



NSFAS

National Student Financial Aid Scheme



Vital Statistics - 2019





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Abbreviations

CPUT	-	Cape Peninsular University of Technology
DHET	-	Department of Higher education and Training
DUT	-	Durban University of Technology
EC	-	Eastern Cape
FS	-	Free State
GP	-	Gauteng Province
KZN	-	Kwazulu natal
LP	-	Limpopo Province
MP	-	Mpumalanga Province
MUT	-	Mangosuthu University of Technology
NMU	-	Nelson Mandela University
NWU	-	North West University
NC	-	Northern Cape
NSFAS	-	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NW	-	North West
PSET	-	Post School Education and Training
Rhodes	-	Rhodes University
SMU	-	Sefaku Magatho University
SPU	-	Sol Plaatjie University
TUT	-	Tswane University of Technology
UMP	-	University of Mpumalnga
UWC	-	University of the Western Cape
UFS	-	University of Free State
US	-	Stellenbosch University
UKZN	-	University of Kwazulu Natal
UJ	-	University of Johannesburg
SMU	-	Sefaku Magatho University
TVET	-	Technical Vocational Education and Training
VUT	-	Vaal university of Technology
WC	-	Western Cape

Glossary of relevant terms

Word/Phrase	Explanation
Academically eligible student	Applicants that are registered on a DHET approved course at a public university or technical and vocational education and training (TVET) college and who have satisfied relevant NSFAS academic progression and duration rules.
Approved applicant	An applicant who has been issued a NSFAS Bursary Agreement following registration at a public university or TVET College.
Bursary	A form of financial support/grant awarded to a student, that does not need to be repaid, but which may carry contractual commitments, such as a defined period of community service.
Disbursed student	A contracted student who has had allowances and fees approved and entered into the payment system.
Eligible applicant	An applicant that is both financially and academically eligible .
Financially eligible applicant	Those applicants who qualify for funding under the economic means test rules .
First time entering (FTEN) student	A financially eligible applicant who is registered for the first time on an approved course of study at an approved institution .
Higher Education	All learning programmes leading to qualifications higher than grade 12 or its equivalent in terms of the National Qualifications Framework as contemplated in the South African Qualifications Authority Act 58 of 1995, and includes tertiary education as contemplated in Schedule 4 to the Constitution.
Household income	The combined income of the parents of the applicant who are sharing the household or place of residence listed by the applicant as their place of residence. It includes every form of income, both from the formal and informal sector (e.g., salaries, wages, retirement income, near cash government transfers like food stamps, grants, business incomes and investment gains).
New cohort students	Those registered students that first registered on an approved course at an approved institution in or after 2018.
NATED/ Report 191 programmes	NATED / Report 191 programmes are delivered under the auspices of the Department of Higher Education and Training and quality assured by Umalusi. The programmes consist of 18 months theoretical studies at colleges and 18 months relevant practical application in workplaces. Engineering studies range from N1 – N6 while Business and Utility Studies range from N4 – N6.
NCV	National Certificate Vocational (NCV) programmes are offered by public Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges. These were introduced in 2007 in a variety of vocational fields. The programmes are intended to directly respond to the priority skills demands of the South African economy. It is offered at Levels 2, 3 and 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)
Registered student	A student registered on an approved course at an approved institution .
TVET College	Technical and Vocational Education and Training College as established by the Further Education and Training Act 16 of 2006 (replaced the Further Education and Training Act 98 of 1998).
University	Any university established, deemed to be established or declared as a university under the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, and/or subsequent amendments. As per the NSFAS Act, a “designated higher education institution” means a higher education institution with which the NSFAS has entered into an agreement in terms of section 20 of the Act.

Background and the objective of the Vital Statistics series

The NSFAS Act NO 56 of 1999 sets out the functions of NSFAS as the:

- a. allocation of funds for loans and bursaries to eligible students;
- b. development of criteria and conditions for the granting of loans and bursaries to eligible students in consultation with the Minister;
- c. raising of funds as contemplated in section 14(1);
- d. recovery of loans;
- e. maintenance and analysis of a database and undertaking research for the better utilisation of financial resources;
- f. advising of the Minister on matters relating to student financial aid; and
- g. performance of other functions assigned to it by this Act or by the Minister.

Highlights

- In 2019 NSFAS received over **620 000** new applications and funded over **750 000** students
- Majority of **NSFAS funded students** are **female**
- The overwhelming majority of **NSFAS beneficiaries** are **African**
- The majority of NSFAS funded students can be found at **universities**
- The majority of NSFAS applications come from **KZN**
- The most NSFAS funded students came from the broad field of Humanities (**37%**), followed by Science, Engineering and Technology (**26%**); Education (**22%**) and Business, Economics and Management studies (**15%**).
- In 2019 NSFAS disbursed a total of **R27.7 billion** across South African public PSET institutions
- NSFAS funded students constituted roughly a **quarter of graduates** in 2017.

The Vital Statistics Series provides a formalized document that, on an annual basis, will present and regularly communicate information based on a descriptive analysis of available NSFAS data. This aligns with fulfilling mandates b), e) and f). The greater communication and availability of NSFAS data will assist in the post-school education and training (PSET) system evaluation of the role of student financial aid in reaching education and training, and broader societal goals in South Africa.

The series aims to provide the latest audited data available on NSFAS funded students in an easy to use and consistent format. This issue presents primarily 2019 data¹, with some comparison to the previous issue where appropriate. Most of the graphs in the publication are based on data extracted from the NSFAS Business Intelligence, Operational Data Store (ODS) and Phoenix (payment) systems. The NSFAS Vital Statistics document is designed to provide consistent messaging and reporting. This issue will report along four key areas:

- **Area 1:** Who applies for NSFAS funding?
- **Area 2:** Who does NSFAS fund?
- **Area 3:** How much money is spent and where?
- **Area 4:** Performance of students funded by NSFAS?

¹ This data is based on the most recently available internal data as extracted on the 1st of March 2021.

