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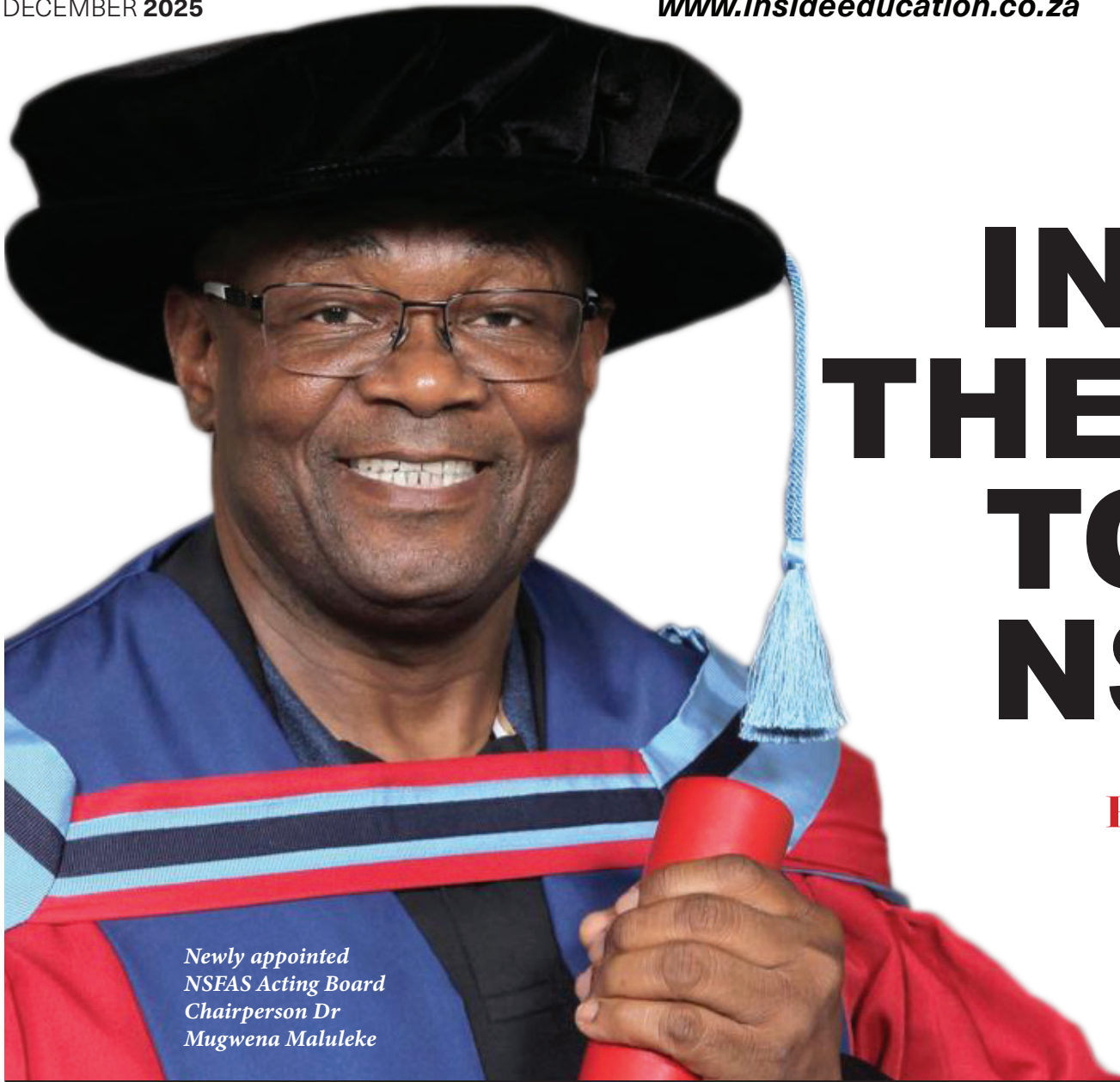


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QUARTERLY EDITION



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## STUDENT FUNDING

## NSFAS ‘turning a corner’

JOHNATHAN PAOLI  
& THEBE MABANGA

**N**ational Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) acting CEO Waseem Carrim says the entity has entered a “new era of stability, governance reform and operational rebuilding” after years of turbulence, delays and governance failures that shook confidence across the higher education sector.

In an exclusive interview with Inside Education, Carrim detailed a far-reaching reform plan — from leadership stabilisation and decentralisation to accommodation regulation, debt recovery, and NSFAS’s R69.9-billion budget for the 2025/26 financial year. His comments come as the scheme faces mounting pressure, including a R10.6-billion funding shortfall and rising demand for financial aid.

Carrim said NSFAS is “turning a corner” following prolonged instability marked by delayed payments, fraud scandals and administrative backlogs. The appointment of a new board chairperson, Dr Mugwena Maluleke, and the filling of several critical senior posts represent what he calls “strategic, deliberate and necessary” interventions.

“The appointments were guided by a strategic focus on strengthening governance, enhancing operational efficiency, and restoring public trust,” Carrim said.

“Stabilising leadership and filling critical vacancies are essential to ensuring accountability and driving strategic reforms.”

He added that NSFAS prioritised leaders with strong backgrounds in public finance, governance and higher education.

These appointments, he said, will enable NSFAS to “operate more transparently, deliver on its mandate efficiently, and rebuild stakeholder confidence”.

One of the most consequential changes underway is the decentralisation of NSFAS operations to all 25 universities and TVET colleges. For the first time in NSFAS’s history, core functions such as student registration, bursary administration and accommodation support will be handled by NSFAS offices located on campuses.

“The decentralisation initiative is driven by the need to enhance responsiveness, efficiency and localised support for students,” Carrim said. On-site staff will speed up processing, reduce bottlenecks and offer direct assistance to students, landlords and administrators — especially during the busy registration season.

**N**SFAS is also preparing to relocate its head office from Cape Town to Johannesburg to improve coordination with government departments and institutions.

“The move aims to position NSFAS closer to key partners, enhance accessibility and strengthen



**Stabilisation is key:** The acting CEO of NSFAS, Waseem Carrim, has a clear focus of where he wants to take the institution in the future. - Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

stakeholder engagement,” Carrim said. The relocation is expected to reduce long-term operational costs and improve service delivery.

Student accommodation — plagued by delayed payments, accreditation disputes and quality concerns — remains a major pressure point. Carrim said NSFAS has taken “significant steps” to stabilise this function ahead of the 2026 academic year. These include comprehensive audits of accredited accommodation, strengthened verification processes and the development of new monitoring systems.

A student accommodation protocol was released for public comment in 2025, setting new regulatory standards. “Significant steps have been taken to bring landlord payments under control and prevent mass evictions of students,” he said.

However, Carrim acknowledged that the crisis was partly “self-inflicted”. NSFAS assumed responsibility for accommodation from institutions even though it lacked property-management expertise. He argued that a national accommodation policy, aligned to uniform standards and backed by DHET investment, is required. He pointed to PRASA’s new 700-bed Braamfontein residence as an example of the type of infrastructure needed.

Responding to questions on historical failures, Carrim outlined systemic reforms to address fraud, backlogs and internal control weaknesses. These include ICT system overhauls, strengthened compliance units, enhanced oversight mechanisms and improved payment turnaround times.

“Early signs of progress include

greater stakeholder engagement and more frequent public reporting,” he said. Dedicated liaison units have been set up to respond to accommodation disputes, while direct-payment systems are being upgraded to provide real-time transparency.

NSFAS continues to face severe financial pressure. In August, the scheme announced a R10.6-billion shortfall for university funding. The shortfall was driven by increased bachelor passes, rising cost-of-living pressures that widen the pool of eligible applicants, and real-term reductions in state resources.

**G**overnment subsequently reprioritised R13.3 billion within DHET’s budget to fund 34,000 students with blocked registrations and 15,000 second-semester applicants. NSFAS said this reprioritisation also enabled it to settle outstanding accommodation payments, marking “a significant moment in the stabilisation of NSFAS for the 2025 academic year”.

Demand for NSFAS continues to surge. Of the 893,853 applications received for 2026, 85% were first-time applicants, including 520,544 SASSA beneficiaries. Young women made up 66.45% of applicants.

DHET’s new enrolment plans will see university numbers rise from 1.07 million in 2023 to 1.18 million by 2030 — growth that will place even more pressure on NSFAS’s budget.

NSFAS will manage R69.9 billion in 2025/26, including R719.6 million for administration and R950 million for loan funding.

The remainder will support bursaries, accommodation and system upgrades. Carrim said that

while the budget is substantial, “we remain committed to advocating for increased funding to meet growing demand”.

Historical debt remains a major challenge. NSFAS is owed R45.9 billion by 841,879 debtors, some dating back to 1991 when the scheme operated as TEFSA.

NSFAS is procuring a new loan-management system and intensifying debt recovery. “Where debtors are employed and not making repayments, we initiate recovery processes, which may include external debt collectors or legal action,” he said. The long-term strategy, he added, will balance financial sustainability with fairness.

Carrim also noted that major policy shifts — such as the introduction of the “missing middle” loan and changes to accommodation rules — were implemented without giving NSFAS time to adapt its systems, contributing to instability.

NSFAS has supported 7.8 million students since its inception and disbursed R51.6 billion in the last financial year alone. Carrim highlighted that South Africa now produces four times more black African graduates than in 1994 — evidence, he said, of NSFAS’s role in expanding access.

In a recent interview on the Palatable Politics podcast, he expressed pride in NSFAS’s work, noting that the scheme supports about 900,000 students at any given time. While graduate unemployment remains a concern, joblessness among graduates is significantly lower than among those without degrees.

“This progress underscores the importance of stabilising and strengthening NSFAS,” Carrim said.

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STUDENT FUNDING

Maluleke moves to restore order and stability at troubled NSFAS

CHARLES MOLELE

The new acting chair of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), Dr Mugwena Maluleke, has vowed to deal decisively with the mismanagement, corruption, and administrative failures that have plagued the entity.

The problems that have led to late payments, academic exclusions, hunger, and operational chaos are undermining access to higher education for thousands of young people.

In an exclusive interview with Inside Education, Maluleke said stabilising governance and restoring operational efficiency will be his immediate priority as he steps into the role.

“Our immediate focus is to stabilise payment processes, secure cash flow for the current academic cycle, and urgently address ICT and payment system failures that have caused disruptions,” Maluleke said.

“We will implement a clear command-and-control structure to strengthen governance, enhance transparency, and ensure every approved student receives their funding on time.”

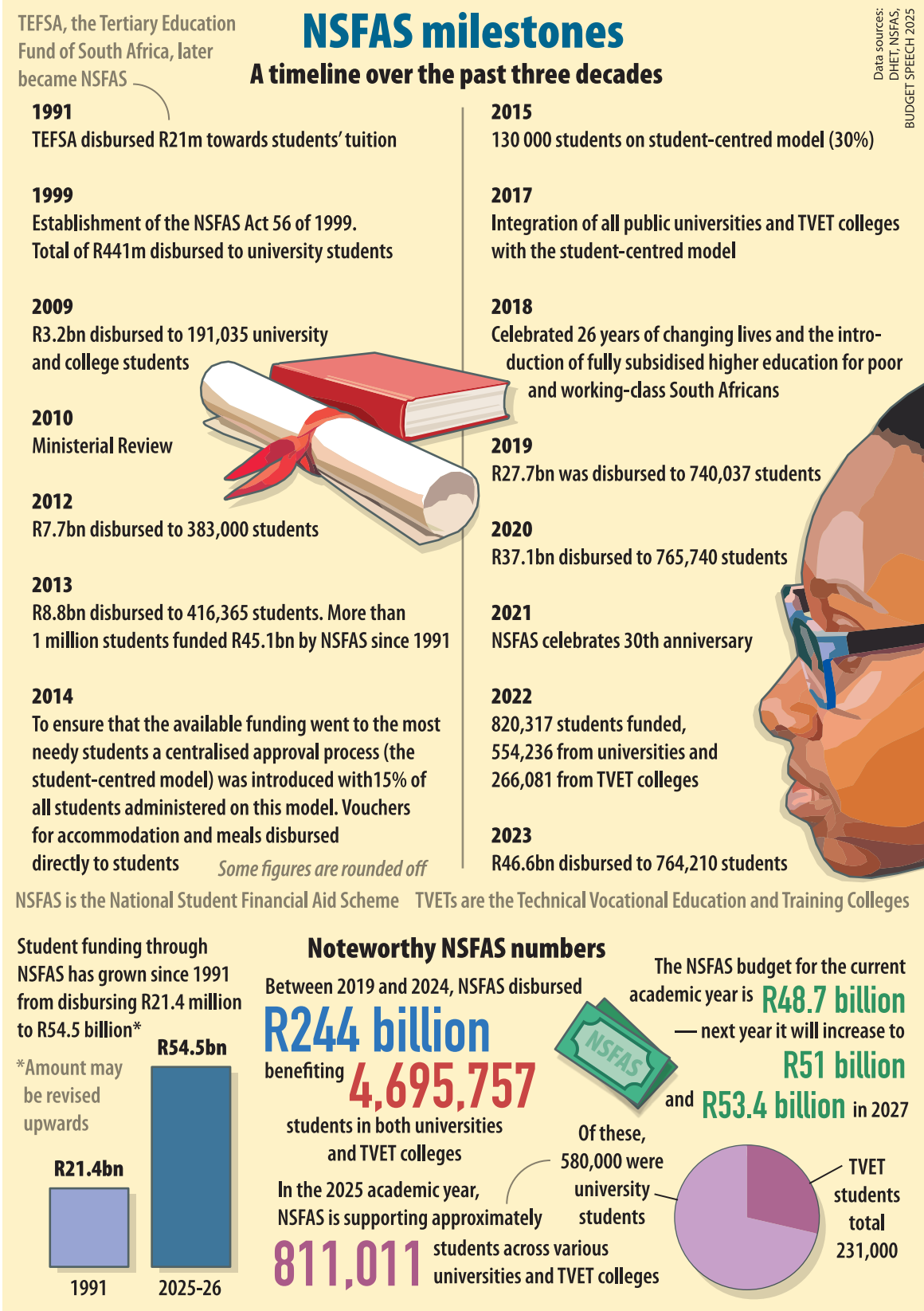
He said the long-term vision is to rebuild NSFAS into a model public entity that delivers its mandate through efficient, transparent, and accountable funding systems.

Maluleke stressed that accountability will be central to NSFAS’s turnaround.

“We are strengthening internal controls, enhancing oversight, and introducing more rigorous audit processes. We aim to foster a culture of integrity and ethical conduct throughout the organisation,” he said.

“Working with the Department of Higher Education and Training, the Auditor-General, and other oversight bodies, we are committed to full transparency. Any irregularities will be promptly investigated and resolved. I am personally committed to disciplined, evidence-based engagement with the Minister, Parliament, and institutional leaders to support coordinated reforms.”

On the contentious issue of direct payment of student allowances, Maluleke said the



Cracking the whip: The new acting chairperson of the NSFAS. Dr Mugwena Maluleke. - Photo: Education International via Flickr

system requires a balanced and evidence-based approach.

“While it offers efficiency and transparency, it also presents risks related to oversight, financial literacy, and potential misuse,” he said.

“The Board will commission a full technical evaluation of the platform. We are developing stronger monitoring systems, enhanced tracking mechanisms, and financial literacy support for students.

Close collaboration with institutions is essential to ensure funds are used appropriately.”

He added: “Our ultimate goal is a transparent and accountable disbursement process that protects public funds and supports equitable access to quality education.”

Maluleke said rebuilding trust in NSFAS is one of his top priorities as the new chair.

“We will do this through transparent communication, strengthened governance, and demonstrable improvements in service delivery,” he said.

“We are engaging directly with students, universities, TVET colleges, and govern-

ment stakeholders to rebuild trust. Continuous improvement, responsible financial management, and adherence to best practices in public-sector governance will guide this work.”

Maluleke was appointed by Higher Education and Training Minister Buti Manamela in November this year following the resignation of the previous NSFAS board chair. As a current board member, he brings extensive leadership and governance experience to the position.

Widely regarded for his commitment to education and social justice, Maluleke is a seasoned educationist, trade unionist, and academic.

He holds a doctorate in education and has contributed significantly to South Africa’s education transformation.

He currently serves as the General Secretary of the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union and has been a member of the union since its inception in 1990.

Last year, he was unanimously elected President of Education International at its 10th World Congress in Buenos Aires, a global recognition of his leadership and advocacy in the education sector.

NSFAS said Maluleke’s experience in policy development, stakeholder engagement, and organisational leadership will be key to strengthening the scheme and restoring confidence among students and institutions.

“He has contributed extensively to advancing educational transformation in the country,” said NSFAS in a statement.

“Dr Maluleke’s expertise in policy development, stakeholder engagement, and organisational leadership is well-regarded, and NSFAS is confident that his guidance will further strengthen the organisation’s commitment to supporting students in need. We wish Dr Maluleke every success in his new role and look forward to his leadership as NSFAS continues its mandate to provide financial assistance to deserving students across South Africa.”



## SKILLING MZANZI — ADVERTORIAL

# New Administrator sets the CETA on 'Road to Renewal' to restore confidence



**Sense of urgency: Oupa Nkoane is the newly appointed Administrator of the CETA.**  
- Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

## THAPELO MOLEFE & THEBE MABANGA

**O**upa Nkoane, the newly appointed Administrator of the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA), says the organisation has entered a decisive era of reform, rebuilding, and accountability as it works to restore public confidence after the CETA was placed in administration for the third time in just over a decade due to what Nkoane calls "chronic governance failures".

Addressing its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Mbombela, Mpumalanga, recently, Nkoane said the CETA is "putting its house in order" through a comprehensive turnaround strategy grounded in good governance, strong partnerships and a renewed commitment to quality skills development. "We are introducing a culture of accountability and responsibility, and we are creating a conducive environment for welcoming ideas that can drive the organisation forward," Nkoane told delegates. "Our renewal is about getting the basics right, creating partnerships that work, and establishing a legacy

that results in efficient organisational processes."

The CETA is one of 21 Sector Education & Training Authorities (SETAs), established in terms of the Skills Development Act of 1998. SETAs are designed to supply skills to their respective sectors, and in the case of the CETA, this is for the built environment, including the construction and infrastructure subsectors.

The CETA can accredit around 70 categories of skills, from bricklaying, carpentry and tiling to building materials, manufacturing, architecture and draughtsmanship, as well as managerial and executive skills.

**T**he CETA AGM was held under the theme "Road to Renewal", a concept the Administrator said is not merely symbolic but a strategic framework guiding the CETA's reform trajectory since it was placed under administration earlier this year.

Nkoane displays a sense of urgency in his approach to his role, which is a 12-month tenure, saying, "I will not be here forever." He conveys an equal sense of urgency for the CETA itself, noting calls for SETAs to be closed and the money handed to employers

for skills training.

He argues that the construction industry will always need a dedicated body to facilitate skills training, whether it is the CETA or a similar structure.

Nkoane conveys similar urgency for the CETA itself. "If we do not change the narrative and improve our impact, our existence will be under threat," he says, noting that SETA licences expire in March 2030, meaning the CETA must prove its relevance and impact if it hopes to retain its mandate.

Nkoane, who was announced as Administrator in August, brings more than 30 years of executive experience in public administration, infrastructure development, and organisational turnaround.

His career includes being head of city planning in Ekurhuleni and holding senior leadership roles in the City of Johannesburg and Tshwane, where he was also Acting City Manager. He is not new to helping troubled entities, having served as the Section 139 administrator at the Emfuleni Local Municipality.

