Introduction

RUJobReady 2026 was a student-led webinar series designed to help Journalism and Media Studies students understand the transition from university into the media, communications and creative industries. Through conversations with practitioners, the series explored the realities of entering the profession, responding to employer expectations, and creating professional pathways beyond conventional employment.

The project developed through three connected webinars: “Beyond Graduation: Navigating Your Professional Path”; “Entering the Profession: What Employers Look For”; and “Making Your Own Way: Entrepreneurship and Independent Practice”. Each session approached the transition into professional life from a different angle. Taken together, they were intended to give students access to practitioners and practical insights into the skills, decisions, relationships and opportunities involved in building a career.

I served as Project Coordinator, working alongside the Webinar Host Tshepiso Tshabalala, and the communications and marketing co-ordinators Nomfundo Myaka and Ndimphiwe Mpongoma. My role was to coordinate and oversee planning, chair team meetings, recruit panel members, liaise and prepare speaker briefing material, and assist the host with the continuity script. Shaping themes, researching topics,and supporting the delivery and promotion of each webinar were shared across the team.

This report reflects on RUJobReady as a whole, from my position as Project Coordinator. It considers the relationship between the project's intentions and the series delivered, the difficulties we encountered, the ways we responded, the learning resources and support we drew on, and the lessons that future teams can carry forward. Passages marked “***Reflection***” are quoted directly from my individual journal reflections on the three webinars; the rest describes what we did together.

Reflection. *“Across the three webinars, I came to see that delivering a project well takes more than organising people and making sure events happen. It means anticipating uncertainty, deciding with incomplete information, communicating with different stakeholders and checking, again and again, whether the project is serving its purpose.”*

From intention to final product

RUJobReady's central purpose was to help students think more concretely about the transition from university into professional practice. The final series addressed this through

three stages: understanding graduates' experiences, examining what employers look for, and considering entrepreneurship and independent practice when a conventional opportunity does not already exist.

Webinar 1: Beyond Graduation Navigating your professional path

The first webinar established the series and created a space for students to hear about life after graduation. It was also our first experience of delivering the format. The session received 36 RSVPs and 30 attendees, including one participant who joined via Zoom. It began approximately ten minutes late and ended around ten minutes beyond its planned finish.

The first event gave us an initial test of coordination, timing and event logistics. It showed that having a programme and confirmed speakers did not automatically guarantee that the event would run precisely to schedule, and it gave us a practical basis for reviewing how timing, transitions and supporting logistics were managed.

Reflection: *"The webinar itself ran smoothly, although we began approximately ten minutes late because audience members were still arriving. This meant that we also finished ten minutes later than planned…These small incidents showed me that even when the overall production is successful, timing and attention to operational details remain important."*

Webinar 2: Entering the Profession What Employers Look For

The second webinar focused on the expectations and practices involved in entering the profession, including professionalism, demonstrating competence, building a portfolio, volunteering, problem-solving and making use of available resources. The discussion also explored remote work and the role of AI in creative practice.

The event received 39 RSVPs. Approximately 20 registered attendees were present, alongside 11 walk-ins, giving an estimated total of about 31 attendees. We faced an operational challenge when the expected technician was initially unavailable because of a staff event, and we worked to locate technical support while continuing preparations.

The session began and ended on time. We used red and yellow cards to help speakers keep to their allocated presentation time, a concrete adjustment to the timing issues of the first webinar. The Q&A began hesitantly, but the host helped open the discussion by asking questions, and audience participation developed from there.

Reflection: *"It allowed the host and speakers to remain aligned without interrupting the presentations, and it reinforced the importance of translating lessons from previous experiences into practical improvements."*

Webinar 3: Making Your Own Way, **Entrepreneurship and Independent Practice**

The final webinar examined how people create professional pathways through entrepreneurship, independent media and creative practice. Its central question was: "How do you build a professional pathway when the opportunity you are looking for does not already exist?" The panel brought together Mrs Slindile Khanyile, Mr Alastair Otter and Ms Lolu Ncukana, whose experiences offered different perspectives on audience-centred publishing, data-led independent media and creative production. The session kept the format of the earlier webinars: an introduction by the host, individual speaker contributions, a moderated panel conversation, audience questions and closing reflections. That consistency preserved continuity across RUJobReady, while the questions reflected this panel's particular experiences.

The webinar received 45 RSVPs. Of those who registered, 20 attended in person and two joined online, giving 22 attendees from the registered group. A further 12 walk-ins attended, bringing total attendance to 34. Slindile joined approximately 15 minutes after the original start time, and the host began at 17:40. The discussion continued beyond the planned 19:00 finish, with speakers still engaging students at approximately 19:15.