Highlights



In 2019 NSFAS received over
620 000
New Applications

NSFAS funded students constituted roughly a **quarter of graduates** in 2017.



funded over
750 000
students

44%

were first time entering and the remainder continuing students



Majority of NSFAS funded students are
female



The majority of NSFAS funded students can be found at
universities



The majority of **NSFAS applications** come from

Kwa-Zulu Natal



In 2019 NSFAS disbursed a total of

R27.7 billion

across South African public PSET institutions

The most NSFAS funded students came from the broad field of

Humanities (37%)

Education (22%)

Engineering and Technology (26%)

Economics and Management studies (15%)

Introduction

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has a very clear social mission: to alleviate financial constraint for disadvantaged students, who are academically qualified, to gain admission to post school education and training (PSET). The scheme thus focusses on increasing accessibility for poor and other marginalized groups to public Universities and Technical and Vocational Educational and Training (TVET) colleges. In 2018 NSFAS implemented two major changes as per the Presidential pronouncement of December 2017:

- The household income limit for the assessment of financial eligibility, increased from **R122,000** p.a. to **R350,000** p.a.
- From 2018, all support would be in the form of a bursary, rather than a combination of bursary and loan.

A key expectation in 2018 thus was that there would be an increase in demand for bursaries and substantially increased disbursements to students. In 2019, the expectation of a rise in demand persists. There has not been any major change in policy for the 2019 academic year, other than the implementation of a universal personal care allowance to recognize and alleviate difficulties our beneficiaries face in attending to their basic needs.

As adopted in the inaugural 2018 version, this 2019 version of the NSFAS Vital Statistics document will continue to differentiate between applications, financially and academically eligible individuals, and disbursements².

Area 1: Who applies to NSFAS?

In 2019 NSFAS received a total of **642 116** new applications. Of these, the majority came from KZN (**24%**) and Gauteng (**21%**) provinces, with the smallest proportions of applications coming from the Northern Cape (**2%**). This does not compare poorly with the provincial proportions in terms of schooling participation; where the Western Cape constitutes 9.1%, Eastern Cape **14.3%**, Kwazulu-Natal **22.4%**, Free State **5.6%**, Northern Cape **2.4%**, North-West **6.7%**, Gauteng **17.3%**, Limpopo **13.6%** and Mpumalanga **8.6%** (DBE, 2019).

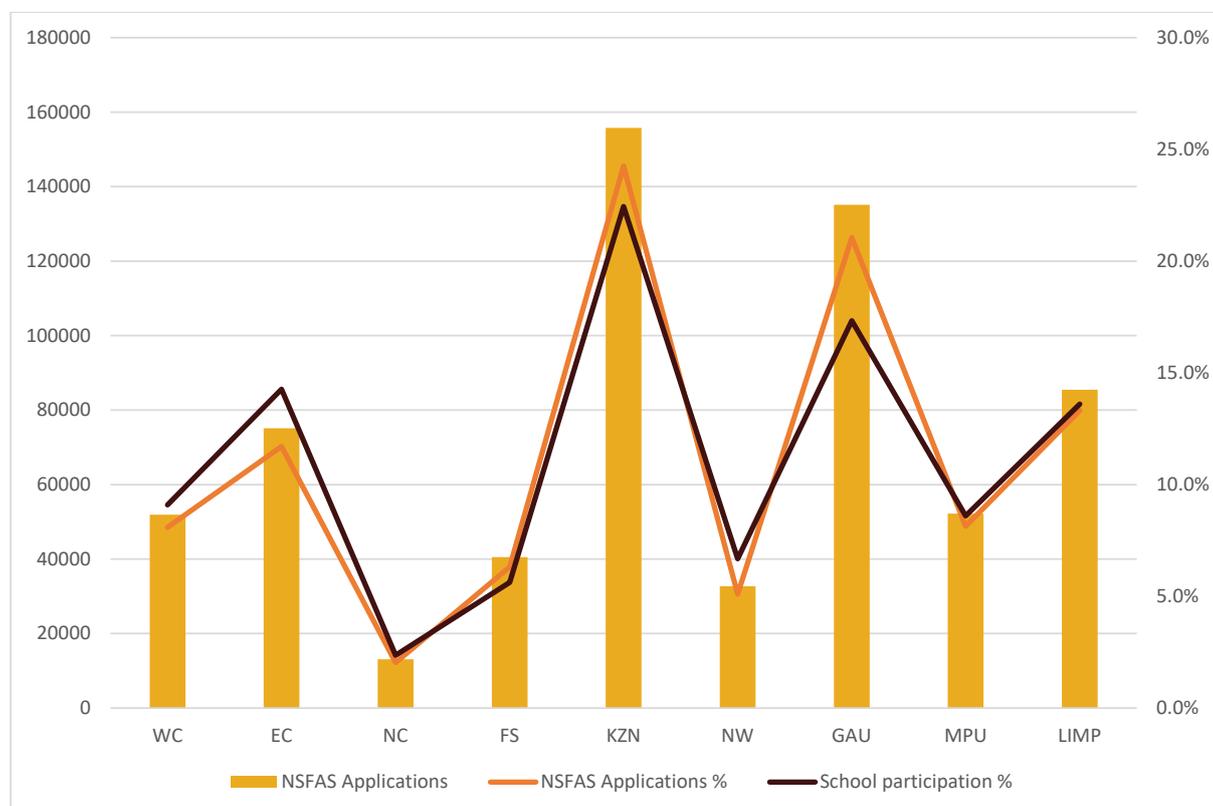


Figure 1: 2019 NSFAS applications, disaggregated by province³

² Within the operational environment a differentiation is often made between disbursements and payments, the former to indicate that monies have been paid from NSFAS to institutions and the latter to indicate the monies reaching the student.

³ As extracted from BI on the 6th of May 2021. The numbers would exclude applications that did not indicate province. The schooling participation data was sourced from the Department of Basic Education Statistics for 2019.

An explicit goal of the social support system in the country is ensuring that the most vulnerable and marginalized social groups receive available government support as quickly and efficiently as possible. Since 2017 there has been consistent effort to grow this cohort of applicants for NSFAS support. In 2019, about **19%** of new applications were identified as coming from families that receive social grant support (aka SASSA applicants) (**120 851**). Furthermore, the biggest proportion of new applicants are female (**390 087**) and African (**582 993**).

Area 2: Who does NSFAS fund?