He was also previously the CEO of the Municipal Demarcation Board and holds a master's



**Firm resolve: Sfiso Masango, a beneficiary of training from the CETA, has this advice for young people: "Take every opportunity seriously, stay committed, and keep learning." - Photo: Eddie Mtsweni**

## Sfiso Masango: A story of success

THAPELO MOLEFE

**G**rowing up in Waterval B near Siyabuswa in Mpumalanga, Sfiso Masango carries great pride in his rural KwaNdebele roots. It is the place that shaped his discipline, resilience, and the determination that later defined his journey in construction and skills development.

He completed Grade 12 at Phillip Ndimande Secondary School in Emalahleni and was always drawn to hands-on work. His interest in building led him to pursue accredited construction programmes, laying the foundation for the path he would later follow.

"I have always enjoyed building and working with my hands," Masango says. "That's why I continued learning through accredited training programmes."

Masongo comes from a disadvantaged household, an experience that shaped his work ethic.

"I grew up with only my late brother working at home," he recalls. "This taught me to be strong, disciplined, and to make the most of every opportunity."

Those challenges strengthened his resolve to create a better future not only for himself but for others.

His involvement with the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) began in 2014 while he was completing computer and life skills training at Love Life. He was selected for a CETA-funded apprenticeship, which enabled him to complete an occupational qualification in bricklaying.

"The CETA funded my bricklaying qualification, and that opened many doors for me," he says.

"The CETA changed my life," he adds, reflecting on how the training helped him grow from a learner into a skilled professional with the confidence to start a business.

On 13 January 2016, Masongo founded Abiding Trading Enterprise, now a construction company and accredited training provider offering learnerships and apprenticeships in building, plumbing, tiling, and landscaping.

"Starting a company was my plan B," he explains. "I was afraid of being unemployed after training."

He also wanted to honour his late mother's unrealised dream of running a successful company.

Starting was difficult. "We didn't have a proper office or classroom. We used a closed school building, and it was very difficult because we needed money to build our own office," he says.

Masongo took loans from First National Bank and Standard Bank to build proper facilities, loans he later repaid after receiving support from the CETA.

Abiding Trading Enterprise now employs nine people, including former learners. So far, the company has trained 162 learners.

"Six of our practitioners came from the CETA programmes," he notes with pride.

Looking ahead, Masongo plans to expand his training centre, open a trade test centre, and take on larger construction projects.

His message to young people is simple: "Take every opportunity seriously, stay committed, and keep learning."

He remains grateful to God, the CETA, his mentors, and his team for supporting a journey built on resilience, opportunity, and community upliftment.

At the recent CETA Annual General Meeting, Masongo was recognised alongside other notable beneficiaries, including the NCA Skills Institute, the Forek Institute of Technology, Professor Gonnafela Gabriel Letlole, founder of the Gonnafela Letlole Academy, and Terrence Moshoma, who won a gold medal at an international competition.



## SKILLING MZANZI — ADVERTORIAL

degree in town and regional planning, grounding him in spatial development, policy implementation and the built environment.

His extensive background, the CETA officials noted, positions him to stabilise and modernise the organisation at a critical moment. “I speak the industry’s language,” Nkoane noted of his early interactions with stakeholders.

In his AGM address, Nkoane said he arrived at the CETA to find an institution facing “a series of chronic governance challenges” that required decisive action and structural reform.

He said the CETA has already begun stabilising its operational environment through strengthened governance structures, including the appointment of an Audit and Risk Committee to champion oversight and internal-control reform.

His overall task is to help appoint the Board as well as the executive, led by the CEO and CFO.

Nkoane added that the renewal of the CETA is also linked to the broader national context, where the construction industry has recently contributed significantly to job creation, according to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey.

The construction industry added 130,000 jobs over the third quarter, after adding 20,000 jobs in the second quarter of this year. However, over the past three years, the construction industry employment levels have hovered around 1,3 million. The decline and stagnation of the sector are attributed to the relatively slow rollout of the infrastructure programme. This has contributed to construction industry giants Murray & Roberts Holdings being placed under liquidation.

Nkoane said this highlights the urgency for the CETA to accelerate the development of skilled workers who can support infrastructure-driven economic growth.

“We must begin to match the country’s infrastructure ambitions with credible, reliable and dependable skills,” he said.

The AGM included a detailed presentation by the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA), which highlighted ongoing issues in the CETA’s financial reporting and grant management.

AGSA’s senior engagement manager, Rienk Grobler, told delegates that the CETA received a qualified audit opinion for 2024/25, with increasing qualification areas over recent years.

These included challenges related to discretionary grant commitments, expenditure, payables, and irregular expenditure, much of it due to inadequate documentation from stakeholders to support payments.

“The majority of qualification areas result from the CETA not having adequate evidence regard-

ing the spending of grant funds. This is where stakeholders must support the CETA by providing documentation promptly,” Grobler said.

He confirmed that one active material irregularity is currently being addressed.

It relates to payments that did not yield intended training benefits. The AGSA issued binding recommendations to the Administrator, and failure to act may lead to further steps such as referral to the Special Investigating Unit, a remedial directive or a certificate of debt.

Nkoane has made clear his desire not to challenge the AG’s findings and instead prepare an audit plan that will be presented to the Standing Committee of Public Accounts in Parliament.

Speaking to Inside Education, Nkoane said that the administration is pursuing every finding decisively.

“Irregularity, investigations and corrective action are be-

*“We are repurposing and restructuring this organisation so that it becomes the engine for skills, growth and transformation in the construction sector.”*

*CETA administrator  
Oupa Nkoane*

ing done without fail,” he said. “Those found to have had their hands in the kitty will face consequence management.”

He added that he is already seeing shifts in organisational culture, with staff showing improved receptiveness and clarity on responsibility and expectations.

Nkoane also outlined a multi-pillar turnaround strategy anchored in governance, strengthened internal systems, and the rebuilding of organisational morale.

He said morale was low when he assumed office, but reforms such as reconstituting the labour forum, revising internal-control policies, and clarifying departmental roles have helped stabilise the institution.

Nkoane said the authority will no longer tolerate partners who merely position themselves to access discretionary grants. “We want partners who bring capacity, resources and infrastructure,” he said. “We are cutting off middlemen who are counterproductive to our objectives,” noting that “the days of the CETA being seen as a

cash cow by service providers are over”.

He added that the CETA is decentralising parts of its work to provincial structures, where projects are implemented, to strengthen oversight, capacity and delivery.

Nkoane said he envisions the CETA becoming a centre of excellence for research, innovation and future-oriented skills in the built environment. This includes training for new building technologies, microgrids, alternative sanitation systems and modern construction techniques. He said the CETA is positioning itself to support President Cyril Ramaphosa’s R1 trillion infrastructure programme announced at last year’s State of the Nation Address and reiterated at the recent National Construction Summit. The scale of this programme, he said, makes the CETA’s mandate more important than ever.

“We are wired, we are ready. The infrastructure programme touches the core nerve of our existence,” he said. “We will align ourselves with targeted training that creates opportunities for young people, from general workers to engineers.”

One of Nkoane’s key goals is to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with entities such as Rand Water and the South African National Roads Agency, which are major infrastructure implementers, to become a preferred skills supplier.

He emphasised that provinces such as Mpumalanga, which spend R16 billion annually on capital infrastructure projects, require strong training pipelines to meet construction demand. He noted that a metro like the City of Johannesburg has a R50 billion spend for infrastructure building and maintenance.

As he concluded his address, Nkoane reaffirmed that the CETA’s “Road to Renewal” is a long-term organisational movement designed to strengthen governance, build impact, and position the organisation as a vital player in South Africa’s skills ecosystem.

“We want relationships characterised by creativity, innovation, longevity, impact and sustainability,” he said. “We are repurposing and restructuring this organisation so that it becomes the engine for skills, growth and transformation in the construction sector.”

With governance reforms underway, a clear turnaround strategy in motion, and a renewed emphasis on institutional integrity, the CETA’s Administrator believes the organisation is now firmly set on the “Road to Renewal” and committed to rebuilding trust in one of South Africa’s most strategically important sectors.



**Support:** Master Builders South Africa Executive Director Roy Mnisi said the organisation was unwavering in its commitment to the CETA.

- Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

## Industry leaders back CETA’s renewal drive

THAPELO MOLEFE

Stakeholders across South Africa’s construction sector delivered strong messages of support at the Construction Education and Training Authority’s (CETA) Annual General Meeting, affirming their confidence in the organisation’s renewal path and its crucial role in strengthening skills and competitiveness in the built environment.

Programme director and Vice-President of the Organised Business and Black Business Council in the Built Environment (BBCBE), Gregory Mofokeng, opened the segment by stressing the importance of aligning training with modern technologies.

Reflecting on the evolution of global construction, he said: “We can’t have, in this day and age, a programme to train bricklayers ... but we don’t have 3D printing integrated. It cannot be. We need to integrate those latest technologies so that we can keep up with the rest of the world.”

The first message of support came from Aubrey Tshalata, the President of the National African Federation for the Building Industry, who warmly welcomed the Administrator and the leadership team steering the CETA’s turnaround.

“We are excited to be here ... We welcome the administrator and his team,” he said.

Tshalata praised the expertise of the new leadership, calling it “a team of people who know this terrain, who know skills development, who understand governance, who understand ethics”.

He positioned the CETA as a national asset, saying it is “a critical tool for competitiveness, economic development, growth, and job creation”.

Tshalata emphasised that the industry stands ready to work alongside the CETA during its renewal.

“We are assuring you that we will work with you side by side ... not to an improved performance, but to an unqualified audit report.”

He concluded by celebrating the contribution of the CETA’s staff.

“The CETA staff are key heroes ... people who wake up every day and go to the offices to serve the nation,” he said.

Delivering the second message of support, Master Builders South Africa Executive Director Roy Mnisi echoed the organisation’s unwavering commitment.

He described the industry’s relationship with the CETA as “a sweet and endless kind of relationship ... a marriage that cannot have a divorce at all”.

He affirmed full backing for the Administrator.

“You have all our support as Master Builders South Africa,” he said.

Mnisi said the CETA’s renewed focus on stakeholder relations was encouraging, adding: “We will continue to support the CETA until the end of time.”

The final message of support came from BBCBE President Danny Lesiba Masimene, who highlighted the importance of levy-paying employers.

“It is compulsory to contribute to the Skills Development Levy, but it is not compulsory to direct those levies to the CETA,” Masimene explained.

He urged stronger collaboration, noting that employers choose SETAs based on the relationship and service they receive.

“We look at the relationship we are having and the service we are receiving ... and that influences our decision where our levies should go.”

Collectively, the messages underscored a united commitment: the construction industry stands firmly behind the renewal of the CETA, its governance reforms, and its mission to build a skilled, competitive workforce for South Africa’s future.



# EDUCATION NEWS

## Pens down parties: Parents and teachers warn of dangers

**LEBONE RODAH  
MOSIMA &  
CHARMAINE NDLELA**

In a nation where the end of high school exams should signal triumph and hope, a troubling ritual of unsupervised “pens down” parties is instead unleashing chaos, claiming lives and shattering families.

As the class of 2025 wrapped up its National Senior Certificate exams, educators and parents sounded alarms over preventable tragedies tied to underage drinking and violence, demanding stricter laws and parental supervision to curb the cycle of violence and death.

At Gem-Meg Academy School in Johannesburg, educators have called on the government to raise the legal age to buy alcohol from 18 to 21 and to make ID checks mandatory for every alcohol sale.

Anything less leaves underage teenagers exposed to the potentially deadly pens-down party culture, the teachers told Inside Education.

Their call came as the class of 2025 was finishing final examinations and notorious celebrations were set to ramp up across the country.

In previous years, some pens down parties have ended in tragedy, the most devastating example being the 2022 Enyobeni Tavern disaster in East London for mid-year celebrations, where 21 teenagers, aged between 14 and 17, died.

The incident raised questions about the safety of the celebrations, the accountability of adults who enable them, and the overall culture surrounding underage drinking in the country.

Tavern owners Siyakhangelana and Vuyokazi Ndevu were convicted for selling alcohol to minors on the night of the tragedy, but how exactly the deaths occurred is still the subject of investigation.

Educators told Inside Education that businesses and community members who enable underage drinking must be held accountable. One educator, speaking on condition of anonymity, said adults should be guiding students, not “leading these children astray”.

The Enyobeni tragedy is only one of many devastating events linked to pens down celebrations.

In 2024, Ntombi Mandulo lost her son Sifiso during a pens-down party. “Matric pens down ate my son,” she said.

In December 2023, three northern KZN matric pupils died in a car crash after attending a pens down party.

In 2023, five learners from Dinwiddie High School in Germiston, Ekurhuleni, died in a pens down-related accident.

Parents and educators agree that such tragedies are preventable — but only if strict controls are put in place.

Some educators said that the “secrecy” and “rebellious nature” around pens down parties make them attractive to teenagers.

Schools should host their own, supervised year-end events to ensure learner safety, they said.

“I don’t think the pens down celebrations will end anytime soon,” said one teacher, “because there are people in the community gaining something from the events hosted by these learners.”

The principal of the Gem-Meg Academy, Busani Ndlovu, said the root cause of risky celebration culture begins at home. He said teachers are often unfairly blamed for incidents that occur outside school premises.

The school has introduced a men-to-men mentorship programme aimed at “grooming boys into responsible young men who can uphold positive values,” he said.

This was one way in which the school could encourage pupils to “follow the customs of their forefathers,” said Ndlovu.

A teacher from Stembridge Dishon School told Inside Education that schools should organise official pens down alternatives.

“I think we need to plan the pens down for them and not allow the students to go out and plan it on their own, because planning it on their own comes with a lot of hazards.

“As parents, we need to enforce strict measures on our children,” he said, adding that this included curfews.



**Say no: A pupil wears a T-shirt that condemns pens down parties, drug and alcohol abuse, gangsterism and gender-based violence. - Photo: Supplied**

“As much as [the pupils] are done with high school, they are not done with their lives,” he said.

Minister of Basic Education Siviwe Gwarube has urged matriculants across South Africa not to attend pens down parties.

Gwarube said the unsupervised celebrations sometimes spiral into dangerous situations that lead to “alcohol abuse, violence, vandalism, sexual assault, property damage, and even a risk to lives”.

“The safety of learners remains a shared responsibility,” she said.

“Let us together ensure that the end of exams is not the beginning of regret,” she said.

“Let it be a time of hope, of responsible celebrations marked by the dignity you have earned, while you await the announcement of the national results on 12 January and the provincial announcement on 13 January 2026.”

KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Education, Sipho Hlomuka, has issued a stern warning to all matriculants to act responsibly when celebrating the end of their examinations.

“While we commend our learners for completing this critical chapter of their academic journey, we cannot condone activities that place them and others at risk.

KwaZulu-Natal Police Commissioner Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi has told matriculants to prioritise

their futures and exercise caution around pens down parties, adding that the police would keep a close watch on gatherings linked to the festivities.

The Gauteng Education Department has also warned against pens down parties.

“We are discouraging the pens down parties...we have been saying to candidates, you can celebrate, but responsibly. No alcohol, no parties that would end up with casualties,” said spokesperson Steve Mabona.

In late November, the Eastern Cape Department of Education hosted an ‘anti-pens down’ event in Nelson Mandela Bay, focusing on substance abuse, gender-based violence and gangsterism. Mayor Babalwa Lobise urged learners to stay safe during the festive season, while Tat’u Majola of the Khula Foundation said parents must take responsibility for their children.

In Mpumalanga, several schools have taken a stand against the parties.

Lekete Secondary School in Arthurseat village, Acornhoek, has joined several institutions across the province to publicly oppose pens down celebrations. The schools have opposed the parties because of fatal accidents, sexually transmitted infections, teenage

pregnancies, and sexual assaults that have occurred in the past.

Educators in the province say teenagers are exposed to danger because some unsavoury characters and criminals attend the parties in search of victims. They gave examples of gang rape after drinks were spiked.

One teacher said that the matriculants spent an entire year studying, often attending extra classes on weekends, only to have their lives destroyed at pens down parties.

Lekete Secondary and other schools have also condemned another tradition – the tearing up of uniforms after final grade 12 exams. Instead, they urge pupils to donate the uniforms to those in need or return them to the school on their last day.

Mpumalanga Education MEC Lindi Masina called on provinces to unite and “firmly reject” the celebrations.

“The Department of Education wishes to state that it strongly condemns ‘pens down parties’. These are not official school activities; they are unsafe and have no place in our efforts to protect and nurture the future of our young children,” she said.

Despite the repeated warnings, posters for 2025 pens down parties were already circulating on social media in November.



## ADVERTORIAL — URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The Joburg Property Company —  
a passion for people and property

## THEBE MABANGA

**M**usa Makhunga, the CEO of the Joburg Property Company (JPC), would like to see private sector collaboration with the City increase in the future into areas like financing developments that would assist the City, which has limited resources and vast and competing developmental needs.

The JPC manages the City's R8,6 billion land and property portfolio and is responsible for keeping a range of public spaces clean and properly maintained. The entity employs just over 1,500 people.

At a recent staff event to honour those with long service, Makhunga described his vision for the JPC as being to "build a world-class property management company that not only serves the City of Johannesburg with pride but also empowers its employees and uplifts communities."

He reminded his staff of the need for and importance of acting with integrity and accountability, two of the key values of the JPC. He also reminded his executive team to "lead with humility". His message resonated with staff and leadership alike in a celebratory mood for those who marked longevity with the organisation. The JPC came into being in 2000 when the City of Johannesburg was formed by amalgamating several town councils.

The JPC operates four main divisions. The first is Property Asset Management, which manages about 30,700 parcels of land on behalf of the City. The division also drives the City's land strategy and does property research.

Property Management handles various types of accounts, from blue-chip clients to mixed-use accounts, socioeconomic accounts for social housing, as well as municipal accounts. These generate management fees and rental income for the JPC on behalf of the City.

Then there is the Property Development, which includes developments of over R4 billion, with developments of R8 billion facilitated over the past five years. "The JPC's approach to the redevelopment and management of office space is progressive and transformative, leading to mixed-use developments along the Corridors of Freedom," the company notes.



**Community-minded:** Musa Makhunga, the CEO of the Joburg Property Company.  
- Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

There is also Facilities Management, which includes the management of taxi ranks, informal trading spaces, public conveniences and the refurbishment and maintenance of all council facilities.

**T**he divisions give the JPC a mixed skill set that starts with those in areas such as finance, but also property industry professionals like valuers and conveyancers, and the bulk of their skills in facilities management includes general workers and cleaners.

In the year to June, the JPC had assets of R1,4 billion and liabilities of R1,1 billion to indicate healthy solvency.

Over the same period, the JPC generated revenue of R1,2 billion, with R695 million in subsidies from CoJ for managing its portfolio. That means the entity must still go out and raise R500 million through rentals, cleaning service recoveries, commission from property sales and facilitation fees from developments, as well as rental income from outdoor advertising through billboards.

Some of the major developments are the Ekhaya Centre around the Orlando Towers in

Soweto, the Alexandra Mall and Pan Africa Mall in Alexandra, and the 27 boxes development in Melville, among others.

An interesting development in the pipeline is a student housing project in the suburb of Cottesloe for the University of Johannesburg. The suburb was established after World War II as a resettlement hub for returning white soldiers who were awarded houses.

