

# Broadening second-chance Matric opportunities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

Martin Gustafsson  
Research on Socio-Economic Policy (ReSEP)  
Stellenbosch University

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## SUMMARY

The 2019 to 2024 overall five-year plan of government emphasises a need for continued qualitative improvements in the schooling system. A natural outcome of this will be a continuation of the upward trend in the number of youths who obtain a 'Matric', which can take the form of either the **National Senior Certificate (NSC) or the Senior Certificate (SC)**.

Two relatively new points of emphasis in this plan are of great significance for the certification of youths. One is a clear intention to introduce **a national Grade 9 examination and certificate**. This can serve as a fallback for those youths who fail to obtain the Matric, and thus leave the schooling system without any certification. Currently, just under half of youths do not obtain the Matric, though this proportion is gradually declining. Youths who do not obtain the Matric are very unlikely to obtain *any* national qualification. Only around 3% of youths in the population obtain a formal qualification which is not a Matric without already having the Matric. A Grade 9 certificate will help youths in a number of ways. It will put them in a better position to know their strengths and weaknesses, and hence to choose their Matric subjects wisely. For those who do not get to obtain the Matric, the Grade 9 certificate will facilitate entry into TVET colleges and employment. Recent and interesting research from South Africa, discussed in this report, confirms how important having good information on one's skills is in navigating the labour market successfully.

The second point of emphasis in government's plan relates directly to the topic of this report: how to improve second-chance Matric opportunities for youths, or **opportunities for obtaining the Grade 12 qualification if one failed at one's first attempt, as a full-time learner in a school**. There are few details on how to improve these opportunities in existing plans. In many ways, the matter has been 'off the radar' previously. Now is therefore a good time to put forward proposals on the specifics of second-chance matriculation. It is likely that 'second-chancing' will become more important than ever for youths, given the disruptions to schooling caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the reasons second-chance matriculation has been off the radar is that there is so little reporting on this phenomenon. It seems this is in part due to the perception that the success rates of 'second-chancers' are so low that it is not worth reporting on this, or even embarrassing for government to do so. This is clearly not a good approach. If success rates are to be improved, current trends must be known and discussed. In fact, whether success rates are low is debatable. They are clearly lower than for full-time learners in school, but this is what one would expect. Two key numbers are the following: at any time, **around a quarter of a million youths are attempting to obtain the Matric through some second-chance route**, and around 40,000 additional Matrics are obtained each year outside of the existing reporting systems. These 40,000 can be considered what 'second-chancers', defined broadly, obtain.

A part of the reporting problem may be that the data for second-chancers is complex, as certification occurs through various channels. But the data exist, and **it is important for government to report all new Matrics obtained each year**, in part because acquisition of the Matric is an official indicator of progress. A key contribution of the current report is a flow diagram attempting to reconcile various pieces of information to produce a holistic view of how many youths, by gender, attain specific levels and types of education, and what the associated employment prospects are.

The report also examines the policies and online systems second-chance youths might interact with when registering for examinations and applying for the certificate. Importantly, **government's plans envisage 'Matric services' as one focus area in the development of better online e-services**. This is relevant for facilitating second-chance opportunities. The

pandemic has created an additional reason to promote e-services, as this can reduce health risks associated with queuing and social mixing at physical public buildings.

A number of enhancements which would not be prohibitively difficult or costly stand out.

At a basic level, **web pages of the national and nine provincial education departments** which convey information to those preparing for the Matric, as second-chancers or as first-timers, should become more coherent and informative. There is currently a relatively large volume of information available online, but it is too often poorly organised. Crucially, the principle of dating every web page should be followed, so that it is clear what the most recent information is, and what information is now redundant. Examination guidelines, crucial documents which tell candidates how examination papers will be organised and how many questions should be selected, exist for some years and some subjects. It should be clear what applies for the next round of examinations, across all subjects.

Certain enhancements involve more effort. For example, it would be useful to have a **web page summarising what Matric mark thresholds universities use for entry into key academic programmes**. How many engineering faculties require applicants to obtain 50% in mathematics, how many require 60%, and so on? The web page would not have to cover everything, and students should obviously be urged to consult the prospectuses of individual universities. However, currently there appears to be no clear signalling at all to youths about this aspect of the university admissions rules.

A further enhancement would be a **‘Do I now qualify for a Matric?’ calculator** on some website. The rules around subject combinations and marks needed to obtain a basic Matric, or one with a Bachelors-level pass, can be confusing. A calculator that processed someone’s inputs, and indicated how near or far one was to qualifying for a Matric, is likely to be used by many part-time candidates, even if it is just to verify that they have understood the rules correctly. Going a big step further, an online facility which calculated whether, say, a part-time candidate qualified for a Matric using *actual* results accumulated over the years, would be hugely valuable.

There is a large volume of educational materials available online to assist those preparing for the Matric examinations. However, there is so much of it that it is likely to be difficult for students to select what will serve them best. Better online guidance on what materials are designed for what kinds of student would help. Moreover, downloadable videos which are large in terms of memory, while pedagogically sound, may not be accessible to youths with limited connectivity. Namibia’s public agency focussing specifically on supporting second-chancers, NAMCOL, serves as a useful example of how students can be directed to relevant materials. NAMCOL maintains a **YouTube channel, something which is missing in the South African second-chance space**.

While it may be difficult to establish a single online portal for second-chance youths, with everything they need, given how many state actors exist, identifying a limited number of portals, and agreeing on who provides what information or service, would streamline the current system. Government’s new ‘Matric services’, at [www.eservices.gov.za](http://www.eservices.gov.za), currently includes three types of transaction: re-issue (of the certificate); re-mark/re-check; and registration. There are clearly more transaction types needed by youths. Moreover, the education websites and the new e-services portal should ‘talk to each other’ to a greater degree. Importantly, **e-services are notoriously difficult to design well in developing countries**. They frequently fail to fulfil their promise. Monitoring of who uses the online ‘Matric services’ in future, and how effective users see it, is crucial.

There are many ways in which **non-government actors** can contribute to the envisaged enhancements. Pressure for better reporting on second-chance results is in everyone’s interest.

Non-government websites providing information to second-chancers exist, but they appear to have specific commercial interests. A more neutral online source of information would add value.

**Verifying whether a Matric certificate is genuine**, and not a fake, is an important matter for youths, employers and post-school institutions. The process for doing this, through the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), has become more cumbersome in recent years, probably to protect privacy. Some years ago, anyone could enter a person's 13-digit national identity number and obtain the details of the person's Matric. Brazil's 'Matric' has an online verification facility which is immediate, yet provides relatively high levels of privacy. Instead of using a national identity number, users must enter a unique number appearing on the certificate, and then obtain the details of the certificate-holder and academic results online. This is something which could be considered in South Africa, both with respect to the Grade 12 and the envisaged Grade 9 certificates.

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## 1 Introduction

The current report is produced for Youth Capital. Youth Capital describes itself as a youth-led campaign with an Action Plan combining data with young people's lived stories to ‘shift gears’ on youth unemployment. Youth Capital believes in a South Africa where every young person has the skills and opportunity to get their first decent job.

Youth Capital's Action Plan<sup>1</sup> is informed by a series of conversations held with youths since 2018, the scope being people aged 15 to 34, and in particular those who have struggled to find employment. The priorities of the plan are captured below.

**Table 1: Youth Capital's '10 steps to shift gears'**

	Step	
<b>Education</b> (all who start should finish)	1	Certify us
	2	Catch us up
	3	Make us count
	4	Support us
<b>Transitions</b> (everyone should be supported)	5	Make job-seeking affordable
	6	Grow our circles
	7	Bridge the information gap
<b>Jobs</b> (all work must be a stepping stone to jobs)	8	All experience must matter
	9	Unlock public opportunities
	10	Make public employment work

This report deals to a large extent with Step 1, which is to get youths certified, but the other three education steps receive attention too. Education in Youth Capital's plan is seen as necessary for meaningful work and jobs, but also citizenry.

This report is specifically concerned with facilitating ‘second-chance Matric’ opportunities. Here ‘Matric’ means receiving the National Senior Certificate (NSC) or the equivalent Senior Certificate. These are widely considered general qualifications, not vocationally-oriented qualifications, though they can cover subjects which are clearly vocational, such as hospitality studies. The report does not deal specifically with other more vocational qualifications of a similar level, such as those obtained through TVET<sup>2</sup> colleges. However, the role of, say, the NSC in facilitating movement into TVET studies is dealt with. By ‘second chance’ is meant obtaining the Matric outside the traditional full-time route. This could mean obtaining a Matric if one dropped out of school before Grade 12, or wrote the examinations as a full-time

<sup>1</sup> Youth Capital, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Technical and vocational education and training.

student in Grade 12 but did not obtain the qualification. It could also mean obtaining a *better* set of Matric results after obtaining a first Matric as a full-time student. Often this is about obtaining a Matric with sufficiently good results to allow for Bachelors-level studies at a university.

The report examines both the problems and solutions. As little has been written about the problem, and it is often poorly understood, much attention goes towards clarifying its nature and magnitudes. With regard to solutions, ‘low-hanging fruits’ which are apparent in the current system are identified, and lessons are drawn from other countries.

How the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 creates new ‘second chance’ challenges, and offers new opportunities, is discussed. At this stage, conclusions on optimal responses must be tentative, given how much uncertainty there is around the pandemic’s health and other effects going forward.

The next section, Section 2, provides a critical overview of how the problem is currently understood. How much attention has the second-chance Matric issue received in the media, for instance? What solutions have been put forward? Are certain solutions not receiving attention? How the proposed Grade 9 national qualification is influencing the debates is examined.

Section 3 examines government policy aimed at tackling the problems of youths, in particular unemployment, as well as policy dealing specifically with second-chance opportunities. How informed are these policies by the evidence and international practice? How coherent and well communicated are these policies?

Section 4 takes stock of what the rules are for those pursuing second-chance opportunities, with a strong focus on what is available online, and how well packaged this critical information is. A report accompanying the current one<sup>3</sup> provides findings from a very limited number of interviews conducted with youths and institutions aimed at gauging how people actually experience existing systems.

Section 5 turns to data and statistics, and explores the numbers of youths in need of second-chance opportunities, and what their success rates are. A key flow diagram is put forward to assist in understanding what is a complex yet poorly understood system.

Section 6 provides an account of second-chance opportunities in two other countries, Brazil and Namibia, with a view to drawing lessons for South Africa.

Section 7 presents recommendations aimed at government policymakers, while section 8 presents recommendations directed at non-government organisations (NGOs) and the corporate sector.

Finally, section 9 concludes the report, in part by outlining further research which could be of use.

## **2 A critical view of how the problems are currently understood**

Even a rudimentary scouring of the South African online media will reveal that youth unemployment is a widely acknowledged problem. Not having a Matric is frequently put forward as a key underlying reason<sup>4</sup>. The view is underpinned by the economic evidence that

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<sup>3</sup> ‘The second-chance Matric examination system: Case studies from the Cape Town area in the Western Cape’ by Lunga Swelindawo, from Stellenbosch University.

<sup>4</sup> A good illustration of this widespread view can be seen in Mamphiswana (2016).

having a Matric is associated with much better employment and welfare prospects. Hofmeyr *et al* (2013: 6) find that having a Matric, relative to just having reached grades 10 or 11, is associated with 78% more income and a 19% increase in the probability of being employed. Leibbrandt (2018: 18) finds having a Matric to be one of the most important markers of access to middle class financial stability.

While economists do underline the importance of better education for employment prospects, and acknowledge the income and employment returns of the Matric, getting more youths to reach the Matric is in fact not often put forward as the pre-eminent solution to the unemployment problem. In fact, the education solutions put forward by economists tend to differ in substantial ways from those frequently put forward in the South African media. A 2020 report by three economists (including the author of the current report) to the National Planning Commission (NPC), on education and employability, serves as a useful reference point. In that report, Van der Berg *et al* (2020) argue in favour of two key education solutions<sup>5</sup>.

Firstly, the foundational skills of learners, largely acquired in the early grades, need to continue to improve. These skills have been improving, steadily, for over a decade, at a speed which is relatively good, but off a very low base. This means foundational skills such as reading and mathematics are still weak, though at the current rate of improvement it is conceivable that by 2030 South Africa could reach levels seen in Malaysia currently. However, the NPC report does not advocate business-as-usual in the schooling sector. For continued quality improvements to be assured, innovation in areas such as school accountability will be needed.

Secondly, it is argued that a Grade 9 certificate, something which has been discussed for two decades, ought to be introduced. This is needed to improve 'signalling' to employers and post-school institutions. Employers and, say, TVET colleges need a better sense of what the skills are of the just under half of youths who leave school with no national qualification (this is examined in detail in section 5).