2.1 Demographic and locational profile, 2019

Upon receipt of registration data for 2019, NSFAS confirmed funding for **753,521** students, made up of **402,189** university and **351,154** TVET college students with **99%** of bursary agreements generated accepted or signed by students. Unsigned NBAs contributed significantly to NSFAS' s inability to disburse to students in prior years. This thus represents a significant improvement and prevented legacy issues being carried over to the 2020 cycle. For planning purposes it is also important to reflect the proportion of funded students that are new and continuing students. In 2019, approximately **44%** of all funded students were new and the remainder made up of continuing students. At institutional level, for universities, roughly **36%**, and for TVET Colleges roughly **52%**, are new students.

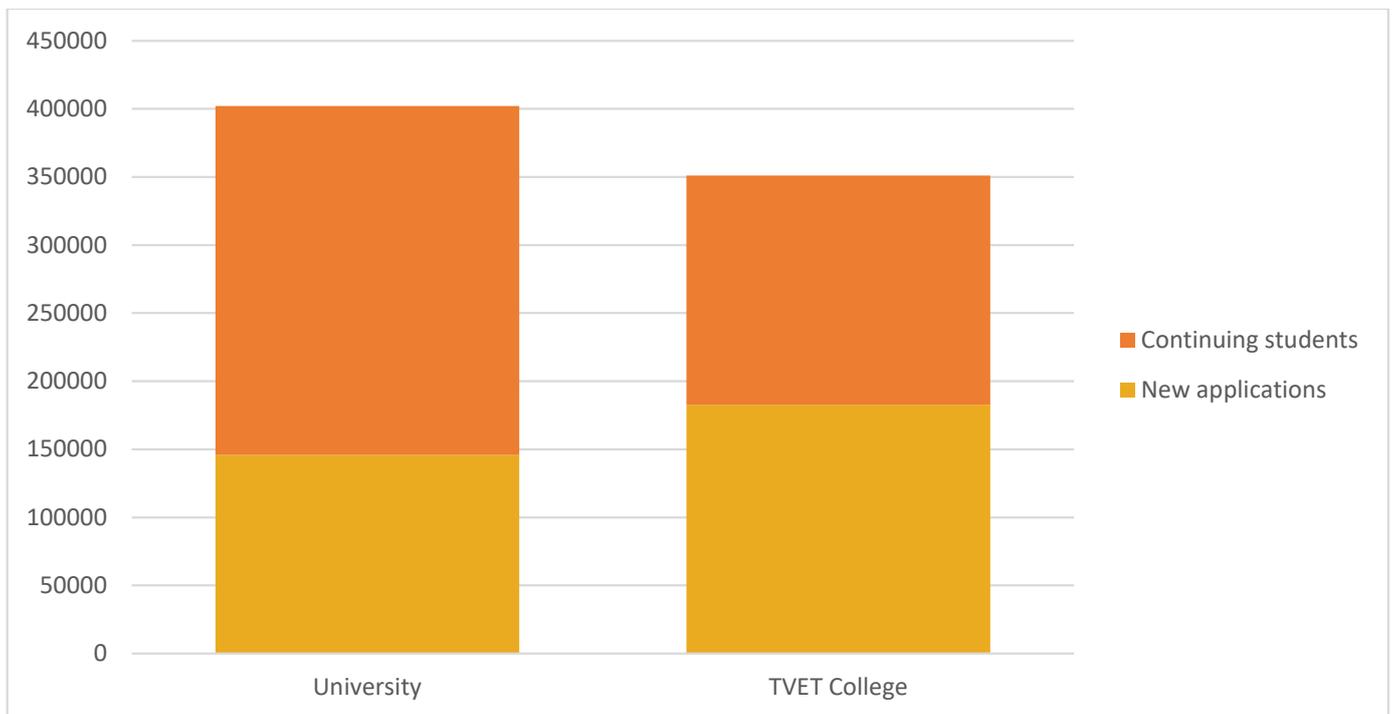


Figure 2: Proportions of first-time entering and continuing students funded at universities and TVET Colleges, 2019

Of these confirmed funded students, **63%** were females and **37%** were male. The overwhelming majority of beneficiaries were African students (**93.9%**), followed by Coloured students (**4.7%**), White students (**0.6%**) and Indian students (**0.6%**) (Fig 3). The proportion of African students is some **14%** higher than the proportion of Africans in South African society. Coloured, White and Indian students are all underrepresented, compared to society by **4%**, **7%** and **2%**, respectively.

⁴ For the purpose of this report funded means the number of students that satisfied both the academic and financial eligibility criteria for funding in 2019. A further distinction is made later in the document where we consider disbursements. A number of factors contributes to the success of the disbursement process and there will be a difference between students found to be eligible and those that end up receiving funding.

