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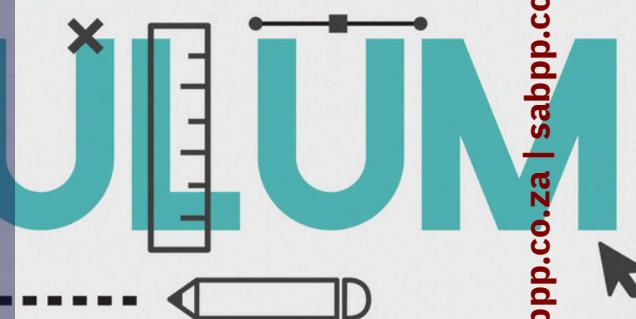
CURRICULUM

**FUTURE-FIT HR
CURRICULUM AND
GRADUATE: INSIGHTS FROM
SAHRUF**

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Introduction

SABPP hosted the annual South African HR University Forum (SAHRUF) conference on 4th and 5th of August 2025. The SAHRUF annual conferences bring together HR academics from across the country to deliberate on a specific theme. The theme of this year's conference was 'Future-Fit HR Curriculum and Graduate', which was explored through the below listed three subthemes. These subthemes were meant to speak to graduates' employability, as illustrated in the below figure on page 3.

Subtheme 1:	Future HRM landscape and trends
Subtheme 2:	Locating and integrating the standards of good people practices in the university curriculum
Subtheme 3:	Future-fit HR curriculum

In this Fact Sheet we share some of the insights from the SAHRUF conference. The conference did not aim to arrive at a one-size-fits-all solution or so-called best practice. These singular formulations are problematic and are not appropriate to the context, field, and practice of HRM (see the [April 2025 Fact Sheet¹](#)), nor for the mission and institutional autonomy of higher education institutions. Singular formulations do not appreciate the contextual, nuanced and evolving conceptions of quality education. Nor do they appreciate the debates on the fit of purpose of higher education and the fitness for purpose of higher education institutions, as articulated by the various reports by the Council for Higher Education (CHE)². The SAHRUF conference aimed to create a space for critical exploration and diverse perspectives, drawing from academic, practitioner, and the professional body perspectives. We aim to continue building and evolving this space and engage key stakeholders on future-fit HR curriculums and graduates.

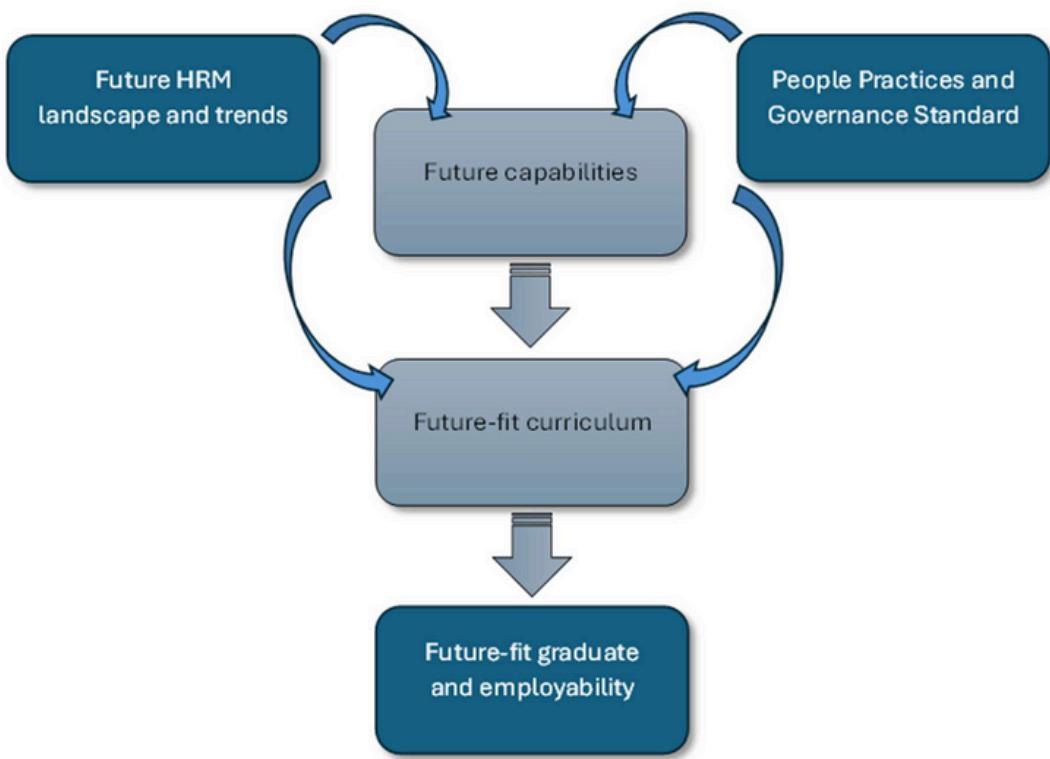
We begin the Fact Sheet with a brief report on the SAHRUF conference in the below textbox from the Chair of the SABPP Higher Education Committee and Second Vice Chair of the SABPP Board, Mr Lyle Markham.