The panel explored how independent media and creative ventures are built and sustained, including understanding audiences, identifying opportunities, developing useful products and maintaining credibility. Slindile's experience with Umbele, including her decision to produce a print magazine despite the cost, showed that independent media decisions must respond to the people a publication serves. Alastair's work in independent publishing and data-led storytelling showed how journalists can build products around information needs, and his account of starting a venture near the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the uncertainty of building something new and the importance of usefulness, quality, consistency and a loyal audience. Lolu's career across commercial, broadcast and branded content, and her move towards independent practice, widened the discussion beyond journalism. She showed that careers can move between environments and that relationships built over time become professional assets.

The final session showed the value of connecting professional experience to students' practical concerns. Questions covered work-life balance, working alone or in partnerships, moving from journalism into creative producing, funding, sponsorship, pricing, cash flow, credibility and internships. One student asked Lolu for her contact details to continue a conversation about a possible internship. This was a meaningful example of the webinar creating an opportunity for professional connection, although it does not establish that an internship resulted.

Reflection: *"Students may understand networking in theory, yet a live exchange makes it tangible. It moved a student from listening to taking initiative."*

Overall assessment of the final product

Across the three sessions, RUJobReady delivered a connected series of conversations about professional transition. The themes moved from graduates' experiences, to employer expectations, and finally to independent practice. The series offered students direct access to practitioners and space to ask questions about the realities of work.

The delivery also differed from an idealised plan in practical ways: time management issues in the first session, technical uncertainty in the second, and speaker recruitment and access challenges in the third. These differences did not prevent the series from being delivered, but they exposed areas where the process could be made more robust.

What the team struggled with

Speaker recruitment and availability

Recruiting suitable speakers was a recurring challenge, particularly for the final webinar. It was not enough to find people whose careers matched the theme. I had to approach them, explain the purpose of a student-led project, give them a reason to take part, follow up, and keep building the panel when people could not commit. We were not looking for impressive titles; we needed people who could speak from experience about creating opportunities, building sustainable careers and working beyond conventional employment.

I contacted people working in independent media, creative production, journalism, entrepreneurship and media innovation. The process showed me how hard it is to ask busy professionals to give their time to a student initiative. Some responded but could not participate. Others, including Thabile Ngwato and Velly Bosega, did not respond at all. Mia

Malan and Atlehang Ramathesele declined, and further prospective speakers were prevented by their circumstances or availability.

These outcomes are different from one another, and each calls for a different response. Silence leaves you unsure whether a message has even been seen. A decline gives clarity but means looking for alternatives. An interested reply creates more work such as confirming availability, explaining the format and securing a commitment. No response, a decline, an expression of interest and a confirmed commitment should not be treated as interchangeable, which is why recruitment status needs to be tracked carefully.

Two exchanges taught me particular lessons. Ms Lolu Ncukana later apologised for missing my LinkedIn message, explaining that she was not active on the platform, and offered her email address. Silence on one platform does not mean unwillingness, and it helps to be ready to continue the conversation elsewhere, for me that was Instagram, I wrote to Ms Lolu there as well. Mr Alastair Otter, by contrast, replied that he was available and asked about the format and participants. I shared the programme details and requested the material needed to prepare and introduce him. His case showed me that recruitment does not end when someone says yes as the coordinator I still had to make participation clear, answer questions and keep communication going as the event approaches.

Reflection: *"I learned not to treat any single response as the final measure of the effort. A promising conversation did not guarantee availability, and a delayed reply did not mean a lack of interest."*

Technical and logistical uncertainty

The second webinar was affected by the initial unavailability of the expected technician. The third introduced a different technical problem, some external speakers encountered a Zoom registration error indicating that they were not authorised to register. The issue appeared to affect some work email addresses, while personal addresses seemed to work in certain cases. I asked Mrs Slindile to try a personal address, and Mr Alastair eventually used his as well. This helped us work around the difficulty, but it created extra communication shortly before the event and exposed a gap in our preparation.

These incidents showed that technical readiness cannot be assessed only from the organiser's side. A webinar can look ready from our side while a speaker still cannot get in. Registration is part of the participant experience, and it has to work for people outside the institution as

well as those who know its systems. External speakers must be able to register and access the event, and we need time to test the process before the event day.

Time management and programme changes

The first webinar began late and ran beyond its planned finish. In the second, we used timing cards and the event began and ended on time. The third began late after one speaker joined later than expected, and the discussion continued beyond the planned finish. Time management improved in some areas but remained dependent on the circumstances of each event.

Shortly before Webinar 3, Mr Gcina Ntsaluba, who had been expected to take part, told us he had a conflicting meeting at 18:00 and asked whether he could contribute for about 15 minutes. I consulted Tshepiso, our host, and we decided not to alter the programme, because the change would have disrupted the running order. The situation required a judgement between accommodating a possible contribution and preserving a coherent experience for the confirmed speakers and the audience. We proceeded with the three-speaker panel.

