



## EDUCATION

# OFFICIAL GUIDE TO **SOUTH AFRICA**

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## Basic Education

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 department planned to focus on improving school infrastructure; providing support to improve matric completion rates; providing high-quality support materials for learners and teachers; facilitating the increase in supply of quality teachers while preparing serving teachers to teach new subjects that will prepare learners for a changing world; improving services provided through the Early Childhood Development (ECD) function taken over from the social development sector; and providing nutritious meals for learners through the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP).

### Providing support to improve matric completion rates

To reduce the learner dropout rate, the Second Chance Matric Programme provides support to matrics who do not meet the pass requirements of the National senior certificate examinations or senior certificate (amended). Over the medium-term period, the programme aims to increase the number of learners obtaining subject passes from 50 000 to 100 000, partly driven by its expansion to include learners with barriers to learning, starting with visually and hearing-impaired learners in 2023.

### Providing high-quality learning materials

In recognition that access to workbooks is essential for quality learning and teaching, the department plans to print and distribute an estimated 60 million workbooks over the medium-term period for grades R to 9 in languages, mathematics and life skills to all public schools that request them. An estimated R3.8 billion is allocated over the period ahead for this in the Curriculum and Quality Enhancement subprogramme in the Curriculum Policy, Support and Monitoring programme.

### Facilitating more quality teachers

The Funza Lushaka bursary programme collaborates with the Department of Higher Education and Training in its efforts to address critical educator shortages in priority subject areas such as inclusive education, mathematics, coding, robotics, and science and technology.

### Providing nutritious meals for learners

The department's NSNP continues to contribute to eliminating poverty and supporting food security by providing meals to an estimated nine million learners on each school day at 19 550 schools in 2023/24, increasing to a targeted 20 000 schools in 2025/26.

The NSNP provides one nutritious meal to all learners in poorer primary and secondary schools to improve their ability to learn. The programme also teaches learners and parents how to lead a healthy lifestyle, and promotes the development of school vegetable gardens.

### Action Plan to 2024: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030

The department's Action Plan to 2024: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030, gives expression to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996, the National Development Plan, as well as continental and international conventions. It continues to provide the moral imperative and a mandate to government to make the social justice principles of access, redress, equity, efficiency, inclusivity and quality educational opportunities, widely available to all citizens.

### Languages

The Incremental Introduction to African Languages Strategy was initiated in 2013 to strengthen the teaching of previously marginalised African languages in public schools.

The department has since decided to expand the list of South African languages offered as Second Additional Languages (SAL) in curriculum. The additional languages are the Khoi, Nama and San languages, as well as the South African Sign Language, which is now the country's 12th official language. The DBE has since signed an agreement with Kenya and Tanzania on the development of curriculum and the South African teachers in Kiswahili.

### School attendance

Approximately 14,5 million individuals aged 5–24 years attended school in 2022; 50,3% were males and 49,7% females, according to Statistics South Africa's Census 2022. The table shows a rising number in school attendance among children, with attendance peaking among 11–13-year olds.

Furthermore, attendance was almost consistently evenly distributed by gender except among 17–20-year-olds, where fewer females were likely to attend. However, more females compared to males attended school among the 21–24-year-olds.

The period between 1996 to 2001 showed a large increase in the percentage of young children under the age of compulsory education participating in education (23,1 percentage points among five-year-olds and 21,2 percentage points among six-year-olds). However, it is the decade between 2001 and 2011 that showed an unprecedented increase in participation among five-year-olds with a rise of 35,5 percentage points in participation from 45,6% to 81,1%.

Furthermore, nearly nine out of 10 (92,4%) children of this age were attending educational institutions in 2022, which is a nearly 70 percentage points increase from 1996. Among six-year-olds, less than half (49,1%) were attending educational institutions in 1996 but subsequently increased by 21,2 percentage points in 2001.