¹ https://sabpp.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Fact-Sheet_AM_2025.pdf

² <https://www.che.ac.za/>

FUTURE-FIT CURRICULUM + GRADUATE = EMPLOYABILITY



Report on the 2025 SAHRUF Conference

By Lyle Markham (Chair of SABPP HEC and Second Vice Chair of SABPP Board)

The 2025 SAHRUF Conference took place at SABPP House in Johannesburg on the 4th and 5th of August, bringing together academics from universities across the country under the theme “Future-Fit Curriculum + Graduate.” The aim was simple but powerful: to spark conversations about how universities can reimagine their HRM programmes to better prepare graduates for the future world of work.

The programme kicked off with Ms Tshepo Y. Mosadi, Chair of the SABPP Board, who spoke about the future HRM landscape and trends, setting the tone for thinking ahead about the profession. Dr Ajay Jivan, Head of Research and Assurance at SABPP, then unpacked how the People Practices and Governance Standard can be integrated into university curricula, showing practical ways to bridge academia and professional standards. Dr James Keevy, CEO of JET Education Services, introduced the idea of microcredentials as a tool for lifelong learning, a topic that resonated strongly with delegates. Ms Lerato Mahlasela, Chair of the SABPP PRC and Executive Director at GIBS, spoke about aligning human capital development with professional readiness. Finally, Prof Hayley Pearson from GIBS challenged academics to “Flex and Thrive” by designing agile curricula through frugal innovation.

What made the conference truly engaging were the working groups after every keynote. These sessions gave participants the chance to reflect, debate, and brainstorm practical steps towards curriculum innovation. The main idea was to keep the conversation alive — not just about what should be taught, but how future curricula can stay relevant in a fast-changing HRM environment.

A highlight of the conference was the recognition of the Marius Meyer Excellence Award winners:

- 1st place: Jason Schickerling (University of Pretoria)
- 2nd place: Katlego Mpu (North West University)
- 3rd place: Rene Snyman (EDUVOS)

Their work stood out as excellent contributions to the field of HRM education. The second day brought everyone together for a large group discussion on what it means to be a future-fit graduate. It was a chance to consolidate ideas from the keynotes and working groups, with lively debates on how universities can balance agility, relevance, and academic integrity.

The conference wrapped up with the SAHRUF Annual General Meeting (AGM), where the 2026 organising committee was elected to take the Forum’s work forward.

The 2025 SAHRUF Conference was more than just a two-day event — it was a call to action. By bringing academics and industry closer together, it set the foundation for creating HRM curricula that are agile, relevant, and able to prepare graduates who can thrive in the future workplace.