The densification development will see a dilapidated structure converted into a 16-storey building to provide student accommodation, a pressing issue in Johannesburg. There is also a mixed-use development planned for the vicinity of Diepsloot just off Winnie Mandela Drive, north of Johannesburg.

Makhunga says one of the areas he would like to drive is private sector collaboration to expand beyond the current area of cooperation with private developers. Increasing the role of the private sector to expand to areas like financing developments is recognising that the City has limited resources and vast competing developmental needs, which require entities to be creative to raise revenue.

He proudly declares that a

significant number of their developments are undertaken with black-owned developers, a requirement he deems non-negotiable.

**M**akhunga says the JPC frequently meets with international counterparts to understand how cities manage their land and property portfolios. The JPC has interacted with cities such as Madrid, Paris and Singapore to gain an understanding of how they have undertaken inner city rejuvenation.

Makhunga says he is driven by a passion for people, whether it's employees or communities, and sees property as a vehicle he can use to achieve these goals. His love for community is rooted in his upbringing in Msinga, Kwa-Zulu-Natal.

Due to the violence and instability in the area, his parents moved him to Ulundi, where he completed his high school education. He then went to Rhodes University to gain a B.Com in Accounting. While pursuing articles at Ernst & Young, then at Sizwe Ntsaluba and Associates, he audited property companies, and that is how he obtained exposure to the sector. "I decided at this point that this is a sector

I must get involved in," he says.

Makhunga joined the Metro Trading Company in 2011, which was responsible for managing City property around taxi ranks and informal traders. This has given him a handle on the current impasse between the City and informal traders, where the City obtained a court order to move informal traders to designated spaces. He believes the solution lies in education, both for consumers and hawkers.

"When you need to get petrol, you go to a specific place. When you need to purchase grocery items or clothing, you go to a specific place," he says, arguing that the goods sold by hawkers, especially food, cannot be placed randomly in pedestrian spaces and must be regulated. He argues that in many other countries, markets are a defining feature, as they house informal traders who sell their wares. This is the environment in which informal traders must operate, he says.

The Metro Trading Company was incorporated into the JPC; that is how he entered the entity and grew a step closer to realising his dream. After working in audit and risk, he became head of strategy and later decided to join the operations side of the business. This led to him being appointed as General Manager for Mega Projects, which are projects above R1 billion.

In January this year, he was appointed as acting CEO, and he assumed the role permanently two months ago.

Part of what he likes about property is that, unlike accounting and auditing, he can explain to someone like his late grandmother what he does daily to change people's lives.

Makhunga notes that he assumed the role at a busy time for the organisation, including the preparatory work for the G20. The result is that he hardly finds time for himself outside of work. When asked what he does to unwind, he notes that "I am working, planning something".

He spends limited time with his family, and as a keen hiker and cyclist, he religiously spends Sunday morning in the open hiking, but also planning and strategising work-related issues.

The City of Johannesburg's land and property portfolio is in safe and capable hands.



## TEACHER'S CORNER

## Gugu Motlanthe on a lesson that stayed with her for life

*Her mathematics teacher taught her that every problem contains its own solution*

**Wise words:** Gugu Motlanthe, Executive Trustee of the Kgalema Motlanthe Foundation, says teachers are “idols, mentors, counsellors, disciplinarians, coaches and caregivers — all in a single day”.  
- Photo: KMF



**Outreach:** Gugu Motlanthe, Executive Trustee of the Kgalema Motlanthe Foundation, with learners at the UN Stakeholders Roundtable on Social Cohesion. - Photo: KMF

## SIMON NARE

**G**ugu Motlanthe, executive director of the Kgalema Motlanthe Foundation, has dedicated her career to supporting young learners and addressing the gaps left by South Africa's public education system. Through the foundation, she has developed what she describes as a unique window into the lives of children — an insight into their struggles, aspirations, and the support they need to thrive.

“At the Kgalema Motlanthe Foundation, we are acutely aware of the gaps many learners in public schools must navigate — gaps shaped by access, resources and socioeconomic realities,” she told Inside Education. “This awareness guides our commitment to step into the lived experience of our learners, to understand what their minds hunger for and what their hearts respond to.”

Motlanthe cherishes her own early school memories — the classroom, teachers and shared curiosity — because they help her interpret the minds of today's young people. She values the imaginative world

children inhabit, believing that adults can rediscover solutions by observing how children think and interact.

“One of the ways we do this is through intergenerational dialogue,” she said. Before and after extracurricular sessions, the team spends time speaking with learners, sharing meals and, crucially, listening. “Listening is a muscle that must be exercised intentionally.”

In a world dominated by social media noise and shrinking attention spans, she believes active listening has become rare. Yet it is precisely what children want. “Listening helps us reconnect with our intuition — a voice many adults have long ignored. Children are masters of instinct. They remind us what it feels like to trust our gut, follow our emotions, and explore the world with openness.”

Motlanthe views education as the most powerful tool for transformation, offering skills, confidence, networks and opportunity. Her work is anchored in the recognition that circumstances differ widely. While some high-profile figures built careers without completing degrees, she warns that such examples are

the exception and not a model for young people.

“We must encourage learners to pursue education — not to follow a single path, but to expand their choices and tools for life,” she said.

Motlanthe also reflected on the mounting burdens teachers face: poverty, trauma, inequality, and shifting societal expectations. “They are idols, mentors, counsellors, disciplinarians, coaches and caregivers — all in a single day,” she said. Despite the challenges, many continue to show up with dedication and compassion. Society, she argued, must offer them resources, professional development, emotional care and meaningful recognition.

**M**otlanthe's own educational journey was profoundly shaped by her Standard 8 mathematics teacher, Mr Noor, at her Sydenham high school in Durban. He was not loud or forceful; rather, his quiet confidence made her feel capable. He often recognised her potential before she did.

Though she was placed in the top academic classes, she did not take Physical Science — a limitation that sometimes affected class placement.

Mr Noor looked past this, recognising her ability to excel in mathematics and challenging her to rise to it.

One lesson from him stayed with her for life: “In mathematics, the answer is always hidden in the question.”

Through his teaching, mathematics became more than numbers; it became a way of thinking — about logic, patterns, planning and problem-solving. It even helped her absorb content-heavy subjects. His belief built her confidence and strengthened the resilience and independence she carries today. “If a supportive teacher can change a learner's trajectory, then he surely changed mine,” she said.

English and history classes fuelled her imagination, but mathematics taught her that every problem contains the seed of its own solution — a message she believes remains essential for today's learners.

Motlanthe worries about the growing narrative that formal education is unnecessary for success. Public figures often cite their unconventional paths — Kanye West's The College Dropout, Oprah Winfrey leaving university early, or Bonang

Matheba's insistence on hard work. These stories are inspiring, she acknowledged, but they are outliers.

“Success without education is not a formula learners can rely on,” she emphasised. A more constructive message would be: ‘If I had been able to complete my studies, I might have been even more empowered and successful.’ Education strengthens confidence, discipline, critical thinking, creativity and resilience. It creates networks and opportunities many young people do not even know exist.

Reflecting further on her journey, Motlanthe noted that teachers often underestimate their influence. Learners spend more waking hours with teachers than with their own parents, and educators shape intellectual, emotional and social development. Today's teachers face unprecedented pressures, yet many continue to serve with heart.

Her reflections pay tribute not only to her favourite teacher but to educators everywhere. “Teachers need empathy, encouragement and respect,” she said. “Society must equip them with resources, professional development and emotional care.”

## Q&amp;A with Gugu Motlanthe

**What were your favourite subjects at school?**

Mathematics, English and history.

**How did your favourite teacher endear himself to you?**

He taught me that learning is not about memorising but about discovering how things are interconnected. His approach helped shape the resilient, self-reliant

and independent person I am today. He showed me that every problem contains its own solution.

**What did you most appreciate about him?**

He was not commanding, but he made me feel capable. His belief instilled confidence and motivation. If a supportive teacher can change a learner's path, he changed mine.

**Did this influence your career choice?**

Not directly, but a good teacher becomes part of your personal history and influences how you think and believe in yourself.

**What phrase from him inspired you?**

“In mathematics, the answer is always hidden in the question.”

**Why are teachers so important?**

They are mentors, counsellors, disciplinarians, coaches, caregivers and role models. Society must support them through adequate resources and emotional care.

**What advice do you have for learners?**

To listen is to learn. Listening helps us confront misconcep-

tions, reconnect with intuition, and understand ourselves and others more deeply.

**Any advice for teachers?**

Learners spend more time with you than with their parents. You shape their intellectual, emotional and social development. Your role is powerful — approach it with heart, patience and courage.



## EWSETA

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For more information, visit [www.ewseta.org.za](http://www.ewseta.org.za)

Ms Robyn Vilakazi  
Acting CEO





## MINISTER'S CORNER

## Africa steps forward at G20

*Education emerges as a structural pillar of global development*

*Africa's future: The continent's young people are not a problem to be solved, but a potential to be unlocked, says Buti Manamela. - Photo: Vecteezy.com*



**BUTI  
MANAMELA**

The G20 Leaders' Summit concluded with the usual choreography of diplomacy, but behind the photo-ops and the carefully weighted communiqués lies a deeper shift that deserves attention, especially from those of us on the African continent.

For once, education did not appear as a footnote to economic policy; it emerged as a structural pillar of global development. With the adoption of the Leaders' Declaration, the G20 has signalled that the future of higher education in Africa is no longer a regional concern. It is a global priority.

This new posture is long overdue. Africa's population is young, dynamic and growing, and by 2050, one in every four young people entering the world's labour markets will be African.

Whether viewed through the lens of economics, geopolitics or human development, this demographic shift represents the single most consequential trend of the 21st century. The G20 finally acknowledges this as an opportunity that depends entirely on the decisions we make in education today.

The Declaration recognises what African policymakers and students have known for decades: that access to higher education remains deeply unequal and, without intervention, will widen the chasm between those who benefit from the knowledge economy and those who remain trapped outside it.

The reality is stark. Africa south of the Sahara still has the lowest tertiary enrolment levels in the world. Rural communities remain underserved, digital access is uneven, and too many young people enter the labour market without the skills demanded by a fast-changing world. The G20 has now placed these issues on the global agenda with unprecedented clarity.

What stands out in this year's commitments is the centrality of digital transformation. The world has moved beyond seeing online learning as a temporary solution introduced during Covid-19. It is now recognised as a structural enabler of mass inclusion.

Digital platforms open the doors to students who live far from campuses or who balance work and study. They lower costs, enable new forms of personalised learning and allow institutions to expand without relying solely on physical infrastructure. For a continent like Af-

rica, where the demand for higher education far outstrips the ability to build campuses, the commitment to digital ecosystems is not an innovation — it is a lifeline.

Equally significant is the emphasis on educational mobility. The commitment to improve the recognition and portability of qualifications, to expand micro-credential frameworks and to enable learners and workers to move more freely across borders is transformative.

For countries like South Africa, and for millions of African students, mobility is the difference between being confined to local opportunities and being part of a genuinely global workforce. The Leaders' Declaration positions mobility as a strategic necessity for a world seeking resilience, innovation and talent.

These global commitments align closely with what we have been pursuing through South Africa's G20 Presidency. Our focus on solidarity, equality and sustainability has shaped the education agenda from early childhood development to higher learning, from digital governance to skills recognition, and from teacher professionalisation to international partnerships.

At home, we are modernising curricula, expanding occupational qualifications, strengthening NSFAS, transforming the TVET

system, and building international partnerships that connect our institutions to global knowledge networks. The G20's commitments validate this direction and create a platform for accelerating our reforms.

Perhaps the most important shift reflected in the Declaration is the recognition that higher education is fundamental to economic transformation. It is no longer acceptable to imagine universities and colleges as institutions that merely produce graduates.

They must become engines of innovation, hubs of research and experimentation, and catalysts for entrepreneurship. They must develop the scientific, digital, cognitive and creative capabilities that African economies will depend on in the decades ahead. They must prepare not only job seekers, but also job creators.

There is, of course, a gap between commitments and implementation. Declarations do not change systems; governments do. The test for the global community and for African governments in particular will be whether these commitments find expression in budgets, partnerships, and sustained reforms.

For South Africa, this means deepening digital infrastructure,

strengthening cross-border recognition mechanisms, expanding access to blended learning, transforming the TVET sector, and continuing the difficult work of ensuring that NSFAS serves the students who need it most.

Yet despite these challenges, this G20 Summit marks a quiet turning point. For the first time, the world's most influential economies have acknowledged that Africa's education challenges and opportunities are global determinants of growth.

They have recognised that access is not a matter of charity but of shared prosperity. They have implicitly accepted that the future of global labour, innovation and stability will be shaped in classrooms, lecture halls, training workshops and digital platforms across our continent.

The task now is to turn the Declaration into action. If we do so with urgency and ambition, the G20 Summit of 2025 will be remembered as the moment when the world finally understood that Africa's young people are not a problem to be solved, but a potential to be unlocked, and that higher education is the key that opens that door.

*Buti Manamela is the Minister of Higher Education and Training*



## MINISTER'S CORNER

# A turning point for foundational learning – and a mandate for bold action



**Commitment:** The Minister of Basic Education, Siviwe Gwarube, says South Africa is championing the early foundations of learning as the cornerstone of human development and economic growth. - Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

## SIVIWE GWARUBE

November marked a profound shift in global education diplomacy. From the historic G20 Leaders' Summit held for the first time on African soil to the reaffirmation of cooperation at a general meeting of the Heads of State of India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) on its sidelines, the world has signalled a growing commitment to strengthening the early foundations of learning.

For South Africa, this shift aligns strongly with our own strategic direction. Early in my term of office, I announced a reorientation of our basic education system towards improving learning foundations from birth through the early primary grades — focusing on early childhood care and education (ECCE) and early-grade literacy and numeracy.

This approach is grounded in clear global and local evidence: without decisive investment in the early years and the early grades, no education system can deliver equitable outcomes or close inequality gaps.

The signals emerging from the G20 and IBSA meetings affirm

that South Africa's strategic focus is timely, necessary and aligned with global best practice.

### G20: A global mandate that reinforces South Africa's reform direction

The G20 Leaders' Declaration recognises ECCE as "a vital investment for a country's social and economic future" and calls for strengthened teaching quality, improved pedagogical support and inclusive access to technology and safe learning environments. It also underscores the need to support teachers to strengthen early competencies, including literacy and numeracy — precisely the priorities at the heart of South Africa's reforms.

In reorienting our basic education system, we are prioritising improved access to quality ECCE, strengthening early-grade literacy and numeracy, expanding structured pedagogical materials and practices, and supporting vulnerable learners early so that gaps do not become entrenched.

The G20's commitments show that these are not only national priorities — they are global ones. When the world's major econo-

mies affirm the importance of early learning for economic growth, equality and long-term stability, it reinforces the evidence-based path South Africa is taking.

### IBSA: Global South leadership on early learning

In parallel, on the sidelines of the G20 Summit, the Leaders of India, Brazil and South Africa endorsed the progress made by the IBSA Ministers of Education toward establishing the IBSA Network on Quality Foundational Learning. Their commitment strengthens our shared resolve to ensure that every child develops strong early foundations — from early cognitive and socio-emotional development to early literacy and numeracy.

President Ramaphosa welcomed the deepening of IBSA collaboration on this agenda, which aligns closely with the G20's renewed emphasis on expanding quality early learning.

As South Africa prepares to assume the IBSA Presidency in 2026, we welcome the call for urgency and ambition in advancing this work. South Africa stands ready to drive the next phase of cooper-

ation, deepening the exchange of evidence-based policies and practical solutions across the Global South and beyond, and supporting early learning systems that work for all children.

The IBSA Network will serve as a platform for countries committed to improving children's learning from the earliest years through the early grades. While its modalities will be determined collectively by India, Brazil and South Africa, we believe there is value in gradually creating space for wider international engagement with countries, organisations and partners that share this vision.

### A growing global consensus on strengthening early learning

Across both the G20 Declaration and the IBSA meeting, one message is clear: a global consensus is forming around the strategic importance of strengthening ECCE and early-grade learning.

Evidence has long shown that strong early learning drives later success, that early gaps quickly become entrenched inequalities, and that investments in the early years deliver the highest returns. This is why South Africa's basic educa-

tion strategy is being reoriented to strengthen early foundations — and why global alignment around these priorities strengthens our resolve.

### South Africa's commitment

The convergence of global momentum and national reform creates a powerful opportunity. Our domestic priorities sit squarely within the direction reaffirmed by G20 Leaders and endorsed by IBSA Heads of State.

As Minister of Basic Education, I reaffirm my commitment — and that of my Department — to ensuring that South Africa continues to lead in championing the early foundations of learning as the cornerstone of human development and economic growth.

The world is recognising what evidence has long shown: the foundations laid in the early years determine the future. South Africa is acting on this truth — and we intend to lead from the front.

**Siviwe Gwarube is the Minister of Basic Education.**



# SKILLING MZANSI — ADVERTORIAL



## RAMATSOBANE KHOMOTJO MPHAHLELE CHAMPIONING MARITIME EDUCATION FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S BLUE ECONOMY

**R**amatsobane Khomotjo Mphahlele is a seasoned maritime professional whose career spans nearly two decades across seafaring, marine education and training, port operations, and regulatory compliance.

Her work reflects a rare combination of practical sea-going experience, academic depth, and a strategic commitment to strengthening South Africa's maritime capacity.

She holds a National Diploma in Maritime Studies from the Durban University of Technology, a Postgraduate Diploma in Maritime Studies from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Maritime Affairs at the prestigious World Maritime University in Sweden.

Her journey into the maritime sector was inspired by a deep passion for the ocean and the transformative potential of maritime careers. Over the years, she has built an impressive portfolio that includes deep-sea navigation, cargo operations, curriculum development, cadet and ratings training, and stakeholder engagement.

Her track record includes significant roles within Transnet and SAMTRA, where she contributed to elevating operational and training standards.

Today, Mphahlele continues her mission as an independent consultant, offering expertise that supports organisations in aligning with international maritime conventions, strengthening compliance, and improving human capital development.

Before beginning her TETA programme, Mphahlele was building her own enterprise, Oceans Gateway Maritime Academy, which is an initiative born from

her commitment to expanding access to quality, internationally aligned maritime education in South Africa.

She said that the TETA programme became an essential step towards enhancing her professional capacity, ensuring that both she and the academy could contribute meaningfully to the growth and competitiveness of the maritime sector.

As an entrepreneur, Mphahlele dedicated herself to designing programmes, cultivating partnerships, and developing the structures needed to launch a credible and impactful institution.

Mphahlele has ambitions to actively influence the evolution of maritime education and training in South Africa.

She is focusing on aligning institutional frameworks with global standards, enhancing regulatory compliance, and building a sustainable pipeline of skilled seafarers.

Mphahlele was funded for a scholarship programme by TETA to study at the World Maritime University, which she said enabled her to gain access to global expertise and networks crucial to catalyse and establish the mammoth impacts she hopes to influence within the sector.

She said that TETA's investment has empowered her to convert vision into tangible progress to play a critical role in advancing South Africa's maritime capability and future readiness.

To young South Africans who are eyeing a maritime career, she says: "It is not only a pathway to personal growth, but also entails an act of patriotism by establishing South Africa's presence and representation in the global maritime arena."

## PHINDILE VANECA NGCUNGAMA HOW AN AFRIKAANS LESSON TOOK PHINDILE TO THE HEART OF THE MARITIME VALUE CHAIN

**I**n a sector often perceived as distant and inaccessible, Phindile Vanecia Ngcungama stands as a reminder of how exposure, mentorship and determination can redirect a career.

