

FREE FACTS



# Free facts

**More to education advances  
than matric pass rate**

January 2025



# FreeFACTS

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## More to education advances than matric pass rate

One of the successes of post-apartheid South Africa is the expansion of people receiving education. Over the past few decades the number of people who have passed matric has risen rapidly – in 2008 (when a new curriculum was introduced) about 500,000 people passed matric, which rose to nearly 700,000 in 2023.

There was a similar increase in the numbers of people passing matric well enough to go to university – a “bachelor’s pass”. In 2008 just over 100,000 people secured a bachelor’s pass, growing to over 280,000 in 2023. This increase meant that the proportion of people getting bachelor’s passes also increased – from 20% in 2008 to 40% in 2023.

However, if one digs deeper into the numbers it is also clear that there are still large numbers of people being left behind.

This edition of *FreeFACTS* digs a bit deeper into the numbers around the matric pass rate and it shows that things are perhaps not as rosy as they appear at first glance.

There are large numbers of people who don’t make it through the school system and drop out before they make it to matric. For example, 1.2 million children enrolled in Grade One in 2012 – by the time this cohort of kids made it to the Grade 12 examinations in 2023 over 500,000 had dropped out, with fewer than 600,000 writing the final exams. Of those 1.2 million kids fewer than 300,000 passed well enough to go to university.

In addition, if we look at the proportion of matric pupils who pass subjects like mathematics and physical science with high marks, issues also become apparent. In 2023 only 8% of those who wrote Mathematics and Physical Science got more than 70%. For the relatively easier Mathematical Literacy only 7% of those passed with more than 70%.

While the growth in people passing matric and doing well enough to go to university is a positive in post-apartheid South Africa, it must be asked if the education system, and by extension, matric exams is fit for purpose. Does it equip people for the world of life and work after school?

— Marius Roodt

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## Education

### National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results (new curriculum), 2008-23

Year	Candidates	— Pass —		— Higher Certificate admission —		— Diploma admission —		— Bachelor's admission —	
		Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion
2008	533 561	334 744	62.7%	102 032	19.1%	124 258	23.3%	107 274	20.1%
2009	552 073	334 718	60.6%	93 356	17.0%	131 035	23.8%	109 697	19.9%
2010	537 543	364 513	67.8%	91 241	17.1%	146 224	27.2%	126 371	23.5%
2011	496 090	348 114	70.2%	85 296	17.2%	141 584	28.5%	120 767	24.3%
2012	511 152	377 829	73.9%	88 604	17.3%	152 881	29.9%	136 047	26.6%
2013	562 112	439 779	78.2%	94 556	16.8%	173 292	30.8%	171 755	30.6%
2014	532 860	403 874	75.8%	86 022	16.1%	166 689	31.3%	150 752	28.3%
2015	644 536	455 825	70.7%	105 770	16.4%	183 720	28.5%	166 263	25.8%
2016	610 178	442 672	72.5%	100 486	16.5%	179 619	29.4%	162 374	26.6%
2017	534 484	401 307	75.1%	86 265	16.1%	161 333	30.2%	153 610	28.7%
2018	512 735	400 632	78.1%	86 790	16.9%	141 700	27.6%	172 043	33.6%
2019	504 303	409 906	81.3%	78 984	15.7%	144 672	28.7%	186 058	36.9%
2020	578 468	440 598	76.2%	79 117	13.7%	150 600	26.0%	210 820	36.4%
2021	704 021	537 565	76.4%	103 859	14.8%	177 572	25.2%	256 031	36.4%
2022	725 146	580 555	80.1%	108 159	14.9%	193 357	26.7%	278 814	38.4%
2023	691 160	572 839	82.9%	101 973	14.8%	187 876	27.2%	282 894	40.9%
<b>Change</b>	<b>29.5%</b>	<b>71.1%</b>	<b>32.2%</b>	<b>-0.1%</b>	<b>-22.8%</b>	<b>51.2%</b>	<b>16.7%</b>	<b>163.7%</b>	<b>103.6%</b>

Source: DBE, National Senior Certificate Examination Reports, 2009-22; 2023 NSC Exam Results Technical Report, January 2024, Table 6.1.4, p38

## Education

### The grade 1 class of 2012

Class progress	Number	Proportion
Grade 1 in 2012	1 208 973	100.0%
Grade 10 in 2021	1 081 618	89.5%
Grade 11 in 2022	928 050	76.8%
Grade 12 in 2023	740 566	61.3%
NSC candidates who wrote in 2023	691 160	57.2%
NSC passes in 2023	572 839	47.4%
Bachelor's passes in 2023	282 894	23.4%

Source: DBE, *School Realities 2012*, September 2012, Table 4, pp2-3; *School Realities 2021*, January 2022, Table 4, pp2-3; *School Realities 2022*, December 2022, Table 4, pp2-3; *School Realities 2023*, December 2023, Table 4, pp2-3; *2023 NSC Exam Results Technical Report*, January 2024, Table 6.1.4, p38