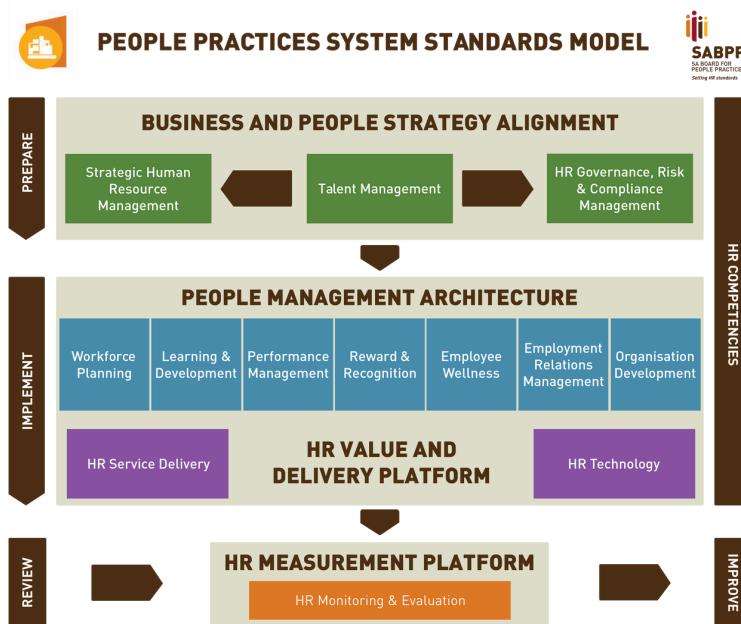
Key insights from SAHRUF

The 2025 SAHRUF conference comprised of presentations and working group discussions organised around the three subthemes that were previously listed. The key insights from these are organised thematically below. First, we explore how we can locate the standards of good people practices (People Practice and Governance Standard (PPGS)) and the future HRM landscape and trends within university curriculum. We then outline the dynamics between content, curriculum and context. We follow this with considerations on micro-learning and credentials. We end with the call to draw lessons from other professions and the management sciences more broadly.

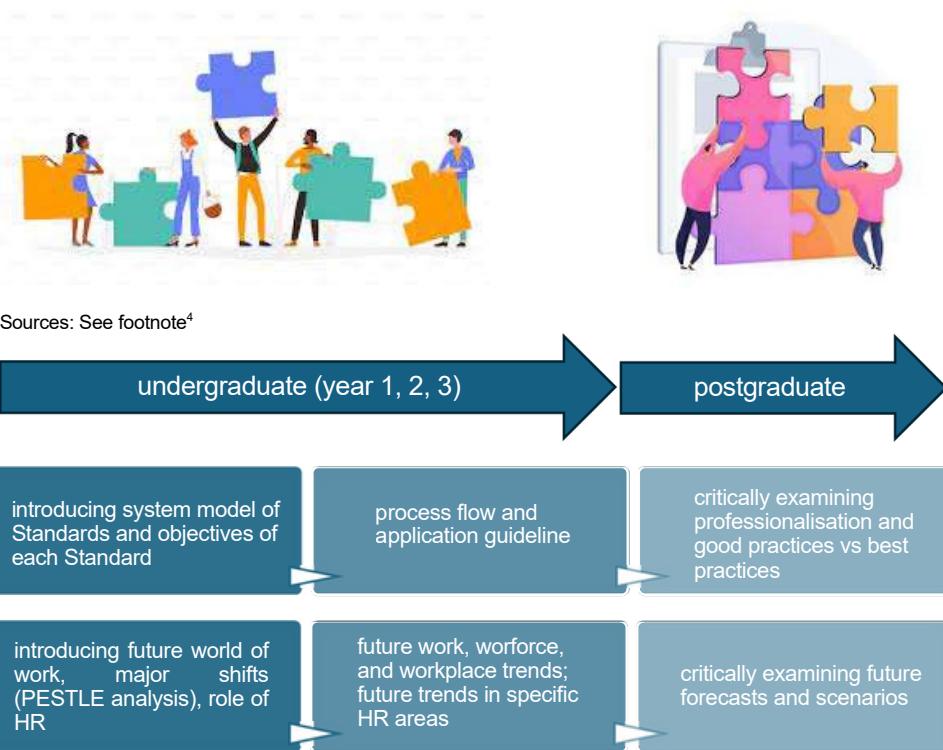
Locating practice standards and future trends

One of the key insights on the standards of good people practices and future HRM landscape and trends was to stagger the content of the PPGS and trends across the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In this way learning is scaffolded in a way that makes the good practice standards and future trends accessible and meaningful for learners. One of the analogies proposed was that of puzzle pieces. Scaffolding and staggering in this instance would mean introducing the different puzzle pieces of the standards and trends through the undergraduate years, with the critical examination of the configuration and alignment of these pieces at the postgraduate levels.

