

Creating a just and inclusive society for all

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities is celebrated annually on 3 December.

This year's theme, "Achieving 17 goals for the future we want", highlights the role the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations can play in building a more inclusive and equitable world for persons with disabilities.

The theme is a clear indication of a move towards creating environments that are more inclusive, including physical access, access to



Marcia Lyner-Cleophas. Photo: Stefan Els

THE POLICY WILL DEMONSTRATE HOW WE RESPOND TO DIVERSE NEEDS AND ABILITIES, HOW WE TEACH, LEARN AND WELCOME ALL PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF ABILITY.

information and employment, communicating inclusively or developing policies that promote inclusivity.

Government's White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015) aims to create a free and just society inclusive of persons with disabilities. It states that "persons with disabilities must be accorded equitable social rights as all other people in society, because the provision of these rights enables full participation in the life of society".

"It includes the right to education, health care, housing, transport, sport, recreation, culture, social development services, food security and family life."

Work done in higher education, particularly at Stellenbosch University (SU), resonates with the White Paper, especially in its facilitation of equitable contexts for disabled persons.

The fortunes of Stellenbosch University (SU) are intertwined with the growth and development of the town, impacted as it is by its

development. The planning and layout of the town and its accessibility will have an impact on visitors, residents and students. For example, a staff member or student using a wheelchair needs barrier-free access to town. Pavements, shops, restaurants and places of leisure must be physically accessible. In recognition of the fusion between town and university, SU has strengthened its ties with the Stellenbosch Municipality.

This year, the municipality approved a universal access framework as a guide in becoming more accessible to the people of Stellenbosch. This marked a big departure from how disability was reflected in its built environment. There is the realisation that the environment is often the disabling factor preventing people with disabilities from equitable participation.

This shift, among other debates, has given the university the necessary impetus also to pursue a policy that considers all its staff, students and visitors to



Tactile paving along Victoria Street helps blind students in particular to find their way along busy sidewalks and corners. Tactile paving aids direction and knowing where to cross streets.

campus. The current Policy on Students with Disabilities (Special Needs) guides the institution's support to students linked to the Disability Unit, but it is time to move towards a policy resonating with all staff, students and visitors. Sanctioned by the Rector's Management Team, a Universal Access Policy is currently

being developed for SU. "We truly believe the policy will demonstrate how we as a university respond to diverse needs and abilities, how we teach, learn and welcome all people regardless of ability," said Lyner-Cleophas.

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