

IYUNIVESITHI WALTER SISULU

FACULTY OF ENGINEERING, BUILT ENVIRONMENT & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Walter Sisulu's FEBEIT and China's Henan Polytechnic Institute Launch Landmark Skills Partnership

A new international partnership between Walter Sisulu University and China's Henan Polytechnic Institute (HPI) is opening the door to global learning opportunities for our Engineering, Built Environment and IT students, while deepening technical skills development and cultural exchange between South Africa and China.

The collaboration, centred on the China–South Africa “Dahe Workshop”, was formally launched at the Potsdam Site just outside KuGompo City on Monday, 20 January. It will focus on vocational education, student and staff training, curriculum development, technical services and digital learning platforms, creating new pathways towards internationally recognised technical qualifications.

“This is a clear demonstration of the growing importance of international cooperation in higher education, and a deepening South–South relationship in a global economy undergoing tectonic geopolitical shifts.” — Mr Ntlanganiso Dladla, Advisor to the Vice-Chancellor

Building on that momentum, the HPI delegation travelled to the Buffalo City Campus the following day, Tuesday, 21 July, to tour the engineering laboratories at the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology (FEBEIT). The visit reinforced the practical foundations of the growing partnership between the two institutions.

Leading the delegation was HPI Deputy President Mr Zhu Chengjun, joined by Mr Fan Guohui (Dean, School of Architectural Engineering), Mr Li Lei (Vice Dean, School of Electronic Information Engineering) and Mr Zong Wentao (Secretary-General, BRICS Organization for Youth Cooperation and Development).

Touring the labs and engaging with academic staff, Mr Chengjun noted striking similarities in equipment and approach, describing a solid foundation from which the two institutions can jointly conceptualise and implement the practical components of the agreement. He also expressed optimism about establishing reciprocal student exchanges through the Dahe Workshop, giving Engineering, Built Environment and IT students from both institutions the chance to study in each other's countries — broadening global perspectives while strengthening academic collaboration and cross-cultural understanding.

Together, Walter Sisulu University and Henan Polytechnic Institute will now work on developing innovative teaching models, expanding technical skills training and strengthening industry-focused education, producing graduates ready for an increasingly interconnected global economy.

SKILLS & GRADUATION

Cellphone Repair Graduation: A Real Game Changer for Rural Entrepreneurs

On 2 June 2026, the Cellphone Repair graduation hosted by NEMISA and Walter Sisulu University (Class of 2025) was held at the Lusikisiki Resource Centre. Thirty proud graduands received their certificates after successfully completing the practical training programme.

The event was more than a certificate ceremony — it was a celebration of new beginnings. Graduates took the stage to share their training journeys, describing long hours of hands-on practice, challenges overcome, and the satisfaction of mastering technical skills. Many spoke about the personal and family support that carried them through, and expressed deep gratitude to NEMISA, Walter Sisulu University, programme facilitators and community supporters for the opportunity.

For these 30 newly qualified cellphone technicians, most of whom come from rural areas where unemployment remains a serious challenge, this qualification is a real game changer. Equipped with marketable skills, basic business know-how and confidence, they are now launching micro-enterprises and repair services in their communities. Several graduates announced that they have already started earning profit from repairs and services, turning their training into immediate income and sustainable livelihoods.

This programme demonstrates how targeted skills development can address unemployment, stimulate local entrepreneurship and strengthen rural economies. By creating pathways from training to self-employment, the initiative helps graduates become job creators rather than job seekers — repairing phones today and rebuilding local prosperity tomorrow.

Congratulations to the Class of 2025 — may your businesses thrive, may you employ others from your communities, and may your success inspire many more to pursue technical skills and entrepreneurship.





Graduates of the NEMISA–Walter Sisulu Cellphone Repair Programme, Class of 2025, at the Lusikisiki Resource Centre.

SKILLS & GRADUATION

A New Dawn for Skills, Entrepreneurship and Community Empowerment

Address by the Executive Dean, Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology

“It is both an honour and a privilege to stand before you today as we celebrate a remarkable achievement — the graduation of participants from the Cellphone Repair Programme,” said the Executive Dean at the graduation ceremony.

The Dean thanked partners, government, NEMISA and stakeholders for making the programme possible and described the day as a celebration of hope, resilience, opportunity, innovation and the transformative power of education and skills development. He emphasised that this success shows what can be achieved when universities, government, industry and communities collaborate to provide practical skills that stimulate local economic development.

