UNIVERSITIES SOUTH AFRICA

4th USAF HIGHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2026

CO-CREATING A RESILIENT FUTURE

07 – 09 October 2026

CSIR Convention Centre, Pretoria



CO-CREATING A
RESILIENT FUTURE

07-09 OCTOBER 2026

UNIVERSITIES SOUTH AFRICA



CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

Provide a national platform for dialogue on the future of higher education in South Africa.

- Explore collaborative approaches to building resilient, inclusive and sustainable universities.
- Share innovative practices in teaching and learning, research, governance and leadership.
- Strengthen collaboration between universities, government, industry and international partners.
- Identify practical actions to advance the resilience and responsiveness of the higher education sector.

CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE

DAY FOCUS

DAY 1
Understanding the Present

DAY 2
Reimagining Universities

DAY 3
Co-Creating the Future

Please visit the USAf website for more iformation:
www.usaf.ac.za

Time	Session	Venue	Speakers(s)	Chair
DAY 1: Understanding the Present				
08:00–09:00	Arrival, Registration, Tea & Coffee			
SESSION 1: OPENING AND WELCOME **Plenary :** **Chairperson: Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, Vice-Chancellor, University of Limpopo**				
09:00–09:20	Official Welcome & Opening	*Diamond*	**Dr Phethiwe Matutu** *Chief Executive Officer, Universities South Africa (USAf)*	**Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele**
09:20–09:50	Opening Keynote Address	*Diamond*	**Honourable Mr Buti Manamela** *Minister of Higher Education and Training*	
09:50 – 10:00	**COMFORT BREAK**			
10:00 – 10:30	Keynote: Creating a Resilient Future – Understanding the Present	*Diamond*	**Professor Thandwa Mthembu** *Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Durban University of Technology*	**Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele**
10:30 – 10:45	Discussion			
10h45 – 11h10	**TEA**			
SESSION 2: Plenary				
11:10 – 12:00	**Panel:** Reimagining and Challenging the Idea of the University	*Diamond*	**Professor Sizwe Mabizela** *Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Rhodes University* **Dr Amani Saidi** *Director: Quality Assurance & Promotion Coordination, Council on Higher Education* **Professor Linda du Plessis** *Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, North-West University*	**Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele**
12:00 – 12:15	Discussion			
12:15 – 12:45	Governance, Accountability and Renewal	*Diamond*	**Mr Edward Kieswetter** *Former SARS Commissioner*	
12:45 - 13:00	Discussion			
13:00 – 14:00	**LUNCH**			

Time	Session	Venue	Speakers(s)	Chair
		SESSION 3: Parallel 1A, 1B		
14:00 – 15:00	**Parallel Session 1A:** Resourcing Universities	*Emerald*	**Professor Gerald Ouma** *Senior Director: Institutional Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, University of Pretoria* **Professor Ellen Hazelkorn** *(online) Joint Managing Partner, BH Associates, and Professor Emerita, Technological University Dublin* **Professor Eugene Cloete** *(online) Chief Executive Officer, Cape Higher Education Consortium*	**Professor Bismark Tyobeka** *Vice-Chancellor and Principal, North-West University*
15:00-15:30	Discussion			
14:00 – 15:30	**Parallel Session 1B:** Academic Futures, Credibility, Disruption and Continuity in an AI-mediated World	*Diamond*	**Professor Lisa-Dionne Morris** *(online) Professor of Public and Industry Understanding of Capability-Driven Design, University of Leeds* **Professor Donrich Thaldar,** *Professor of Law, University of KwaZulu-Natal*	**Professor Sibusiso Moyo** *Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation & Internationalisation, Stellenbosch University*
15:00-15:30	Discussion			
15:30 – 16:00	**TEA**			
		SESSION 4: Plenary		
16:00 – 16:30	**Reflection:** Reimagining the University for a Resilient Future	*Diamond*	**Professor Sibusiso Moyo** *Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Internationalisation, Stellenbosch University* **Professor Bismark Tyobeka** *Vice-Chancellor and Principal, North-West University* **Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele** *Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Limpopo*	**Professor André Keet** *Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Engagement and Transformation, Nelson Mandela Universit*
16:30-16:45	Discussion			
16:45 – 17:00	**Information sharing -** Profiling the National University Teaching Awards (NUTA)	*Diamond*	**Professor Clever Ndebele** *Senior Director: Learning and Teaching, IYunivesithi Walter Sisulu, Chair of SAUT*	

Time	Session	Venue	Speakers(s)	Chair
DAY 2: Reimagining Universities				
SESSION 5: Plenary **Chairperson: Professor Francis Petersen, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Pretoria, Chairperson: USAf Board**				
08:30 – 09:05	**Keynote 3:** Internationalisation, Knowledge Equity and Academic Solidarity in a Changing World	*Diamond*	**Professor Paul Tiyambe Zeleza** *Senior Advisor for Strategic Initiatives, Howard University*	**Professor Francis Petersen** *Chairperson, Universities South Africa, and Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Pretoria*
09:05 – 09:25	Discussion			
09:25 – 09:55	**Panel:** Sustainability of Higher Education through Collaboration	*Diamond*	**Professor Anthea Rhoda** *Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic, University of the Free State* **Professor Thenjiwe Meyiwa** *Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Mpumalanga*	
09:55 – 10:15	Discussion			
10:15 – 10:45	Data and Digital Transformation	*Diamond*	**Professor Vukosi Marivate** *ABSA UP Chair of Data Science, University of Pretoria*	**Professor Lynn Morris** *Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation, University of the Witwatersrand*
10:45 – 11h00	Discussion			
11:00 – 11:30	**TEA**			
SESSION 6: Plenary				
11:30 – 12:40	(Academic) Innovation for a Changing World	*Diamond*	**Facilitator: Professor Herman van der Merwe** *Deputy Dean: Teaching and Learning, North-West University* **Professor Joey Chifamba** *Project Scientist, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)* **Dr Kim Lamont-Mbawuli** *Deputy Director: Innovation and Technology Transfer, Tshwane University of Technology* **Mr Zanodumo Godlimpi** *2025 Studentpreneur of the Year, IYunivesithi Walter Sisulu*	**Professor Thobeka Ncanywa** *FALF-FREF Research Chair in Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion, Nelson Mandela University*
12:40 –13:00	Discussion			
13:00 – 14:00	**Lunch**			