The NPC report does not argue *against* having more Matrics among youths. But this should be seen as a natural result of improving the quality of schooling. In fact, South Africa's successful completion of secondary schooling, at just over 50%, is not unusual for a middle income country. Moreover, trends in other countries suggest that South Africa's current rate of improvement in the attainment of the Matric is about as fast as one could hope for. The key underlying dynamic is that it is poor quality schooling which places a binding constraint on how many Matrics can be obtained. It would be virtually impossible to maintain the quality of the Matric, while reaching, say, a 95% annual attainment figure in five years time. While such proposals are hardly ever made explicitly, much of the public discourse on the Matric seems premised on the idea that such a sudden shift would be possible.

While the importance of foundational skills for progress is increasingly being understood, in part due to the global emphasis on such skills through the relatively new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the notion of a Grade 9 certificate remains contentious in South Africa. The largest teacher union has raised concerns that without a clear policy framework and transparency, the new certificate could encourage, or seen to be encouraging, learners to leave school earlier than they otherwise would<sup>6</sup>.

Recently released results of a World Bank study (Carranza *et al*, 2020) undertaken in South Africa provide important evidence relating to certification and the labour market. In the study, around 7,000 work seekers in Johannesburg had their basic language, numeracy and 'soft'

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<sup>5</sup> The media article Gustafsson (2019b) provides a brief version of many of the arguments.

<sup>6</sup> Tsotetsi, 2019.

skills tested. Some were given a report on how well they performed in the assessment, and some training on how to communicate their skills to potential employers. The ‘treatment group’ of youths with reports from the assessment enjoyed significantly better employment and income prospects. The study reveals several points that are often missed in South Africa’s public debates. A part of the employment problem in South Africa is that hiring is often inefficient because of a lack of information. Employers must often ‘take a gamble’ when employing someone, because they know so little about the person’s skills. At the same time, work seekers may not have a good idea of their own strengths and weaknesses, which can lead them to apply for the wrong jobs, or promote themselves poorly during an interview. In this context of uncertainty, employers may shun investments which could create jobs. Though the World Bank study dealt with youths who nearly all already have the Matric, it is of relevance for the debate on the Grade 9 certificate. Moreover, the fact that the assessment report helped youths find the right job *even though they had a Matric* points to some of the weaknesses in the ability of the Matric itself to communicate information about skills.

While obtaining a Matric features prominently in the South African debates, what has received insufficient attention is subject choices. There is a general sense that more youths need skills in mathematically- and scientifically-oriented subjects. In this regard, there has been progress, though figures such as mathematics passes can be confusing<sup>7</sup>. However, there is often disagreement over the strategies needed to promote the desired skills. To illustrate, in the case of mathematics the argument is often made that more learners should take mathematics, as opposed to the easier mathematical literacy, in Grade 12. Yet a very large proportion of Grade 12 mathematics learners have an insufficient grounding in mathematics. Only around 60% of these learners pass mathematics at the lowest 30% mark level, and only one-fifth obtain 50%, the lowest threshold considered in mathematically-oriented programmes at universities<sup>8</sup>. Given this situation, it could even be argued that *fewer* learners should take mathematics in Grade 12, in order to raise the numbers considered ready for these university programmes. Having fewer learners would reduce class sizes and allow teachers to provide more individualised attention to learners who are close to achieving the desired level of performance.

The NPC report highlights the importance of having more black youths participate in technical subjects in Grade 12, in order to correct apartheid-like inequalities which persist. For instance, currently over 50% of white students take a technical subject for Matric, while only 8% of black African students do. This is largely related to the unavailability of these subjects in historically black schools. In the larger scheme of things, this is a relatively simple problem to address, and could significantly improve the employment and further studies prospects for black students. This is another problem which has not featured in the public debates, in part because so little information about the problem is available.

Much of the current report is about how ‘off-the-radar’ second-chance opportunities for obtaining the Matric are, in government reports, and the public discourse. The country is strongly focussed on one thing: learners who obtain the NSC after participating in the year-end examination. What is left off the radar is a complex system whereby those who fail to obtain the NSC on their first attempt, or did not reach Grade 12, can try again. Why are second-chance opportunities off the radar? Discussions with relevant people suggest that the problem is partly that government considers the success rate of, say, part-time NSC and Senior Certificate candidates so low that it is embarrassing to publish them. As explained in section 5, around 450,000 youths annually obtain the Matric on their first attempt, while an additional approximately 40,000 Matrics are obtained ‘on the fringe’, which barely receives any attention. In fact, 40,000 additional Matrics a year, and this is counting only the public

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<sup>7</sup> See Shay (2020), including the discussion between Gustafsson and Shay at the end of the article. Also Gustafsson (2016).

<sup>8</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2020.



system, is not insignificant. Having this *on* the radar would moreover help place attention on how to increase the number beyond 40,000.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted normal Grade 12 activities in 2020. Examinations that were to occur in the middle of 2020 for around 350,000 youths wishing to improve earlier results, through either the NSC or Senior Certificate route, were postponed to the end of the year, so that those examinations could occur concurrently with the year-end examinations. This means that there are for the first time ever more than a million students participating in the 2020 year-end examinations. How might this disruption affect the prospects for youths? Firstly, the disruption of Grade 12 through the rearrangement of the school year and the loss of at least 17% of contact time means first-time examination candidates have suffered learning losses, on top of uncertainty and anxiety relating to the pandemic<sup>9</sup>. Secondly, second-chance candidates, while they may have had more time to prepare for the examinations, will see their results becoming available half a year later than expected, which represents missed opportunities in the labour market and in terms of entry into post-school education.

Concerns have been expressed that the 2020 Matric certificate will be worth less than Matric certificates from previous years because of the Grade 12 disruptions and the likelihood of generous mark adjustments to compensate for learning losses. Given that Grade 12 learners carry skills which have accumulated over twelve years of schooling, it is unlikely that the Grade 12 class of 2020 will see their skills affected to a large degree. Grade 12 is largely about consolidation and preparation for the examination. The mark adjustments will need to ensure, above all, that the right signals are sent into the university entrance process. If, for instance, 50,000 Matriculants in 2019 could be considered ready to enter engineering studies at university in 2020, on the basis of their 2019 Matric results, then the certification process in 2020 should ensure that a similar number would qualify for studies in 2021. Given the disruptions which occurred in 2020, that could require relatively large mark adjustments. As argued in Gustafsson and Nuga Deliwe (2020), it is more likely that Grade 12 groups in *future* years, beyond 2020, will experience substantial negative effects from the pandemic, given that the acquisition of their fundamental skills in grades below Grade 12 have been affected.

### 3 Broad government policy

Improvements in educational outcomes, and not just participation, is now clearly prioritised in key government plans in South Africa. The 2012 National Development Plan (NDP)<sup>10</sup>, whose horizon is 2030, pays attention to education quality improvements and increasing successful completion of Grade 12. The Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) documents of government, one set for the electoral cycle 2014 to 2019, and a recently released one for 2019 to 2024, are meant to take the NDP forward. The most recent MTSF<sup>11</sup> includes emphases which have been missing previously. Apart from setting fairly realistic targets for NSCs with results permitting Bachelors-level studies at a university, the plan also emphasises the following:

Better opportunities for second-chance NSC (improved) pass

Increase access among historically disadvantaged learners to ‘niche’ subjects such as those focussing on engineering and computing.

Introduce the General Education Certificate in Grade 9, in part to facilitate movement between schools and TVET colleges.

The second of the above three is a reference to Matric subjects.

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<sup>9</sup> Mohohlwane *et al*, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> National Planning Commission, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, 2020: 79, 82.

Education and training opportunities for youths in the TVET sector, a topic outside the scope of the current report, also receives attention in the MTSF. Clearly, TVET needs to expand. Currently, total enrolments in colleges, counting full- and part-time, and public and private institutions, come to around 800,000 individuals, equivalent to the enrolment of just one school grade, for instance Grade 10. An even starker indication of how small the impact of the TVET sector is, is the fact that only around 3% of youths in the population obtain a national qualification from a TVET college *without first obtaining a Matric*<sup>12</sup>. TVET is thus largely an add-on, when government strategies in fact envisage TVET as an *alternative* to grades 10 to 12. A part of the problem is the absence of a Grade 9 qualification in the schooling system, which makes colleges reluctant to enrol students who cannot show documentary evidence of their skills, in other words a Matric.

## **4 The ‘second chance’ rules as currently communicated to youths**

### **4.1 Rules applicable to full-time NSC candidates**

Before second-chance rules are considered, how clear and coherent are first-chance rules, in other words rules in relation to obtaining the National Senior Certificate (NSC) as a full-time learner in a school? These rules would largely also apply to second-chance youths.

The online searching that informs what appears below (and in sections 4.2 and 4.3) took place in August and September of 2020. Searching occurred on a computer, not a smartphone. Ease of access to information could be better or worse on a smartphone, depending on how web-based services are organised, but it is unlikely to be very different compared to a computer.

Learners enrolled full-time at a school enjoy the advantage of the school’s taking much of the responsibility for ensuring that learners navigate their way correctly through the rules. A key issue for learners is selecting an appropriate set of subjects for grades 10 to 12, from the subjects offered by the school. In fact, information in this regard, needed already in Grade 9, may be the most critical thing that full-time learners, and their parents, would want to know more about. Subject choices both influence how difficult it will be to obtain the NSC, and what doors will be open to a learner pursuing post-school studies.

A learner wishing to verify the rules could expect to find the relevant information on the Department of Basic Education’s website. The rules are national, so one might expect the national department to communicate these well. The DBE’s website has an ‘Information for’ link and ‘Learners’ on a menu. This leads to what is essentially a blank page. However, the ‘Curriculum’ link followed by the ‘National Senior Certificate (NSC) Examinations’ menu item provides some information regarding matters such as registering for the examination, and previous examination papers. However, the critical and somewhat complex matter of subject choices is not explained here.

Some online searching leads one to what seems to be the definitive document explaining subject combinations, and several other aspects of the NSC. This document is titled *The National Senior Certificate: A qualification at level 4 on the National Qualifications Framework*, and is from 2009. This 2009 document differs little from an original Government Notice 744 of 2005, though the 2009 document is said to incorporate a few amendments from subsequent government notices. The 2009 document is available on a number of websites, including the DBE website.

The rules require an examination candidate to take seven subjects: two official languages; either mathematics or mathematical literacy; life orientation; and three additional subjects from a list of subjects which includes 30 non-language subjects. The list also includes

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<sup>12</sup> Van der Berg *et al*, 2020: 29.

language subjects, including official languages and non-official languages, meaning that a candidate can take more than just two official languages. Certain combinations are not allowed. For instance, a candidate cannot have both consumer studies and hospitality studies among the three additional subjects.

What the 2009 document does not explain is that in order to obtain an NSC permitting entry into a Bachelors programme at a university, the three additional subjects had to be from a 'designated list' specifying which of the 30 were considered important for universities. In 2018, this system was abolished, through Government Notice 165 of 2018, meaning that one's subject choices would no longer determine one's eligibility for Bachelors studies. However, to obtain a Bachelors-level pass one would still need to achieve relatively high marks in one's subjects. Moreover, universities themselves have entrance requirements, for instance a requirement of a percentage mark of 60 for mathematics. These university thresholds are provided in the documentation of the individual universities. Clearly, what would be helpful is a single guide clarifying to learners and teachers what the most common university thresholds are, and how these differ across universities. Such a single guide does not appear to exist.

Every NSC candidate carries school-based assessment (SBA) results with him or her into the certification process. According to policy, SBA results in each subject account for 25% of the final subject mark, with the examination accounting for the remaining 75%. SBA results are derived from assignments done during the year and marked by teachers. The credibility of SBA results has understandably been a concern over the years. A 2008 report for Umalusi<sup>13</sup> concluded that SBA results ranked students and schools rather differently to examination results, and that this undermined the credibility of the Matric. In 2017 a new policy<sup>14</sup> allowing for the adjustment of SBA marks by external moderators was introduced. The official 2018 NSC report indicated that the following procedure had been implemented<sup>15</sup>:

The conduct of statistical moderation of the all [sic] SBA moderation records in all subjects to ensure that the outcomes are commensurate with that of the final written examination.

Logically, if examination results are used to adjust SBA results, in order to make SBA results 'look more like' examination marks, then the ultimate effect is that the SBA will account for less than 25% of the overall mark in each subject. The extent to which this has happened, and what the effective weight of the SBA results has been in recent years, is not publicly available. Moreover, the information schools and teachers have access to appears not to make it possible for one to estimate what the adjustment to the SBA marks was. The important thing is that the influence of the SBA on whether one obtains the NSC, and the NSC at a particular level, seems not to be a concern currently among, for instance, universities.