“On behalf of the iYunivesiti Walter Sisulu Management, Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to each graduate. Your success today reflects your determination, commitment, discipline, and willingness to invest in your future.”

Highlighting the importance of mobile technology, he noted that mobile phones are no longer simply communication devices — they have become essential tools for education, healthcare, banking, agriculture, entrepreneurship, governance and social interaction. The Dean explained the programme's dual aim: to equip participants with employable technical skills and to promote entrepreneurship so graduates can establish sustainable businesses and create jobs.

“The knowledge and skills you have acquired extend beyond replacing screens, repairing charging ports, diagnosing software faults, or troubleshooting hardware components,” he told the graduates. “You have learned how to solve problems systematically. You have learned precision, patience, professionalism and customer service. Most importantly, you have learned how to create value through technical expertise.”

Urging continued learning and self-reliance, the Dean said graduation is not the destination but the beginning of a lifelong journey of learning, and called on graduates not to wait endlessly for employment opportunities but to create them —

starting small, operating from their communities, and building a reputation based on honesty, quality, reliability and excellent customer service.

He closed with a call to service and excellence: “Go into your communities with confidence. Serve with integrity. Work with excellence. Innovate with courage. Lead with humility. Congratulations once again to every graduate. Your future begins today.”



The Executive Dean addresses graduates and guests at the Cellphone Repair Programme graduation ceremony.

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

Facilities Management Takes Centre Stage at Inaugural Public Works Sector Conference

At the inaugural Public Works Sector Facilities Management Conference, held at Walter Sisulu's Potsdam Site, the strategic role of facilities management was placed firmly in the spotlight. In his opening address, FEBEIT Executive Dean Prof. Didibhuku Thwala reminded delegates that facilities management has evolved beyond maintenance to become a strategic discipline that integrates people, places, processes, technology and infrastructure to deliver organisational objectives and sustain built assets across their lifecycle.

“Beautifully constructed hospitals or world-class university buildings still fail their users if poorly managed.” — Prof. Didibhuku Thwala, FEBEIT Executive Dean

Prof. Thwala warned that infrastructure value is realised only through effective operation and maintenance. He highlighted pressing sector challenges in South Africa, including ageing infrastructure, deferred maintenance backlogs, constrained budgets, rising operating costs, climate pressures and heightened public expectations.

Delegates heard a strong call for higher education to prepare the next generation of built environment professionals — facilities managers, engineers, architects, quantity surveyors and asset managers — equipped with leadership, digital literacy, sustainability awareness and innovative problem-solving skills.

SAFMA President Batabile Sibaca described the conference as a historic milestone and urged stronger partnerships across government, industry and service providers to elevate facilities management from a background support role to a strategic driver of asset performance. Eastern Cape Head of Department Phucuka Penxa echoed the need for urgent reform to reposition facilities management within the public sector so that schools, hospitals and government offices can reliably support learning, healing and service delivery.

This convening marks an important step toward collaboration, knowledge sharing and the sustained performance of our public infrastructure.



Scenes from the inaugural Public Works Sector Facilities Management Conference at the Potsdam Site.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT — OPINION

Building with Integrity: A Blueprint for the Future of the Built Environment

Mandilakhe Lawana Tutu, Senior Manager: Project Management Unit, Eastern Cape Parks & Tourism Agency

For 24 years, my professional path has wound through construction management, quantity surveying, project management and business development across the private and public sectors. Today, standing before a new generation of professionals, I see enormous promise for South Africa's infrastructure, but I also see threats that technical skill alone cannot fix. If our built environment is to serve communities reliably and equitably, we must pair competence with character: resilience, accountability and unshakeable integrity.

The most urgent threat is the rise of organised criminal syndicates — what has come to be known as the construction mafia. These groups use extortion and intimidation to hijack projects, demanding percentages of budgets or forcing subcontracting arrangements. The consequences are immediate and corrosive: project costs inflate, work stalls, investors withdraw, public funds are wasted, and communities are left waiting for roads, clinics and schools. Confronting this threat requires collective action — professionals must document and report extortion attempts, work closely with law enforcement, and press for stronger legislation and site protection.

“Without registration, you remain a practitioner; with it, you become a trusted professional accountable to peers, clients and the public.”