One of the analogies proposed was that of puzzle pieces. Scaffolding and staggering in this instance would mean introducing the different puzzle pieces of the standards and trends through the undergraduate years, with the critical examination of the configuration and alignment of these pieces at the postgraduate levels. The below figure tries to illustrate the scaffolding and staggering of puzzle pieces across undergraduate and postgraduate levels. For example, universities could introduce the different aspects of the PPGS (such as the definitions, objectives, processes, and application guidelines), the System Model therein, and the future trends from first year to third year of an undergraduate degree. At the Honours, Masters and Doctoral levels it would mean that the learner is able to understand, apply and critically examine the professionalisation of the HR profession, the development and application of Standards, and the identification and application of future trends. Here, there could be the critical exploration of evidence-based practice and the differentiation of good and best practices by the PPGS³. Similarly, universities' curriculum could introduce the future trends and future world of work in a staggered and scaffolded manner as illustrated below.



³ See the SABPP Fact Sheet: https://sabpp.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Fact-Sheet_AM_2025.pdf



Regarding the PPGS, remember that the System Model and Competency Framework are related but also separate. Alignment to the Competency Framework does not equate to alignment with the System Model and Standards. The academic delegates at the conference suggested that the Standards and Competency Framework provide a shared understanding of professionalisation and ethical practice across universities. Thus, these provide a shared understanding of professional development and practice across higher education institutions, with a shared System Model, Standards, and Competency Framework informing all institutions. Partnering with the SABPP on professionalisation and professional and ethical practice was emphasised. It should be noted here that the Standards does not prescribe a specific theoretical framework, methodology, method, or technique. It was emphasised in the conference that the Standards are outcomes based and, therefore, are neither procedural standards nor so-called best practice.

Dynamic between content, curriculum, and context

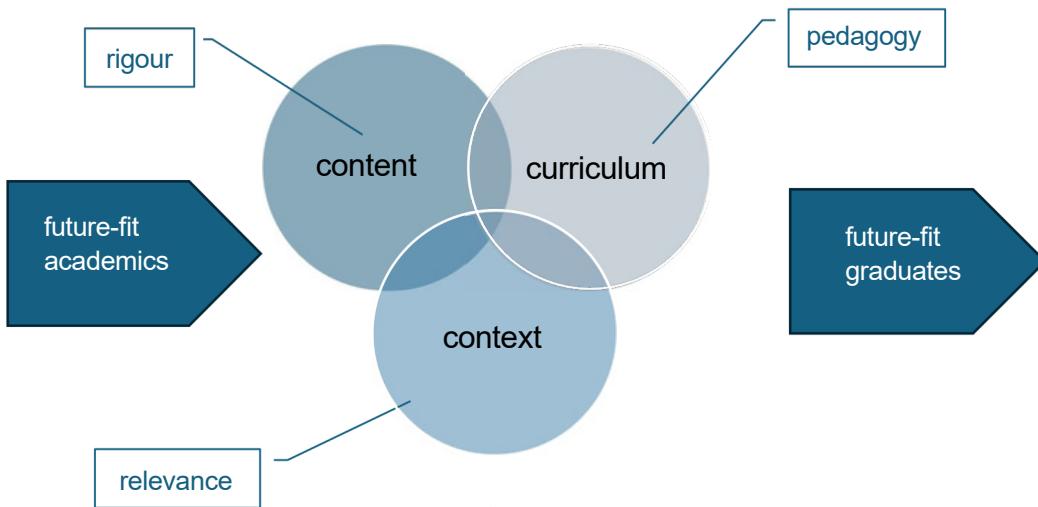
On the current discussions of future HR trends and the future world of work, the delegates noted that it is important to recognise the dynamic relations between the content (of learning), curriculum, and context over time. The questions confronting us about the future world of work and future curriculums and graduates are not new. These questions have been asked previously as industry, technology, and the social, economic, and political environments changed over time. Here, the delegates emphasised the need to retain academic rigour and be grounded in sound pedagogy. Thus, continuing to ground teaching and learning in sound educational theory. This was a warning against chasing fads. However, delegates also identified to need to critically examine whether academics are themselves future-fit as we explore questions on future-fit curriculums and graduates. In this regard, the relationship between academia and industry needs to be explored – from utilising industry guest lecturers, developing industry informed simulations and practical skills training to implementing work-integrated learning, project-based learning, community service learning, interdisciplinary problem-solving of real-world problems, and the sharing resources and networks among universities.

