

Over 180,000 spaces available for first time students

Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande says 184,315 spaces are available for first time entering students for 2021 in the public university system, as per the enrolment plan for the system as a whole.



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A total of 578,468 learners wrote the Grade 12 examination in 2020, and of these, 210,820 learners achieved an NSC pass at Bachelor's level; 150,600 learners achieved at Diploma level and 79,117 learners achieved at Higher Certificate level.

“In the scarce skills areas the available first-time entering spaces are 67,863. Of these 16,647 are in the field of studies in Engineering, 17,161 in the field of study in Life and Physical Sciences, 10,155 in the field of study of Human Health, 943 in the field of study of Animal Sciences, 211 in Veterinary Sciences and 22,746 in Initial Teacher Education,” Nzimande said on Thursday.

He added that through the National Skills Fund (NSF) and the Agri-SETA joint funding, bursaries will be provided to approximately 4,000 students who are studying at agricultural colleges, using the NSFAS criteria. Students in this field are currently not being funded by NSFAS.

“This funding will also ensure that we continue to step up support for black small-scale farmers and the implementation of the poultry master plan and the sugar master plan, amongst others. We will ensure that we work very close with the Department of Agriculture and Agrarian reform to also restore the physical infrastructure of these agricultural colleges,” Nzimande said.



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Call for calm at institutions of higher learning

Meanwhile, Nzimande has called for calm at institutions of higher learning.

The call follows the death of a 35-year-old man, Mthokozisi Ntumba, who was killed in the Braamfontein during a Wits university student protest on Wednesday.

Nzimande expressed his condolences to Ntumba's family, friends and colleagues of the deceased.

"I have directed that the Wits University Council, the Wits Management and requested the relevant law enforcement authorities agencies to provide us with an explanation on what caused this tragedy, and to take whatever steps to ensure justice is done and appropriate responsibility is accorded," Nzimande said.

The Minister urged student leaders and institutional leaders to make use of structures in place, where there are matters of dispute and grievances, to resolve problems amicably.

"We cannot afford at this time to endure disruption to the 2021 academic year, which is already starting later than usual due to the extended 2020 academic year and the delayed National Senior Certificate examinations.

"The 2020 academic year was a difficult year for everyone. Students and staff at our public institutions had to adjust to remote forms of teaching and learning and institutions had to manage the academic year during different phases of the national lockdown," Nzimande said.

He also acknowledged the communication received on Wednesday from the South African Union of Students (SAUS) which represents all public university SRCs, outlining a number of demands of students.

"I will respond to this communication as soon as I am able to do so," he said.