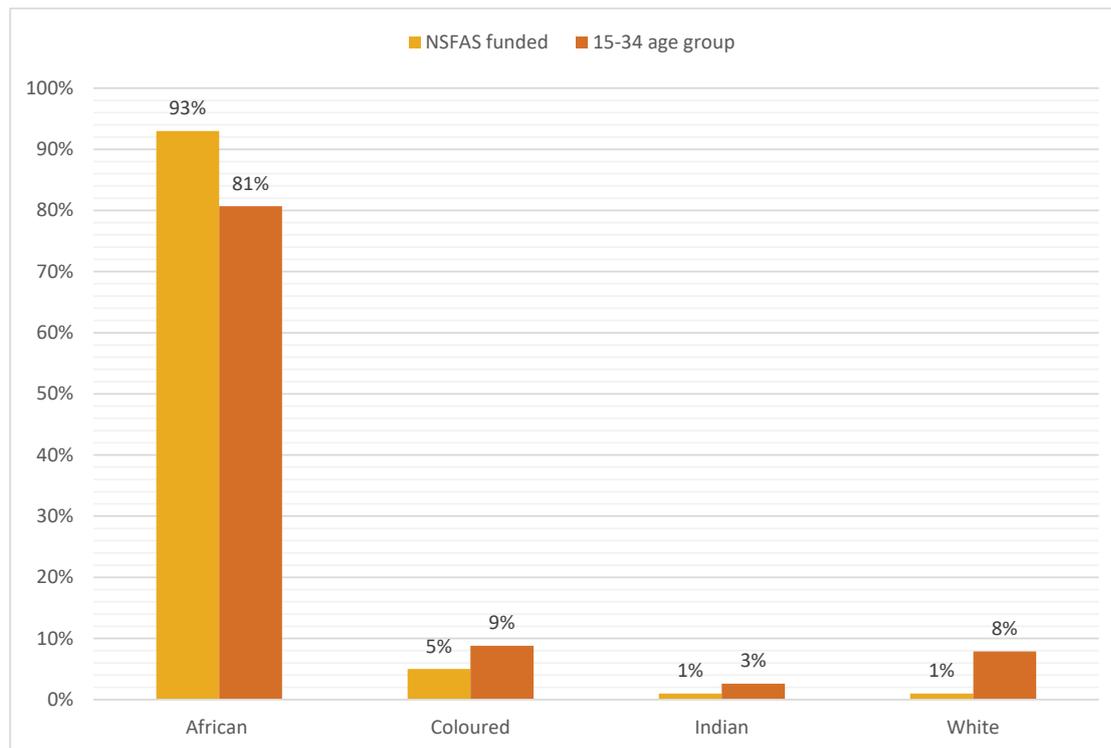


Figure 3: Comparison between the 15-34 years age group in the South African Population and 2019 NSFAS funded students, disaggregated by race⁵

As indicated earlier, an explicit goal of the social support system in the country is ensuring that the most vulnerable and marginalized social groups receive available government support as quickly and efficiently as possible and growing partnership with the Department of Social Development (**DSD**) has resulted in significant growth in the proportion of both applications and funded students that are from individuals from families that receive social grant support. Just under **21%** of NSFAS beneficiaries in 2019 (**104 538**) were from households receiving social grant support.

⁵ The calculation for proportional representation of racial groupings of NSFAS beneficiaries excludes a total of 10 921 students that did not indicate their race and those classifying themselves as "other". The proportions for South Africa are based on the 2019 mid-year population estimates.

2.2 Institutional type, field of study and qualification type, 2019

2.2.1 Universities

The majority of NSFAS funded students can be found at universities for the 2019 academic year. In line with NSFAS funding policy, the majority of NSFAS funded students are registered for undergraduate qualifications:

- National First Degree (**57%**),
- National diplomas (**16%**)
- Diplomas (**15%**)

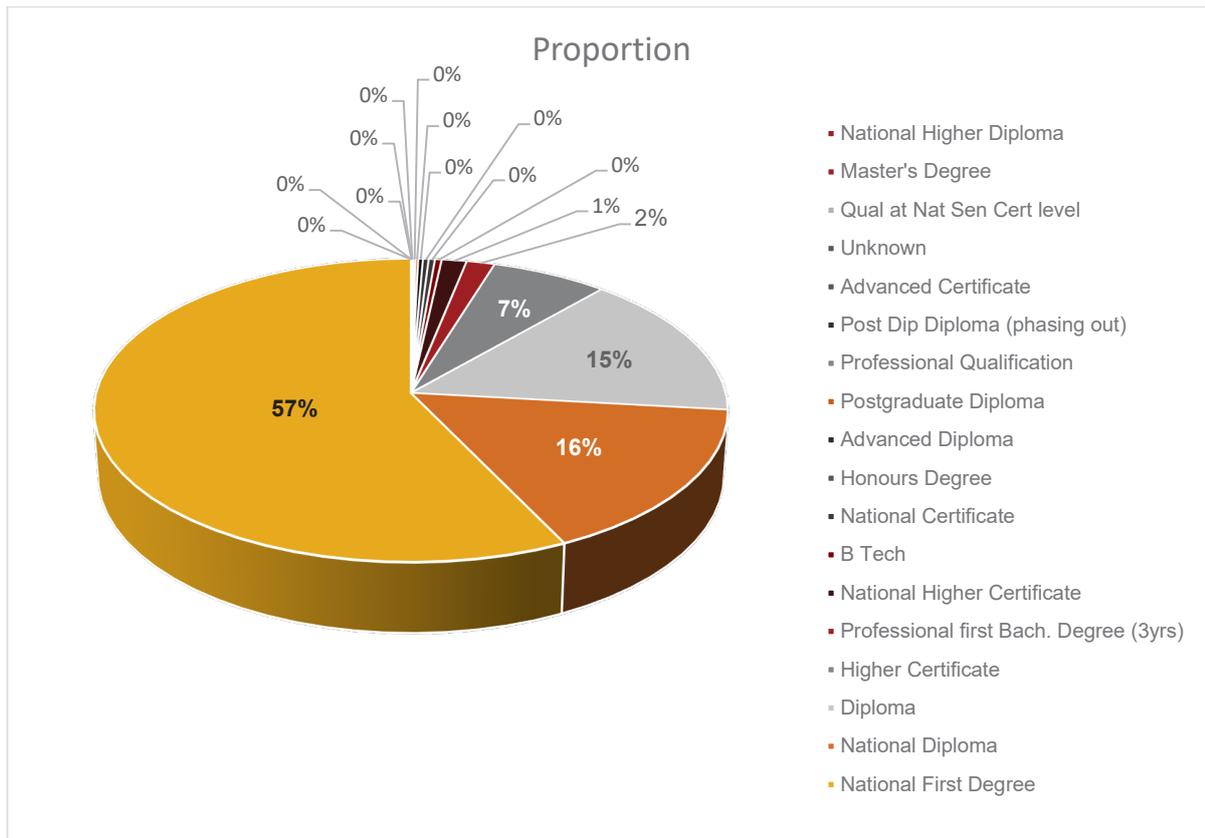


Figure 4: 2019 University NSFAS funded students by qualification type

A set list of eligible post-graduate qualifications explains why there would be a proportion of 2019 NSFAS funded students that received funding for post-graduate qualifications (less than 1% for each category). There has been a vast improvement in the proportion of qualifications that are unclassified; evidence of better classification at institutional level as well as improved organizational data integration has dramatically reduced erroneous funding based on non-eligible programmes. Figure 5 depicts the proportion of NSFAS funded students disaggregated by broad field of study⁶.

