USAf
The Voice of South Africa’s Public Universities

- Advocacy
- Institutional Support
- Internationalisation
- Policy Engagement
Who we are

Universities South Africa (USAf) is an association of South Africa’s 26 public universities. The organisation’s primary mandate is to support its 26 members in the achievement of their core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement, and to create an environment where universities can thrive and prosper, and contribute effectively to South Africa’s development.

Our strategic intent

USAf is the voice of South Africa’s public universities. The association aspires to realise a number of key strategic goals, including:

• To inform and influence the higher education policy agenda by presenting evidence based on research in lobbying, advocating and campaigning on behalf of universities;

• To support South Africa’s universities to effectively perform their core functions of teaching and learning; research and community engagement by facilitating effective dialogue amongst institutions and creating opportunities for collaboration, common problem-solving and the development of ‘best practice’ models;

• To provide value-adding services to member institutions, such as providing broadband capability in especially remotely located institutions for improved research, teaching and learning;

• To build and strengthen collaboration between USAf and key stakeholders; including government, parliament, business, the science community and international partners for the pursuance of USAf’s objectives and resolution of issues affecting universities;

• To support the internationalisation agenda of South Africa’s universities by fostering relationships with like-minded global associations that lead to meaningful collaboration in research, innovation, student mobility and, ultimately, contributing to the globalisation of knowledge;
The USAf Board sets the policy agenda and advocacy priorities for USAf, as advised by the five strategy groups in pursuit of specific goals.
How we operate

USAf supports member institutions through work undertaken by Strategy Groups and Communities of Practice. These structures are formed around specific priorities and functions in the university sector.

Strategy Groups

Strategy groups take a lead on universities’ most strategic concerns and advise the USAf Board on key initiatives to be undertaken in pursuit of specific goals. They regularly engage with relevant government departments and other organisations. USAf has five such groups - each chaired by a vice-chancellor. These are:

- **The Funding Strategy Group (FSG)**, whose main concern is adequate funding of the university sector, including financial support for needy, deserving students. As such, key priorities of the FSG for the foreseeable future will include sustainable financial support for students with special focus on postgraduate study funding for students who completed their undergraduate studies with the support of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and the “missing middle” category of students neither supported by NSFAS nor commercial funding institutions.

- **The Transformation Strategy Group (TSG)** supports the transformation agenda of public universities in alignment with the national imperatives and universities’ collective priorities. These include aligning institutional cultures with the sector’s collective transformative goals and positively influencing epistemological, pedagogical and curriculum practices of institutions. Current focus areas of the TSG include the reconstitution of institutional culture by focusing on the design of the universities around our students and staff. Furthermore, the TSG focuses on theorising the engagement of universities with their local contexts and the broader society.
The Teaching and Learning Strategy Group (TLSG) advises the USAf Board on key initiatives to be undertaken to uphold or improve teaching and learning. In response to the 2015/16 student uprisings, the TSLG has taken up the issue of curriculum renewal as a priority focus area and this will remain so for a while. Another preoccupation of the TSLG is to understand how best to enhance use of technology to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The TLSG in action. One of their current preoccupations is to persuade member institutions to take the trouble to understand what type of students they have enrolled, and their needs and expectations, so as to adapt their teaching approaches, support programmes and cultures to meet those needs for the students’ success.
The Research and Innovation Strategy Group (RISG) concerns itself with suitability and adequacy of research infrastructure within the system to meet national innovation needs, and also with funding for research and innovation, locally and further afield. It promotes collaborative research with local and global partners. As such, the RISG was instrumental to the undertaking of a study in 2017, on emerging researchers within the public university system with intent to profile them, determine the extent to which they are carrying out research; understand the institutional and systemic impediments to research and formulate appropriate responsive strategies for capacity building and support. Current priorities of the RISG include capacity development for research and promoting the internationalisation of South Africa’s higher education through international collaboration in research, student and staff mobility.

The RISG strives to align the research and innovation agenda of public universities with the vision in the National Development Plan and other national strategic initiatives.

The internationalisation of SA’s higher education is high on the RISG agenda, as demonstrated by its work in spearheading engagements between South Africa’s institutions with those of other countries, such as the United Kingdom in 2018 (left) and Japan through the SAJU Forum conference of 2019.
The World of Work Strategy Group (WSG): newly established during 2018, this group advises the USAf Board and the member institutions on changes and trends in the world of work and their implications on the core functions of the university and the sector. It will do this by focusing on:

- Work integrated learning and internships
- The vast changes that are taking place in the world of technology through artificial intelligence, data and data analytics, robotics and new kinds of human-machine interfaces
- The significant changes taking place in the world of work
- The production of entrepreneurial culture within the universities and
- National graduate destination surveys.

