



Reimagining the Social Compact for Higher Education: From Implicit Promise to Deliberate Partnership

On behalf of the Universities South Africa (USAf) Leadership and Management Strategy Group (LMSG), we warmly invite you to participate in a high-level virtual dialogue. This dialogue will bring together senior higher education leaders and representatives of government, students, communities, business, labour and civil society to consider whether South Africa should move from an implicit, largely policy-driven social compact towards a more deliberate, shared and sustainable partnership between universities, the state and society.

South Africa's existing higher education compact is increasingly strained by financial pressures, widening and sometimes conflicting expectations, tensions between institutional autonomy and state oversight, and questions about the relevance, legitimacy and public value of universities. The engagement will consider:

- The public purpose of higher education in a changing social, economic and technological environment.
- What universities, government, students and wider society should reasonably expect of one another.
- How institutional autonomy and academic freedom can be balanced with public accountability and responsiveness.
- What universities require to fulfil their developmental mandate sustainably.
- Whether a more explicit social compact could help rebuild trust, clarify responsibilities and provide a stronger basis for collective action.

The programme will include keynote contributions, a facilitated panel dialogue and an opportunity for participants to contribute questions and perspectives.

It will take place on **Tuesday, 13 October 2026, between 13:00–14:30 SAST**. Colleagues with an interest in higher education's social compact and the future of South African higher education are warmly encouraged to attend and to share this invitation within their networks.

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