

FreeFACTS

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Higher education expansion shows advances

This edition of *FreeFACTS* looks at how access to higher education has increased over the past 30 years, one of the successes of post-apartheid South Africa.

Statistics from this edition of *FreeFACTS* shows that those with access to higher education has increased markedly, with far more people getting some form of tertiary education. While an increase in the number of people who have had some form of higher education is not a panacea to South Africa's problems, evidence (also provided in this edition) shows that those with higher education are more likely to be employed.

In addition, the demographics of both students and staff at South Africa's various institutions of higher education have changed significantly, which also undermines the argument of those who claim that South Africa has not changed in any significant way since the end of apartheid.

In addition, the growth in the number of people who have access to higher education is also an example of true transformation. True, sustainable transformation is not about replacing white people with black people or from other groups that were oppressed during apartheid, but ensuring those that were previously excluded from opportunities now have access to opportunity.

However, while ensuring that more people have access to higher education is important, especially as South Africa continues to be an economy where those with skills are more likely to be employed, at the same time it is vital that the economy also grows.

A growing economy will benefit everyone in the country, whether they are skilled or not.

Furthermore, South Africa must ensure that its higher education framework is such that it produces skills that the country needs. To that end, South Africa must make sure that skills which are the foundation of a growing economy – such as artisanal skills, such as plumbing or bricklaying – are not seen as also rans.

But in the overall analysis the expansion of higher education to more people is something that South Africa can be proud of and should not be dismissed as a meaningless achievement.

— **Marius Roodt**

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Higher Education

People aged 20 and older with a degree and higher ^a by race, 1995-2022						
Race	People aged 20+	1995	2002	2010	2022	Change 1995-2022
Black	Number with a degree and higher	188,000	330,000	604,000	1,721,000	1,533,000
	Total aged 20+	15,676,000	19,783,000	22,076,000	30,715,000	15,039,000
	Proportion with a degree and higher	1.2%	1.7%	2.7%	5.6%	—
Coloured	Number with a degree and higher	24,000	42,000	105,000	168,000	144,000
	Total aged 20+	2,079,000	2,332,000	2,807,000	3,402,000	1,323,000
	Proportion with a degree and higher	1.2%	1.8%	3.7%	4.9%	—
Indian/ Asian	Number with a degree and higher	35,000	57,000	107,000	231,000	196,000
	Total aged 20+	644,000	743,000	900,000	1,137,000	493,000
	Proportion with a degree and higher	5.4%	7.7%	11.9%	20.3%	—
White	Number with a degree and higher	403,000	526,000	755,000	862,000	459,000
	Total aged 20+	3,700,000	3,069,000	3,338,000	3,427,000	-273,000
	Proportion with a degree and higher	10.9%	17.1%	22.6%	25.2%	—
Total ^b	Number with a degree and higher	649,000	956,000	1,572,000	2,984,000	2,335,000
	Total aged 20+	22,100,000	25,954,000	29,121,000	38,680,000	16,580,000
	Proportion with a degree and higher	2.9%	3.7%	5.4%	7.7%	—

Source: Stats SA, *October Household Survey 1995*, Statistical release P0317, 27 November 1996, Table 8.1, p75; *General Household Survey 2002*, Statistical release P0318, 15 December 2003, p4; *General Household Survey 2010 (Revised version)*, Statistical release P0318, 3 August 2011, Table 2.2, p53; *General Household Survey 2022*, Statistical release P0318, 17 August 2023, Table 2.2, pp89-90

^a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 7-10. Includes Higher Diploma/National Certificate/B-Tech.

^b Totals should add up vertically but may not, owing to rounding/the inclusion of unspecified values.

Higher education participation rate						
Race	Higher education participation rates ^a by race, 2002 and 2022					
	—20-24 year olds in the country—		—Students enrolled in higher education—		—Participation rate—	
	2002	2021	2002	2021	2002	2021
Black	3,594,000	3,970,830	399,915	849,246	11.1%	21.4%
Coloured	358,000	418,877	38,329	59,313	10.7%	14.2%
Indian/Asian	96,000	97,930	47,706	38,911	49.7%	39.7%
White	283,000	251,668	179,380	108,982	63.4%	43.3%
Total ^b	4,333,000	4,739,305	667,182	1,068,046	15.4%	22.5%

Source: Stats SA, *General Household Survey 2002*, 15 December 2003, p2; *Census 2011: Census in Brief*, 30 October 2012; *Mid-year population estimates 2021*, Statistical release P0302, 19 July 2021, Table 6, p19; DHET, www.dhet.gov.za, Table 2.12 for all institutions to 2nd order CESM (Enrolment, 2002 and 2021), accessed 6 June 2023

^a The proportion of people aged between 20 and 24 who are enrolled in public universities.