Between 2015 and 2019 an arrangement called 'multiple examination opportunity', or MEO, existed. This allowed full-time students who were struggling academically to write some of their examinations in the October/November examinations, and the remainder in the middle of the following year. This arrangement was discontinued in 2020<sup>16</sup>, meaning that 2020 Grade 12 full-time learners would have to sit for all their examinations in October/November. The MEO was terminated as it was believed schools were using this mechanism to avoid providing struggling learners with the support they needed<sup>17</sup>.

Understanding the structure of examination papers is extremely important for those preparing to write an examination. There are many past examination papers, and even marking

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<sup>13</sup> Van der Berg and Shepherd, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Government Notice 911 of 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2019b: 39.

<sup>16</sup> DBE Circular E29 of 2019.

<sup>17</sup> SAnews, 2019c.

memoranda, available online, on the DBE website and elsewhere. These can obviously be of use for examination candidates. However, what is particularly important is what is known as the ‘examination guidelines’ for the next examination. These specify, for instance, the degree to which learners can choose between topics. Some googling led to the DBE web page titled ‘2020 Examination Guidelines for Grade 12’, which offered examination guidelines for three subjects: accounting, business studies and electrical technology. Some searching for past examination guidelines led to a DBE page with 2017 guidelines, headed ‘2017 Examination Guidelines for Grade 12’. Here it seems at least all the major subjects were covered. No pages of this kind were found for the 2018 and 2019 examinations. One suspects that if no updated guidelines are published, then the last available ones apply. If this is the case, it should be made clear.

It should be underscored that the rules discussed so far are not easily accessible to youths. This may not be too much of a problem where learners are enrolled full-time in a school, and have a close relationship with the school staff. However, the channels for disseminating information do not seem adequate for youths who have left school and need to inform themselves. The problem is in a sense twofold. On the one hand, finding the official and original rules should be easier. Secondly, there should ideally be simplified but accurate summaries of the policy aimed at specific audiences, for instance youths who last had contact with the education system several years ago. One web portal for all this information would obviously be ideal.

#### 4.2 Registration and certification rules specific to second-chance youths

So what would a youth seeking second-chance information find online? Key questions one might anticipate are listed below. These questions deal with administrative and logistical issues relating to registration and certification. There are of course also important questions regarding educational support, but in many ways the answers to those questions would be far more varied, given how many potential sources of support there are, and the variety of support required by different youths. Access to educational support is discussed in section 4.3. The more administrative and logistical questions are then the following.

- Regarding **registration**: What examinations may I register for? How many subjects can I write at a time? What are the pre-requisites for registration in terms of my age, my previous school attendance and school-based assessment (SBA) marks? How do I register and how much does it cost? What if I want to change my registration? Can I select where I write the examination? If I re-write an examination and obtain worse results than on the previous occasion, which results will be considered?
- Regarding **certification**: Do I now have enough credits for my first or an upgraded Matric? Can I combine results from examinations written in different provinces? How do I obtain the certificate as easily as possible? Do I need to travel somewhere to pick it up?

A key matter, which can be confusing, is how the answers to the above questions differ across the National Senior Certificate and Senior Certificate. The differences are summarised in a table which appears at the end of this section.

On the DBE website there is an easily found page headed ‘**Second Chance Programme**’<sup>18</sup>. This page describes the programme as follows:

The aim of the Second Chance Matric Programme is to provide support to learners who have not been able to meet the requirements of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) or the extended Senior Certificate (SC), thereby meeting the goals of the NDP and the sector thus increasing learner retention.

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<sup>18</sup> [www.education.gov.za/Programmes/SecondChanceProgramme.aspx](http://www.education.gov.za/Programmes/SecondChanceProgramme.aspx).

The NDP referred to here is the National Development Plan. The page was clearly not updated to reflect changes brought about by the pandemic, and discussed below. The page refers to two target groups of youths: ‘Senior Certificate (amended) Examination Candidates’ and ‘NSC Examinations Part-time candidates’. The latter are ‘Learners who attempted the NSC examinations post 2015’. As will be seen below, 2015 must be an outdated cut-off year. Moreover, it seems the reference above to ‘extended Senior Certificate’ should be ‘amended Senior Certificate’.

A two-page PDF file titled ‘Second Chance Programme Z-Cards’ and obtainable through the page seems to be a definitive summary of the programme. The document is not dated, so it is not clear how current the information is. Much of the information in this document and the webpage in general relates to educational support, as opposed to registration and certification issues.

The programme has a Facebook page titled ‘Second Chance Programme’ ([www.facebook.com/DBE2ndChance](http://www.facebook.com/DBE2ndChance)). This is clearly a page created by the DBE. This type of social media page can be useful in assessing what youths need. The Facebook page is not used much, but this could be because the page administrator seldom posts or responds. The last post was from a year ago, and is dated 19 August 2019. That post urges students who did not pass the May/June 2019 examinations to ‘register today’ for ‘another opportunity to sit for the exams’. No information regarding what one would be registering for is provided. There are only twelve user comments, four of which are reproduced here to illustrate the types of concerns.

**December 2019.** please send me application form

**December 2019.** Hi I'd like to know can i do matric at department of education if i didn't do matric before?help please

**January 2020.** My daughter didn't do well on her matric results, can she still register to rewrite June this year 2020?

**January 2020.** Hi, I wrote in 2008. Can I upgrade my matric to maths, physical science and rewrite my life sciences?

None of these questions are answered by the administrator. In fact, the last time the administrator responded to questions was in April 2019. Beyond April 2019, and up to August 2019, there were ten further posts, all apparently without any administrator responses to user questions. In some instances, users answer each other's questions.

Some of the information second-chancers would need is on another DBE website page titled ‘**FAQs on examinations**’<sup>19</sup> A critically important text on that page is the following:

Anyone whose School-based Assessment validity has not expired may register as a part-time candidate for the NSC examinations. The School-based Assessment validity expires after 3 years from the date the candidate first wrote the NSC exams.

The NSC must include SBA results, while the SC has no such requirement. This is a key distinction between the NSC and SC. The three-year cut-off is obviously important, and could be explained better. For instance, if one's SBA results were obtained during the 2017 school year, when exactly would their validity expire? By the October/November examinations of 2020? The page explains that following the phasing out of the ‘supplementary examination in February/March’, those wishing to improve their October/November results, obtained as full-

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[www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/NationalSeniorCertificate\(NSC\)Examinations/FAQsonExams.aspx](http://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/NationalSeniorCertificate(NSC)Examinations/FAQsonExams.aspx).

time learners, must write in the following ‘June NSC examination’. A link on the latter leads to another page, ‘Release of 2019 National Senior Certificate Examination Results’, with ‘Conditions for entry’ stating, among other things, that the subjects one takes should be the subjects one took in the October/November examinations. There appears to be no limit to how many of one’s October/November subjects one re-writes, though this could have been stated explicitly. It is made clear that under certain circumstances one would not be able to re-write an examination, for instance if one missed the year-end examinations without having some valid reason, such as illness. This raises the question of penalties that apply if one misses *any* examination as a second-chance youth. For instance, if one misses a second attempt at writing the history examination in May/June simply because one felt one was not ready, or one did not have transport money to attend the examination, would that count against one when one tried further re-writing in future?

The rule that one may not change one’s set of subjects between the initial October/November examination and the following May/June examination is clear. However, what is not clear is whether one may *ever* change one’s set of subjects. For instance, could one do so three years after one’s initial October/November participation?

The page ‘Release of 2019 National Senior Certificate Examination Results’ presents the following four options for those who have not passed the year-end examinations:

Re-enrol for the NSC as a full-time repeater candidate at a school without delay, provided that the candidate is younger than 21 years of age.

Register as a part-time repeater candidate at a Public Adult Education Centre.

Register for the Senior Certificate (SC) examination which is a school leaving qualification for adults and out-of school learners, provided the validity of the candidate's SBA has expired.

Alternatively, candidates that were not successful in their examinations could consider vocational education and training. There are 50 Public Further Education and Training (FET) colleges across all provinces of South Africa comprising over 300 campuses or teaching sites.

The current report focusses on the first three of the four options listed here. The first option may not actually be open for some learners, given reports that certain public schools do not allow learners to repeat Grade 12, though policy appears to establish repetition as a right<sup>20</sup>. Repetition in Grade 12 in public schools is in fact rather low, at around 5% of enrolled learners repeating, compared to figures of over 15% in grades 9 to 11<sup>21</sup>. This suggests that the first option is not extensively followed.

The second option may also be a bit misleading as it seems around half of part-time learners have been writing their examinations at a school, often the school they originally attended, and not a separate adult centre<sup>22</sup>. There thus appear to be options to be a part-time candidate while maintaining a relationship with the original school.

The separate DBE web page titled ‘**Senior Certificate**’<sup>23</sup> provides further information. This page seems not to be linked to the ‘Second Chance Programme’ page, though it should be. The ‘Senior Certificate’ page makes a critical point clear, namely that the Senior Certificate (SC) can permit entry into university studies. The original purpose of the SC appears to be to

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<sup>20</sup> Macupe, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Department of Basic Education (2016: 14) says around 5%, while Department of Basic Education (2019a: 26) says around 10%. The fact that the latter figure is higher is very likely due to the fact that this statistic (but not the earlier 5%) includes independent schools.

<sup>22</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2016: 59.

<sup>23</sup> [www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/SeniorCertificate.aspx](http://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/SeniorCertificate.aspx).

facilitate the transition from the old (un-amended) SC that existed before 2008, and the NSC introduced in that year. The intention was clearly to provide opportunities to, for instance, candidates who wanted to build on their 2007 SC results in subsequent years. However, it appears that increasingly the purpose of the SC is to provide options for youths who attempted the NSC, but whose SBA results expired, or who dropped out of school before Grade 12 in the last decade. Apart from the SC not requiring SBA results, a further key distinction from the NSC is that the SC does not require the subject life orientation, which in the case of the NSC is based entirely on SBA, meaning there is no examination. The SC is thus comprised of six subjects, and not seven as in the case of the NSC.

As discussed in section 5, public ‘community colleges’, the officially correct name for adult centres, play an important role in assisting youths attempting to obtain the Senior Certificate.

The following on the ‘Senior Certificate’ page confirms that NSC credits for whole subjects, so examination plus SBA results, are transferable to the SC.

In the case of learners, who have attempted the National Senior Certificate examination, but were unable to complete all the subject requirements, and have exhausted the three year validity period allowed for the School Based Assessment (SBA), such candidates will have all their previous credits recognised.

The ‘Senior Certificate’ webpage explains that one must be at least age 21 to be admitted in the examination. A clarification such as one needs to have turned 21 by, for instance 1 May of the year in which one is writing the May/June examinations is needed. It seems clear that SC candidates can only write the mid-year examinations, not the year-end examinations (though in 2020 this has changed due to the pandemic, according to other sources, though this is not reflected on the ‘Senior Certificate’ page). On application, exceptions to the age rule can be granted according to the page. The SC candidate must have passed Grade 9 (or Standard 7 in the old system), and have proof of this in the form of a school report. Registration can be manual or online, and a deadline of 31 January 2020 is given for this. Manual registration should occur at education district offices. Registration forms provided through the webpage indicate one thing which could leave youths confused. These forms require one to have the signature of the ‘centre manager’ of the examination centre at which one wants to write one’s examinations. The page refers to ‘designated examination centres determined by the Provincial Education Department’. These centres can also be determined by ‘independent assessment bodies’. As is explained below, details on these centres are not always easy to obtain, even on the provincial department websites. In 2019, when the May/June examinations were held for the first time, it appears they were held both in ordinary secondary schools and other centres<sup>24</sup>. The registration forms suggest there is no registration fee.

Some googling takes one to a key e-government service at [www.eservices.gov.za](http://www.eservices.gov.za), whose front page says ‘Welcome to the new e-Government Portal’. To test the service, the author of the current report registered personally. This worked well, and led to a menu of services, including ‘Matric services’. That led to three options: ‘Re-Issue’, ‘Re-Mark/Re-Check’ and ‘Registration’. The last of these takes one to registration for the SC (but not the NSC). A message said the period for registration was not currently open, which is what one would expect.

Returning to the ‘Senior Certificate’ page, some key information one would need to gauge the difficulty of obtaining the SC, relative to the NSC, is provided. Once again, it is made clear that the SC draws only from examination results, not SBA. The past examination papers made available on the page make it clear that the SC and NSC use the same examination papers.

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<sup>24</sup> This seems clear from the high number of centres reported in SAnews (2019a), as well as the fact that secondary schools are listed as centres in Umalusi’s (2019) quality assurance report on the 2019 SC examinations.

According to a key policy document, *A résumé of subjects for the Senior Certificate, Report 550 (2016/03)*, a link to which is provided on the page, the SC examinations cover the official languages, as for the NSC, but just 13 of the 30 non-language subjects one finds in the NSC. The 13 non-language subjects are ones taken by large numbers of learners in the case of the NSC, though interestingly two relatively small subjects are approved SC subjects: computer applications technology and information technology. Non-official languages cannot be selected by SC candidates.