Today, she is a rising maritime professional with experience in logistics, cargo management and the export value chain. But her journey began in an unexpected place.

It was during an Afrikaans lesson in high school when her teacher first spoke about the maritime industry.

That classroom moment, she said, sparked her curiosity and prompted her to explore the wide range of global opportunities in the sector. It would go on to shape the trajectory of her professional life.

Before embarking on her TETA-funded training, Ngcungama served as Branch Manager for ChromTech Holdings in Richards Bay. She had already carved out a solid place for herself in the field, but felt a growing desire to contribute more significantly to South Africa's maritime sector.

She said that pursuing Maritime Education and Training would provide the guidance, refinement and added expertise necessary to elevate her impact.

Three months into the TETA programme, starting on 25 September 2025, Ngcungama said that it has already left a profound mark on her.

This was not only because of the financial support, she said, but also due to the extensive network of knowledgeable and influential figures who play pivotal roles within the maritime space and from whom she could learn.

Ngcungama said that Ocean Governance stood

out as a favourite and most "transformative" segment.

Taught by seasoned and respected maritime officials, the module expanded her understanding of how deeply connected global maritime systems are.

She said her perception of the industry was enhanced massively as she came to understand the intricate links between Africa, Europe, America and Asia within international trade ecosystems.

Although Ngcungama feels it is still too early to fully articulate how the TETA programme will shape her daily work, she maintains that it is an undeniable fact that the goals she had at the outset will be surpassed.

Her long-term vision is embedded in contributing to South Africa's maritime administration and developing programmes that inspire young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to enter the sector not merely as job seekers, but as innovators who identify and fill industry gaps.

Ngcungama advised those considering a maritime career, young and old, to take the opportunities available to them.

"Come hungry to learn. Money follows effort and there is always space for one more."

Through TETA, Ngcungama is not simply advancing her own path, she is helping to enable and secure the future of South Africa's maritime industry.





# SKILLING MZANSI — ADVERTORIAL



## KEKANA BRIAN NTHANE SAILING TOWARDS EXCELLENCE IN MARITIME EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

**K**ekana Brian Nthane is a dedicated professional at the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA), steadily building a career at the intersection of maritime operations, education and youth development.

He is currently pursuing a qualification in Maritime Affairs with a specialisation in Maritime Education and Training (MET) through the TETA-funded programme at the World Maritime University (WMU).

According to Nthane, the programme is equipping him with the skills and knowledge necessary to excel in the maritime industry, and he chose it to enhance his contribution to maritime education and capacity building.

“I got so entrenched in the maritime industry development programmes that studying towards Maritime Education and Training became a natural choice.”

His fascination with ships and the sea goes back to childhood.

Growing up, a calendar featuring the SA Zebediela – a vessel named after his hometown’s citrus estate – captured his imagination. That image stayed with him and later helped steer him towards a career in the maritime sector.

This early interest eventually led him to SAMSA, where he has been involved in key initiatives such as the Maritime Awareness Programme and the National Cadetship Programme.

These programmes expose young people to seafaring and broader maritime opportunities, and align closely with his passion for skills development.

“The maritime industry is full of opportunities, whether at sea, in ports, in technology, in environmental work, or in maritime administration,” said Nthane.

Through the TETA programme, Nthane is gaining a

comprehensive understanding of the maritime industry, including maritime economics, safety culture and regulatory frameworks.

He is applying this knowledge to his current role at SAMSA, where he is responsible for managing the Maritime Awareness Programme and contributing to broader maritime development initiatives.

“The programme has significantly boosted my confidence by giving me a firmer grounding in both maritime operations and training methodologies,” he said.

For Nthane, the WMU experience is not only about lectures and assignments. Not only did he experience class interactions, the programme has also been enriching, with expert lecturers and industry professionals sharing their knowledge and expertise.

“The support, the level of education, and getting so much knowledge from the actual experts that are part of the industry and its maritime administrative procedures have been invaluable.”

He is also gaining practical skills that include instructional design, facilitation, and assessment, which he is applying in his work with youth development and awareness programmes.

Nthane is passionate about inspiring young South Africans to consider a career in this field.

“I would tell them that the maritime industry is full of opportunity, whether at sea, in ports, in technology, in environmental work, or in maritime administration.”

“It is a global industry that rewards skills, discipline, and curiosity. With the right training and commitment, they can build a meaningful career that contributes to South Africa’s economy and connects them to the world.

“The programme is broadening my career prospects and affirms my path in maritime capacity building,” he said.



## ATHENKOSI KILANE SHAPING SOUTH AFRICA’S MARITIME FUTURE THROUGH EDUCATION

**B**orn in Gqeberha and later raised between KwaZakhele township and Njwaxa location in Middledrift (eXesi), Athenkosi Kilane grew up in communities living close to the sea. “The coastline was more than a geographic feature, it was a place of deep spiritual connection, livelihood, and peace, where land and water met in harmony.”

His late grandmother, Nominithi Kalawe, set him on his path at the age of 12. “When I was 12, she entrusted me with a mandate to go to Port Elizabeth, pursue my education, and strive toward a better future for myself and my family. That moment instilled in me a belief that education is a transformative tool capable of changing lives and communities.”

Kilane completed a BA (Sociology & Business Management), BA Honours and a Postgraduate Diploma in Maritime Studies at Nelson Mandela University (NMU).

He says: “Professionally, my inspiration for pursuing Maritime Education and Training (MET) stems from my experience in the higher education sector, particularly at Nelson Mandela University’s Ocean Sciences Campus.

“MET offered a natural progression that aligned with my passion for education, capacity development, and maritime human resource growth.”

Before joining the TETA-funded programme, he worked as a Coordinator in the Projects Office at NMU’s Ocean Sciences Campus. “My role involved supporting maritime-related programmes, research initiatives, and stakeholder engagement.

“The TETA programme made it possible for me to pursue this advanced qualification at an institution

that plays a central role in global maritime capacity building.”

Now enrolled for an MSc in Maritime Affairs (Maritime Education and Training) at the World Maritime University (WMU), he is part of an international cohort of maritime professionals.

“The programme exposes me to global maritime governance systems, comparative education models, and advanced policy frameworks.” His planned research on MET frameworks in South Africa, Gambia and Indonesia will explore how countries can “strengthen their training systems in line with international standards.”

He adds: “What has stood out the most is the multicultural, global learning environment at WMU.”

“I study alongside professionals from over 50 countries, each bringing unique insights and experiences.”

A class exercise analysing real MET policy documents from IMO member states “showed how theoretical frameworks directly influence maritime workforce readiness and safety outcomes.”

“The programme has significantly elevated my career prospects and confidence.”

“My long-term goals include contributing to the development of a robust MET ecosystem in South Africa, expanding maritime research, and supporting the growth of the national maritime workforce.”

He says: “I would encourage young South Africans to explore the maritime sector because it offers diverse and globally competitive career opportunities.

“The sector needs passionate young people who are committed to innovation, sustainability, and national development.”



## HIGHER EDUCATION

Moving from high school to university:  
Challenges faced by first-year students

*Hard-won success: The journey from first year enrolment at a university or college to graduation can be a difficult learning experience for many, but expert help and perseverance can ease the way. - Photo: Vecteezy.com*

## CHARMAINE NDLELA

**A** rapid shift from a small, familiar school environment to expansive university classrooms filled with thousands of students is one of the first adjustments students face when moving from high school to tertiary education. When examining the differences between both stages, it becomes clear that adapting to a new academic and social environment is essential in successfully transitioning to university life.

Large buildings, diverse groups of students, and thousands of individuals wandering across campus in search of lecture rooms can be overwhelming — let's not even start discussing the anxiety that comes with it.

Many first-year students experience culture shock and begin questioning whether they have chosen the right career path. Some are further influenced by peers who may discourage certain degrees by claiming they offer limited financial prospects. As a first-year student, you are already facing numerous challenges, making such doubts even more stressful.

One of the biggest adjustments students face is the shift in academic expectations. In high school, teachers typically offer

close guidance, frequent reminders about assignments, and regular check-ins.

In contrast, a university requires a far greater level of self-direction. Lecturers expect students to manage their own deadlines, complete readings independently, and engage with academic material on a deeper level.

**A**nother concern is the first-year dropout rate, with roughly 30% of students completing a three-year degree in six years.

According to Future SA, at the beginning of the 2025 academic year, between 50% and 60% of South African first-year university students drop out before completing their qualification.

Margi Boosey, Principal at the IIE's Varsity College, said that the transition from high school to university is a major hurdle: "Academically, emotionally and socially, many students simply aren't prepared or getting the support they need to navigate the shift."

Boosey stated that rather than concentrating only on academics, the answer is in overall student development.

Council of Higher Education statistics revealed that of the students in three-year degrees starting in 2016, 38% had not gradu-

ated by 2021, and most of them dropped out in their first year.

According to the Department of Higher Education and Training, attrition rates in 2016 for first-year students in South Africa have been fluctuating between 33% and 25% in recent years.

Many students report that they felt unprepared for university and ultimately chose to take a gap year to rest or regroup.

For many students, attending university is their first experience living away from home. Tasks that were once managed by parents — like cooking, cleaning, and budgeting — now become daily responsibilities. This newfound independence can feel both free and challenging. Learning to balance freedom with responsibility becomes an important part of the transition.

Small routines can make a significant difference. Preparing simple meals, doing weekly laundry, or tracking expenses contribute to stability and help students better manage both academic and social demands.

Students also note that technology is used more extensively in university compared to high school. Additionally, they often struggle to keep up with the pace of the curriculum. Many observe

that there is less collaborative work in university, whereas basic schooling often encourages group activities and peer support. As a result, university students may feel confused or isolated in their academic journey.

Financial aid through the National Students' Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is a critical intervention, with studies showing that NSFAS-funded students often have lower dropout rates than non-funded registered students.

For example, many institutions provide orientation programmes, academic advisers and counselling services to help students adjust.

**R**ecognising these challenges, universities and external bodies offer various support mechanisms to address challenges faced by first-year students in ensuring they adapt and avoid falling behind.

The University of the Free State offers a First-Year Seminar, a mandatory module designed to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to adjust to university life and prepare for academic and career success. Blended learning support services assist staff and students in integrating technology meaningfully into education.

Academic language and literacy development services help strengthen critical academic literacy skills, while academic advisement provides ongoing guidance to help students achieve personal, academic, and career goals. Peer advisors are also available to assist first-year students in connecting with career support services, with academic advice offered to approximately 13,000 students each year.

Similarly, Wits University introduced the Gateway to Success, a two-week programme designed for first-year students that takes place before the academic year begins. This mandatory blended programme assists students in adapting to the university environment, connecting with peers, accessing support services, and building a strong foundation for academic success.

As part of the Gateway to Success programme, first-year students are also required to participate in a two-week course focused on digital skills. This course aims to enhance students' confidence in using various digital tools and to explore a wide range of content and opportunities available online. Participants learn about digital wellbeing, cybersecurity, Microsoft Office, and information



# HIGHER EDUCATION



**Working together:** One student interviewed for this article says it is important for newcomers to varsity life to build a small network of peers and mentors to help bridge the gap between high school and university. - Photo: Vecteezy.com

literacy.

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) reported steadily increasing retention of first-year students in 2013, the result of a series of initiatives to reduce the institution's drop-out rate. In 2012, the university recorded an improved first-year success rate of 80%, up from 75.6% in 2011.

UJ introduced a part-academic, part-psychosocial programme with an accent on students mentoring fellow students, called the First Year Experience programme, which was introduced in 2010.

The programme offers academic skills reinforcement through an Academic Development Centre and psychosocial assistance through the university's Centre for Psychological Services and Career Development.

In addition, the university's management executive committee approved substantial strategic funding to further develop the tutor programme.

UJ also introduced academic advisers in university residences and approved off-campus accommodation facilities. Under the Academic Excellence Programme, 250 student advisers are serving 2,000 first-years in 25 residences.

Personal experiences from students across institutions highlight

the realities of this transition.

Puleng Motholo from the University of the Free State shared that his journey was particularly difficult. Coming from a challenging background and moving to a new province with very little made adjusting even harder.

He explained: "University life was overwhelming at first. Coming from a poor background with little, it made it difficult to adjust. NSFAS delays added stress, but I learned to be independent. Support programmes helped, though they are often overstretched."

**N**oxolo Thobekile Ndlela, a first-year postgraduate student at the University of the Witwatersrand, described her experience as a rollercoaster. Although this was not her first time entering university, adapting to a new environment still came with challenges.

She said: "Transitioning from a strong matric pass to university life is a big shift. While a good high-school result opens the door, success at the tertiary level depends on learning new study habits, managing time, and dealing with practical challenges such as limited digital skills, delayed NSFAS payments and the feeling of being alone in a large, competitive

campus."

She emphasised the importance of families, noting their role in providing tutoring, financial assistance, and emotional support.

"Many students still struggle due to a lack of sufficient support. While university programmes such as orientation, mentoring, and counselling can be helpful, they are often under-resourced. Therefore, the most effective approach is to seek help early, actively utilise campus resources, and build a small network of peers and mentors to bridge this gap between the structured cycle of school and the independent reality of higher education."

Regaugetswe Makgoba from Boston College in Johannesburg said that the high expectations many students have on entering university often clash with harsh realities.

She explained: "The transition from high school to varsity is a big, drastic change. The reality of independence and being alone in the world isn't something someone can ever prepare themselves for, especially at such a young age. The main factor of not being able to afford to have an education due to the lack of financial stability at home has become such a disadvantage, and most of these student

bursaries aren't enough to cover all students. The future doesn't look bright like it used to due to the harsh realities."

She added that cultural and social isolation can be deeply challenging.

"This can be mentally frustrating and lead to making life decisions that might have possible implications, such as having a 'sugar daddy' that will give you the lifestyle that you want. Most students get overwhelmed by the reality of what life brings to them."

**L**ungi Litshani, also from Boston College, highlighted that experiences differ widely based on personal backgrounds.

She said: "The reality is that people from unfortunate backgrounds will have so many disadvantages to their social and cultural lives. This also trains you as an individual to surpass your personal needs and goals for future success. The reality in varsity and high school is completely different. At varsity, you are there to grow yourself and choose your own path, whereas in high school, you do what you are told and what is expected of you."

Pamela Ngaleka from Wits University spoke about the non-academic challenges she faced.

"My first year was horrible for seven months. I had issues with my NSFAS. I had to move from an off-campus residence to an on-campus res because my NSFAS status was still on appeal. After six months, I got my money, and that is when everything started to become better, and I saw the light. After all those horrible six months, I was finally happy. I met friends who were supportive and assisted one another in terms of exams and fun."

Ashley Ndlela from Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape shared that her first-year experience was both overwhelming and exciting.

"There were a lot of cultural shocks that I encountered that left me questioning the life that I lived in Johannesburg. University is way different from high school, and that threw me off a bit because the work ethics required were way beyond what I had anticipated."

Despite the pressure, she eventually adapted well to her new environment and enjoyed her experiences in the lecture hall.

With layers of support put in place to endure the adaptation from transitioning from high school to higher institute, first-year dropout rates remain a concern.



## SKILLING MZANZI — ADVERTORIAL

# ASUS Education encourages South African schools to embrace technology and AI

LEVY MASITENG

**A**SUS Education has renewed its call for South African schools to invest in education technology, urging educators, policymakers and stakeholders to embrace technology and AI to prepare students for the future workforce.

In an interview with Inside Education, Werner Joubert, the country head at ASUS South Africa, stressed the need for schools to adapt to rapidly changing times.

“Do not be scared of AI, do not be scared of technology. It needs to be used, and it needs to be embraced from a young age,” Joubert said.

He said the company has been working with schools and institutions to provide technology solutions that cater to the needs of both students and teachers.

“ASUS started researching and developing a product aimed directly at students, to make their lives easier, their parents’ lives easier, their teachers’ lives easier, and ultimately improve the whole ecosystem. That is where it started: from an engineering concept to making sure that we provide a solution for the pain points we see developing, not just for students but in every segment – commercial, consumer, gaming, and education,” Joubert added.

The company’s focus is on creating devices that are durable, reliable and accessible, making it easier for students to learn and for teachers to teach.

With more than 5,000 research and development engineers, ASUS is trying to develop skills through their partner networks and through the local distributors they use. That network includes Mustek, Rectron and DCC Technologies — all highly respected IT distributors.

Joubert said that ASUS has been involved in various initiatives to support public schools, including providing devices to top-performing matric students in Mpumalanga.

“At a school in Sunninghill, when they opened, we developed the first eSports lab inside the school. They now use that eSports centre to set up applications or games – for example, Minecraft is one of them. They design it in such a way that the students indirectly learn how to solve a maths problem and gets support with their schoolwork. So it’s not just about playing games,” he added.

The company is planning to expand its reach to more schools and institutions in 2026, with a focus on developing digital skills in areas such as eSports, coding and digital content creation.

“We want to make sure that students know they can purchase these types of products not only through a commercial channel, but also by going to their local retailer, where these products are available,” Joubert said.

They have also developed devices with AI capabilities, making it easier for students to access information and learn at their own pace.

“We actually believe that if AI is used correctly, it will increase productivity, it will boost imagination, and it will enhance creativity. AI is there to assist, not to replace,” Joubert emphasised.

“It’s about how quickly you can adapt, and if you don’t adapt quickly enough, you’ll definitely be left behind.”





## SCIENCE &amp; TECHNOLOGY

## UCT celebrates scientific excellence and public engagement

JOHNATHAN PAOLI

The University of Cape Town (UCT) capped off a milestone month in South African science and education in November, celebrating achievements that span academic recognition, dynamic public engagement, international collaboration and youth-focused outreach.

From the induction of nine leading UCT academics into the Academy of Science of South Africa to street-level science communication and groundbreaking astronomy partnerships, the university's footprint across the national research landscape has rarely been more visible.

In a statement to staff and students, Vice-Chancellor Mosa Moshabela announced the induction of nine UCT scholars into the Academy at its annual awards ceremony. They represent 20% of the national cohort of new members and underscore the university's continued prominence in South Africa's research ecosystem.

"Their induction is a reminder that our excellence is not measured only by rankings or outputs, but by the depth of our impact on people, on policy and on the planet," Moshabela said.

This year's inductees reflect the breadth of the university's scholarship: Adam Haupt, a leading voice in film, media and hip-hop studies; environmental health specialist Andrea Rother; award-winning writer and critic Imraan Coovadia; health economist John Ele-Ojo Ataguba; global health systems authority Lucy Gilson; catalysis researcher Michael Claeys; demographer Tom Moultrie; curriculum theorist Ursula Hoadley; and human geographer Zarina Patel.

"These bright minds continue to raise the bar. UCT remains a spring of scientific, creative and intellectual



**Proud: Prof Mosa Moshabela, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, congratulates the scholars inducted into the Academy of Science of South Africa.** - Photos: UCT

contributions for South Africa, for Africa, and for the world," Moshabela noted.

In another event, UCT researchers took science to the streets through Soapbox Science 2025, held at the V&A Waterfront's Clocktower precinct.

The event featured women scientists presenting their work from wooden soapboxes, without slides, podiums or microphones.

The open-air format created a vibrant, unpredictable atmosphere as passers-by drifted between four simultaneous talks per session.

Topics ranged from shark genetics and dolphin acoustics to carbon dioxide-to-fuel technologies and the biochemistry of hormones.

Among the speakers was UCT PhD candidate Munira Hoosain, whose talk on how hydrogen gas forms stars drew significant interest.

