



KICK-OFF EVENT PROGRAMME

Dear Colleagues and Participants,

Welcome to **HE ON TRIAL: The People vs Higher Education**, jointly convened by the Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) and the Western Cape Government (WCG).

We are delighted to have participants joining us both in the room and online, for what promises to be a bold and forward-looking conversation about the future of higher education.

HE ON TRIAL is structured deliberately as a courtroom-style examination of the higher education system. The purpose is not to condemn higher education, but to examine its current form honestly and to identify the changes needed for it to remain legitimate, relevant and future-shaping in the coming decade.

Venue: AMAZON WEB SERVICES TRAINING CENTER (AWS): 57 Heerengracht St, Cape Town City Centre, 8001, South Africa

MSTEAMS: Join: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/36576998966516?p=z0aJD06Fkci6cOsTAL>

Meeting ID: 365 769 989 665 16 ; Passcode: WJ6Cf7wu

Note that you will not be allowed to attend (online or in person, if you have not registered)

PROGRAMME OF THE DAY

08:30 – 08:45 | ARRIVAL OF GUESTS

Participants arrive and take their seats.

08:50 – 09:00 | ARRIVAL OF THE JURY PANEL

Guests will be asked to stand as the jury enters and takes their seats.

09:00 – 09:25 | WELCOME AND OPENING ADDRESS

This session sets the tone for the day by reflecting on the role of universities in a rapidly changing world.

- Prof Eugene Cloete (CEO, CHEC) – Welcome
- Prof Jonathan Jansen (Distinguished Professor of Education, Stellenbosch University) – Opening Address

09:25 – 09:55 | ACT 0 – CONTEXT

This opening session provides context for the trial by reflecting on what the next 5–10 years of work, skills and production may look like in practice

Speaker: George Webster (International VFX Supervisor)
(Mentimeter: M1).

09:55 – 10:05 | THE CHARGES

The formal charges against higher education are presented, including questions of curriculum relevance, systemic inequality, digital and AI readiness, governance constraints and the pace of institutional transformation

Clerk of the Court: Ms Sisipho Zweni
(Mentimeter: M2).

10:05 – 10:55 | Panel 1 – GOVERNANCE, POLICY AND SYSTEM DESIGN ON TRIAL

This panel examines structural and policy challenges within higher education systems

Prosecutor: Prof René Pellissier (CHEC)

Speakers:

- Prof Ramon Torrent (President, OBREAL Global – video contribution)
- Bonakele Jacobs (Director: TVET Curriculum and Institutional Support)

(Mentimeter: M3).

10:55 – 11:05 | Brief break

11:05 – 12:05 | Panel 2 – THE ACADEMIC PROJECT ON TRIAL

This panel explores the pressures within the academic profession and the human realities of teaching, research and academic work Prosecutor: Prof René Pellissier (CHEC)

Speakers:

- Dr Delmaine Christian (MP)
- Dr Whitfield Green (CEO, Council on Higher Education)
- Dr Lucy Wakiaga (African Population and Health Research Center)

(Mentimeter: M4)

12:05 – 12:45 | Lunch

12:45 – 14:00 | Panel 3 – TECHNOLOGY, AI AND SKILLS MISMATCH

This panel examines how prepared universities are for rapid technological change and the evolving skills landscape

Prosecutor: Ms Melissa Parker (Western Cape Government)

Speakers:

- The Hon Minister of Tertiary Education, Science & Research (Mauritius), Dr Kaviraj Sharma Sukon.
- William T. Malik (Cybersecurity Consultant, USA)
- Prof Colin Thakur (Distinguished Professor, UNISA)
- Ms Tiara Pathon (Director, Microsoft AI)

(Mentimeter: M5).

14:00 – 14:45 | Panel 4 – HIGHER EDUCATION AS A PUBLIC GOOD (THE DEFENCE)

This panel reflects on the essential functions of higher education that must be preserved even as transformation unfolds Prosecutor: Ms Melissa Parker (Western Cape Government)

Speakers:

- Dr Peter J. Wells (Chief, Higher Education, UNESCO)
- Prof Teeroven Soobaryen (Aston Business School)

(Mentimeter: M6).

14:45 – 15:00 | JURY BRIEFING

Lead prosecutor: Prof Eugene Cloete

The jury receives its instructions and begins deliberations on the key priorities for the future of higher education and appoints a spokesperson:

1. *What must change within five years?*
2. *What must not change, even under pressure?*
3. *What trade-off must the system finally confront?*

Output: Maximum 5 system-level priorities that are structural, actionable

(Mentimeter: M7a, M7b, M7c)

Jury panel:

Ms B Abrahams (Regional Manager: Western Cape MERSETA)

Ms Anita Carrollisen (Executive Head: People & Transformation Takealot)

Ms Lieza Blom (Senior Regional Manager, WERSETA)

Prof Stan du Plessis (CEO: STADIO)

Mhlangi Khambule (PhD candidate SU)

John Lawson (CEO: Cape Chamber of Commerce)

Deirdre Samson (Head: Skills and Training Partnerships, The CollectiveX)

Bertram Loriston (Deputy Director-General: Curriculum and Assessment Management, Western Cape Education Department)

Mbali Williams (Advocacy Strategist: Youth Capital)

Nomahlubi Mosethedi/ Fatgiyah Bardien (Harambee)

15:00 – 16:10 | THE VERDICT

The jury presents up to five structural priorities for the redesign of HE (Mentimeter: M8a, M8b, M8c)

16:10– 16:20 | THE WAY FORWARD

Chair: Prof René Pellissier

Reflections on how the insights from the trial will inform future collaboration and transformation (Mentimeter: M8).

16:20 – 16:30 | CLOSING AND WORDS OF THANKS

Chair: Ms Melissa Parker

16:30 | TRIAL CLOSES

PARTICIPATION AND TIMEKEEPING



Throughout the day you will see **Mentimeter questions on screen**, allowing participants in the room and online to contribute their perspectives (<https://www.menti.com/al8e12h61kka>).

Because the event follows a courtroom-style structure with multiple speakers and panels, **strict timekeeping is essential**. We therefore ask speakers and participants to help us keep the programme on schedule so that every session can proceed as planned.

Thank you for joining us and contributing your voice to this important conversation about the future of higher education.

Warm regards,

Prof René Pellissier

Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC)

Ms Melissa Parker

Western Cape Government (WCG)

PARKING

Parking in close proximity to AWS is as follows (please note that parking is for your account):

- CTICC – 650 metres from meeting venue
- Hotel Sky – 290 metres from meeting venue
- Roggebaai Place – 270 metres from meeting venue
- The Capetonian Hotel – 210 metres from meeting venue
- Pier Place - 110 metres from meeting venue
- The Onyx Hotel - 17 metres from meeting venue

CONTACT INFORMATION:

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