

Open Call for Papers 2026 W&RSETA Research Conference

Theme: “Wholesale and Retail Re-imagined: Next Generation Skills, Innovation and Entrepreneurship”

The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) invites academics, researchers, industry professionals, practitioners, and SETA-funded research beneficiaries to contribute to the 2026 W&RSETA Research Conference.

For the 2026 Special Edition, a hybrid participation model will be adopted. This will comprise:

- Approved abstracts already submitted under the 2026 open call (closing 31 March 2026); and
- A targeted invitation extended to W&RSETA-funded researchers, project leads, commissioned researchers, postgraduate students, and postdoctoral research fellows supported during the 2025/26 cycle.

This approach is intended to strengthen knowledge integration by bringing together established academic submissions and applied research emerging directly from SETA-supported projects within the skills development ecosystem.

The conference will convene leading experts to explore emerging trends, innovative practices, and workforce transformation in South Africa’s wholesale and retail sector. Submissions should present evidence-based insights, practical applications, or policy-relevant findings aligned with the conference theme.

MAIN EVENT SUB-THEMES

1. Digital Transformation and the Future of Retail Work

- Focus: Examining how technology, automation, AI, and data-driven systems are redefining retail job roles, workforce structures, and operational strategies.

2. Entrepreneurship and SMME Resilience in the Digital Economy

- Focus: Understanding how entrepreneurial ecosystems, business support frameworks, and innovation strategies enhance SMME competitiveness, sustainability, and scalability.

3. Skills Development for a Reimagined Sector

- Focus: Addressing skills mismatches and emerging competencies required in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), and strategies to strengthen upskilling, reskilling, and alignment with sectoral needs.

4. Consumer Intelligence, Behaviour, and Digital Identity

- Focus: Exploring evolving consumer preferences, digital identity, trust, and engagement, and their influence on retail innovation, marketing, and customer experience

MASTERCLASS SUB-THEMES:

1. Data-Driven Decision-Making in Retail

- Focus: Enhancing analytical capabilities, insights generation, and strategic use of retail data for operational efficiency.

2. E-Commerce Excellence: Building and Scaling Digital Stores

- Focus: Best practices for launching, optimising, and scaling digital retail platforms to improve online reach, engagement, and conversion.

3. Sustainable Retail Operations and Ethical Supply Chains

- Focus: Developing environmentally conscious business models, transparent operations, and ethical supply chain practices for sustainable retail.

Submission Guidelines:

- Abstracts should be structured, up to 300 words, including: background, objectives, methodology, results/expected outcomes, and practical implications.
- Clearly indicate the relevant sub-theme and whether the submission is for the Main Conference or Masterclass session.
- All submissions will undergo peer review and accepted papers will be published in the conference proceedings.
- Presenters must comply with ethical research standards and ensure originality.
- Selected papers may be invited for publication in accredited journals or sector reports.

Important Dates

- **Abstract Submission Deadline:** 15 July 2026
- **Notification of Acceptance:** 15 August 2026
- **Full Paper Submission:** 30 September 2026
- **Conference Dates:** 29-30 October 2026

Benefits of Participation

- Present research to a national audience of industry leaders, policymakers, and academics.
- Contribute to an **accredited conference**, providing professional recognition.
- Engage with peers, sector experts, and policy influencers to shape the future of wholesale and retail in South Africa.
- Gain opportunities for networking, collaboration, and knowledge exchange.

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