This strategy group represents a dynamic interface between universities, industry and other employers.

At their inaugural meeting in July 2019, the WSG looked at global work trends and brainstormed priority focus areas and a plan of action for the short and medium term.
Communities of Practice (CoPs)

USAf responds to recommendations from the sector for communities of practice. Some of the communities of practice are administratively supported by USAf and others operate independently and have their own legal status.

Examples of the first type are:

- The Finance Executives’ Forum (FEF) concerns itself with funding and financial matters relating to public universities in South Africa, and is thus linked to the FSG.

- The Registrars’ Imbizo gathers all university registrars to share information, deliberate on common challenges and share best practices concerning general administration matters from applications and students’ admission, to graduation. As key players in their institutions’ governance, registrars also oversee universities’ compliance with the national higher education policy and regulations as well as their institutions’ policies, processes and systems. The Imbizo also shares best practices in these regards.

- The Skills Development Facilitators’ Forum (SDF) is a vehicle for promoting good practice in the learning and development of staff within higher education institutions. It concerns itself with skills development at a national level, compliance with work-skills planning and reporting, as well as scarce and critical skills. One of the current projects of the SDF is the training of insourced security workers at universities, a programme set to run over 3 years.

Communities of Practice meetings rotate among institutions to share the hosting experience and cost, and also to showcase best practices in the host institutions.
Examples of the second type are the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) the Association of South African University Directors of Information Technology (ASAUDIT) and the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA).

Our flagship programmes

USAf also performs its functions through two programmes, namely:

- **Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) Programme:** HELM is a programme of Universities South Africa being implemented within a strategic partnership with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), which provides financial support through the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP).

  When HELM was initially implemented in 2002, it was meant to offer vice-chancellors and senior managers strategic insight into the specific challenges that exist within the South African higher education landscape. HELM continues to offer valuable perspectives on the contemporary leadership and management context, complexities and challenges facing universities. The need has never been greater for HELM to provide all levels of university leadership with skills, strategies and insight into this ever-shifting terrain.

  Since 2016, HELM has been reconfigured and repositioned to create cutting edge solutions that address organisational and individual capacity needs for leadership and management development. The objective is to ensure that the system is endowed with appropriately skilled academic leaders and managers who will be able to steer these institutions towards an invigorated and sustainable future.
Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) Programme: This is a programme founded at the end of 2016 to develop entrepreneurial students, entrepreneurial academics and entrepreneurial institutions and also to instil an entrepreneurship culture within public universities. Established within the University Education Branch of the Department Higher Education and Training (DHET), EDHE was inspired by the growing graduate and youth unemployment, the resources available at universities, the national drive for small and medium enterprises and the need for third-stream income at universities.

In June 2018 the programme was re-located to Universities South Africa (USAf) for day-to-day administration and implementation. This was in recognition of the fact that universities, as centres of entrepreneurship development, have been at the heart of the EDHE initiative all along. The programme remains primarily funded from the DHET’s University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP), even though USAf is soliciting and has successfully begun to secure additional support from other sources.

The EDHE Programme aspires to achieve three goals, namely:

- **Student entrepreneurship** through mobilising the national student and graduate resource to create successful enterprises that will ultimately lead to both wealth and job creation;

- **Entrepreneurship development** in academia by supporting academics in instilling an entrepreneurial mindset in all students and graduates through the offering of relevant knowledge, transferral of practical skills and the application of business principles in all disciplines.

- **Developing entrepreneurial universities** by creating a conducive environment that will enable universities to adapt strategically and embark on projects whereby third-stream income can be generated through innovative business ideas.
As at June 2019, the EDHE programme was proving to be firmly rooted within the university system, thanks to initiatives such as a) communities of practice established within institutions for the development of entrepreneurial students, academics and universities, and b) national awareness creating events such as the annual EDHE Lekgotla, the Student Entrepreneurship Week (SEW) and the Entrepreneurship Intervarsity competition. Along with other initiatives, these events promise to entrench the programme more solidly and contribute towards achieving a sustainable.

The Matriculation Board, which administers the minimum general university admission requirements; provides a second opportunity to non-traditional and mature students to access higher education and benchmarks foreign qualifications against South Africa’s, continues to be a part of USAf.
Contact us:

Office of the Chief Executive Officer:
+27 (0) 12 030 0650 / admin@usaf.ac.za

Office of Director: Operations and Sector Support:
+27 (0) 12 030 0652 / michelle@usaf.ac.za

Matriculation Board:
+27 (0) 10 591 4401 / applications@usaf.ac.za

EDHE Administrator:
+27 (0) 12 030 0675 / zamaswazi@usaf.ac.za

HELM Administrator:
+27 (0) 12 030 0676 / molatelo@usaf.ac.za

Website: www.usaf.ac.za