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Where are the young men? Addressing gender misrepresentation in higher education

Equity, access and inclusion

Gender and learning are deeply interconnected and yet they are often addressed separately. The South African Minister of Basic Education, Siviwe Gwarube, noted the decline in numbers of boys completing basic education during the announcement of matric results in January 2026. She questioned whether attention to the girl child had led to the boy child being forgotten. This sentiment was taken up by Prof Kopano Ratele in April 2026 after observing that boys and men were under-represented in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch university. The concerns of these scholars speak directly to SDG 4, 5 and 10, without which the other SDGs would be difficult to achieve.

Universities are at the forefront of knowledge production and are expected to create solutions that impact the communities they serve. Nelson Mandela university's mission is "*To offer a diverse range of life-changing educational experiences for a better world.*" Borrowing from the university's mission and the belief that learning drives life outcomes, while gender shapes who gets to benefit from it; this panel (roundtable) asks:

- How can humanising pedagogies be employed to address gender disparities and transform higher education?
- What role can Mandela university play, as an engaged institution, in ensuring that no gender is left behind?
- What can we learn from our history as a people to transform systemic inequalities and create the educational future we want?

Participants will gain practical ideas on how humanising pedagogies can reduce inequalities and transform learning and teaching spaces towards inclusive and sustainable futures.