

Work-Integrated Learning & Graduate Employability Summit: Season V

Hotel Sky, Sandton – Johannesburg

6-7 August, 2026

www.firesideconversations.co.za

CONFIRMED SPEAKERS



Rachel Heyes

Associate Director: Employer Engagement & Placements – Nottingham Trent University, UK



Bahri Toper

Executive Member of the World Association for Co- operative & Work-Integrated Education (WACE), and Career Centre Director – Bahçeşehir University, Turkey



Dr Juliet Joseph

Shared Services Lead: Centre for Psychological Services & Career Development (PsyCaD) – University of Johannesburg



Stafford Bomester

Director: Career Services – University of Cape Town (UCT)



Shalin Ledwaba

Head of Talent Acquisition – Bowmans



Prof Samson Mashele

Deputy Vice Chancellor: Research, Innovation & Engagement - Central University of Technology (CUT)



Michelle Constant

Chief Executive Officer – The American Chamber of Commerce South Africa



Dr Henri Jacobs

Director: Work Integrated Learning & Industry Liaison – Central University of Technology (CUT)



Prof Ajay Jivan

Head: Research and Assurance – SA Board for People Practices (SABPP)



Shanita Roopnarain

Chief Executive Officer: Swiss-South African Cooperation Initiative (SSACI)



Ms. George Barrett

Country Director: (SA)/Regional Lead for TVET – British Council



Lisa Schneider

Head of International Relations: Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University, Germany



Kyle Wesemann

Transformation Executive - Labournet



Jacqui Ford

Regional Representative Africa – World Employment Confederation

Summit Synopsis

As industries continue to evolve faster than higher education curriculums, the need for meaningful workplace learning, future-focused skills, and stronger university- industry partnerships has become impossible to ignore. From internships and apprenticeships to digital skills, AI readiness, entrepreneurship, and authentic assessment, this summit explores how institutions can produce graduates who are not only employable, but adaptable, resilient, and ready to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Through thought-provoking discussions, delegates will unpack the reality that WIL has since left the “nice-to-have” building, and entered an era to prepare graduates for jobs that don’t yet exist, workplaces that are more tech-enabled, and employers who want experience for “entry-level” roles. The summit will also spotlight innovative models of Work-Integrated Learning that bridge theory and practice, helping students convert academic knowledge into workplace confidence.

Whether you are an educator, employer, policymaker, or student success champion, this event offers fresh insights, collaborative solutions, and perhaps a little reassurance that employability is more than just holding qualifications with fancy titles. After all, the future of work belongs to those who can learn, unlearn, relearn — and with a limited risk of "we didn't learn that in school".

Expect bold reflections, uncomfortable truths, fresh ideas, and enough networking to finally answer the age-old graduate question: “Are we designing learning experiences that move beyond the lecture halls to meeting employer expectations”



Why attend this annual event?

Because “the future of work” is no longer the future. It arrived early, brought AI with it, and expects everyone to adapt immediately. Degrees are great... but employers still ask, “Can they actually do the job?”

- Learn from industry experts and academic nerds who've been there, done that and cracked codes.
- Participate in interactive sessions on skills gaps, workforce realities, and how WIL models have evolved from “nice-to-have academic add-ons” into powerful engines for economic inclusion and innovation.
- Access exclusive resources and templates for WIL design, implementation and assessment
- Learn practical strategies for WIL, internships, employability, curriculum alignment and surviving endless meetings about them.
- Discover how to prepare graduates for jobs that don’t even exist yet — reassuring and terrifying at the same time.
- Build partnerships that could lead to internships, research collaborations, funding opportunities, and fewer unanswered emails.
- Get a sneak peek into digital skills, soft skills, power skills, and whatever skills that will trend soon.
- Explore how AI is changing recruitment faster than students can update their LinkedIn profiles.
- Hear success stories and cautionary tales in some international case studies on WIL programmes and industry partnerships.

Target Audience

This event invites the full pipeline — the people teaching, hiring, placing, and funding. Think everyone who touches a student between lecture halls and their first paycheck.

Higher education institutions

University & TVET leadership:
VCs, DVCs Academic, Deans, Heads of Department

WIL coordinators & career services:
Directors of Co-operative Education, Internship Managers, Career Centre staff

Academic staff:
Lecturers running WIL modules, service-learning, or industry engagement projects

Quality Assurance & curriculum design:
People responsible for accreditation and embedding employability outcomes

Industry & employers

HR & talent acquisition:
Graduate recruiters, Learning & development managers, Talent pipeline leads

Host employers:
Companies already taking WIL students — engineering firms, banks, hospitals, NGOs

Industry bodies, SETAs and Professional Councils:
• Government & policy
• Intermediaries & support

AGENDA

DAY 1: THURSDAY, 6 AUGUST

The agenda blends rigorous intellectual inquiry (pedagogy, policy, measurable outcomes, inclusion/equity, AI/hybrid models) with unapologetic pursuit of truth, merit, and human flourishing. This completion keeps the agenda balanced and coherent: The first half covers structured, evidence-based elements of education/systems design, while the second half adds the bold, non-negotiable core—refusing to subordinate inquiry to politics, feelings, or lowered standards. Every session is designed to be immediately actionable.

