

NSF helps to establish FET for the blind

4 January 2016 - The trauma of going blind can happen to anyone – either through accident, crime or health reasons like diabetes or glaucoma. And when it happens the person has to learn a whole new set of skills on how to survive.

The South African National Council for the Blind, with R10.4 million aid from the National Skills Fund (NSF), is setting up a special further education and training (FET) centre in Gauteng to help visually impaired learn those skills

Optima FET College seeks to benefit 190 students from designated disadvantaged groups in the three-year project funded by the NSF, 98% of whom would be black African, evenly distributed between men and women.

Many who suffer visual impairment, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, struggle to obtain a post-matric qualification because few colleges are able to accommodate them, and without skills, they fall even further down the queue in being able to find a job, or generate an income for themselves.

The last census counted more than a million visually impaired South Africans, with hundreds of adults going blind every year who need to relearn skills they had taken for granted. This results in a crippling high rate of unemployment for the blind.

Optima College aims to establish itself as an education and training institution of the highest standard, and the project involves the physical upgrade of the college and implementing suitable curriculum and programmes for visually impaired learners.

The project scope is to offer five accredited courses from levels 2 to 4 adapted for persons with visual impairments. The programme started in 2014 with an intake of 50 learners, with 70 being admitted for 2015 and a further 70 scheduled for 2016.

The budget of R10.4 million covers staff costs, training materials, accommodation, learner tools, infrastructure and other equipment for the three years.

The one course is for end-user computing skills offered at levels 2 and 3, which will accommodate 10 learners every six months and result in 60 graduates after three years.

The contact centre and support course at level 2 is a six-month theory course followed by another six months practical training in a centre to train 20 learners a year for three years, also for a total of 60 graduates.

A third course in business administration at level 4 will accommodate 10 learners a year for three years, for a total of 30 graduates.

A year-long course in music and sound technology at level 4 will run for two years with 10 graduates a year to produce a total of 20 graduates.

The fifth course, an introduction to media studies and journalism at level 4, is also planned to have 10 graduates a year for two years for a total of 20 graduates.

In addition to the courses, all 190 learners planned for the project over the three years go through training on social skills, job hunting skills, basic communication, orientation and mobility, and sport and recreation.