



Deloitte report on language in SU residences

14 June 2021

Dear member of the SU community

You are probably aware of the allegations made against Stellenbosch University (SU) with regard to the implementation of our [Language Policy](#) in the residence environment during the welcoming period in March this year.

We conducted an internal investigation, and – given the seriousness with which we took the allegations – we also referred the matter to Deloitte for an independent forensic investigation. We have now received their report, and I would like to share the main findings and recommendations with you.

Background

To summarise, it was alleged that, during the welcoming period at the start of academic year 2021, student leaders and administrators at some SU residences reportedly prohibited students from conversing in Afrikaans, including informally.

As soon as the University became aware of these allegations, we immediately launched an internal investigation and our Centre for Student Communities started engaging with student leaders and students in residences to work towards a common understanding of the Language Policy. And as far as we were concerned, the issues were resolved satisfactorily.

The allegations were reported in the media and complaints were subsequently made by the Freedom Front Plus and the Democratic Alliance to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC). The Commission launched an inquiry and gave notice to SU Rector and Vice-Chancellor Prof Wim de Villiers to appear at a hearing in Stellenbosch on 10 May.

The full statement made at the hearing by Prof De Villiers is [available here](#), and [click here](#) for a summary news report on the University's website.

Subsequently, the SAHRC scheduled a second round of hearings for 14 and 15 June, again to be held at STIAS. SU has submitted a follow-up report to the SAHRC, and also made the Deloitte report available to the Commission.

Findings in the Deloitte report

Deloitte looked into complaints relating to the Minerva, Irene and Francie van Zijl residences and the Capri private student organisation (PSO), and made the following conclusions:

Minerva:

- There was no SU management instruction to prohibit the use of Afrikaans.
- Residence leaders did not issue a prohibition on the use of Afrikaans.
- Several house committee members had experienced feelings of exclusion due to the use of language when they had been first years at Minerva, and therefore wanted to make the 2021 welcoming period more inclusive.
- Most newcomers bought into the idea of using English during the welcoming period for the sake of inclusivity, but the extent of the implementation was initially not clearly defined and communicated, which resulted in speculation that the Welcoming Programme was being used to take away Afrikaans language rights.

Irene:

- Deloitte did not identify evidence to support the alleged prohibition on the use of Afrikaans at Irene during the welcoming period.

Huis Francie van Zijl:

- According to Deloitte, it appears that an official complaint was lodged with the SU Equality Unit (EqU) in respect of an alleged prohibition on the use of Afrikaans at Huis Francie van Zijl on the Tygerberg campus dating back to a period between 2018 and 2020. The EqU had recommended an anonymous survey, which residence leaders had agreed to, but it seems a lack of communication might have led the student who complained to believe that attempts at resolving the matter had been futile.

Capri:

- Deloitte did not identify evidence to support the alleged prohibition on the use of Afrikaans by the Capri private student organisation (PSO) during the amaMaties Cluster day on 6 March 2021.

Recommendations in the Deloitte report

The Deloitte report includes recommendations in terms of Minerva and Huis Francie, but they argue that these warrant wider application at SU.

The first of these is that residence leaders should be educated on the SU Language Policy and its implementation in residences, as well as on complaint procedures regarding the use of language.

Deloitte also recommended that, for future welcoming periods, residence leaders should:

- Specify that the use of a common language is a request for inclusivity and not a command with the intent to subjugate the rights of any other language.
- Define clearly which portions of the Welcoming Programme would be subject to the use of a common language.
- Allow students who feel uncomfortable about speaking English to have their home language translated for the sake of inclusivity.
- Celebrate the use of a common language in building new friendships.
- Inform newcomers of the processes for dealing with complaints and the relevant escalation procedures.

SU management response to the Deloitte report

The Rectorate has noted the findings and recommendations of the Deloitte report, and the following will be undertaken to address these:

- Training programmes will be developed to explain exactly what the University means by multilingualism, and how it should be embodied and practised. This will include sensitivity training with regard to exclusionary language and behaviour.
- There will be more training with regard to the implementation of the Language Policy in student communities – not only during the welcoming period, but also in the course of the first and consecutive years.
- The information about the Language Policy in SU's institutional welcoming booklet will be expanded to provide a better explanation of the process for complaints.
- Biannual language implementation reporting will be instituted in student communities from the second semester of 2021. These reports will follow the same reporting process as that currently undertaken in respect of faculty reports.

Finally, I give you the assurance that we remain committed to inclusive multilingualism at SU, taking into account the diversity of our society and the wealth inherent in that diversity. As the VC said in his submission to the SAHRC on 10 May, we believe that our approach to language provides our students with more choices, broader access and a better future.

Our student body has demonstrated an ability to resolve difficulties around language, with assistance from our Centre for Student Communities. We want to do even better in managing the complexities and possibilities of multilingualism. SU is a place of learning – we are therefore using this episode to improve the experience that we provide to our students.

Best regards,

Prof Deresh Ramjugernath
Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Learning and Teaching