

HIGHER EDUCATION SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (HESCoP)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. NAME

The Higher Education Sustainability Community of Practice (hereafter referred to as the HESCoP)

2. BACKGROUND

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations include time-bound and quantified targets. Twelve of the seventeen SDGs are applicable to South African higher education institutions, namely:

- SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing)
- SDG 4 (Quality Education)
- SDG 5 (Gender Equality)
- SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)
- SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy)
- SDG 8 (Decent Work)
- SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality)
- SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)
- SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption and Production)
- SDG 13 (Climate Action)
- SDG 16 (Peace, justice and Strong Institutions)
- SDG 17 (Partnerships on the SDGs).

Closer to home, two principles of the King IV report speak to environmental sustainability, namely Principle 1.3 and Principle 2.1., while the statement of purpose of Universities South African (USAf) indicates that universities play an important part in the intellectual life of the country and have a major impact on the social, economic and cultural development and well-being of our nation. The statement of purpose further indicates that USAf aims to ensure that the public university sector has the optimum conditions in which to flourish and will continue to produce and disseminate knowledge to advance national development and human civilisation through lobbying and advocacy work.

Within this context USAf indicates that transformation within the Higher Education (HE) sector should bear evidence of the four main pillars of transformation, namely equity, democracy, efficiency and responsiveness, and should – in line with the

central goal of the policy framework for the transformation of the higher education system, as outlined in the 1997 Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education – produce “...graduates who are not just capable professionals, but also conscious and sensitive intellectuals and critical citizens”.

The HESCoP, therefore, has the potential to strengthen and influence the ability of South Africa to achieve specific SDGs and to contribute to the successful realisation of the mandate of USAf and the South African higher education sector.

3. STATUS

- 3.1. The HESCoP will be a USAf-aligned Community of Practice.
- 3.2. The Community of Practice determines its own modus operandi and manages its own affairs.
- 3.3. The Community of Practice meets at least twice a year.
- 3.4. By virtue of its status as a USAf-aligned Community of Practice, the HESCoP will explore a close working inter-relationship with USAf's Funding Strategy Group (FSG) and shall, in this regard, report to the FSG on any strategic matters relating to its operations, if so agreed by the FSG.

4. MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

4.1. MISSION

The HESCoP endeavours to be a key advisory, advocacy and capacity-building Community of Practice in support of the transformation agenda of the Higher Education (HE) sector, specifically with regard to the sector achieving its environmental sustainability objectives.

It will develop, and contribute to policy positions on environmental sustainability matters in higher education, to strengthen teaching and learning, research, community engagement, and operational activities nationally and internationally.

It will organise regular sector-wide engagement platforms to tackle environmental sustainability issues and share promising practices across the sector with a view to promoting inter-institutional collaboration.

4.2. OBJECTIVES

The HESCoP endeavours to:

- 4.2.1 Actively participate in the development of a sectoral Environmental Sustainability Framework that speaks to all three pillars of the sector, namely
 - teaching and learning (by infusing the principles of environmental sustainability into the curriculum);
 - research (by promoting research on environmental sustainability); and
 - community engagement (by raising awareness through advocacy).

- 4.2.2 Actively participate in the embedding of environmental sustainability principles in the facilities of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- 4.2.3 Actively participate in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a National Environmental Sustainability Plan for the Higher Education sector.
- 4.2.4 Actively participate in the development of a sectoral Environmental Sustainability Barometer.
- 4.2.5 Benchmark, develop, advocate and share best practice guidelines and relevant sectoral statistics for advancing environmental sustainability in HEIs.
- 4.2.6 Identify and recommend to FSG, research and policy studies, as well as challenges relating to environmental sustainability in HEIs.
- 4.2.7 Provide advice and support to member institutions on how to deal with environmental sustainability challenges.
- 4.2.8 Respond to calls by the national government on the localisation of the SDGs in HEIs.
- 4.2.9 Facilitate, in collaboration with USAf, capacity-building opportunities in the HESCoP and broader national HE community regarding environmental sustainability in the sector.
- 4.2.10 Explore and make recommendations regarding the governance and resourcing of environmental sustainability in HEIs.

