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**OFFICIAL  
GUIDE TO**  
South Africa  
**2020/21**

**EDUCATION**

## 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 throughout South Africa, with the objective of assessing compliance with the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 and with 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.

## School attendance

According to Statistics South Africa's General Household Survey (GHS) of 2019, there were approximately 14,6 million learners at school in 2019. The largest percentage of these learners attended schools in KwaZulu-Natal (21,8%) and Gauteng (19,7%). Although only 6,5% of learners attended private schools, there were large variations between provinces.

While 13,6% of learners in Gauteng and 8,2% of learners in Western Cape attended private schools, only 3,5% of learners in KwaZulu-Natal and 3,8% in Eastern Cape attended such institutions. Large variations were also observed in terms of transport used to travel to school. Almost two-thirds (65,9%) of learners walked to school while 13,9% used private vehicles. Another 5,2% travelled to school by taxi or minibus taxi.

The survey revealed that about 85,8% of learners needed 30 minutes or less to get to school. In addition, it seemed that most learners (84,1%) preferred to attend the nearest institution of its kind to their place of residence.

Participation in education institutions was virtually universal (96,6%) by the age of 15 years (the last compulsory school age). Approximately two-thirds (64,3%) 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. Almost one-quarter

(24,3%) of 20-year olds were, for instance, still attending secondary 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.

The percentage of students attending universities, technical and vocational colleges remain very similar throughout the reference period. The percentage of learners that attended no-fee schools increased from 21,4% in 2007 to 66,2% by 2019. More than one-fifth (21,6%) of learners who have dropped out of school before the age of 18 years, however, put forward a lack of money ('no money for fees') as the main reason. Other reasons included poor academic performance (22,6%), family commitments (8,6%) and a feeling that education is useless (8,0%).

The percentage of individuals aged 20 years and older who did not have any education decreased from 11,4% in 2002 to 3,7% in 2019, while those with at least a Grade 12 qualification increased from 30,5% to 46,2% over the same period. Inter-generational functional literacy has also decreased markedly. While 38,2% of South Africans over the age of 60 years did not at least complete a Grade 7 qualification, this figure dropped to only 4,5% for those aged 20 to 39 years of age.

In 2019, 32,4% of individuals aged five years and older attended an educational institution, according to the GHS of 2019. Nationally, 85,9% of individuals aged five years and older and who attended educational institutions, attended school, while a further 5,8% attended tertiary institutions. By comparison, only 2,8% of individuals attended Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

While the percentage of individuals aged five years and older and who attended school was particularly high in Eastern Cape (92,0%), much lower figures were noted in Gauteng (75,7%) and Western Cape (83,1%). Attendance of higher education institutions was most common in Gauteng (11,3%) and Western Cape (7,4%). This is reflecting the higher number of post school educational institutions, such as universities, in those provinces.

The highest percentage of learners aged seven to 24 years who attended educational institutions by metropolitan area was observed in Buffalo City (80,2%), followed by Mangaung (79,2%). The lowest attendance was observed in Cape Town (69,8%) and eThekweni (71,1%).

More than one-fifth (21,6%) of males and females in the age group 7–18 years cited a lack of money as the main reason for not attending an educational institution while 22,6% reportedly fell out due to poor academic performance. Although 8,6% of individuals left their studies as a result of family commitments, such as getting married, minding children and pregnancy), it is noticeable that females were much more likely to offer these as reasons than males (17,1%

compared to 0,3%). Approximately 8,0% of individuals felt that education was useless. A higher percentage of males (9,8%) than females (6,1%) believed education was useless.

Although inadequate access to money to pay for fees remains a major hurdle for learners, attendance of no-fee schools has increased sharply over the past decade and a half. Provincially, 89,0% of learners in Limpopo and 76,9% of learners in Eastern Cape attended no-fee schools, compared to 48,7% of learners in Western Cape and 50,9% in Gauteng.

Individuals without any formal education were most common in Limpopo (7,1%), North West (6,6%) and Mpumalanga (6,1%), and least common in Western Cape (1,2%) and Gauteng (1,3%). The figure shows that 24.5% of people aged 20 years or older have attained some academic qualifications that are equivalent to or less than Grade 9. Grade 9 is the final year of the senior phase and learners are allowed to leave school on its completion or when they turn 15 years old, whichever comes first. Individuals with lower secondary qualifications or less were most common in Eastern Cape (41,4%) and Northern Cape (38,8%).