7:45 AM – 8:30 AM

Registration & Arrival Refreshments

Speed Icebreakers & Name-Tag Networking

8:30 AM – 8:45 AM

Welcome & Opening Remarks

Chairperson sets the tone with a stand-up routine on why graduates need WIL more than ever

8:45 AM – 9:15 AM

Opening Keynote

The Employability Ecosystem: It Takes a Village to Launch a Career

Graduate employability doesn't emerge from isolated interventions. It develops through a connected ecosystem involving education providers, employers, communities, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and students. This discussion explores how stakeholders can work together to create sustainable pathways that benefit individuals, organisations, and society.

9:15 AM – 10:15 AM

PANEL DISCUSSION

Why Employers and Universities Need Couples Therapy?

A humorous but honest conversation about misaligned expectations, communication breakdowns and how to build stronger partnerships. Expect fiery (but polite) exchanges.

10:15 AM – 10:45 AM

Morning Coffee/Tea Break

Fuel for the trenches

10:45 AM – 11:30 AM

CASE STUDY

What if Every Classroom Had an Employer in It?

BAU Company Integrated Learning...A different approach to WIL by bringing companies into Classroom

Company Integrated Learning (CIL) is an innovative model developed and implemented at Bahçeşehir University (BAU), where companies design and teach 14-week, credit-bearing university courses embedded directly into the curriculum. CIL is not an internship or a guest lecturer strategy, but a full-semester course, co-governed by faculty and taught by industry professionals, including real projects, sector tools, site visits, and formal assessments. It allows companies to fully integrate into faculty for course content creation and evaluation. It is also an opportunity for companies to reach out to high potential students for internship and employment, as well as to create student networks.

CONTINUE.....

11:30 AM – 12:15 PM

Celebrating the Quiet Revolution of Human-Centred Abilities that Employers Desperately Seek but Academia often Undervalue

For decades, qualifications have been the most valuable currency of employability. Today, employers increasingly seek evidence of adaptability, critical thinking, communication, problem solving, and the ability to learn continuously. This session explores the growing gap between academic achievement and workplace readiness. Discussions will focus on employer perceptions of qualifications versus capability and the rise of portfolio based hiring.

12:15 PM – 1:00 PM

Gig Economy Graduates: Building Careers With Duct Tape and Side Hustles

- Creative exploration of non-traditional career paths where flexibility and multiple income streams (freelance projects, and entrepreneurial ventures) define modern success
- The shifting value of degrees in the labour market
- Adaptability, self-management, networking, digital literacy, and branding
- Understanding financial realities such as irregular income, taxation, retirement planning, and managing economic uncertainty

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Lunch & Networking Buffet

Purposeful Mingling with a Side of Satire (Themed tables)

2:00 PM – 2:45 PM

The Employability Analytics Revolution: Using Data to Improve Graduate Outcomes

- Graduate destination tracking
- Predictive analytics for career success
- Data informed student interventions
- Ethical considerations in employability analytics

2:45 PM – 3:30 PM

Digital transformation and AI Meets WIL: Preparing Graduates for the Robot Takeover

- How emerging technologies are reshaping employability and why adaptability now beats perfect GPAs
- Are we teaching careers that have not been invented yet?
- Stop Teaching Subjects. Start Solving Problems
- Human skills that remain difficult to automate
- Labour market intelligence and forecasting

3:30 PM – 3:45 PM

Afternoon Refreshment Break

Recharge

3:45 PM – 4:30 PM

Global Graduates in a Borderless Talent Economy

Technology and remote work have transformed talent markets. Graduates increasingly compete and collaborate on a global stage. This session examines how institutions can prepare students to succeed in international and cross cultural work environments.

4:30 PM – 4:45 PM

Day closes with key takeaways and Day 2 teaser

CONTINUE.....

DAY 2: FRIDAY, 7 AUGUST

7:45 AM – 8:30 AM

Registration & Arrival Refreshments

8:30 AM – 8:45 AM

Welcome Back!

Quick recap with a highlights reel

8:45 AM – 9:30 AM

Keynote

Employability by Design: Embedding Career Readiness Across the Curriculum

Graduate employability cannot be confined to career services offices. It must become an intentional outcome of curriculum design. This session explores how employability can be integrated into teaching, assessment, learning outcomes, and student experiences across all disciplines.