### The grade 12 class of 2023

Achievement	Number	Proportion of total <sup>a</sup>
Higher certificate admission	101 973	14.8%
Diploma admission	187 876	27.2%
Bachelor's admission	282 894	40.9%
NSC <sup>b</sup>	96	0.0%
<b>Passed/Achieved</b>	<b>572 839</b>	<b>82.9%</b>
<b>Failed</b>	<b>118 321</b>	<b>17.1%</b>
<b>Total<sup>c</sup></b>	<b>691 160</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: DBE, *2023 NSC Exam Results Technical Report*, January 2024, Table 6.1.4, p38

a IRR calculations.

b Candidates who obtained an NSC but did not satisfy the minimum requirements to study for a higher certificate, diploma, or bachelor's degree.

c Full-time candidates only.

# Education

## Results for selected subjects (proportions)<sup>a</sup>, 2008-23

Subject	Year	Wrote	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass
			0%-29%	30%-49%	50%-69%	70%-100%
Accounting	2008	176 366	38.7%	43.9%	12.9%	4.5%
	2010	160 991	35.8%	45.8%	12.9%	5.5%
	2012	134 978	34.4%	39.4%	17.1%	9.1%
	2014	125 987	32.0%	40.7%	17.7%	9.6%
	2016	128 853	30.5%	42.1%	17.7%	9.7%
	2018	90 278	27.5%	42.1%	19.5%	11.0%
	2020	92 767	24.5%	41.0%	22.1%	12.3%
	2022	104 798	24.6%	42.5%	21.3%	11.5%
	2023	100 974	23.2%	44.8%	21.0%	10.9%
Life sciences	2008	298 210	29.5%	48.3%	16.6%	5.6%
	2010	285 496	24.7%	43.9%	23.4%	7.9%
	2012	278 412	30.5%	44.7%	18.6%	6.2%
	2014	284 298	26.2%	44.0%	21.2%	8.5%
	2016	347 662	29.5%	43.8%	19.5%	7.2%
	2018	310 041	23.7%	45.2%	23.6%	7.5%
	2020	319 228	29.0%	42.1%	21.8%	7.1%
	2022	399 007	28.5%	41.1%	22.7%	7.7%
	2023	379 024	24.4%	43.1%	24.5%	8.0%
Mathematics	2008	300 008	54.6%	24.6%	12.5%	8.3%
	2010	263 034	51.4%	29.5%	12.3%	6.8%
	2012	225 874	46.0%	31.3%	15.6%	7.0%
	2014	225 458	46.5%	31.1%	15.0%	7.3%
	2016	265 810	48.8%	29.9%	14.4%	6.9%
	2018	233 858	42.0%	36.3%	15.5%	6.2%
	2020	233 315	46.2%	31.5%	15.2%	7.1%
	2022	269 734	45.0%	33.0%	15.6%	6.5%
	2023	262 016	36.5%	36.0%	19.4%	8.1%

## Education



### Results for selected subjects (proportions)<sup>a</sup>, 2008-23

Subject	Year	Wrote	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass
			0%-29%	30%-49%	50%-69%	70%-100%
Mathematical literacy	2008	267 236	21.4%	41.1%	23.5%	14.0%
	2010	280 836	13.5%	45.9%	30.3%	10.3%
	2012	291 341	12.6%	51.6%	28.0%	7.7%
	2014	312 054	15.9%	49.8%	26.5%	7.8%
	2016	361 865	28.7%	45.7%	20.7%	4.9%
	2018	294 204	27.5%	47.1%	20.4%	5.0%
	2020	341 363	19.2%	45.4%	28.2%	7.1%
	2022	450 005	14.3%	50.0%	28.7%	7.0%
	2023	421 835	17.7%	48.7%	26.1%	7.5%
Physical science	2008	217 300	45.1%	39.9%	11.6%	3.4%
	2010	205 364	50.5%	31.0%	12.3%	6.2%
	2012	179 201	38.6%	37.0%	16.7%	7.6%
	2014	167 997	38.5%	39.0%	15.3%	7.1%
	2016	192 618	38.0%	37.3%	16.6%	8.1%
	2018	172 319	25.8%	44.4%	20.1%	9.8%
	2020	174 310	34.2%	39.5%	18.2%	8.1%
	2022	209 004	25.4%	44.2%	22.2%	8.2%
	2023	206 399	23.8%	45.1%	22.9%	8.2%

Source: DBE, email communication, 11 July 2024  
<sup>a</sup> IRR calculations.