The data also show high attendance rates among six to seven-year olds in 2022, who would most likely be attending Grade R. However, the attendance rate starts to decline by age 15, with only six out of 10 (59,9%) 18-year-olds attending educational institutions in 2022; a reduction from 75,7% in 1996. In 1996 more than half (54,6%) of the 20-year-olds were in education, which reduced to 37,0% in 2022.

Overall, the percentage of individuals attending school increased from 70,1% in 1996 to 73,4% in 2022. However, not much change was observed between 2011 and 2022. The percentage of black Africans who attended school increased by 3,4 percentage points from 1996 to 2022, coloureds by 1,1 percentage points and whites by 6,8 percentage points. The number of individuals who were not attending school declined across all population groups from 1996 to 2022. Moreover, the white population group experienced a substantial decline from 29,4% in 1996 to 22,6% in 2022, and black Africans from 29,3% in 1996 to 25,9% in 2022.

Overall, the percentage of individuals attending educational institutions increased from 70,1% in 1996 to 71,5% in 2001, but remained steady at 73,4% across both 2011 and 2022. During the past 26 years, the overall growth in attendance was 3,3 percentage points. In the five-year period from 1996 to 2001, Limpopo and Eastern Cape accounted for the highest increase in the percentage of attendance (3,5 and 3,7 percentage points respectively).

In Limpopo, the percentage of individuals aged 5–24 years attending educational institutions increased to 78,3% in 2001 from 74,8% in 1996. In Eastern Cape, the percentage of individuals aged 5–24 years attending educational institutions increased to 76,2% in 2001 from 72,5% in 1996. The percentage in attendance remained unchanged for Western Cape, Gauteng and North West during the same period.

Furthermore, in the quarter of the century between 1996 and 2022, the largest growth in attendance was observed in Northern Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal (6,1, 5,8 and 5,3 percentage points respectively). In Free State, the largest rise in attendance was observed during 2011–2022 with the percentage of individuals aged 5–24 years attending educational institutions increasing by nearly four percentage points, from 73,1% to 76,8%. Across all the census years,

Eastern Cape, Free State, Mpumalanga and Limpopo consistently displayed attendance levels above the national average.

South Africa has geared up to intensify its measures through policy reforms to tackle school dropouts and increase completion of secondary schooling. Post-apartheid South Africa has experienced an expansion in the completion of secondary schooling for previously disadvantaged population groups.

However, race disparity in educational attainment intersects with other forms of disadvantage, including poverty and the urban-rural divide. This section presents progress in educational attainment in the past three decades and equity by gender and population group.

Mpumalanga and Limpopo had the highest percentage of persons with no schooling, which was above the national average of 6,9% (11,7% and 14,1% respectively). The lowest percentage of individuals with no schooling was found in Western Cape (2,3%), followed by Gauteng (3,9%).

The majority of individuals aged 20 years and older in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga had completed secondary education, which is also above the national average (42,9%, 41,2% and 40,2% respectively). The lowest percentage of individuals who completed secondary education was found in Eastern Cape (27,2%). In Western Cape, close to 18% of individuals aged 20 years and older had achieved post-school education, followed by Gauteng (16,2%).

More than 14,1 million persons aged 20 years and older completed secondary education in 2022, followed by 11,9 million who achieved some secondary education and 4,6 million who attained post-school education. Close to 2,6 million persons aged 20 years and older had no schooling and 1,3 million had completed primary education.

In terms of post-school education, the stark results are that disparities primarily exist among different population groups. For instance, regardless of sex, the white population group reported the highest percentage of post-school education attainment, followed by Indian/Asian population with half as much as that for the white population group.

However, the notable sex differences appear primarily within the black African and coloured population groups. Both groups show lower levels of post-school education, and these levels are nearly comparable between the two population groups.

Black African and coloured populations tend to be concentrated in some secondary education level, which may suggest higher dropout rates and limited progression to tertiary education. Conversely, the white and Indian/Asian population groups are more likely to be concentrated in the completed secondary school and post-secondary education levels.

