2026 Siyaphumelela Conference

Reimagining student success and expanding opportunity for all

The Siyaphumelela Conference is Saide's flagship national convening focused on data-informed, equity-driven student success in South African higher education. Held annually, it brings together a dynamic community of practitioners, institutional leaders, researchers, analysts, funders, partners and students committed to improving student outcomes at scale.

The 2025 Siyaphumelela Conference drew 450 in-person delegates, including 45 students and several senior sector leaders, reflecting strong national engagement across the post-schooling landscape. Online participation increased reach, with plenary sessions attracting over 50 virtual attendees across the four days. Delegates were primarily from the 20 partner public universities with additional participation from non-network public and private higher education institutions, TVET colleges, international universities, philanthropic organisations, government bodies and civil-society partners. This diverse attendance profile underscores the conference's growing reputation as a leading national platform for collaboration, innovation and evidence-based approaches to advancing student success.

The 2026 Siyaphumelela Conference will take place from 23-26 June 2026 at the [Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo Conference Centre, Boksburg, Johannesburg](). The Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo Conference Centre has become a preferred national venue for major education gatherings, such as the annual Basic Education Sector Lekgotla in 2025 and 2026, as well as the Gauteng G20 Provincial Education Indaba.

We continue to explore the conference theme, **"*Reimagining student success and expanding opportunity for all",*** which aims to inspire delegates to reimagine traditional approaches and embrace new and innovative strategies that empower students to transition into and beyond university, complete their studies successfully, thrive in their careers, contribute meaningfully to society and achieve lasting economic mobility.

The theme further encapsulates our vision of scaling out, scaling up and scaling deep, fostering innovation and collaboration and driving systemic change.

About the 2026 Siyaphumelela Conference

Siyaphumelela Conference Aims

The Siyaphumelela Conference aims to:

1. **Share Evidence-Based and Scalable Interventions** – Share with delegates proven strategies that can be implemented for transformative post-secondary student success.
2. **Encourage Collaboration** – Create spaces for inter- and intra-institutional sharing of insights, learn from each other's experiences and work together to drive change.
3. **Advance Scholarship in Student Success** – Explore what student success looks like from a Siyaphumelela practitioner's perspective, how it is integrated within the institution, and deepen the academic discourse.
4. **Embed the Student Voice** – Ensure students actively participate in presentations and discussions to keep their perspectives central.
5. **Foster Innovation and Advocacy** - Advocate for Siyaphumelela as a transformative, sustainable and scalable model for Student Success, encouraging innovative practices and solutions.

Important Dates

- *30 March – 6 June: Conference registration open*
- *12 March 13h00-14h00: **Webinar for interested Conference Presenters***
- *20 April Deadline for Presentations to be submitted via EasyChair*
- *6 May Deadline for Siyaphumelela Network Partner Sharing (for institutional leads ONLY) to be submitted via EasyChair*
- *8 May Notification of Acceptance to all Presenters*

Registration costs

Category	Registration Fee (R) (inclusive of VAT)
Network Delegate	R6,325
Non-Network Delegate	R7,900
Presenter	R4,250
Full-time Student paid for by their university	R4,250

Presenters whose proposals are accepted for 15-minute, 30-minute and 90-minute sessions will have their registration fee discounted (see above). This applies to one presenter per 15-minute and 30-minute presentation or up to three presenters per 90-minute session. Poster presentations are not eligible for the Presenter discount.

Accommodation

Accommodation is available at the Birchwood Hotel, with 3-star at Birchwood and 4-star at Silverbirch, both on the conference premises. The conference rates will be shared shortly. Birchwood arranges complimentary shuttles to/from OR Tambo International Airport.

Call for Presentations

Presentations

We seek proposals addressing session themes in five different concurrent session formats:

90-minute Multi-Institutional Session: Incorporating robust and multi-institutional engagements in a session theme related to work streams, imbizo-style discussions, cluster dialogue time – with case study presentations, workshops, etc.

