



COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

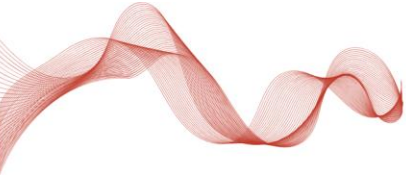
HIGHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE

28 FEBRUARY TO 1 MARCH 2024

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT

Theme:

***Deepening the Discourse on
Academic Freedom, Institutional
Autonomy and Public
Accountability in South African
Higher Education***



Higher Education Conference: 28 February to 1 March 2024

First Announcement

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is a statutory body established in terms of the provision of section 4 of the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended, and its mandate as stipulated in section 5 of the same Act, includes arranging and coordinating conferences on themes germane to higher education. It is in line with this mandate that the CHE has regularly organised conferences on topical issues on higher education since 1999.

The CHE hereby announces that its next Higher Education Conference will take place from **28 February to 1 March 2024 in Gauteng Province** at a venue that will be confirmed soon. The conference will be in-person only.

The theme of the conference is:

*Deepening the Discourse on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy
and Public Accountability in South African Higher Education*

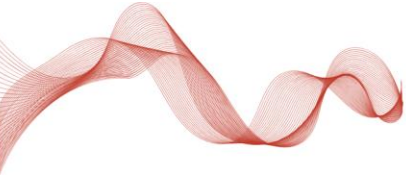
Background and context

Academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability are key elements in the architecture of governance of higher education in South Africa, and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) has, over the years, invested significant amounts of time and other resources in developing insights into these concepts and their influence on the higher education system.¹ The outputs of this work have included advice to the Minister on cooperative governance² and the publication, *Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and Public Accountability in South African Higher Education*.³ This 2008 publication was the final output of a three-year project implemented between 2005 and 2008. The aim of the project was to facilitate a national dialogue and research on the conceptions of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability; and on their implications within the context of the democratisation and transformation of higher education in South Africa. The project involved South African and international academics, leaders of higher education institutions, policy makers, policy analysts and researchers. The CHE organised regional workshops and national conferences to provide platforms for exchanging notes and ideas on academic freedom,

¹ Council on Higher Education (2004) *South African Higher Education in the first Decade of Democracy*. Pretoria: CHE.

² Council on Higher Education (2003) *Annual Report for 2002/2003*. Pretoria: CHE.

³ Council on Higher Education (2008) *Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and Public Accountability in South African Higher Education*. Pretoria: CHE. Available from <https://www.che.ac.za/publications/research/task-team-higher-education-institutional-autonomy-and-academic-freedom-heiaaf>



institutional autonomy and public accountability. Higher education institutions and other interested parties were requested to make direct submissions to the CHE on their perspectives on this triad of concepts, as well as on the positions that they had adopted on the same. The CHE also contracted independent researchers to investigate different aspects of, and issues pertaining to academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability. A Task Team analysed, triangulated and synthesised the data and information obtained from the workshops, conferences, stakeholder submissions and reports of the independent researchers, and presented the final product of the three-year project as the 2008 publication.⁴

Five years after the publication of the *Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and Public Accountability in South African Higher Education* in 2008, the CHE published a *Kagisano* Number 8⁵ carrying articles reflecting on the state of the national discourse on academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability as synthesised and presented in the 2008 publication. While the articles in this *Kagisano* present different perspectives, and pass different judgements on the impact of what came out of the CHE's three-year project, they all conclude that the discourse has not run its course as yet, because there are many aspects about academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability that still need to be fully explored. One of the articles⁶ is critical of the project and argues that the project did not entirely achieve its lofty objectives.

