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DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

NO. 1160 **30 OCTOBER 2020**

HIGHER EDUCATION ACT, 1997 (ACT NO. 101 of 1997)

LANGUAGE POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS DETERMINED IN TERMS OF SECTION 27(2) OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT, 101 OF 1997 AS AMENDED

I, Bonginkosi Emmanuel Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, hereby promulgate the *Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions, determined in terms of section 3(1) of the Higher Education Act, 101 of 1997 (amended)* as set out in the Schedule.

The purpose of the policy is to provide a framework for the development and strengthening of indigenous languages as languages of scholarship, teaching and learning and communication at South African public higher education institutions, in particular, universities. The policy provides guidelines for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of institutional language policies and contributes to transformation in higher education with specific reference to universities through enhancing the status and roles of previously marginalised South African languages to foster institutional inclusivity as well as social cohesion.

Dr BE Nzimande, MP
Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation
Date: 09/08/2020

higher education & training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

SCHEDULE

THE LANGUAGE POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS,

DETERMINED IN TERMS OF SECTION 27(2) OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT, 101 OF 1997 (AS AMENDED)

July 2020

This gazette is also available free online at **www.gpwonline.co.za**

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Published by the Department of Higher Education and Training

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PREAMBLE

The Minister of Education developed and promulgated the *Language Policy for Higher Education* in 2002. The aim of the policy was to promote multilingualism in institutional policies and practices of South African public higher education institutions.

Since the promulgation of the *Language Policy for Higher Education* there have been various initiatives on the part of the Department of Higher Education and Training (hereafter the Department) to monitor progress and assess the extent to which institutional practices are in line with national policy. The most recent initiative is the Ministerial Advisory Panel on the Development of African Languages in Higher Education (MAPALHE) established in 2012, whose work resulted in the "*Report on the Use of African Languages as Mediums of Instruction in Higher Education*" (2015). From this report and others before it, it is apparent that there has been little progress made in exploring and exploiting the potential of African languages in facilitating access and success in higher education institutions.

This policy framework is therefore a review of the 2002 "*Language Policy for Higher Education*" and it seeks to address the challenge of the underdevelopment and underutilisation of official African languages at higher education institutions whilst simultaneously sustaining the standard and utilisation of languages that are already developed.

Drawing from the principles and values of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), as well as the relationship between language and cognition in the learning process, the revised *Language Policy Framework for Higher Education* seeks to promote multilingualism as a strategy to facilitate meaningful access and participation by university communities (students and staff) in various university activities, including cognitive and intellectual development. The policy framework aims to promote and strengthen the use of all official languages across all functional domains of public higher education including scholarship; teaching and learning; as well as wider communication in line with Section 29(2) of the South African Constitution.

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ACRONYMS

ACRONYMS	DEFINITION
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information Systems
HEQF	Higher Education Qualification Framework
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LPHE	Language Policy for Higher Education
MAPALHE	Ministerial Advisory Panel on African Languages in Higher Education
NDP	National Development Plan
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
PanSALB	Pan South African Language Board
PSET	Post-School Education and Training

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

TERMS	DEFINITION
Academic language	The language used in teaching and learning, knowledge production and dissemination. It includes, for example, discipline-specific vocabulary, grammar and punctuation, argumentation and discourse, and applications of rhetorical conventions and devices that are typical for a content area.
Access	Affordance, by a higher education institution, of the opportunity to students to register for, and pursue education and training; or of the opportunity to staff members to work in the institution.
Collaborative partnerships	The working together of two or more people or institutions in reaching a specific goal.
Epistemic access	The successful process of knowledge acquisition and dissemination through enabling teaching and learning pedagogies.
Higher Education	It means all learning programmes leading to a qualification that meets the requirements of the Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQF).
Higher Education institution	Any institution that provides higher education on a full-time, part-time or distance basis and is established and declared as a public higher education institution in terms of the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997).
Multilingualism	The effective use of multiple languages either by an individual or by a community.
Inclusivity	An expressed policy intent on, or practice of, embracing diversity and bringing people from various backgrounds into the fold at different levels institutionally, into groups and individually.
Indigenous languages	Languages that have their heritage roots in Africa (also referred to as African languages in literature and some policy documents) and that belong to the Southern Bantu language family, where 'Bantu' is used purely as a linguistic term. An indigenous language is a language that is native to a region or country and spoken by indigenous people.

