



## **Language Policy of Stellenbosch University**

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Owner of this Policy	Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching
Institutional functionary (curator) responsible for this Policy	Senior Director: Learning and Teaching Enhancement
Date of approval	
Approved by	Stellenbosch University Council
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## The essence of the Policy

Stellenbosch University (SU) is oriented towards engagement with knowledge in a diverse society. The Language Policy advances institutional multilingualism and individual multilingualism in its academic, social, administrative and professional contexts. The Policy aims to increase equitable access to SU for all students and staff. Since our campuses are situated in the Western Cape, we commit ourselves to the promotion of the province's three official languages, namely Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa.

### 1. Introduction

At SU our focus is on engagement with knowledge. As part of this engagement, SU takes into account the diversity in our society, including linguistic diversity, and the intellectual wealth inherent in that diversity.

The South African Constitution grants official status to eleven languages and regards all these languages as assets that should be used as a means of developing human potential. The Constitution determines that everyone has the right to receive education at public education facilities in the official language or languages of their choice, where that is reasonably practicable.

The Language Policy aims to increase equitable access to SU for all students and staff.

### 2. The multilingual context

SU follows a dynamic process to make the institution inclusive and diverse, including by utilising more than one language.

SU creates opportunities for the advancement of institutional multilingualism (more than one language being used in the institution) and individual multilingualism (competence of an individual to function in more than one language).

SU is a national asset, with students and staff representing most of the language groups in South Africa. Although we acknowledge that all South African languages function as resources for learning, we choose to focus our institutional commitment on the users of Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa, which are the three official languages of the Western Cape Province.

The contextual considerations for using these languages are as follows:

#### **Afrikaans**

Afrikaans has developed an academic repertoire over decades, to which SU has contributed significantly. Applying and enhancing the academic potential of Afrikaans is a means of empowering a large and diverse community in South Africa.

#### **English**

Speakers of the various South African languages use English to communicate with each other, and English has significant academic, business and international value. Therefore, SU uses English routinely, but not exclusively, in its academic, social, administrative and professional contexts.

## **IsiXhosa**

IsiXhosa is used by one of the largest language communities in South Africa. By means of specific initiatives, SU is contributing to the advancement of isiXhosa as a developing academic language in addition to expanding isiXhosa as an internal language of communication.

### **3. Application of the Policy**

The Language Policy applies to all faculties, support services divisions, management bodies, staff and students of SU.

### **4. Purpose of the Policy**

The purpose of the Language Policy is to guide language planning, language management and language use at SU.

### **5. Aims of the Policy**

- (a) To contribute to achieving SU's Vision 2030 as contained in its Institutional Intent and Strategy (2013–2018), so as to enable inclusivity and equitable access to SU for all.
- (b) To promote institutional and individual multilingualism as important differentiating characteristics of SU and its graduates.
- (c) To facilitate effective learning and teaching, research, and service delivery at SU.

### **6. Policy principles**

The Language Policy is based on the following principles:

- (a) SU acknowledges and respects the core values enshrined in the South African Constitution, particularly those related to inclusivity, and equitable access to education and language.
- (b) SU respects the languages of students and staff and acknowledges their language preferences and levels of language proficiency.
- (c) SU acknowledges the complex role of language in general and our separate languages in particular in our society. All languages are regarded as resources for the effective construction of knowledge.
- (d) SU applies its chosen languages to include all students, staff and other stakeholders.
- (e) SU acknowledges that academic language and literacy comprise sets of complex practices which are linked to how disciplines create knowledge. These practices are best developed within the contexts of academic disciplines and their fields of study.

- (f) SU establishes suitable and sufficient language support, language services and academic staff development services to ensure the success of the Language Policy.
- (g) The Language Policy and its implementation are informed by what is reasonably practicable in particular contexts. Relevant factors to be considered include the number of students that will benefit through a particular implementation, the language proficiency of the students involved, the availability and language proficiency of staff, timetable and venue constraints, SU's available resources, and the competing demands on those resources.

## **7. Policy provisions**

The Policy principles mentioned above give rise to the following binding Policy provisions:

### **7.1 Learning and teaching**

The pedagogy envisioned in the Policy is derived from the viewpoint that all languages are resources for learning. While all languages are enablers of learning, a pedagogically sound approach to the use of language in the classroom ensures that learning and teaching material are accessible to as many students as possible to support the goals of the University for inclusivity.

