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UCT underscores commitment to multilingualism through new language policy

In underscoring a commitment to multilingualism, inclusivity and transformation in line with Vision 2030, the University of Cape Town (UCT) has officially launched the UCT Language Policy.

The policy was approved by Council at its last ordinary meeting in December 2024, together with its framework for implementation. It was officially launched on Thursday, 27 February 2025 during UCT's celebration of International Mother Language Day.

The revised UCT language policy promotes multilingualism – with English, IsiXhosa and Afrikaans as the official languages of the university. In addition, the policy identifies Afrikaaps (Kaaps), South African Sign Language (SASL) and Khoekhoegowab and N|uu as languages for development by UCT.

UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela said the approved revised language policy was in line with a commitment to multilingualism, inclusivity and transformation.

"This policy will help us embrace both the extraordinary diversity within our community and an environment where language is valued as a resource for learning, research and communication," he said.

The revised policy emphasises promoting marginalised South African indigenous languages in teaching, learning, research and communication.

"This includes supporting isiXhosa as a language of instruction, alongside English, and encouraging students and staff to incorporate multilingual approaches into their academic work," said Professor Moshabela.

The core provisions of the policy are:

- **Teaching and learning:** All undergraduate students will be encouraged to take a course in isiXhosa communication if they do not already have proficiency in an indigenous South African language. For postgraduate students, UCT aims to require PhD abstracts to be translated into one of the marginalised indigenous languages. Additionally, UCT will support the use of official languages in theses and dissertations.

- **Research and scholarship**: The policy commits the university to supporting research in and about indigenous languages, providing resources for scholars and promoting the development of discipline-specific language tools. UCT will also encourage research on multilingual pedagogies for higher education.

- **Communication**: Internal university communications, such as notices and announcements, will be made available in at least two of the official languages, where the occasion and medium of communication allows. UCT will also strive to ensure that its communication with external stakeholders respects language preferences, using official South African languages as well as the UCT language policy as appropriate.

Faculties as well as Professional, Administrative Support and Service (PASS) departments will develop language implementation plans tailored to their needs. These will need to be approved by Senate and reviewed every five years.

Professor Moshabela said the successful implementation of the policy would need support from all members of the UCT community.

"This policy reflects UCT's commitment to ensuring that language is no longer a barrier to education but a bridge to knowledge, advancement and innovation. By striving towards being a multilingual environment, we aim to empower our students and staff to engage with diverse languages and cultures, thereby contributing to an inclusive and transformative academic experience.

ENDS

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