

Update on facilitation of Wilgenhof residence renewal and transformation process

This is a brief update for the Stellenbosch University (SU) community on the facilitation process for the renewal and transformation of Wilgenhof.

SU identified the Centre for the Study of the Afterlife of Violence and the Reparative Quest (AVReQ) as the "home" for the coordination of the facilitated renewal process of Wilgenhof, following the exposure of disturbing stories and images from a room, which was locked and hidden from the public for several years. Prof Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Dr Wilhelm Verwoerd were appointed to lead this facilitation process. They were joined by Dr Francois Hugo, a clinical psychologist and management consultant affiliated with the FirstRand Group, nominated by members of the Association for the Advancement of Wilgenhof Residence (AWIR). Delecia Davids, a lecturer in curriculum studies with extensive facilitation experience with student leaders and whose [Master's thesis](#) provides critical insights into residence culture at SU, was also invited to join the facilitation team.

In broad terms, the goal of the facilitation process is focused on an honest reflection on the culture of Wilgenhof that has endured over several decades, and establishing a renewed identity that will be more closely aligned with the University's values and respect for human rights and dignity. In December 2024, initial consultations between the facilitators and the Wilgenhof house committee marked the start of the renewal process. Following several consultative meetings involving Prof Deresh Ramjugernath (Rector and Vice-Chancellor), Dr Leslie van Rooi (Senior Director: Social Impact and Transformation), Wilgenhof house committee members and members of the Victoria cluster of residences situated around Wilgenhof, it was decided that the best way to implement the process of transformation would be to establish a diverse "core team" of students who would play a leadership role to guide the renewal process within Wilgenhof, and in terms of its relationship with the broader SU community.

A carefully selected group of fifteen student leaders, representing Wilgenhof, the Victoria cluster and the wider student community was established to form the "core team." After the

welcoming programme in early February, open invitations were issued through a Wilgenhof house meeting, a meeting with the prim committee, the Victoria cluster convenors and the Wilgenhof house committee. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: diversity (including race, gender, socio-economic background); sustainability (ensuring a mix of year groups); commitment to positive change (within and beyond Wilgenhof); experience within student communities; availability to participate in facilitation activities. The first facilitation workshop with the core group was held over from 28–30 March. The main goal of this gathering was to establish strong relational bonds and build a cohesive leadership team that will be able to steer the renewal process in a sustainable way throughout 2025 and beyond. Over two days, the facilitators met with the core team to flesh out the main issues to be addressed in the renewal of Wilgenhof, and what the team's primary activities will entail in the upcoming months.

The rich diversity of the core team inspired robust and critical debates. The discussions and debates were intense, demonstrating an openness to listening and a genuine willingness to grapple with the complex historic and current issues that require attention. The important outcome of these discussions was the co-creation of broadly defined and constructive shared goals for the specific activities that the group will undertake. The collaborative process facilitated at this first meeting of the core team underscores the students' serious commitment to drive meaningful change within the Wilgenhof culture. The commitment by the students representing the broader residence communities to work together with the Wilgenhof leadership toward this renewed vision marks a significant step forward in the journey towards a transformative future.