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Global higher education leaders gather at UCT for first THE summit in Africa

The University of Cape Town (UCT) is on the eve of hosting the Times Higher Education (THE) World Academic Summit from 29 September to 1 October 2026, bringing more than 500 delegates and 100 speakers from universities, government, research organisations, business and civil society to Cape Town. The event will be held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre and the UCT upper campus.

This will be the first THE World Academic Summit to be hosted on African soil, placing African higher education at the centre of global conversations about the future of universities.

Held under the theme "Knowledge, justice and futures: Universities in the age of intelligence", the summit will examine how universities can respond to rapid advances in artificial intelligence, changing research and funding environments, digital inequality, climate pressures and shifting global partnerships.

UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela said: "We are very honoured and privileged to host the Times Higher Education World Academic Summit, which is being brought to Africa for the very first time. The summit is one of the most preeminent gatherings of world university leaders.

"We want these conversations to come to Africa, as this means that many of our African sister universities will be able to participate more effectively and more conveniently in these conversations. It's important that we take part in the conversations in order to shape them."

High-profile speakers

The summit will bring together prominent South African and international voices, including:

- Buti Manamela, Minister of Higher Education and Training
- Geordin Hill-Lewis, Executive Mayor of Cape Town
- Dr Precious Moloi-Motsepe, UCT Chancellor
- Professor Moshabela, UCT Vice-Chancellor
- Professor Judy Dlamini, University of the Witwatersrand Chancellor
- Professor Adam Habib, SOAS University of London Vice-Chancellor

- Professor Puleng LenkaBula, University of South Africa Vice-Chancellor
- Professor Hester Klopper, University of the Free State Vice-Chancellor
- Professor Nancy Ip, President and Professor of Life Science, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
- Professor David Garza, Tecnológico de Monterrey President
- Professor Evelyn Welch, University of Bristol President and Vice-Chancellor
- Phil Baty, Times Higher Education Chief Global Affairs Officer
- Chris Havergal, Times Higher Education Editor
- James Ricci, Schmidt Sciences Director for Science Systems
- Professor José Frantz, Sol Plaatje University Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies
- Professor Edgar Pieterse, UCT African Centre for Cities Director

Conversations with major implications for higher education
The summit will explore four broad areas:

- The future university: How universities can rethink teaching, learning, funding and their role in a rapidly changing world.
- Universities and society: The role of higher education in advancing justice, inclusion, public trust and the public good.
- Global collaboration: How universities, particularly in the Global South, can build more equitable and reciprocal international partnerships.
- Ethical AI, access and innovation: How universities can respond to artificial intelligence while addressing digital inequality, infrastructure gaps and the ethical challenges of emerging technologies.

The summit offers opportunities to explore South Africa's place in the global higher education landscape, the future of university funding and research, AI and teaching, international partnerships, student access and success, and the role of universities in addressing wider societal challenges.

World University Rankings 2027
THE is scheduled to release its World University Rankings 2027 on 29 September 2026.

Media opportunities
The summit provides an opportunity for the media to engage with THE experts and university leaders on – among others – global rankings, research performance, internationalisation and the factors shaping the global higher education landscape.

Members of the media are invited to attend the summit and interview selected speakers, subject to availability and programme commitments.

Media wishing to attend or arrange interviews with speakers are requested to contact the undersigned.

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