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Language(s) of Learning and Teaching	A language or languages used to teach or instruct learners or students in an educational environment.
Language of scholarship	A language used in an academic setting for knowledge production and dissemination, as well as for technology transfer.
Official South African languages	This refers to the eleven official languages of South Africa as specified in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (i.e. Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, and English).
Scientific Language	The language used by scientists to communicate their scholarly work or research findings.
Social cohesion	The degree or extent to which a society is integrated, united and functional, providing an environment in which its citizens can live harmoniously and flourish.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Language continues to be a barrier to access and success for many students at South African higher education institutions. Despite their status as official languages, indigenous languages have in the past and at present, structurally not been afforded the official space to function as academic and scientific languages.

2. South African higher education institutions are therefore confronted with the challenge of ensuring the development of a multilingual environment in which all official South African languages, particularly those which have been historically marginalised, are afforded space to develop as languages of scholarship, research as well as teaching and learning.

3. The persistent underdevelopment and undervaluing of indigenous languages should not be allowed if public higher education institutions are to meet the diverse linguistic needs of their student population. Conditions must therefore, be created for the development and strengthening of indigenous languages as languages of meaningful academic discourse, as well as sources of knowledge in the different disciplines of higher education.

BACKGROUND

4. In 2002, the Department of Education (DoE) developed and promulgated the Language Policy for Higher Education (LPHE). The aim of the policy was to promote multilingualism in institutional policies and practices.

5. Following the promulgation of the *Language Policy for Higher Education*, a number of initiatives were introduced by the Ministry of Education (later, Higher Education and Training) to assess the status of indigenous languages at public higher education institutions, and map out the interventions required to strengthen the development and use of these languages.

6. The most recent was the Ministerial Advisory Panel on African Languages in Higher Education (MAPALHE) established in 2012 to assess existing institutional language policies and their level of implementation at universities, and advise the Minister on how indigenous languages could be strengthened. The Panel's report was published in 2015, and one of the recommendations was a call for the review of the 2002 *Language Policy*

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for Higher Education (LPHE). The report indicated that the policy has limitations which impede effective implementation by universities. Some of the limitations cited include lack of enforceable mechanisms built into the policy; lack of funding or incentives by government to support the implementation of the policy; as well as lack of clear directives within the policy on how multilingualism is to be realised within higher education institutions.

7. The report also raised concerns that the language and concepts utilised in the policy were obsolete, and not in line with new developments in the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system introduced in 2009, following the split of the former Department of Education into the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

8. Lack of alignment with the curriculum and language policy of the DBE was also cited as a major hurdle for the development and use of indigenous languages at university level. There was therefore a call for partnership and collaboration between the Department and DBE to ensure systemic development of indigenous languages, from school level up to tertiary level.

9. Finally, partnerships between universities (as custodians of scholarship) in the development of languages were underscored, and support for African language departments at universities was also highlighted as critical.

10. This policy framework therefore seeks to address the above-mentioned challenges and it replaces the *Language Policy for Higher Education* (2002).

PURPOSE

11. The purpose of the policy framework is to:

11.1 provide a framework for the development and strengthening of indigenous languages as languages of scholarship, teaching and learning and communication at higher education institutions;

11.2 provide guidelines for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of institutional language policies;

11.3 contribute to transformation in higher education with specific reference to universities through enhancing the status and roles of previously marginalised South African languages to foster institutional inclusivity and social cohesion.

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12. The policy framework therefore seeks to address the following:

12.1 The language of teaching and learning at public higher education institutions, bearing in mind the fundamental right of persons to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public education institutions, where it is reasonably practicable to do so, and the duty of the state to ensure effective access to and implementation of this right (section 29(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996);

12.2 The language or languages of official communication within higher education institutions;

12.3 The role of higher education in promoting, and creating conditions for the development of historically marginalised official South African languages, as well as the Khoi, Nama, San languages, and Sign Language;

12.4 The right of every person to use the language and participate in the cultural life of his or her choice within an education institution;

12.5 The role of higher education in preparing sufficient language teachers, interpreters, translators and other language practitioners, to serve the needs of a diverse South Africa's multilingual society.

SCOPE OF APPLICATION OF THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

13. The Policy framework applies to all public higher education institutions in South Africa. However, private higher education institutions, in their teaching, learning and other education activities must ensure that they do so in a manner that is consistent with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 as well as the Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997 (as amended).

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

14. The policy framework must be interpreted and applied in a manner that is consistent with the following legislative frameworks and regulations: the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (Section 29(2); the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997 as amended); the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013); and the National Language Policy Framework (2003); the National Curriculum Statement:

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Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Grade R–12 (2010); Pan South African Language Board Act No. 59 of 1995; and the National Development Plan (NDP).