The rules for qualifying for the SC are stated as follows on the page ‘Senior Certificate’:

Pass three subjects at 40%, one of which must be an official language at Home Language level.

Pass two subjects at 30%, one of which must be an official language at First Additional or Home Language level.

Obtain a subminimum of 20% in the sixth subject.

This is very similar to the NSC requirements. One difference, in relation to the second paragraph, is that the NSC requires *three* additional subjects to be passed at the 30% level. This simply reflects the fact that for the NSC the subject life orientation is counted, and this is a subject passed by virtually 100% of candidates, according to the official 2019 examinations report of the DBE. The third paragraph above, requiring a minimum of 20% in the worst subject, is not a requirement in the NSC. On balance, the SC seems at least as difficult to obtain as the NSC, and is probably harder if one takes into account the self-discipline required to take an examination outside the supporting environment of a regular school.

Further googling takes one to the important Government Notice 633 of 2019 – ideally this policy document should be accessible through, for instance, the ‘Senior Certificate’ page. This policy formalises the replacement of the earlier supplementary examinations by the ‘May/June examination’. It seems that this policy removes a limitation on the number of subjects taken in the May/June examination. It also seems that the October/November examination is limited to only NSC candidates. A key question begged is why SC candidates should not be permitted to participate in these examinations. The terms ‘repeat candidate’ and ‘part-time candidate’ are defined. It seems both apply for both the SC and NSC. A repeat candidate is someone taking a full set of subjects after the initial attempt at obtaining the certificate, while a part-time candidate takes less than the full set, so for instance fewer than six subjects in the case of the SC.

From the above discussion, it seems many questions are answered through national government websites, but several are not. The discussion now turns to other websites, in particular those of the provincial governments, as well as non-government organisations, to see whether further answers can be found. Questions on examination centres and the critical matter of combining credits to produce one’s certificate are key questions that have clearly not been adequately answered so far.

Two provinces known to function relatively well, Gauteng and Western Cape, were explored. In the case of **Gauteng**, [www.gauteng.gov.za](http://www.gauteng.gov.za) has a link to ‘Education’ which leads one to a list of services including ‘Request to combine matric results’. It is a little unclear whether this service covers both the NSC and the SC, but it seems this is the case. The service is about obtaining a ‘replacement certificate’ or a ‘statement of results’. With regard to the latter, it is made clear that ‘The Department does not automatically combine your credits’ from different examinations. One needs to apply for this, and this presumably results in a new and *combined* statement of results. There is a list of requirements for the certificate, apparently to guide users on whether it is now worth applying for a combined statement of results, because this would lead to a certificate. How the conversion from a new statement of results to the actual



certificate is made is not explained. This is a critical gap. The list of requirements could be difficult for users to understand. What would have helped are some examples, or perhaps even a tool where users enter their past examination details and results, and the user then obtains advice on whether he or she has enough credits for a certificate. Applications for the statement can be made at a Gauteng district office, but the [www.eservices.gov.za](http://www.eservices.gov.za) facility is also mentioned for online applications. The problem with the latter is that the three [www.eservices.gov.za](http://www.eservices.gov.za) options referred to previously do not seem to include applying for a new statement of results.

The Rand cost of the application process is not high, according to the Gauteng website:

It will cost you R118.00 for the Replacement certificate, and if you want a statement of results, it will cost you an additional R47.00.

However, the above can be confusing for someone who has never obtained a certificate in the past – so there can be no replacement certificate – but who wants a combined statement of results. The site says the process takes from four to six weeks.

The [www.gauteng.gov.za](http://www.gauteng.gov.za) site also features the link ‘Access Adult Education Training’ which is described as a service to ‘Find all ABET Centres in Gauteng’. However, this leads just to one phone number and an e-mail address.

Turning to the **Western Cape**, [wcedonline.westerncape.gov.za](http://wcedonline.westerncape.gov.za) has an FAQ<sup>25</sup> link which leads one to ‘If I did not obtain my NSC Certificate, what can I do?’. The advice here is that one should register as a ‘private candidate’ at a ‘private education institution’. This suggests that there are no public services for second-chance youths. Registering as a private candidate must nonetheless occur physically at the Western Cape Education Department headquarters in Cape Town. If this is correct, then this obviously implies considerable transport costs for youths, in particular those outside the provincial capital. A link ‘Exams information’ takes one to a set of relatively informative pages, one of which, ‘Frequently Asked Questions for May/June candidates’, has the following relating to the shift of the May/June examinations to October/November during 2020:

*I entered for only 3 subjects for the May/June 2020 examination, but now that I have more time to study, can I register for additional subjects for the November 2020 examination? No. Learners will not be allowed to register for new subjects.*

*Where will SC (adult) matric learners and part time learners write their examinations in November 2020? The writing venues will be confirmed later in the year. The Western Cape Education Department will make every effort to place learners at writing venues that are easily accessible and on public transport routes. However, due to the large number of learners writing this examination, learner placement will be made according to the space available.*

Though little information is provided on the ‘writing venues’, this is still a bit more than what has been provided elsewhere. On a page titled ‘Application for the issue of Certificates’, the following appears:

The WCED (Directorate Examinations Administration) facilitates:

Issue of certificates (see list below): This services is available only for clients who reside within the Western Cape (regardless of the Education Department where the qualification was obtained)

where results are unavailable to the WCED, clients are referred to the respective province where the examination was written.

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<sup>25</sup> Frequently asked questions.

A question would be what the following means: ‘where results are unavailable to the WCED’. How likely is it that results from other provinces are unavailable? Is this the norm, which one would expect if there is no national information system to share results? Or is this about exceptions in the system?

Does any non-government organisation provide a frequently updated and well-constructed ‘one stop shop’ website with information for second-chance youths? This is a key question for the current report. While sites such as [educonnect.co.za](http://educonnect.co.za) and [www.matric.co.za](http://www.matric.co.za) provide some information, many of the gaps identified above remain. Moreover, it seems that in the case of these two sites certain commercial interests are being promoted. While the private sector can provide important services to youths, what youths also need is an information source which is both comprehensive and is clearly not biased towards selling one particular private service.

The information presented in this section is complex. The following table attempts to sum it up.

**Table 2: Summary of the second-chance rules**

Certificate	National Senior Certificate (NSC)	Senior Certificate (SC)
Who registers	Youths whose school-based assessment (SBA) results have not passed their three-year expiry date.	Any youth aged at least 21 (not clear at what point in the year this applies), and who has successfully completed Grade 9.
When examinations are written	Either in October/November, or May/June.	Only on May/June.
Subjects available	Official languages, non-official languages, and 30 non-language subjects.	As for the NSC, but <i>not</i> non-official languages and only 13 non-language subjects.
Subjects required for the certificate	Seven, life orientation being a compulsory subject.	Six, as life orientation is not available.
Academic requirements	Six subjects must be passed, of which three with at least a 40% mark.	Essentially the same.
University admission	Qualification for Bachelors-level studies is possible with sufficiently good results.	The same.
Basis for one's subject results	Written examination and school-based assessment.	Just written examination.
Registration	It seems the school one originally attended may assist, but where this does not occur, online information on its own regarding registration is somewhat unclear.	This seems clear, and there is an online registration option. Before registration, the candidate must obtain the written agreement of the examination centre manager that the candidate will write at that centre. This could imply travel and other costs for the youth.
Maximum number of subjects for which one can register	It seems there is now no limit (though previously there was).	It seems there is no limit.
Changing one's selection of subjects	It is not clear whether one can change this between one examination period and another, but it seems one cannot do this.	Not clear, but it seems there is flexibility.
Registration fee	Not clear, probably none.	None.
Where examination is written	This could be a school, but other centres are also used. Details are not clear. In Western Cape, it may be the case that only private centres are used for all second-chance youths.	This could be a school, but other centres are also used. Details are not clear.
Is the best subject result ever obtained always used?	Not clear.	Not clear.
Information on whether one qualifies for the certificate	One needs to apply for a combined statement of results from the provincial department, but it is not clear if this statement simply provides the subject results, or if it also indicates whether one's results are sufficient for the certificate or, for instance, a Bachelors-level pass.	As for the NSC. Subjects passed within the NSC system can be counted when building one's credits for the SC.
Obtaining the certificate	How one takes a statement of all one's results, when sufficient, and converts that to the certificate is not made clear.	The same.

What can be confusing for someone searching for information online is the proposed **National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA)**. The NASCA was conceived as a Matric for adults, with formal specifications appearing in Government Notice 658 of 2014, issued by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The decision by the DBE to continue with the ‘amended’ Senior Certificate beyond the expiry of the original SC, clearly reduces the need for the NASCA, as the SC can also be viewed as a Matric for adults. Yet there seems to be no formal statement that the SC eclipses the NASCA. Some recent online information suggests that the NASCA will indeed be issued for the first time in 2021. Yet DHET’s 2020/21 annual plan makes no mention of this. A part of the uncertainty seems to arise out of a lack of alignment between DBE and DHET. The envisaged NASCA, like the existing NSC and SC, is a qualification on level 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). While the NSC carries 130 credits, NASCA carries 120 credits. A 2019 media article<sup>26</sup> attributes the uncertainty around the NASCA to budget and capacity constraints in the adult education area within government.

### 4.3 Educational support to second-chance youths

It is beyond the scope of the current report to provide an in-depth evaluation of the educational materials and support which second-chance youths can easily access. A brief overview of what was found online is nonetheless provided here. The overriding conclusion is that there has been considerable investment in the necessary materials. However, the problems seen with respect to registration and certification are repeated here: there is too often a lack of clarity around who resources are intended for, how they should be used, when they were last updated, and how one finds further information. Moreover, in the case of educational materials, what can be considered essential is occasional and structured evaluations to ensure that materials which have been developed are accessible to typical youths, for instance in terms of the online data required, and their actual effectiveness.

The ‘Second Chance Programme’ page discussed in section 4.2 is strongly focussed on educational materials. The volume of materials available is large, but it could be difficult for youths to select what is most useful for them, given how little guidance there is in navigating the resources. The page mentions that there are 50 venues, mostly in rural and semi-rural areas, where face-to-face classes can be accessed. The ideal would be to provide more details on these venues, but users are advised to contact district offices for more information. There is of course the risk that the information could be old. There are no date stamps linked to specific pieces of information.

The DBE page provides links to two substantial initiatives, both aimed at providing video-based support to youths preparing for the Grade 12 examinations. One is Interactive Telematic Education, and the other the Internet Broadcast Project.

**Interactive Telematic Education** is a collaboration between the Western Cape Education Department and the University of Stellenbosch. Unfortunately, information on how youths could access this programme is not easily available. It appears tuition occurs via live video links with tutors. Recordings from past classes are not available, it seems, though conceivably even recordings could be helpful to students. It appears there are schools which students can physically go to in order to access the live and interactive broadcasts, but details on when this next occurs could not be found. Access through a smartphone also seems possible, but again details are thin.

The **Internet Broadcast Project** is a joint project of the Free State Department of Education and the University of the Free State. A large volume of lecture videos is available online. For instance, in the case of Grade 12 history, there are 13 hours of lecturing across 15 videos. This

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<sup>26</sup> Oberholzer, 2019.

level of investment occurred for a further eight subjects. Lecturers are subject advisors from the education faculty at the university. Videos are available in English and Afrikaans. A superficial viewing of a few lectures suggests they are technically sound and educationally relevant. Videos, which are typically around 200 megabytes, must be downloaded before they are viewed. All the physical science videos come to 7 gigabytes, implying users must have relatively good data storage. While the Internet Broadcast Project has a YouTube channel, its videos aimed at Grade 12 learners appear not to be there. This means, among other things, that it is not possible to check how often these videos have been viewed.

## 5 The magnitudes of the challenges in South Africa

As seen in section 2, there are currently important uncertainties and gaps with regard to second-chance statistics. But even with regard to youth pathways in general, there are important information gaps. This section puts forward a picture that is arguably as accurate as possible, given the statistics which are currently available. A discussion of the various sources informs the diagram seen below titled ‘Youth Pathways’. This diagram focusses on annual flows among youths, defined as young adults aged 15 to 34, in recent years. There is no attempt here to reflect the impacts of the 2020 pandemic, which are uncertain. The intention is very much to reflect the situation in the years before the pandemic. A diagram such as this one inevitably mixes cohorts to some extent, because the aim is to use recent statistics. The most recent statistics on dropping out before Grade 9 will obviously reflect the experiences of a later birth cohort compared to the most recent statistics on, say, entry into university studies. Obviously, all these statistics are changing somewhat over time. One can think of the diagram as representing what youths, of whatever age, *in the absence of the pandemic*, could expect as their reality in the near future.

