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OFFICIAL GUIDE TO SOUTH AFRICA



BASIC EDUCATION

All South Africans have a right to basic education and the Bill of Rights obliges the government to progressively make education available and accessible to everyone through reasonable measures. Human resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of a nation, and it is therefore vital that a country develops the skills and knowledge of its residents for the greater benefit of all.

The mandate of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) is to monitor the standards of the provision, delivery and performance of education annually or at other specified intervals across South Africa, with the objective of assessing compliance with the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 and national education policy.

The department derives its mandate from the:

- National Education Policy Act of 1996, which inscribes into law the policies, legislative and monitoring responsibilities of the Minister of Basic Education, and the formal relations between national and provincial authorities.
- South African Schools Act of 1996, which promotes access to education, promotes quality and democratic governance in the schooling system, and makes schooling compulsory for children aged seven to 15 to ensure that all learners have access to quality education without discrimination.
- Employment of Educators Act of 1998, which regulates the professional, moral and ethical responsibilities of educators, and competency requirements for teachers.

Over the medium term, the DBE aimed to continue focusing on:

- accelerating the delivery of and improving school infrastructure;
- providing educational opportunities to learners with severe to profound intellectual disabilities;
- enhancing teaching and learning by ensuring access to high-quality learner and teacher support materials;
- increasing the supply of quality teachers and preparing teachers to teach new subjects that will prepare learners for a changing world;
- improving the quality and reach of early childhood development (ECD) services; and
- providing nutritious meals for learners through the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP).

The department has identified five key priorities to:

- intensify efforts to improve access to and quality of ECD, recognising that the formative years are critical to laying a strong foundation for children's education journey;
- steadfastly improve literacy and numeracy skills across all phases of schooling;
- increase efforts to improve access to and the quality of inclusive education for learners in most vulnerable communities and learners with special education needs;

- intensify efforts to improve access to and the quality of training and professional development opportunities available to school management teams and teachers; and
- work tirelessly to improve the safety and quality of schooling environments for our learners and teachers.

Improving school infrastructure

The department is committed to ensuring that all schools have safe and appropriate infrastructure. This is delivered through the Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG) and the School Infrastructure Backlogs Grant (SIBG).

The EIG was allocated funds to be transferred to provinces as supplementary funding to accelerate the construction, maintenance, upgrading and rehabilitation of new and existing infrastructure in the basic education sector. The SIBG addresses infrastructure backlogs at schools that do not meet the norms and standards for basic school infrastructure. This funds will be used to replace a targeted inappropriate and unsafe schools with newly built ones, and to provide water, sanitation and additional classrooms to address overcrowding.

Supporting learners with intellectual disabilities

The learners with profound intellectual disabilities grant aims to improve the provision of quality education to learners with severe to profound intellectual disabilities. The grant is expected to provide access to quality publicly funded education to more than 13 000 such learners over the medium-term period.

Providing high-quality learning materials

Recognising that quality learning materials enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning, the department plans to print and deliver grades R to 9 life skills, languages and mathematics workbooks to all public schools that request them.

Increasing the supply of quality teachers

The Funza Lushaka Bursary Scheme provides bursaries to prospective teachers to address critical educator shortages in priority subject areas such as inclusive education, mathematics, coding, robotics, and science and technology. It is funding more students completing the one-year postgraduate certificate in education and increasing the number of bursaries awarded to institutions with lower fee structures.

Improving ECD services

The provision of ECD services in provinces is supported by the ECD Grant, which provides subsidies for children accessing ECD services, infrastructure support to ECD providers and pre-registration support packages; and to pilot the construction of low-cost ECD centres. Additional funds had been earmarked for piloting a nutrition support programme that targets low-cost ECD centres.

Providing nutritious meals for learners

The department planned to continue providing nutritious meals through the NSNP Grant to more than 10 million learners on each school day at 19 950 schools each year over the period ahead, in line with the National Development Plan's priority of eliminating poverty and supporting food security.

The NSNP aims to enhance the learning capacity of learners through the provision of a healthy meal at schools. Where it is implemented, the programme has shown to improve punctuality, regular school attendance, concentration and the general well-being of participating learners.