⁶ We use the CHE (2013) categorisation to aggregate the 20 CESM categories into four broad field or areas of study in the following way: 1. Science, Engineering and Technology (SET): CESM 01, 02, 06, 08, 09, 10, 13, 14, 15 & 16 2. Business & Commerce (B&C): CESM 04 3. Humanities (Hum): CESM 03, 05, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19 & 20, and 4. Education (Ed): CESM 07.

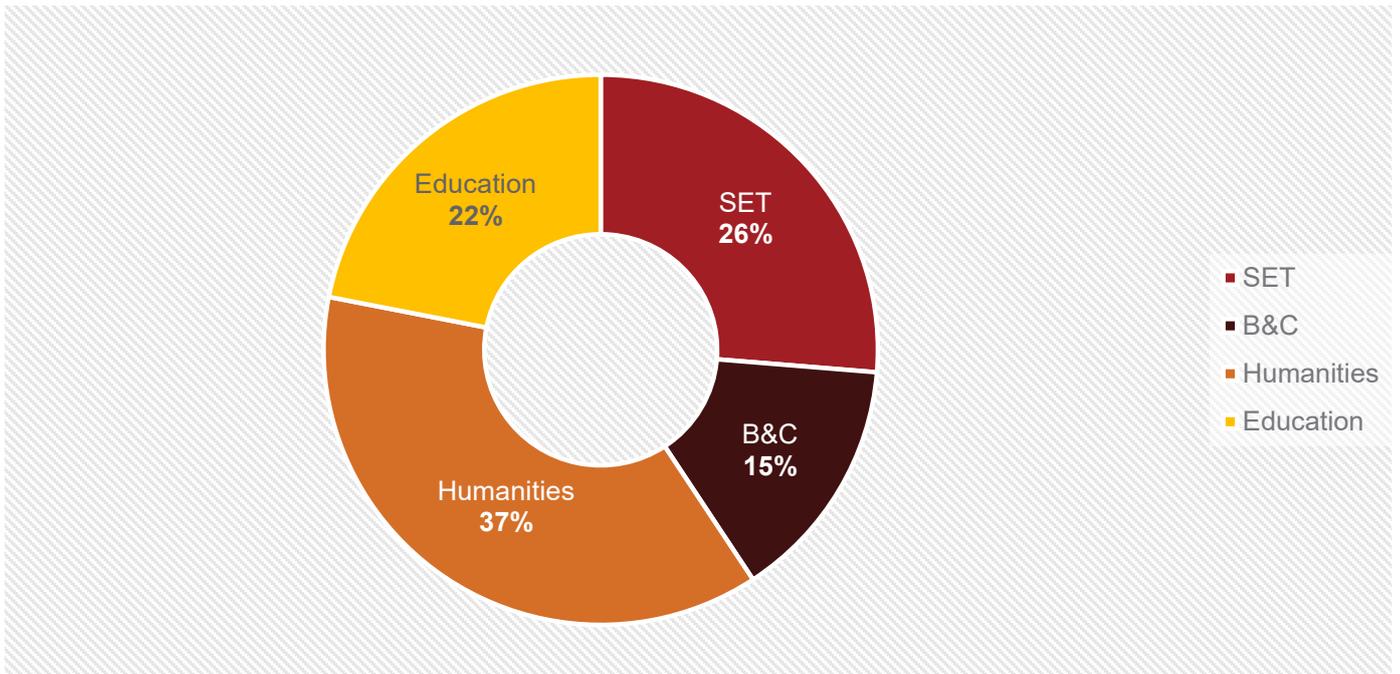


Figure 5: Proportion of NSFAS funded students, by broad field of study

From the figure we see that the most NSFAS funded students came from the broad field of Humanities (37%), followed by Science, Engineering and Technology (26%); Education (22%) and Business and Commerce (15%). This represents a decline in the proportion of applications for study in SET (37% in 2018) and Business and Commerce fields (31% in 2018), with the most significant increase in applications in the Humanities (25% in 2018) and Education (7% in 2018) fields.

2.2.2 TVET Colleges

The majority of NSFAS funded students at TVET Colleges in 2019, were enrolled for Report 191 programmes (70%), with the minority enrolled in NCV programmes (30%). These proportions are basically static in comparison to the data for 2018 (71% for Report 191 and 29% for NCV programmes).

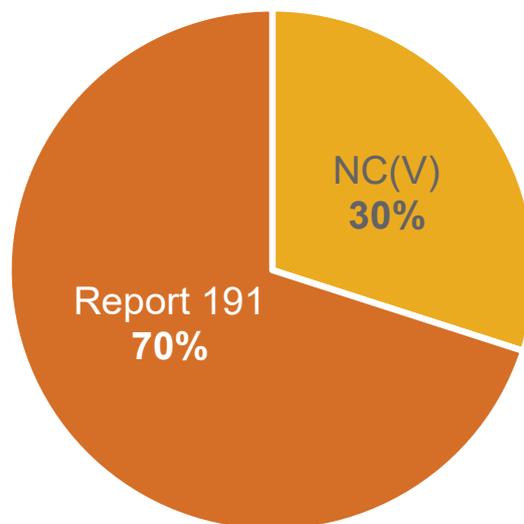


Figure 6: Proportion of NSFAS funded students, by type of TVET programme

Figure 7 illustrates that for those NSFAS funded students participating in NCV programmes, the majority of students were studying in Office Administration. The fact that the biggest proportion of students are found in the Office Administration programme is consistent with the 2018 data, but comparatively much bigger proportions in 2019 are participating in Engineering and related Design and Electrical Infrastructure Programmes, with the minority being in the Drawing Office Practice and Process Plant Operations programmes.