The point of departure is successful completion of primary schooling, or Grade 7. For these kinds of statistics, the **General Household Survey of 2018** serves as the best recent data source. According to this source, 97% of young South Africans were completing primary schooling<sup>27</sup>. The method employed here was to examine successful completion of Grade 7 by all ages in the range 15 to 35, and to select the second-highest value. Selecting the highest value could increase the risk of using an outlier resulting from an unusual sample. The approach of using a maximum, or almost maximum value over single ages is optimal for this kind of analysis, where there is no neat correspondence in the real world between ages and completion of specific levels of education. This approach has been used by Africa Check when this fact-checking organisation examined South African attainment statistics<sup>28</sup>.

The General Household Survey (GHS) data point to females being 51% of those who successfully complete primary schooling. What is interesting is that this statistic rises as the education level rises. In Grade 12, females are 56% of NSC examination candidates. This is due to stronger performance by females in school, and higher levels of dropping out among boys. The latter can be seen in the low female statistics on the dropping out flow lines in the diagram. The better performance of females in schools has been documented by Spaul and Makaluza (2019).

In order to translate the GHS percentages to thousands of youths of one age cohort, a critical assumption was employed. It was assumed that each age cohort consists of 932,000 individuals. This is in fact the average per single age cohort in the age range 15 to 19 of the 2019 mid-year population estimates of Stats SA<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Own analysis for the current report. The GHS microdata are available through the DataFirst data portal ([www.datafirst.uct.ac.za](http://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za)).

<sup>28</sup> Africa Check, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Statistics South Africa, 2019: 10.

To obtain global and comprehensive NSC figures, **various data sources on the NSC** are required.

With respect to candidates writing the NSC examinations, the 2016 to 2019 annual average for full-time candidates, counting both public and non-public examinations, was about 523,000 examination-takers per year. This is after one removes around 30,000 full-time candidates who are repeaters in the public system, meaning they are not sitting for the NSC for the first time<sup>30</sup>. The 523,000 figure moreover includes around 13,000 candidates sitting for non-public NSC examinations<sup>31</sup>.

In 2019, females made up 56% of all full-time candidates in the public system. The diagram applies this percentage to the 523,000 examination-takers.

A somewhat misunderstood topic is the number of youths who get to obtain the NSC. The misunderstanding arises mainly out of the fact that NSCs obtained by *full-time examination candidates in the public system immediately following the October/November examination* is widely reported on, and is often assumed to be the total NSCs obtained, when this is not quite the case. For now, the Senior Certificate is kept out of the discussion.

Additional NSCs, beyond the ‘headline’ numbers published by the Department of Basic Education in January of each year would be accounted for by the following three categories: (1) full-time candidates in the public system who qualify for the NSC only after improving their subject marks in the May/June examination; (2) part-time students in the public system who obtain enough credits to obtain the NSC; (3) and NSCs obtained through one of the private boards, the largest by far being the Independent Examinations Board (IEB). A DBE research report<sup>32</sup> from 2019, referred to as the ‘comprehensive view report’ below, indicates that categories (1) and (2) raise the number of NSCs obtained each year by around 39,000. However, it is also necessary to *subtract* around 4,000 public NSCs, which are NSCs obtained not for the first time. The aim is to understand how many youths get to obtain the NSC. A youth who obtains two NSCs is just one youth. The private board NSCs raise the figure by a further 13,000 approximately. The ‘headline’ figures thus under-report NSC passes by around 48,000 (39,000 minus 4,000 plus 13,000).

The annual average NSCs for full-time candidates in the public system across the years 2016 to 2019 was about 414,000 NSCs<sup>33</sup>. The three thick orange lines connecting the boxes ‘National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations’ and ‘NSC’ represent youths per year obtaining the NSC, at the three different performance levels. The three lines, from the top, represent 210,000, 126,000 and 126,000 youths, meaning a total of 462,000 (previous 414,000 plus 48,000). These three lines mean, respectively, youths obtaining an NSC allowing for Bachelors studies at a university, an NSC allowing for Diploma studies at a university, and an NSC not allowing for university studies.

From the 2019 examinations report, one can see that 55% of full-time candidates in the public system obtaining the NSC were female, and an equal 55% of these candidates obtaining a Bachelors-level NSC were female. Analysis behind the ‘comprehensive view report’, relating to the 2017 examinations, points to females constituting 52% of Diploma-level NSCs and 56% of NSCs without any university endorsement.

There are many part-time NSC examination candidates. These candidates’ results are included in the NSC numbers referred to above. The number of part-time examination takers was about

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<sup>30</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2020; Gustafsson , 2019a: Table 2.

<sup>31</sup> [www.ieb.co.za](http://www.ieb.co.za).

<sup>32</sup> Gustafsson, 2019a.

<sup>33</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2020: 40.

170,000 in 2019<sup>34</sup>. It has been at this level for some years. Analysis behind the comprehensive view report points to females making up 60% of part-time candidates. Over 99% of part-time candidates are people who have no certificate yet.

Part-time candidates generally take fewer than the full set of seven subjects, meaning one would expect only a small proportion of these candidates to have accumulated enough credits to obtain the NSC in any one year. In fact, only around 6% of part-time candidates obtain the NSC in any year. Thus, of the 170,000 who write the examinations, around 159,000 are left with just a statement of results, which is what a candidate who does not receive the certificate obtains. The remaining 11,000 obtain a certificate, and of these around 4,500 obtain a Bachelors-level NSC. On average, part-time candidates take 3.1 subjects a year<sup>35</sup>.

One important factor behind the low success rates of part-time students is that in recent years around 30% of them registered (entered) for the examination but did not write an examination<sup>36</sup>. They apparently gave up. In the diagram, these drop-outs are included in the 170,000, as presumably they had the intention to write the examinations and might have done some preparatory studying before abandoning hope.

Official examination reports point to around 84,000 of *full-time* candidates not achieving the NSC. Some 56% of these non-achievers are female.

The official NSC reports, while not providing statistics on attainment by part-time students of the NSC, do have subject-specific statistics for these students. The following two graphs compare full- and part-time students. In Figure 1, it is clear that participation among part-time examination writers in mathematics and physical science is high. This in part reflects the fact that mathematics is a particularly difficult subject (see Figure 2), but also suggests that inflated expectations could be contributing to the non-attainment of a Matric. Students tend to take difficult subjects which they should perhaps avoid, if their aim is to obtain the NSC. In general, science subjects, and not subjects such as history, are subjects which youths tend to repeat through the part-time route. Turning to Figure 2, the performance of part-time students is clearly well below that of full-time student in all subjects. To illustrate, just 30% of part-time students pass economics at the minimum 30% mark level, against 69% of full-time students. Clearly, many part-time students struggle to prepare for the examinations, and some may be repeating subjects which realistically they stand little chance of ever passing.

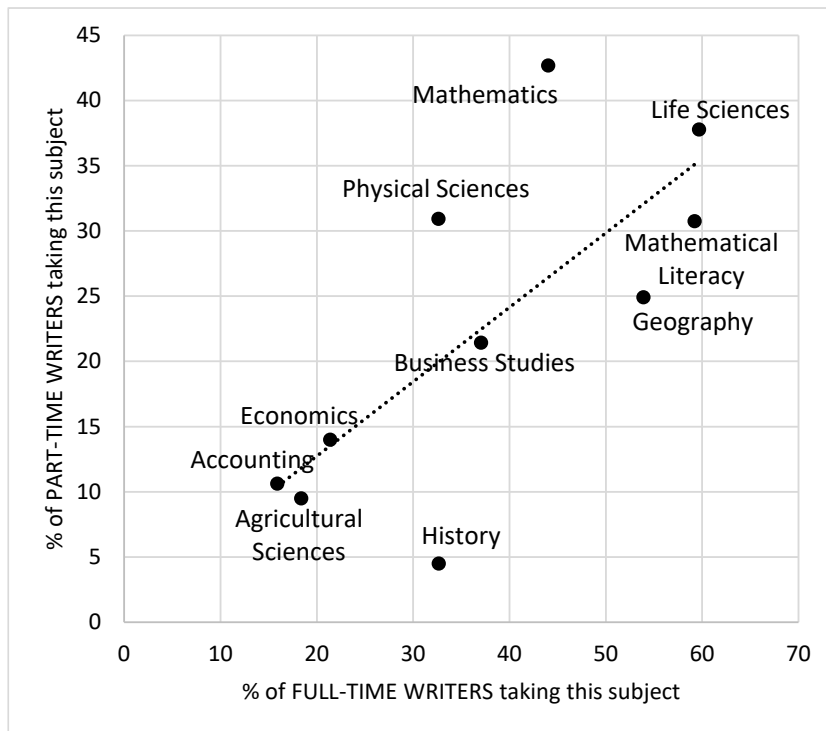
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<sup>34</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2020.

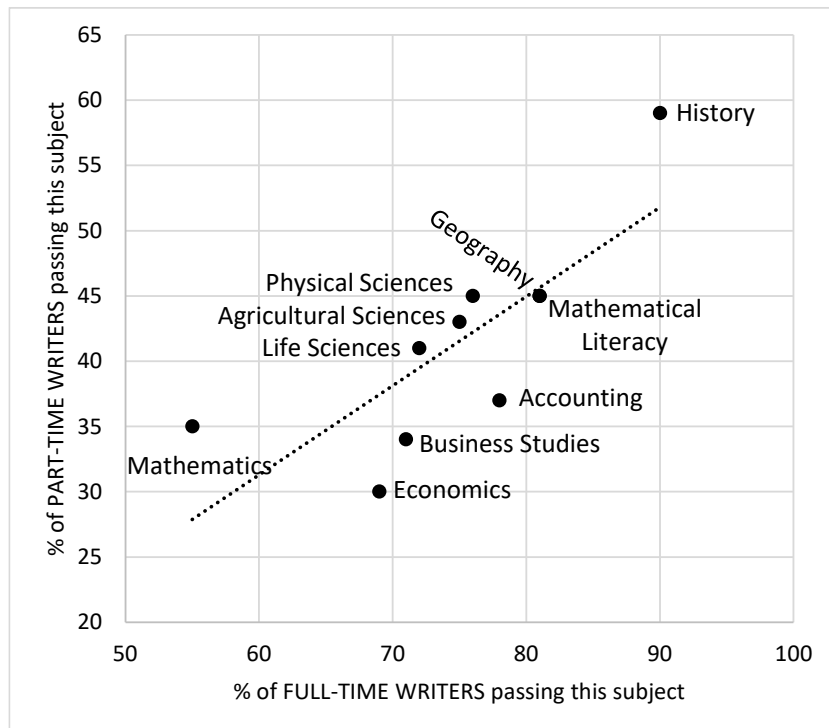
<sup>35</sup> Analysis behind Gustafsson (2019a).

<sup>36</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2019b: 67.

**Figure 1: Subject participation among full- and part-time writers in 2019**



**Figure 2: Percentage passed among full- and part-time writers in 2019**



Note: Geography and Mathematical Literacy carry identical values.

**Various sources on the Senior Certificate** are required to provide clarity on the numbers in relation to this qualification. How many Senior Certificates are obtained each year? There seems to be no formal national or provincial reporting on this, unfortunately. This is also a problem that is seen with regard to NSC ‘second-chancers’. Certification not linked to the high-profile and massive full-time year-end examinations is in general poorly reported on. A page in government’s SAnews (2019b) website indicates that few Senior Certificate



candidates sit for all the required subjects in one examination round. In the 2019 May/June examinations, of 100,825 SC candidates writing the examinations, only 6,952 took ‘the full complement of subjects’, and only 700 of these candidates obtained the certificate, with 186 obtaining Bachelor-level certificates. Thus, around 94,000 did not take the full set of subjects. To obtain a rough idea of how many of the 94,000 obtained the NSC as a result of their participation in the 2019 mid-year examinations, one can use the ratio of NSC recipients to candidates among part-time NSC students. As discussed above, this was found to be around 6%. This suggests around 5,632 of the 94,000 obtain the SC, and if one adds the 700, this gives about 6,000 certificates a year in total. If one then imagines that the ratio of Bachelors-level SCs to SCs in general is half among the 5,632, relative to the 700, based on the assumption that ‘part-time’ SC students are likely to be less motivated than those who take all subjects at once, one arrives at about 1,000 Bachelors-level certificates. These very rough estimates inform the numbers in the diagram in relation to the Senior Certificate.

Where are the 100,825 SC candidates coming from? A critical question is whether they are youths who have already attempted the NSC, and been in Grade 12 in a school, and to what extent they are youths who left school before Grade 12. There seem to be no publicly available statistics in this regard. A Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) report<sup>37</sup> indicates that every year up to 2016 (and presumably beyond that), there were between 70,000 and 80,000 ‘Grade 12’ students enrolled in community colleges<sup>38</sup>, public institutions whose role is partly to help youths who have dropped out of school. It is likely that the great majority of these people would be youths no older than 35. These would be some of the 100,825 students referred to previously. In other words, over half of Senior Certificate students appear to be receiving some kind of institutional support, through community colleges. The extent to which the NSC caters for ‘second-chancers’ who have at least attempted the full-time NSC examination, suggests that the SC would be largely catering for youths who have not attempted the NSC. For the diagram, it was assumed that four-fifths of SC candidates belonged in this category.

