Varsity plan ‘lends hope’

Stellenbosch transformation programme implementation ‘remains a challenge’

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THE chairperson of Parliament’s portfolio committee on higher education and training, Yvonne Phosa, says though Stellenbosch University’s (SU) transformation programme gives hope, its implementation remains a challenge.

Phosa made these comments during an oversight visit to the university on Wednesday to get a report on progress made since the last meeting held in Parliament with the university on September 1, 2015 for initial submissions to the portfolio committee.

In her concluding remarks Phosa said: “Mission accomplished. We came here to get information and we are very happy with what we received. You are doing very well in terms of academic excellence and financial management, and your transformation programme is also giving us hope, but actual implementation remains a challenge.

“There has been progress but this aspect must be fast-tracked. You can’t delay. It is a high-risk area.”

Touching on the issue of student protests, Phosa said: “We would like to see a conducive environment for teaching and learning. All stakeholders must get together and agree on that.”

Rector and vice-chancellor Wim de Villiers reiterated that the university regarded itself as a national asset serving all the people of South Africa and not just a particular section.

“We have our flaws, no doubt, but more importantly, we have a job to do, which is to broaden access, maintain our excellence and increase our social impact in order to contribute to a community of social justice and equal opportunities,” De Villiers said.

The language implementation at Stellenbosch University also came under scrutiny and SRC chairperson Axolile Qina told the committee that students were not against Afrikaans or English but only wanted to ensure that language was not a barrier to effective education.

The committee also heard from Dr Antoinette van der Merwe, senior director of teaching and learning enhancement, that the university had embarked on a formal review of its language policy.

A first draft would be made available for broad consultation and comment between March 22 and April 22.

A second draft would go to faculty boards between May 9 and May 13, and a final draft would go to the institutional forum on May 25, the senate on June 3 and finally to the university council on June 22.

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