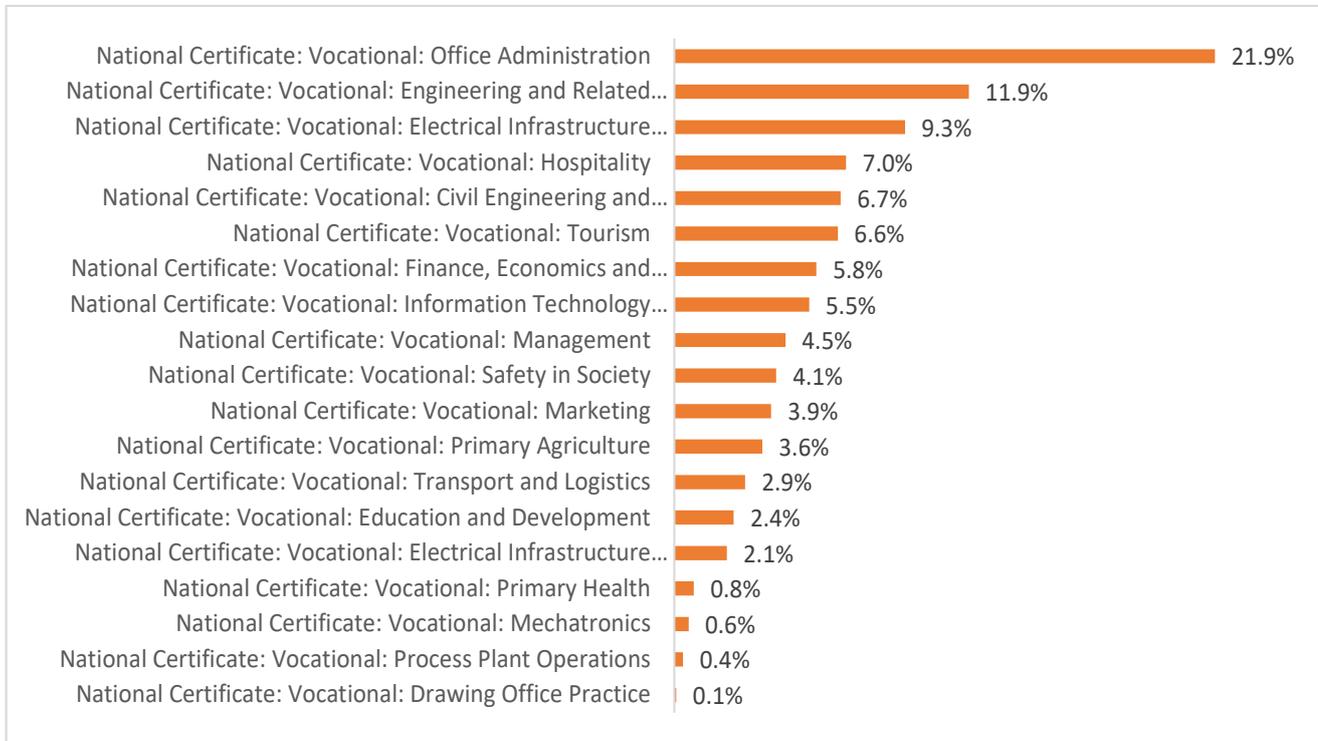


Figure 7: 2019 TVET NSFAS funded students by qualification: NCV programmes

On the other hand Figure 8 shows that the majority of students enrolled in Report 191 programmes in 2019 were enrolled for Engineering studies and the minority for the Medical Secretary programme. This trend is consistent with that for 2018 with Engineering Studies being the programme where the majority of NSFAS beneficiaries could be found. The management programmes all have sizeable proportions of NSFAS funded students as well.

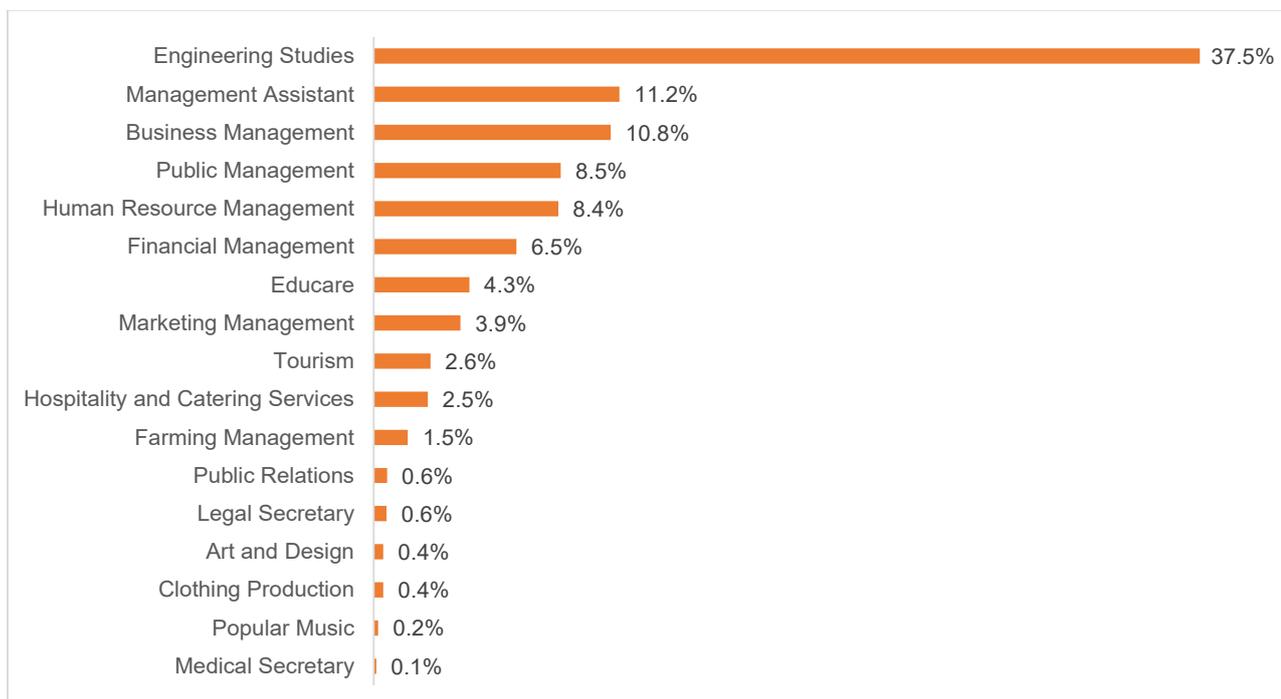


Figure 8: 2019 TVET NSFAS funded students by qualification: N/Report 191 programmes

Area 3: How much money is spent, on what and where?

