



SAAIR NEWSLETTER

12 MAY 2025



Greetings from SAAIR

Time is truly flying, and it is hard to believe we are already well into the second quarter of 2025! This moment offers a great opportunity to pause and reflect on the journey so far - acknowledging what we have achieved and anticipating what still lies ahead.

This edition of the newsletter coincides with the first major event of the year hosted by SAAIR - the 2025 Learning Analytics Institute (LAI), taking place at the University of the Witwatersrand from 12 to 14 May. For those of you planning to attend, we wish you a rewarding experience. May it be a time of rich learning, meaningful connections, and fresh insights to take back to your institutions. We look forward to sharing the stories, experiences, and highlights from the Institute with the wider SAAIR community very soon - stay tuned!

This edition also marks the beginning of a new initiative to celebrate African languages, philosophies, and identity through the use of themed section titles drawn from diverse linguistic and cultural traditions across the continent. Let this not only be a newsletter, but a reflection of who we are and who we are becoming as a learning community rooted in Africa connected to the world.

In this edition, you will read about the following:

- [A Special Message from the President \(Isibongo - "Praise, Tribute, Leadership"\)](#)
 - [Reflecting on Our Journey](#)
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 - [Introducing the SAAIR Strategic Framework: DISCO](#)
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- [Call for Task Teams and Working Groups \(Ubuntu - "I am because we are"\)](#)
- [Writing for the SAAIR Community \(Lulwazi - "Sharing of Knowledge"\)](#)
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Message from the President



Dear SAAIR Community

As we progress through the second quarter of 2025, I write to you with immense gratitude and renewed commitment on behalf of the Southern African Association for Institutional Research (SAAIR) Executive Committee (ExCo). It has been an energising period of engagement, reflection, and strategic direction-setting for the 2025 - 2026 term, and I am pleased to share with you highlights of our journey thus far and our path forward.

Reflecting on Our Journey to Date

Our team began with a clear and deliberate commitment to serve as a consultative and inclusive ExCo, rooted in the values and mission of SAAIR. Throughout this period, we have actively engaged with members, institutional partners, higher education leaders, researchers, sponsors, and emerging voices in the higher education community to ensure that our actions are informed, responsive, and aligned with the evolving needs of our diverse academic and professional community. We have had the opportunity to:

- Engage key sponsors and strategic allies in thoughtful discussions on mutual value creation.
- Analyse responses from the SAAIR Member Satisfaction Survey. We appreciate those who shared their voice with us.
- Establish and enhance internal databases to better track membership insights, institutional participation, strategic partnerships, and engagement trends.
- Strengthen regional representation by actively engaging institutions and individuals across the sector, with particular emphasis on broadening participation in the Sub-Saharan region.

Collective Priorities

Our members expressed a strong desire for:

- A more inclusive and dual-stream approach that supports both practitioners and academic researchers.
- Practical, hands-on training and capacity-building opportunities integrated into SAAIR events to strengthen skills and application.
- An increase in webinars and digital engagements that are contextually relevant and responsive to member's evolving needs.
- A clarified and strengthened research agenda for SAAIR, with an emphasis on practice-led contributions that inform and advance the field.
- A stronger focus on policy influence, positioning SAAIR as a key contributor to strategic dialogue in higher education.
- Deepened and more strategic partnerships with local and international institutions to expand reach and ensure long-term sustainability.

These insights have informed our strategic approach moving forward.