Unfortunately, the DHET report does not provide examination results for the SC candidates in community colleges. However, it does provide statistics for people receiving ‘ABET Level 4’ qualifications in community colleges. These represent the Grade 9 level. While there is no national Grade 9 certificate in schools, at least not yet, for some years a certificate at this level has existed in the adult education sphere. In 2016, there were around 28,000 people receiving this qualification, three-quarters of whom were female. This is indicated in the diagram. The assumption was thus made that all the certified people would be age 35 or younger.

The diagram depicts an annual total of 468,000 Matrics, counting both NSCs and SCs. This 468,000 divided by one youth cohort of 932,000, equals 50%, below the 55% value one gets from a completely unrelated source, namely the General Household Survey data<sup>39</sup>. This gap, while not too large, needs to be explained. It could be the result of over-reporting among GHS respondents, but it could also be explained by an under-count in the diagram. In particular, there is little clarity around the SC numbers. A further possibility is that the denominator, the size of age cohort, used for the diagram is too high. There have in the past been wide discrepancies between official population statistics and what data gathered from schools suggest population by age should be<sup>40</sup>.

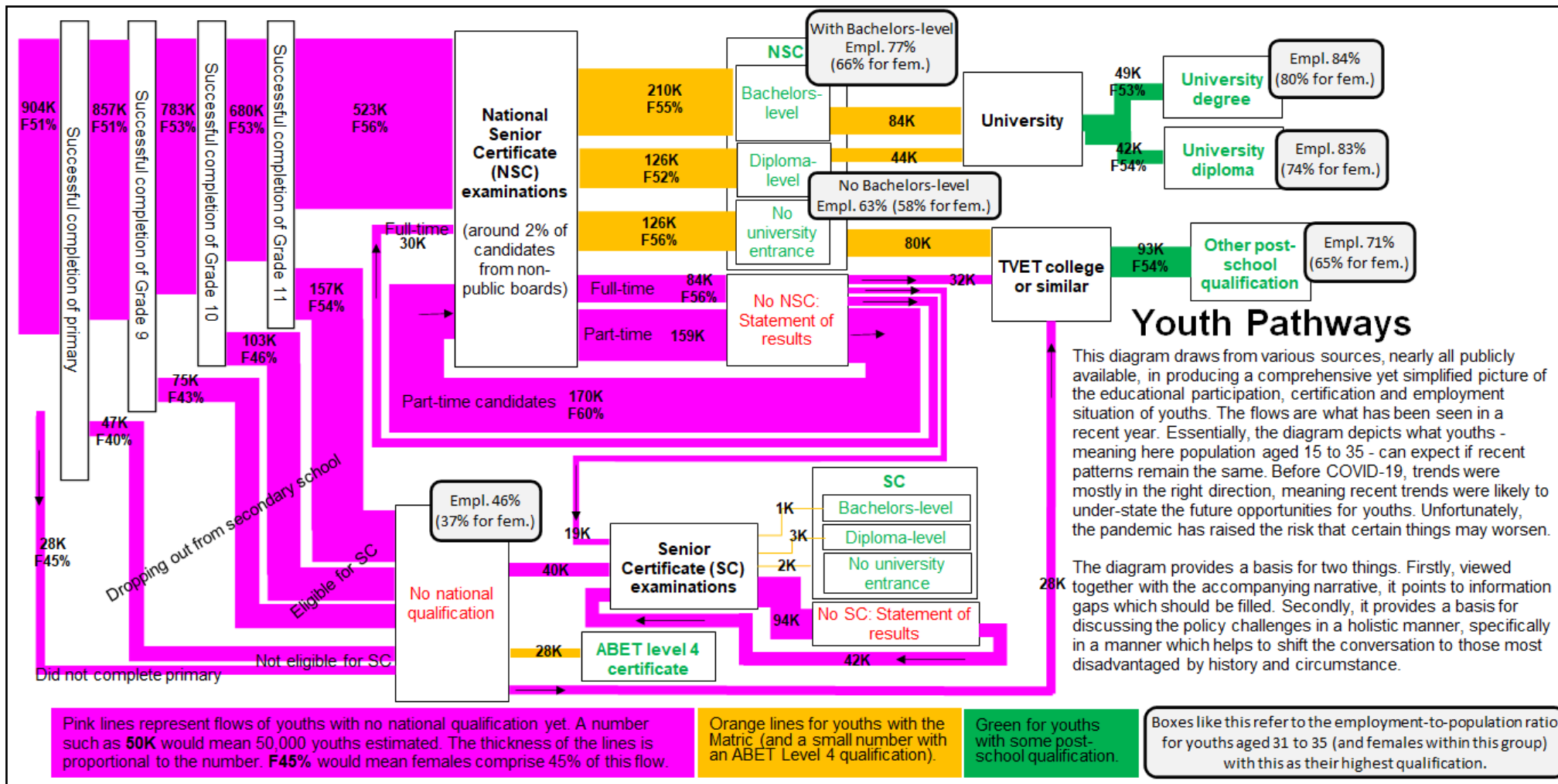
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<sup>37</sup> Department of Higher Education and Training, 2018: 52, 53, 58.

<sup>38</sup> See section 6 for a discussion of the institutional design of the community colleges.

<sup>39</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2020: 14.

<sup>40</sup> Gustafsson, 2012.





Though flows into universities are not a major focus of the current report, this is an important contextual matter. **DHET reports on higher education, analysis of student records derived from schools and universities, and the GHS data** are helpful in this regard. It is useful to begin the analysis with the number of degrees and diplomas obtained from universities among youths. Following the second-highest age-specific value approach described above, the GHS data was used to find the percentage of the population, by age, whose highest qualification was a degree, either an initial degree or some advanced degree. Within the age range up to 35, the highest value was 5.8% at age 33, the next highest value was 5.3% at age 34, and the next highest 5.2% at age 29. The second-highest value of 5.3% was used. This provided some reassurance that one was not selecting a value made exceptionally high due to the GHS sampling, or an age cohort that for some reason experienced an unusually good attainment of the qualification. A similar analysis found that 4.5% of youths attained a diploma from a university. These two percentages, 5.3% and 4.5%, inform the thickness of the green lines flowing from the box 'University'. These percentages translate to a total of 91,000 youths obtaining a university qualification each year. Van der Berg *et al* (2020) triangulate various sources, including household data and DHET statistics, and conclude that each year around 170,000 students obtain a university qualification for the first time. This figure is for all ages. One should bear in mind that South Africans tend to obtain a university qualification comparatively late in life. Age 48 represents the peak, a point at which just under 9% of the population has a university degree – this compares to the 5.3% value for age 34.

How many youths get to enrol as a student at a university? By age 40, 11% of the population has a university qualification, suggesting that by age 35, at the very least this proportion of the population would have entered a university. The GHS 2018 data point to age-specific *enrolment* in a university reaching just 8% – at age 21 – but this is misleading as entering and exiting university occurs at many different ages. A key statistic needed is the university drop-out rate, in the sense of some ratio of youths who enter university without obtaining a university qualification. Van Broekhuizen *et al* (2016) conclude that around ten years ago, 30% of university students did not obtain a qualification within five years. That figure would be lower if one extended the horizon beyond five years. Importantly, Van Broekhuizen *et al*, using student records from school and university, dispute other much higher university drop-out figures. There are good reasons to believe the drop-out situation has not changed much over the last ten years. If anything, there is less dropping out. A drop-out figure of 25% was applied to the 11% qualification attainment figure referred to previously, the conclusion being that 14% of youths become university students. This seems plausible if one looks at the Grade 12 graduation figures, and produces a flow rate from school to university in line with those of Van Broekhuizen *et al* (2016: 26). The diagram takes into consideration that some NSC graduates with a Bachelors-level pass take Diploma studies at a university. This occurs because not all Bachelors-level NSC youths are able to find a position in a Bachelors programme, and because universities tend to give preference to Bachelors-level NSCs, even in the case of Diploma programmes, as these would be the students with the best subject scores.

**DHET reports on college education and the GHS data** help to clarify the situation with regard to post-school qualifications which are not from a university and which are not the Senior Certificate, which some may think of as 'post-school'. It should be clarified that the 'ABET Level 4' qualifications referred to above are not considered part of the 'other post-school qualification' set. This set is thus any non-Matric and non-university qualification *above the Grade 9 level*.

Unfortunately, the kind of student-level analysis available for understanding school to university flows are not available in the case of school to college flows. The GHS 2018 data point to 10% of youths obtaining, as their highest qualification, a post-school qualification that is not from a university, and not the NSC or SC. If one excludes individuals who *explicitly* did not have the NSC or SC beforehand, the 10% figure drops to 9%. But the 10%

figure is about ‘post-school’ qualifications in the sense that, say, someone who left school in Grade 10 and then obtained some vocational certificate, does in fact have a qualification from after school (and beyond Grade 9). Among the 10%, 54% of youths are female.

The percentage of youths with a first national qualification which is *not* the NSC or the SC is a critical figure. Government policies emphasising the need for more vocational training, and the fact that officially TVET colleges are intended to cater largely for youths who have left school *before* Grade 12, both suggest this percentage should rise. Currently it is very low. Apart from the ‘explicit’ 1% referred to above, it can be assumed that some, almost certainly a minority, of GHS respondents with qualifications such as the vocational ‘N’ certificate, do not have the Matric. Because detailed analyses of the flows between schools and colleges are not available, indirect ways of estimating the critical percentage must be employed. Van der Berg *et al* (2020: 29) conclude it is around 3%. Thus, of the 10% of youths obtaining a post-school qualification, around seven-tenths of this, or 7% of the youth population, already had a Matric beforehand. This split between the 3% and 7% is not shown in the diagram.

How many youths get to participate in some post-school non-university institution? It must clearly be well above the aforementioned 10%, as many youths are likely not to complete their training. GHS 2018 data point to up to 8% of an age cohort being enrolled in either a TVET college (5%), some ‘other college’ (2%) or an ABET<sup>41</sup> centre (1%). The latter would be largely the community colleges. A rough estimate of 15% of youths accessing at least for some time a non-university post-school institution was made for the diagram. This implies a completion ratio of 66%. The 15% is split up with respect to source as follows: 3% from youths with no qualification yet, and 12% from youths who have a Matric.

The boxes in the diagram with ‘Empl.’ indicate the percentage of youths aged 31 to 35 who are employed and who have specific educational qualifications. This statistic is commonly referred to as the employment-to-population ratio. The figures were arrived at using the 2019 Quarter 3 **Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) data** of Stats SA<sup>42</sup>. The ratio for both sexes combined, and for just females, are given. Clearly, the higher the qualification, the better the ratio. For those with university degrees it is 84%, while for those with no qualification, it is just 46% (and 37% for women). It is clear that for all qualifications, women experience a lower ratio than men, in contrast to the fact that women tend to be slightly over-represented among holders of specific qualifications. It is important to note that the employment-to-population ratio is not the same as the employment rate, which is the complement of the unemployment rate. To illustrate, Stats SA reports the unemployment rate for university graduates to be 8%, while the diagram indicates that 16% of university graduates – in the age range 31 to 35 – are not employed. A key reason for this discrepancy is that the unemployment rate does not consider those not seeking employment as unemployed. There are many reasons why university graduates may not seek employment, at least for a while, including because they are looking after young children.

One interesting pattern, which seems not to have been picked up in earlier analyses, is the employment advantage of those aged 31 to 35 whose highest qualification is a Matric with a Bachelors-level pass, relative to Matriculants of the same age without a Bachelors-level pass. According to the diagram, the difference is 14 percentage points – 77% minus 63%. These statistics were re-calculated using the QLFS from one year before, Quarter 3 of 2018. A similar pattern emerged, though the gap was smaller, at 8 percentage points – 66% and 58%. That the statistics should move around in this manner should come as no surprise, given how small the sub-sample being analysed is. This also serves as a reminder that individual statistics should be interpreted with caution. What is more important are the general patterns, such as the rising gap between females and males, in favour of females, as one moves up the

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<sup>41</sup> Adult basic education and training.

<sup>42</sup> Available through the DataFirst portal.

levels of attainment, or higher qualifications being associated with substantially better employment prospects.