## 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](http://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 in an effort 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 Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) 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 (NSA) 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 Act of 2006**, which provides for the regulation of continuing education and training, 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 continuing education and training.
- **NQF Act of 2008**, which provides for the NQF, South African Qualifications Authority, and quality councils for the issuing and quality assurance of qualifications required by the sub-frameworks of the NQF.

Over the medium term, the DHET planned to focus on supporting the post-school education and training system by expanding access to higher education and facilitating the transition to work, and enhancing performance by upgrading infrastructure and increasing capacity.

### Expanding access to higher education and facilitating the transition to work

The NSFAS was set to receive R153.2 billion over the medium-term period for student bursaries, accounting for 93.6% (R153.2 billion) of the entity's total estimated expenditure of R163.7 billion.

The scheme aims to use these funds to provide financial assistance to an estimated 1.3 million university and 1.2 million TVET college students from poor and working-class backgrounds.

The department has two programmes in the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative. These are aimed at facilitating the transition to work by providing unemployed young people with employment and training opportunities. In 2023/24, the university graduate assistants programme aims to provide employment to 2 559 unemployed graduates at 26 universities in fields related to their areas of study.

## Enhancing performance by upgrading infrastructure and increasing capacity

The DHET planned to ensure that its institutions have appropriate infrastructure to accommodate students who access higher education. It also planned to alleviate overcrowding and upgrade ailing infrastructure at universities.

These allocations will enable infrastructure repairs and maintenance in priority areas such as bulk services, sanitation, teaching and learning facilities, and student accommodation. The majority of community learning centres are hosted at schools. Their programme offering is affected by the lack of proper tools, equipment, security and suitable furniture to support teaching and learning.

The percentage of individuals with no schooling has reduced almost threefold (19,1% in 1996 and 6,9% in 2022). The percentage of individuals with some primary education has reduced by half. Similarly, completion of primary schooling has decreased by half. Completion of secondary education more than doubled from 16,3% in 1996 to 37,6% in 2022.

However, achievement of post-school education increased by only 5,1 percentage points. In 1996, one-third (33,6%) of the population aged 20 years and older had only some secondary education and only 16,3% had completed secondary education. However, in 2022 more than one-third (37,6%) had completed secondary education.

Furthermore, in 2022 functional literacy of the population aged 20 years and older was 85%, up from a low base of 64,3% in 1996. The largest expansion in functional literacy was observed between 2001 and 2011 (66% and 78,8% respectively). The number of individuals aged 20 years and older with no schooling reduced from 4,0 million in 1996, to 2,6 million in 2022.

Access to certain fields of study in post-secondary education remains segregated by sex as females are more likely to earn qualifications in education, while males would most likely qualify in the science, engineering and technology fields. This section presents progress in fields of education in the past decade.

More than three million individuals aged 20 years and older reported a field of education in 2011; this has increased to 5,2 million in 2022. The two principal fields of study for both 2011 and 2022 were business, economics and management sciences, and education. Both fields of study were dominated by females, with wider gender gaps observed in the education field.

The percentage of females with qualifications in education was 69,6% in 2011 and increased to 72,3% in 2022. Males dominated in engineering with 84,9% in 2011 and 78,1% in 2022, as well as electrical infrastructure (83,6% in 2011 and 79,4% in 2022). For both periods, females were more likely to obtain a qualification in health professions and related clinical sciences (75,6% in 2011 and 75,7% in 2022).

The percentage of males who studied computer and information sciences increased from 57,2% in 2011 to 61,5% in 2022 while the percentage of females declined from 42,8% in 2011 to 38,5% in 2022.

Furthermore, the number of individuals with qualifications in communication, journalism and related studies more than doubled within the decade, from 46



048 in 2011 to 93 140 in 2022. This field of study had more females in both years (60,6% in 2011 and 63,2% in 2022).

