South Africa National Benchmarking of Employability and Digital Maturity in Higher Education

Strengthening Employability and Digital Maturity in South African Higher Education

The Council on Higher Education (CHE), in partnership with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member organization of the World Bank Group, is pleased to share the final **2025/26 National Employability Benchmarking Report** and **2025/26 National Digital Maturity Benchmarking Report**. Together, these reports provide a national evidence base for understanding two increasingly interconnected priorities for South African higher education: how institutions prepare students and graduates for a changing world of work, and how effectively they harness digital technologies to support teaching, learning, student success and institutional performance.

The benchmarking initiative included both public and private higher education institutions and combined institutional self-assessment with evidence review and validation. Participating institutions also received individual benchmarking reports to help identify their own strengths and opportunities for improvement, while the national reports provide a consolidated perspective on patterns, priorities and opportunities across the sector.

National Employability Benchmarking

Graduate employability is broader than whether a graduate secures a job. It depends on the institutional practices and systems that connect curriculum and teaching with labour-market needs, strengthen employer engagement, provide effective career support, engage alumni and generate evidence on graduate outcomes. The employability study examines these interconnected areas to understand how comprehensively employability is embedded within institutional practice.

The findings point to a South African higher education system with a strong foundation for employability, while also highlighting opportunities to strengthen the coherence and institutionalization of this work. The report identifies priorities including stronger graduate

outcomes evidence, more structured external input into curriculum and faculty development, expanded experiential learning and greater use of alumni and other stakeholders as part of the broader employability ecosystem. An important outcome of the study is the recommendation for a national system-level infrastructure for tracking graduates.

Importantly, the benchmarking is intended as more than a once-off assessment. It provides institutions with a practical reference point for prioritizing improvement and monitoring progress, while creating opportunities for differentiated support, peer learning and future rounds of measurement. At system level, the findings also provide evidence that can inform ongoing quality-enhancement conversations and capacity-development initiatives.

National Digital Maturity Benchmarking

The companion Digital Maturity Benchmarking study considers the enabling institutional capabilities required for successful digital transformation. Digital maturity increasingly influences the capacity of higher education institutions to deliver flexible and accessible learning, improve teaching and learning, support student success, strengthen institutional decision-making and operate effectively in a rapidly changing environment.

The study therefore looks beyond technology infrastructure alone. It provides a diagnostic perspective on institutional digital readiness and the capacity required to use technology effectively across higher education. Its methodology combines quantitative institutional self-assessment with qualitative evidence review and validation, providing a structured basis for identifying strengths, gaps and opportunities for further development.

The report also draws attention to the importance of equity in digital transformation. Differences in infrastructure, resources and institutional capacity can deepen divides between institutions, making it important that digital advancement strengthens rather than widens access and opportunity across the higher education system.

Two complementary perspectives on a future-ready higher education system

Although presented as separate reports, employability and digital maturity are closely connected. Digital literacy is itself an important employability capability, while digitally mature institutions are better positioned to support flexible learning, data-informed decision-making, student support, and increasingly technology-enabled learning and working environments.

Taken together, the two reports offer a valuable resource for higher education institutions and other sector stakeholders. They provide an evidence base not only for understanding current practice, but also for identifying where collective action, institutional improvement and continued sector dialogue can strengthen the relevance, inclusivity, and responsiveness of South African higher education.

The intention is not simply to benchmark where the sector is today, but to use the evidence as a basis for continuous improvement. The reports invite stakeholders to engage with the findings, consider their implications within different institutional contexts, and contribute to continued dialogue on how South African higher education can strengthen graduate outcomes while building the institutional capabilities required for a rapidly evolving digital future. The outcomes of the two reports have also informed feedback for the CHE's consultation on the proposed Higher Education Practice Standards (HEPS).

The CHE and the IFC plan to host online webinars to enable sector engagement on the reports.

Hyperlinks to the reports:

2025/26 National Employability Benchmarking Report

2025/26 National Digital Maturity Benchmarking Report