

CUT ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

16TH EDITION



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Foreword



Dear CUT Alum

Every great institution is defined by the people who carry its spirit forward. At the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), that spirit lives in each of you, our alumni whose journeys, achievements, and service continue to shape the world beyond our campus gates.

This 16th edition of the CUT Alumni Newsletter is more than a publication; it is a celebration of connection, a testament to how far we've come and how powerfully we continue to grow together. It reflects a university community that is vibrant, innovative, and daring or ready to lead.

As we turn a new chapter with the election of the Convocation Executive Committee, we do so with renewed optimism and purpose. Their leadership represents the shared voice of all alumni, a voice committed to fostering engagement, advancing the university's vision, and ensuring that every graduate remains a vital part of the CUT story.

As our alumni continue to excel across industries and continents, their success is our collective pride, and their stories continue to inspire the next generation of trailblazers who walk the same corridors today.

Let this edition remind us that being part of the CUT family means belonging to something enduring, a legacy of learning, leadership, and limitless possibility. As we celebrate our shared achievements, may we also look ahead with confidence, unity, and the determination to keep transforming lives and communities through the power of education.

With warm regards

Qondakele Sompondo
Director: Institutional Advancement

Editorial note



Dear Alum

We are excited to bring you the 16th edition of the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) Alumni Newsletter, a publication that celebrates excellence and leadership, while strengthening the bonds that unite our ever-growing alumni community.

In this edition, we are proud to introduce the newly elected Convocation Executive Committee, a dynamic group of leaders committed to strengthening alumni engagement and advancing the vision of their alma mater. Their collective expertise and dedication will play a vital role in shaping future alumni initiatives.

We also take great pride in celebrating our alumni who continue to make their mark nationally and beyond. Amongst them are the Mail & Guardian's 200 Young South Africans honourees and the recipient of the Young Internal Auditor of the Year Award – outstanding individuals whose achievements embody the spirit of innovation and excellence nurtured at CUT.

This issue further highlights the remarkable journeys of other distinguished alumni who are making significant strides in their respective fields. Their stories remind us of the transformative power of education, and the impact of perseverance and purpose.

In addition to these inspiring profiles, we shine a light on recent university events that have brought our community together, including the Vice-Chancellor's Business Breakfasts in various regions, the vibrant Alumni Social in Kathu, the Human Resources (HR) Summit, and the university's impressive second-place finish in the Learn-A-Thon competition. Each of these milestones reflects CUT's ongoing commitment to innovation, collaboration and growth.

As you read this edition, we hope you are inspired by the success stories, strengthened by our shared sense of belonging, and motivated to stay connected with the CUT community.

Warm regards

Jacqueline Pietersen
Deputy Director: Alumni Affairs

Introducing the newly elected Convocation Executive Committee

The Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) proudly introduces the newly elected Convocation Executive Committee, a team of dedicated professionals and alumni leaders committed to strengthening alumni engagement and advancing the university's mission of innovation, learning, and social impact.



President: Mr Raseng Selebedi

Mr Raseng Selebedi, who also serves as the Free State Provincial Chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) Council, is a passionate advocate for education and community development. He holds a BTech in Labour Studies and a Diploma in Philosophy. Mr Selebedi brings a strong commitment to alumni engagement and educational advancement, guiding the committee with purpose and integrity.



Deputy President: Ms Thandiwe Mohale

Ms Thandiwe Mohale is a dynamic information technology (IT) professional and values-driven leader. A proud CUT graduate with a National Diploma in IT and advanced qualifications, she has built a career in enterprise technology, project management, and strategic leadership. Having started as a lecturer's assistant and Institutional Research Assistant to Prof. Antoni Szubarga, Ms Mohale has since led specialised teams in the IT and financial sectors. She continues to promote ethical leadership, collaboration and transformation in all her professional endeavours.



Mr Andrew Zonisele Mapolesa

Mr Andrew Zonisele Mapolesa holds a National Diploma and BTech in Marketing from CUT, as well as a Certificate in Public Procurement and Supply Chain Management from the University of South Africa (Unisa). His career spans roles as sales representative, Distribution Manager at Spoornet, and Unit Manager at G4S, complemented by part-time lecturing at CUT. He is currently the Founder and Director of Meriting Real Estates, specialising in property sales and rental management.



