



**MINISTRY
HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**ON THE STATE OF THE POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR AND
READINESS FOR THE 2026 ACADEMIC YEAR**

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Deputy Minister Nomusa Dube-Ncube

Director-General Dr Nkosinathi Sishi

Deputy Directors-General and Senior Officials

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Over the past weekend, leaders and institutions across the Post-School Education and Training system came together to confront a central and difficult question: is our PSET system fit for purpose in the context of the pressures we now face—and the future we must build?

This was not an abstract discussion. It was a sober, practical interrogation of capacity, coordination, and execution.

Today's engagement with the public flows directly from that work. It is part of our commitment to transparency, accountability, and honest leadership.

We meet at a pivotal moment.

South Africa has just recorded more than 650 000 successful matriculants. This is an achievement that must be acknowledged. It reflects sustained progress in basic education and the determination of learners, educators, families, and communities.

But progress carries pressure.

The Post-School Education and Training system currently has approximately 535 000 funded and planned spaces across universities, TVET colleges, CET colleges, skills programmes and workplace-based learning. This gap between success and capacity is real, structural, and longstanding.

The task before us is therefore not to explain it away, but to manage it responsibly, to expand pathways deliberately, and to prevent confusion, despair, or false expectations.

WHAT THE MATRIC RESULTS MEAN — AND WHAT THEY DO NOT MEAN

The 2025 National Senior Certificate results provide important insight into learner outcomes and post-school pathways.

- 46.4% of candidates achieved a Bachelor's pass
- 28.1% achieved a Diploma pass
- 13.5% achieved a Higher Certificate pass

This means that over 40% of learners did not achieve a Bachelor's pass, underscoring a fundamental truth: our post-school system must be differentiated, articulated, and well-communicated.

It is also critical to clarify a persistent misunderstanding.

A Bachelor's pass does not guarantee admission to a university or to a specific programme. Universities apply faculty- and programme-specific requirements, including subject combinations, minimum symbols, and selection processes where demand exceeds capacity.

Where learners and families experience disappointment, it is often not because of failure, but because of misaligned expectations.

Our responsibility is to ensure that learners understand, early and clearly, the full range of credible post-school pathways, not only the most visible ones.

STEM AS A SYSTEMIC PRIORITY

A major structural constraint confronting the PSET system is the pipeline into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

Current trends are concerning:

- Growing enrolment in Mathematical Literacy rather than pure Mathematics
- Stagnant performance in Mathematics and Accounting
- Limited growth in Physical Sciences

The consequences are profound.

Learners are excluded from high-demand programmes in engineering, health sciences, ICT, data science, and advanced manufacturing, not because of institutional failure, but because of subject-level preparation.

This weakens our national skills base and limits the system's responsiveness to industrialisation, innovation, and economic growth.

For this reason, the Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training are finalising a formal Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen alignment, particularly around subject choice guidance, learner preparedness, and smoother transitions into post-school STEM programmes.

This is not a short-term fix. It is a medium- to long-term structural intervention.

MANAGING THE GAP BETWEEN PASSES AND PATHWAYS

The growth in matric success reinforces the urgency of moving beyond a university-centric narrative.

South Africa's PSET system was deliberately designed to be differentiated with universities, TVET colleges, CET colleges, occupational qualifications, skills programmes, and workplace-based learning all forming part of a single ecosystem.

We are therefore strengthening coordinated enrolment planning across the system, informed by matric trends and labour-market intelligence.

The newly established Just Energy Transition Skills Desk will play a critical role in linking learner demand to priority economic sectors, particularly renewable energy, construction, grid infrastructure, and electric mobility.

Given infrastructure and staffing constraints, we will increasingly prioritise:

- Short courses and modular qualifications
- Occupational programmes that can be scaled rapidly
- Workplace-based learning including apprenticeships, learnerships and internships

These pathways offer faster labour-market entry while allowing articulation into further learning.

TVET AND CET COLLEGES AS PRIMARY PATHWAYS

Let me state this unequivocally:

TVET and CET colleges are not residual options. They are central pillars of the PSET system.

They provide practical, accessible, and work-relevant education to the majority of South Africans and are essential to confronting unemployment, inequality and poverty.

Through these institutions, students progress into:

- Artisan and trade qualifications
- Occupational qualifications at NQF Levels 3–6
- Skills programmes linked to priority sectors
- Employment, self-employment and entrepreneurship
- Further learning and articulation

We are strengthening TVET colleges as sector-focused hubs of skills development through Centres of Specialisation, Trade Test Centres, modernised workshops, and industry-aligned curricula.

The National Skills Fund is currently funding the uMasinga TVET Smart Campus pilot at a value exceeding R350 million, with completion expected by 2027. This project signals the direction we must take: modern, digitally enabled, future-ready institutions.

SECOND-CHANCE AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Community Education and Training Colleges remain central to inclusive access.

They are fully prepared for the 2026 academic year and will accommodate youth and adults seeking:

- The Amended Senior Certificate
- The National Senior Certificate Second Chance Programme
- Occupational and skills programmes

The academic year commenced on 12 January 2026, with registrations for annual programmes closing on 27 February 2026, while short skills programmes remain open throughout the year.

FUNDING, NSFAS AND SETA CONTRIBUTIONS

NSFAS remains critical in enabling access for poor and working-class students. However, sustained improvements in basic education, combined with economic constraints, continue to place pressure on the funding model.

Short-term stabilisation measures are in place while a medium-term sustainable funding reform is being developed. The missing-middle fund continues to scale.

For 2026:

- 626 935 first-time applicants are provisionally eligible
- 427 144 continuing university students met progression criteria
- Appeals remain open and active

SETAs continue to play a critical complementary role.

In the 2025/26 cycle, over 15 000 new bursary beneficiaries and nearly 8 000 continuing beneficiaries are supported, with a combined value of almost R2 billion.

This diversification of funding sources reduces over-reliance on NSFAS and strengthens system resilience.

STATE OF READINESS AND STUDENT WELL-BEING

Institutions across the sector have undertaken extensive preparations for the 2026 academic year.

This morning, the Ministerial War Room convened to assess readiness. We are confident of a stable opening of the academic year, with ongoing monitoring.

Academic success, however, is inseparable from student well-being.

Higher Health remains the designated wrap-around support institution, operating a 24-hour Toll-Free Crisis Helpline (0800 36 36 36). Over 61 000 students have been supported through this service in recent years.

We are strengthening sector-wide responses to mental health, gender-based violence, food insecurity, accommodation and safety through national norms, preventative interventions, and coordinated protocols.

Students are urged to rely on official DHET, NSFAS and institutional platforms for accurate information. Furthermore Students are warned to beware of illegally operating private colleges and colleges that offer unaccredited course. The department has a database of all registered colleges available on the website of the department. To first time entrants, only go to campus when it has confirmed acceptance of an application and accommodation has been confirmed.

CONCLUSION

South Africa's post-school education and training system is not static, and it is not in crisis by default. It is under pressure—but it is being deliberately reshaped.

Education, training and skills development in all their forms carry equal dignity and social value. Multiple pathways are not a compromise, they are a strength.

Not every learner will secure immediate placement in their first choice. But every learner must be able to find a credible, supported pathway into learning, skills development and productive participation in society.

That is the task we have set ourselves and that is the work we will continue to do.

I thank you.