In the case of the effect of having a Bachelors-level pass, relative to other Matrics, the difference in terms of employment is statistically significant, whether one uses the 2019 or the 2018 data<sup>43</sup>. How should one interpret this difference? There are two plausible explanations. One is that employers pay attention not only to whether someone has a Matric certificate, but also the quality of the Matric in terms of subject marks and the presence of a Bachelors-level pass. The other is that youths with a Bachelors-level pass are more likely than other Matriculants to have spent some time in a university, even if they dropped out without obtaining a university qualification. Even one or two years spent at a university are likely to broaden someone's networks and skills base, and to improve the person's employment prospects. This is important, and counters the common perception that a youth who drops out of university is a wasted investment. In reality, the dynamics are more complex, and the gap in the employment-to-population ratio discussed here seems to support this.

As one might expect, employment prospects improve with age, meaning that if instead of the age 31 to 35 range used for the diagram one uses a lower age range, statistics worsen. Younger people have fewer networks which could lead to a job, and are of course more likely to be studying. For instance, the employment ratio for those with no qualification aged 21 to 25 is just 20%, compared to the 46% in the diagram. The figure for youths with a basic Matric, with no Bachelors-level, is 27% for those aged 21 to 25, against the 63% seen in the diagram.

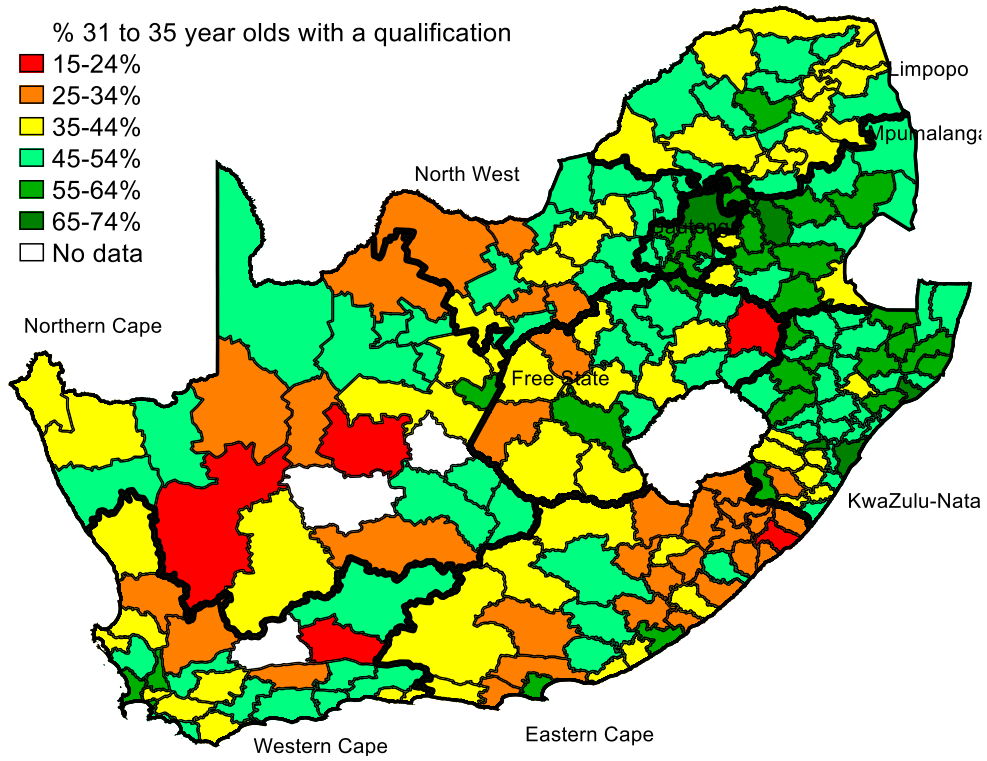
The **2016 Community Survey** data collected by Statistics South Africa provides an opportunity to break down education-related statistics by municipality. While these data are half a decade old, the general patterns are unlikely to have changed much, and maps such as the ones presented below do not seem to have been produced previously. The first map focusses on the percentage of youths with any national qualification, the second on the percentage with a post-school qualification. A general pattern of better levels of education in urban areas is clear. In both maps, all metropolitan municipalities are placed in one of the two top categories. However, some deviations from the general pattern stand out. Youths in northern KwaZulu-Natal are remarkably well-educated, given how poor and rural this part of the country is. This is in line with other evidence pointing to rather high matriculation ratios in this province as a whole<sup>44</sup>.

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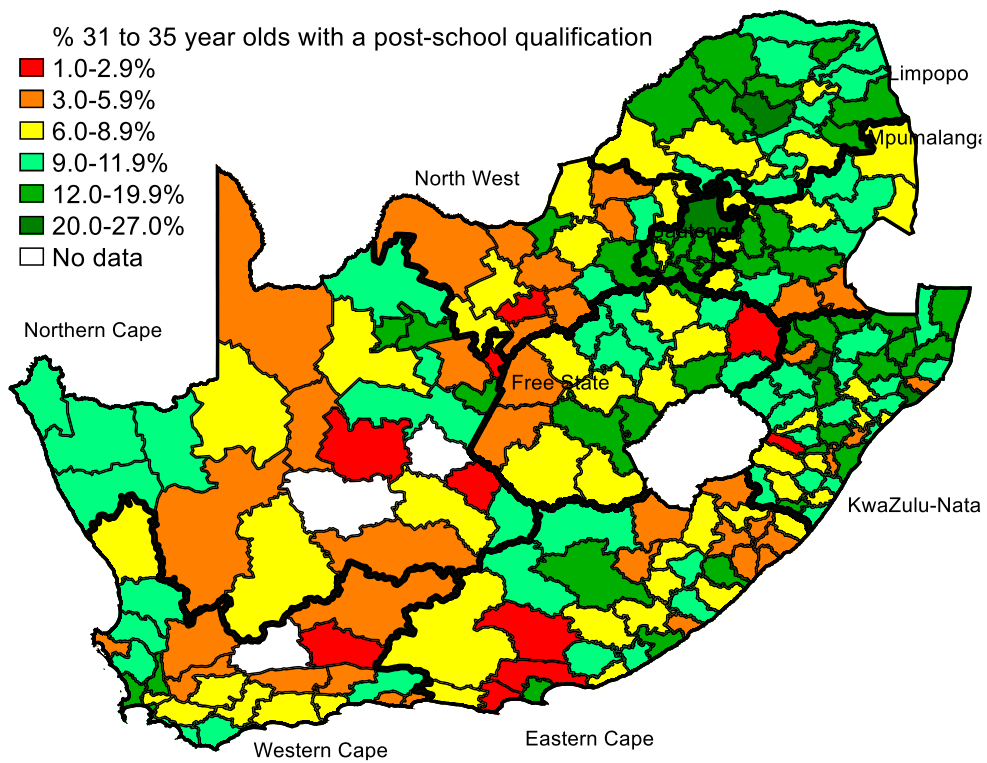
<sup>43</sup> A logistic regression of being employed on having a Bachelors-level pass, with the analysis restricted to youths aged 31 to 35 with Matric as their highest qualification, yields a coefficient on the explanatory variable with  $p$  equal to 0.020 in the case of the 2019 data, and 0.058 in the case of the 2019 data. The lower the  $p$  value, the less the uncertainty, and anything below 0.050 is generally considered highly statistically significant.

<sup>44</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2020: 15.

**Figure 3: Attainment of any national qualification (2016)**



**Figure 4: Attainment of a national post-school qualification (2016)**



Unfortunately, the publicly available Community Survey 2016 dataset does not include employment variables, so it was not possible to produce similar maps dealing with this topic.

## 6 A global perspective on upper secondary opportunities

Examining the upper secondary certification processes and second-chance opportunities of other countries can help to provide insights into what to pursue, and what to avoid, in South Africa. Two developing countries, Brazil and Namibia, displaying some form of innovation in the area of second-chance opportunities, were selected for the discussion of this section.

**Brazil** is an interesting case because the upper secondary examination is taken many times over by youths, as they attempt to improve their results. Moreover, Brazil experiences similar development and inequality challenges to South Africa, and both countries collaborate on a variety of governance issues through BRICS<sup>45</sup>.

Brazil's 'Matric' examination is the ENEM<sup>46</sup>, said to be the second-largest examination, in terms of candidates, in the world. The largest is China's end-of-secondary Gaokao. In recent years, up to nine million candidates have taken part in Brazil's ENEM in a year, which is almost three times the number of youths in one age cohort. This clearly points to repeated participation. If South Africa's Matric experienced similar levels of 'second-chancing', there would be three million candidates a year, as opposed to the current approximately 800,000 (see section 5). In Brazil, the number of ENEM candidates is around twice the number of learners enrolled in the final year of secondary – in South Africa this ratio is around 1.3. Separate ENEM statistics point to around 60% of candidates already having left school<sup>47</sup>.

ENEM is structured very differently to South Africa's Matric<sup>48</sup>. ENEM is written once a year, on the same two consecutive days across the whole country, the two days being a Saturday and Sunday in November. On each day, candidates spend around five hours in the examination room. The examination is organised according to four core areas of competency: languages, mathematics, natural sciences and social studies. The only subject choice available to candidates is English or Spanish as one's foreign language, Portuguese being the national language and hence compulsory. This appears to be the only subject choice made within the curriculum at the upper secondary level, which includes 15 mandatory subjects<sup>49</sup>. Each of the examination's four competency-specific sections has 45 multiple choice questions and requires an essay. All questions must be answered, except where one of the two foreign languages is chosen.<sup>50</sup>

The relatively low costs per student, driven by the limited examination sittings and the fact that multiple-choice questions are less costly to mark, makes ENEM interesting with respect to South Africa's proposed national Grade 9 examination. There is clearly a need to reduce the costs of this examination to levels well below the Grade 12 examinations, where just marking per student comes to around R2,500 per candidate per year<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

<sup>46</sup> Exame Nacional do Ensino Medio.

<sup>47</sup> <http://portal.inep.gov.br/sinopses-estatisticas-do-enem>.

<sup>48</sup> Basic characteristics of ENEM, in English, can be found at the page titled 'ENEM in Brazil' available at <https://www.brazileducation.info/tests/higher-education-tests/enem-in-brazil.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Schwartzman and Knobel, 2016.

<sup>50</sup> A past examination question paper is available at [http://download.inep.gov.br/educacao\\_basica/enem/provas/2018/1DIA\\_01\\_AZUL\\_BAIXA.pdf](http://download.inep.gov.br/educacao_basica/enem/provas/2018/1DIA_01_AZUL_BAIXA.pdf). It is mostly in Portuguese, but includes the English language questions, including a question using a South African poem dealing with the existence of different forms of English!

<sup>51</sup> SABC, 2018.



Registering as a candidate for the ENEM appears to be much easier than registering for the Matric in South Africa, at least as far as second-chance candidates are concerned. Above all, before the candidate enters the examination venue, all interaction with the authorities occurs online. This makes sense insofar as what any examination system must avoid at all costs is fraud in the form of one person having another person write the examination on his behalf. What is needed to avoid this is proper verification of the individual at the examination event. Online registration by the individual student, which is the only form of registration allowed in ENEM, is open during twelve days in March. A registration card is posted to the candidate, but the registration card can also be printed off a web page. During twelve days in April, candidates can upload information that would exempt them from paying the ENEM fee, which is around 300 Rand. Candidates who are enrolled in the final grade at a public school enjoy exemption, and this is secured when the candidate submits the school's unique identification number. Brazil has a relatively well-functioning learner record system, so the national authorities are able to verify whether an individual is in a particular school. Candidates not in a school but from poor households are also exempted. In this case, the education authorities rely on information regarding the receipt of a government poverty relief grant in the household. Candidates who are not exempt from the fee must pay this by a certain date.

There is no minimum pass threshold in ENEM. The system simply produces a statement of how competent one is in each of the four competency areas, where this is measured on a scale of 0 to 1000. Around 300,000 places in public universities for first-year students become available each year. A crucial role of ENEM is to determine who secures a place. No mark threshold applies. The determination is based on the ranking, in terms of ENEM results, of those who apply.

Every candidate must attend both examination sittings of the current year. It is not possible, for instance, to rewrite just two of the four subjects.

After the examination, the results of individuals become accessible online. The certification process is low-cost and very different to South Africa's. It appears that in the case of candidates still at a school, the school uses the online results together with other performance information from the school, to create a certificate issued by the school, but which includes details of the ENEM results. In the case of candidates outside school, it appears as if there is no centralised printing and distribution of certificates. Candidates must instead print their statement of results appearing online. Verification of authenticity occurs through a vital government online verification site<sup>52</sup>, where anyone can verify the ENEM results of someone. One enters the unique identification number found on the printed copy, and the site provides the verified examination results, and the identity of the candidate, online. The anti-fraud measures are thus entirely based on the unique identification number and online processes. There is no incentive to falsify a paper certificate.