Ms Kenalemang Sonia Sedikelo

Ms Kenalemang Sonia Sedikelo is an accomplished human resources (HR) and capacity development specialist. She holds a National Diploma in Personnel Management, a BTech in HR Management, and several certifications in labour law, skills development facilitation, and outcome-based assessment. Her work as a senior specialist in training and capacity building has seen her lead impactful initiatives, such as apprenticeship programmes, CSI projects and the Techno-Girl Project, empowering young people and advancing workforce development.



Mr Suprise Samuel Mhlongo

Mr Suprise Samuel Mhlongo holds a National Diploma in IT, and serves as an IT technician at Roseview Primary School. Beyond his technical work, he contributes to youth development as a member of the SGB and as a dedicated soccer coach, embodying a spirit of service and mentorship.



Ms Lerato Sehloho

Born in QwaQwa, Ms Lerato Sehloho is a dedicated primary school educator with a strong foundation in language and communication. She holds a National Diploma in Language Practice and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education. Her professional journey includes experience as a former sports editor and presenter at CUT FM, where she honed her communication and leadership skills. Currently, she serves as the Deputy Chairperson of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU)'s Bloemfontein branch, advocating for teachers' rights and professional growth.



Dr Bridget Ikalafeng

Dr Bridget Ikalafeng is a public health professional with expertise in implementation science, who serves as the Research and Epidemiology Manager at the Gauteng Health Department in South Africa. She specialises in implementation science; a field focused on putting research into practice. As a member of the newly elected Convocation Executive, she's advocating for a stronger connection between alumni and industry to drive innovation and socio-economic development.



Mr Rolihlahla Richard Alexander

Mr Rolihlahla Richard Alexander also forms part of the Convocation Executive Committee. The Convocation Executive Committee will serve as a vital link between the university and its alumni community, fostering collaboration, professional growth, and continued engagement amongst graduates who proudly carry the CUT legacy forward.

Central University of Technology, Free State Chief Audit Executive honoured as Young Internal Auditor of the Year



The Central Utniversity of Technology, Free State (CUT) Alumni Affairs is proud to celebrate one of its own, Mr Banele Police, who recently received the Young Internal Auditor of the Year Award from the Institute of Internal Auditors South Africa (IIASA).

Police's path in internal auditing began in 2010, when he joined CUT to pursue a National Higher Certificate in Accounting. Excelling in his studies, he soon progressed to a National Diploma and later a BTech in Internal Auditing. Arriving at university with limited resources, Police recalls the difficulties of his first year, from navigating student life with little financial support to walking long distances due to unaffordable transport, and how things improved when he became a Supplementary Instructor (SI) Leader in his second year.

During his final year, an opportunity came his way as part of the best performing students who were placed in various organisations for work-integrated learning (WIL). After completing his studies, he entered the professional auditing space through internships, and quickly proved his capability. Rising from intern to auditor and later senior positions, he ultimately joined CUT as Senior Internal Auditor, and was later promoted to Chief Audit Executive (CAE), a role he continues to lead.

Receiving the Young Internal Auditor of the Year Award is, in his words, a very big honour, as it places him amongst top auditors across sectors in South Africa. Shortlisted for both the Young Internal Auditor and the overall Internal Auditor of the Year awards, Police describes the recognition as adding credibility to his career, while motivating him to keep raising the profile of the profession within higher education.

Police credits persistence, vision, and continuous professional development as keys to success. "Don't limit yourself to your current role," he advises young professionals. "Have a clear vision of where you want to be, and use every opportunity to grow and get certified." Beyond professional achievements, Police values mentorship, and hopes to leave a legacy through nurturing the next generation of auditors. His guiding principle remains simple, but powerful: "Proper planning prevents poor performance."



Turning curiosity into impact: Dr Mkhize Simelane - Mail & Guardian

Top 200 Young South African 2025 Award Winner

Brilliant, determined, and deeply passionate about transforming tourism, Dr Bianca Mkhize-Simelane has steadily risen to become a respected voice in academia and beyond. From her beginnings in Germiston, Ekurhuleni, to being named one of the Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans in the Tourism and Hospitality category, her journey reflects a powerful blend of hard work, academic excellence, and a vision for inclusive and sustainable tourism.

Raised by her grandparents, who she says played a big role in shaping who she is, Dr Mkhize-Simelane is the only girl amongst three siblings, with an older and a younger brother. She began her education at Basa Primary School, later completing her matric at Freedom Community College.