Technical competence remains essential, but the future demands a hybrid toolkit: mastery of construction methods and materials alongside digital proficiency in BIM, drones and AI-driven project management. Problem-solving, clear leadership and communication, ethical judgment and a working knowledge of sustainability and resource efficiency are equally important. Technical excellence alone will not advance you — learn to communicate, negotiate and lead; the best professionals marry skill with soft skills.

Growth opportunities are abundant. Across Africa, investment is flowing into water and sanitation systems, affordable housing, transport infrastructure, digital construction techniques and climate-adaptive design. For aspiring professionals, that means broadening your view beyond a job title — enter the workplace with humility and curiosity, and be teachable.

Start building your career long before graduation. Seek internships and workshops, document your experience with precision and honesty, and ensure references are traceable. Networking is oxygen: cultivate mentors and peers who will guide you academically, professionally and personally.

Character underpins everything. Integrity and accountability must be non-negotiable. Humility keeps you open to learning from colleagues, communities and mistakes. Resilience helps you stay calm and solution-focused when projects face delays or political interference. Respect for the communities we serve must guide design and delivery — listen to those who use the infrastructure.

Balance is equally important. Protect your personal time and relationships to avoid burnout; ambition without a solid foundation leads to collapse. Speak with conviction but listen with openness — confidence should grow from competence, not arrogance. Ambition versus patience, confidence versus humility, and work versus rest are not contradictions, but parts of a sustainable professional life.



ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

ECSA Accreditation Panel Visits Walter Sisulu's Electrical Engineering Programme

Walter Sisulu University is currently hosting a high-profile interim accreditation visit by a panel from the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) at the institution's College Street site. The visit marks a significant milestone for the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology (FEBEIT), positioning it as a key contributor to South Africa's engineering and technical talent pipeline.

Welcoming the delegation, FEBEIT Executive Dean Professor Didibhuku Thwala provided the ECSA panel with a comprehensive background and overview of the faculty, outlining its academic direction, its role in the broader engineering sector, and its strategic outlook for the next decade. Beyond the faculty's academic offerings, Prof. Thwala highlighted the pressing societal challenges shaping FEBEIT's teaching, learning and community engagement priorities — including the energy crisis, water pollution and scarcity, food insecurity, public safety, disease burdens, traffic congestion, rapid technological change and population pressures.

“A key priority for us is to ensure that we attract staff who are professionally registered with ECSA, or who are at an advanced stage of their professional journey — so that our graduates are taught by role models who already meet the ECSA standards.” — Prof. Didibhuku Thwala

In strengthening academic quality and professional standards, Prof. Thwala discussed the faculty's partnership with MerSETA through a professionalisation programme aimed at improving staff qualifications, workplace competency and alignment with industry needs. The Dean also revealed that the university is actively developing postgraduate programmes in electrical engineering, intended to create a stronger pipeline of master's and doctoral graduates who can lead research and innovation in energy systems, power electronics, renewable technologies and smart grid applications — targeted for launch by 2030.

The accreditation visit also spotlighted the faculty's growing investment in infrastructure and innovation, including a R6 million funding injection from the Automotive Industry Development Centre Eastern Cape (AIDC EC). This funding will support the construction of a new laboratory housing both Electrical and Mechanical Engineering activities, creating a shared space for interdisciplinary projects and industry-linked research.

By aligning curricula with ECSA outcomes, integrating industry-relevant projects and strengthening postgraduate and staff development pathways, FEBEIT aims to equip graduates with the technical expertise, ethical grounding and practical skills needed to contribute meaningfully to South Africa's development.



The ECSA accreditation panel engages with FEBEIT leadership, staff and students at the College Street site.

TVET & 4IR • 8 APRIL 2026

iWS–CIDB Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Construction and 4IR in TVET Education Launched

The launch of the iWS–CIDB Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Construction and 4IR in TVET Education marked a pivotal step toward building a more innovative, skilled and future-ready construction sector.

From powerful keynote addresses to dynamic discussions on digitalisation, skills development and industry collaboration, the event united leaders from government, academia and industry around a shared vision for growth.

The launch underscored a firm commitment to bolstering the talent pipeline, embracing cutting-edge technology, and advancing sustainable construction practices across South Africa.





Launch of the iWS–CIDB Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Construction and 4IR in TVET Education.

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