The unconventional setting, she said, sharpened her science-communication instincts.

"Being outside allowed me to connect the science to the world

around us. I could talk about the sun and actually point to the sun," she admitted.

Hoosain emphasised the importance of making STEM research accessible.

"If we want South Africa to continue to advance in science, we need events like this that bring science to the people rather than keeping science locked up in the academic ivory tower," she said.

The diversity of speakers, she added, offered young attendees a wide range of role models, helping young people to see themselves as potential scientists.

In another major highlight, UCT celebrated the successful conclusion of Radiomap, a three-year South Africa-Italy exchange programme focused on radio astronomy.

The achievement was marked with a public lecture by Grazia Umama of Italy's National Institute for Astrophysics.

Senior UCT astronomy lecturer and Radiomap co-leader Lucia Marchetti described the collaboration as a model of international partnership

driven by mutual scientific priorities.

"We are celebrating the end of a successful three-year exchange programme between South Africa and Italy around the MeerKAT and the SKA [telescopes]," Marchetti said.

UCT's dean of science, Hussein Suleman, said such global partnerships were increasingly essential for shaping education, research and society.

Umana's lecture highlighted the growing role of Italy in South Africa's radio astronomy landscape, including its investment and engineering expertise in MeerKAT Plus, the 14-antenna expansion that will significantly enhance the telescope's sensitivity and resolution by 2026.

But it was the human element she emphasised most, acknowledging engineers and scientists from both countries whose work made the collaboration possible.

Back on campus, UCT's Department of Physics marked more than four decades of its Phenomenal Physics outreach programme.

The long-running initiative invites Grade 11 learners to an afternoon of dramatic live demonstrations designed to ignite enthusiasm for scientific inquiry.

This year's event was enriched by the global International Year of Quantum Science and Technology, with the South African Quantum Technology Initiative helping schools without transport to attend.

About 300 learners from schools across the Western Cape participated in demonstrations ranging from superconducting levitation and liquid-nitrogen experiments to foundational mechanics and electricity.

The department paid special tribute to former senior lecturer Gregor Leigh, whose bold demonstrations have shaped the programme for decades.

Debbie Rowe from the German International School said her learners didn't want to leave, especially after the burning-gas wave experiment and the ping-pong ball chain reaction.

For students like Hout Bay International School's Didintle Kela, the experience was transformative.

She said each experiment offered insight into the deeper laws that govern the world, encouraging her to keep exploring physics beyond the classroom.

Across academic honours, public science, global partnerships and youth outreach, UCT's November calendar has captured a consistent message that science thrives when it is inclusive, collaborative and publicly engaged.

From high-level scholarship to high-school curiosity, the university's efforts demonstrate how scientific excellence can shape society at every level in laboratories, on street corners and in classrooms across the Western Cape.



**Former UCT Physics Senior Lecturer, Gregor Leigh, demonstrates a few experiments for Grade 11 learners from across the city.** - Photos: UCT/Gregor Leigh



**Dr Tayyibah Tahier from the University of the Western Cape, illustrating the potential of catalytic CO2 conversion to fuel.** - Photos: UCT/ Nasief Manie



# EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



**Bright sparks:** Angela Voultepsis, Head of Department for Pre-Primary at Radford House, engages with some young learners. - Photos: Eddie Mtsweni

## How one SA school nurtures young geniuses

*Many gifted children's educational needs go unrecognised in the public system, but Radford House teaches some bright youngsters how to realise their full potential*

### LEVY MASITENG

In classrooms across South Africa, children who race ahead of the curriculum often find themselves waiting for challenges, recognition, and a system built to meet their pace.

How schools respond to gifted learners depends largely on where those schools are and how much they can afford.

In private schools, resources, engaged parents, and specialised staff can help intellectually exceptional students thrive. In the public system, where budgets are stretched and policies are broad, giftedness is often acknowledged only in passing and supported unevenly.

The Department of Basic Education uses what it calls the screening, identification, assessment and support policy, a framework intended to flag learners with “unique educational needs”, which includes gift-

edness. But implementation varies widely, and much of the responsibility rests on individual schools and teachers.

Kerry Mauchline, spokesperson for the Western Cape Department of Education, said teachers and administrators look for “learners who demonstrate exceptional abilities or potential,” after which district officials, including psychologists, social workers and learning support advisers, step in to craft individual support plans.

“An example of best practice would be Pinelands North Primary School, where gifted learners have the opportunity to explore expanded academic opportunities through discussion groups and additional classes,” Mauchline told Inside Education.

However, she acknowledged that the system “relies on identification at the classroom and school level,” a process that is far from fool proof.

The consequences of missing a gifted child can be profound. Research has shown that students who go unrecognised “may not reach their full potential, leading to boredom, disengagement, and poor academic performance”, and may feel “isolated or unsupported”.

If a gifted child is spotted early and placed in the right environment, their experience can look very different.

**A**t Radford House, a small private school in Johannesburg that specialises in educating gifted children, the emphasis is on promoting curiosity from the earliest years. The school’s approach focuses on “nurturing foundational skills, fostering a love for learning, and providing enriching opportunities”.

Angela Voultepsis, Head of Department for Pre-Primary at Radford House, told Inside Education that the admission process begins with a questionnaire sent to interested parents, asking about their child’s advanced abilities or giftedness.

Based on the questionnaire, selected children are invited for a week-long observation, during which they participate in activities and assessments.

“We teach them something new

and we do an assessment, then based on the outcomes of those assessments, we would either accept them or say they would not cope in this environment,” Voultepsis said.

Many prospective students have already been assessed by an educational psychologist, who recommends Radford House as the ideal environment for intellectually gifted children.

“Sometimes they’re identified as gifted a little later when the teacher suddenly realises this child is really smart and they’re so capable and need to find another environment for them,” Voultepsis added.

Once accepted, learners aged between four and six years old engage in theme-related teaching, exploring complex topics that include plant physiology and geology. Voultepsis said that themes for study at Radford House are vastly different to those at other pre-schools. Here, the curriculum is tailored to meet individual needs, with students learning to read and write at their own pace.

“One of our maths lessons would be something like flower plus flower equals 20. What is the flower? What’s the value of the flower? And then we would extend it further and say, well, now that you know what the value of flower is, flower minus B equals 5. What’s

the value of B? So, we’ll do those kinds of maths lessons,” she said.

Inside Education’s visit to Radford House revealed small classes and busy, colourful spaces: a library with a Minecraft area, sports fields and a playground designed for pre-primary learners.

The school’s atmosphere is warm and welcoming, with teachers and students forming close bonds. Grade 11 students were writing exams, with the option to type or handwrite their papers.

“They love to play, but when it’s time to learn, they need more depth. They know stuff already that other children their age don’t, and so we need to help nourish that love for learning,” Voultepsis said.

Head of the school, Philip Kokot, said that the accepted learners have IQs of 125 and above, with some scoring as high as 145 to 150+.

To cater to these exceptional students, Radford House keeps class sizes small, with an average of 12 children per teacher in primary school and three to four learners per teacher in high school. This allows for personalised attention and creates space for more complex work, according to the school.

Kokot told Inside Education that the teachers had to adapt the syllabus and make the work “a little bit harder, more challenging, and a



# EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



**Problem solving:** Ilona Conroy teaches a mathematics class. - Photo: Eddie Mtsweni



**Informed:** Head of Radford House, Philip Kokot, says gifted children “go a little deeper, a little bit further, a little bit faster”. - Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

little bit out of reach ... incorporate critical thinking skills, multiple intelligence thinking, and challenges”.

“When they’re given a topic, when they’re given a challenge, someone needs to get them excited. When a gifted child is properly inspired, they can go way beyond what a normal child can do,” he added.

**T**he school also prioritises community service and outreach programmes. Radford House works with orphanages, where students tutor and interact with the orphaned children, aiming to promote their social responsibility and empathy.

“Many of our children are very academic or intellectual, but they’re not very good at social [interactions], so they need that [grounding],” he said.

Every Saturday, students participate in outreach activities, such as community clean-ups, walking dogs, or working at animal shelters.

Regarding support for potentially gifted children from disadvantaged backgrounds, Kokot said there was a trust fund contributed to by parents, which helps support students in need. He said parents and teachers had been trying to get the support of the government, but were “still trying”.

“The parents who have more money available, some of them put a little bit extra aside, and they help us with that support. The school’s main job is to pay the rent and electricity. When that’s paid, if there’s money left over, we can use that money for outreach work.”

“We are a school for gifted children. We’re not a school for rich children. So obviously, we do have high school fees, but when a child needs to be here, we make a plan,” he added.

Kokot defined gifted children as those with “an above-average capacity to interact with knowledge and ideas at a more rapid pace, who can solve problems, and who have memory and cognitive abilities that are not unique, but above average.” He likens it to having a brain that can “go a little deeper, a little bit further, a little bit faster”.



**Knowledge at hand:** A Radford House learner searches for a book in the library. - Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

By contrast, in the country’s public schools — many of which are under-resourced and often beset with underperforming and demotivated teachers — spotting a gifted child can be far more difficult. Large class sizes, heavy workloads and pressure to meet basic literacy and numeracy targets can leave little time to stretch high-ability learners. Kokot said that for those gifted children who are unable to cope in a normal school environment, home schooling is one solution. He said that in his experience, gifted children often force themselves to fit in, but the social and emotional toll can be severe.

“[T]he gifted cohort or the gifted section of society tends to have the highest incidence of anxiety and stress,” he said.

“The problem is that teachers tend to focus more on marks rather than on intellectual potential. There are many very bright children who don’t do well at school because they’re too bright. If they find the work boring, if they find the work tedious, if they find that the teachers are too restrictive or too structured, then these children lose interest in school. Some of the brightest learners have just given up on school.”

Mauchline encouraged parents who feel that their child has additional educational needs to engage with their schools. This would ensure support that could include district help.

Despite policy commitments,

the Department of Basic Education’s annual report shows that there is no specific budget or staff dedicated to gifted learner programmes. Support, when available, is funded under inclusive education, which is a broad umbrella that covers both special needs and high-ability learners. The department also has no central database of gifted students or schools catering for such.

*“A gifted child is like a cheetah; they need to run at 120km/h to thrive. We provide the space for them to do so.”*

*Philip Kokot*

**I**dentifying gifted learners is crucial for their development and future contributions to society. By knowing who these learners are, the department could provide targeted support, enabling gifted learners to reach their full potential and cultivate future problem-solvers and leaders who can drive soci-

etal progress.

As Kokot emphasised, gifted learners have a unique ability to solve problems and benefit society, but they need exposure and support to realise their potential.

“Whatever your religious views or whatever your beliefs, somehow they were born with something special, an ability to solve problems in society, and an ability to use their brain in a way that should benefit the world around them. And the only way they’re going to do so is if they’re exposed to the world around them. That’s why there’s an effort to get them out there,” he said.

Internationally, systems like Singapore’s are more structured and centrally directed, identifying gifted learners early and offering tailored curricula. Singapore’s Ministry of Education describes its Gifted Education Programme as one that identifies students in Primary 3 through a two-stage process and trains teachers “with the knowledge and pedagogies to support high-ability students”.

“Test preparation activities are not encouraged as these could inflate the scores, which may then not reflect your child’s actual potential,” the Singapore ministry says.

A study by researchers Annari Milne and Mike Mhlolo of the Central University of Technology in Bloemfontein highlighted what South Africa could learn from that model. They found Singapore’s system displays “institutional

alignment, clear focus on bold outcomes, and careful attention to implementation and evaluation”.

“One of the most outstanding realisations when visiting Singapore was that the different ministries (manpower, national development and community development) as well as sectors of the universities, technical institutes and schools share the same clear focus on the same bold outcomes,” the researchers found.

During the visit to Radford House, Inside Education spoke with Grade 5 learners Jessica Gray and Cesare Small. Both navigate complex concepts with ease, which they said was influenced by the school’s adaptive approach.

“I think my favourite part about being at the school is that they don’t teach in one specific way,” said Cesare. “Even in exams, you have different exams for special types of people. So you can either write on a piece of paper or you can type on a computer. So I think it’s not one set way of learning, it’s a bunch of different ways, so that you feel free to express if you’re confused or stuck on something. Test questions are complex and in-depth, which require critical thinking.”

**J**essica said the school pushed learners beyond their limits, with the outcome being enhanced learning. “Right now, I’m doing advanced algebra, and it’s challenging, but it’s also exciting. I’m learning new stuff, and it’s helping me improve,” she said. “And also, the questions aren’t base level, they are higher level.”

Cesare said Radford is preparing her for future challenges. “You might not know what you want to study, but they’ll guide you. I want to be a paediatrician, and I feel confident that Radford will help me get there.”

As Kokot puts it: “A gifted child is like a cheetah; they need to run at 120km/h to thrive. We provide the space for them to do so.”

For many as yet unidentified gifted children in South Africa’s mainstream classrooms, however, the system still asks cheetahs to move at a walking pace.



## OPINION

# We need a national shared purpose for the future workforce

AZWINNDINI MURONGA

**S**outh Africa stands at a critical inflection point. The turbulence we face in our society, economy, education system and political life is not merely cyclical – it is structural. And, unless we define a national shared purpose that can guide the development of the future workforce, the country risks fragmenting into sectors, institutions and interests that pull in different directions, weakening our collective capacity for renewal.

What we need in South Africa is a national shared purpose to produce a comprehensive landscape for the future workforce, including entrepreneurs and business owners.

Earlier in November, at the Eastern Cape Higher Education Sector National Dialogue Launch, hosted by Nelson Mandela University, I argued that universities – and the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) sector as a whole – are at a crossroads. We must rethink, with urgency and clarity, what it is we want to achieve as a sector, and how that contributes to the larger project of nation-building.

Leaders from all four universities and eight technical and vocational education and training colleges in the Eastern Cape attended the dialogue, as well as a range of participants in education, government, labour, business, the media and citizens, both in person and online, to discuss the centrality of education to the future of the country.

Universities have traditionally been anchored on two pillars: learning and teaching, and research and innovation. Increasingly, we have embraced a third pillar: engagement – the metaphorical third leg of the African pot – signifying our responsibility to work with government, industry, community, labour, and civil society to address pressing societal challenges.

Engagement and transformation, when working alongside learning and teaching, as well as research, innovation and internationalisation, speak to the deep responsibility higher education carries in tackling unemployment, poverty, inequality, environmental collapse, technological disruption, and declining public trust.

But as we take on these responsibilities, we must guard against an overcorrection that neglects curiosity-driven fundamental research.

At the South African Depart-



**Complex future:** Professor Azwinndini Muronga writes that “all PSET graduates must be prepared for a rapidly changing world”.

- Photo: Vecteezy.com

ment of Science, Technology and Innovation’s National System of Innovation Transformation Summit earlier this year, I made the point that short-term applied solutions, without the propulsion of fundamental science, inevitably lead to long-term stagnation.

## Rallying around a shared purpose

This year, the International Year of Quantum Science and Technology, reminds us that innovations such as the MRI, GPS, AI, as well as modern electronics and telecommunications, all began as pure scientific inquiry. We cannot build a future workforce without protecting the very knowledge ecosystems that produce tomorrow’s breakthroughs.

At the Eastern Cape Higher Education Sector National Dialogue Launch, former South African president Thabo Mbeki reminded us that the country’s National Development Plan (NDP), adopted in 2012, was meant to be our lodestar – our collective agreement on the future. Yet, it never translated into an actionable, lived programme that citizens could rally around. People cannot articulate what the NDP sought to achieve, because the clarity of purpose – and the ownership – never reached society.

There is a story often told of President John F Kennedy visiting NASA during the space race. He encountered a janitor and asked him what he was doing. The janitor replied: “I’m helping to put a man on the moon.” This is what a national shared purpose looks like: when every individual, regardless of role, sees themselves as

contributing to a greater mission.

South Africa has experienced glimpses of this unity in sport. As Nelson Mandela said: “Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does.”

We now need a similar rallying point around the development of the future workforce – a clear national purpose that binds education, government, business, labour, and communities.

Without this, as I said earlier, each part of the system will continue “doing its own thing” – with limited alignment, low impact, and fractured national progress.

## TVET colleges must be part of the skills plan

A coherent national purpose must embrace the full PSET sector: universities and TVET colleges producing differently qualified but equally capable graduates. Our TVET institutions, in particular, must become sites of excellence and aspiration – institutions of choice, not of second chances.

In Switzerland – one of the world’s most innovative economies – two-thirds of young people go through vocational training, and youth unemployment is among the lowest globally. Their model works because it is national, coordinated and valued. We need to develop our own South African version of excellence. We must study international models – not to copy them, but to craft a localised, context-driven system that works for us.

## Excellence begins with the curriculum

Excellence begins where the future begins: the curriculum.

What we teach – how we teach it, how dynamic and responsive it is – will determine the trajectory of the country. Curriculum reform is the front line of the battle for South Africa’s future.

The battle for the soul of the future of South Africa will be won and lost in the curriculum and it needs to be informed by the national shared purpose. The curriculum needs to be dynamic and responsive to the challenges of the country and the rapid technological advances globally.

From law to engineering, from humanities to skilled trades, from environmental conservation to digital technologies, all PSET graduates must be prepared for a rapidly changing world. They must be digitally literate, scientifically grounded, ethically guided, and capable of navigating the complex terrain of misinformation, ideology and technological disruption.

Our curriculum cannot remain trapped in slow-moving policy cycles devised for a different era. It must be flexible, future-oriented and driven by a clear national purpose. The same applies to innovation: securing intellectual property protection in South Africa must be as straightforward as it is in the world’s leading innovation hubs.

## Collaboration must be the norm

To achieve these goals, we must adopt the quintuple helix model of innovation – uniting academia, government, industry, civil society and the natural environment in a shared mission. No single sector can solve the country’s complex challenges alone.

Collaboration must become our norm.

And this collaboration must extend into basic education. Without strong foundations in mathematics, literacy, coding, data science and critical thinking from the earliest years, we cannot even contemplate accelerating qualifications, shortening pathways, or building advanced skill pipelines.

The future workforce is only as strong as its foundation, and that foundation must be anchored in a shared national purpose.

South Africa needs its own ‘moonshot’. Not a metaphorical leap into the cosmos, but a grounded, collective leap into a future where every citizen sees themselves as part of building the nation’s workforce, economy and capabilities.

This is what the National Dialogue must achieve: clarity, coherence and collective energy. The Dialogue must not be another talk shop; it is an opportunity to redefine the country’s trajectory.

Higher education must be one of its principal architects, shaping the ideas, knowledge and human capabilities that can renew our nation. The intelligentsia must help shape South Africa’s shared national purpose. The intelligentsia has historically led movements of renewal and transformation. — Republished courtesy of University World News.

**Professor Azwinndini Muronga is a theoretical physicist and the deputy vice-chancellor: research, innovation and internationalisation at Nelson Mandela University in South Africa.**



## EDUCATION NEWS

## Female inventors take top prize spots

## STAFF REPORTER

Female inventors and entrepreneurs dominated the inaugural Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) Absa Innovation Challenge — the largest student entrepreneurship initiative ever undertaken across South Africa's 26 public universities, with prize money exceeding R1 million. Women claimed the top five positions and seven of the top 10.

Ms Mpho Kotlolo from the Tshwane University of Technology was named EDHE Absa Top Student Innovator of the Year, winning R500 000 for her development of age-appropriate ARVs for children living with HIV/AIDS.