Ongoing developments within the higher education sector serve to confirm that indeed there is a need to deepen the national discourse on academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability. There is an increasing realisation that the higher education sector in South Africa is not doing that well as it was expected to be doing at this juncture.⁷ Over the past 20 years, more than nine universities have been placed under administration by the Minister responsible for higher education, and some have been placed under administration more than once. Since the year 2000 the Minister has appointed sixteen independent assessors to investigate and report on alleged maladministration, mismanagement, corruption and other alleged malfeasances at public universities. Student protests and the violence that often ensue them have increasingly become a culture within universities.⁸ Interestingly, independent analysts, university councils, leadership and management of institutions, parliamentary portfolio committee responsible for higher education, national authorities responsible for

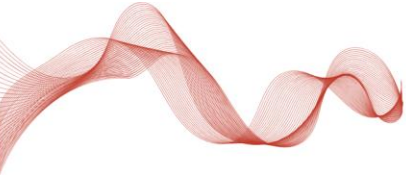
⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ Council on Higher Education (2013). *Academic Freedom. Kagisano* No. 8. Pretoria: CHE. Available from <https://www.che.ac.za/publications/research/Kagisano8>

⁶ Du Toit, A. (2008) Losing the academic freedom plot? The CHE and the debate on institutional autonomy and public accountability. *Kagisano* Number 8, pp 28 - 56

⁷ Wildhüter, C. C and Langa, P. (2021). Management and governance in higher education: South African universities under siege. *Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia*, 46: 105 – 118.

⁸ Fomunyam, K. G. (2017). Student protests and a culture of violence at African universities: an inherited ideological trait. *Yesterday & Today* 17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2017/n17a3>



higher education, and other higher education stakeholders, often invoke the principles of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability when analysing the genesis of the *status quo* in higher education in South Africa. Academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability are often placed at the centre of the root causes of the challenges facing higher education, and yet the same triad of concepts are key to finding and unlocking sustainable solutions to the challenges.⁹ This dialectical juxtaposition of these concepts requires interrogation and critical analysis, and this further justified the need for deepening the national discourse on them, given the influence they have on the health and functionality of higher education systems¹⁰.

Aim and objectives of the conference

The aim of the conference is to provide a national platform for reviving the national discourse on academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability, building on the extensive work that the CHE has undertaken in this area, in collaboration with stakeholders in the sector, during the last three decades.

The objectives are to:

- Revisit the philosophical and/or theoretical conceptions of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability; and reflect on these from the vantage point of Afrocentrism, and Africanisation of higher education;
- Reexamine the roles of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability in the context of the democratisation and transformation of higher education, and other national imperatives such as expanding access to higher education and improving success of students, and expanding the national system of research and innovation, to mention only two;
- Assess the extent to which academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability could still be considered as valid conceptual frameworks and tools for analysing the state of higher education, and for designing and planning the future of higher education;
- Reflect on the inclusion of academic freedom as a basic right in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, and examine models for exercising this basic right;
- Assess the impact of contemporary technological developments such as generative artificial intelligence, on how academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability are viewed and observed;

⁹ Bergan, S., Gallagher, T. and Harkay, I. (Eds). (2020). *Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy, and the Future of Democracy: Council of Europe Higher Education Series No. 24*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing

¹⁰ Kori, E. (2016). Challenges to academic freedom and institutional autonomy in South African universities. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning*. IV (1): 45 – 53.



- Reexamine the extent to which emerging paradigms such as state's steering (as opposed to state control) of higher education, managerialism and the corporatisation of higher education, can be located within the academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability matrix; and
- Reflect on the state of institutional and student governance in higher education using the lenses of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability.

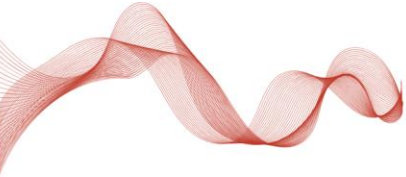
Target participants

The conference is intended to bring together participants from target groups from South Africa and the neighbouring countries. The target groups are:

- Academics from public and private higher education institutions;
- Researchers from public and private higher education institutions, science councils, civil societies, and independent research institutions and think tanks;
- Leaders and executive managers of public and private higher education institutions;
- Members of governance structures in public and private higher education institutions;
- Students from public and private higher education institutions;
- Representatives of academic staff and other higher education staff associations;
- Policy developers and/or analysts;
- Department of Higher Education and Training officials;
- Members of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee for Higher Education, Science and Innovation;
- Higher education institutional ombudspersons;
- Officials from education and training regulatory bodies;
- Officials from scholarly publishing houses; and
- Other higher education stakeholders that might be interested in, or are affected by matters related to academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability.