^b Includes unspecified population groups.

Higher Education

Headcount enrolment ^a at universities by type of university, 1985-2021					
Year	Universities	Universities of technology	Total enrolment	Contact students ^b	Distance students ^c
1985	211,756	59,118	270,874	N/A	N/A
1986	233,625	43,490	277,115	221,113	56,002
1990	285,986	92,721	378,707	N/A	N/A
1995	385,221	190,191	575,412	453,065	122,347
2000	380,168	199,089	579,257	455,107	124,150
2005	563,199	171,874	735,073	593,986	141,087
2010	739,368	153,568	892,936	545,766	346,828
2011	785,988	152,212	938,200	556,694	381,130
2012	798,551	159,822	953,373	566,239	387,133
2013	824,692	159,006	983,698	581,048	402,556
2014	807,663	161,491	969,154	596,824	372,142
2015	824,880	160,332	985,212	605,480	379,732
2016	817,567	168,270	975,837	638,001	337,836
2017	859,395	177,589	1,036,984	659,970	377,014
2018	900,330	185,238	1,085,568	685,069	400,499
2019	880,376	194,536	1,074,912	704,021	370,891
2020	909,962	184,846	1,094,808	682,440	412,368
2021	887,246	180,800	1,068,046	683,885	384,161
1985-2021	319.0%	205.8%	294.3%	209.3%^d	586.0%^d

Source: DHET, www.dhet.gov.za, Table 2.19 Distance only for all institutions (1986-2014), accessed 17 July 2015; Table 2.12 for all Institutions to 2nd order CESM (Enrolment, 1985-2021), accessed 6 June 2023; *Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa: 2021*, March 2023, p3

^a Refers to the number of students enrolled at an institution as opposed to enrolment figures which refer to the number of students enrolled in different courses.

^b Refers to those whose courses involve personal interaction with lecturers or supervisors, through lectures, tutorials, seminars, practicals, supervision, or other forms of required work, which occur at the institution's premises or at a site of delivery.

^c Refers to those whose courses do not involve personal interaction with teachers or supervisors, and whose studies are undertaken remotely through the use of correspondence, telematics, or the Internet.

^d Change is calculated from 1986 to 2021.

N/A — Not available.

Higher Education

Headcount enrolment^a at universities by race (proportions)^b, 1986-2021

Year	Black	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	Total ^c
1986	19.8%	4.9%	7.9%	64.1%	100.0%
1987	22.7%	6.6%	7.1%	60.3%	100.0%
1988	23.1%	6.8%	6.2%	57.1%	100.0%
1989	27.2%	6.9%	7.1%	56.5%	100.0%
1995	46.6%	5.2%	6.3%	36.4%	100.0%
2000	58.8%	5.3%	6.8%	28.1%	100.0%
2001	57.1%	5.1%	6.5%	26.3%	100.0%
2002	59.2%	5.1%	7.1%	26.6%	100.0%
2003	60.0%	6.1%	7.4%	26.2%	100.0%
2004	60.9%	6.2%	7.3%	25.3%	100.0%
2005	60.8%	6.3%	7.4%	25.3%	100.0%
2006	60.8%	6.5%	7.4%	24.9%	100.0%
2007	62.7%	6.4%	6.9%	23.7%	100.0%
2008	64.4%	6.5%	6.6%	22.3%	100.0%
2009	65.4%	6.6%	6.4%	21.4%	100.0%
2010	66.7%	6.5%	6.1%	20.0%	100.0%
2011	68.3%	6.3%	5.8%	18.9%	100.0%
2012	69.5%	6.2%	5.5%	18.1%	100.0%
2013	70.1%	6.2%	5.5%	17.5%	100.0%
2014	70.1%	6.3%	5.5%	17.1%	100.0%
2015	70.7%	6.3%	5.4%	16.4%	100.0%
2016	72.6%	6.4%	5.2%	15.8%	100.0%
2017	74.3%	6.3%	4.9%	14.5%	100.0%
2018	75.6%	6.1%	4.4%	12.9%	100.0%
2019	77.3%	5.8%	4.0%	11.8%	100.0%
2020	78.8%	5.7%	3.8%	10.8%	100.0%
2021	79.5%	5.6%	3.6%	10.2%	100.0%