5. COMPOSITION

- 5.1 The HESCoP shall consist of representatives of all the South African HEIs, to allow it to give full effect to its roles and functions. This should normally be the relevant senior academic staff members and the Director or most senior practitioners of the Environmental Sustainability Offices/Units within HEIs, senior staff members responsible for the campuses of HEIs and any other membership as may be appropriate.
- 5.2 The members of the HESCoP will represent their institution in the relevant subcommittee, namely the Academic Subcommittee, the Localisation Subcommittee and the Technical Subcommittee.
- 5.3 Each subcommittee will develop a plan of activities annually, and report on progress against this plan at HESCoP meetings.

6. MEMBERSHIP

Membership will be linked to institutional participation in the Community of Practice.

7. FINANCING

- 7.1 Each member institution will fund its participation in the HESCoP.
- 7.2 USAf will fund one event of the HESCoP annually, funds permitting.
- 7.3 The HESCoP and its subcommittees will source funding for projects, where possible.

8. MEETINGS

- 8.1 The HESCoP shall meet at least twice a year, but may, at the discretion of the Chairperson, meet more frequently in order to fulfil its duties.
- 8.2 The agenda for the meetings shall be prepared by the Administrative Officer, in conjunction with the Chairperson.
- 8.3 The agenda shall, as a rule, be provided to HESCoP members at least 5 days prior to the relevant meeting.
- 8.4 Subcommittees of the HESCoP shall meet at least twice per year.

9. GOVERNANCE

- 9.1 A Chairperson and a Deputy Chairperson will be elected every second year. Such election will take place at the last meeting of the second year. The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson are eligible for re-election for not more than two consecutive terms.
- 9.2 Each subcommittee will elect a Chairperson every second year. Such election will take place at the last meeting of that year. The Chairperson is eligible for re-election for not more than two consecutive terms.
- 9.3 If the Chairperson of a subcommittee is elected as Chairperson of the HESCoP, the subcommittee will elect a new Chairperson.
- 9.4 An Executive Committee forms the management structure of the HESCoP. The Executive Committee will consist of the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and the chairpersons of the subcommittees.
- 9.5 The Chairperson of the HESCoP will act as Chairperson of the Executive Committee.
- 9.6 The Community of Practice may, from time to time, constitute task teams to deal with projects or specific tasks allocated within the Community of Practice.

10. REPORTING

- 10.1 The Administrative Officer shall make available the minutes of all meetings to the HESCoP after each meeting.
- 10.2 Recommendations of the HESCoP will serve before the FSG and shall be submitted by FSG to the USAf Executive Committee and Board, when appropriate.
- 10.3 Feedback from FSG meetings will be provided by the USAf Executive Office to the HESCoP, as appropriate.
- 10.4 As a Community of Practice, the HESCoP will have links with other like-minded USAf Communities of Practice in the pursuance of the Higher Education Environmental Sustainability Agenda.

11. DISSOLUTION

The HESCoP shall be deemed dissolved if and when:

- 11.1 All HESCoP members resign at the same time.
- 11.2 The USAf Board, after a thorough process of consultation and engagement, considers such action to be in the best interest of the sector.

11.3 USAf as a constituent ceases to exist.

12. TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The following transitional arrangements shall be in place until the establishment of the HESCoP has been approved by the USAf Board:

- 12.1 Monash South Africa, Tshwane University of Technology, the University of Johannesburg, the University of Pretoria, the University of South Africa and Vaal University of Technology shall form the steering committee for the establishment of the HESCoP.
- 12.2 All members of the HESCoP steering committee shall fund and make their own logistical arrangements for attendance of meetings.
- 12.3 The Sustainability Office of Unisa shall take responsibility for the administrative functions of the Community of Practice.
- 12.4 USAf shall be consulted in all matters pertaining to the establishment of the Community of Practice

13. EXPLANATORY NOTES / DEFINITIONS

USAf – Universities South Africa

HESCoP – Higher Education Sustainability Community of Practice

FSG – Funding Strategy Group

The Board – USAF Board as constituted by Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Public Higher Education Institutions

June 2022

END