

DA asks SU to widen consultation pool in language policy debate

The Democratic Alliance (DA) has added its voice to the language debate at Stellenbosch University (SU) regarding the use of Afrikaans as its official language of preference.

Belinda Bozzoli, shadow minister of higher education and training, said in a statement yesterday that the DA strongly recommends SU uses the next stage of its consultative process to significantly widen the pool of those consulted, to include all students, student organisations, academics and alumni, and to ensure all constitutional principles are duly

adhered to.

“While the DA respects the autonomy of Stellenbosch University to make decisions affecting its language policy,” Bozzoli said, “we have some concerns about the proposed language policy, as outlined in the Vice-Chancellor’s recent statement.

“The change would see English made the primary language of instruction, and this appears to be in contravention of the constitutional principle that every person has the right to be taught in the official language of their choice, where reasonably practicable. It cannot be argued that teaching in Afrikaans is not ‘reasonably practicable’.

The constitutional rights of Afrikaans speaking students, therefore, need to be upheld while those of other students of different backgrounds are also met. That is what inclusiveness means in a multicultural society.

“Instead of jettisoning Afrikaans as the primary language of instruction, ways should be found to ensure that both the principles of inclusivity and language rights are upheld.

“Perhaps as a reflection of the haste with which this proposal has been put forward, it is also of concern to us that the consultation process undertaken thus far by the SU appears to have been quite narrow, and may not have taken all views into consideration. We note, for example, that the South African Students Congress was consulted, but the Democratic Alliance Student Organisation was not. Students and academic staff with a wide variety of opinions surely need to be consulted, including many whose views may not accord with those of any political party or movement.”