Reflection: *"I weighed the value of his contribution against my responsibility to the confirmed speakers and the audience."*

Audience participation

The second webinar's Q&A began with some reluctance from students. The host helped stimulate participation by asking questions, after which the discussion became more active. In the final webinar, the discussion addressed concerns students were already holding, such as money, credibility, collaboration and internships, and they engaged with the panel on those issues. We would not credit one factor alone, but the contrast suggested that audience engagement should be designed and facilitated, rather than assumed to happen spontaneously.

Recording and evaluating attendance

The attendance figures show why registration, registered attendance and walk-ins need to be recorded separately. Webinar 1 had 36 RSVPs and 30 attendees. Webinar 2 had 39 RSVPs and approximately 31 attendees, including walk-ins. Webinar 3 had 45 RSVPs and 34 attendees, including 12 walk-ins. The gap between registrations and attendance matters when judging an event's reach, and the walk-ins show that the webinar drew people we had not reached through registration.

These figures provide useful evidence of participation, but they do not on their own explain why people attended or did not attend, nor do they establish learning outcomes. A consistent record and short post-event feedback on the whatsapp community “Friends of RUJobReady” would help future teams evaluate reach and usefulness more carefully. Upon reflecting it is clear that we did not use Friends of RUJobReady as effectively as we could have, as I write I believe there is more potential in creating and maintaining a community of its kind.

Preparing speakers and the programme

Securing speakers was only part of the task. I also had to think about how their experiences would fit together in a session that served students. I wrote an individual brief for each speaker, linking their experience to the central question. Slindile's brief focused on building media around a distinct audience, including language, editorial value and sustainability. Alastair's explored independent publishing, data journalism, digital products and spotting gaps in the media landscape. Lolu's connected her experience in commercial, broadcast and branded content to developing an independent creative practice.

The briefs also clarified expectations, they explained the purpose of RUJobReady, identified the audience, outlined the format and requested the material needed for introductions and promotion. They were more than administration. They helped align each contribution with the project's educational purpose.

Reflection: *“A general discussion about entrepreneurship can easily become abstract or merely motivational. By tailoring the prompts, I hoped speakers would draw on real decisions and challenges that students could learn from.”*

Planning, consultation and mentorship

We relied on planning documents and communication practices, meeting discussions, speaker briefs, follow-up records and event preparation materials. These helped organise work across multiple contributors. The project's mentor, Dr Du Toit, provided guidance, including the importance of preparing for speaker withdrawals and keeping contingency plans. This helped us recognise that uncertainty is a normal part of delivery and needs to be planned for.

Reflection: *“Dr Du Toit had prepared us for the possibility that speakers might withdraw at short notice, so I approached the process with the understanding that we needed contingency plans. When a speaker pulled out, having a backup speaker meant that we could still complete the panel without compromising the webinar.”*

Not every challenge was eliminated. The third webinar still began later than intended, and the conversation continued beyond the scheduled finish. The important lesson is not that we achieved perfect control, but that we continued delivering the project while identifying improvements for the future. The event going ahead successfully does not prove every decision was ideal. A stronger process would have included earlier technical testing, clearer contingency arrangements and a realistic buffer for delays.

What the team learned

Project delivery requires both structure and flexibility

The three webinars demonstrated that a plan is necessary but cannot anticipate every circumstance. Coordination requires clear roles, communication, schedules and records, alongside the ability to make decisions when speakers, technical access or event timing change. A useful contingency plan should include practical alternatives and a clear understanding of what can change without compromising the purpose of the event. Good coordination does not mean preventing all disruption. It means identifying risks where possible, preparing alternatives and making decisions that let the project continue.

Reflection: *"My biggest lesson is that successful coordination is not only about ensuring that tasks are completed; it is also about anticipating where misunderstandings or disruptions can occur and building processes that reduce those risks in the next cycle." "I am also more comfortable with the idea that coordination is not about personally controlling every part of an event. It is about creating enough structure for people to work well, communicating clearly, seeking support when needed and deciding when circumstances require it."*

Stakeholder communication is ongoing work

Contacting a speaker is only the beginning of the relationship. Contributors need clear information about the purpose, audience, format, timings and materials required. Follow-up is important, but it must be appropriate to the circumstances. A structured recruitment tracker would make the process easier to manage and hand over.

