



**10 September 2024**

## **Higher Education has lost a legend in Human Resources management**

The Board of Directors of Universities South Africa (USAf) was deeply saddened and shocked to learn last Friday (6 September) of the passing of Dr Kgomotso Kasonkola, Senior Director: Human Resources (HR) at the University of the Witwatersrand. His passing is a tragic loss, not just to his family and Wits, but also to the HR community across universities, and the entire higher education sector.

Dr Kasonkola was a long serving and highly respected member of various groups of USAf.

He was first elected as the Chair of the USAf Human Resources Directors' (HRD) Forum in April 2015 for an initial three-year term. During this period, he made a significant contribution to the forum collaborating with fellow HR professionals to address critical challenges faced by universities. He earned so much trust and recognition of his peers throughout his chairpersonship that they re-elected him for a second term on the HRD Forum, which he served until June 2023. His expertise, impactful work to this community of practice, and continuity concerns, informed the HRD Forum's decision to retain him on their steering committee beyond the traditional term of office.

"Dr Kasonkola earned himself a reputation as a knowledge bank – someone who was always available to share his expertise and advice," Professor Francis Petersen, Chairperson of the USAf Board says. "It was not by accident that in the HR Directors' Forum, his name became the default choice whenever USAf was invited to nominate experts to various fora. That is how he was appointed to represent the HRD Forum on multiple levels, including the Association of Commonwealth Universities' HR Steering Committee. He was also nominated to represent the higher education sector as a member of the South African Medical Research Council, and to Chair the National Skills Authority (NSA).

"He represented USAf on the Board of the Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) SETA, and served as the Chairperson of ETDP SETA's Research Chamber. When USAf established the Leadership in Management Strategy Group in 2022, Dr Kasonkola was again invited to become its member.

"Under his stewardship, the HRD Forum became more strategically positioned and proactive towards sector challenges such as the critical skills issue and the appointment of foreign nationals in Higher Education. During 2016, he led the conceptualisation of USAf's response to the staff insourcing demands of 2015/16. As part of that process, he conceptualised a re-capacitation drive for security personnel, which resulted in a partnership between USAf and the Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority (SASSETA) to launch the General Security Practices Learnership training programme, with notable outcomes.

"Over the years, the HRD Forum became stronger, gainfully using its members' expertise to advance various recommendations to the USAf Board in response to emerging HR trends," Professor Petersen goes on to say. "One of Dr Kasonkola's latest legacy projects was championing the development of an Academic Internship project for the sector. The internship will provide

professional work learning experience that offers meaningful and practical exposure for early academic entrants. It also aims to serve as an early academic talent feeder and to fast-track sector transformation in alignment with the B-BBEE achievement requirements, assisting universities in improving their scorecards. He was very passionate about this project and worked on its implementation plan until two days before his passing.

“From 2018 to date, Dr Kasonkola was appointed a member of USAf’s Human Resources and Remuneration Committee – one of USAf’s six committees supporting the Board on governance. Also, initially appointed for a period of three years, his wealth of expertise, great personality, professionalism and commitment led to the Board deciding to retain him from 2018 until his passing. Dr Kasonkola was a gentleman of note, warmly regarded by all those who worked closely with him.

“In this capacity, Dr Kasonkola provided invaluable counsel to the Board of USAf, leading a team that recommended an HR management response of public universities to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The sector-wide HR strategy that the USAf Board adopted during the 2020 lockdown, and universities’ management of the post-lockdown return to campuses during late 2021, was, in part, his legacy. This was over and above the guidance he gave to the USAf Office over the years, on HR policies and strategic staff-related decision-making.

“Dr. Kasonkola's passing leaves a gaping void in the higher education sector. However, his impact as a strategic leader and profound expert endures,” The USAf Chair declares. “As we grieve his loss, we also honour his lasting legacy which will continue to inspire the USAf Board and Office, and inform future generations of HR professionals and educators. His contributions have left an indelible mark on the broader higher education community he served so faithfully. His will be a hard act to follow.

“As the Board of USAf, we stand with his wife and children in prayer, and, on behalf of the higher education sector, we convey our deepest condolences. May his soul rest in perfect eternal peace.”

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