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When the Management of a University analyses its core activities so incisively so as to use its resources more effectively to extend its academic excellence with a view to the future, and then uses innovative thinking to make R29 million available for teaching in the classroom and for language development, as has just been done by Stellenbosch University, it is a tangible illustration of a leadership corps that gives shape to our philosophy of hope in a problem-solving manner.

It is even more significant when these innovative decisions take place against the backdrop of the launching of South Africa's second satellite, which incontrovertibly makes the country a leader on the continent in the field of space technology – thanks to the cutting edge expertise developed at Stellenbosch University.

And to crown it all, the African Union announced its plans to launch a Pan-African University in the new year, comprising five centres of world leadership on the continent – and the first centre (for space studies and space technology) is being planned for Stellenbosch University. Associated with this will be a package of bursaries and funding for students from all over Africa who will come here to learn from the best experts on the continent.

This is the world and the realities that the Management of the University therefore needs to consider when they have to take decisions on the academic task of the University – the globalised playing field in which Stellenbosch currently finds itself and in which it increasingly will have to assert itself.

The implications of this for the students that we have to produce for this changing and highly competitive world are obvious. At another level, it places an every increasing responsibility on the University to continuously offer the best expertise to our students in each field of study.

Along with all these hard academic realities and challenges of academic excellence and international competitiveness in the sphere of research, and relevant teaching in a global context, there also are the unique problems that have to be managed effectively. Among these are issues such as accessibility, diversity, student success and the contribution made by SU to offer equal opportunities to people who were previously excluded from the University. These are but a few facets of a broader programme of self-renewal to ensure that SU achieves the objectives that it has envisaged for itself to be a 21st-century university in all respects.

In the midst of all these challenges there is the issue of language, and more specifically the language of instruction. Against the background of the mentioned realities, this poses special challenges to the University, because it is obvious that there is continuous tension between language exclusivity and the University's endeavour to be accessible to all who wish to study here.

In the spheres of diversity and demographic representation, SU is significantly behind the other higher education institutions in the country and this has already been pointed out in reports by government bodies. The danger is that any form of language exclusivity can easily change into more nuanced forms of racial exclusivity. This would be contrary to the University's commitment to an inclusive culture in which all feel welcome.

Even where there is strong support for the inevitability of change, there often is a demand for "transformation in Afrikaans", which means that Stellenbosch essentially becomes a place where only white Afrikaans first-language speakers and coloured first-language Afrikaans speakers (the latter primarily from rural areas) can study. This inevitably leads to exclusion on the basis of demography and poor preparation of students from previously disadvantaged schools in rural regions, which produce only about 800 qualifying school leavers per year for

a market consisting of 21 institutions of higher education. This standpoint negates or undervalues the challenges facing SU in the modern era and reduces the academic task of SU primarily to the retention of Afrikaans.

Our University currently has 75 lecturers in eight faculties who have indicated that they are not proficient in Afrikaans. (This excludes Military Science, where all staff are employed according to the conditions of service of the State, as well as Health Sciences, where a large number of staff is employed in terms of the conditions of service of the Province.) Among the more than 576 full-time lecturers in the other eight faculties, there are many who indicate that their first language is German, French or an African language.

This should be read in the light of the fact that SU is home to many programmes that are offered nowhere else in the country: forestry and wood science, wine biotechnology, as well as military science; and that our Faculty of Theology offers an academic platform for many church communities; and our centres of excellence operate in collaboration with centres at other universities and government bodies. The presence of English-speaking lecturers therefore is an academically justifiable reality in conjunction with our current challenges to be a relevant University in a globalised world.

This brings me back to the R29 million for teaching in the classroom and for language development, to which I referred earlier. No Council or Management will invest this type of money in a language model that will not ensure the future of the University's historical language. The aim of Council is that undergraduate students at SU must be able to study in the language of instruction of their choice (Afrikaans or English), with exposure to the other language, as long as it does not lead to racial segregation in the parallel medium classes. The abovementioned funds will be used to appoint extra staff, translate learning material, create new facilities, support curriculum redesign were required, etc.

It remains our endeavour to promote Afrikaans as an academic language in a multilingual context. In addition, we want to make SU more accessible to undergraduate students who are not first-language Afrikaans speakers. In this manner we want to live out the objective of our Learning and Teaching Policy, namely to offer the best learning experience for our students and to provide the market with multilingual graduates.

The multilingual teaching model of the University is aligned with the points of departure of the National Language Policy for Higher Education and the principles underlying bilingual (and multilingual) education, which have broad international support.

My Management and I have consulted extensively with the University community on the direction that the University should take on the way to 2015. This gave rise to the development of our visionary Overarching Strategic Plan, which will put SU on an even stronger foundation to face the challenges of the future. I have shared this progress with the SU Council over the past few months and also have tested it with our external interest groups here in the Western Cape and in Gauteng, as well as with academic leaders and our alumni beyond the country's borders.

The reaction has been one of excitement and support throughout. Diplomatic representatives of other countries have extended invitations to us on more than one occasion to strengthen and further extend new possibilities for collaboration in the sphere of research and in exchange schemes for our lecturers and students with experts in their countries. They see in Stellenbosch a strategic partner and a knowledge groundbreaker. Only recently, after thoroughly examining the University's systems, its management processes and its vision, the Dutch government entrusted R150 million to SU to manage for use in divergent community development projects. Some of these focus on ensuring that students from previously disadvantaged areas are ready for study at university. What strikes these international leaders about Stellenbosch is its academic and research stature, the innovative way in which

the University tackles academic and other challenges, and the farsightedness of its Management and Council.

The choice for SU about the future thus is very clear: you can enter the 21st century with fears of a tortured language experience, or with the self-confidence of an official language protected by the Constitution. We invite all future-oriented people to accompany SU on the path of a shared vision in the modern era where we pay intense attention to high-level knowledge extraction, while at the same time work on transformation in justice so that Stellenbosch will be as accessible to the daughter of the farm worker as it is to the son of the farmer, as I have said previously. Our endeavour is a Stellenbosch that stands for the idea of hope in justice.

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