



## Role of University Vice-Chancellors as Public Individuals

HESA is the voice of the leadership of the public South African higher education system, shaping the system and enhancing its contribution to the public good. Higher education is indeed the foundation of South Africa's success as a nation and is indispensable to ensuring national intellectual, social and economic well-being. Our individual institutions and their leaders hold great responsibilities in this regard.

HESA prizes institutional autonomy and strongly advocates among its members for it to be balanced with the requirement of accountability to the institution and the public, and believes that there are adequate statutory arrangements to ensure both imperatives. We sincerely do not believe that our institutions are generally indifferent to serious issues of mismanagement. Where this is the case there are institutional and legislative instruments and mechanisms to address the situation.

HESA believes that it is in the national interest for its members to provide independent critical voice as ordinary citizens concerned with the well-being of the nation. In his book "Universities and the Future of America", Derek Bok wrote that "What Rachel Carson did for risks to the environment, Ralph Nader for consumer protection, Michael Harrington for problems of poverty, Betty Friedan for women's rights, they did as independent critics, not as members of (university) faculty".

It is therefore an imperative that this "right" of "freedom" be encouraged and protect as it is in the national interest to do so. HESA is cognisant of the fact that the "freedom" of its members as citizens carries certain fundamental responsibilities. It is not, for example, an entitlement to contravening the statutory provisions for law and order. Should a Vice-Chancellor, or any employee of an academic institution for that matter, choose to contravene these provisions, we believe what ought to be at stake is his or her freedom as an individual and not the freedom of the institution to which he or she belongs.

Finally, HESA acknowledges that other members of society enjoy the same "right" of "freedom" to scrutinize and challenge the views of the higher education leadership that are in the public domain.

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