- (a) Afrikaans and English are SU's languages of learning and teaching. SU purposefully supports their academic use through a combination of facilitated learning opportunities for students, which include lectures, tutorials, practicals and ICT-enhanced learning strategies.
- (b) Undergraduate modules will be offered in either parallel medium or dual medium, except for those modules covered by paragraph 7.1(e).
- (c) Parallel medium: For undergraduate modules where it is practical and pedagogically sound to divide the students into more than one group, there must be separate lectures in Afrikaans and English. Additional learning opportunities involving students from both language groups must be created to promote integration.
- (d) Dual medium: Both Afrikaans and English are used in the lectures for the same class group, provided that the relevant lecturers and teaching assistants have the necessary language proficiency to do so. At SU, dual medium is implemented in a combination of facilitated learning opportunities as follows:
  - (i) During each lecture all information conveyed is conveyed in English or, time permitting, in both English and (wholly or partially) in Afrikaans. Emphasis or summaries are also given in Afrikaans; and questions in Afrikaans are answered in Afrikaans.
  - (ii) Students will be supported in Afrikaans and English during a combination of appropriate facilitated learning opportunities.
  - (iii) Subject to the constraints on its resources at the relevant time, SU provides real-time interpreting services in first-year dual medium modules; and, if resources permit, will provide real-time interpreting services in subsequent undergraduate years based on requests from faculties and needs of students.

- (e) The following categories of modules can be offered otherwise than in parallel medium or dual medium:
  - (i) Where the nature of the subject matter of the module justifies doing so, for example where the module is about the language itself.
  - (ii) Where there is no lecturer available in the relevant faculty/department who is able to give dual medium lectures in both Afrikaans and English. For these modules additional support will be provided:
    - a. If the lectures are in Afrikaans, SU will provide real-time interpreting services in English.
    - b. There will be appropriate auxiliary facilitated learning opportunities in Afrikaans and English.
  - (iii) Where all the students in the class are monolingual Afrikaans- or English-speakers, the module will be presented in only Afrikaans or English respectively, provided that the relevant lecturers and teaching assistants have the necessary language proficiency to do so.
- (f) In addition to lectures, based on students' needs and practicability, SU will provide a variety of ICT-enhanced learning strategies, including podcasts and vodcasts of lectures, which will be increasingly made available to students in Afrikaans, English and, in some cases, isiXhosa for the further reinforcement of concepts and for revision.
- (g) The materials for learning are made available as follows:
  - (i) All compulsory reading material must be provided in English except where the nature of the module is about the language itself.
  - (ii) Compulsory reading materials are also provided in Afrikaans if justified by the number of students that would benefit, the extent of the benefit and the amount of staff time required to prepare the Afrikaans versions.
  - (iii) SU-produced module frameworks and study guides are available in Afrikaans and English.
  - (iv) The question papers for tests, examinations and other summative assessments are available in Afrikaans and English. Students may answer all assessments and submit all written work in either Afrikaans or English.
  - (v) The advancement of academic materials in Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa is supported by the progressive development of multilingual glossaries and other academic materials.
- (h) The academic potential of Afrikaans is enhanced by, for instance teaching, research, symposia, short courses, supporting language teachers and guest lecturers in Afrikaans; investing in parallel medium teaching; teaching in Afrikaans in dual medium lectures; making teaching assistance available in Afrikaans; translating learning materials into Afrikaans; presenting Afrikaans language acquisition courses for students; developing academic and professional literacy in Afrikaans; reading and writing development; providing language services that include translation, editing and document design in Afrikaans; developing multilingual glossaries with Afrikaans as one of the

languages; and promoting Afrikaans through popular-scientific publications in the general media.