9:30 AM – 10:15 AM

Career Agility: Preparing Graduates for Multiple Careers Across a Lifetime

The traditional model of one qualification leading to one profession is rapidly disappearing. Graduates are likely to change careers numerous times throughout their working lives. This session explores how institutions can cultivate career agility and lifelong employability.

10:15 AM – 10:45 AM

Morning Tea Break

Networking or Strategic Napping — Your Choice

10:45 AM – 11:45 AM

WORKSHOP

NTU's framework for whole Institution Work-Like learning

At the recent Global Careers Services Summit in Cape Town, Nottingham Trent University (NTU) won a Global Award recognising the work on Assessed Work-Like Experience. NTU's framework is often cited as a strong example of institution-wide employability integration, where curriculum, pedagogy, student development, and employer engagement operate as an interconnected system.

Key Questions:

- What enables successful institution-wide implementation?
- How can universities create work-like cultures?
- What are the risks of scaling such frameworks?

11:45 AM – 12:30 PM

Professional Bodies and the Missing Link Between Higher Education and Industry

- Should professional bodies have greater influence over curriculum design?
- How can professional bodies help universities anticipate future skills demands rather than react to them?
- What would a truly integrated education-to-employment ecosystem look like?

12:30 PM – 1:30 PM

Lunch & Networking

Connect and Collaborate

CONTINUE.....

1:30 PM – 2:15 PM

Distributed WIL: Designing Learning Across Multiple Employers and Experiences

Traditional WIL often relies on a single placement. Distributed models allow students to gain experience across several organisations, projects, and sectors

- Advantages of portfolio-based learning
- Quality assurance challenges
- Credentialing fragmented experiences

2:15 PM – 3:00 PM

When WIL Gets Messy: Exploring Ethical Dilemmas, Blurred Boundaries, and Toxic Workplace Dynamics During Placements

- Confidentiality vs. Learning/Reporting Obligations
- Gifts, Favours, and Dual Relationships
- Scope of Practice and Safety
- Exploitation and Unpaid Labour

3:00 PM – 3:15 PM

Afternoon Refreshment Break

Last Chance for Caffeine & Connections

3:15 PM – 4:00 PM

Academic Integrity in High-Stakes Professions

- Longitudinal relationship between academic integrity violations and professional ethical breaches
- Unique challenges posed by AI tools in maintaining authentic learning and assessment
- Institutional strategies for cultivating cultures of integrity that translate effectively into workplace ethics
- Role of employers in signalling integrity expectations during recruitment and onboarding

4:00 PM – 4:15 PM

Summit Conclusion

Work-Integrated Learning & Graduate Employability Summit: Season V

REGISTRATION FORM

Standard Registration Fee is R8,499

PLEASE WRITE IN BLOCK LETTERS

Authorizing Person:

First Name		Surname	
Designation			
Company Name			
Telephone Number		Cell Number	
Postal Address			
Postal Code			
E-mail Address		Department	
Person Dealing with Payment		Contact Number	

Signature:

By completing & signing this form, the authorizing signatory accepts the terms and conditions as stated on the registration form

Note: Please provide information as you wish it to appear on certificate

ATENDEE INFORMATION

Title	First Name	Surname	Designation	E-mail	Mobile

BANKING DETAILS:

Account name: FIRESIDE CONVERSATIONS
Name of Bank: ABSA
Branch name: GREENSTONE MALL
Account Type: CHEQUE ACCOUNT
Branch Code: 632005
Account number: 93 5022 7482

TERMS & CONDITIONS

Fees are inclusive of presentation materials and video recordings of proceedings. Following completion and return of registration form, full payment is required before admission into the event. A receipt will be issued on payment. Unless otherwise stated on the registration form, payment must be made in Rand. Fees for late arrivals and early departures will not be refunded. A full credit will be given to attend any future Fireside Conversations event if notice of cancellation is received in writing no later than 3 working days before the event. Substitutions are allowed at no cost to the delegate. While every reasonable effort will be made to adhere to the advertised package, Fireside Conversations reserves the right to change event dates, sites and/or location, or omit event features, as it may deem necessary, without refunds, part refunds or alternative offers. Under circumstances where Fireside Conversations permanently cancels the event for any reason whatsoever, (Including, but not limited to acts of terrorism, extreme weather conditions, industrial action) and provided that the event is not postponed to a later date nor merged with another event, the client shall receive a full refund within 21 days. Fireside Conversations will, however, not be held responsible for the recovery of costs related to accommodation and travel bookings. All intellectual property rights in all materials produced or distributed by Fireside Conversations in connection to this event is expressly reserved and any unauthorised duplication, publication or distribution is prohibited.

FOR BOOKING AND ENQUIRIES PLEASE CALL +27 (72) 822-5916

PLEASE RETURN REGISTRATION FORM TO alvin@firesideconversations.co.za or events@firesideconversations.co.za