Source: DHET, www.dhet.gov.za, Table 2.12 for all Institutions to 2nd order CESM (Enrolment, 1986-2021) accessed 6 June 2023

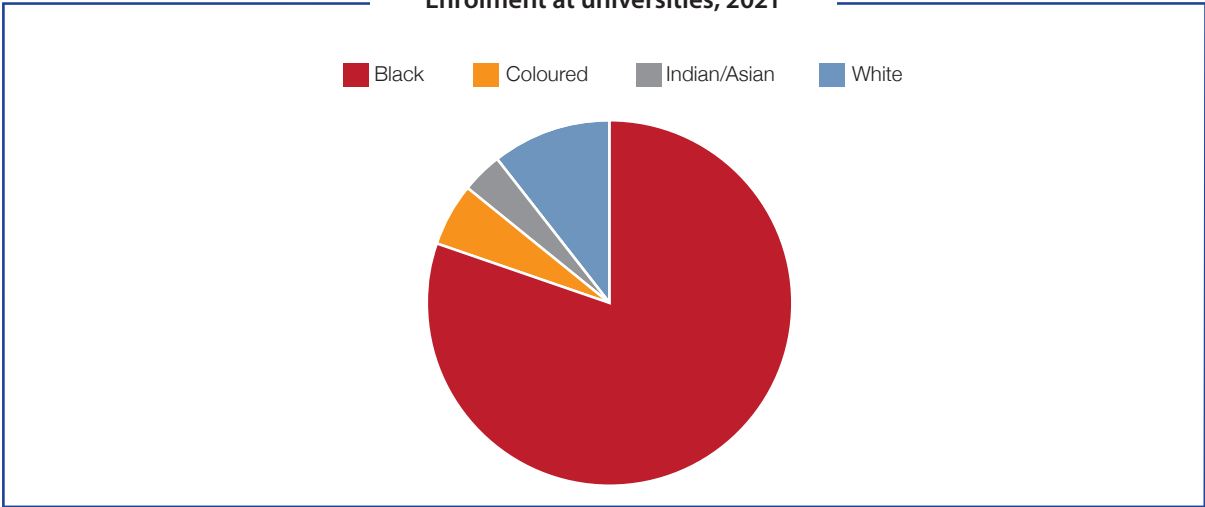
^a Refers to the number of students enrolled at an institution as opposed to enrolment figures which refer to the number of students enrolled in different courses. Between 1997 and 2003, however, head-count enrolment was greater than enrolment due to institutions submitting head-count figures that included non-formal qualifications. The former Department of Education requested that these institutions correct their databases.

^b IRR calculations.

^c Figures should add up horizontally to 100% but may not, owing to rounding and the inclusion of students whose race is unspecified. For 2004 the former Department of Education changed the manner in which tertiary enrolment and output data was collected and presented. Unisa was defined as 'comprehensive' for being both a university and a university of technology. Thus, for 2004, enrolment and output figures for universities and universities of technology are not comparable with figures for previous years. Total tertiary enrolment and output figures remain

Higher Education

Enrolment at universities, 2021



Black	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White
79.5%	5.6%	3.6%	10.2%