- (i) IsiXhosa as an emerging formal academic language will receive particular attention for the purpose of its incremental introduction into selected disciplinary domains, prioritised in accordance with student needs in a well-planned, well-organised and systematic manner. The academic role and leadership of the Department of African Languages, through its extensive experience in advanced-level teaching and research in language and linguistic fields relevant to the theoretical and research base of this project, will be harnessed to the full. In certain programmes, isiXhosa is already used with a view to facilitating effective learning and teaching, especially where the use of isiXhosa may be important for career purposes. SU is committed to increasing the use of isiXhosa, to the extent that this is reasonably practicable, for example through basic communication skills short courses for staff and students, career-specific communication, discipline-specific terminology guides (printed and mobile applications) and phrase books.
- (j) In postgraduate learning and teaching any language may be used provided all the relevant students understand the language.
- (k) The following measures are taken for persons with special learning needs/disabilities:
  - (i) Where students or staff need alternative texts such as Braille or enlarged texts as a means to communicate and understand information and these are not available, the relevant member of staff should liaise with SU's Braille Office to ensure the timeous availability of the alternative texts.
  - (ii) As South African Sign Language is the primary means of communication for some Deaf people, a sign language interpreter and/or real-time captioning must be available at lectures, tutorials and main SU public events, where it is required and it is reasonably practicable to do so.
  - (iii) These provisions must be understood in line with SU's Policy regarding Students with Special Learning Needs/Disabilities.
- (l) Faculties may depart from the Policy provisions in this paragraph 7.1 in particular instances only if the deviation is:
  - (i) Limited by the human and physical resources made available by the University or by pedagogical concerns; and
  - (ii) Approved by the relevant faculty board, and reported with the justification to the Senate in the faculty's Language Implementation Plan referred to in paragraph 7.4(a) below. If the Senate does not approve a deviation, it may require the faculty to adhere to the policy provisions in this paragraph 7.1 or approve a different deviation.

## **7.2 Internal institutional communication**

- (a) Documentation of prime importance (e.g. policies and strategic Human Resources documents relating to service conditions) is made available in

Afrikaans and English. The rest of the documentation is made available in Afrikaans, English or isiXhosa depending on the languages of the target audiences.

- (b) The language of written communication within faculties and divisions (agendas, hand-outs) and at meetings depends on the language needs of the readers or participants (including staff and students), provided that no one should be excluded by the language of communication.
- (c) Oral or written enquiries and requests by students and staff are, where reasonably practicable, dealt with in the language of the enquiry or request.
- (d) Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa are used judiciously at official events, such as official meetings, ceremonial occasions and inaugural lectures.
- (e) In residences and other living environments, language is used in such a way that, if reasonably practicable, no stakeholder is excluded from participating in any formal activities in these environments.
- (f) The following provisions apply to Information Technology (IT) software system user interfaces (UIs), mobile applications and web content management systems:
  - (i) Where multilingual operation is possible (i.e. where SU is able to influence the development of the software products, or where the product supports it, or SU builds it), SU will support Afrikaans and English based on the user's language preference.
  - (ii) Where commercial off-the-shelf software applications that do not support multilingual operation are employed, the operation will default to English.
  - (iii) Where the user's language preference is unknown, the default is English.
- (g) The following provisions apply for information system data:
  - (i) Information system data pertaining to an individual should be multilingual, where the system's data design caters for it.
  - (ii) Where the data design accommodates multilingualism and where feasible, the associated UIs for capturing the data should support multilingual data capture.
  - (iii) Where the data design only caters for a single language, English will be used.
  - (iv) For all other data, English will be used.

### **7.3 External communication**

- (a) Afrikaans and English and, where reasonably practicable, isiXhosa are SU's languages of external communication.
- (b) SU respects the language policies and preferences of its stakeholders, partners and external correspondents. This means that official communication and meetings with them will generally be in their language of preference, or that

the necessary services (e.g. translation or interpreting services) will be provided.

- (c) Where SU does not have the capacity to fulfil the language preference, the medium of communication will be English.
- (d) Stakeholder-facing IT user interfaces will be treated as in paragraph 7.2(f). Examples would be user interfaces facing alumni, donors and parents/guardians.

#### **7.4 Language planning**

- (a) Each faculty and support services division must have a Language Implementation Plan that adheres to the Language Policy.
- (b) Every faculty must regularly review its use of language for learning and teaching, and record the language arrangements in its Faculty Language Implementation Plan. This Plan must be reported to Senate via the Faculty Board and Academic Planning Committee. The Senate has the power to accept, reject or modify the faculty's Language Implementation Plan. Once accepted, the language arrangements for learning and teaching must be published in the relevant module frameworks.
- (c) Changes to the language arrangements that fall outside the regular review process, but are necessitated by, for example, a specific student group's preferred language of tuition, pedagogical considerations or the unavailability of a lecturer with the necessary language proficiency, can be made by the relevant department head and dean after consultation with the faculty's student representative committee. These changes must be reported at the next faculty board and Senate meetings. The students of the specific modules must be informed as soon as practically possible of the changes and the reasons for them.
- (d) Every support services division must regularly review its use of language and record the language arrangements in its support services division's Language Implementation Plans. These plans must be approved by the relevant line managers and the Rector's Management Team.