15. The language policies of both public and private higher education institutions must take into account the constitutional imperatives such as access, equity and inclusivity and be context sensitive in order to avoid racial discrimination, unjust exclusion, preservation of exclusivity so as to promote social cohesion and nation building in all institutions of learning.

16. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa declares that the official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. It thus places an obligation on the state to take practical and positive measures to develop, elevate the status and advance the use of indigenous languages, recognising their historically diminished use and status in order to achieve the aspiration of Section 29(2) of the Constitution and ultimately ensure that "all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably," (Section 6 [1], [2] and [4] of the Founding Provisions).

17. Section 29(2) of the Constitution accords every South Africa the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. It states that in order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of this right, all reasonable educational alternatives must be considered, taking into account equity and practicability.

18. Section 27(2) of the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997 as amended), provides that, subject to the policy determined by the Minister, the councils of public higher education institutions, with the concurrence of their senates, must determine the language policy of a higher education institution and must publish and make such policy available on request.

19. The National Plan for Post-School Education and Training (2020), amongst others, calls for the transformation of curricula to reflect the location of knowledge and curricula in the context of the African continent. The study of African languages and literature is seen as important in this regard.

20. Similarly, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013) calls for a cross-disciplinary approach that would ensure the integration of African languages into the formal programmes of institutions. To achieve this goal, targeted support and the

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strengthening of African-language departments at universities in line with areas of regional strength are encouraged. This is in order to ensure that capacity is built to expand teaching of official South African languages, in particular, indigenous African languages, as well as their development as languages of literature, science and academia.

VALUES

21. This policy framework is guided by the following values which are foregrounded by constitutional and legislative imperatives:

21.1 The need for higher education to value all indigenous languages as sources of knowledge, capable of informing learning of the different disciplines in higher education;
21.2 The value of collaborative partnerships to promote multilingualism;
21.3 Commitment to the promotion of language equity; equality and fairness;
21.4 Commitment to the development and promotion of indigenous languages to redress past injustices;
21.5 The nurturing of an environment where multilingualism is not seen as a problem but as a resource to facilitate cognitive development, epistemic access, inclusiveness, transformation, social cohesion and respect for all languages;
21.6 The promotion of human dignity;
21.7 A stance against the use of any language for the purposes of exploitation, exclusion, domination and discrimination; and
21.8 The creation of a receptive institutional culture at universities.

PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

22. The Language Policy Framework for Higher Education Institutions is embedded within the following principles which must guide the interpretation and application of this policy:

22.1 The promotion of access and success in the academic enterprise of public higher education institutions;
22.2 The recognition and respect of the linguistic and cultural diversity that exist at South African higher education institutions;

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22.3 Parity of esteem and use of all official languages as determined by constitutional and legislative imperatives;

22.4 The nurturing of an environment where multilingualism is not seen as a problem but as a resource to facilitate cognitive development, epistemic access, inclusiveness, transformation, social cohesion and respect for all languages;

22.5 A recognition that languages are critical resources in the transmission of knowledge, cognitive development and effective participation in the knowledge economy; and

22.6 Enhancing people-centeredness in addressing the interests, needs and aspirations of a wide range of language communities through ongoing dialogue and debate.

POLICY STATEMENT

23. This policy framework recognises the important role of higher education in the promotion of multilingualism for social, cultural, intellectual and economic development.

24. All institutions must develop strategies, policies and implementation plans for promoting multilingualism as defined by this policy framework. Such plans must indicate at least two official languages, other than the medium of instruction or language of teaching and learning, for development for scholarly discourse as well as official communication.

25. This policy framework commits to the development and study of all official South African languages especially those which were historically marginalised, including the Khoi, Nama and San languages. Institutions are required to develop language plans and strategies indicating mechanisms they will put in place to enhance the development and promotion of indigenous African languages as centres of research and scholarship.

26. The policy framework recognises the need to develop competencies and capacity in South African sign language consistent with the Use of Official Languages Act, 2012 (Act No.12 of 2012).

27. In relation to other international languages, this policy framework enjoins institutions to include in their language policies and plans, programmes that encourage the study of international languages, in particular, those languages that are important for the promotion of South Africa's cultural, trade and diplomatic relations. However, priority should be given to historically marginalised South African languages, particularly those granted official status by the Constitution of the Republic.

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28. Higher education institutions must assist in preparing sufficient language teachers, interpreters, translators and other language practitioners, to serve the needs of South Africa's multilingual society.

Domains of use of the languages

29. *Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT)*: Recognising the *de facto* status of English as the language of learning and teaching across South African higher education institutions, this policy calls upon universities to adopt a flexible approach in the implementation of English as the language of learning and teaching. Necessary support must be provided to students for whom English is not their first language or mother tongue, in order to ensure academic success.

