

Accessing higher education and succeeding in it

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The Department of Higher Education and Training oversees the post-school education and training system in South Africa, and it is working very hard to enable a wide range of relevant post-school education and training opportunities for young South Africans that will lead to viable and successful careers and improved livelihoods.

attention to this, as there are a large number of unscrupulous organizations that purport to be registered and accredited to offer qualifications but actually are not.

At the undergraduate level, universities and private higher education institutions offer a diverse range of general and vocational-focused higher certificates and diplomas and general and professional

with students largely being selected on academic merit into competitive study programmes.

Public universities have set spaces for study in certain programmes which have been determined by factors such as the resource requirements required to offer the programme, the human resource needs of the country and so on.

Here are examples of the approximate number of spaces that are available in 2016 at first-year level in some programmes in the scarce skills areas across all universities in the country:

- 16 500 spaces in Engineering programmes
- 12 800 spaces in Life and Physical Sciences programmes
- 860 spaces in Animal Sciences programmes
- 10 400 spaces in Human Health programmes
- 200 spaces in Veterinary Sciences programmes
- 22 700 spaces in Initial Teacher Education programmes

The number of available spaces in programmes such as medicine and veterinary sciences is small, and so selection is highly competitive. For example, over 700 applications have been received from the Matric class of 2015 for the 120 available spaces in the Veterinary Sciences programme, the remaining 80 spaces are reserved for students who have already entered higher education. Experience in past years has shown that learners who did not achieve at least six distinctions at matric level, stand a small chance of gaining access to studies in veterinary sciences and medicine.

If you have not yet applied to a university or have been unsuccessful in your first application, all is not lost. The Central Applications Clearing House (CACH) has been set up to link prospective students with study places that are still available across the country. Read how to access and use the CACH system in the article that also appears in this supplement. It must be noted that no universities will accept walk-in applications.

Obtaining access to your study programme of choice is the first step. Making a success of your university studies is the next. Research by Merridy Wilson-Strydom reported in a 2015 briefing paper for the Second National Higher Education Transformation Summit showed that even top-achieving school-leavers can struggle at university, that readiness for university study is multi-dimensional and is an important determinant in success, and that there are several clusters of capabilities with respect to university readiness as shown below:

Dimensions of readiness	Description – capabilities for university readiness
Decision-making	Being able to make well-reasoned, informed, critical, independent and reflective choices about post-school study
Knowledge and imagination	Having the academic grounding for chosen university subjects, being able to develop and apply methods of critical thinking and imagination to identify and comprehend multiple perspectives and complex problems.
Approach to learning	Having curiosity and a desire for learning, having the learning skills required for university study and being an active inquirer (questioning).
Social relations and social networks	Being able to participate in groups for learning, working with diverse others to solve problems or complete tasks. Being able to form networks of friendships for learning support and leisure.
Respect, dignity and recognition	Having respect for oneself and for others, and receiving respect from others, being treated with dignity. Not being devalued, or devaluing others because of one's gender, social class, religion or race. Valuing diversity and being able to show empathy (understand and respect others' points of view). Having a voice to participate in learning.
Emotional health	Not being subject to anxiety or fear that diminishes learning. Having confidence in one's ability to learn.
Language competence and confidence	Being able to understand, read, write and speak confidently in the language of instruction.

(Wilson-Strydom, 2015)

You may be more ready with respect to some of these dimensions and less ready with respect to others. It will be important for you to understand your readiness and to work on the areas that need strengthening, if there are any.

Most universities offer a comprehensive 'First-Year Experience' programme that is designed to assist and support first-year students to make the transition from school to university and to support students in their first year of study. Find out about the support programmes that are available at your university and ensure that you participate fully in them.

Remember that there are many and varied opportunities in the PSET system, and that a university qualification is only one of many alternatives. You need to be aware of your capabilities and interests and use those as a guiding star to make your choices for your future career and life.

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Places for students at universities increase annually

Post-school education and training opportunities are available through public universities, private higher education institutions, public and private Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges and through the newly-established Community Education and Training Colleges.

Higher education in South Africa is offered by 26 public universities and over 100 private higher education institutions. When choosing your institution, you must make sure that the institution is registered by the Department of Higher Education and Training and that the programme applied for is accredited by the Council on Higher Education. The register of registered private higher education institutions is updated regularly and published on the DHET website (www.dhet.gov.za). Potential students and their parents or guardians are urged to consult the register or contact the DHET to ensure that the private higher education institution being considered is legitimately registered with the DHET. We advise that you pay serious

degrees which are aligned to the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework. You can visit the websites of institutions to review the study opportunities that are on offer and also access the DHET's Career Development Services (CDS) for advice. Read how to access and use the CDS in the article that also appears in this supplement.

In order to access certificate studies, diploma studies or degree studies, you need to hold a national senior certificate which satisfies the minimum national requirements for admission to the relevant qualification. Entry to higher education is highly competitive and spaces are limited. Universities typically set admission requirements which are higher than the minimum national requirements. Having met the minimum requirements for admission to a university, be it a higher certificate, a diploma or a bachelor's degree endorsement on the National Senior Certificate does not guarantee that you will necessarily be accepted at a university. Selection is thus also based on the quality of your matric pass,