Second place, with a prize of R250 000, went to Ms Nondumiso Nkosi of Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, founder of HepaSure Diagnostics — a pioneering analytical assay for Hepatitis B that addresses a critical health gap in regions where the disease is endemic. The University of Limpopo's Ms Qetello Baloyi secured third place and R150 000 for inventing smart panty liners designed to detect infections.

Other award-winning innovations included a process to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in cement production, affordable high-per-



**Bright spark:** Ms Mpho Kotlolo from the Tshwane University of Technology was named EDHE Absa Top Student Innovator of the Year. - Photo: EDHE

formance prosthetic knees, a bioprocess that converts waste into high-value natural compounds, and size-adjustable school shoes.

Beyond the prize money, winners will receive extensive business development support, such as mentorship, potential access to Absa procurement networks, and connections to industry partners.

The EDHE Absa Innovation Challenge targets current students and recent alumni at public

universities, encouraging them to develop and commercialise solutions to pressing societal challenges in fields such as health-tech, greentech and fintech. The initiative forms part of the EDHE programme of Universities South Africa (USAf), which aims to embed entrepreneurship in the curriculum and unlock young talent to drive economic growth and job creation.

Dr Edwell Gumbo, USAf Di-

rector for Entrepreneurship, said EDHE's mission is to ensure that academic knowledge does not "end in publications only", but finds expression in ventures that strengthen the economy. Universities, he argued, must function as "low-risk sandboxes for innovation", uniquely equipped with intellectual capital, laboratories and multidisciplinary expertise capable of nurturing early-stage ideas.

Referencing the well-worn global narrative of tech giants founded in garages, Dr Gumbo noted that many South African students do not have such resources at home. "Our universities have to be the garages that enable innovators to thrive," he said. "Students can test prototypes, researchers can turn intellectual property into commercial possibilities, and interdisciplinary teams can shape solutions for society."

He also paid tribute to the 20 finalists selected from 644 entries. "It is no cliché to say you are all winners. Out of 1.1 million public university students, you are in the Top 20 — a remarkable achievement."

Absa's Managing Executive for GMCA Strategic Transformation and Partnerships, Mr Clement Motale, said the bank was proud to support entrepreneurship across the sector. The partnership, he added, also strengthens Absa's engagement with emerging SMEs and future industry leaders.

This year's theme, "Entrepreneurship for Sustainability", reflects global realities of climate pressure, economic uncertainty, inequality and digital disruption. "Entrepreneurship is one of the most powerful forces for sustainable development," Motale said. "Without it, South Africa will never reach its full potential."

## Reflections from the UFS multilingualism conference

## ANTHONY MTHEMBU

The second International Conference on Languages, Multilingualism and Decolonisation Practices in Higher Education has been hailed as both successful and insightful by local and international delegates.

The three-day event, hosted by the Academy for Multilingualism at the University of the Free State (UFS) in partnership with the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources, concluded on 27 November 2025 on the UFS Bloemfontein Campus.

Dr Nomalungelo Ngubane, Director of the Academy, said a key highlight was seeing "young and emerging scholars from different countries sharing insights on how

they are promoting multilingualism and inclusive teaching and learning practices".

Decolonisation and decoloniality in higher education dominated the programme, with several parallel sessions showcasing new research. Among these were presentations by Dr Nonjabulo Madonda and Prof Loyiso Jita from the UFS on "Decolonial assessment practices in Science and Mathematics teacher education: a systematic review", and by Unisa's Kagiso Mahlatji on decolonial and multilingual approaches to fostering inclusivity in South African universities.

Keynote speakers also engaged deeply with these themes. Prof Russell Kaschula of the University of the Western Cape discussed how language and culture teaching in South Africa has evolved through

decolonisation and transformation. Drawing on ethnographic methods, he traced shifts in pedagogies over time and noted that all 26 South African universities now have language policies requiring active promotion of African languages. He referenced a 2004 University of Cape Town initiative ensuring medical students develop proficiency in English and Afrikaans as an example of linguistic reform in practice.

Prof Vasu Reddy, UFS Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies, delivered a keynote titled "Translanguaging, technology and the third space: multilingualism as a conduit for decolonised internationalisation and internationalised decolonisation". He argued that multilingualism disrupts entrenched language



**Connectivity:** Professor Vasu Reddy described decolonised internationalisation as building broader connections across knowledge systems and cultural identities. - Photo: Vecteezy.com

hierarchies, affirms linguistic diversity, and advances epistemic justice — a continuous process rather than a single event.

Prof Reddy described decolonised internationalisation as building broader connections across knowledge systems and cultural identities, stressing the need to reform conventional internationalisation models by removing bias

and promoting genuine inclusivity. Such an approach, he said, can provide "more impactful and intellectually robust frameworks for transforming higher education".

Delegates concluded that the discussions would meaningfully shape their future work in multilingualism and decolonisation, reinforcing the urgency and value of these efforts across the sector.



# EDUCATION NEWS

## Unlock your future

*Solwazi Institute opens its doors to make accredited skills training accessible*



**Bright future:** The skills gained through the Solwazi Institute's programmes translate directly into employability and entrepreneurship. - Photo: Vecteezy.com

### STAFF REPORTER

**A** new force in accessible education has arrived to help tackle South Africa's persistent skills and post-school education access challenges. Solwazi Institute has officially launched to make accredited learning opportunities available to all South Africans anywhere, anytime.

Currently operating through a flexible online learning model with personalised, human-centred support, Solwazi combines digital convenience with a commitment to guided, practical learning.

Solwazi Institute offers a range of accredited occupational qualifications, skills programmes, and short courses that equip learners with the practical, job-ready abilities demanded by today's economy.

All programmes are accredited by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations and the South African Qualifications Authority ensuring every qualification is recognised, credible, and aligned with national occupational standards.

"We are preparing our learners to thrive in a digitally connected world, where opportunity isn't defined by location or circumstance," says Solwazi Institute chairman, Matuma Letsoalo.

"Every programme we offer,

from occupational qualifications to short skills courses, is designed to unlock potential and create pathways to employment, entrepreneurship, and independence."

Breaking down barriers to skills development

South Africa's education system has long struggled with accessibility. For many young people, financial constraints, geographic distance, and high competition for limited university and college spaces have locked them out of the opportunity to gain practical skills.

Solwazi Institute eliminates many of these challenges by offering a flexible learning model. Learners save on accommodation, travel, and many material costs, while still accessing high-quality, structured education.

"Our programmes are designed for flexibility so learners can study while working, caring for family, or building their future," says Letsoalo. "Each course is assessed against workplace-readiness standards, ensuring that the skills gained translate directly into employability and entrepreneurship."

Accessible pathways for every learner

Solwazi Institute's programmes are ideal for those who have completed Grade 12, including learners who may not have achieved satisfactory APS scores but still wish to



**Unlocking potential:** Solwazi Institute chairman Matuma Letsoalo says the programmes it offers are "designed to unlock potential and create pathways to employment, entrepreneurship, and independence" - Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

acquire a recognised qualification.

By focusing on occupational and skills-based training, Solwazi Institute provides a bridge to employment, self-employment, and further study through nationally recognised credentials.

Not everyone has access to a university or TVET college, but everyone deserves a chance to learn. Solwazi Institute offers that chance and turns it into a pathway for real, sustainable careers.

Programmes now open for 2026 intake

Programmes include accredited qualifications in fields such as journalism, artificial intelligence, early childhood development, road transport management, and business administration, with more to be announced in the coming months.

Applications are now open for the January 2026 intake, offering learners flexible study options designed to build real-world, job-ready skills.

Early graduates from Solwazi's pilot programmes have already gone on to establish successful careers in journalism, television broadcasting, and teaching abroad, demonstrating the institute's commitment to equipping learners for tangible, real-world opportunities.

**To apply, visit**  
[solwaziinstitute.co.za](https://solwaziinstitute.co.za)



EDUCATION NEWS

# Reflections on South Africa’s G20 education journey across nine provinces

MATHANZIMA MWELI

As we reflect on South Africa’s tenure as host of the G20 Education Working Group, one truth stands out above all: our country has shifted from conversation to collective action. What began as a global mandate has become a uniquely South African journey — one that has travelled through all nine provinces, gathering the voices, insights, frustrations, and aspirations of our people.

From the bustling urban centres of Gauteng to the rural landscapes of Limpopo and the Northern Cape, from the innovation corridors of the Western Cape to the resilient communities of the Eastern Cape, each province has contributed to a national dialogue that is deeply local and globally resonant. This is the story of a nation turning its education pyramid together.

A country in conversation with itself

The provincial G20 Education Indabas were not ceremonial exercises. They were acts of democratic accountability: spaces where educators, MECs, policymakers, researchers, unions, SGBs, youth formations, ECD practitioners, and civil society confronted the realities of our system with honesty and hope.

Across all nine provinces, a shared recognition emerged: We cannot expect excellence in Grade 12 without investing profoundly in the early years.

This was the unifying call to turn the pyramid — to stop wasting our energy at the top of the system and start building from the foundations upward.

Foundational learning: A non-negotiable national priority

Whether in KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State, or Mpumalanga, the message was consistent: ages 0–4 are where inequality takes root — and where it can be dismantled.

The discussions across provinces affirmed that the ECD function shift to the Department of Basic Education represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to craft a coherent, dignified, and truly national early learning pathway.

Provinces highlighted innovations such as:

- Home-visiting models that empower caregivers as first educators;



**Firm resolve:** Mathanzima Mveli, Director-General of the Department of Basic Education, says South Africa is building the foundation for a future where every child has an opportunity to learn, thrive, and lead. - Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

- Community programmes that integrate nutrition, stimulation, and early learning;
- Scalable developmental screening tools; and
- Mentorship and training models for practitioners who carry the weight of early learning on their shoulders.

Yet, the most powerful insight was universal: ECD practitioners deserve professional recognition, better conditions, accredited pathways, and fair remuneration. A nation that values its children must value those who teach and love them first.

Teachers at the centre of transformation

Across provinces, teachers voiced both pride and pain. Pride in their commitment to learners. Pain from administrative overload, societal pressures, and the increasing anxiety of meeting expectations in a fast-changing world.

Our national G20 journey affirmed key imperatives:

- Modernising teacher education to match contem-

- porary demands;
- Embedding professional learning communities in every district;
- Protecting teacher well-being as a pillar of quality;
- Leveraging technology and AI to remove drudgery, not replace professionalism; and
- Restoring the dignity and agency of the teaching profession.

No system can outperform its teachers. Our G20 engagements reaffirmed that the success of South Africa’s education project will rise or fall on the strength of its educators.

Systemic reform requires national coherence

The G20 provincial dialogues revealed a persistent challenge: pilot projects are abundant — scaled solutions are not.

MECs, HODs, district officials, and partners repeatedly called for the end of scattered, short-lived interventions that never reach every classroom.

Instead, the country championed a new approach:

- Coherence over fragmen-

- tation;
- Evidence over assumption;
- Collaboration over silos; and
- Sustained implementation over episodic enthusiasm.
- This is how we turn the pyramid — not through rhetoric, but through disciplined system reform.

A national tapestry of innovation and resolve

What I witnessed across the nine provinces was not uniformity but unity. Each province brought its character, challenges, and innovations:

- The Western Cape emphasised systemic ECD scale-up and data-driven reform.
- The Eastern Cape foregrounded rural realities and community empowerment.
- KwaZulu-Natal showcased integrated service delivery across departments.
- Limpopo and Mpumalanga demonstrated resilience in resource-constrained environments.
- Gauteng explored

AI-driven solutions within a complex and diverse schooling system.

- The Free State reflected on teacher professionalism and school leadership.
- The Northern Cape highlighted unique geographic challenges and collaborative responses.
- The North West advanced conversations on strengthening foundational learning ecosystems.

This diversity of insight is our national strength.

From local wisdom to global leadership

As South Africa leads the G20, our provincial dialogues have become more than consultations — they are contributions to the global education agenda. We have shown that countries can listen deeply, mobilise collectively, and innovate locally while speaking to global challenges such as inequality, digital transformation, early learning, and teacher development.

The world is looking to us not for perfection, but for leadership grounded in reality, humility, and evidence.

The road ahead: A commitment to every child

Turning the pyramid requires courage. It requires discipline. And above all, it requires unity of purpose across the entire system — from the most remote ECD centre to the most sophisticated urban school.

Our G20 journey across all nine provinces has reaffirmed a simple but profound truth:

The greatest innovation in education remains a well-supported teacher and a child whose potential is recognised from birth.

South Africa has charted a new path, one that honours our children, dignifies our practitioners, and strengthens our system. The work ahead is immense, but so is our resolve.

Together, as a nation, we are building the foundation for a future where every child — regardless of province, postcode, or circumstance — has an opportunity to learn, thrive, and lead.

That is how we turn the pyramid.

That is how we build a nation.

**Mathanzima Mveli is the Director-General of the Department of Basic Education.**



## HIGHER EDUCATION &amp; TRAINING

## The generational power of education

*How one degree transforms South African families*

**NANDIPHA MBHELE** examines how postgraduate learning creates ripples across generations, communities and the nation, and why investing in education means investing in collective progress and legacy

In many South African families, the first graduation gown ever worn not only symbolises generational renewal, but it also honours personal triumph that transforms family narratives. Behind every degree lies a community that dared to dream differently. I think of the countless first-generation graduates who cross the stage each year carrying with them not only their own hopes but also those of their siblings, parents and children. For them, education is not an individual achievement; it's a collective milestone.

Our country is still marked by deep social and economic divides, and as a result, education remains the most reliable bridge from limitation to liberation. When you consider this, it makes perfect sense that a single graduate has the power to rewrite a family's story. One qualification can shift what an entire household believes is possible. That is the quiet, transformative power of learning and its ability to plant seeds of change that bloom across generations.

#### The ripple effect of learning

When one person studies further, their success radiates outward. A postgraduate qualification is rarely a private victory; it creates ripples that touch everyone around the learner. It may come in the form of greater financial stability, which supports dependents and reduces the cycle of poverty. It might mean exposure to new ideas that influence how a community solves problems. Or it might simply be the inspiration which provides proof that higher education is attainable and worth pursuing.

In many South African homes, the first graduate often becomes the family's informal career coach, legal adviser and life mentor. Their knowledge extends beyond textbooks; it shapes conversations, decisions and aspirations. This is especially true for mature learners who attend university for the first time or further their studies while raising children or managing full-time work. Their perseverance teaches resilience, a lesson their children carry into their own lives.

Education's real influence is measured not in certificates but in

changed attitudes: the way it shifts a family's vocabulary from "if" to "when", and transforms questions like "Can I?" into "How will I?"

#### From personal advancement to collective progress

The decision to pursue postgraduate study is often seen as an individual career move, a way to climb the professional ladder or specialise within a field. But in South Africa's context, it is far more significant than that. Every postgraduate adds to the country's social capital: an expanding pool of critical thinkers, problem-solvers and innovators who drive economic growth and community development.

Research consistently shows that education enhances social mobility. According to Statistics South Africa, individuals with tertiary qualifications are significantly more likely to achieve stable employment and higher lifetime earnings. A 2025 policy brief by RESEP at Stellenbosch University further supports this, revealing that the return on tertiary education has more than tripled since 2001. But beyond the economic data lies something less quantifiable than the societal confidence that comes from education. It allows people to participate meaningfully in democratic life, to make informed decisions and to lead with empathy and insight.

When we invest in postgraduate learning, we invest in communities that are better equipped to solve their own challenges. Education becomes the thread that connects personal advancement to collective progress, and each graduate becomes a custodian of national development.

Cases in point would be a nurse who pursues a master's degree may introduce new health protocols that improve patient outcomes in rural clinics. Or a teacher who completes a postgraduate diploma might develop methods that reduce dropout rates in under-resourced schools. And perhaps a business leader who furthers their studies could mentor young entrepreneurs in their township. These are not isolated benefits; they are generational catalysts.



**Building a legacy: A single graduate has the power to rewrite a family's story.** - Photo: Vecteezy.com

#### Education as legacy

Graduation Day is often described as the end of a journey, but in truth, it's the beginning of a legacy. The impact of one degree extends far beyond its holder, and a postgraduate qualification often becomes the foundation upon which others build their dreams.

In South African families, especially those where access to education was once a distant dream, the presence of a graduate shifts the family narrative permanently. Younger siblings see possibilities their parents never had. Children grow up believing that excellence is expected, not exceptional. Friends and colleagues find motivation in watching someone in their circle achieve what once seemed impossible.

Education doesn't just alter economic outcomes; it redefines identity. It gives people the confidence to say, "I come from a family of graduates", a phrase that carries weight in communities where opportunity was historically withheld. And with each generation that follows, the ripple widens. Postgraduate study, then, becomes more than a personal investment. It is an inheritance, a gift that keeps on giving.

#### The role of business and society

Organisations, too, play a vital role in sustaining this generational impact. When businesses support postgraduate education through bursaries, study leave, or flexible learning arrangements, they do more than upskill an employee. They invest in a multiplier effect that benefits society

at large.

A workforce that values continuous learning results in innovation, inclusivity and long-term resilience. It encourages leadership that is informed, ethical and responsive to social realities. Employers who enable postgraduate study are, in essence, contributing to nation-building.

It follows that businesses which champion education create a culture of aspiration within their teams.

When employees see that learning is celebrated, they are more likely to pursue development themselves, passing that enthusiasm on to their families and communities. The result is a virtuous cycle of growth, one that links organisational success with social progress.

South Africa's future depends not only on economic reform but on intellectual renewal. That renewal begins with every individual and institution that believes in the transformative power of education.

#### The knock-on effect

Graduation is not merely a ceremony; it is a moment of generational handover. The cap and gown, of course, represent academic achievement, but more than that, they symbolise responsibility. Each graduate becomes a torchbearer for those who follow, lighting a path towards possibility.

As we celebrate this season of achievement, we are reminded that the effects of education extend further than earning a qualification. The resultant earning power changes lives, beginning with our own and extending to those yet to come.

For mature learners, pursuing postgraduate study is not only a personal milestone; it is an act of legacy-building. It says to future generations, "I have climbed so you can soar." And that, perhaps, is the greatest gift education gives us: the power to transform one success story into many.

Nandipha Mbhele is an Admitted Attorney of the High Court of South Africa and an academic at Regent Business School.



## EDUCATION NEWS

## SETAs warn of skills gaps as SA races to build green hydrogen workforce

THAPELO MOLEFE

**S**outh Africa's skills authorities have warned that the country must urgently accelerate the development of specialised capabilities for the green hydrogen economy or risk falling behind global competitors.

The warning dominated a panel discussion at the 2nd Pan-African Green Hydrogen Skills Conference hosted by the Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority (CHIETA), where Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), labour representatives and industry leaders outlined the scale of workforce preparation needed to support one of the most promising sectors of South Africa's energy transition.

CHIETA CEO Yershen Pillay told delegates that South Africa must avoid repeating international mistakes in which infrastructure advanced more quickly than human capacity.

Pillay said South Africa must "learn from the Manchester experience" in the United Kingdom, where green hydrogen infrastructure was introduced before a local talent pipeline had been built.

"They did not have a skilled workforce ready for green hydrogen ... they are importing hydrogen skills in the UK. We don't want to repeat that," he said.

He added that the country's preparation for the green hydrogen economy is not optional but essential.

"What we're doing now is preparing for the future so we avoid the Manchester issue in the UK."

The conference heard that CHIETA has registered three national green hydrogen qualifications with the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations.

**P**illay explained that these qualifications are designed to anchor South Africa's foundational skills framework for the green hydrogen sector.

