

POLICY REPORT OF STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY'S
STUDENT PARLIAMENT COMMITTEE
2020 / 2021

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is two-fold. Primarily it aims to provide the student body with insight into the health of student leadership structures' policy frameworks as well as their compliance with the 2021 Student Constitution, as evidenced from the Policy Forum held on 21 August 2021. Secondly, it aims to provide similar insight into Student Parliament's own policy health and constitutional review process.

POLICY UNIT 2021

After delays due to the change in the academic calendar brought on by renewed lockdown and further knock-on effects on the delegates' academic schedules, the Policy Forum was held on 21 August 2021, on Microsoft Teams. It was attended by all constitutionally mandated structures, apart from the Military Academy.

While the broad aims of this Forum are to communicate with the various student leadership structures on policy updates, and as such ensure that policy formulation happens as efficiently as possible, the Forum in 2021's specific focus was to move beyond the structure of a mere update platform so as to encourage collaborative and cooperative governance via the communication of shared challenges that hinder efficiency. This is because much of the frustrations highlighted by previous Student Parliament policy officers still exist among the student leadership structures we engage with. As such, this portion of the report will focus on these challenges and the recommendations drawn therefrom. In order to gain insight into the individual update of

each Forum delegate, one may consult the reports submitted in preparation for our meeting, which will be available on our website from the time of this report's publishing.

BROAD POLICY CHALLENGES

Overwhelmingly, structures struggle with almost all facets of policy formation - all the way from the actual drafting, to the procedures needed for the promulgation and ratification thereof. This is because leadership structures inherit incredibly limiting and outdated constitutions and are then expected to amend them while simultaneously navigating the often arbitrary limits placed on them by the constitutions currently in force. Structures who comprise smaller teams than the Student Representative Council, for example the Academic Affairs Council and Prim Committee, especially struggle with the balancing of these two conflicting duties due to limited capacity. I have noted that among the delegates, few were solely Policy Officers. Many representatives either jointly held the position of Secretary General and Policy Officer, or did not hold the position at all and had merely taken substantial enough initiative regarding policy matters for them to speak on behalf of the structure.

This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that leadership structures are expected to draft policy that is legally sound without the resources and skill set that is standardly required to perform such a task. Structures rarely have an abundance of law students familiar with policy drafting, and even when this is the case, the standard required is often beyond the scope of an undergraduate law student's studies. When structures inherit constitutions and policies that are manifestly defunct, the task of revamping can be overwhelming.

The impact of the above is that structures are prevented from serving their constituents in dynamic and forward-thinking ways. In their attempts to draft internal policies that enable them to fulfil their constitutional mandates, structures like the Prim Committee in particular have been tasked with such a volume of policy work simply to lay the procedural foundation for these new policies, that the envisioned better fulfilment and

expansion of their mandate has been delayed. In light of the structural hindrances highlighted above, the conundrum faced by the Prim Committee is by no means a unique challenge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The solutions to the above issues cannot be the casualisation of policies or the legitimisation of ad hoc leadership. Rather, student leadership structures need substantial more support when drafting policy. Primarily, this must come from Student Governance in that policy making must become a specific focus point when leaders undergo their training, and more assistance must be granted by the office of the Registrar. Furthermore, leadership structures should be financially equipped to appoint members to their team with the appropriate skill set who can wholly commit themselves to policy matters.

CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE

In light of the SRC delegate's update on the status of the 2021 Student Constitution, which has been approved by the student body and is likely to be approved by council by the end of this year or early next, it is of course imperative that student leadership bodies are already geared towards compliance.

While much of the challenges that apply to policy formulation apply to constitutional review, I am pleased that all reports and presentations point to all structures complying with the new Student Constitution either before or by its approval by Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the time of the Policy Forum, most delegates were preparing for their handover processes. As such, in order to ensure that constitutional compliance is in fact ensured it is imperative that a follow-up Forum be held with the incoming representatives who will take responsibility for these processes. It is my recommendation that this happens in the fourth term, so as to allow for the completion of the handover process and to

grant the new delegates the time to have considered their own approaches to the task facing them.

STUDENT PARLIAMENT INTERNAL POLICY REPORT

While the bulk of my update on Student Parliament's policy health can be found in my term two report, and I have given an appraisal of our constitutional review process during our second Ordinary Sitting, I would like to expand upon the information already shared with the student body.

CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW PROCESS

Despite the challenges and delays regarding Student Parliament's constitutional review process, it will be substantially compliant with the 2021 Student Constitution by the end of our term, 1 November, and therefore before its ratification by Council.

POLICY UNIT APPROVAL OF ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE POLICY

As made clear by Deputy Speaker Mngadi, in order to empower the Accountability Committee ("AC") to fulfill its mandate of ensuring accountability and transparency, an internal policy had to be drafted allowing the AC to enquire into and report on ostensible SRC shortcomings without having to wait for an external complaint first.

As Policy Officer and member of the Accountability Committee, the struggles faced while trying to draft this simple policy were indicative of all the structural hindrances to effective policy promulgation highlighted in the first portion of this report. It is frustrating that a procedural issue proved so cumbersome to solve that it severely impacted and delayed the AC's ability to fulfill its core mandate. That being said, I am happy that the Policy Unit was able to approve this policy after much reworking.

CONCLUSION

In addition to the recommendations already set out in my capacity as facilitator of the Policy Forum, I conclude with the hope that student leaders see the value of this platform insofar as it allows for the collective solving of policy challenges. I certainly

gained a lot of insight into the workings of the respective leadership structures and, despite some delays in report submissions and initial challenges I faced in ensuring attendance, I am very pleased with the quality of the engagement at the Forum itself. More regular communication must be had among policy officers so as to pool resources and facilitate consultative governance. As such, the follow up Forum in the fourth term is imperative.

Regarding Student Parliament's own policies, I am excited to continue working with our Constitutional Review Committee on our two new constitutions that will give rise to the new bicameral parliamentary structure.