Time	Session	Venue	Speakers(s)	Chair
		SESSION 7: Parallel 2A, 2B, 2C		
14:00 –15:00	**Parallel Session 2A:** People, Equity and the Public Good	*Emerald*	**Dr Pedro Mzileni** *Senior Lecturer: Sociology, University of Zululand* **Professor Edith Dinong Phaswana** *Acting Executive Dean: Thabo Mbeki African School of Public and International Affairs, University of South Africa*	**Dr Saloschini Pillay** *Manager: Student Support Services, College of Health Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal*
15:00-15:30	Discussion			
14:00–15:00	**Parallel Session 2B:** Building Institutional Resilience, Strategy and Agility	*Ruby*	**Dr Max Price** *Former Vice- Chancellor, University of Cape Town, and Scholar-in- Residence, Atlantic Institute, University of Oxford* **Professor Xoliswa Mtose** *Emeritus Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Zululand*	**Professor Thoko Mayekiso** *former Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Mpumalanga*
15:00-15:30	Discussion			
14:00–15:00	**Parallel Session 2C:** Reimagining Student Success for a Resilient Future	*Diamond*	**Professor Luvuyo Lalendle** *Executive Director: Quality Assurance and Enhancement, University of South Africa* **Dr Thato Masekoa** *Spokesperson, South African Union of Students* **Professor Francois Strydom** *Senior Director: Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of the Free State*	**Dr Sanele Nene** *Director: National Standards and Reviews, Council on Higher Education*
15:00-15:30	Discussion			
15:30–16:00	**TEA**			
		SESSION 8: Plenary		
16:00 – 16:20	**Programme Spotlight** Building the next generation of Academics and Researchers	*Diamond*	**Professor Stephanie Burton** *AECRS Programme Leader and USAf Research Fellow; Professor, University of Pretoria*	**Professor Lynn Morris** *Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation, University of the Witwatersrand (TBC)*
16:20 –17:00	Reflections from the Parallel Sessions	*Diamond*	**Dr Sanele Nene** *Director: National Standards and Reviews, Council on Higher Education* **Professor Thoko Mayekiso** *former Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Mpumalanga* **Dr Saloschini Pillay** *Manager: Student Support Services, College of Health Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal*	**Professor Thokozani Majozi** *Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Internationalisation, University of Cape Town*

Time	Session	Venue	Speakers(s)	Chair
16:20 –17:00	Reflections from the Parallel Sessions *(continued)*	*Diamond*	**Professor Lynn Morris** *Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation, University of the Witwatersrand* **Professor Thobeka Ncanywa** *FALF-FREF Research Chair in Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion, Nelson Mandela University*	**Professor Thokozani Majozi** *Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Internationalisation, University of Cape Town*
18:00	**USAf Conference Dinner: The Resilient Flame – A South African Braai Experience** **Venue: THE DECK**			
DAY 3: Co-Creating the Future				
SESSION 9: Plenary				
08:45–08:50	Session Introduction	*Diamond*	**Chairperson**	**Dr Vathiswa Papu-Zamxaka** *Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation & Engagement, Tshwane University of Technology*
08:50 –10:30	Research and Societal Impact	*Diamond*	**Professor Chris Brink** *Emeritus Vice-Chancellor, Newcastle University* **Professor Jean Greyling,** *Head: Department of Computing Sciences, Nelson Mandela University* **Dr Gerrie Booysen** *Director: Centre for Rapid Prototyping and Manufacturing, Central University of Technology* **Professor Linda Godfrey** *Principal Scientist: Circular Economy, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research*	
10:20 – 10:30	Discussion			
10:30 - 10:50	Impact of Varsity Sports- Community and Social Impact	*Diamond*	**Mr Flip van Zyl** *Chief Executive Officer, University Sport Company (Pty) Ltd.*	
10:50 – 11:00	Discussion			
11:00–11:30	**TEA**			
SESSION 10: Plenary				
11:30–12:55	Vice-Chancellors' Dialogue: Co-creating a Resilient Future	*Diamond*	**Professor Dini Mawela** *Acting Vice-Chancellor, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University* **Professor Nokuthula Kunene** *Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Zululand* **Professor Thokozani Majozi** *Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Internationalisation, University of Cape Town* **Dr Thandi Lewin** *Deputy Director-General: University Education, Department of Higher Education and Training*	**Professor Bismark Tyobeka** *Vice-Chancellor and Principal, North-West University*

Time	Session	Venue	Speakers(s)	Chair
13:00–13:15	Closing Remarks	*Diamond*	**Professor Bismark Tyobeka** *Vice-Chancellor and Principal, North-West University*	
13:15 – 14:00	**Lunch & Departure**			

CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

- Strengthened collaboration across the USAf Strategy Groups.
- Identification of priority actions towards building resilient universities.
- Identification of collaborative opportunities across teaching, research, leadership, governance and funding.
- Recommendations for future policy engagement and sector collaboration.



THANK YOU!