‘WILL PROMOTE ACCESS’

Anger over language change at Stellies

Carlo Petersen

STELLENBOSCH University (SU) approved a new language policy this week, a move which Afriforum has described as “a genuflection to anarchy”.

Paul Roos Gymnasium rector Janni van der Westhuizen resigned from the council with immediate effect, and 10 other members stormed out of the meeting after the majority of SU’s council voted in favour of the proposed new language policy on Wednesday.

Afriforum also condemned the SU council’s decision as a transgression against the constitution and citizens’ language rights yesterday.

The university’s senate had approved the policy with 113 votes for and 10 against on June 9.

SU spokesperson Martin Viljoen said: “By approving the proposed new language policy, council has expressed its unequivocal support for multilingualism, without excluding students who are not proficient in either Afrikaans or English.”

He said the policy is based on the principles that the university’s languages of instruction must promote access and academic success, and that the institution’s language policy must serve its academic project.

“The policy explicitly makes provision for students who prefer to study in Afrikaans, while also improving access to education for students who are proficient in English only,” Viljoen said.

He said the new policy makes provision for mechanisms for academic oversight, effective management and good governance relating to language implementation.

“This would be within a framework that enables faculties to customise their language implementation plans, and their mechanisms for accountability and reporting to the relevant structures. SU council chairperson George Steyn said the majority of members expressed strong support for the multilingual context as outlined in the new policy.

“The revised language policy acknowledges SU as a national asset and reaffirms our commitment to the users of Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa, being the three official languages of the Western Cape,” Steyn said.

Steyn said it was unfortunate that some members of council had stormed out of a meeting on Wednesday.

He added that it was also regrettable Van der Westhuizen had resigned.

Afriforum deputy chief executive Alana Bailey said the councillors who voted in favour of the decision betrayed not only their community’s language rights’ interests, but those of all South Africans.

“The decision seems to be an act of political expediency and a genuflection to anarchy. “This bodes ill for both national stability and social cohesion in South Africa,” Bailey said.

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TRANSFORMATION: Stellenbosch University will adopt a new language policy in 2017 to make English its main medium of instruction after student activists called for a more inclusive learning environment. Picture: REUTERS/MIKE HUTCHINGS