Her favourite childhood memory is a trip to Victoria Falls with her parents, which she recalls as the moment that sparked her love for travel. Her grandparents' church work exposed her to travel across Southern Africa, and their influence, together with her mother's encouragement, instilled in her the values of discipline, resilience and faith.

Dr Mkhize-Simelane's academic journey began in 2009 at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), where she completed her diploma, and later a BTech in 2013. That same year, she met her husband, who encouraged her to continue her studies. She completed her master's degree in 2017, followed by a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education at the University of Pretoria (UP). In 2023, she achieved two major milestones: graduating with a doctorate in tourism, focusing on food security and entomophagy, as well as a Postgraduate Diploma in Education at CUT.

She recalls travelling to Japan in 2018 for her doctoral research project as a memorable highlight, saying it opened her mind to how food and culture connect to tourism and food security.

Her career has spanned hospitality, guiding and academia. She worked as a waiter at Mivami restaurant in 2012, a site guide at Sudwala Caves, and later as a lecturer at Ekurhuleni East College (2014–2019), before joining CUT in 2019. She credits her master's supervisor, Prof. Uwe Hermann, for guiding her into her first lecturing opportunity.

Reflecting on her recognition, Dr Mkhize-Simelane said, "I felt deeply honoured and humbled. It reminded me that the work I am doing has value and is recognised beyond just my immediate circle." She highlights her doctoral research on food security and edible insects as a major contribution to the award. She believes the recognition will open more opportunities for collaboration, research, and influencing policies within tourism and hospitality.

Her proudest professional achievement is completing both her doctorate and Postgraduate Diploma in Education in the same year. She continues to enjoy teaching, supervising research, and engaging with students at CUT. "I enjoy engaging with students and seeing them grow academically and professionally," she says. She is also currently involved in projects advocating for universal accessibility in the tourism industry.

Outside the classroom, Dr Mkhize-Simelane mentors students and colleagues, which she finds deeply rewarding.

She says that whilst the Mail & Guardian recognition is significant, "on a personal level, hearing from former students who thank me for helping them believe in themselves has been most meaningful."

She balances her work and personal life by following her mother's advice: "Never take your home problems to work, and never take your work problems home. I literally leave work behind at the Park Street gate and pick it up the next day." In her spare time, she enjoys hiking and playing tennis.

She lives by Marianne Williamson's reminder: "Who are you not to be? Your playing small does not serve the world."

Dr Mkhize-Simelane hopes to be remembered for contributing to inclusive and accessible tourism, and for leaving a legacy of resilience and proof that "anything can be done if you believe in yourself."



Mail & Guardian Top 200 Young South African 2025 Award Winner, Molebatsi Nkotoane’s inspiring journey of education through national recognition

In a world where education often feels like a privilege, the journey of a dedicated educator stands as a testament to the power of determination and resilience.

Molebatsi Nkotoane was born and raised in the small community of Megheleng in Ficksburg. He attended Qhowaneng Primary School, then went to Tlotlison Secondary School, where he completed matric, after which he pursued a National Diploma in Office Management and Technology at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT). Upon completing his diploma, he obtained a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) from the same institution, specialising in Business Studies and Computer Applications Technology (CAT). He is currently pursuing a BEd Honours with specialisation in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) at the University of South Africa (Unisa). Due to his interest in acquiring technical skills, he also completed a Certificate in Full Stack Development at FNB Academy. Through his passion for literacy, he is also certified to teach English as a foreign language.

During his first year at CUT, he joined the CUT Reading Club, whose mandate is to promote knowledge and literacy. The activities are tailored to ensure that people become interested in reading, acquire knowledge, and share the knowledge they gain. “The organisation has played a pivotal role in moulding me into a leader that I am,” Molebatsi reflects. He later served as the Chairperson of the CUT Reading Club for two to three years, where he fulfilled the role of coordinating all the activities of the organisation. He is currently a mentor in the organisation. He also served the CUT as a member of the CUT Debate Society, representing the institution in tournaments such as the South African National Universities Debate Championships, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits)’ Jozi Rumble, and the Free State Open.