Call for Abstracts

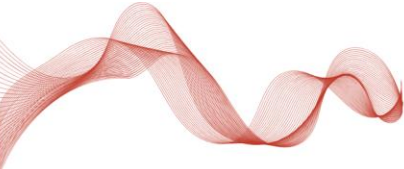
Researchers, academics, students, leaders and executive managers of public and private higher education institutions, members of governance structures in public and private higher education institutions, policy developers and/or analysts, and all others who have something to share about academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public participation, are invited to submit abstracts for platform presentations at the conference. The abstracts should be on topics that speak to the following conference subthemes and presentation streams:



1. Philosophical and/or theoretical conceptions of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability.
2. Reflections on the concepts of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability from Afrocentric, and Africanisation of higher education worldviews.
3. Academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability in the context of the democratisation and transformation of higher education.
4. Reflections on the inclusion of academic freedom in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, and models for exercising academic freedom as a constitutional right.
5. Academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability in the era of generative artificial intelligence and other impactful technological developments.
6. Academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability as conceptual frameworks and tools for analysing the state of higher education, and for designing and planning the future of higher education.
7. Implications of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability to the pursuit of national imperatives of,
 - a) expanding access to higher education, and improving success of students;
 - b) expanding the national system of research and innovation;
 - c) preserving natural heritage, including indigenous knowledge systems;
 - d) developing African languages as media of teaching, learning and scholarship in higher education; and
 - e) increasing production of graduates for occupations in high demand.
8. Locating the state's steering mechanisms of higher education within the matrix of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability.
9. Locating managerialism and the corporatisation of higher education within the matrix of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability.
10. Reflecting on the state of institutional and student governance in higher education using the lenses of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability.

Each and every abstract submitted should adhere to the following requirements:

- Not more than 400 words long;
- Reflect title, name of authors (or titles and names of authors) and institutional or organisational affiliation or affiliations;
- Bear email address of author, or of the corresponding author, in case of multiple authors;
- List five (5) keywords;
- Typed using 11-point Arial or Century Gothic font type; and



- Text lines justified and spaced consistently at one-and-half line spacing.

The abstracts should be sent to the conference Organising Committee through the following email address: Research@che.ac.za (cc Qampi.w@che.ac.za). The deadline for the submission of abstracts is **30 November 2023**, and the Organising Committee will communicate back to authors by no later than **5 January 2024**. It is recommended that authors register for the conference by the time they submit their abstracts.

Publication of Conference Papers

The CHE will explore the possibility of entering into an agreement with one of the journals recognised by the Department of Higher Education and Training to publish papers developed from presentations at the conference. Details of this will be provided at the time of the conference.

Registration for the Conference

Any person who wishes to be part of the conference should complete and submit a formal registration form which can be accessed by clicking [Registration](#). Please follow the submission instructions on the form after completing it in full. Registration for the conference will close on **14 February 2024**.

Registration Fees

Early Registration: up to 30 November 2023

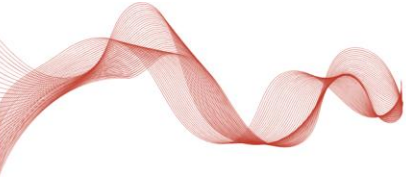
- Persons based in South Africa: R4 800 per head
- Persons based outside South Africa: 360 US Dollars per head

Registration after 30 November 2023

- Persons based in South Africa: R5 600 per head
- Persons based outside South Africa: 415 US Dollars per head

Please note that those whose abstracts are accepted for presentation will be exempted from paying registration fees. However, in the event that there are two or more presenters for the same paper, only the lead authors/presenters would be exempted from paying registration fees. The other presenters will be required to pay.

Details of payment methods will appear on the invoice.



Further Information

Further information about the conference, including registration and payment queries, should be addressed to research@che.ac.za (cc Mayepu.L@che.ac.za, Boti.Z@che.ac.za; Mufamadi.A@che.ac.za and Qampi.W@che.ac.za).

Enquiries can also be made via telephone by calling any of the following members of the Higher Education Conference Organising Committee:

- Lumka Mayepu on +27 (0) 83 319 9170
- Zanele Boti on +27 (0) 83 319 4962
- Amos Mufamadi on +27 (0) 83 333 0231
- Wendy Qampi on +27 (0) 72 727 5480

