

INTEGRATING THEORY & PRACTICE: INNOVATIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TO PROMOTE WORK- INTEGRATED LEARNING

UFS SENATE CONFERENCE 2025

Warm greetings to you all!
Hartlike groete aan almal!
Ke ya le dumedisa kaofela!

Prof Henk de Jager: CEO of THENSA
20 May 2025





TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED



THENSA at a Glance

Innovative Stakeholder Engagement to Promote WIL

Models of Engagement

WIL as an Instrument to Enhance Stakeholder Engagements with Business & Industry

Innovative Ways to Introduce WIL

Resourcing WIL

Concluding Remarks





THENSA AT A GLANCE

Contributions to Entrepreneurship, Research, Innovation & WIL

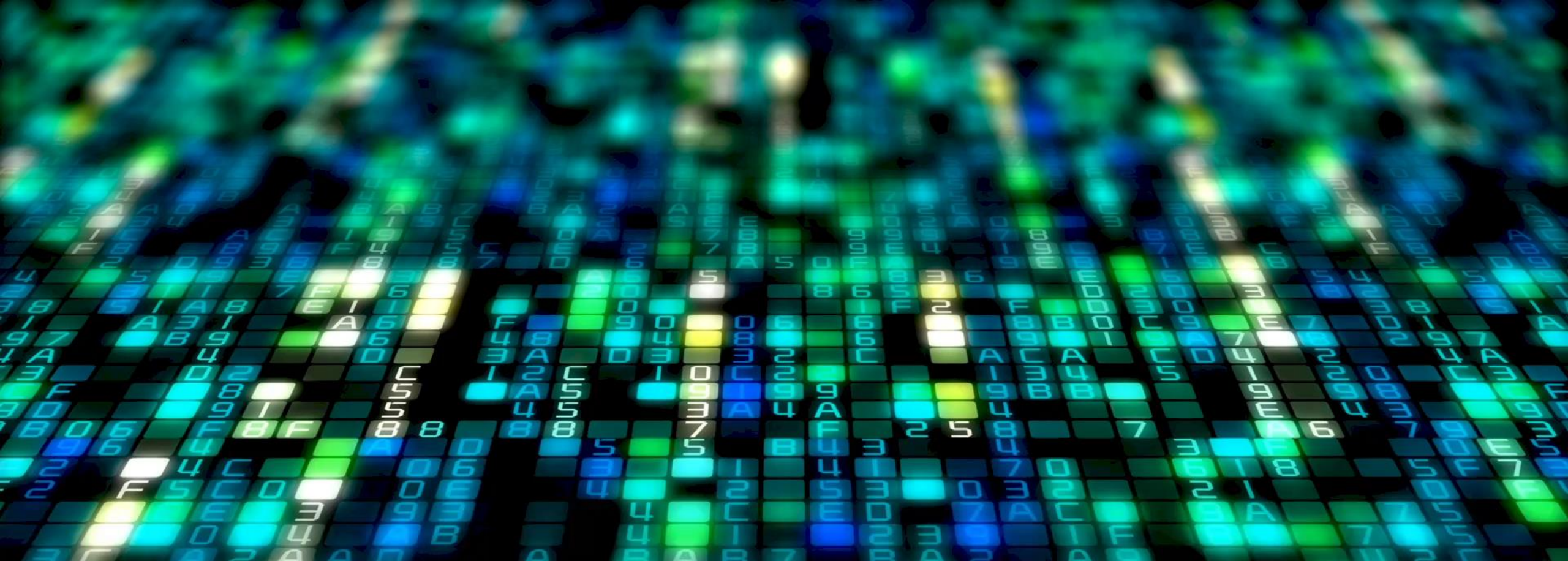


ABOUT THENSA

- THENSA, known as the South African Technology Network (SATN) then, was **established in 2006**.
- The organisation **was rebranded in 2020 as THENSA** and reviewed its vision, mission and strategic objectives to accommodate its new partners.
- THENSA is a representative body for **technology-focused higher education institutions in Africa**.
- Current members include nine **(9) universities in South Africa, NUST and ATUPA**.
- This body's main objective is to **promote relevant, impactful, and globally competitive qualifications, skills, research, and innovation in partnership with Businesses, Industries, and Research Institutions locally and internationally** to ensure a vibrant economy in Africa.