When he was a full-time student trying to figure himself out, the library became his safe haven and sanctuary, which makes it his most memorable experience. “I have always been a reserved person who preferred quite spaces on campus, and there’s nothing that I loved more than spending time in the library,” he explains. He faced many challenges during his educational journey. After passing matric, he did not apply to any institution, because at the time, applications were not free, and he did not have the financial means. The first thing he did after receiving his final results was to travel to Bloemfontein. “I knew that I wanted to enrol with CUT. Therefore, CUT was my only option at the time, and luckily there were walk-in applications. Eventually, I applied and got accepted, but my struggles did not end there. I needed financial means in order to register, as I had not applied for NSFAS,” he elaborates. He had to rely on the assistance of the then Students’ Representative Council (SRC) to register, while sorting out issues with NSFAS and the Fees and Financial Aid Office.

Being recognised in the Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans 2025 list was a major achievement for him. “I was excited that I did not only attend the event as a finalist/nominee, but I also won the award in my category,” he says. Personally, he believes that the recognition is an indication that although one may go through moments of despair at times, moments of complacency in what you do ultimately make the greatest noise, even when you believe that nobody notices your efforts.

When he is not in the classroom, he is an activist for a multiliteracy pedagogical approach. It is an educational framework that recognises the diversity of literacy practices. Therefore, his line of work transcends beyond the classroom, with the sole purpose of advancing education. “I believe the projects that I had taken part in, that embrace literacy activism, continue to reflect the vision of shaping South Africa’s future,” he says. He is also a member of the Literacy Association of South Africa (LITASA), which has contributed to some of his projects and towards him winning the award. Mr Molebatsi is also a public speaking and debate coach for learners at the school where he is currently working.

He lives by this quote: “You don’t have to be great to start, but you have to start in order to be great.” He advises young professionals to find purpose in what they are doing. He further states that purpose is what drives you, even when the motivation diminishes. “In most instances, you are not paid for going beyond the call of duty. Hence, there is a need to find purpose in what you do. Purpose breeds passion. When you understand the purpose, it’s easier for you not to succumb to distractions,” he says.



Preserving heritage, empowering communities, and redefining entrepreneurship earned Bokang Lehloenya a spot at the Mail & Guardian Top 200 Young South African 2025 Awards

From the vibrant township of Thabong in Welkom emerges a trailblazing entrepreneur whose journey embodies resilience, cultural pride, and a vision for community empowerment. Bokang Lehloenya, founder of Wa Rona Food Enterprise, is more than a businesswoman - she is a custodian of heritage, an advocate for women and youth, and a symbol of how tradition and innovation can intersect to drive meaningful change.

At the heart of Bokang's story is Motoho wa Rona, a traditional sorghum-based porridge drink. Growing up, she witnessed how this simple beverage brought families together at ceremonies and gatherings. Recognising its cultural and nutritional value, she transformed motoho into a modern enterprise that both honours tradition and addresses pressing issues such as food insecurity and unemployment. Through the Wa Rona Food Enterprise, Bokang has created a sustainable business that empowers local farmers, provides jobs for women and youth, and reintroduces South Africans to the richness of their culinary heritage.

Bokang's vision and hard work earned her a spot on the Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans list, under the Entrepreneurship category. For her, the recognition was not just personal validation, but also a testament to the value of culture-driven innovation. It positioned her enterprise as a credible, forward-thinking brand, and opened doors to partnerships, networks, and expansion opportunities. She believes her recognition stems from the way Wa Rona Food Enterprise blends heritage with economic and social impact, reviving traditional foods, while creating jobs and fostering pride in local products.

Bokang's path was far from smooth. In her early days, she sold Motoho wa Rona on the streets, often facing ridicule from those who dismissed her vision. Instead of giving up, she turned adversity into fuel. Each small sale reinforced her belief in her product and mission. Her perseverance transformed scepticism into success, proving that cultural heritage could be the foundation of modern entrepreneurship.

Bokang's mission is rooted in empowerment. Inspired by the resilience of women in her community, she ensures that Wa Rona Food Enterprise creates pathways for women and youth in agriculture and entrepreneurship.

By offering skills training, mentorship and employment, she equips them with the tools to overcome systemic barriers and claim their place in the economy. Her leadership echoes the wisdom of mentors such as Dr Vuyo Mahlati, whose guidance instilled in her the importance of resilience, vision, and community-driven business.

Bokang envisions Wa Rona Food Enterprise as a nationally and internationally recognised brand in the next decade. Her goal is to see Motoho wa Rona on the shelves of major retailers and in markets abroad, proudly representing South African heritage. She also hopes to play a greater role in promoting traditional foods as healthy, sustainable, and globally relevant.