South Africa did in the past have an automated online verification site for the Matric, run by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), where users could check the verified Matric results of an individual at no charge. This system, known as SAQA VeriSearch, or SAQA Verifications Service<sup>53</sup>, still exists but is now not as easy to use. Those enquiring must fill in forms, obtain the consent of the individual concerned, pay a fee of around R100 per Matric, and wait a few days for the verification to occur. This clearly involves some manual processing by SAQA. It seems as if the changes occurred to protect the privacy of individuals. A problem with the automated service which had existed previously was that it required only the individual's national 13-digit identity number, not a separate code seen on the certificate, as in the case of ENEM. Clearly, if SAQA followed ENEM's approach, a more efficient

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<sup>52</sup> [https://suap.ifrn.edu.br/comum/autenticar\\_documento](https://suap.ifrn.edu.br/comum/autenticar_documento).

<sup>53</sup> <http://verisearch.octoplus.co.za/ClientMenuPage.aspx>.

verification process, which largely protects the privacy of individuals, would be possible. This could facilitate recruitment processes in the labour market.

**Namibia** is an interesting case as, unlike Brazil, it has an education system very similar to South Africa's, yet with certain innovations which South Africa could learn from. The Namibian College of Open Learning, or NAMCOL, is a public body aimed in part at providing second-chance opportunities with respect to not just the Namibian 'Matric', officially known as the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate (NSSC), but also the Junior Secondary Certificate, linked to Grade 10. NAMCOL is discussed as an interesting case study in a recent UNESCO review of lifelong learning opportunities in developing countries<sup>54</sup>.

What is noteworthy is that the Grade 10 certificate in Namibia is being phased out<sup>55</sup>. The reasons for this are not completely clear, but it seems as if Namibians, like many South Africans, believe that a pre-Grade 12 qualification dilutes the interest in obtaining a Grade 12 qualification. The current report has argued that such a position is unfortunate in that it ignores typical development pathways. Namibia in fact introduced the Grade 10 qualification shortly after independence to ensure that youths would not leave school with no qualification. Abolishing that qualification will result in more youths with no qualification.

Namibia's enrolment and attainment situation is a little worse than South Africa's. Grade 10 enrolments as a percentage of an age cohort is 105%, the figure being 56% in Grade 12. South Africa's figures are somewhat higher, in part due to very high levels of grade repetition in Grade 10. Statistics on successful completion of the two grades in Namibia are not readily available. Unpublished figures drawing from Namibia's 2011 national census<sup>56</sup> point to around 33% of youths aged 24 completing the Grade 12 certificate, the figure for the Grade 10 certificate being 60% (also using age 24). Age 24 is chosen here as this is the age at which these attainment figures peak, suggesting many attain these levels quite late in life. South Africa figures from 2013 would be 70% of youths aged 25 successfully completing Grade 10, and 47% of youths aged 25 successfully completing Grade 12<sup>57</sup>. South Africa's attainment has thus been higher, but as in the case of Namibia, the fact that peaks are found at relatively high ages confirms that youths attained these levels rather late.

NAMCOL's 'Matric' second-chancers amount to just over 50% of a youth cohort. In South Africa, community college Grade 12 second-chancers come to around 10% of an age cohort<sup>58</sup>. NAMCOL thus plays an especially large role in providing opportunities for youths. NAMCOL enrolments for the Grade 10 certificate are about half that for the Grade 12 certificate<sup>59</sup>.

NAMCOL's system displays many similarities with South Africa's. NAMCOL runs 20 centres across the country. Even relative to population, South Africa is better endowed with its approximately 3,300 adult centres catering in part for 'second-chancers'. In both countries, these centres tend to use the premises of regular schools<sup>60</sup>.

Importantly, a 2015 policy<sup>61</sup> redesigns the institutional landscape for adult centres in South Africa. According to the policy, all centres in a province become part of one provincial 'Community Education and Training College Administrative Centre' (CETCAC), sometimes referred to simply as a 'community college'. The official name for the over 3,000 sites of

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<sup>54</sup> Vieira do Nascimento and Valdés-Cotera, R. (eds.), 2018: 34.

<sup>55</sup> Namibia: Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2019: 46.

<sup>56</sup> Obtained from Servaas van der Berg.

<sup>57</sup> Own analysis of 2003 General Household Survey data.

<sup>58</sup> This is based on the 80,000 figure referred to in section 5.

<sup>59</sup> NAMCOL, 2017: 16.

<sup>60</sup> Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Notice 569 of 2015.

delivery across the country is, since 2015, community learning centres (CLCs). Even after the 2015 restructuring in South Africa, however, South Africa's nine provincial 'community colleges' appear to lag behind NAMCOL in terms of the institutional autonomy needed for innovation, and in terms of institutional accountability. In South Africa, managers of the colleges are employees of DHET, though they are in part accountable to a governing council overseeing each college. This bifurcated accountability is similar to what school principals in South Africa are subject to, and can complicate management. Very importantly, the 'community colleges' depend heavily on DHET for general staffing, as everyone, including those working in the CLCs, are on the DHET payroll. This gives managers of the provincial colleges limited powers with respect to human resourcing. NAMCOL, in contrast, is directly responsible for hiring staff, many of whom are employed on a non-permanent contract basis. It seems that full-time teachers earn additional income by taking on hours working for NAMCOL. The 2016/2017 annual report of NAMCOL, the most recent one available on the NAMCOL website, reflects an organisation that is strongly service-oriented and focusses on value for money. While the Gauteng community college has a fully-fledged website<sup>62</sup>, no annual reports are available<sup>63</sup>.

NAMCOL registration processes<sup>64</sup> are clearer than those for, say, 'second-chancing' in Gauteng through the province's community college. It also provides more structured and intensive support to second-chancers. This comes with additional costs, including a fee students must pay per subject taken (the amount of this could not be found). There is a specific pack of materials NAMCOL provides to its 'Matric' students, as opposed to the more open approach in South Africa, where youths are often expected to choose from a wide range of available materials. Very importantly, NAMCOL arranges its tutorial videos in a YouTube channel<sup>65</sup>. Such a facility directed at second-chancers is unfortunately lacking in South Africa. NAMCOL requires students to submit two assignments per year per subject, which are marked by NAMCOL. This can obviously assist students in preparing for the final examination. In South Africa, though the Senior Certificate rests only on examination results, there should be nothing stopping a provincial community centre from establishing a system of assignments and feedback to assist students. NAMCOL moreover runs a face-to-face orientation workshop for new students at the start of each academic year.

NAMCOL is not without problems. The annual report describes setbacks caused by serious budget cuts, which are linked to fiscal constraints in the Namibian public system as a whole.

## 7 Recommendations aimed at government

There are two very obvious and necessary changes which government can bring about relatively easily. One is **more efficient registration and certification processes for second-chance youths**. Section 4.2 pointed to several problems with the existing processes, while section 6 discussed a few solutions seen in a couple of other developing countries.

Better public e-services in general, and such services directed at youths attempting to obtain the Matric, have been emphasised in recently released government policy documents.

The 2019 to 2024 overall five-year plan of government has, apart from a special emphasis on second-chance Matriculants (see section 3 above), the following 'intervention' and 'indicator' in relation to e-services<sup>66</sup>:

Modernise business processes in the public sector

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<sup>62</sup> <https://gcetc.edu.za>.

<sup>63</sup> There was an 'Annual reports' link, but it led nowhere.

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.namcol.edu.na>.

<sup>65</sup> Named 'NAMCOL Edu'.

<sup>66</sup> Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, 2020: 38.

Implementation of the National e-Government Strategy and Roadmap, as well as recommendations of the Presidential Commission on 4IR

The strategy and roadmap document, released in 2017<sup>67</sup>, emphasises two e-service initiatives in the basic education sector which should receive attention during 2018 to 2019. One deals with a teacher bursary programme, the other with services for Matrics. The purpose of the latter is:

To enable eligible learners to conveniently use the internet from anywhere and at any time to complete application forms online for registration to write matric examinations, requests for re-marking of results and requests to re-issue the matric certificate.

It seems there had been limited progress up to 2019 on this priority, judging from the problems described in section 4.2. In fact, this e-services development work does not seem to feature in the recent annual plans of the Department of Basic Education. Clearly, this remains unfinished work. The basic e-service portal envisaged in the roadmap document now exists, at [www.eservices.gov.za](http://www.eservices.gov.za), and 'Matric services' is one service currently available. As indicated previously, in section 4.2, there are three types of Matric services, which are still limited. The registrations service only deals with the Senior Certificate (SC), not the National Senior Certificate (NSC), and several important services, such as checking whether one's subject results from various years provide enough credits for the Matric is not available. If one 'test drives' the service, it seems the explanations of the process, and what it does and what it does not do, could be better. A critical matter is of course if this new service actually works as it should.

The three types of Matric e-services seen in [www.eservices.gov.za](http://www.eservices.gov.za) are in fact that the three points from the extract of the roadmap document quoted above. It seems the systems development has followed the roadmap in a somewhat narrow and compliance-oriented fashion. The paragraph from the high-level roadmap document was almost certainly not intended to be a full menu of the work that needed to be done. Moreover, a holistic interpretation of the roadmap document would point to the need to align the e-service portal and information being disseminated by the national and provincial education departments.

Building government e-services is risky and difficult. Especially in developing countries, these projects often do not succeed<sup>68</sup>, for various reasons. Systems development skills in the country may be lacking, and government procurement rules may be a hindrance to obtaining the right service providers. The difficulty in South Africa of managing the trade-off between a single public systems development agency, which facilitates government control and can reduce costs, against the use of multiple private providers, which can facilitate innovation and quality control, is something many countries experience. South Africa's State Information Technology Agency (SITA) has been criticised for its slowness in bringing about e-government innovation<sup>69</sup>.

The second change which government could fairly easily bring about is **better reporting on second-chance trends**. As pointed out in section 5, the certification of SC and part-time NSC students is not reported on in any systemic manner. Even the extent to which supplementary examinations improve the acquisition of the NSC each year receives very little attention in government's reporting systems. While second-chance opportunities may not produce large numbers of additional Matrics, they do produce around 40,000 additional NSCs a year (see section 5). This warrants better reporting. Better reporting would help to put the matter of second-chance opportunities on the radar of the public debates, which in turn could facilitate better thinking on solutions, and hence a more successful second-chance system.

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<sup>67</sup> Government Notice 886 of 2017.

<sup>68</sup> World Bank, 2016: 165.

<sup>69</sup> National Treasury, 2017: 32.

Beyond the two key recommendations made above, there are other areas where positive change could be brought about. Currently, large volumes of materials are available to second-chancers, but how youths would select what is best for them from the current ‘menu’ could be difficult. Academic support to second-chancers could be streamlined, possibly along the lines of what is done in Namibia. However, following this route would have cost implications, which would need to be carefully considered.

## **8 Recommendations aimed at the non-government sector**

There are ways in which non-government organisations, be they non-profit organisations or firms, could make a positive contribution to the two key recommendations described in section 7: more efficient registration and certification processes for second-chance youths; and better reporting on second-chance trends.

On the first, by providing rigorous evaluations of e-services, through testing of these systems and gathering data from youths who use the systems, risks of under-performing systems can be avoided. The private sector has an interest in as many youths being certified as possible – as argued in section 2, we have interesting evidence from South Africa confirming that good information on the skills of youths improves opportunities for employment. Many actors in the private sector have extensive knowledge of the design of online systems development and would thus be well placed to offer advice.

What non-government organisations can also do is to set up their own online resources to assist second-chance youths understand the various options, their rights, and the risks they take. The various chapters of the 2017 *Basic education rights handbook*<sup>70</sup>, put together by SECTION27, serves as an example of how information can empower ordinary citizens within the sector.

On the second recommendation, the non-government sector should add its voice to the demand for a more holistic view of ‘matriculation’, in government’s reporting systems, in the debates in Parliament, and in structures where the public and private sectors discuss solutions for the economy, such as NEDLAC<sup>71</sup>. The focus should move beyond just ‘first-timers’ who obtain a Matric immediately after their first attempt.

## **9 Conclusion**

This report has been aimed at putting second-chance matriculation on the radar within the public debates. It has examined the strengths and weaknesses of existing processes youths go through to register as second-chance examination candidates, and to be certified. It has also pieced together a comprehensive picture of how ‘second-chancers’ fit into the broader picture of school completion, dropping out, post-school institutions, and employment.

Though the current report is accompanied by a report drawing from a very limited number of interviews on the experiences of a few people, it is true to say that currently the knowledge we have of how youths experience ‘second-chancing’, and thus how existing systems of administration and support could be improved, is very thin. For researchers, a natural next step would be to gather better data from youths. While existing household data must be used to understand the context of being a youth in South Africa currently, these data do not tell us anything specifically about second-chance opportunities. The current report can assist in identifying key questions needed in any new survey, and in interpreting the responses.

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<sup>70</sup> Stein *et al*, 2017.

<sup>71</sup> National Economic Development and Labour Council.

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