Nationally, three-tenths (30,8%) of persons aged 20 years and older have attained Grade 12 while 15,4% have attained some post-school qualifications. Post-school qualifications were most common in Gauteng (21,8%) and Western Cape (17,5%) and least common in Northern Cape (9,2%) and North West (10,7%).

## Literacy levels

Functional illiteracy refers to individuals who have either received no schooling or who have not completed Grade 7 yet. According to the GHS of 2019, the percentage of individuals over the age of 20 years who could be regarded as functionally illiterate was 12,1% in 2019.

Individuals over the age of 60 years have consistently remained most likely to be functionally illiterate, followed by individuals in the age groups 40–59 and 20–39. Improved access to schooling has led to a significant decline in the percentage of functionally illiterate individuals in the 20–39 age group.

## 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 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:

- 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 TVET colleges and community education and training (CET) colleges, the registration of private colleges, and the promotion of quality in continuing education and training.
- Higher Education Act of 1997, which provides for a unified national system of higher education.
- National Qualifications Framework Act of 2008, which provides for the national qualifications framework, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and quality councils for the issuing and quality assurance of qualifications required by the sub-frameworks of the national qualifications framework.
- 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 Amendment Act of 2008, which enables the creation of the National Skills Authority (NSA); 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.
- Skills Development Levies Act of 1999, which provides for the imposition of skills development levies.

Over the medium term, the department was expected to focus on expanding access to higher education institutions by implementing a five-year plan for the enrolment of students at higher education institutions, and updating guidelines for the implementation of its bursary scheme for students from poor and working-class backgrounds.

As part of its focus on improving performance in higher education institutions, the department will seek to implement university capacity development plans, eradicate the certification backlog in TVET colleges, and conduct advocacy campaigns on the use of open-access learning and teaching support materials in CET colleges.

According to the GHS of 2019, the survey estimates that 978 784 students were enrolled at higher education institutions (universities and universities of

technology) in 2019. Just under three-quarters (72,9%) of these students were black African, while 14,8% were white, 6,8% were coloured and 5,5% were Indian/Asian. There are relatively few institutions of higher education across the country and the institutions also tend to be clustered in specific provinces and geographic areas.

Even though most students were black African, the education participation rate of this population group remained proportionally low in comparison with the Indian/Asian and white population groups. The survey found that 84,6% of students in the 18 to 29 year age cohort were enrolled at public higher education institutions and that 7,6% of all persons aged 18 to 29 in metropolitan areas were enrolled at a higher education institution.

The highest enrolment rates were reported in Mangaung (17,8%) and the City of Tshwane (13,0%) and the least in Nelson Mandela Bay (4,2%) and Buffalo City (5,2%).

### 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 and exists under the National Qualifications Framework Act of 2008, as amended. Its mandate and goals are to advance the objectives of the national qualifications framework, coordinate the higher education qualifications and occupational qualifications sub-frameworks, and oversee the further development and implementation of the national qualifications framework.

### 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 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 sub-framework, and protect their integrity. Its main outputs are research, quality assurance, knowledge and advisory services, and monitoring and evaluation.

### Quality Council for Trades and Occupations

The QCTO was established through the Skills Development Act of 1998. It is mandated to oversee the development and maintenance of the occupational qualifications sub-framework in the national qualifications framework, and advise



the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation on all policy matters concerning occupational standards and qualifications.

The council's quality assurance role and its management of the occupational qualifications sub-framework contribute to the post-school sector's broader imperative of providing access to education and training of the highest quality that leads to significantly improved learning outcomes.

### **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, SETAs were expected to continue to focus on providing workplace placement for unemployed graduates and internships for students; providing full bursaries to students from poor families to cover tuition, learning materials, accommodation and living allowances; and collaborating with TVET colleges to strengthen their capacity to deliver specific programmes. SETAs support artisan development through skills development centres, which aim to address skills shortages identified by occupational teams working on strategic infrastructure projects.

### **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 involves:

- 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
- 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, as amended. 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 of Higher Education, Science and Innovation;
- raising funds;
- recovering past loans from debtors;
- maintaining and analysing a database of funded students;

- undertaking research to improve the 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.

To qualify, students must be from households with a combined annual income of less than R350 000, and less than R600 000 for students with disabilities. Bursaries cover tuition fees, prescribed study materials, meals, accommodation and transport costs.