More than building a thriving enterprise, Bokang aims to leave a legacy of empowerment and cultural preservation. Her dream is to inspire a new generation of entrepreneurs to embrace resilience, innovation and community as guiding principles.



Francois le Roux: Turning experience into expertise

From navigating student life with determination to building a successful career in environmental health, Francois le Roux now heads Test-it Laboratory as the Technical Manager and Director of Operations, proving that even the most grounded journeys can lead to remarkable heights. Born and raised in Bloemfontein, Francois attended Onze Rust Primary School then Hoërskool Fichardt park.

Francois's road to success was not straightforward. "When I left school, I didn't know what I wanted to do," he says. With limited financial resources, he explored academic departments at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) until a conversation with Dr Weyers sparked his interest in environmental health. "I wouldn't say it was my dream, but it sounded interesting, and it definitely helped me figure out what I wanted to do." He went on to complete his diploma and BTech in Environmental Health and recently completed his Master's in Environmental Health.

His time at university was shaped not just by academics, but by resilience and determination. "As a student, you never have money," he recalls. To support himself, Francois juggled multiple jobs, working at a DVD store, in a hospital, a bar and even the rugby stadium. "It was really, really tough," he admits. "If you work six to six and then have class at eight again, it's not easy but I enjoyed it." Despite these challenges, he remembers the student life fondly. "It was really nice. I made a lot of friends, and many of us are still in contact today," he says.

Francois's dedication led to one of his proudest moments, which is presenting his master's research at an international conference in Bari, Italy. "CUT paid for it, so thank you," he says gratefully. Another major achievement is the laboratory management software he developed, which enabled the company to go completely paperless. "We don't print one piece of paper," he states proudly.

Despite his busy role, Francois works hard to maintain balance in his personal life. "My wife and I have a rule - no work for the first five hours when I get home," he shares. In his free time, he enjoys cycling, fishing, and gaming with his wife.

His approach to leadership and life is deeply rooted in pragmatic optimism. "It's to not trust someone else's word on anything," he warns. "Have a system where everything is documented. People will try to get away with things if you don't keep them accountable."

Francois dreams of owning a deep-sea fishing boat one day, but professionally, his goal is to roll out the water management software he built to municipalities across South Africa. "Water quality is more complicated than people think, but it can be managed in a way that's effective," he shares. When asked how he stays relevant in his field, his answer is simple: "YouTube. I know it sounds silly, but I'll follow like specific people. I never stopped learning."

His personal motto reflects his scientific approach: "We have a saying in the lab, in Afrikaans it translates better, so it's 'om te meet, is om te weet.' In English, it's 'to measure is to know.' His parting advice to young professionals? "Definitely get experience and don't take your time for granted, it flies."

Francois le Roux describes himself in three words: "laid back, professional, and fun." It is a fitting summary for a man whose story is marked by grace under pressure, relentless innovation, and an unwavering commitment to doing good work, even if it starts with washing dishes.



Central University of Technology, Free State forges stronger industry connections to power regional economic growth



Mr Sompondo Qondakele, Director: Institutional Advancement, Office of The Vice-Chancellor and Principal

The Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Pamela Dube, successfully concluded a series of Vice-Chancellor's Business Breakfasts in partnership with Standard Bank. The initiative, which took place across the Bloemfontein and Welkom campuses and concluded in Kathu, Northern Cape, brought together leaders from business, government, and academia to strengthen partnerships that promote innovation, skills development, and sustainable economic growth.

The series aimed to bridge the gap between higher education and industry by fostering dialogue around aligning academic programmes with the evolving needs of the economy. Mr Qondakele Sompondo, Director of Institutional Advancement, said the engagements were built on CUT's commitment to collaboration and purposeful engagement. "We invited business leaders, suppliers, and community stakeholders to engage in dialogue around skills development, innovation, and sustainable economic growth, because impactful partnerships start with listening," said Sompondo.

At the Welkom Business Breakfast, Professor Dube outlined CUT's vision for a future-focused university that prepares students for the modern world of work. She emphasised the institution's commitment to delivering relevant, flexible, and inclusive education that empowers graduates to thrive in an evolving economy. "Our students require flexible, inclusive, and career-relevant education," she said.