30. Where demonstrable competencies have been established in one or more languages other than English, such competencies and initiatives should not be impeded, but rather, nurtured and encouraged as long as they do not serve as barriers of access to speakers of other languages. The Constitutional values of inclusivity, social cohesion and equity of access must always be upheld in the implementation of this policy.

31. *Scholarship, Teaching and Learning*: higher education institutions must demonstrate in their language plans the investment they have made or will make in the development of official languages into languages of teaching and learning, scholarship and research. This is in addition to the LOTL. The plans must also reflect on ways and mechanisms to strengthen African Language Departments. Continuous research must be undertaken by the institutions, to explore and document strategies for intellectualising indigenous languages for use in higher education.

32. *Communication*: All official internal institutional communication must be conveyed in at least two official languages other than English, as a way of cultivating a culture of multilingualism. Institutions must consider all possible options to accentuate the use of indigenous African languages in official communication and ceremonies.

Enablers

33. *Institutional language policy and plans:* Institutions must develop or revise their language policies and plans to accord greater importance to indigenous African languages for purposes of teaching and learning, scholarship, communication and administrative use.

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The policies and plans must indicate strategies that the universities will adopt to promote multilingualism.

34. *Collaborative programmes*: Institutions are strongly encouraged foster trans-institutional and inter-institutional collaborations in the development and strengthening of official African languages. The focus of such programmes should be on strategies that could be adopted in higher education to achieve quality education for all students, as well as to promote multilingualism.

35. *Institutional culture*: The creation of a receptive institutional culture which embraces linguistic diversity and promotion of a climate where people feel affirmed and empowered to realise their full potential must be supported.

Collaborations and partnerships

36. The Department will work in partnership with relevant government departments, in particular, the DBE, to rally support for meaningful multilingual education embracing all indigenous African languages starting from school level. Multilingual education should focus on proper vocational preparation of teachers for a multilingual environment, with emphasis on teaching in African languages.

37. The promotion of indigenous African languages for use in scholarship in higher education will require, amongst others, the development of dictionaries and other teaching and learning materials. The Department will work with other relevant government departments and entities to create or strengthen existing open-source multidisciplinary terminology bank to be accessed and used as a teaching and learning resource by all higher education institutions.

38. Institutions are encouraged to work closely with the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in the development of all terminology and authentication processes in all disciplines, and seek to deposit such authenticated terminology in the multidisciplinary terminology bank.

39. Institutions must establish or strengthen (if existing) centres for Language Development to undertake relevant research required with respect to each of the official languages. These centres must be encouraged to enter into collaborative programmes with other relevant national language development bodies.

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40. Institutions are strongly encouraged to develop regional partnerships and collaborative language development programmes with other universities and language bodies to avoid working in *silos*. This will assist in the sharing of information and data relating to language and terminology development for various disciplines.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

41. Institutions are required to develop or revise their language policies to ensure alignment with this policy framework. The policies must be supported by implementation plans which must be reviewed annually to monitor progress in terms of the requirements of the Department. The plans are to be submitted to the Department on or before a set deadline. The plans must also be responsive to the needs of developing competencies and capacity in languages which they use in the different domains. This is to ensure that language proficiency is not used as a means of excluding potential students from any university in South Africa.

42. Institutions are required to report annually to the Department on progress made in implementing their language policies and language development plans. Resources and capacity to implement these policies and plans must be made available and be supported. These include information technology infrastructure relating to language development and preservation. Universities also should provide means to promote access and success of students by providing quality supporting language services such as translation and interpreting services.

43. The Department will establish and implement a funding model to enable the implementation of this Policy framework. The model will require universities to submit language development plans for approval by the Department before funding could be made available. The evaluation criteria for institutional plans will be outlined in the implementation guidelines that the Department will develop and share with the universities. Institutions will have the opportunity to revise and submit in the following year (n+1) plans which were not approved during the year of assessment.

44. The Department will monitor the impact of language policy in higher education, to establish whether or not policy implementation is achieving desired results. This will include the collection and analysis of relevant data through the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS). The Department will occasionally conduct

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impact assessment studies to evaluate policy responsiveness to the identified challenges.

45. The Department will develop and implement a monitoring instrument, with indicators that will form part of the monitoring process. Where appropriate, institutional visits will also form part of the regular monitoring exercise to address the challenges hampering the implementation of short and long term language development programmes.

REVIEW OF THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

46. This policy framework will be reviewed whenever necessary, ideally within five years from the date of implementation.

DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

47. The policy framework is effective from 01 January 2022.

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