Higher Education

Staff						
University teaching staff and students						
Students and teaching staff, 2005 and 2021						
University	—Students—		—Teaching staff—		—Student-to-staff ratio ^a —	
	2005	2021	2005	2021	2005	2021
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	28,961	32,429	621	779	47 to 1	42 to 1
Central University of Technology	10,320	22,345	203	316	51 to 1	71 to 1
Durban University of Technology	22,779	33,196	537	710	42 to 1	47 to 1
Mangosuthu University of Technology	9,901	14,562	146	228	68 to 1	64 to 1
Nelson Mandela University	24,157	29,735	557	702	43 to 1	42 to 1
North West University	38,596	53,469	769	1,648	50 to 1	32 to 1
Rhodes University	6,322	8,477	306	359	21 to 1	24 to 1
Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University	N/A	6,525	N/A	696	—	9 to 1
Sol Plaatje University	N/A	2,829	N/A	141	—	20 to 1
Stellenbosch University	21,702	31,949	818	1,302	27 to 1	25 to 1
Tshwane University of Technology	57,971	58,369	880	879	66 to 1	66 to 1
University of Cape Town	21,764	29,618	821	1,182	27 to 1	25 to 1
University of Fort Hare	8,790	15,897	230	326	48 to 1	49 to 1
University of the Free State	24,659	40,954	620	864	40 to 1	47 to 1
University of Johannesburg	45,544	50,669	917	1,309	40 to 1	39 to 1
University of KwaZulu-Natal	40,704	44,070	1,448	1,222	28 to 1	36 to 1
University of Limpopo	17,579	21,632	804	613	22 to 1	35 to 1
University of Mpumalanga	N/A	5,435	N/A	168	—	32 to 1
University of Pretoria	46,351	53,912	1,575	1,260	29 to 1	43 to 1
University of South Africa	207,931	363,020	1,308	1,781	159 to 1	204 to 1
University of Venda	10,497	14,806	268	425	39 to 1	35 to 1
University of the Western Cape	14,580	24,790	465	671	31 to 1	37 to 1
University of the Witwatersrand	23,626	42,127	939	1,215	25 to 1	35 to 1
University of Zululand	10,398	16,352	219	345	48 to 1	47 to 1
Vaal University of Technology	17,408	19,899	312	365	56 to 1	55 to 1
Walter Sisulu University	24,533	30,980	531	908	46 to 1	34 to 1
Total	735,073	1,068,046	15,302	20,414	48 to 1	52 to 1

Source: DHET, www.dhet.gov.za, Table 2.12 for all institutions to 2nd order CESM (Enrolments, 2005 and 2021); Table 3.4 for all institutions (Staff, 2005 and 2021), accessed 5 June 2023

^a IRR calculations.

N/A — Not available.

Higher Education

Teaching staff by race, 1986 and 2021				
Race	—1986—		—2021—	
	Number	Proportion of total ^a	Number	Proportion of total ^a
Black	424	3.7%	9,105	44.6%
Coloured	243	2.1%	1,516	7.4%
Indian/Asian	348	3.1%	1,675	8.2%
White	10,263	90.4%	7,729	37.9%
Other/unspecified	80	0.7%	389	1.9%
Total	11,358	100.0%	20,414	100.0%

Source: DHET, www.dhet.gov.za, Table 3.3 for all institutions (Staff, 1986 and 2021), accessed 5 June 2023

^a IRR calculations.

Graduation rates ^a in Public Higher Education Institutions by type of award, 2021					
University	Undergraduate Certificates and Diplomas	Undergraduate Degrees	Postgraduate Below Master's	Master's Degrees	Doctoral Degrees
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	20.7%	21.3%	55.8%	14.7%	9.0%
University of Cape Town	20.7%	18.6%	64.2%	22.0%	12.2%
Central University of Technology	19.6%	15.1%	36.0%	10.6%	12.0%
Durban University of Technology	30.9%	25.6%	64.2%	17.1%	12.8%
University of Fort Hare	36.4%	18.2%	52.3%	17.9%	12.6%
University of the Free State	53.5%	18.9%	60.0%	28.6%	15.5%
University of Johannesburg	23.9%	19.2%	61.5%	24.3%	15.6%
University of KwaZulu-Natal	0.0%	20.5%	67.6%	21.3%	14.6%
University of Limpopo	N/A	19.3%	66.2%	29.5%	26.6%
Mangosuthu University of Technology	18.2%	22.9%	53.6%	42.9%	N/A
University of Mpumalanga	18.6%	18.4%	84.1%	14.6%	N/A
Nelson Mandela University	21.3%	19.6%	63.5%	21.8%	15.6%
North West University	33.7%	22.0%	69.9%	24.9%	17.2%
University of Pretoria	42.1%	19.9%	48.4%	32.4%	14.5%
Rhodes University	31.0%	20.3%	75.4%	28.9%	14.6%
Sefako Makgatho Health Science University	21.7%	21.7%	69.4%	14.7%	12.7%
Sol Plaatje University	26.3%	17.2%	16.1%	0.0%	N/A
University of South Africa	19.6%	10.6%	26.3%	17.1%	15.8%
University of Stellenbosch	27.6%	20.6%	65.8%	30.1%	18.1%
Tshwane University of Technology	24.5%	31.0%	37.7%	15.0%	13.5%
University of Venda	45.9%	23.6%	75.2%	24.7%	13.0%
Vaal University of Technology	17.9%	45.8%	57.6%	14.5%	10.6%
Walter Sisulu University	26.8%	22.5%	21.2%	14.5%	3.9%
University of Western Cape	65.4%	20.2%	55.1%	14.0%	9.7%
University of Witwatersrand	N/A	20.0%	53.1%	21.6%	12.8%
University of Zululand	26.2%	21.4%	61.1%	13.5%	15.0%
Total	22.5%	17.1%	46.0%	22.8%	14.5%