Mr Innocent Makoti, Project Coordinator in Education at SIOC Community Development Trust

During the engagement, Professor Dube also announced that the university is exploring the establishment of a School of Mining in Welkom under its Programme Qualification Mix (PQM) framework. The initiative aims to create opportunities for regional development, address community needs, and support the repurposing of mines for sustainable economic activity. "This programme will support regional development, repurpose mines, and provide opportunities aligned with the university's vision for innovation and community impact," she explained.

The final breakfast in Kathu, a region regarded as the Iron Ore Capital of South Africa, concluded the series on a high note. The event drew representatives from the mining, engineering, and renewable energy sectors, including many CUT alumni. Professor Dube used the platform to reaffirm the university's mission to drive regional transformation through education, innovation, and collaboration. "At CUT, we're thinking beyond preparing graduates for today's jobs and co-creating solutions for tomorrow's economy," she concluded.

The Vice-Chancellor's Business Breakfast series highlighted CUT's growing role as a catalyst for innovation and regional growth. By creating meaningful connections between academia and industry, the university continues to position itself as a hub of impact, dedicated to advancing inclusive, sustainable, and future-oriented development across South Africa.



Alumni Social in Kathu - a night of reunion and laughter



Mr Sompondo Qondakele, Director: Institutional Advancement in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal

The Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) alumni gathered socially in Kathu in the Northern Cape on Friday, 29 August 2025. This successful reunion was filled with good food, great conversation, social engagement, and opportunities to reconnect with fellow alumni.

The event began in a welcoming atmosphere with soft background music. Mr Qondakele Sompondo, the Director: Institutional Advancement, served as the Programme Director, and extended a warm word of welcome to the guests, including the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof. Pamela Dube. Mr Sompondo introduced the speakers, and clarified that the event was a motivational session rather than a formal gathering.

Several speakers shared their experiences since graduating from CUT, expressing pride in their alma mater, which they referred to as “the best university in the central region”. The keynote speaker, Mr Kgatliso Manake, a CUT alumnus with a National Diploma in Import and Export Management and a BTech in Project Management, shared his journey, and mentioned that he now serves as Board Chairman for the Northern Cape Agricultural Incubator. “I am proud to be a CUT product, because I wouldn’t be where I am today if it wasn’t for them,” he says.



Prof. Pamela Dube, CUT Vice-Chancellor and Principal

Prof. Pamela Dube delivered a compelling presentation, addressing several key topics relevant to the institution. These included the importance of stakeholder engagement, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) within the university, the strategic goals of CUT, and initiatives aimed at enhancing students’ academic performance. Additionally, she touched on the identity of CUT and how it aligns with the institution’s objectives, as well as the ongoing discussions regarding the renaming of various CUT buildings. “Your personal journeys and stories serve as an inspiration to our students. I encourage you all to offer your time and resources to contribute to our students’ success,” she emphasised.



Mr Kgatliso Manake, Chairman: Northern Cape Agricultural Incubator

A question-and-answer session with the Vice-Chancellor and Principal followed the speeches. A lucky draw also took place, creating a networking atmosphere amongst attendees. Guests enjoyed themselves as the main course and dessert were served. The event ended on a high note, with Dr Choice Makhetha, Executive Director: Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, delivering the vote of thanks, expressing gratitude to everyone who took their time to attend the event.

More than just an alumni social, the event reinforced the strong sense of community amongst CUT alumni in Kathu. The bonds formed during their time at the university were celebrated, serving as a reminder that these connections can last long after graduation. The event concluded with pledges to stay in touch, and the organising committee announced plans to make the Alumni Social an annual tradition, to further strengthen the alumni network.



Dr Choice Makhetha, Executive Director: Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal



Empowering the future of human resources practitioners



The Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) hosted the second Human Resources (HR) Summit on 09 September 2025 in the Japie van Lill Auditorium, Bloemfontein Campus. The event, held under the theme “Shaping the Future of Work through Inclusive Leadership, Artificial Intelligence Integration, Employee Upskilling and Well-Being”, created a vibrant platform for dialogue between students, academics, and HR professionals. Intended to bridge the gap between theory and practice, the summit gave students valuable exposure to industry realities, while offering professionals an opportunity to reflect on emerging challenges and trends shaping the world of work. The day’s proceedings were directed by Programme Director Ms Makgotso Kgosana, from the Alumni Affairs Office, who ensured seamless transitions between speakers and kept the audience engaged throughout the summit.