#### **7.5 Promotion of multilingualism**

The Language Centre, the faculties, support services and management bodies are co-responsible for the advancement of multilingualism at SU. SU will incentivise innovative multilingual practices through providing institutional funding for, for instance, expanding parallel medium in faculties, conducting research, and sharing best practice multilingual practices, ICT-enhanced learning strategies and discipline-specific academic literacy initiatives.

#### **7.6 Support**

The Language Centre provides language support services aimed at the effective implementation of the Language Policy, in collaboration with the faculties, support services divisions and management bodies, by providing, for example, reading and



writing development support, language services that include translation, interpreting and editing services, modules in professional communication, academic literacy and language acquisition, and research. The faculties, support services divisions and management bodies may, after consultation with the Language Centre, also provide language support of their own.

## **8. Feedback, monitoring and conflict resolution**

- (a) Each faculty, Responsibility Centre and the Student Representative Council must submit a report to the Rector's Management Team once a year, by a date determined by the Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching, detailing:
  - (i) Any difficulties that it has experienced with implementing the Language Policy;
  - (ii) Any mechanisms, strategies or techniques that have improved the implementation of the Policy, or may better advance the goals of the Policy; and
  - (iii) Any suggestions for amendments to the Policy.
- (b) The Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching must prepare an annual report to the Senate and the Council taking into account the responses above. The aims of the report include addressing areas of concern and sharing knowledge within the University.
- (c) Student Committees in faculties will monitor adherence to the Policy in the learning and teaching context, by means of a system of class representatives, and report to the deans and the Student Academic Affairs Council.
- (d) Students who feel negatively affected by the implementation of the Language Policy must deal with the issues as follows:
  - (i) In the case of faculties, complaints must be lodged as prescribed by the relevant faculty's appeals/complaints procedure or in the absence of such a procedure, in sequence with the lecturer, the relevant departmental chairperson or departmental head, and subsequently the dean. If the complaints are not satisfactorily resolved at faculty level, students can refer the complaints to the Academic Planning Committee via the Student Academic Affairs Council.
  - (ii) In the case of support services, complaints must be lodged with the relevant hierarchy of line managers or, in the case of the broader University, with the Rector's Management Team via the Student Representative Council's executive.
  - (iii) In the case of student living environments, complaints must be lodged with the house committee or the relevant residential head. If the complaints are not satisfactorily resolved at university residence or private student ward level, students may refer the complaints to the Senior Director: Student Affairs.
  - (iv) In cases where the use of the mentioned structures is not suitable, complaints may be submitted to the SU ombudsman for settlement in consultation with the relevant structures.

## **9. Policy governance**

The Language Policy is approved by Council with the consent of Senate and after consultation with the Institutional Forum.

The owner of the Policy is the Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching. The Vice-Rector reports on an annual basis on matters concerning the Policy to Council via the Rector's Management Team, the Senate, and the Council's Language Committee.

The Vice-Rector may appoint a Language Planning and Management Project Team and assign tasks to it to perform.

The curator of the Policy is the Senior Director: Learning and Teaching Enhancement, who must support the Vice-Rector.

## **10. Revision**

Language policy-making and implementation are dynamic processes.

The Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching must:

- (a) Facilitate the testing of the Language Policy against changing circumstances through research on the implementation, monitoring and impacts of the Policy;
- (b) Facilitate regular consultation with the broader SU community about matters concerning the Language Policy;
- (c) Publish information gained from such research and consultations; and
- (d) Whenever he or she considers it necessary to do so, initiate and oversee a review of the Language Policy with a view to its possible amendment or replacement.

The Language Policy lapses five years after the date of its implementation. Subject to (d) above, it must be reviewed during its fifth year of operation.

## **11. Disclosure**

The Language Policy is a public document and is published on the University's website.

## **12. Repeal**

The Language Policy repeals and replaces the Language Policy and Language Plan adopted by Council on 22 November 2014.

## **13. Reference documents**

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

Draft Language Policy of the Department of Higher Education and Training (2016)

Higher Education Act 101 of 1997

National Language Policy for Higher Education (2002)

Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000

SU's Policy regarding Students with Special Learning Needs/Disabilities

Use of Official Languages Act 12 of 2012

Draft