Education Act. SU's Regulation: Policy and Management Documents also stipulates that all policy documents that affect academic matters, should simultaneously follow a consultation route via Senate and the Institutional Forum before the policy may be submitted to Council for approval.

The regulation also stipulates that during the process of developing and approving a policy, external and internal stakeholders must be consulted, for example governing structures, faculty boards, student bodies, staff associations, Senate and Council committees, as well as external stakeholders.

Refer to the [webpage for the revision of the language policy](#) for detailed information about the revision process.

### **6. Does the new Language Policy mean that all internal communication must be made available in three languages, for example also SU's website and academic material?**

The Language Policy Framework (2020) for Public Higher Institutions stipulates that official internal institutional communication must be made available in three languages. Official internal institutional communication refers to all communication from the Chancellor, University Council, Senate, the Rector and Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the Chief Operating Officer or the Registrar that is distributed to the entire university. It is therefore not applicable to SU's website and academic material.

In certain programmes, isiXhosa is already used in addition to Afrikaans and English with a view to facilitating effective learning and teaching, especially where the use of isiXhosa can be important for career purposes. SU is committed to expanding the use of isiXhosa insofar as it is reasonably practicable and pedagogically justifiable, for example through teacher training, short courses in basic communication skills for staff and students, career-specific communication, discipline-specific terminology guides (printed and mobile applications in three languages) and language guides.