

THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF SOUTH AFRICA: 2008



Structure of South Africa's Educational System

Academic Year: January to December

Primary School: Reception to grade 6

Secondary School: Junior Secondary, Grades 7-9; Further Education and Training (10-12)

Higher Education

Certificates and Diplomas (generally 1-2 years of study)

Bachelors' Degrees (from 3 years to 6 years of study, depending on course)

Honor's Degrees (1 further year of undergraduate study, requiring a thesis)

Master's Degree (2 years of post-graduate study)

Doctorate (variable in duration with a minimum of 2 years, following a Master's)

Language of Instruction

South Africa has 11 official languages, but schools and universities generally use either English or Afrikaans as the language of instruction. Students who have attended an English-medium high school or university and have performed well academically can reliably be granted a waiver from the TOEFL.

Secondary Education

Schooling is compulsory through grade 9, but under the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) students may opt at the successful completion of grade 9 to obtain their General Education and Training Certificate and to pursue employment or technical training at Further Education and Training (FET) institutions. Those continuing into senior secondary school for grades 10-12 sit the nationally set and moderated matriculation examinations, or an approved alternative such as the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) test series, to obtain the National Senior Certificate (NSC) at the end of grade 12. From grade 10, senior secondary students must take 7 subjects, 4 of which must be English, a second South African language, Life Orientation, and either Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy. The remaining 3 courses are selected from 27 options, which range from Accounting, Art (which includes theory and history), Business Economics and Computer Technology, to Tourism and Woodworking. Courses in science (Physical or Life Science) are optional, as are the social sciences (History and Geography). Students wishing to pursue university studies, however, are often constrained in their choices at tertiary level unless they take the more rigorous Mathematics (rather than Mathematical Literacy), and Physical or Life Science. The notion of a Liberal Arts and Sciences education is very foreign to most South African students, and thus they often focus early on in their high school years on a particular set of subjects.

With a total population of approximately 45 million people, South Africa has 6000 secondary schools. In 2006, 524,698 learners took the South African 'matric' examinations; 67% passed to obtain their Senior Certificate. Only 16% of those who took the examinations achieved a pass with endorsement making them eligible to apply for university study in South Africa. Endorsement in 2008 requires, at a minimum, a rating of 4 (or a C) in four subjects from a designated list of subjects, and is denoted with an 'E' on the NSC.

The new Outcomes based Education (OBE) curriculum, in which the Higher and Standard Grade options have given way to one set of courses on offer, aims to develop the critical thinking skills that are so necessary to success at tertiary level. Due to the legacy of apartheid and resource constraints, however, many public schools are severely challenged to meet the bars set for introducing 'OBE'. At the beginning of 2008 the assessment standard for this new curriculum reached the grade 12 level. Reports show that the average achieved for most examinations in most subjects across South Africa is now between 50% and 60%. Any mark over 70% is considered to be very good and a result over 80% is excellent and rare. The new grading scale using numbers instead of symbols appears below:

US Grade	A	B+	B	C	D	F	F
SA Grade*	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Based on SA Score of	80-100%	70-79%	60-69%	50-59%	40-49%	30-39%	20-29%

*Note the Higher Grade/Standard Grade distinction of earlier years has been dropped.

Higher Education in South Africa

South Africa's higher education system consists of 23 publicly funded universities, consolidated since 1994 down from 36 separate institutions. Some of these are considered comprehensive and others are universities of technology (see www.studysa.co.za for a complete list). Both types of institutions offer Bachelor's, Honors, Masters and Doctorate degrees, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate diplomas. Several of South Africa's comprehensive universities are internationally recognized for their research in areas such as astronomy, business, paleontology, and public policy in Africa, as well as the caliber of student produced. The Higher Education Act of 1997 stipulates that all higher education institutions (see list below) come under the authority of the national government, while the FET colleges (listed at www.education.gov.za) report to the provincial governments.

Together, these institutions enroll over a million students per year, many from neighboring African nations. Students are admitted on a competitive basis, upon their admissions points score (APS) calculated from their matriculation examination marks. The required APS varies from course to course, and between universities. Students without the matriculation endorsement from Umalusi (South Africa's council for quality assurance)

may enroll at universities of technology.

Education Contacts in South Africa:

Higher Education of South Africa: <http://www.hesa.ac.za/>

Council on Higher Education: www.che.ac.za

South African Qualifications Authority: www.saqqa.org.za

Umalusi: www.umalusi.org.za

National Qualifications Framework: www.nqf.org.za

The Matriculation Board: www.sauvca.org.za/mb

South African Department of Education: www.education.gov.za

Minister: Ms. Naledi Pandor Tel: 27 12 312 5911 Fax: 27 12 325 6260

The International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA): www.studysa.co.za

Education USA <http://educationusa.state.gov>

South Africans in the United States

In the 2006/07 academic year in the US, there were 1665 South African students enrolled for study, 56 % of which were undergraduates. This overall figure represents a decline of 2.6 percent from the previous year. The USAP program began in South Africa in 2006, and in 2007 four students from public school backgrounds attained admission with full scholarships to US institutions.

Testing in South Africa

The SAT is offered six times a year in nine locations around the country, and the TOEFL, GRE and GMAT are offered in Cape Town and Johannesburg twice weekly.

Education USA in South Africa

The Education USA advising centers in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban are based in the Public Affairs Sections of the respective US Consulates. Together, the three advisors serve approximately 24,000 students a year with information on suitability of US study, selection of institutions, the preparation of applications, and on pre-departure orientation, at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels. They also provide assistance to visiting US university representatives conducting outreach among South African students.

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