

- **Designation:** Ms Penny Lithauer, Miss Margeaux Liberty, Miss Okuhle Cembu, Ms Dieketseng Masudubele
- **Affiliated University / Institution:** Nelson Mandela University
- **Title of your work:** Emphasising the importance of “soft skills” in science.
- **Sub-Theme:** Equity, Access, and Inclusion
- **Format:** Panel Discussion (minimum: 4 individuals per panel)

Emphasising the importance of “soft skills” in science.

Science students are generally expected to arrive at university with a broad range of skills that extend beyond disciplinary knowledge. These are often referred to as “soft skills” and include goal setting, responsibility and accountability, time management, resilience, communication, teamwork, digital literacy, critical thinking, and the ability to engage in lifelong learning. Very few of these skills are taught explicitly and are instead assumed to form part of a student's existing "bag of tricks." As a result, we, as lecturers, often have unrealistic expectations of our students.

This presentation explores some of the soft, (and some not-so-soft), skills required for success in the sciences and considers why these are increasingly important in higher education. It draws on my experiences as Academic Advisor and first yr lecturer within the science faculty. This talk examines common challenges related these skills. Particular attention is given to the growing disconnect between social media literacy and computer literacy, as well as the need to foster deeper engagement with learning, reading, and critical evaluation.

These skills should not be viewed as deficits within students but rather as developmental attributes that require intentional support and cultivation. By making expectations explicit and creating learning environments that promote these skills (within a module or through a dedicated module like *Academic Skills for Science*) we can better support students in developing into capable scientists and responsible graduates.

The presentation highlights the importance of nurturing both disciplinary expertise and the personal attributes necessary for success in science, higher education, and society.