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| **Position**  | Chairperson: Societies Council  |
| **Subject:** | *Third term:: March-July 2020* |
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# Constitutional Responsibilities

*Student Constitution*

S88(1) states that the duties of the Societies Council is to represent the interests of all recognised student societies and that of student societies of the university of Stellenbosch, in that capacity on the SRC and all other structures.

*Societies Council*

S15(1) states that the chairperson of the Societies Council is responsible for representing the interests of all societies and the Societies Council on the SRC.

# Portfolio Overview

1. *The SRC*

The Societies Council has a mandate to be the representative body of the all student societies, it contributes to the general student experience through supporting student societies and encouraging students to participate in activities which enhance the student experience.

1. *Stellenbosch University*

The societies Council has a dual mandate, the first being that of representing student societies on campus, the second being a structure for consultation between student leaders. This in turn ensures that student societies become an enriching platform for all students

1. *South Africa*

Student organisations have always been a pillar of south African higher institution of learning. From our pre-democratic era, student organisations were the main driving force in the struggle against the injustices of the time, it is from within student organisations that formidable leaders such as Steve Biko were born. In that regard even in post democracy South Africa student organisation continue to be forces of positive change, whether one agrees with their tactics or not, the role and influence of student societies in the change we have witnessed in the higher education sphere can never be down played.

# Committees / Task Teams

## Institutional

Anti-GBV working group: Procedures and Processes

The mandate of the committee is:

* Review polices which directly impact the fight against Gender based violence.
* Identify shortcomings with the institutional policies for dealing with such incidences.
* Produce recommendation to the Policy holder

## Other committees

Executive Committee: Student Representative Council

The mandate of the SRC executive is:

* Set the agenda for SRC meetings
* Manage the day-to-day matters of the SRC
* Fulfil any duty the SRC delegates to it
* Fulfil any other function that the Constitution assigned to it
* Compile the SRC budget
* Make important decisions in urgent cases
* Allocation of SRC portfolios
* Appoint the election convenors.

# Budget Overview

Despite the unbelievable difficulty with ensuring that the SRC budget was finalised, the Societies Council has still not received all its allocated subsidy, this has resulted in an inability to properly assess our financial situation. This matter is reflected on in my Chairperson’s report bellow.

# Term Overview

As chairperson of the Societies Council I have a dual mandate of representing societies and also managing the affairs of the societies Council as such my term overview would often contain two reports, which was my own personal reflection as well as the State of Council report. However, due to the financial report being outstanding the State of Council report has still not been compiled. Therefore this term report will just contain my personal reflection, an updated report may be produced in due course.

## Chairperson’s report

**Prologue**

When the initiators of the expression: ‘when life gives you lemons, make lemonade’ first created the expression surely the Societies Council was well within their considerations. The ‘lemonic’ nature of the Societies Council finds its greatest expression in my previous term report in which I indicate that the Societies Council is faced with challenges which are both behavioural and systemic. These challenges have now been further highlighted by the struggle of the Societies Council as a result of the onset of mitigation efforts aimed at attending to the matters relating to the Corona Virus.

**Background**

My first term as the Chairperson of this structure was mostly utilised for trouble shooting, in hindsight it appears that what I perceived as the problems of the Council whilst I was an ordinary member were in fact far more devasting in reality than I anticipated, and despite having prepared myself to engage in what I perceived as a dysfunctional structure I was completely shocked to discover that the Societies Council was a complete lemon. It was not just dysfunctional it was incredibly self-destructive.

Following this assessment, the Second term was utilized as a mitigation to the destructive nature of the Societies Council, in the result a variety of different structures were established within the Societies Council to help deal with the dysfunction. These efforts are well documented in the previous state of council report and my term report. However, during these cause of these efforts we were suddenly challenged by the rippling effects of the arrival of the Corona Virus on our shores, this then resulted in the Executive committee having to completely readjust our strategy from a fast all encompassing Societies Council renewal and restructuring and we have had to rather seek to stabilise the existing structure and slightly restructure what we could given our new restraints.

**Projects**

My second term began in January of 2020, below is a reflection on some of the activities which I have supervised in an effort to stabilize and professionalize the Council:

1. **Societies Council long term strategy.**

During the second term, in response to the lockdown measures in response to the threat of the Corona virus the societies Council executive committee resolved to suspend all our in-contact activities until a time when we would assess the feasibility of such activities. We then resolved to adopt the long-term strategic framework as a plan on how the Council would continue to function. This plan in essence divided the operations of the Council into four dimensions. The first two were: the administrative work of the Council and the Administrative work of the Societies, the last two were the activities of the Council and the Activities of the Societies. This document sort to give clear direction on how the Council and its constituents were to continue to function in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Societies Council.