30-minute Evidence-Based Sharing (20 min presentation and 10 min Q&A discussion): Including the use of data to demonstrate successful strategy execution in one of the session themes and providing strong evidence of success at scale with substantive improvement in student and institutional outcomes.

Lightning Sharing (10 min presentation and 5 min Q&A): Highlighting innovation in one of the sub-themes through a shorter presentation format. This session may be particularly suited for new or evolving interventions, demonstrations of software or tools, and student presenters or co-presenters.

Siyaphumelela Network Partner Sharing (for Institutional Leads only) (20 min presentation and 10 min Q&A): As in previous years, partner institutions have been allocated a space in the conference programme. The sharing will be in parallel sessions, focusing on a selected session theme. We request that at least one student be included to share their perspective.

Posters: The posters are reimagined for Siyaphumelela 3.0 and are intended to provide an opportunity to a) showcase the visuals and artefacts that have been produced through Siyaphumelela or b) an alternative option for lightning sharing. These should be broadly aligned to the session themes.

Session Themes

Proposals are encouraged on evidence-based practices for student success within the following themes:

- **Transition into University** - including innovative programmes focused on high school interventions from grade 9-12 that assist disadvantaged learners to be accepted into university and to be better prepared for university
- **Student Support** – including holistic student supports, academic and peer advising, first year experience, senior student experience, mental health, design/systems thinking, AI chatbots, and gender-focussed interventions.
- **Use of Data** – including equity performance gaps, tracking and interventions of high-impact modules, student tracking, data ethics and governance, know your students and use of AI in data analysis.
- **Institutional Change** – including student success committees, use of ICAT, student success frameworks, policies, monitoring and evaluation and mental health frameworks.
- **Teaching and Learning** – including digital transformation and use of AI, learning design, authentic learning and assessment, curriculum, literacy and mathematics, or open education resources
- **Student Voice** – focusing on how the student voice has been embedded or used to inform student success practices or understand the student journey.
- **AI for Student Success** – including digitisation, automation and optimisation, innovative use of AI for student success, demonstration of AI tools, such as chatbots, etc.
- **Beyond University** – considering employability and the world of work and business, transition to post-graduate studies, self-employment, entrepreneurship etc.

Preference will be given to proposals which have strong evidence of success at scale.

Identifying what Proposal to Submit

	90-minute multi-institutional session	30-minute Evidence-Based Sharing	Lightning Sharing	Siyaphumelela Network Partner Sharing	Poster
Are you an institutional lead at a partner university?				Yes	
Are you involved in student success interventions at your institution with strong evidence of success at scale?		Yes	Yes		
Are you involved in a new or evolving student success practice at your institution and want to share it with others?			Yes		Yes
Are you a student involved in a student success intervention and want to share your perspective?			Yes		Yes
Are you a work stream, regional network, or Partner, and want to propose a longer multi-institutional engagement?	Yes				
Do you have visuals and artefacts that have been produced through Siyaphumelela?					Yes
Are you not yet part of the Siyaphumelela Network and want to share your student success intervention that has strong evidence of success?		Yes	Yes		
Are you not yet part of the Siyaphumelela Network and want to share your new or evolving student success practice with others?			Yes		Yes

Further Information

There will be an open webinar explaining the conference session themes and five different concurrent session formats on **12 March 13h00-14h00. Click here to register for the webinar**

The deadline for proposal submissions is 20 April 2026. Proposals can be submitted via EasyChair. The link will be shared at the beginning of April.

Please direct any queries to info@siyaphumelela.org.za

90-minute Sessions

PRESENTATION DETAILS

The 90-minute sessions incorporate robust and multi-institutional engagements related to work streams, imbizo style sessions, cluster dialogues, in depth engagement on a student success theme with case study presentations and discussions, workshop, etc.,

Presenters

Insert the last name and initials of each presenter in Harvard reference format. If successful, the additional presenters will need to register for the conference using the 90-minute session code generated by the system.

Proposal Title

The title should provide an overview of the session in a maximum of 100 characters including spaces.

