



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA'S MATRIC CERTIFICATE IS WORTH THE PAPER IT'S PRINTED ON

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The Department of Basic Education notes with serious concern the damning statements made at the recent Allan Gray Investment Summit by Dr Thabi Leoka and supported by PriceWaterhouse Coopers (PWC), according to a BusinessTech article dated 22 September 2021, titled 'South Africa's matric certificate is not worth the paper it's printed on: economist'. It is disconcerting that Economists make such sweeping statements on Education, without allowing the Department of Basic Education the right of reply.

Historically, the National Senior Certificate (NSC), commonly referred to as matric, has enjoyed societal acceptance as the premier schooling qualification that has provided on an annual basis to hundreds of candidates, potential access to tertiary and the world of work. The NSC not only enjoys local recognition but is recognized internationally and scores of our learners are studying at international institutions, having used the South African Matric, as the admission qualification. In 2020, 210 820 learners attained admission to Bachelor studies at Higher Education Institutions, and this number has consistently been above 150 000 over the last few years. These are learners that enter Higher Education Institutions, successfully complete their qualifications and enter the economy. The engineers, the medical scientists, the surgeons, the Chief Executive Officers of the large conglomerates, and others, are all products of the South African schooling system. This certainly, cannot be the product of a "matric certificate that is not worth the paper it is printed on."

However, Education systems world-wide, rarely remain static. The rapidly changing work environment with radically changing industry requirements, warrants continuous changes. As early as 2018 the Department has embarked on a programme that has necessitated a change in emphasis in education outcomes and differentiated education access. To this end the Department is currently piloting the introduction of a three-stream model with expanded opportunities for learners to pursue vocational and occupational tracks. This will ensure improved alignment between the schooling sector and the world of work and will result in better preparing our learners for the skills required by the workplace.

The introduction of new subjects such as Marine Sciences, Coding and Robotics, Technical Science, Technical Mathematics and the various Technology subjects, will have a positive influence on keeping the NSC relevant to industry requirements. The Department continues to work closely with industry to identify areas of need and to ensure that new subjects are



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introduced as the demands of industry change. Entrepreneurship is a major thrust of the Economic and Management Sciences, a subject taken at the primary school level and pursued further at the secondary school level in subjects like Economics, Business Studies and Accounting.

The Department is working on a Curriculum Blueprint that will shift focus towards innovative and progressive pedagogies and usher in competency based learning, deeper learning and assessment for learning. As part of the Curriculum innovation agenda, the Department will also usher in a new qualification in the form of a General Education Certificate designed to recognise a more holistic dashboard of learner capabilities and to support learner inclinations that is more fit for purpose towards career pathing and self-knowledge linked to expanded educational tracks.

The Department is fully aware of a number of the challenges that confront the education system, which include, inter alia, the low reading comprehension levels of our primary school learners and the knowledge levels of some of our teachers. These are matters that are being decisively addressed through the various reading programmes that are currently instituted and are making a difference. There are also intensive teacher development programmes, which are being implemented in conjunction with the Labour Unions and other key partners. Unfortunately, educational changes are slow and gradual and these changes are producing green shoots, as evidenced by various studies.

The BusinessTech article, while drawing from the World Bank Human Capital Index (HCI), argues that young South Africans do not reach half their potential. Clearly, many still do not get close to reaching their full potential, though the situation has been improving for around twenty years, in the sense that the quality of schooling has improved according to reliable international assessments. The article's argument is unclear in this regard. The HCI measures human capital in one country relative to that in others. It does not measure what ratio of full potential is realized.

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