Whilst learners are being provided with nutritious meals, they are also taught to establish and maintain good eating and lifestyle habits for life. Nutrition Education also provides educators with resource materials to support curriculum and to make every school a healthy school.

Schools are also encouraged to establish food gardens from which they obtain fresh produce (vegetables/fruit) to supplement the menu in line with South African Food Based Dietary Guidelines. Learners, teachers and parents are provided with skills to grow their own food contributing towards long-term household food security. The gardens are also used as a teaching and learning resource, and to beautify the environment.

School attendance

According to the Statistics South Africa's (Stats SA) General Household Survey (GHS) of 2023, there were approximately 15,4 million learners at school in 2023. Participation in education institutions was virtually universal (97,3%) by the age of 15 years (the last compulsory school age). Approximately two-thirds (63,6%) of learners were still in school by the age of 18 which usually represents the age at which learners exit Grade 12. A notable percentage of learners, however, remained in primary and secondary schools long after they should have exited those institutions.

Less than one-fifth (18,3%) of 20-year olds were, for instance, still attending school. While the percentage of learners who have achieved Grade 12 has been increasing, the survey shows that the percentage of individuals who attended post-school education has remained relatively low for youth aged 19 to 22 years of age. Although almost two-thirds (66,1%) of learners attended no-fee schools (up from 21,4% in 2007), the percentage varies from 87,3% in Limpopo to 51,0% in Western Cape.

Learners who dropped out of school before the age of 18 years cited reasons such as poor performance (29,1%), and a lack of money (19,5%) as the main reasons. Although 7,2% named family commitments as the main reason, it was more common for females (14,1%) than for males (0,1%). The percentage of individuals aged 20 years and older who did not have any

education decreased from 11,4% in 2002 to 3,1% in 2023, while those with at least a Grade 12 qualification increased from 30,5% to 50,8% over the same period. Intergenerational functional illiteracy (where individuals have not attained Grade 7) has also decreased markedly. Although 34,4% of South Africans over the age of 60 years were still functionally illiterate, this figure dropped to only 3,2% for those aged 20 – 39 years of age.

Role players

Provincial departments of basic education

The DBE shares a concurrent role with the provincial departments for basic schooling and ECD, but it is the responsibility of each provincial department to finance and manage its schools directly. District offices are the provincial departments' main interface with schools.

South African Council for Educators (SACE)

The SACE is mandated by the SACE Act of 2000 to enhance the status of the teaching profession by providing for the professional registration of all educators, promoting the continuing professional development of educators, and maintaining ethical and professional standards in the teaching profession.

Umalusi Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training

Umalusi derives its mandate from the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act of 2008 and the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act of 2001. As an external and independent quality assurance body, the council's mandate is to set and maintain standards in general and further education and training through the development and management of the general and further education and training qualifications sub-framework.

Programmes and projects

Thutong Portal

Through the Thutong Portal (www.thutong.doe.gov.za), the DBE aims to lead the drive to improve learning in the country through appropriate use of technology. The Thutong Portal is the online point of entry to a comprehensive array of free educational resources, policy information, and interactive services concerning all aspects of the South African schooling sector. It provides relevant information and services about the South African school curriculum, teacher development, school administration and management.

Thutong's key focus is on creating strong and vibrant online communities of practice to facilitate discussion and sharing of information and ideas amongst peer networks, and to encourage South African educators to develop and improve education by sharing the country's common intellectual capital. Thutong – meaning “a place of learning” in Setswana – features a searchable database of web-based curriculum resources for various education sectors, grades and subjects.

School fees and exemption

School fees are set at annual public meetings of school governing bodies (SGBs), where parents vote on the amount to be paid. Parents who cannot afford to pay school fees can apply to the SGB for conditional, partial or full exemption from paying school fees. Schools must not charge school fees for orphans.

The right not to charge school fees is limited to the schools that have been declared no-fee schools. The names of the no-fee schools, which are determined based on the economic level of the community around the school, are published in a provincial gazette.