After this document was distributed the Societies Council executive sought to redesign our year plan in response to the needs of the time, in this regard we postponed all planning of in-contact activities to August which is when the Council would re-assess the feasibility of continuing with its programmes.

1. **Handbook Task team**

As part of the Assessment we had done in the first term, and the assessment of the general Societies Council task team. We determined that a Societies Council handbook was necessary for the purpose of coherently compiling all the policies of the Societies Council. This Document would seek to make the task of understanding the Societies Council more efficacious for Society leaders and even members of the Council.

In pursuit of this objective the Societies Council Handbook Task team was established. The purpose of which would be to collate all the policies which govern the Societies Council and to create a coherent document which would be the official policy document of the Societies Council. The Task team was officially established by the executive committee in terms of section 4 of the Societies Council Code of Conduct, the members of the Task team were recruited by the Executive committee. The task team has very strict deadlines and the report of the Task team will be tabled on the 1st of August 2020 with the final handbook being submitted by the 2nd of August 2020. The handbook will be tabled to the Societies Council on 15 August 2020.

1. **Societies Constitutional Appraisal Task Team**

As part of the ongoing project of making the Societies Council more efficient, we sought clarity on a matter that had been previously dealt with arbitrarily by the Societies Council. The matter pertained to whether the Chapter 9 Provisions of the Student Constitution necessitated that individual Society constitutions be approved by the Student Court. An assessment by the Societies Council had determined that not only was the reliance on student Court unreasonable it also created a heavy backlog for the Societies Council in terms of approving new constitutions and new amendments. This resulted in the 2018 decision to no longer make ratification by the Student Court a necessity for registration of a Society Constitution. However, despite this there continued to exist challenges with how the Societies Council approved constitutions.

In the result a broad consultation process with the executive committee of the Student Court began, after this the members of that executive agreed that a preliminary assessment of the Provisions in the Student Constitution indicate that ratification by the Student Court is not necessary in this regard and that, that duty was duly delegated to the Societies Council. Following this discussion, the Executive committee determined that a permanent task team should be appointed for the purpose of reviewing, assisting in drafting and ratifying of Society Constitutions. In this regard a process to establish the task team and to ensure it gets the necessary training and a competent membership began. This was then delegated to the Vice-Chairperson to conclude the process.

1. **Evaluation Panel**

I had grown increasingly dissatisfied with the arbitrary nature of assessment of the performance of the executive committee, in this regard a new constitution amendment was introduced which would ensure that a proper process is developed for the assessment of the performance of the Executive committee. In this regard an evaluation panel must now be established to evaluate the performance of the executive committee and to produce a report which would be used by the Chairperson in determining the Honoraria of the executive committee members. This process will be concluded by the 14th of September 2020.

**Societies Council governance**

As the leader of the Societies Council I am responsible for ensuring that the Council functions efficaciously and productively, this duty entails amongst other things the task of delegating duties to the Societies Council executive committee, ensuring compliance with the policies of the Societies Council and finally ensuring that the Societies Council fulfils its constitutional mandate. The following are the matters I dealt with in the course of terms in this regard:

1. **Societies Council levies decision**

I cannot begin to express my frustration with this matter, but in essence just to give a brief background:

The ICBC, which is the institutional structure established to deal with the university’s adjustment to COVID-19, determined that certain levies which are ordinarily deducted by the university would no longer be deducted in an effort to offer ‘financial relief’ to students. In the course of this decision Society levies were reversed pending a determination to re-allocate the levies. The Societies Council was never consulted on any point on this decision and in the result the ICBC used flawed reasoning to make its decision.

In light of the clear breach of policy and professional decency, the Societies Council vehemently rejected the decision and called for it to be reversed. In a result the following was done by the Council in an effort to have the decision reversed.

1. A collaboration with the Tygerberg Societies Council was sought in order to fight this injustice together as both structures would be negatively impacted by this matter.
2. We sought the assistance of the SRC on the matter.
3. We consulted student governance on a resolution to the matter, of which it was recommended that we should seek the support of the Senior director of student affairs.
4. We wrote a very strongly worded letter to Student Affairs asking them for assistance.
5. The Senior director indicated that she would have an engagement with the vice rector of learning and teaching on the matter.
6. After this engagement we received a response which indicated that either the letter by the Councils was either not read or not comprehended because the response was completely non-sensical.
7. After this we further sought to engage with the Vice rector of teaching and learning, this was done through proxy messages communicated during another meeting with him.
8. The response to this further illuminated that the initial letter was not comprehended.
9. The matter has now been tabled as a matter to be discussed at the upcoming meeting with the Rector’s management team. Both the Societies Council and the Tygerberg Societies Council will be participating in the discussion.

We hope that this decision will be reversed, and the matter settled in a manner that will ensure that all parties are fairly treated.