Introducing the SAAIR Strategic Framework: DISCO

We are proud to introduce the SAAIR 2025–2026 Strategic Framework, named DISCO, symbolising our commitment to cultivating rhythm, coherence, and excellence across our collective efforts. This framework captures the core pillars that will shape our collective direction and aspirations:

- **D – Data-Driven:** Fostering a culture where analytics and evidence are central to informed decision-making and active member engagement across the higher education landscape.
- **I – Impact and Sustainability:** Designing initiatives that deliver measurable outcomes and lasting value, ensuring continuity and relevance beyond short-term cycles.
- **S – Strategy and Policy Influence:** Playing a meaningful role in shaping institutional strategies and contributing to national and regional policy discussions.
- **C – Capacity and Professional Development:** Equipping members through targeted, skills-based initiatives that strengthen expertise, advance scholarship, and build leadership—while exploring the potential for formal or occupational qualifications in related fields.
- **O – Optimisation and Innovation:** Equipping members through targeted, skills-based initiatives that strengthen expertise, advance scholarship, and build leadership. Embracing creative thinking, new approaches, and collaborative models to address the sector's evolving challenges and opportunities - especially in relation to technology.

This framework will guide our activities, partnerships, and priorities as we work towards a stronger and more resilient SAAIR.



The SAAIR 2025-2026 Strategic Framework (DISCO) was introduced during the ExCo Strategic Planning Session.

2025 - 2026 SAAIR ExCo Members (from left): Dr Sannah Mativandlela (University of Venda); Ms Valentine Maroga (Tshwane University of Technology); Dr Munienge Mbodila (Walter Sisulu University); Mr Innocent Mamvura (University of the Witwatersrand); Mr Benjamin Ntshabele (Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University); Dr Hossein Masoumi Karakani (University of Pretoria); Ms Elizabeth Booï (President, University of the Western Cape); Mr Ashton Maherry (Vice President, South African Institute for Distance Learning), and Ms Carin Strydom (SAAIR).

Walking Forward Together

SAAIR belongs to all of us. It is a shared space where data professionals, institutional researchers, quality assurance practitioners, academic planners, and institutional strategists meet with purpose and intention. As a community of practitioners, we are called to showcase our work, share best practices, and highlight the initiatives making a tangible impact on higher education across the region.

Let us embrace SAAIR events not only as learning platforms, but as spaces to build vibrant communities of practice that foster collaboration, spark innovation, and celebrate excellence. Let us co-create a future that values both theory-informed practice and practice-informed theory, ensuring that our contribution remain responsive, impactful, and grounded in the realities of our institutions.

On behalf of the ExCo, thank you for your continued support. We look forward to your active participation as we turn shared vision into purposeful action – together.

With Sincere Regards,

Elizabeth Booï

President, SAAIR 2025–2026

Southern African Association for Institutional Research

Your Role: Call for Task Teams and Working Groups



The 2025 - 2026 SAAIR ExCo warmly invites all its members to actively participate and contribute to a Task Team or Working Group - key platforms that drive our strategic priorities and foster collaboration across the Southern Africa higher education landscape. These groups/teams are central to advancing SAAIR's mission and provide a unique opportunity to:

- Contribute meaningfully to sector wide initiatives
- Collaborate with professionals from a diverse range of institutions
- Expand your professional network
- Grow your leadership profile within a dynamic community

The current ExCo is committed to creating an inclusive and dynamic environment where every member's voice is not only heard but truly valued, driving meaningful impact. If you are interested in shaping the future of SAAIR, we encourage you to get involved in the following Task Teams/Working Groups:

- Scholarship and Mentorship Programme
- Professional Development and Training
- Academic Planning and Quality Assurance (APQA) Special Interest Group (SIG)
- Fundraising and Sponsorship
- Digital Innovation and Optimisation

If you are passionate about contributing to any of these, please respond to our call for participation by clicking the button below:

CLICK HERE

Writing for the SAAIR Community



SAAIR invites your voice to shape the future of strategic and institutional planning across Southern Africa. We welcome short, engaging, and evidence-based content that sparks meaningful discussions and promotes best practices in higher education. Your content will be featured on the SAAIR website and shared across our social media platforms. We encourage you to link to relevant conference presentations, recordings, or data visualisations when applicable. Read more by clicking the button below:

CLICK HERE

SAAIR is undertaking this initiative to strengthen its commitment to community engagement, societal impact, and research that is context-specific and transformative. By empowering institutional researchers, policymakers, and academic leaders, SAAIR aims to align its activities with both the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063. These global and continental frameworks emphasize inclusive growth, quality education, reduced inequality, and sustainable communities—goals that resonate strongly with the mission of SAAIR. Through this initiative, the association is fostering collaborative spaces where data-driven insights inform decisions that genuinely improve lives within Southern Africa and beyond.