The funds that NSFAS disburses in lieu of the full cost of study of students studying at Universities and TVET Colleges falls into the following three categories: 1) Registration, 2) Tuition and 3) Allowances (Accommodation, Meals, Learning materials, Transport and Personal Care). With regards to registration it is important to indicate that in 2019 a policy decision was made that no student that has confirmed funding from NSFAS will be required to pay registration. Furthermore, tuition is paid to institutions and the majority of allowances is paid to students directly through the NSFAS Wallet platform. Where systems are not yet fully supported, institutions still facilitate the payment of allowances to students. While the following section generates an NSFAS per capita spend at institutions, it bears noting that a range of factors impact on the amount of bursary funding spent per person and across institutions, for example, the types of programmes enrolled for differ in price across institutions, the per capita spend for persons with disabilities would be slightly higher; as they would qualify for support to purchase assistive devices, there will be differing proportions of students qualifying for accommodation or travel allowances. However, the number of persons with disabilities receiving NSFAS funding at any of the institutions is not substantive enough to significantly influence the average per capita spend at any institution. The per capita spend is a snapshot measure to indicate on average how much is spent on funding a typical student per annum.

3.1 To which institutions, 2019

In 2019 NSFAS disbursed a total of R27,7 billion across South African public PSET institutions in lieu of the DHET Bursary Scheme. Universities accounting for 22.5 billion and TVETS 5.1 billion aligning with the treasury guidelines for TVET funding⁷ which indicates that TVETS only receive 20% of the fees proportion from NSFAS and the remainder coming directly from the DHET. While NSFAS does administer funds from other sources, the DHET Bursary funding in 2019, constituted roughly 88% of funding administered.

Figure 9 represents disbursement values for universities for 2019 per institution. An overall average per capita spend on students in 2019 was found to be R56 064 (in 2018 this was R62 000⁸), with a standard deviation of roughly R21 000. Using the number of students funded against the disbursed amount per institution results in a per capita funding rate, which shows a range in funding at Universities from a minimum of R13 946 (in 2018 this was R13 605) to a maximum of R103 101 (in 2018 this was R88 633). We find that Unisa (R13 946), CUT (R32 553) and DUT (R39 393) are the institutions with the lowest NSFAS per capita spend and UCT (R103 101), Rhodes (R101 221), Wits (R99 860) and UP (R99 209) have the highest NSFAS per capita spend.

⁷ National Treasury. 2014. Performance and expenditure review. TVET funding model. Accessed on 30 May 2019 from <https://www.gtac.gov.za/perdocuments/TVET%20PER.PDF>.

⁸ This average is influenced by the inclusion of the low per capita rate for UNISA students.