Proposal (1500 characters, approximately 250 words)

The narrative should provide proposal reviewers with an accurate and engaging description of the session. The description will be included in the Siyaphumelela programme. The narrative should include the following:

- **Proposed Outline of the Session**
  This should include a draft outline of the session. Proposals that are structured around presentations only, without discussion, are discouraged, unless the session involves case study presentations by multiple institutions on a session theme.
- **Session Outcomes**
  Explain the session outcomes. What will the delegates learn or be able to do after the session and how is this work relevant to advancing student success?
- **Student Inclusion**
  Specify how students will be involved in the session.
- **Eliminating Equity Gaps**
  Illustrate the Siyaphumelela aim of eliminating equity gaps based on socio-economic status, gender and/or race.
- **Key insights**
  Describe any helpful insights or lessons learned that will be shared during your session, and who would benefit from these insights.
- **Delegate Engagement**
  Explain how delegates will be engaged in authentic learning in the session. Describe any tools or strategies that will be used, such as polls or any other forms of technology.

30-minute Evidence-Based Sharing Sessions

PRESENTATION DETAILS

The 30-minute evidence-based sessions are 20-minute presentations with 10-minute discussion. They include the use of data to demonstrate successful strategy execution in one of the session themes and provide strong evidence of success with substantive improvement in student and institutional outcomes.

Presenters

Insert the last name and initials of each presenter in Harvard reference format.

Presentation Title

The presentation title should provide an overview of the presentation in a maximum of 100 characters including spaces.

Proposal (1500 characters, approximately 250 words)

The narrative should provide proposal reviewers with an accurate and engaging description of the presentation. The description will be included in the Siyaphumelela programme. The narrative should include the following:

- **Evidence of Success**
  Each 30-minute session presentation should include quantitative and/or qualitative evidence of success. At least two or more semesters of student success data are strongly encouraged.
- **Inclusion of Students**
  Describe how students have been involved in the implementation practice. Specify the number of students involved as beneficiaries of the intervention or in the sample size of the analysis. Include how student feedback has been incorporated.
- **Taking it to Scale**
  Describe the planning, strategies, challenges, and success within the scaling process.
- **Eliminating Equity Gaps**
  Illustrate the Siyaphumelela aim of eliminating equity gaps based on socio-economic status, gender and/or race.
- **Evaluation**
  Explain how the work has been (or will be) evaluated, providing examples of specific indicators being used or planned.
- **Key insights**
  Describe any helpful insights or lessons learned that will be shared during your presentation, and who would benefit from these insights

Lighting Sharing

LIGHTNING SHARING DETAILS

The Lightning sessions are 15 minutes with 10-minute presentations and 5-minute discussion. These can highlight new or evolving innovations in one of the session themes but may not yet have evidence to support widespread adoption and scaling. This format may be particularly suited for new or evolving interventions, software or tool demonstrations, and student presenters or co-presenters.

Presenters

Insert the last name and initials of each presenter in Harvard reference format.

Presentation Title

The presentation title should provide an overview of the presentation in a maximum of 100 characters including spaces.

Proposal (1500 characters, approximately 250 words)

The narrative should provide proposal reviewers with an accurate and engaging description of the presentation. The description will be included in the Siyaphumelela programme. The narrative should include the following:

- **Evidence of Success**
  Include a description of the quantitative and qualitative evidence being collected to determine the effectiveness of the strategy.
- **Inclusion of Students**
  Describe how students have been involved in the implementation practice. Specify the number of students involved as beneficiaries of the intervention.
- **Taking it to Scale**
  Describe how it could be scaled if successful.
- **Eliminating Equity Gaps**
  Illustrate the Siyaphumelela aim of eliminating equity gaps based on socio-economic status, gender and/or race.
- **Evaluation**
  Explain how the work has been (or will be) evaluated.
- **Key insights**
  Describe any helpful insights or lessons learned thus far that will be shared during your presentation, and who would benefit from these insights.