THENSA responds to:

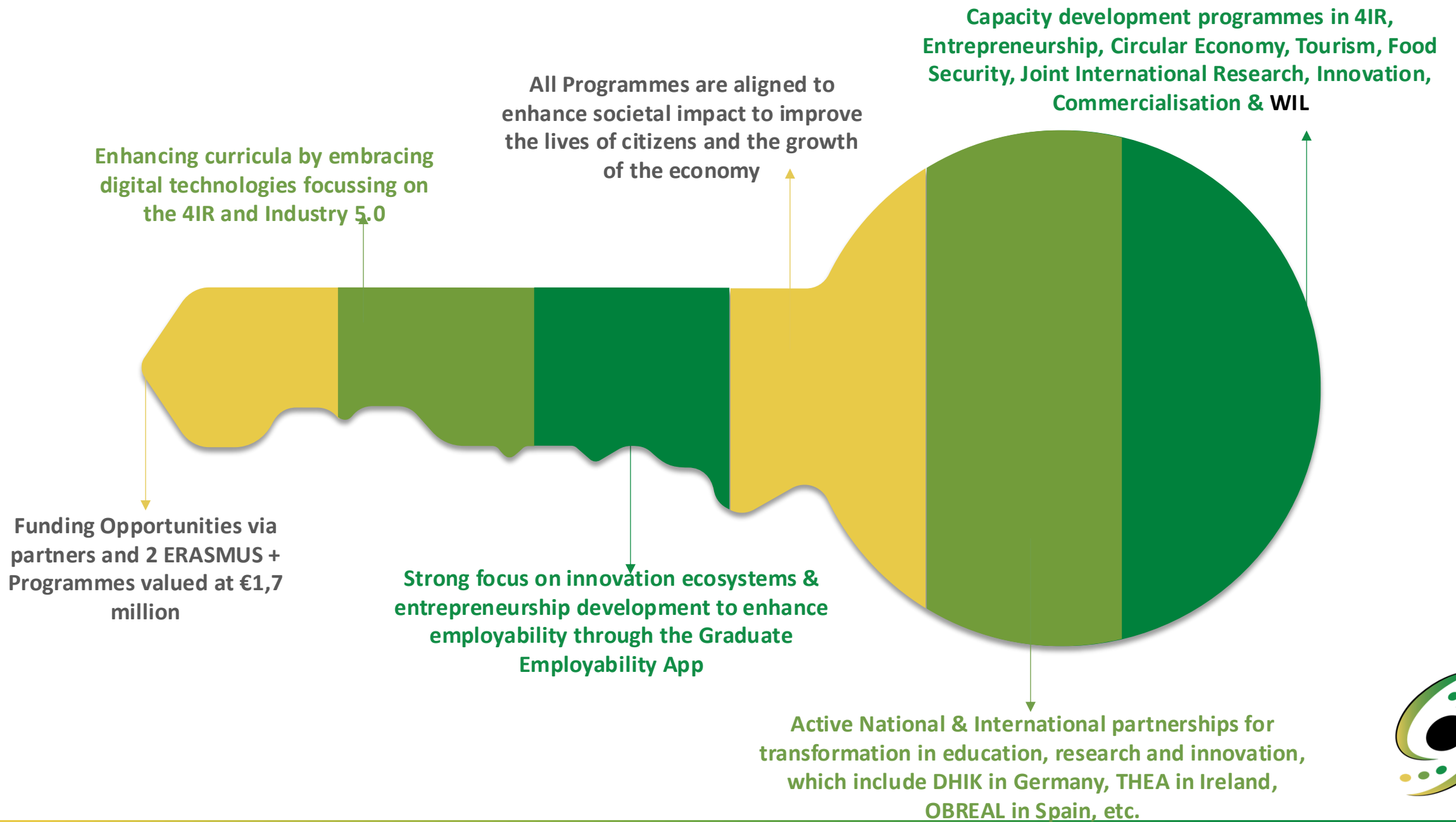




Value Proposition

THENSA is a vibrant, innovative consortium that advances technology-focused higher education institutions with a transformative societal impact.