"We've developed three new qualifications ... Green Hydrogen Technology Practitioner, Green Hydrogen Production Practitioner, and Green Hydrogen Fuel and Storage Transport," he said.

These qualifications form part of 17 priority skills identified from the national Green Hydrogen Skills Master Plan, which Pillay said are now ready for delivery.

"If we don't produce the green hydrogen, we can't go to midstream and downstream ... we need to make sure we develop the qualifications and prepare the workforce," he added.



*Preparing for the future: CHIETA CEO Yershen Pillay at the 2nd Pan-African Green Hydrogen Skills Conference 2025 in Irene, Pretoria. - Photo: Eddie Mtsweni*



*Skills needed: A green hydrogen renewable energy production facility. - Photo: Vecteezy.com*

Transport Education and Training Authority CEO Maphefo Anno-Frempong stressed that siloed planning has no place in the green hydrogen sector.

She said SETAs have agreed to align their efforts through the SETA Integrated High Impact Projects initiative.

"We started recognising that silos are not the way to go," she said. "The economy is not divided according to SETA divisions ... all of us are needed to support skills development."

She said green hydrogen had been identified as the first joint priority under the new structure, signalling a more coordinated national approach.

Mining Qualifications Authority CEO Thabo Mashongoane said South Africa's coal regions reveal the urgency of reskilling. Mine closures and the decommissioning of coal-fired power stations have left thousands of workers in need of transition pathways.

"We went back ... to capacitate and skill the people who used to work in these coal stations for their

own livelihood," he said. "Some of those programmes are going to include renewable energy and the green hydrogen economy."

Mashongoane warned, however, that the mismatch between training and job absorption must be urgently resolved. "We prepare skills, but then there's no work ... not all industries are on board," he said.

**C**onference delegates raised concerns about declining artisan enrolment numbers, noting that the green hydrogen workforce cannot be expanded without fixing the base of the skills pipeline.

"We had a target of 20,000 artisans ... based on two quarters, we've only enrolled 6,000, and some SETAs are reporting zero," a delegate said.

The participant warned that training bodies are not working collaboratively or "holding each other accountable," adding pressure to an already fragile system.

Pillay said the challenge is not only a shortage of qualifications but a lack of practical exposure.

"We don't necessarily have a

skills gap; we have an experience gap," he said.

"You can have the best civil engineer, but without 24 months' experience in a high-risk plant, they will not be employed."

He said some occupations linked to green hydrogen are in extremely high demand.

"We graduated 80 coded welders ... they didn't even come collect their certificates, they went straight into jobs."

Energy and Water Sector Education and Training Authority Acting CEO Robyn Vilakazi said Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges will be at the heart of the green hydrogen skills pipeline.

"TVETs are going to play a very important role," she said.

Vilakazi emphasised the need to ensure that the sector's development remains inclusive.

"We've learned from renewable energy ... we must ensure women, SMMEs and persons with disabilities are not left out," she said.

As the conference moved into its final session, attention shifted to

the next steps. CHIETA Manager of Qualifications Design and Development, Tshidi Magonare, said the two-day gathering had demonstrated clear progress but also highlighted gaps that demanded urgent action.

She said the sector must deepen collaboration between SETAs, industry, communities and African partners, while strengthening regional skills hubs in Mpumalanga, the Northern Cape and Limpopo.

She emphasised that the Just Energy Transition Skills Desk will be critical for gathering labour market intelligence and ensuring programmes respond to real-time industry demand. She also called for the establishment of a Green Hydrogen Skills Advisory to align qualifications with workplace exposure and institutional readiness.

Magonare said the operationalisation of the Green Hydrogen Centre of Specialisation must remain a priority and that funding mechanisms, including a dedicated grant window for green hydrogen skills, must be expanded.

"Africa, your time is now," she concluded.

**M**inister of Higher Education and Training Buti Manamela, delivering his keynote address, stressed that South Africa's energy transition will succeed or fail on the strength of its human capital. He said his recent discussions with Minister of Electricity Kgosisentsho Ramokgopa confirmed that South Africa cannot rely solely on technology.

"A transition without skills is not a transition. It is a handover from us to others," he said.

Manamela argued that the country can build infrastructure, attract investment and modernise the grid, but these gains will mean little if young people are not equipped to participate.

He said CHIETA's work in creating new qualifications and establishing green hydrogen skills centres aligns with the national goal of building a skills-led transition and urged SETAs to strengthen links between training institutions and industry.

A CHIETA board member closed the conference by reminding delegates that the responsibility to advance the green hydrogen skills agenda rests with everyone. She said discussions must translate into actions, not reports.

"We are saying we are not going to be employing skills from outside Africa. We will be developing our own," she said.



## EDUCATION NEWS

## SA champions foundational learning



**Developing strategies:** Basic Education Minister Siviwe Gwarube joined representatives from the Roger Federer Foundation and global partners on the sidelines of the G20 Social Summit to discuss the critical role of Early Childhood Development in achieving sustainable development and inclusive growth. - Photo: Department of Basic Education

## THAPELO MOLEFE

South Africa's push to elevate early childhood development, strengthen global mobility through qualifications recognition, and build a future-ready teaching workforce gained momentum in November when G20 leaders formally adopted a Declaration anchoring these priorities at the centre of global development.

Adopted at the Johannesburg G20 Leaders' Summit, the Declaration commits member states to a comprehensive approach to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and stronger international cooperation on qualifications recognition, directly reflecting the work of ministers, senior officials, and global organisations who met in Mpumalanga in October under the G20 Education Working Group (EdWG).

Early Childhood Development emerged as a key pillar of the G20's education priorities, with the Leaders' Declaration emphasising that investing in

early learning is essential not only for children's cognitive and social development but also for countries' long-term economic resilience.

By supporting the integration of 21st-century teaching competencies and updated pedagogies, leaders reinforced the need to empower early-years practitioners with the tools required to prepare learners for an increasingly complex world.

"We recognise that developing education professionals for the 21st century involves integrating educators' abilities to equip learners for an evolving society. We support greater recognition of the teaching profession, as a way to curb teacher shortages, especially in early and basic education," the G20 Leaders' Declaration states.

On global mobility, leaders reaffirmed support for the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education and regional frameworks to promote fair and transparent recognition systems. Such mechanisms aim to facilitate the movement of

students, graduates, academics, and skilled workers across borders while respecting national standards and regulations.

These high-level commitments were underpinned by extensive discussions held on 22 October in Skukuza, Mpumalanga, where Education Ministers from G20 member and guest countries, together with representatives from the OECD, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the International Labour Organisation, reflected on the state of global education systems.

"The official closure of our deliberations as part of South Africa's G20 Presidency is not the end of our collaboration, but rather the start of a new chapter in our collaboration and the exchange of views and best practice," Minister of Basic Education Siviwe Gwarube said.

Although countries could not reach consensus on a Ministerial Declaration, the South African Presidency released a four-volume compendium that captured the EdWG's work. It details progress and policy options

on ECCE, mutual recognition of qualifications, and educator professional development. Senior officials, led by Department of Basic Education Director-General Mathanzima Mweli and Department of Higher Education and Training Director-General Inkosinathi Sishi, had convened earlier on 20–21 October to shape the final ministerial agenda.

Delegates widely applauded South Africa's consistent focus on foundational learning and the professionalisation of the education workforce throughout its G20 term.

Ministers reaffirmed that strengthening Early Childhood Care and Education remains the most cost-effective and transformative investment in human development. They supported comprehensive, context-sensitive ECCE policies that engage both government and communities, emphasising children's wellbeing, early literacy and numeracy, and social-emotional development.

Equitable access to quality ECCE was recognised as essen-

tial for building long-term social and economic resilience. Leaders also stressed the importance of strengthening the ECCE workforce, improving professional recognition, and addressing persistent teacher shortages.

The meeting highlighted the need to professionalise the ECCE workforce, particularly in developing countries where many practitioners lack formal qualifications. Improved working conditions, clearer career pathways, and continuous professional development were identified as essential for delivering quality early learning.

"Together, we reaffirmed our collective commitment to expand access to quality early childhood education; support teachers as the cornerstone of quality learning; strengthen equity and inclusion; and mobilise and align partnerships and resources for measurable impact," Gwarube said at the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) and Friends Dialogue.

Gender equity was a recurring theme, with ministers calling for action to address disparities in



# EDUCATION NEWS



**Future citizens: Strengthening Early Childhood Care and Education remains the most cost-effective and transformative investment in human development.**

- Photo: Vecteezy.com

the care economy, where women dominate but remain underpaid and undersupported.

On the sidelines of the G20 Leaders' Summit, leaders of India, Brazil, and South Africa endorsed the establishment of the IBISA Network on Quality Foundational Learning, a collaborative platform to strengthen early learning systems across the Global South.

The Network aims to support strong early learning outcomes from the earliest years through the early primary grades, mobilising international cooperation in foundational literacy, numeracy, and early childhood development.

"I commit myself, my department and the whole country to playing a leading role in mobilising global support for quality foundational learning as the cornerstone of human development and economic growth," Gwarube said.

While the modalities of participation are still being finalised, South Africa has indicated that it plans to enable broader collaboration over time, inviting other countries, development partners, international organisations, and philanthropies to contribute. The Network is expected to serve as a mechanism for sharing innovations, strengthening capacity, and building resilient early learning systems capable of supporting every child to develop strong literacy and numeracy foundations.

President Cyril Ramaphosa welcomed the endorsement,



**Building blocks: Foundational learning is the cornerstone of human development and economic growth.** - Photo: Vecteezy.com

noting that the three countries were actively shaping global governance and that education cooperation would be integral to building a more equal and sustainable global future.

The Skukuza discussions strongly supported strengthening regional and global frameworks for recognising qualifications and competencies. Countries emphasised the growing need for fair, transparent systems that enable students, graduates, educators, and skilled workers to move easily between countries.

The global recognition of qualifications, including higher education degrees, was highlighted as critical to building a coherent international education ecosystem. Such frameworks enable graduates to access study and employment opportunities

abroad while attracting foreign talent to local institutions.

"The meeting acknowledged the importance of cooperation and sharing best practices and knowledge amongst the G20 member and guest countries to foster a shared understanding of emerging trends in qualifications and skills recognition and development," the Chairs' Statement says.

Emerging technologies, including online learning, digital micro-credentials, and artificial intelligence, were identified as both opportunities and challenges in global skills recognition. Ministers agreed that leveraging these tools while aligning national and regional qualifications frameworks is essential to ensuring mobility without compromising quality or equity.

Global teacher shortages, particularly in rural areas, vul-

nerable communities, and early childhood education, pose a persistent risk to education recovery and long-term skills development. Skukuza discussions underscored the importance of recruiting, retaining, and empowering a professional workforce equipped to meet the needs of the 21st century.

"Developing education professionals for the 21st century involves integrating educators' abilities to equip learners for an evolving society... equip educators with digital, pedagogical, creative thinking, social and emotional skills while also addressing issues related to inclusive digital access, technology infrastructure, and connectivity, to overcome the digital divides for all," the Chairs' Statement says.

Delegates emphasised targeted policies to improve teacher recruitment, retention, job satisfaction, and professional wellbeing. Safe, inclusive school environments were recognised as essential for delivering effective teaching and quality education.

"The meeting recognised that the safety and well-being of educators is essential for delivering effective teaching and ensuring quality education for all. It underscored the importance of strengthening the central role of resilient, welcoming, and inclusive school environments in promoting students' and educators' safety and wellbeing," the Chairs' Statement adds.

The EdWG reaffirmed the

Nelson Mandela Bay G20 Youth Target of reducing the number of young people aged 15–29 who are not in employment, education, or training by 5% by 2030. Strengthening foundational learning, improving mobility, and investing in educators were all highlighted as essential contributions to achieving this goal.

Delegates called for innovative financing models, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and stronger international cooperation to close gaps in education access and quality. Inclusive digital transformation was highlighted as a tool for strengthening foundational learning, enabling recognition of qualifications, and enhancing professional development for educators.

Throughout the Skukuza meetings, delegates praised South Africa's leadership in ensuring clarity, consistency, and focus during its G20 Presidency. Ministers Siviwe Gwarube and Buti Manamela thanked partners for their commitment, noting that the conclusion of the 2025 Education Track marked "the start of a new chapter" in collaboration.

Best practices shared during South Africa's Presidency are expected to shape education reform among G20 members for years to come. As the global education community moves to implement the Leaders' commitments, the work initiated in Mpumalanga stands central to building future-ready, equitable, and resilient education systems worldwide.



## CAREER GUIDANCE

# From Grade 12 to greatness: How early career guidance shapes life after matric



*Bright future: Choosing the right career plays a major role in your long-term professional success. - Photo: Vecteezy.com*

## CHARMAINE NDLELA

**M**aking the right career choice plays a major role in your long-term professional success, but it all begins with making the right subject choices as early as Grade 9.

Many Grade 12 learners end up taking a gap year because they are unsure of what career path to follow. What causes this? Often, there is inadequate career guidance from an early stage. This is why learners should start seeking career guidance as soon as they enter high school.

Career guidance forms part of the Life Orientation curriculum, as stipulated by the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. It helps learners reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, interests, ambitions, and abilities to understand which fields of study and careers they may be best suited for.

According to the Department of Basic Education, provincial education departments are responsible for hosting career events specifically targeted at Grade 12 learners.

Inside Education asked career advisers how learners can navigate the transitional phase from high school to tertiary education. We also spoke to students about their experiences with career guidance.

Many experts agreed that initiating career guidance in Grade 9 is crucial for aligning subject choices with future aspirations.

The subjects you choose ultimately determine the opportunities available to you when you complete matric.

According to a review by the National Committee for Citizens in Education, students experience numerous academic benefits when schools and families work together. In other words, career guidance should start at home.

When parents guide their children from an early age, learners begin high school with clarity about their goals, making it easier to work towards strong Admission Point Scores (APS).

Parents should discuss career options with their children and help them research subjects, qualifications and requirements.

VesselsCareer analyst and life coach, Monisola Oloruntoba,

told Inside Education that the role of the school is to invite a career coach to help give talks to learners from grades 9 to 12.

“A lot of career coaches like me give free school workshops in their environment. This helps learners to ask the questions in their hearts. The group session will help with varied questions, and they all learn together,” she said.

“The schools say they have career counsellors, but unfortunately, a lot of them are not conversant with modern career coaching and careers, as they are not skilled themselves,” she said.

**O**loruntoba encouraged schools and parents to invest in psychometric testing.

“For those who can afford it, the school can have the career coach help with psychometric tests in the later part of the grade 11 year – they can add this to the tuition for the year, and coaches can give bulk prices.

“Or parents can get this session for their children from grade 9 before subject choice, and by grade 11 for career choice.”

The National Career Advice

Portal under the Department of Higher Education and Training guides learners through questionnaires and resources.

According to the portal, learners need to be aware of their interests, abilities and values before selecting subjects in grade 9.

Shirley Brooks, a career guidance counsellor based in Cape Town, advised students to think carefully about their general interests and the requirements of potential courses.

“Some students excel in a long academic path, while others thrive on shorter and focused programmes. It’s crucial to find a study path that aligns with your unique strengths and goals,” she said.

Many universities offer bridging programmes for learners who fall short in subjects like maths and science, as well as extended degrees and higher certificates that provide alternative access routes.

A higher certificate programme can be an excellent option for those who need more time to decide on a long-term commitment to university, or who want to improve their ma-

tric results to reapply for specific courses.

With a higher certificate, you will be well-positioned to either continue with your studies or enter the job market and gain experience in your chosen field.

The Academy for Environmental Leadership, for example, offers an accredited higher certificate in conservation ecology. Beyond a traditional gap year, this programme enables students to enter fields like conservation and ecology with both knowledge and practical experience.

The University of the Free State offers the GoStudy Career Guidance questionnaire. This is a self-assessment tool to help learners and students make the right career and subject choices.

At the University of Johannesburg, the PsyCaD Career Services Unit helps students plan their futures and prepare for the world of work, from their first year right through to graduation.

The unit offers career guidance, assessments, mentoring and counselling through a variety of programmes and tools — including a Career Resource



# CAREER GUIDANCE

Centre and online platforms — to help learners and prospective students explore different study and career options.

The South African Qualifications Authority, in partnership with the Department of Basic Education, offers a National Qualifications Framework career guidance service that includes a website, career advice helpline, printed and digital guidance materials, and a weekly programme produced with SABC Education and aired on regional radio stations in nine languages.

For Grade 12 learners interested in studying at the Central University of Technology, career guidance focuses on helping them understand their personal interests, skills and values. The university offers career-oriented programmes with pathways for both Grade 12 and FET/TVET students.

Sector Education and Training Authorities provide career guidance for learners in Grades 9 to 12 who are choosing subjects and considering career options. Its guidance helps learners understand themselves, their interests, strengths and weaknesses so they can make suitable career choices.

In 2020, the South African Career Development Association developed an educational framework that includes counselling techniques, self-evaluation tools and information on careers and vocational preparation.

**G**rade 12 learners across South Africa told Inside Education how career guidance — or the lack of it — has shaped their decisions about life after school.

Lwethu Maseko is preparing to enter the University of Johannesburg next year and has already started thinking about how to build her career while studying. She shared some of the guidance that shaped her post-matric plans.

“The career advice I received is that as soon as I get to university, I should just make sure I do internships and start applying for bursaries to increase my network. I plan to take it. I was told that you first start with the harder stream, then you switch to the easier one if you can’t do it,” she said.

Patrick Shange credited his family with helping him to understand the value of focus and discipline, and to apply it.

“I’ll be going to the University of Johannesburg. I got career guidance at primary school. My father was very strict when it came to our education; he wanted us to know what we wanted so that we could push our grades until matric.”

He said his father would con-



**Seeking guidance:** Grade 12 learners attend the uMkhanyakude District Department of Education Career Exhibition as they prepare to move into higher education. Photo: X



**“I want to study a geography-related field or pursue pilot training at a flight academy.” — Hlamalani Sono**



**“I simply chose to go with healthcare because it’s in high demand.” — Bonolo Sibotho**



**“I got career guidance at primary school.” — Patrick Shange**



**“[I was told], ‘Choose a career that excites you, stay curious and keep upgrading your skills.’” — Tylor Dilamika**

stantly remind him to follow his dreams and pursue his passion.

“I always wanted to study accounting, and that is what I’m hoping to do at varsity. I worked hard on my final exams to make sure I push my APS score,” he said.

Eighteen-year-old Hlamalani Sono from Hoërskool Ben Vorster in Tzaneen is passionate about geography and aviation. Family members working in similar fields inspired her interest.

“I want to study a geography-related field or pursue pilot training at a flight academy. Choose a career that you know

won’t feel like a burden, but one where when you wake up in the morning, you will be happy with.”

Seventeen-year-old Bonolo Sibotho from Tlokweng Senior Secondary School explored multiple fields before choosing a career “driven by purpose”.

“I was advised to look at culinary arts, accounting and healthcare, but I simply chose to go with healthcare because it’s in high demand and I get to play a huge role in making a difference in people’s lives,” he said.

Tylor Dilamika, who completed the commerce stream, said she is excited to enter a field

that matches her interests and personality.

“I did commerce in high school, and based on that, what I would love to study next year is either a degree in tourism management, a BAdmin in public management, or being a flight attendant. There are many more. I received career guidance from many of my loved ones, so much so that it’s difficult to count. The one piece of advice that stood out was being told, ‘Choose a career that excites you, stay curious and keep upgrading your skills,’” Dilamika said.

