

Eduroam rolled out at all ACSA airports

Students and staff of South African universities and research institutions can now access eduroam - the secure, internet access service widely used in South Africa's research and higher education sector - in all public airports managed by the Airports Company South Africa (ACSA). This is the result of a public-private partnership between the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), ACSA and the Tertiary Education and Research Network of South Africa (TENET).



Photo by Riccardo via www.pexels.com

Eduroam is the secure, worldwide WiFi roaming access service developed for the international research and education community. It allows students, researchers, and staff from participating institutions to get Internet connectivity across campuses and when visiting other participating institutions. But, as the ACSA initiative shows, eduroam can also easily be deployed in public spaces, to provide greater Internet access, particularly for students who do not have access at home. This is part of a broader initiative to expand the eduroam footprint in SA to bridge the digital divide for students.

Public-Private partnership

Says ACSA chief information officer, Mthoko Mncwabe: “We are constantly looking for ways to enhance passengers’ experiences across their airport. As ACSA we are looking at ways to innovate and, in the process, ensure our airport users and passengers have a pleasant experience when they are at our airports. This partnership with Wits University is an example of that.”

“Our partnership with Wits and introducing eduroam at our airports is a great example of how well public-private partnerships can work, and more importantly it gives us an opportunity to combine the expertise and innovation of private companies with the civic vision that government and state-owned entities provide, resulting in a more resilient and job-creating economy,” he added.



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Says Dr Stanley Mgobansimbi Mpofu, chief information officer (CIO) at Wits: “Deploying eduroam at the airports will

significantly increase the eduroam footprint, allowing travelling students and staff access at no additional cost. This will improve the experience of university students and staff with the dual benefit of improving their productivity and reducing the burdens of high data costs whilst at the airports.”

Support from ACSA

“ACSA, in their efforts for this initiative, has recognised the importance of the increased eduroam footprint for university students and staff,” says Guy Halse, head of Trust and Security at TENET. “They have not only opened their airports to eduroam, but also provided the bandwidth for airport Internet users.”

This commitment by ACSA goes a long way towards the end goals of higher education, particularly for online and blended learning, and is already being felt.

Scott Hazelhurst, professor of bioinformatics at the School of Electrical and Information at Wits tweeted in February, during the pilot phase of the project, that thanks to this initiative he was able to run a two-hour online class from the airport, with perfect network connectivity. Similarly, students have tweeted their surprise and appreciation for finding eduroam at the airport.

Says Halse: “Having eduroam in airports is a game-changer for students and academics on the go. It empowers them to access online resources, collaborate with peers, and even participate in classes while travelling. This partnership showcases South Africa's capability to host and provide world-class infrastructure for research and education, highlighting our commitment to supporting academic pursuits.”

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