Partnerships & High-impact projects/programmes

Membership of International Organisations



MIT Jameel World
Education Lab
(J-WEL)



World Association for
Cooperative Education
(WACE)



OBREAL

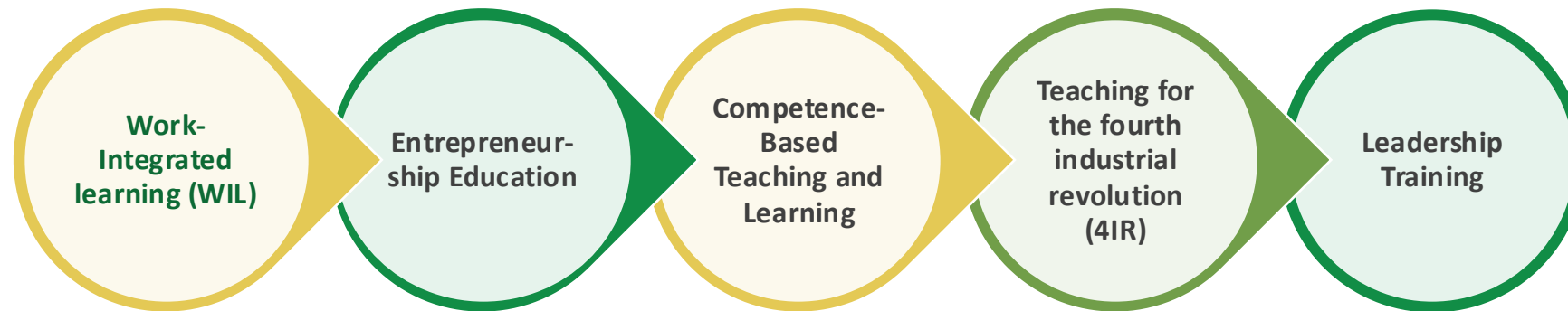


Clarivate
Analytics



Higher Education Reform Experts South Africa: 2021 - 2024

- 🌀 The HERESA project is an **Erasmus+ Capacity Building Project for Higher Education (CBHE)** awarded to THENSA and OBREAL in 2020 to the value of € 754,834.
- 🌀 The project aims to develop a network of Higher Education Reform Experts in South Africa to influence policy change in their respective institutions and countries for approximately a decade. HERESA is based in the member universities of THENSA in partnership with SAQA.
- 🌀 This project focuses on **revising and reinvigorating teaching and learning strategies**, especially those related to:





UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRY CO-CREATION TO BUILD ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITIES IN THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY (UNIICo-create)

- THENSA and its partners across the SADC region secured an **Erasmus+** Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) Grant.
- Using **entrepreneurship as the vehicle for transformation**, this project aims to address several challenges faced by the SADC region, such as low levels of **job creation, start-up success, and graduate employment**.
- Awarded to THENSA and its partners to the value of €1,000,000 for this project from 2025 to 2028.
- It involves **HEIs from South Africa, Lesotho, Eswatini, and Namibia, and Ministries of Education** from each of these countries, supported by three European Union partner institutions from **Ireland, France, and Finland**, and several associate partners, with 24 partners in total, with THENSA as the coordinator.

This project's key objectives are :

To train academic leaders to collaborate with industry and societal partners in co-creating curricula that promote entrepreneurship and innovation.

To pilot the integration of Co-creation Units within university Technology Transfer Offices to facilitate collaborative projects between students, staff, and industry

To create a network of advocates who can influence policies related to **university-industry cooperation**, curriculum design, and joint qualifications.







WORK-INTEGRATING LEARNING – SOUTH AFRICA (WILSA)



- WILSA was established in 2022, **resulting from the HERESA project** and the HERESA WIL Community of Practice, and their desire to have an impact beyond the project.
- WILSA is a **network of excellence for WIL** that is research-focused to promote research, training, capacity building and the practice of WIL in the country and the continent.