Partner Presentations Sessions

PRESENTATION DETAILS

As in previous years, partner institutions have been allocated a 30-minute space with 20-minute presentation and 10-minute discussion in the conference programme. This year the sharing will take place in a parallel session and <u>will focus on a session theme chosen by the institution.</u> We request that at least one student be included to share their perspective.

Presenters

Insert the last name and initials of each presenter in Harvard reference format. The student co-presenter, who is the partner institution's sponsored student delegate, will need to register for the conference using the links provided.

Presentation Title

The presentation title should provide an overview of the presentation in a maximum of 100 characters including spaces.

Proposal (1500 characters, approximately 250 words)

The narrative should provide proposal reviewers with an accurate and engaging description of the presentation. The description will be included in the Siyaphumelela programme. The narrative should include the following:

- **Intended Evidence of Success**
  Each partner presentation should include intended or actual quantitative or/and qualitative evidence of success.
- **Inclusion of Student Perspective**
  Provide the student's perspective on the institution's Siyaphumelela work.
- **Taking it to Scale**
  Describe the planning, strategies, challenges, and success within the scaling process.
- **Eliminating Equity Gaps**
  Illustrate the Siyaphumelela aim of eliminating equity gaps based on socio-economic status, gender and/or race.
- **Evaluation**
  Explain how the work has been (or will be) evaluated, providing examples of key indicators used or planned, and any progress made against your key indicators.
- **Key insights**
  Describe any helpful insights /or lessons learned that will be shared during your presentation, and who would benefit from these insights

Poster Details

POSTER DETAILS

The posters are reimagined for Siyaphumelela 3.0 and are intended to provide an opportunity to a) showcase the visuals that have been produced through Siyaphumelela or b) an alternative lightning sharing. These should be broadly aligned to the session themes.

a) We would like to provide partners and regional networks a platform to share the illustrations, visuals or artefacts that have been produced arising from Siyaphumelela work. For example, these could be visual depictions of student success work at your institution, or regional network, historic visuals that were produced in previous years, illustrations of student success frameworks or other frameworks, infographics or interesting artefacts.

b) We also encourage posters as an alternative opportunity for promising practice sharing, which could share new or evolving student success innovations, or new perspectives or understandings of student success. This session may be particularly suited for student presenters or co-presenters.

Still to be confirmed, the intention is to display the posters in the plenary venue, with opportunities provided in the conference programme for delegates to engage with the posters and their presenters. A webinar specifically for poster presenters with tips on how to produce a good quality poster will be held prior to the conference. Successful posters must be printed professionally following specific guidelines that will be provided later.

Presenters

Insert the last name and initials of each presenter in Harvard reference format. Specify if the presenter or co-presenter is a student.

Presentation Title

The Poster title should provide an overview of the poster in a maximum of 100 characters including spaces.

Proposal (1500 characters, approximately 250 words)

The narrative should provide proposal reviewers with an accurate and engaging description of the poster. The description may be included in the Siyaphumelela programme.

The narrative should be different for the different poster types.

As a guideline for a) the narrative should include the following:

- **Background**
  Background to the visual depiction or artefact that was produced, including who produced it, when it was produced, why it was produced, and how it was used or will be used.
- **Description**
  Narrative describing the visual depiction, concept or artefact that has been produced.
- **Key insights**
  Describe any helpful insights or lessons learned and who would benefit from these insights.

For b) the narrative should include the following:

- **Evidence of Success**
  Include a description of the quantitative and/or qualitative evidence being collected to determine the effectiveness of the promising practice strategy or intervention.
- **Inclusion of Students**
  Describe how students have been involved in the implementation practice. Specify the number of students involved as beneficiaries of the intervention.
- **Taking it to Scale**

Describe how it could be scaled if successful.

- **Eliminating Equity Gaps**
  Illustrate the Siyaphumelela aim of eliminating equity gaps based on socio-economic status, gender and/or race.

- **Evaluation**
  Explain how the work has been (or will be) evaluated.

- **Key insights**
  Describe any helpful insights or lessons learned that will be shared during your presentation, and who would benefit from these insights