Higher Education and Training

The mandate of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is to develop a skilled and capable workforce while broadening the skills base of the country to support an inclusive growth path. The department derives its mandate from the:

- Higher Education Act of 1997, which provides for a unified national system of higher education;
- Skills Development Act of 1998, which enables the creation of the National Skills Authority and sector education and training authorities (SETAs); the establishment of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO); and the regulation of apprenticeships, learnerships and other matters relating to skills development;
- National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) Act of 1999, which provides for the granting of loans and bursaries to eligible students attending public higher education and training institutions, and the subsequent administration of such loans and bursaries;
- Skills Development Levies Act of 1999, which provides for the imposition of skills development levies;
- Continuing Education and Training (CET) Act of 2006, which provides for the regulation of CET, the establishment of governance structures for and the funding of public technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges and community education and training colleges, the registration of private colleges, and the promotion of quality in CET.
- NQF Act of 2008, which provides for the NQF, South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and quality councils for the issuing and quality assurance of qualifications required by the sub-frameworks of the NQF.

As part of implementing its mandate, the department oversees universities, TVET colleges, CET colleges, SETAs, quality councils and private education providers. Its goals include expanding access to higher education and training opportunities, and improving the quality of the provisioning, responsiveness and efficiency of the post-school education and training system. It aimed to give effect to these goals over the medium term by focusing on upgrading ailing infrastructure at higher education institutions, and providing bursaries and loans to students from poor and working class backgrounds.

Upgrading ailing infrastructure at higher education institutions

The department planned to ensure that institutions have appropriate infrastructure to accommodate students accessing higher education. Funds were allocated to construct basic skills centres, teaching and learning facilities, workshops and ICT laboratories at CET colleges.

Providing bursaries and loans to students from poor and working-class backgrounds

The department aimed to ensure that all students who are offered a place to study at a university or TVET college based on academic merit will be afforded that opportunity. The NSFAS provides bursaries that cover tuition at these institutions and living expenses to students from families earning below R350 000 per year.

Early Childhood Development

ECD programmes are offered at day-care centres, crèches, playgroups, nursery schools and in pre-primary schools. According to Stats SA's GHS of 2023, almost one-third (33,6%) of the 0–4-year-olds attended these kinds of facilities and access to these facilities was highest in Gauteng (40,6%) and Western Cape (39,4%), and least common in KwaZulu-Natal (23,8%) and Northern Cape (25,4%).

More than half (54,0%) of children aged 0–4 years stayed at home with parents or guardians. This was most common in North West (64,6%) and least common in Western Cape (45,5%).

Nationally, almost two-thirds (61,1%) of children aged 0 – 4 stayed home with a parent or guardian, or with another adult. This figure was most pronounced in KwaZulu-Natal (72,8%) and Northern Cape (69,2%). Only 33,6% of children in this age group attended formal ECD facilities, nationally. Attendance of ECD facilities was most common in Gauteng (40,6%) and Western Cape (39,4%).

Institutions of higher learning

South Africa's higher education landscape comprises the following institutions:

- Cape Peninsula University of Technology
- Central University of Technology, Free State
- Durban Institute of Technology
- Mangosuthu University of Technology
- National Institute for Higher Education, Northern Cape
- National Institute for Higher Education, Mpumalanga
- Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
- North-West University
- Rhodes University
- Sol Plaatje University, Eastern Cape

- Tshwane University of Technology
- University of Cape Town
- University of Fort Hare
- University of the Free State
- University of Johannesburg
- University of KwaZulu-Natal
- University of Limpopo
- University of Mpumalanga
- University of Pretoria
- University of South Africa
- University of Stellenbosch
- University of Venda
- University of the Western Cape
- University of the Witwatersrand
- University of Zululand
- Vaal University of Technology
- Walter Sisulu University, Eastern Cape
- Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training

The DHET is mandated to provide quality skills programmes that address the need in the labour market for intermediate skills accompanied by practical training. TVET comprises vocational, occupational and artisan education and training as offered by TVET colleges. This band of education and training is also referred to as 'post-school', meaning that it refers to education and training that takes place after leaving school, even if only with a Grade 9 completed.

The only age restriction for a person wishing to study at the TVET level is that the person should be 16 years or older. There are 50 registered and accredited public TVET Colleges in South Africa which operate on approximately 364 campuses spread across the rural and urban areas of the country.