ASSOCIATION FOR WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING (AWIL)

- AWIL was registered in July 2023 with the CIPC as a Section 21, not-for-profit Company, as a **professional body for the WIL community** of practice in SA, the region and beyond.
- It aims to **professionalise and establish quality standards and practices for WIL practitioners**.
- Current status: Engagements with Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (**CEWIL Canada**), which has already professionalised the WIL profession.
- Dr Henri Jacobs**, Director of WIL and Industry Liaison at CUT and **THENSA's Specialist in WIL**, drives WILSA & AWIL.



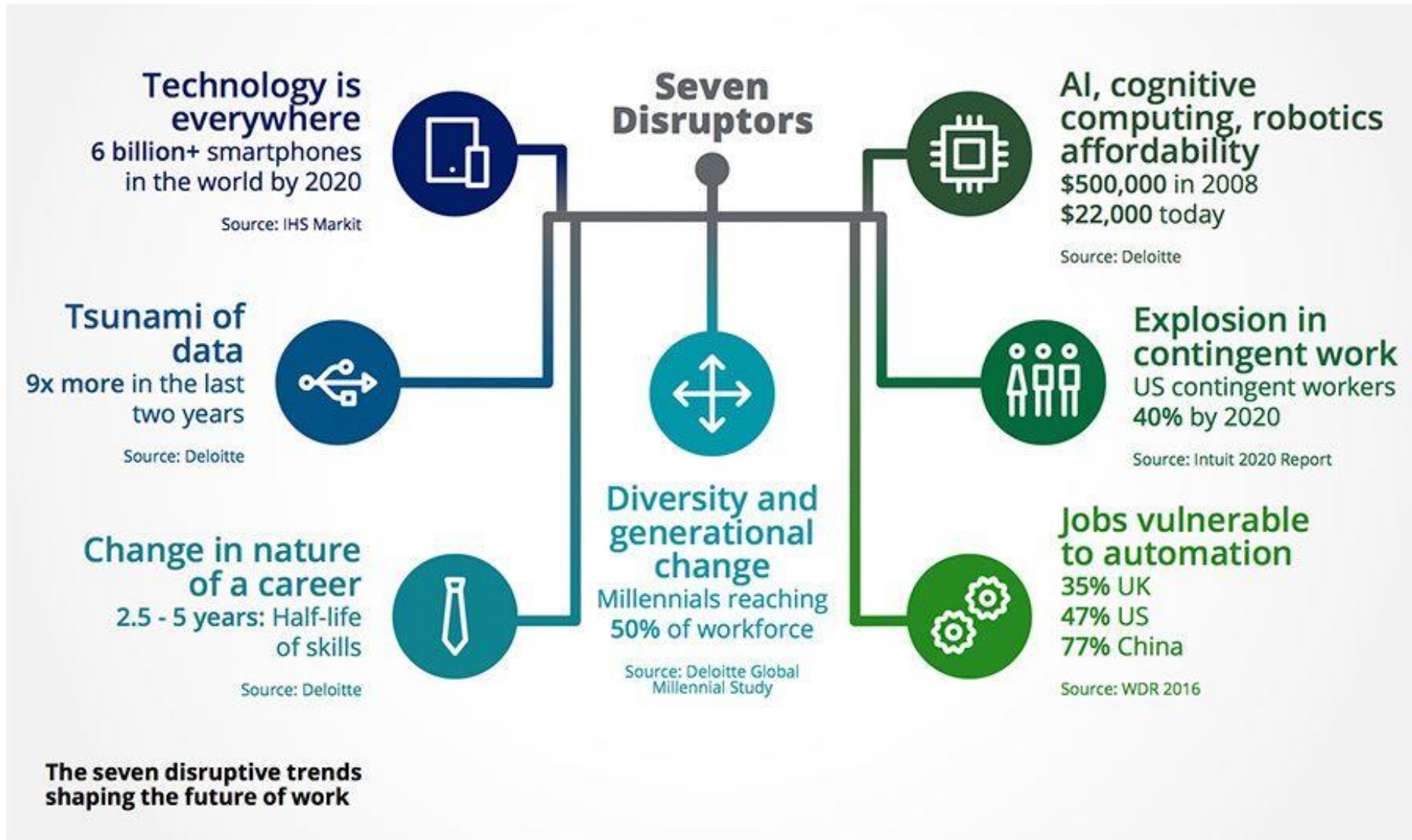


INNOVATIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TO PROMOTE WIL

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FUTURE WORLD OF WORK



(Source: Consultancy.eu. 2021)





STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS



Inclusiveness



Transparency



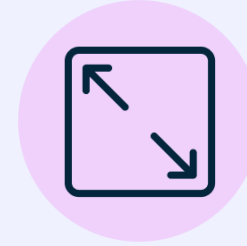
Respect



Accountability



Flexibility



10 KEY PRINCIPLES OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



Equity



Clarity



Sustainability



Timeliness



Continuous
Improvement





(Source: George, C. 14 May 2024)





UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRY INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENT



-  University-industry collaboration represents a **dynamic partnership between academia and industry**, fostering innovation, driving economic growth, and addressing societal challenges.
-  **Enhance the collaborative processes between the university and business/industry** in enhancing quality.
-  Ensure **effective communication** and advice on academic matters between the university and its relevant constituencies.
-  **Networking is vital** for successful university-industry partnerships.
-  Decide on a **University-Industry Engagement Model best for UFS.**



QUINTUPLE HELIX MODEL

- It situates **university-industry-government-civil society partnerships** within the context of the broader **natural environment**.
- It promotes **sound relationships between the HEI graduates** and the places they will occupy as employees, managers, or entrepreneurs, as well as between academic and research staff at the **HEI and external partners**.
- These relationships could be **strengthened through WIL**, collaborative research and innovation programmes, etc.
- The stakeholder engagement ecosystem within which the university operates should **benefit civil society** directly and indirectly while simultaneously **advancing knowledge and innovation that promotes economic, social, and environmental sustainability**.

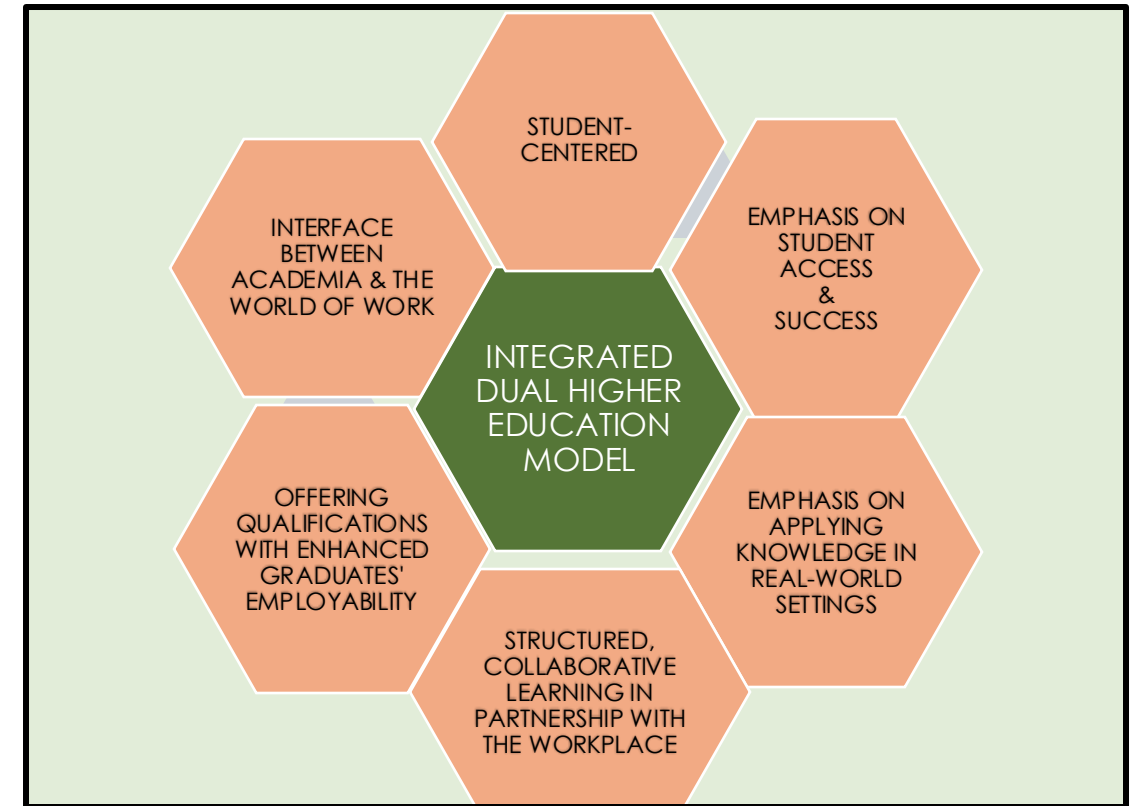


Source: DHET (2022), adopted from Lura & Besnik (2019).



