



AI Ethics and the Future of AI Technology

Join the South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS),
the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), and
the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation

Background

Artificial intelligence is rapidly becoming part of institutional life across research, education, healthcare, and public service. While ethical principles such as transparency, accountability, fairness, privacy, and human agency are widely recognised, they remain aspirational without institutional policies to make them meaningful in practice.

This talk explores why institutions from universities and hospitals to government bodies and research organisations need AI policies grounded in ethical principles to guide responsible use, protect research integrity, clarify accountability, safeguard privacy, and preserve human agency in decision-making. It argues that policy should not be viewed as a constraint on innovation, but as an enabling framework for credible, inclusive, and responsible AI adoption and that the question is no longer whether institutions should have AI policies, but whether they can afford not to.

Date:
Tuesday, 18 August 2026

Time:
13:00 – 14:00 (SAST)

RSVP:
[Click here to register](#)

Objectives:

- To challenge the view that AI ethics is merely soft law or an abstract set of principles with limited practical relevance. Instead, the talk aims to present AI ethics as a dynamic thinking system that can guide real-time decision-making and support more responsible engagement with AI systems.
- To explain why AI ethics matters by examining the potential benefits of AI, the possible harms associated with its use, and the underlying business models that shape how AI technologies are designed, deployed and governed.
- To encourage engineers and scientists to understand their ethical responsibilities across the AI system lifecycle, from design and development to implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Speakers



Professor Emma Ruttkamp-Bloem is Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria and a senior faculty fellow of the African Institute for Data Science and AI. A leading expert in AI ethics, machine ethics and AI governance, she chairs UNESCO’s World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) and serves on several international AI policy, ethics and governance advisory bodies, including the World Economic Forum’s Global Future Council on Autonomous Systems.



Dr Yaseera Ismail is Head of the QuPhotonics Laboratory in the Department of Physics at Stellenbosch University, where she leads research on quantum optical technologies for secure long-distance quantum communication. An experimental physicist, she has received numerous national and international honours, including the TechWomen Emerging Leader Award (2016), appointment as an Optica Ambassador (2018), and inauguration into the South African Young Academy of Science (2024). She serves as Optica-appointed Vice President of the International Commission for Optics, is an Editorial Board member of Scientific Reports, and was named among the Quantum 100 in 2025, a UNESCO-supported initiative recognising global leaders in quantum science.



Dr Ekaterina Rzyankina is a lecturer in Electrical Engineering and a researcher at the Centre for Research in Engineering Education (CREE), University of Cape Town, in Cape Town, South Africa. Her work sits at the intersection of engineering education, digital technology and Artificial Intelligence, focusing on how generative AI, e-textbooks and analytics tools reshape learning, feedback and postgraduate supervision.