## Education

### Mathematics results by school quintile<sup>a</sup> (proportions), 2022

Rank	0%-19.9%	20%-39.9%	40%-59.9%	60%-79.9%	80%-100%	Total
Quintile 1	24.6%	38.8%	25.8%	8.9%	1.8%	100.0%
Quintile 2	22.4%	39.0%	26.8%	9.7%	2.1%	100.0%
Quintile 3	22.1%	39.3%	26.1%	10.0%	2.6%	100.0%
Quintile 4	20.5%	36.4%	27.3%	12.3%	3.4%	100.0%
Quintile 5	8.9%	28.3%	32.9%	21.9%	8.1%	100.0%
Quintile 99 <sup>b</sup>	11.6%	30.8%	34.5%	18.3%	4.8%	100.0%
<b>Total<sup>c</sup></b>	<b>19.8%</b>	<b>36.5%</b>	<b>27.9%</b>	<b>12.3%</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Stats SA, email communication, 19 June 2024

a The quintile ranking system is a poverty index used by the DBE for funding purposes (primarily school subsidies).

b Schools not captured or whose ranking is unknown.

c Figures may not add up, owing to the exclusion of 'Other/' 'Unspecified'.

### Throughput<sup>a</sup> (Grades 10-12), 1995-97 and 2021-23

The grade 10 <sup>b</sup> class of 1995 (number)		The grade 10 <sup>b</sup> class of 2021 (number)	
Grade 10 enrolment 1995	719 190	Grade 10 enrolment 2021	1 081 618
Matric candidates 1997	559 233	Matric candidates 2023	691 160
Matric passes 1997	264 795	Matric passes 2023	572 983
Bachelor's passes 1997	70 127	Bachelor's passes 2023	282 894
Maths passes 1997	116 836	Maths passes (50%+) 2023	72 126
The grade 10 <sup>b</sup> class of 1995 (proportion) <sup>c</sup>		The grade 10 <sup>b</sup> class of 2021 (proportion) <sup>c</sup>	
Grade 10 enrolment 1995	100.0%	Grade 10 enrolment 2021	100.0%
Matric candidates 1997	77.8%	Matric candidates 2023	63.9%
Matric passes 1997	36.8%	Matric passes 2023	53.0%
Bachelor's passes 1997	9.8%	Bachelor's passes 2023	26.2%
Maths passes 1997	16.2%	Maths passes (50%+) 2023	6.7%

Source: 2001/2002 Survey, p260; 2002/2003 Survey, pp247, 255; DBE, *School Realities 2021, January 2022, Table 4, p3*; 2023 NSC Exam Results Technical Report, January 2024, Table 6.1.4, p38

a The table compares the throughput of the grade 10 cohorts of 1995 and 2020, showing pupils registered in each cohort who went on to become matric candidates and how many obtained matric, bachelor's, and maths passes. For example, 719 190 grade 10s were enrolled in 1995. Of those, 559 233 became matric candidates in 1997. Some 264 795 passed matric, with 70 127 obtaining bachelor's passes, and 116 836 passing maths. In 2021, there were 1 081 618 grade 10s and 691 160 went on to become matric or NSC candidates in 2023.

b The minimum duration of a NSC or matric is three years, from grade 10 to 12.

c IRR calculations.

## Education

### Independent Examinations Board<sup>a</sup> Senior Certificate examination results, 2013-2023

Year	Number of schools	Number of candidates	— Pass —		— Bachelor's pass <sup>b</sup> —	
			Number	Proportion <sup>c</sup>	Number	Proportion <sup>d</sup>
2013	181	9 580	9 443	99%	8 150	85%
2014	191	9 976	9 814	98%	8 524	85%
2015	194	10 212	10 038	98%	8 707	85%
2016	237	11 021	10 871	99%	9 654	88%
2017	212	11 464	11 322	99%	10 146	89%
2018	249	11 514	11 390	99%	10 347	91%
2019	227	11 818	11 678	99%	—	—
2020	233	12 032	11 792	98%	10 631	88%
2021	237	12 857	12 650	98%	11 468	89%
2022	232	12 580	12 381	98%	11 236	89%
2023	248	13 967	13 752	98%	12 373	89%

Source: Independent Examinations Board (IEB), email communication

a The IEB is the examining body of independent (or private) schools, although only a small minority of independent schools write IEB exams.

b Bachelor's passes are officially known as passes with matriculation endorsement, or endorsements, and were formerly known as passes with matriculation exemption, or exemptions. Students who obtained university entrance passes achieved marks high enough to gain entry to university.

c Proportion of total candidates passing grade 12.

d The proportion of pupils who gained passes enabling them to study at university for bachelor's degrees.

## Education

### Public and independent school results, 2013-2023

Year	—Public schools—		—Independent schools—	
	Pass	Bachelor's pass	Pass	Bachelor's pass
2013	78%	31%	99%	85%
2014	76%	28%	98%	85%
2015	71%	26%	98%	85%
2016	73%	27%	99%	88%
2017	75%	29%	99%	89%
2018	78%	34%	99%	91%
2019	81%	37%	99%	—
2020	76%	36%	98%	88%
2021	76%	36%	98%	89%
2022	80%	38%	98%	89%
2023	83%	41%	98%	89%

Source: DBE, email communication; IEB, email communication; National Senior Certificate Examination: Technical Reports