

It's All Systems Go for the 2023 Matric Examinations

The State Security Agency and power backup are on standby to ensure a smooth matriculation examination, writes Angie Motshekga.

As we stand on the brink of the 2023 National Senior Certificate examinations for the Class of 2023, it is heartening to witness the dedication and commitment of South Africa's basic education sector in ensuring the smooth execution of this pivotal national duty. The numbers paint a promising picture of our educational landscape as we prepare for the exams starting tomorrow (30 October).

Interestingly, Umalusi has approved all question papers to be administered in the October/November 2023 Examinations and given the nod to the exams.

We've enhanced security measures to prevent paper leaks in all nine provinces. The State Security Agency has also audited these processes. Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) must follow standard operating procedures training storage point managers in security protocols. Moreover, specific collection times for question papers by chief invigilators have been established to deter early access. Each PED has its own irregularity committee to anticipate and mitigate crises. To mitigate the challenge of load shedding, all PEDs and schools have devised contingency plans, including backup generators. The Computer Applications Technology (CAT) and Information Technology (IT) Paper 1 examinations were generally conducted without power issues, with isolated incidents. Affected candidates were isolated and managed. We will offer a backup paper if needed due to power interruptions. In South African Sign Language Home Language (SASL HL), candidates' laptops will be fully charged before each examination commences, and backup power supply measures have been put in place.

This year, we take pride in announcing that we have over 717 377 candidates registered to participate in the final examinations across 6,898 centres nationwide. These figures are not mere statistics; they embody the aspirations, dreams, and relentless efforts of our Grade 12 learners. They stand as a testament to the resilience of our students and the continuous dedication of the Department of Basic Education in providing them with a platform to succeed.

When we compare this year's figures to 2022, we observe a gradual decrease in the number of candidates, 34,626 candidates, and this could be attributed to the fact that more candidates complete their qualifications on time. There has been an increase in the number of part-time learners from 168 631 in 2022 to 181 143 in 2023 (an increase of 12 512). A total of 207 question papers, 72 500 invigilators and 52 500 markers will drive the examinations process.

Furthermore, our roster boasts 72,500 invigilators ready to ensure the smooth conduct of the examinations, compared to 72,000 last year. The number of markers has also risen from 52,000 in 2022 to 52,500 in 2023, reflecting the dedication of educators to assess the papers efficiently and fairly. In terms of examination centres, we have seen a modest decrease from 6,907 in 2022 to 6,898 in 2023, further enhancing accessibility for our candidates.

These numbers go beyond measuring the growth of our education system; they also reflect our commitment to providing opportunities for our youth. We recognise that the Class of 2023 has faced unique challenges due to the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are fully aware of the anxiety and pressure they may be experiencing as they prepare for these crucial

exams. As a sector, we have spared no effort in designing the system to ensure every candidate has a fair chance to succeed.

From a regional perspective, it becomes evident that South Africa is leading the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region for 2023 regarding the number of matric candidates. With an impressive 717 377 candidates, our nation stands at the forefront, reaffirming its commitment to education and its belief in the potential of its youth.

Following South Africa are the Democratic Republic of the Congo with 180,000 candidates, Madagascar with 240,000, and Angola with 100,000 matric candidates, respectively. These figures, while significant, underscore the scale and magnitude of South Africa's basic educational system. They highlight the formidable task we undertake annually to ensure that our matriculants are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in their future endeavours.

Moreover, it's important to note that we have more invigilators 72, 500 than the total number of Grade 12 learners in Tanzania, Zambia, and Malawi combined. Additionally, our total school-going learner population of 13 million is almost higher than the combined population of Lesotho, Namibia, Botswana, and Seychelles put together. These statistics not only underscore the vast scope of South Africa's educational infrastructure but also illuminate the immense responsibility we bear in nurturing our youth.

South Africa's commitment to education extends far beyond statistics; it revolves around shaping a brighter future for our youth. It is about opportunities we are creating for them to flourish and make a meaningful impact on society. We foster a culture of learning and growth that extends well beyond the examination halls.

As we gear up for the 2023 matric examinations, let us remember that we are not only leading in numbers but also in our dedication to providing quality basic education for all. These examinations testify to our learners' and teachers' resilience, determination, and the entire basic education sector. Together, we are paving the way for a brighter future, not only for South Africa but also for the whole of the SADC region.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that it is indeed "all systems go" for the 2023 National Senior Certificate examinations. We possess the numbers, the infrastructure, and the determination to ensure that this year is successful and memorable for our Grade 12 learners. Let us collaborate to ensure they are adequately prepared and ready for the examinations. As we embark on this journey, let us bear in mind that the future of our nation hinges on the success of these young minds, and together, we can help them shine brilliantly.

Angie Motshekga is the longest-serving Minister of Basic Education in South Africa, post 1994.