Reflection: *"I also learnt that stakeholder engagement does not end once a speaker has confirmed. I maintained communication with the speakers until the webinar began, because they may need reassurance and clarification in the final moments before an event." "I could not control whether someone replied or was free. I could control the quality of my approach, the clarity of my information, the care of my follow-up and how quickly I adapted."*

The programme needs to serve purposefuly

The final webinar showed the value of grounding professional themes in concrete questions about money, credibility, work-life balance, collaboration and internships. The panel's discussion of audience needs, language, useful products, consistency and professional relationships helped make entrepreneurship more tangible. The student's request to connect with Lolu illustrated how a session can create an opening for further professional conversation.

Audience engagement must be facilitated

Students may need an invitation or prompt before participating. The host's questions helped the second webinar's Q&A develop. Future sessions could use opening polls, anonymous question submissions or a prompt asking students to identify their main uncertainty about entering the profession, which would also help the host learn what the audience needs, this could be done via *Friends of RUJobReady* in future.

Reflection: *"It showed me that audience engagement cannot simply be assumed; sometimes it has to be deliberately facilitated." "I would not credit one factor alone, but the contrast reminded me to design opportunities for participation rather than assume an audience will speak up unprompted."*

Evaluation should go beyond attendance

Attendance figures are useful operational indicators, but they are only one part of evaluation. A stronger process would combine registrations and attendance with short participant feedback, recurring questions, reflections from speakers and a record of what we would change. This would help future teams make evidence-based decisions rather than relying only on impressions.

Growing as Project Coordinator

My understanding of the role developed across the series. In my first journal, I focused on structure, organisation, quality control and contingency planning. By my second, I was learning about stakeholder management, asking for support early, using LinkedIn more intentionally, and the role of communication in helping a team work through uncertainty. I also began to rethink my view of soft skills as a weakness, coordinating the team required me to communicate, recognise others' strengths, follow up on responsibilities and keep

momentum when challenges arose. The third webinar tested whether I could apply these lessons when recruitment and event preparation became more demanding.

Consulting Tshepiso about Gcina's request shows what I have learned about judgement. I did not make that decision alone, because it affected the running order and the audience's experience. Seeking input was not indecision. It was part of making a considered decision where responsibilities overlap.

The webinar's theme also made me reflect on professional readiness. The speakers showed that a career is not always a straight line from qualification to permanent employment. People move between organisations, build independent ventures, develop relationships over time and spot gaps that become new kinds of work. Recruitment reflected the same reality, I approached people I did not know personally, explained the value of a student project, worked through different responses and kept looking for alternatives. The student who asked Lolu for her details put the lesson into practice by acting on an opportunity instead of treating the webinar as a one-way transfer of information.

The project has given me evidence of my own capabilities. I have coordinated a series of events, communicated with external stakeholders, prepared speakers, supported the host and worked through technical uncertainty. These are transferable experiences for project coordination, communications and stakeholder-facing work. Still, completing a project is not the same as mastering project management. I need to improve how I document risks, verify operational arrangements, track recruitment and evaluate outcomes. Naming these gaps is part of professional growth, and it lets me move from saying I have experience to explaining what it taught me.

Reflection: *"Personally, I am reconsidering my perception of soft skills. I once regarded them as a weakness, but project coordination has shown me their value in motivating others, recognising strengths and helping people complete their work." "My confidence has grown through practice, not through the absence of difficulty."*

Learning resources and support

The project's learning took place through practice, reflection, team communication, guidance and support from the School of Journalism and Media Studies Tech Team led by Sis Fikile. We had to learn how to approach professionals, prepare contributors, coordinate event logistics, manage timing, support audience participation and respond to technical difficulties.

Useful resources included the project's own planning documents, speaker briefs, outreach correspondence, meeting agendas or notes, attendance records, promotional materials and my three individual journals. These records provide a basis for reviewing decisions and tracing how practice changed from one webinar to the next. LinkedIn also became an important channel for reaching practitioners, although Lolu's experience showed that it should not be the only one.

Mentorship was an important source of support. Dr Du Toit's guidance about contingency planning helped us anticipate the possibility of speaker withdrawals, and consultation with the host informed the decision about the late request to change Webinar 3's programme. We also learned from our own experience: the timing cards used in Webinar 2 responded to issues experienced in Webinar 1, while later reflections identified the need for earlier technical testing and more systematic recruitment tracking.

Reflection: *"RUJobReady has taught me that project coordination is the practice of turning intention into action through people, systems, communication and judgement. Much of the work happens before the audience arrives and continues after the event ends. It means managing details while staying attentive to purpose, responding to uncertainty without losing direction, and learning from the gap between what was planned and what happened." "I am beginning to see myself not merely as a student pursuing academic achievement, but as an emerging project manager and change-maker capable of translating ideas into tangible value for others."*

This report therefore treats the project as both a product and a learning process. By preserving the evidence and applying the lessons identified here, future RUJobReady teams can build on what was achieved, strengthen the delivery process and continue improving the connection between academic preparation and professional practice.