Role players: South African Qualifications Authority

The SAQA is a statutory body that was established in terms of the SAQA Act of 1995 and exists in terms of the NQF Act of 2008, as amended. The authority is mandated to:

- advise the Minister on matters related to the NQF;
- oversee, liaise and consult with the quality councils on the implementation of the NQF;
- develop policies and criteria for the registration of qualifications;

- maintain a national learner records database; and
- conduct or commission research into matters related to the NQF.

Over the medium-term period, the SAQA aimed to focus on streamlining and automating its processes to become more efficient. It planned to do this by enhancing its IT infrastructure to enable automation for verification on the national learner records database and for foreign qualifications, and promoting the NQF by clarifying what it is about and how it benefits stakeholders.

Council on Higher Education (CHE)

The CHE is a statutory body established in terms of the Higher Education Act of 1997, as amended. It is mandated to advise the Minister responsible for higher education on all matters pertaining to higher education, develop and manage the higher education qualifications sub-framework, and develop and implement a suite of policies and criteria to facilitate the implementation of the framework and subframework and protect their integrity.

The CHE's ongoing focus is to be a recognised centre for information and policy analysis on higher education by conducting sector research and monitoring all higher education matters to advise the Minister.

Quality Council for Trades and Occupations

The QCTO was established in terms of the Skills Development Act of 1998. It is mandated to oversee the development and maintenance of the occupational qualifications sub-framework in the NQF and advise the minister on all policy matters concerning occupational standards and qualifications.

Over the medium term, the council aimed to focus on ensuring the development and quality assurance of occupational qualifications, part qualifications and skills programmes that are responsive to the labour market and developmental state initiatives; maintaining and quality assuring a single national occupational qualifications sub-framework that promotes synergy, simplification and effectiveness; and embedding a culture of responsive learning within the organisation.

Sector education and training authorities

The Skills Development Act of 1998 mandates SETAs to fund skills development; implement national, sector and workplace strategies to develop and improve skills in the South African workforce; and provide learnerships that lead to recognised occupational qualifications. Over the medium term, the authorities planned to focus on strengthening and delivering relevant priority skills to South Africa's labour market, with particular emphasis on partnering with TVET colleges, universities and the market.

The authorities will continue to establish partnerships with industry to scale up the placement of graduates, work-integrated learning, research, and the facilitation of industry exposure for TVET college lecturers in line with industry needs.

These partnerships also allow authorities to garner labour market intelligence that informs sector skills plans and curriculum development, which improves the quality of programmes offered and the employability of graduates. The authorities derive the bulk of their revenue through the skills development levy, which is collected from employers by the South African Revenue Service and transferred as a direct charge against the National Revenue Fund.

National Skills Fund (NSF)

The NSF was established in terms of the Skills Development Act of 1998. It funds projects identified as national priorities in the national skills development plan, other projects as determined by the director-general and any activity undertaken by the minister to achieve a national standard of good practice in skills development. Over the medium term, the NSF aimed to:

- contribute to the development of skills for small, medium and micro enterprises and cooperatives;
- fund 19 100 learners and 15 000 bursary students for qualifications in occupations in high demand;
- facilitate the acquisition of various skills for 3 450 participants through constituency-based skills development initiatives;
- fund education and training programmes for 187 500 learners from rural areas; and
- fund workplace experience for 2 300 learners.

The fund will also undertake priority projects such as developing infrastructure at TVET and community colleges, research, and innovation aimed at expanding, integrating and improving the effectiveness of the post-school education and training system.

National Student Financial Aid Scheme

The NSFAS was established in terms of the NSFAS Act of 1999. The scheme is responsible for:

- providing bursaries and loans to students;
- developing criteria and conditions for the granting of loans and bursaries to eligible students in consultation with the Minister;
- raising funds;
- recovering loans from debtors;
- maintaining and analysing a database of funded students;
- undertaking research on how to use financial resources more effectively;
- advising the Minister on matters relating to student financial aid; and
- undertaking other functions assigned to it by the Act or the Minister.

Over the medium term, some 1.5 million university students and one million TVET students from poor and working-class backgrounds at 76 public higher education institutions are expected to be awarded bursaries through the scheme.