CONSIDERING ELEMENTS OF THE DUAL HIGHER EDUCATION MODEL *(SA, Germany, CHEC & LaTFURE)*

- It places the **student at the centre**.
- Emphasis on **student access and success**, both academically and in applying their knowledge in **real-world settings**.
- The DHEM provides structured, collaborative learning opportunities **in partnership with workplace stakeholders** to benefit learners and society.
- The DHEM provides Universities with **direct information on industry needs and trends**.
- The DHEM requires a more rigorous approach to the interface between academia and the world of work to be applied, with **regular iterations between academia and industry**.
- The DHEM emphasises the **development of skills** that are directly relevant to the workplace and **enhancing the employability and readiness of graduates**.





CONSIDERING SABBATICAL LEAVE FOR STAFF FOR INDUSTRY EXPOSURE



- Allows **staff members to get exposure to the industry/business** in their specific fields of expertise.
- It allows staff members to **keep abreast of the latest developments** and technology in the workplace.
- To **integrate such developments into the curriculum** and convey them to students.
- Such placements can be local, regional, national and international industry exposure.
- Varies between **ten (10) days and a maximum period of six (6) months** with all benefits.
- Compulsory for full-time Academic employees** from the rank of lecturer upwards.
- Academic employees to complete a **minimum of ten (10) days** of industry exposure excursion in cycles of five **(5) years**.





STRENGTHENING FUNCTIONAL INDUSTRY-LED ADVISORY BOARDS OR COMMITTEES



- Advise the relevant department on **curriculum issues** in order to ensure relevancy.
- Assist the university in its programme/departmental/institutional **self-evaluation exercises** to enhance quality.
- Assist the university regarding the **placement of students (WIL)**.
- Assist the university in the **placement of staff for sabbaticals for industrial experience**.
- Allows staff members to **keep abreast of the latest developments** and technology in the workplace.
- Advise on the **development of new programmes**, the modification of existing programmes, and plans to eliminate programmes based on trends and needs in the related occupations.
- Assist in market surveys to determine the employability of graduates and the **future employment needs** of business and industry.
- **Membership consists** of business and industry staff, academic staff, local authorities, professional bodies/associations where relevant, **students, alumni**, and any other members who can contribute to enhancing the quality of the relevant programme.
- To be **chaired by a member of business and industry**.





**WIL AS AN INSTRUMENT TO
ENHANCE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS
WITH BUSINESS & INDUSTRY**

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BENEFITS OF WIL

(NSA, 2023: 21)



- It allows students to develop essential workplace skills, such as **problem-solving, teamwork, communication, and critical thinking, in a real-world context** (Graduate Attributes).
- It allows **students** to explore potential career paths, build professional networks, and gain industry-specific knowledge and insights.
- From an **employer's perspective**, WIL programs offer a valuable opportunity for employers/industry to identify and **recruit talented individuals** who have already demonstrated their capabilities in a work environment.
- Universities benefit from WIL** by **aligning their curricula with industry needs** and ensuring graduates have practical skills and experience that employers highly value.
- WIL programmes **foster collaboration between academia and industry**, promoting knowledge exchange, research partnerships, and the development of innovative solutions to real-world challenges.
- WIL plays a crucial role in **preparing students for the demands of the world of work**.
- It **enhances students' employability**, contributes to economic growth, and **strengthens the linkages between education and industry**.