⁴ People with puzzle concept vector illustration. Cartoon man woman group of characters in casual clothing, holding puzzle jigsaw pieces, standing and communicating, communication isolated on white vector – Business Image on Unsplash

Coworkers project management, team building, executive managers teamwork, colleagues collaboration. employees characters assembling jigsaw puzzle. | Free Vector

The delegates suggested that the curriculum needs to be both reactive and proactive as we consider industry needs and the changing contexts. This means responding as well as anticipating so that universities are relevant to industry, students, and the broader society. This includes responding to industry skill needs and anticipating these; but also bringing to the debates on relevance the tradition of academic rigour and critique as well as sound pedagogy. This helps us all avoid chasing fads, the latest skills list, and falling prey to pseudoscience and poor research design and methodologies.

The below figure illustrates the dynamic relations between content, curriculum, and context and points to the need to consider relevance together with academic rigour and sound pedagogy.



Source: Author

Delegates also suggested that the HR academics broaden their perspective and explore how the management sciences are engaging with questions on future-fit curriculums and graduates as well as questions on rigour and pedagogy. During this discussion one of the key skills identified for graduates was learning to learn. Relatedly, delegates suggested the need to explore how artificial intelligence can be used in the curriculum, learning, and classroom.

Micro-learning and higher education

There is much debate on micro-learning and micro-credentials. One of the presentations, by Dr James Keevy, cited the Potential of Microcredentials in Southern Africa (PoMiSA) project. The CHE website provides the following description of the project:

“[The] project is a collaborative endeavour among leading Southern African and European universities, national councils, and strategic partners, aimed at exploring and leveraging the transformative potential of microcredentials within the Southern African region. The PoMiSA project aims to contribute to the advancement of higher education and workforce development in Southern Africa by unlocking the potential of microcredentials. Through collaborative efforts and strategic initiatives, the project seeks to establish a robust framework for the recognition, quality assurance, and regulation of microcredentials, ultimately fostering innovation, mobility and economic growth in the region” (CHE, 2025)⁵.

⁵ <https://www.che.ac.za/news-and-announcements/potential-microcredentials-southern-africa-pomisa-state-play-country-report>

There are many debates within universities and the regulatory bodies, including the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), on the utility, quality, recognition, and credentialling of micro-learning. There are also calls made by certain industry and consulting stakeholders that qualifications will not be relevant in the future world of work. However, we should be careful of taking these calls at face value and viewing these debates and opinions in binary terms. For example, viewing the debate on higher education as academic tradition versus innovation, or viewing the outcome of higher education as critical and reflexive reasoning versus employability.

The delegates noted that regulatory certainty and clear policy frameworks will help universities to navigate the micro-learning and micro-credential space more meaningfully. Some questions were raised on whether micro-learning is appropriate for postgraduate level education. Refer to the August 2024 Fact Sheet for a more detailed discussion on navigating micro-credentials and the 'micro' in occupational qualifications.