1. **Student Governance relationship**

Another matter which was related to the functioning of the Societies Council was the issue of engaging Student Governance on the inefficient relationship between the two structures.

In this regard the societies Council had noted that the role of Student Governance was not adequately defined, meaning that there was often unnecessary tension and difficult in terms of how societies and the Societies Council executive understood and interacted with Student Governance. This was an assessment done after numerous complaints by societies were lodged with me in this regard, further the executive committee had equally sought to clarify the role of student governance. Following this the Societies Council brought the matter up to the SRC of which several members equally indicated that they too had queries about the functions of Student Governance. In this regard the SRC committed to writing a supporting document in favour of the request by the Societies Council.

In this regard the Societies Council wrote a letter to Student Affairs requesting:

1. The Policy which establishes and empowers student governance.
2. Clarity on the function and authority of Student governance.
3. The jurisdiction of Student governance.
4. Further engagement after the above are provided.

The dean of Students responded to our letter by indicating that indeed a policy which articulated the function, role and power of Student Governance did not exist and that the office of Student Governance did not have a policy which established it. Rather the letter focused on addressing the concerns around the ‘comportment’ by Student Governance. In this regard an urgent meeting was set with the SRC to discuss such matters. The Societies Council indicated that we requested another engagement to focus on the concerns of the Societies Council.

This engagement with Student Affairs was characterised with conspiracy theories and long-winded clarifications of how Student Governance is important. Ultimately the environment was highly adversarial and defensive resulting in an unproductive meeting.

When the Societies Council sought a date to have our own engagement, Student Affairs indicated that they were unwilling to have the engagement unless an agenda was sent for the matters to be discussed. The Societies Council sent a detailed agenda and further proposed dates. After this Student Affairs requested that the Agenda be further articulated with exactly all the input that the Societies Council would give. The Societies Council executive determined that this was tantamount to a heads of argument presented before a hearing and as the purpose of the engagement was not to argue but to construct a more effective relationship we determined that Student affairs was not only unwilling to have a productive engagement but that they were not ready for a full assessment of their existing structures. In this regard the request was aborted, and the Executive committee will seek an alternative platform to ensure that its concerns are addressed.

1. **SRC Subsidy**

The Societies Council received an annual subsidy from the SRC in order to fulfils its constitutional mandate. Due to the inefficiency of the SRC this subsidy was approved in May of this year, unfortunately despite this an error was done when the subsidy was being processed and thus the Council is unable to re-assess its financial situation without the full subsidy being transferred into its cost centre. This matter is an ongoing issue and I will ensure that the financial resources rightfully allocated to the Societies Council are accurately delivered to the Council.

1. **Elections**

The Societies Council will be having its executive elections on the 27th of July 2020. As Chairperson of the Societies Council I am responsible for facilitating the elections for the executive committee alongside the election convenors who facilitate the Chairperson elections. Since this an ongoing process it will only be reported on in the next report.

**Remarks**

The previous term has allowed me to develop a great appreciation of all the stakeholders of the Council, and has allowed me to note the following:

1. The Societies Council still has a long was to go before it can become a self sufficient and effective structure.
2. The Societies Council is still largely misunderstood and needs to facilitate a process of introducing itself to the university.
3. Reading comprehension is not only a problem within the Council but is a critically scarce skill throughout the university.

**Recommendations**

In the result the following will be considered by myself in the carrying out of my duties in the future:

1. The Communications to external university stakeholders need to be re-evaluated.
2. The matter of the Societies Council financial autonomy must be accelerated.
3. Greater relations need to be established with student parliament.

**Conclusion**

As my term as Chairperson comes to an end, I must reflect on my experience and how I can better equip the Council and my successor for a new tenure of leadership. It must never be forgotten that as the Custodian of some of our most fundamental rights as students, the primary responsibility is to ensure the long-term survival of the Council. In our year plan, this third term has been titled: “final touch-ups”, and indeed after a year long process of touch introspection, difficult assessment, and hard work we are nearing the end of our leg of the journey. However, the journey continues, we may not be at the helm, but the ship must continue sailing, it is this reality which motivates my actions and it is that very reality that will sustain our efforts to create a prosperous and sustainable Societies Council.

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# Plans for Next Academic Term

In the following term I aim to:

* Ensure that the renewed Societies Council Code of conduct is adopted
* Ensure that the ‘how to society’ handbook is completed and submitted to the Council
* Ensure that the Societies Council has free, fair and credible elections.
* Ensure that the Societies Council has an effective handover.

# Important Contacts

**A full list of all important contacts shall be given in both my handover file and the final report as chairperson.**

Submitted by

Yanga Keva

Chairperson: Societies Council

Dated: 20-07-2020