Source: DHET, Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa 2021, March 2023, Table 10.6, p123

^a Graduation rates are calculated by dividing the number of students obtaining a qualification in a given academic year by the total enrolment for that type of award in that year.

N/A — Not available.

Higher Education

Completion rates ^a by subject (proportions ^b), 2019-21			
Field of study	Undergraduate diploma/ certificate (3 years)	Bachelor's degree (3 years)	Bachelor's degree (4 years or more)
Agriculture and related sciences	20.5%	24.2%	22.0%
Architecture and environmental design	19.5%	24.1%	22.2%
Business, commerce and management	23.3%	16.2%	13.4%
Communication, journalism and related studies	18.4%	18.3%	18.7%
Computer and information sciences	17.1%	18.7%	10.0%
Education	13.5%	9.6%	16.4%
Engineering	12.4%	21.5%	14.9%
Family ecology and consumer sciences	28.9%	18.3%	30.1%
Health professions	17.7%	18.6%	20.8%
Language, linguistics and literature	29.0%	20.0%	10.2%
Law	19.0%	25.3%	14.4%
Life sciences	19.9%	21.6%	11.7%
Mathematics and statistics	7.1%	12.0%	4.4%
Philosophy, religion and theology	17.8%	17.6%	16.7%
Physical sciences	17.9%	18.0%	10.4%
Psychology	6.1%	20.9%	7.5%
Public management and services	19.2%	18.9%	4.8%
Social sciences	22.1%	18.6%	16.5%
Visual and performing arts	20.9%	16.9%	18.6%
Total	19.3%	18.2%	16.2%

Source: Source: DHET, www.dhet.gov.za, Table 2.12 for all institutions to 2nd order CESM (Enrolments, 2019); Table 2.13 for all institutions to 2nd order CESM (Graduates, 2021), accessed 6 June 2023

^a The table above shows the proportion of students who graduated in each degree category as a share of all those who were enrolled in that field three or four years earlier. For example, students who graduated with a three-year undergraduate diploma/certificate in agriculture and related sciences in 2021 accounted for 20.5% of all those enrolled in the same category in 2019.

^b IRR calculations.

Higher Education

Employment and unemployment by highest level of education (proportions^a), 2008 and 2023

Level of education ^a	—Q2 2008 ^b —		
	Employed	Unemployed	Total economically active
No schooling	83.9%	16.1%	100.0%
Less than primary school completed	78.6%	21.4%	100.0%
Completed primary school	76.0%	24.0%	100.0%
Less than secondary school completed	70.6%	29.4%	100.0%
Secondary completed	75.7%	24.3%	100.0%
Tertiary	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%
Other	82.7%	17.3%	100.0%
Total	76.9%	23.1%	100.0%

Level of education ^a	—Q2 2023 ^b —		
	Employed	Unemployed	Total economically active
No schooling	74.1%	25.9%	100.0%
Less than primary school completed	70.5%	29.5%	100.0%
Completed primary school	63.5%	36.5%	100.0%
Less than secondary school completed	60.3%	39.7%	100.0%
Secondary completed	64.8%	35.2%	100.0%
Tertiary	84.5%	15.5%	100.0%
Other	79.4%	20.6%	100.0%
Total	67.4%	32.6%	100.0%

Source: a IRR calculations. In 2023, for example, 74.1% of all economically active people with no schooling were employed and 25.9% of such people were unemployed.

Higher Education

	Proportion unemployed, 2008	Proportion unemployed, 2023
No schooling	16.1%	25.9%
Less than primary school completed	21.4%	29.5%
Completed primary school	24.0%	36.5%
Less than secondary school completed	29.4%	39.7%
Secondary completed	24.3%	35.2%
Tertiary	7.7%	15.5%
Other	17.3%	20.6%