Ms Lefera Maraka, Lecturer: HR Management, Business Management, Ms Jeannie Matanki Myeni, Senior Specialist: People Function at Absa and Ms Makgotso Kgosana, Database Admin: Alumni Affairs

The summit began with an opening and welcome by Prof. Albert Strydom, Dean: Faculty of Management Sciences, who emphasised the importance of connecting classroom knowledge to the rapidly changing HR landscape. This was followed by the keynote address from Ms Sylvia Seleka, Senior Talent Manager at Harmony Mining Group. Ms Seleka highlighted the importance of talent management in driving organisational success and shaping future-ready workforces. She shared an inspiring message to the students, “I want you to leave this room today knowing that HR is not a support function; it is a strategic partner.”



Ms Van Der Walt Hannelie, CUT Senior Talent Management Specialist

A series of engaging presentations followed. Ms Hannelie van der Walt, Senior Talent Management Specialist at CUT, unpacked how artificial intelligence (AI) is revolutionising recruitment, retention, and the employee experience. She demonstrated practical examples and explained how recruiters now use interactive games to assess applicants’ tolerance, problem-solving, and strategic thinking skills. “Recruiters don’t just look at personality assessments anymore,” she explained. “They use these games to evaluate how individuals think and perform in real time.” She emphasised that AI tools, when used responsibly, can improve efficiency, predict workforce needs, and personalise employee support systems.

Ms Jeannie Matanki Myeni, Senior Specialist: People Function at Absa, then turned attention to the hybrid work revolution, stressing the importance of balancing flexibility with productivity. She reflected, “We are no longer an admin department; we are now fully integrated into the business.” She elaborated on how her role as an HR practitioner goes beyond office duties, “As an HR practitioner, I’m expected to go out and see clients, not just to support employees, but to bring in business and assess how our teams engage with customers.”

Her remarks highlighted how HR is adapting to new models of work that prioritise trust, accountability and inclusivity while ensuring that employees remain motivated and engaged.



Mr Vuyo Ondala, Stakeholder Relationship Manager at Interstate Bus Lines



Ms Lize Hunt, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of CPI World

Labour relations also came under the spotlight, with Mr Vuyo Ondala, Stakeholder Relationship Manager at Interstate Bus Lines, addressing the complexities of managing strikes and dismissals in the new era of employee relations. He stressed the importance of proactive engagement, transparent communication, and fairness when resolving workplace conflicts. This was followed by a presentation from Ms Natasha Nel, also a Senior Talent Management Specialist at CUT, who spoke on mental health at work, and emphasised the need to build a culture of support and resilience. She stressed that employee well-being is not a minor issue, but a central factor in organisational performance and long-term sustainability. Technology-driven HR practices were also explored by Ms Lize Hunt, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of CPI World, who introduced the role of HR information systems such as Sage in streamlining HR operations. She emphasised how digital systems can transform data management, improve decision-making, and enable more strategic HR interventions. To complement these sessions, the South African Board of People Practices (SABPP) Bloemfontein Cluster delivered a presentation on the role of the SABPP in professionalising HR practice.



Ms Sylvia Seleka, Harmony Mining Group: Senior Talent Manager and Dr Lineo Dzansi, CUT Business Management Head of Department

Each panellist highlighted practical challenges within their domains, and offered valuable insights into how HR professionals can respond innovatively to these pressing issues. A standout feature of the summit was the interactive question-and-answer sessions, where students got to interact with professionals. The summit concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Dr Lineo Dzansi, Head of Department (HoD): Business Management, who praised the collective effort of organisers, speakers and participants in making the event a meaningful and impactful success. She commended students for their enthusiasm and reminded them, “You are the future of HR. Let what you’ve learned today inspire you to create inclusive, innovative workplaces.

By the end of the day, the HR Summit had fulfilled its purpose of fostering knowledge transfer, professional networking, and inspiration. Students walked away not only more informed, but also more motivated to shape inclusive, resilient and innovative workplaces.



Prof. Albert Strydom, CUT Dean: Faculty of Management Sciences

Central University of Technology, Free State shines on the global stage with second place in 2025 Learn-A-Thon



Mrs Maneo Ramahlosi, Information Technology Lecturer, CUT, Mrs Nomabongo Masana, Information Technology Lecturer, CUT, (Middle), Ms Dina Moloja, Information Technology Lecturer, CUT (Right), 2nd Row: Dr Tonde Mangara Senior Lecturer: Light Current, CUT (left), Dr. Merisa Venter, Senior Lecturer: Information Technology, CUT (middle), Ms Mpho Mbele, Information Technology Lecturer, CUT, (Right), Back Row: Dr Ntima Mabanza, Senior Lecture, Information Technology, CUT (left) and Mrs Linda Meiring, Information Technology Lecturer, CUT (Right).

The Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) is celebrating a proud moment after securing second place globally in the prestigious 2025 Cisco International Girls in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Learn-A-Thon. This remarkable milestone was led by Ms Nomabongo Masana, a lecturer in the Department of Information Technology (IT) and a proud CUT alumna, who participated as an instructor in the global initiative.

The Learn-A-Thon was hosted by Cisco Networking Academy as part of celebrating International Girls in ICT Day on 24 April 2025, to inspire girls and women to consider science, technology, engineering, art and

mathematics (STEAM) education and careers. Out of 315 participating classes worldwide, Masana's combined classes, totalling 1 371 students, achieved an outstanding second-place position through active participation in introductory courses on cybersecurity, data science, and modern artificial intelligence (AI). "Based on the number of participants who engaged with the course content during the Learn-A-Thon, as an instructor, I won second place out of 315 participating classes globally," said Masana. Masana's journey with the Learn-A-Thon began in 2024, when she first learned about the initiative through a client connected to her husband.

Intrigued by the opportunity, she researched further and decided to participate. "We started it last year. It was our first time running the Learn-A-Thon, and then from there on, we decided to do it again this year," she explained.

This year's campaign stood out for its improved execution. "We had gained more experience based on what we had learned from last year's project. So, we were able to implement better strategies on how to market the event," she said. The Learn-A-Thon is a friendly global competition hosted by the Cisco Networking Academy that encourages participation across borders and disciplines. "IT is everywhere; you can apply it not just in the tech world, but in any industry or any field," she explained.

There were no stringent selection criteria for participants. "It didn't have any limitations on who can participate, except only for age. People had to be 18 years of age," Masana explained. Her focus was on team members who could assist with marketing the event effectively. "Mainly what I was looking for, were people who were able to market the event, either on their social media, or in any way that they are able to inform others about it."

Behind this success was a strong network of academic and support staff, including Ms Meiring, Ms Ramahlosi, Ms Mbele, Ms Moloja, Mr Motalingoane, Dr Nel, Dr Mangara, Dr Venter and Dr Mabanza. She also acknowledged Ms Pietersen and Mr Mzamani for alumni outreach, Mr Kganakga and Mr Selebano for poster design, Dr Jordaan and Ms Ngophe for social media promotion, and Mr Dintwe for reaching former National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa (NEMISA) participants. Masana highlighted the crucial role of CUT's collaboration with the Cisco Networking Academy, describing it as the cornerstone of the Learn-A-Thon initiative. "Cisco Networking Academy was our key partner in this project. It's their initiative, and our involvement was built on that foundation," she explained.

Alumni played a pivotal role in the success of the Learn-A-Thon, with many participants proudly identifying as CUT graduates. "Most of us are alumni. We were born and bred from CUT," Masana noted, highlighting how this shared background fostered a strong sense of unity and collaboration. The achievement itself marks a significant milestone for the team. "Last year we were in fifth place, and it was our first time.

This year, although we wanted first place, second place is better than nothing," she reflected, emphasising the spirit of teamwork that propelled them forward. Whilst the event welcomed individuals from diverse educational backgrounds, its success speaks volumes about CUT's nurturing academic environment.

Looking forward, the department plans to improve further. "The plan for now is to run the competition again, but better prepared... and also, through the survey we conducted, others were asking for more advanced course," she explains. CUT aims to expand its short learning programmes to meet that demand.

Masana concluded with a powerful message for the future: "You just have to choose one path, upskill yourself in your own field to stay relevant. People who don't use technology will be replaced by those who use it." With dedicated leadership, strong collaboration, and a commitment to digital inclusivity, CUT continues to prove that it is not only preparing for the future, but leading it.

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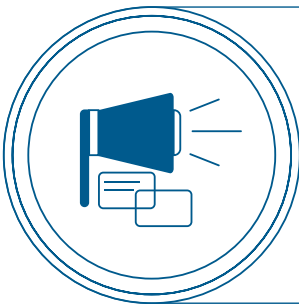
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