Recent figures highlight the urgency and importance of such work. According to UNESCO, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion, with over 32 million children of primary school age out of school. Meanwhile, Agenda 2063 underscores that Africa's future depends on research-informed development that is locally rooted and globally relevant. SAAIR's commitment is to harness institutional research not only for academic advancement but also for driving real change. This includes addressing local societal needs, engaging meaningfully with communities, and ensuring that higher education institutions contribute actively to sustainable development in a way that is responsive to the unique challenges and opportunities of the region.

2025 SAAIR Events



27-31 October 2025
32nd Annual Conference
University of Venda

12-14 May 2025
Learner Analytics Institute
University of the Witwatersrand

23-25 July 2025
Quality Forum
University of Johannesburg

13-15 August 2025
HEMIS Institute
Mangosuthu University of Technology

10-12 September 2025
Institutional Research Institute
University of Free State

In 2025, SAAIR invites you on a vibrant journey across Southern Africa - a journey not only across geographical landscapes but also through the rich tapestry of knowledge, diversity, and purposeful engagement. We begin in the heart of Johannesburg in May, where the Learner Analytics Institute (LAI) at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) delves into data-driven strategies that illuminate student success and inclusion.

From there, the momentum carries us to the University of Johannesburg (UJ) in July for the Quality Forum (QF), where excellence is not a destination but a shared pursuit. Conversations shift from dashboards to deeper reflections on what “quality” means in context. August draws us to the shores of Durban, where the HEMIS Institute at Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) sharpens our understanding of systems and performance data, echoing the rhythms of innovation and accountability. September leads us into the heart of the Free State, where the Institutional Research Institute (IRI) at the University of the Free State (UFS) deepens our commitment to evidence-based leadership and societal impact. And finally, in October, the journey culminates at the 32nd Annual Conference at the University of Venda - where voices, perspectives, and passions converge. Here, researchers, administrators, and students gather not just to share findings, but to co-create futures rooted in community engagement, relevance, and transformation.

2025 SAAIR Membership Renewal



Members of SAAIR enjoy the following benefits:

- Reduced event registration fees for any SAAIR event
- Networking opportunities through SAAIR events
- Access to the SAAIR website downloads for presentations etc.
- Keeping you in touch with activities/trends in the sector

Renew your SAAIR membership today by clicking the button below:

RENEW YOUR SAAIR MEMBERSHIP

SAAIR's membership represents a dynamic and committed community of professionals dedicated to advancing institutional research, academic planning, quality assurance, and higher education transformation in Southern Africa. In 2024, 30% of our members had been part of the association for 5–10 years, while 45% had engaged with us for 2–4 years, reflecting both long-standing commitment and a growing influx of new voices. Notably, 17% have been loyal members for over a decade, underscoring the deep trust and enduring value they find in SAAIR. This is further affirmed by the fact that 85% of our members reported high satisfaction with their membership experience, and 70% said they would actively recommend SAAIR to colleagues—a clear signal of the association's relevance and impact. SAAIR is more than a professional network—it's a vibrant learning community grounded in mutual growth, shared purpose, and a commitment to shaping higher education systems that are both locally relevant and globally connected.

Sectoral News

Opportunities in the Sector ([Link](#))

Events in the Sector

- [Institutional AI Policies and Guidelines in South Africa for Learning and Teaching \(22 May\), USAf](#)
- [Deep Learning IndabaX \(7-11 July\), Stellenbosch University](#)
- [Africa Week 2025 \(25-30 May\), University of Pretoria](#)
- [Siyaphumelela Student Success Network Conferene \(8-11 July\), Johannesburg](#)

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