INNOVATIVE BUSINESS & INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT TO PROMOTE WIL



- 🌀 **Leverage existing partnerships with business and industry** – take stock and sell the strategic notion to enhance WIL in academic programmes.
- 🌀 Start with a few **pilot** academic programmes.
- 🌀 The University should lead programme design and coordination, **working closely with industry partners to align curricula and facilitate meaningful work placements.**
- 🌀 **Effective leadership of WIL** programs requires collaboration and partnership among these stakeholders.
- 🌀 **Government bodies** provide guidance, support, and funding to create an enabling environment for WIL initiatives.
- 🌀 **Post-graduate programmes** to focus on business and industry needs.





INNOVATIVE WAYS TO INTRODUCE WIL IN ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES



- 🌀 The parameters and understanding of **WIL differ significantly across universities** and countries.
- 🌀 **Creative and innovative ways to integrate WIL into the curricula** should be explored to expose students to authentic, real-world challenges and experiences.
- 🌀 **WIL can include** case studies, work simulations, cultural immersion exercises and short-term industry projects.
- 🌀 WIL can **vary from a few weeks to 50%** of a three-year qualification.
- 🌀 **Co-designed Curricula:** The curricula of the university should be designed in partnership with local industries and businesses to promote graduate readiness for the world of work and employability.
 - 🌀 A **flexible curriculum** responsive to industry needs is required.
 - 🌀 The curriculum must be designed to develop **technical and power (soft) skills**.
- 🌀 **Academic staff** in these programmes need to have a blend of academic knowledge and practical experience.
 - 🌀 Staff should **keep abreast of industry trends** and developments.
 - 🌀 **Use experts in the industry as lecturers (50% in Germany).**





INNOVATIVE WAYS TO INTRODUCE WIL IN ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES (CONT.)



- 🌀 **WIL Terminology: Defining what will work best for UFS:** For example, we used the term Practice-Embedded Learning (PEL) during the Phase 2 Feasibility Study of the new HEI of Science and Innovation at Ekurhuleni. **(WIL is not work – it is part of learning!)**
 - 🌀 The conventional WIL model is sometimes seen **as an add-on** to academic programmes.
 - 🌀 A more rigorous approach to the interface between academia and the world of work should be applied, with **regular alterations between academia and industry** (e.g. proposes 50% for the new HEI).
- 🌀 **Industry Partnerships: Students benefit from strong connections with local industries** that provide them with modern facilities, advice from industry experts, and opportunities for experiential learning.
- 🌀 **Ongoing Feedback and Enhancement:** Frequent feedback from industry partners and students is used to continually improve and update the academic programs and workplace learning experiences.
- 🌀 **Entrepreneurship:** WIL can be used to catalyse entrepreneurship.
- 🌀 **Research:** Scholarship of WIL as a research field.





RESOURCING WIL PROGRAMMES



- WIL is costly as it is **not subsidised**. However, WIL programmes could be designed in innovative ways – e.g. credit-bearing Industry Projects! (**BEng Programme**)
- WIL needs to be **adequately resourced by the university!**
- WIL should be **embedded into institutional structures**. (E.g. at UFS - Expand the Scholarly Engagement section to include 'Engagement with Business and Industry'; Senate Committee, etc.).
- Dedicated staff members** to drive and enhance WIL in academic programmes in faculties/departments – **not an add-on to existing workload**.
- Establish **partnerships with SETAs** to support the financial needs of WIL students.





CONCLUSION



- 🌀 **Good news** – UFS has WIL-like initiatives for many years – e.g., Health Sciences, Teacher Education, Accounting, Service Learning, etc.
- 🌀 Start with a **few pilot programmes**.
- 🌀 Partnering with the **experts, e.g. Dr Henri Jacobs & Prof Per Assmo!**
- 🌀 Active involvement in **USAf** Learning-in-Practice Community of Practice (**LIP-COP**), **WILSA & WACE**.
- 🌀 UFS is already a member of the Southern Africa-Sweden WIL University Network (**SAS-WIL**).
- 🌀 Bring **Business, Industry and SETAs on board – face-to-face engagements**.
- 🌀 Best wishes on this exciting journey!
- 🌀 THENSA will gladly assist in whatever way required.



THANK YOU;
KEA LEBOHA;
BAIE DANKIE;
NGIYABONGA;
ENKOSI
MOOI LOOP!
LETSATSI LE MONATE!



Any Questions?





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