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First Term Report of the Deputy Speaker Internal

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# Introduction

This mid-year report sets out the past, present, and projected workings of the Deputy Speaker Internal and Accountability Committee Chairperson of Student Parliament 2021. It is clear from this report that Student Parliament (“SP”) faces numerous challenges, particularly relating to governing policies and general mandates. With hard work and perseverance, I am certain that SP will grow to become a more sustainable and better recognised utilised structure at Stellenbosch University.

# Fourth Term of 2020 - Appointment and Vision

After my interview on 27 October, I received an email that I was elected as Accountability Chairperson that evening. Due to the selection happening so close to the final exam season, the Student Parliament Year-Planning meeting occurred on 25 November. Our Constitutional duties were reiterated. Around this time, I attempted find the hand-over report of the previous Deputy Speaker in order to familiarise myself better with the position, but these were not available. It was clear that the Constitution was going to be the team’s main point of guidance as to the fulfilment of duties, but it was also clear that the SP Constitution had numerous flaws. Between the first and second term, all members of the SP Committee were required to comment on the 2013 Constitution so that a review process could begin in January.

# First Term of 2021

## 3.1. General Overview

The SP Committee received two different days of training from Student Governance this term. Although these sessions were helpful in terms of solidifying the need for Student Parliament, I personally found that the actual role of Student Parliament was not answered. Please find more on this under section 4.1 of this report.

We also had our first sitting in which I presented the house rules and announced the full Accountability Committee. I found this sitting to be relatively successful and suspect that the Speaker’s report will offer more insight.

## 3.2. Constitutional Review

At the end of last year, the SP Committee focused on highlighting the issues in the 2013 SP Constitution. Although we had planned to begin the official process in accordance with J2 this term, we soon found out that the Student Representatives’ Council (SSRC”) was also undergoing constitutional review for the SU Student Constitution. Because the SP Constitution has to be in line with the Student Constitution, the SP Committee decided to pause our own review process until the Student Constitution was finalised. It would be vain to proceed with amendments that may be irrelevant. Upon review, the SRC voted in the SRC’s Constitutional Task Team’s amendment, which inherently restructures Student Parliament to such a degree that a complete recreation of our Constitution is necessary. The SP Steering Committee is currently working with the relevant stakeholders to formulate a new review process that will both be true to Student Parliament’s value of unbiased, whilst working with the SRC to generate this reimagine parliament.

## 3.3. Co-curriculum Assistance

Last year’s SP Committee attempted to apply for co-curriculum recognition from the Centre for Student Leadership. This application was unfortunately unsuccessful. The Steering Committee of this year is working to re-apply for this recognition.

## 3.4. Appointment of Accountability Committee

On 18 March 2021, applications for the fifth member of the Accountability Committee were opened, in accordance with Addendum F of the 2013 SP Constitution. Applications were closed on 25 March at 23h59. Unfortunately, I only received two applications, both of which were a day late. Considering the general lack of interest to join, yet the high calibre of one of the applicants, the Steering Committee agreed to accept Shaniae Maharaj as the final member of the committee.

# Challenges

## 4.1. Constitutional Ambiguity

A huge issue that I currently face is the ambiguity that exists in the SP Constitution. I had hoped that by now the Constitution would have been in its final stages of approval, but due to the circumstances mentioned in 3.2., it is unlikely that our term’s Committee will function under the new Constitution. What this means is that I find (and will probably continue to find until the new Constitution is adopted) myself constantly unsure of how to advise my fellow student leaders on everyday issues. I am supposed to advise on the best ways to achieve discourse and advocate for transparency and accountability, but I do not know to what extent I can do this outside of formal SP sittings. It seems unpractical that I cannot advise leaders on how to engage with Parliament in an everyday setting because I am at risk of being considered bias in future engagements.

The jurisdiction between the three governing student structures (SRC, SP, and Student Court (“SC”)) is also uncertain. As it currently stands, the SRC has internal disciplinary committees/ mechanisms, and the Court has the duty of interpreting the Constitution in cases of dispute. From my personal view, Student Parliament currently has the powers of recommending disciplinary proceedings for unfit SRC members that need to be approved by Court, and to facilitate dispute resolutions between student leadership structures even though the SRC has internal processes for that. If Stellenbosch University’s governing student leadership structures were an exact microcosm of the national government, the Student Parliament would play a lot more an active role in the approval of student-related policies, but this is again a role shared between the SRC and the Court.

Essentially, my main concern is that as the SRC, SP, SC and Student Constitutions stand, Student Parliament can easily become isolated and/ or redundant. The harsh structuring of the 2021 academic calendar means that SP will have to make great sacrifice to create a Constitution of high quality that can absolve us of this dilemma. It is my hope that we will be able to achieve this goal

## 4.2. Proactivity of the Accountability Committee

The Accountability Committee (“AC”) holds the important function of holding student leaders accountable, in accordance with addendum F. We have also been tasked with investigating said structures for issues surrounding transparency. The AC cannot go “looking for problems” to follow up on, so to speak. That remains the duty of the Chairperson of the SRC or the relevant structure. This subsequently means that the AC remains reactive more than proactive in nature. At this stage, I am unsure how to prevent stagnancy in such an important structure while we wait for issues to be reported. I plan to work with the Steering Committee and the full AC to brainstorm whether this is a challenge that we should combat, and, if so, how to best go about achieving that.

# Goals

The Constitutional Review, Co-curicuculum application, and AC purpose restructuring are all ongoing tasks that I aim to achieve in the second half of our term.

# Conclusion

The role of Accountability Chair has been quite silent this year, as there have been no formal complaints for investigation laid with Student Parliament. The Steering Committee, however, has been very busy with applications, reviews, and inquiries that relate to the restructuring of SP. The subjective lack of a functioning SP over the past few years is probably due to the lack of clear mandate, incentive, and jurisdiction of SP. It is imperative that these aspects be solidified in order to ensure the sustainability of Student Parliament.