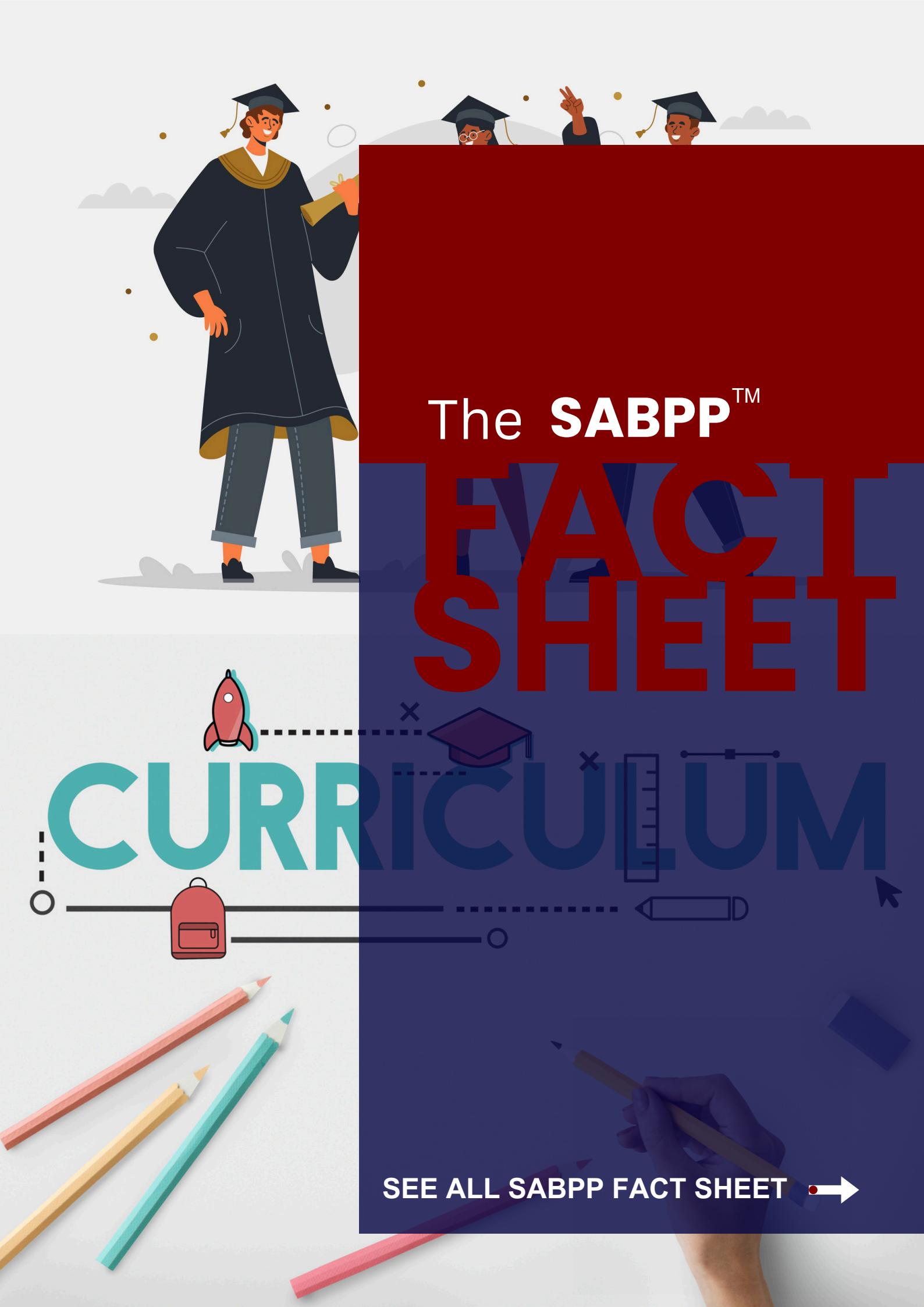
Lessons from other professions

The conference delegates suggested the need to draw lessons from other professions and professional bodies. One example cited was that of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) and the gravitas their graduates have from completing their board exams. Specifically, delegates suggested exploring the possibility of the assessment of competency during the qualification and the possibility of a board examination after the completion of a qualification. It was noted that the SABPP does have two levels of Board exams. The delegates suggested the exploration of contextualised case studies as part of the board exams. This reinforces the earlier point on scaffolding and staggering the Standards through the undergraduate and postgraduate years.

Drawing lessons from other professions also speaks to another earlier point on the dynamic between content, curriculum, and context. Specifically, broadening perspectives and considering developments in the management sciences. Delegates raised the possibility of cross-disciplinary learning for further exploration, including from business management.

Conclusion

As with the SAHRUF conference, this Fact Sheet aims to help building the space and continue the engagement between key stakeholders on future-fit HR curriculums and graduates. The reference to building space is deliberate, as there are no quick or one-size-fits-all solution to curriculum design and higher education more broadly. We need to guard against chasing fads, the latest skills list, and falling prey to pseudoscience and poor research design and methodologies. We need to also guard against academic complacency and ask whether academics are future-fit and how they are reviewing their curriculum and learning content. We require robust debates amongst academic, industry and professional body stakeholders on skills, capabilities, and knowledge required of future-fit graduates as well as the fit of purpose of higher education and fit for purpose of higher education institutions.



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