### Early Childhood Development

The department took over the ECD function, including the ECD Grant, from the Department of Social Development from 1 April 2022. Over the medium-term period, the grant will provide subsidies for children accessing ECD services, provide infrastructure support to ECD providers and pilot the construction of low-cost ECD centres.

More than three million children aged 0–4 years participated in ECD programmes. Crèche/educare centre and pre-school/nursery school/Grade 00/Grade 000/Grade R were the most accessed ECD facilities. Provincial analysis revealed that children in Northern Cape and North West were more likely not to participate in ECD programmes compared to other provinces.

In addition, differentials in population group show that seven out of ten black African children attended an ECD programme compared to eight out of 10 white children. The use of day mothers/gogos/childminders for childcare was high among the Indian/Asian population compared to other population groups. Participation in home/community playgroups was highest amongst coloured children.

Furthermore, an analysis of persons aged 5–24 shows that overall, the percentage of individuals attending an educational institution increased by three percentage points between 1996 and 2022. Attendance increased to almost universal level between 1996 and 2022 for children aged five and six years, while the attendance rate starts to decline by age 15–24 over the same period. Attendance also increased for black Africans, coloureds and whites over the period, while Indians/Asians showed little change.

An analysis of persons aged 20 years and older showed that the number of people with no formal education reduced from 19,1% in 1996 to 6,9% in 2022. Furthermore, persons aged 20 years and older with some primary education decreased from 16,6% in 1996 to 7,4% in 2022.

Over the period, there has been a noteworthy increase in the number of persons completing secondary education (16,3% in 1996 to 37,6% in 2022) and post-school education (7,1% in 1996 to 12,2% in 2022). In 2011 and 2022, business, economics and management sciences and education were dominated by females, while males continue to dominate in engineering as well as electrical infrastructure studies.

### 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 operating on more than 264 campuses spread across the rural and urban areas of the country.

### Role players:

#### South African Qualifications Authority

The SAQA is a statutory body established in terms of the SAQA Act of 1995. It exists under the NQF Act of 2008, as amended, with the role of providing decisive and coherent leadership to coordinate, simplify, monitor and evaluate the implementation of an effectively articulated national qualifications framework.

The authority will focus on enhancing its ICT infrastructure over the medium term to automate the national learner records database and verify qualifications. It will also continue to refurbish, repair and maintain its headquarters while continuing its efforts to sell the building.

### **Council on Higher Education (CHE)**

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

Over the medium term, the council planned to continue focusing on becoming a recognised centre for information and policy analysis on higher education, and on conducting sector research and monitoring to advise the minister on all higher education matters.

### **Quality Council for Trades and Occupations**

The QCTO was established in terms of the Skills Development Act of 1998. The council's mandate is to develop and quality assure occupational qualifications and part qualifications (including trades and skills programmes), manage the occupational qualifications sub-framework, and advise the Minister on all matters of policy concerning occupational standards and qualifications.

Over the medium term, the council planned to continue focusing on overseeing the conversion of national accredited technical education diploma qualifications into occupational qualifications that have greater industry relevance, and developing and submitting new occupational qualifications to the SAQA for registration.

### **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 Authority

The NSA is a statutory body that was first established in 1999 in terms of Chapter 2 of the Skills Development Act of 1998. Its functions involve:

- policy, strategy, implementation and NSA allocations;
- liaising with SETAs about policy, strategy and sector-skills plans;
- implementing the National Skills Development Strategy;
- reviewing the accounts and balance sheet of NSA annually; and
- receiving and using information from the Skills Development Planning Unit.

### 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 for the better use of financial resources;
- advising the minister on matters relating to student financial aid; and
- undertaking other functions assigned to it by the act or by the Minister.

Over the medium-term period, the NSFAS aimed to provide bursaries to 1.4 million university students and 1.7 million TVET students from poor and working-class backgrounds at 76 public higher education institutions.

It also aimed to look to improve the bursary application process so that applicants can get immediate confirmation of funding and resolve issues with the disbursement of tuition and student allowances.