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Second Term Report of the Deputy Speaker External

Table of Contents

[1. Introduction 3](#_Toc80355162)

[2. Second Term Overview 3](#_Toc80355163)

[3. Projects 3](#_Toc80355164)

[3.1. Second Sitting 3](#_Toc80355165)

[3.2. Policy Forum 2021 3](#_Toc80355166)

[3.3. Constitutional Review Committee 3](#_Toc80355167)

[3.4. Accountability Committee Report 3](#_Toc80355168)

[4. Challenges 3](#_Toc80355169)

[4.1. Communication breakdown amongst Student Parliament members 3](#_Toc80355170)

[4.2. Structural and Attitudinal issues with accountability 4](#_Toc80355171)

[5. Goals for the third term: 5](#_Toc80355172)

[6. Conclusion 5](#_Toc80355173)

# Introduction

This is the second term report of the Deputy Speaker of Student Parliament External written in accordance with the Student Constitution and Student Parliament Constitution of the University of Stellenbosch. This report will speak of the goals achieved by Student Parliament second term, seeking to highlight my specific role in these projects. I also aim to point the public to a series of challenges I have faced in seeking to complete these projects and achieve these goals.

# Second Term Overview

The second term has been intensely rewarding but also incredibly challenging. Multiple projects have been running in tandem, namely the Policy Forum, Constitutional Review process, planning and hosting of the Second Sitting, fulfilling the mandate of the Accountability Committee, and the day to day running of Student Parliament. Part of this day to day running includes the taking of minutes, scheduling of meetings, and attending meetings and events hosted by the SRC and Student Governance.

# Projects

# Second Sitting

Our Second Sitting was held successfully and I am proud to have been a part of this process.

## Policy Forum 2021

The policy Forum is set to adjourn on the 21st of August 2021 and I am happy to report that organisation of this has been relatively smooth. This Forum has been tasked with the role of aiding constitutional compliance among leadership structures on campus, given that no applications had been received for the task team envisioned to serve this function. See “Challenges” for a more indepth discussion of this.

## Constitutional Review Committee

The Constitutional Review Committee was successfully elected and I look forward to collaborating with them on our two new constitutions during this coming term.

## Accountability Committee Report

During the second term, in my capacity as a member of the Accountability Committee, I aided the chairperson in the drafting and delivery of the Accountability Report sent to the SRC.

# Challenges

# Communication breakdown amongst Student Parliament members

During the second portion of the term, our Speaker contracted Covid-19, our Deputy Speaker Internal’s phone was stolen, and my own phone broke. While our Speaker is currently recovering and Ms Mngadi has sorted out her phone, at the time of drafting this report I am yet without a device because of administrative issues with my network provider. In conjunction with the sudden change in exam schedule, this series of obstacles has strained communication immeasurably as the entire Steering Committee was de facto unreachable for quite some time. Furthermore, our Communications Officer is currently sick with Covid-19, prolonging this stagnation. While we are able to communicate somewhat effectively via email, student leadership is incredibly fast-paced and requires a lot of telephonic updates. I have personally found this term to be incredibly difficult, isolating, and stressful as a result.

Furthermore, I am experiencing a gap of communication between the Steering Committee and the broader Student Parliament Committee and Tygerberg SP. This is because the Steering Committee is stretched incredibly thinly as we are required to sit on each member’s own committees. I, for example, head the Policy Unit but also serve on the Constitutional Review Committee and Ms Mngadi’s Accountability Forum. There is also a higher onus on members of the Steering Committee to hold campus leaders to account, as such us three find ourselves almost exclusively rotating between SRC meetings,- forums, and – elections. Because of the Constitution expressly and implicitly requires a higher participation from the Steering Comm, it has become easier to take on the obligations of Student Parliament wholly. Exacerbated by the Steering Comm’s individual communication barriers mentioned above, this has resulted in the Steering Committee operating almost in parallel to the broader Committee. This issue is not insurmountable, however, and I believe that our return to campus and “normal” communication will allow for a regain of this cohesion.

## Structural and Attitudinal issues with accountability

I am deeply disappointed in the failure of the Policy Forum thus far. It has been twice postponed, once during my planning phase due to the sudden change in the exam schedule and once officially, due to delegates’ inability to attend on the 14th of August because of these same academic disruptions. While this is understandable, I am more frustrated in leaders’ lack of cooperation with this endeavour. Reports submitted in preparation for the Forum were often late or sparse. This Forum is meant to be a space for leaders to update others and air their shared obstacles so as to promote accountability and cooperation, but leaders seem to view it as either an antagonistic exercise or a waste of time.

Unfortunately, our current Constitution does not empower me to force participation or meaningful engagement and, as will be seen in the Deputy Speaker’s report, other avenues of ensuring accountability are also deeply inaccessible due to the Constitutions lack of provision therefore or procedural barriers thereto.

My reservations with the Forum itself, as mentioned in my term one report, remain. The Constitution’s guidance on how to conduct the Forum, in combination with its historical lack of success, make it difficult to carve out a procedure that is meaningful. This is exacerbated by the communications issues highlighted above.

# Goals for the third term:

My goals for the third term include successfully hosting the first Policy Forum session on the 21st of August and to draft a report on the state of policy matters and constitutional compliance that leaders and students will find meaningful. This report will be presented at our upcoming extraordinary sitting. Thereafter, I intend to host a follow-up informal meeting after the current delegates are replaced by the newly elected representatives to allow for institutional continuity. I have also, along with the Speaker and Deputy Speaker Internal, committed myself to completing the co-curricular application and aiding the Constitutional Review Committee with drafting the two new SP Constitutions required to be in compliance with the soon to be promulgated 2021 Student Constitution.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, I am proud of the progress Student Parliament has made this term and somewhat disappointed in the loss of momentum during the second half thereof. Navigating illness, academic disruptions, personal difficulties and communication obstructions has taught me a lot but I am grateful that these barriers have somewhat been removed and that SP can start term three with more ease.