Siyanda Mziyako, from Emjindini Senior Secondary

School, who has just completed matric, said: “Today I sign out as a Grade 12 learner. I leave with a full heart, grateful for every lesson, every challenge, and all career advice that has given me a direction. This chapter ends, but my story continues.”

The pressure of finishing high school may not have fully set in, but when it does, learners are encouraged to prioritise their mental health and choose careers that align with their dreams – not peer pressure.

Early and accurate career guidance reduces rushed decisions and can help combat unemployment.



## TRAVEL

# Enjoy the magic of the Magaliesberg

**SIMON NARE**

**T**here is something for every visitor to the scenic Magaliesberg region, whether you want to explore Mother Nature closely or want to soar through the skies in a balloon and feel truly alive.

Activities for visitors are abundant along the mountain range, rated the fourth oldest in the world. The Magaliesberg is almost 100 times older than Mount Everest and half the age of the Earth, a unique treasure for us in this part of Africa.

It stretches for approximately 120km across the North West and Gauteng, separating the Highveld grasslands to the south from the Bushveld savanna to the north.

The area holds immense archaeological importance and is part of the Magaliesberg Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO-designated site that includes a large portion of the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site.

It is also the home of the country's first gold mine, the Blaauwbank Historic Gold Mine, established in 1874 and predating the vast Witwatersrand gold rush, which gave birth to Johannesburg.

The mine is now a heritage site and open for tourist-guided tours into its original operations, which were different from those found in other reefs in Johannesburg. In this mine, it is said deposits were found in pockets, and this made the operation more labour-intensive.

I am torn between the hot air balloon ride that will take me to the skies and hover gently above the breathtaking landscape as it drifts majestically high above the mountain range, or the James Bond-esque speedboat on the Hartbeespoort Dam as it cuts through the still waters.

**W**hat a thrill it was when Legacy on the Dam owner Hartley Ngoato took a friend and me on a high-speed ride across the dam. The view from the speedboat of residential areas, restaurants packed with patrons, bars and the mountain range has a different kind of vibe. You would swear you are in some of those islands in the Caribbean.

Ngoato is one of the few black businesspeople who have made the dam their home and is running a flourishing boat cruise and camping business there.

Tents are right on the edge of the dam, where you can spend the night with your beloved, leisurely observing celestial objects with the sound of the water in the background.

Hartbeespoort Dam is buzzing



**Flying high: Tourists lift off for a thrilling ride over the Magaliesberg mountains.**

- Photo: Bill Harrop's Original Balloon Safaris

**Kings of the jungle: Lions and a variety of other African wildlife can be viewed up close from a vehicle at the Lion and Safari Park.**

- Photo: Vecteezy.com

with life despite racial tensions that have been brewing since the black elite started making this their home and setting up businesses.

If only something could be done to deal with the water hyacinth, an aquatic weed that thrives on nutrient-rich water, and which has invaded the dam and formed a dense mat that has covered large portions of it.

The weed chokes the ecosystem, depleting oxygen and blocking sunlight, which kills fish and other aquatic life, but despite this, a few fishermen can be seen still eking a living by fishing here.

And if water is not for you, just a stone's throw from the dam is the Elephant Sanctuary, where you can interact with the African elephants and touch them while admiring the special relationship they have with their handlers.

While in the area, you might want to take up a once-in-a-lifetime experience of a predator safari in the Lion and Safari Park. The

one-hour tour takes you through the inviting park where you can see lions, wild dogs and cheetahs from the comfort of a safari truck.

If you are incredibly lucky, you might chance upon any of the predators on a feeding frenzy or a kill of either a giraffe, zebra, springbok or impala, who are some of the residents in this park.

**I**f animals and game drives don't tickle your fancy, then you have got to visit the Lesedi Cultural Village for an authentic South African experience and some of the indigenous life.

Although the village was built for tourism purposes, the villagers have real homes and live permanently in the village, and are on hand to tell visitors about their life experiences and culture.

The village features five traditional dwellings representative of the Pedi, Zulu, Xhosa, Basotho and Ndebele peoples, which offer visitors a cross-cultural comparison of their different traditions

and cultures. And if you are staying overnight, you are welcomed by the head of the family, who would then be your personal guide during the stay.

"Our culture is the light of our nation — whoever walks here amongst our cultures at aha Lesedi can also see the light," is the village's tagline.

According to the village's website, this is also the home of the Nyama Choma restaurant that offers a Pan African buffet in true African style. Visitors gather around a bonfire for a folk tale, singing and dancing while enjoying the village's unique drink, mamba juice.

For thrills and adrenaline, you will have to go down the Crocodile River for a delightful two-hour, 5km white-water rafting journey that can be extended to three hours.

Those yearning for extra thrills are given a chance to manoeuvre by rafting back upstream to the starting point to run the rapid

again. You are also allowed to sit on the edge of the raft and hold onto the bowline as you navigate the rapids.

Participants are in the company of expert guides for a trip that traverses rapids that can swell in the summer rains.

Magaliesberg is truly a paradise laden with various activities, and the choices are infinite, from abseiling, zip lining, fly fishing, mountain biking and hiking on some of the gruelling yet satisfying trails in the area. You just have to have the energy and choose the right one for you.

The hot air balloon ride over the Magalies River Valley is another unforgettable experience, ideal for early risers. Flights kick off at sunrise and hover above the area for an hour, exposing passengers to the majestic views of the Magaliesberg mountains and the Crocodile River.

Depending on the weather, balloons go up every day of the week, including weekends.



## STUDENT TRANSPORT

## Students must have decent, reliable public transport

MFANAFUTHI SITHEBE

The transport sector is a vital component of the economy and a key driver of development. Yet in South Africa, particularly in urban campus environments, high levels of activity generate persistent congestion in and around tertiary institutions. With more than 100 public and private post-school institutions accommodating over a million students, mobility has become one of the most pressing determinants of educational access.

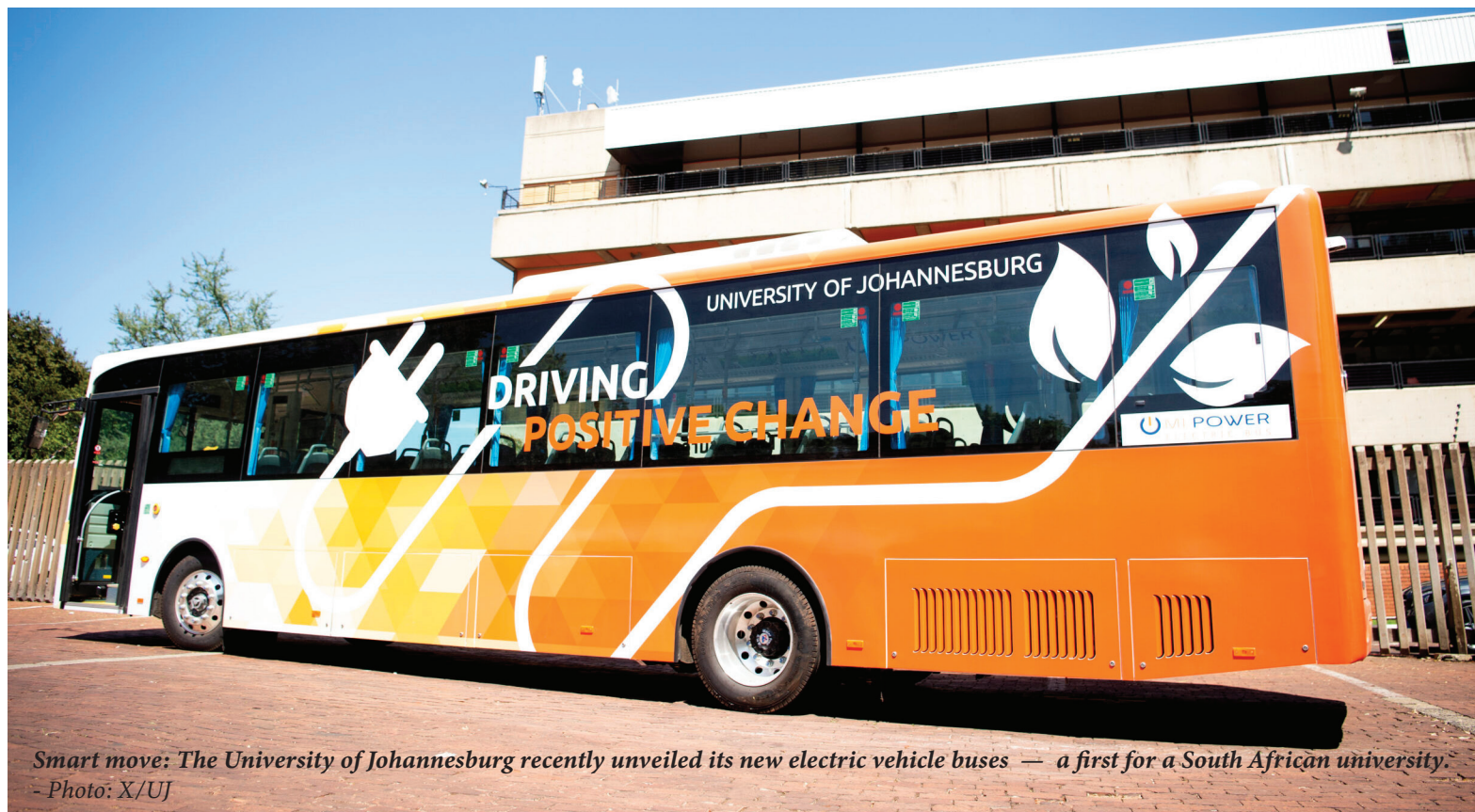
A large proportion of students commute daily between their home or private accommodation and their institutions. Traffic volumes continue to grow on road networks already operating at or near capacity. South Africa's spatial planning legacy exacerbates this, with central business zones surrounded by residential areas in circular patterns that channel predominantly one-directional traffic into urban cores.

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) seeks to build a society that offers meaningful opportunities for youth and adults through education and skills development. This vision depends on quality provision across the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system, supported by skilled staff and robust student support structures.

But while higher education may be a road to social and economic mobility, many students struggle simply to reach their campuses. Long distances, deteriorating roads, inadequate public transport and safety concerns often make the journey to learning a daily ordeal.

Most students at public institutions depend on government support through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). The scheme offers transport allowances to students who live at home, with family, or in accredited private accommodation. However, the costs associated with tertiary study remain overwhelming. Many families cannot afford cars or the high prices of unreliable public transport. Compounding this is the historical location of many institutions in formerly white suburbs, far from previously disadvantaged communities that lack direct public transport routes.

Students — especially those attending historically disadvantaged institutions — often live in unsafe, dilapidated areas of inner cities, informal settlements or neighbourhoods far from campus. Accommodation shortages add



Smart move: The University of Johannesburg recently unveiled its new electric vehicle buses — a first for a South African university.  
— Photo: X/UJ

further pressure. Each year, insufficient residence capacity forces thousands into distant or substandard private rentals. The absence of legislation governing mobility and access within the PSET sector further widens the gap between students' needs and institutional capacity.

Societal challenges, including threats faced by LGBTQ+ students and those with special needs, intensify vulnerabilities linked to poor transport and unsafe living areas. Meanwhile, the rising demand for higher education is not matched by policy infrastructure capable of supporting safe mobility at scale. While tertiary institutions contribute significantly to local development and urban status, unmanaged growth can also create negative externalities, particularly regarding access, mobility and environmental impact.

As institutions expand and surrounding areas develop, travel demand grows across multiple modes and land uses. Yet skewed resource distribution and the absence of dedicated supporting infrastructure leave space for exploitation. Students seeking groceries, attending job interviews, travelling to evening classes or returning from late study sessions face limited, unsafe and costly transport options. For those with cars, parking permits are expensive and spaces near academic buildings are scarce.

Society expects graduates to enter the workforce, pay taxes and strengthen the economy. In principle, a portion of these taxes should

underpin a public transport system that benefits future students, establishing a virtuous cycle of "paying it forward". But for this to materialise, integrated transport planning must evolve — particularly in cities and towns hosting tertiary institutions. This requires coordinated output specifications for operators, authorities and institutions.

*Ensuring safe, affordable and reliable mobility is central to building an equitable, prosperous and socially just higher-education system.*

— Mfanafuthi Sithebe

Effective travel demand management for university precincts depends on mobility management plans and dedicated mobility managers. Many countries demonstrate a working model: institutions partner with local public transport agencies, enabling students to use buses or trains free of charge simply by presenting a student ID. South Africa could realise similar benefits through national implementation. Dedicated public transport systems would not only

support students but also improve mobility for surrounding communities.

Higher education institutions that function effectively within the rule of law strengthen democracy. Municipalities should therefore be regarded as strategic partners capable of driving urban renewal, economic growth and sustainable development. Students themselves are central to the relationship between institutions and their communities. Building a culture of engagement requires acknowledging diverse local groups — businesses, industries, professional bodies, schools, government entities, alumni, indigenous communities and residents.

Transport planning must reflect the presence and needs of these "transit citizens" — students who contribute to municipal revenue but rarely benefit from transport systems. The scheduling of buses, the design of routes, and the alignment of road and rail networks should recognise the locations of tertiary institutions and associated residences. Indigenous knowledge from surrounding communities can further enhance planning processes.

Many South African municipalities provide public bus systems — such as Are Yeng, Re Yavaya and Harambee — linked to railway stations. However, the operating hours of these services, as well as those of public libraries and other civic facilities, often fail to accommodate student schedules, particularly for those who study or travel late. Limited access to func-

tional transport infrastructure, including roads, bus stations and rail terminals, is among the many factors contributing to high youth unemployment.

An efficient, inclusive transport system supports social cohesion, improves well-being, enhances job opportunities and strengthens economic development. For the higher education sector, strategic collaboration between institutions and municipalities is therefore essential. Such partnerships should also involve relevant state-owned entities that provide services vital to student life.

Redressing apartheid's spatial legacy is integral to transforming South Africa's post-school education landscape. The previous system was designed to entrench working-class disadvantage; a reimagined PSET system must instead serve the majority. Overhauling the transport system — historically skewed to the detriment of marginalised communities — is fundamental to unlocking opportunity, growth and development.

In the end, transport is not merely about moving people. For students, it is the bridge between aspiration and achievement. Ensuring safe, affordable and reliable mobility is central to building an equitable, prosperous and socially just higher-education system.

*Mfanafuthi Sithebe is a Director in the Department of Higher Education and Training. These are his personal views and do not necessarily reflect those of his employer*



## SPORTS

# Limpopo caps rising cricket stars ahead of national tournament

JOHNATHAN PAOLI

**L**impopo Impala Cricket (LIC) ushered in a new generation of provincial cricketing talent as dozens of the province's most promising young players were honoured during a spirited capping ceremony ahead of Cricket South Africa's annual national youth weeks.

Held at LIC's headquarters in Polokwane, the ceremony celebrated boys and girls selected to represent Limpopo in the U/13, U/17, and U/19 divisions at major tournaments scheduled across the country in December.

For many of the athletes, the occasion marked the culmination of years of dedication, weekend training sessions, cross-province trials, and an unwavering commitment to the game.

The squads were drawn from hundreds of aspiring cricketers across Limpopo's schools and clubs, making selection itself a monumental achievement, according to LIC president Sakie Mabala Kwakwa.

Addressing the packed venue filled with players, parents, coaches, and administrators, Mabala praised the youngsters for setting the benchmark in provincial youth cricket.

"You were the chosen ones out of hundreds. Your hard work has brought you here, and we believe you'll make us proud. Good luck. Carry our dreams and the pride of Limpopo onto the national stage," Mabala said.

**F**or LIC, the national weeks are more than just tournaments, but a platform for young cricketers to measure themselves against the country's best, broaden their cricketing horizons, and potentially catch the eye of talent scouts.

The ceremony reflected that sense of importance, with players stepping up one by one to receive their provincial caps, symbolising their elevation to the Limpopo elite.

Among the U/16 girls' players, Hoërskool Nylstroom's Mpule Sebele said she felt driven to help the team reach new heights.

"I look forward to achieving something the U/16s haven't achieved in a while. We want to surprise teams, showcase our talent, and show Limpopo we can do this," Sebele said.

Her teammate from Mahwahwa High School, Pontsho Mopai, echoed that sentiment with infectious optimism.



*Pitch perfect: The brightest of Limpopo's young cricket talent during the capping ceremony.*

- Photo: LIC Facebook



*Provincial pride: Limpopo Impala Cricket president Sakie Mabala Kwakwa congratulates the players during the ceremony.* - Photo: LIC Facebook

"I look forward to winning all the games. Even if we don't win, we must show off our talent and show Limpopo we're the best. We should support one another, and we will represent the province well," Mopai said.

For rising bowler Alicia Masele, also from Mahwahwa High School, the goals are both personal and collective.

"Individually, I want to take three wickets per match. As a team, we have to prove we were not mistakenly chosen and represent Limpopo well. We're ready," she said.

At the U/19 level, the stakes feel higher as players edge closer to potential senior provincial selection.

**H**oërskool Frikkie Meyer all-rounder Mahlako Mamabolo said stepping onto the national stage is something she has dreamed of for years.

"I'm looking forward to representing LIC and making my province proud by working hard with my teammates. If we give everything, we can make our tournament a success," Mamabolo said.

Mahwahwa High School's Shelfa Mukhari said her ambitions extend far beyond the December fixtures.

"We want Limpopo to be proud of us and to improve our careers. We look forward to playing for the Proteas one day.

This is another step toward that goal," she said.

The U/13 boys, the youngest group heading to nationals, could hardly contain their excitement.

Many will be experiencing a major provincial tournament for the first time.

For Unicorn Preparatory School's Tanish Patel, the call-up feels like the beginning of a lifelong cricket journey.

"I'm looking forward to the new challenge and playing at a high level of cricket. It's a dream come true," Patel said.

His teammate Ejnar Joubert, also from Unicorn, shared similar enthusiasm.

"I want to play at the highest level and make my team, my family, and the whole province proud," he said.

Laerskool Julian Muller's Mpho Matsetela said he is motivated by the chance to test himself against unfamiliar opposition.

"I'm looking forward to facing a new, tough challenge. I cannot wait for the experience," he said.

While the focus of the morning remained firmly on the players, the event also offered a moment for LIC to reflect on its broader mission of nurturing cricketing excellence across Limpopo.

Founded in 2006, Limpopo Impala Cricket has long served as the beating heart of cricket in South Africa's northernmost province. From its Polokwane headquarters, LIC has grown into a central hub of development, inclusivity, and opportunity for aspiring young players from rural villages, mining towns, and urban schools alike.

Its vision, as articulated by officials, is to cultivate a cricket culture that goes beyond on-field results — to inspire discipline, character, diversity, and unity among young athletes.

The organisation's history is one of resilience: from securing first-class status in the 2006/07 season to making a triumphant return to top-tier competition in 2022/23 after a hiatus.

That legacy made the capping ceremony all the more meaningful, as the next generation stepped forward to carry Limpopo's cricketing hopes into the future.

With the national tournaments now just days away, Limpopo's squads will spend the coming week in final preparation.

Coaches say the youngsters are peaking at the right time, with balanced squads capable of competing with the traditional cricketing powerhouses.

For the athletes themselves, the months of training are over, the caps have been awarded, and the moment they have dreamed about has arrived.

If the passion, ambition, and confidence they expressed at the ceremony are anything to go by, Limpopo's future in cricket is bright, and December's national tournament could be the stage where some of these rising stars take their first steps toward greatness.