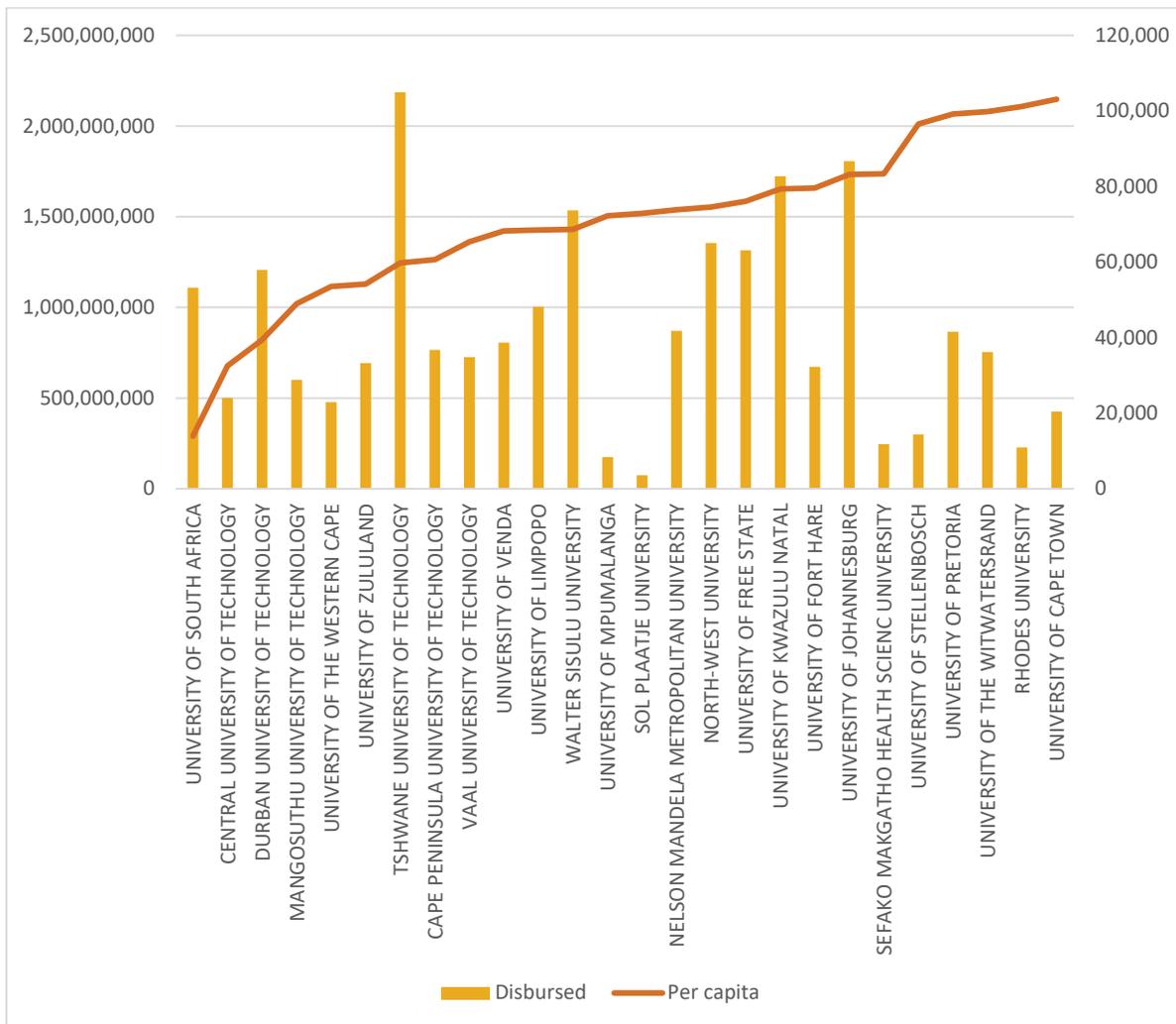


Figure 9: University disbursement values disaggregated by institution, 2019

Figure 9 represents actual utilization values for TVET Colleges for 2019 per institution. From the data, Ma-juba and South West TVET College received the highest disbursement amounts, with Lephalale, Northern Cape Rural and Goldfields TVET Colleges receiving the least. Using the number of students funded against the disbursed amount per institution results in a per capita funding rate, which shows a range in funding at TVET Colleges from a minimum of R22 295 to a maximum of R40 087, with an average cost of roughly R30 192, and a spread of costs with a standard deviation of roughly R4 500. When the number of students funded at each institution is taken into account, we find that Flavius Mareka (R22 295) and Ingwe College (R22 999) are the institutions with the lowest NSFAS per capita spend and South West (R44 07), College of Cape Town (R40 112), Waterberg (R39 608) and West Coast (R39 252) have the highest NSFAS per capita spend.

⁹ Based on 2019 TVET college utilisation data as at October 2020.

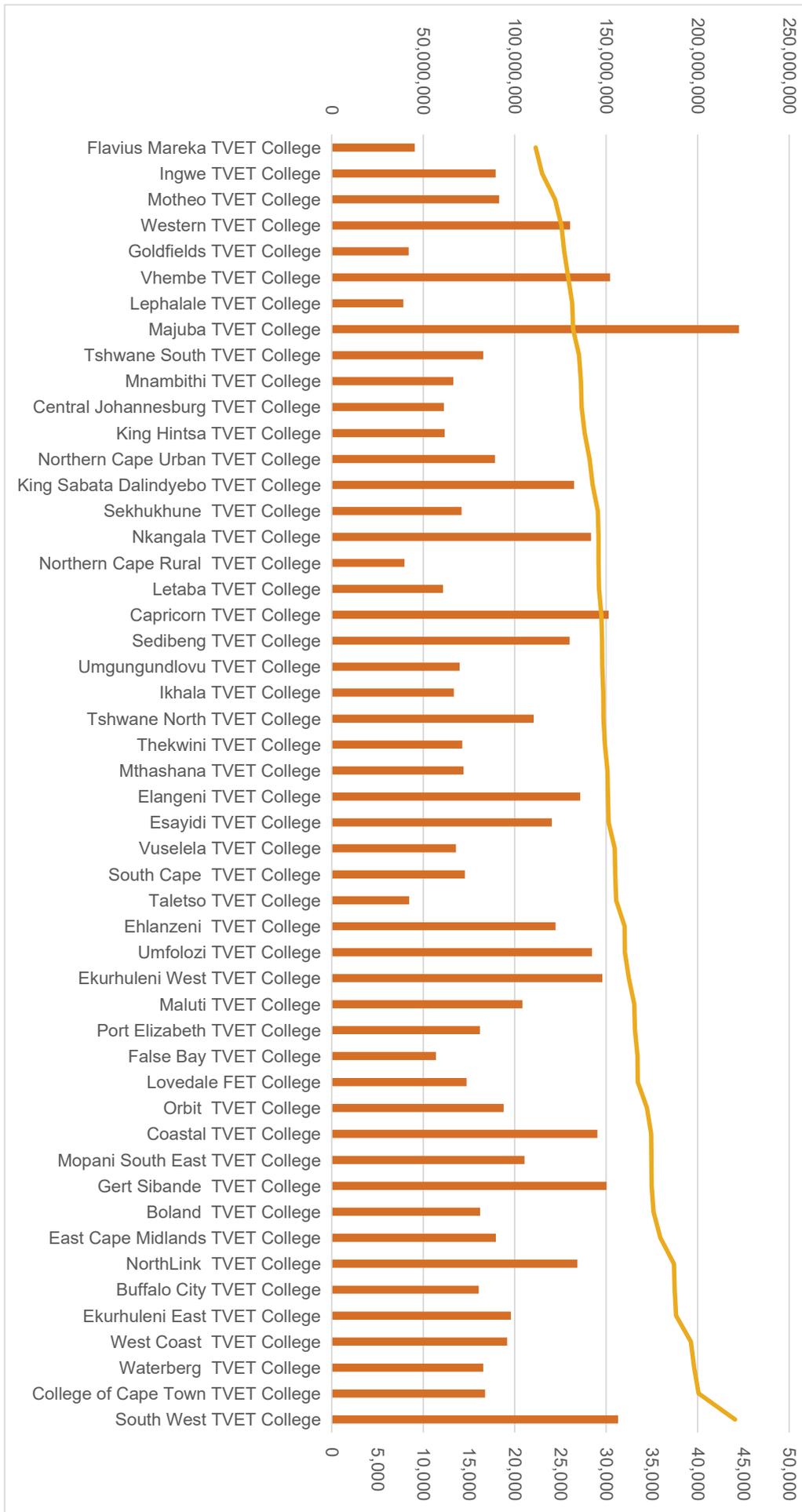


Figure 10: TVET disbursement values disaggregated by institution, 2019⁹

For both the University and TVET College data it is important to understand that these rates are calculated to give an overview of spending per institution but is of course influenced by the mixture of programmes and qualifications that are offered and taken up at different institutions. Understandably, some courses of study are more expensive than others, and if bigger proportions of NSFAS funded students are participating in the more expensive courses, then this would play a role in higher per capita spend at some institutions in comparison to others.

Area 4: How does NSFAS funding support measures of performance?

4.1 Completion and/or graduation

Establishing performance of NSFAS-funded students in the absence of tracer or cohort study data will always be only a rough and crude measure. Towards establishing some measure of performance of NSFAS funded students, in this document we calculate the proportion of NSFAS funded students that graduated in 2017. We repeat the calculation of this indicator annually to establish a robust measure of trends in the relative success of NSFAS funded students over time. It was possible to identify 50 253 NSFAS funded students that had graduated in 2017¹⁰. The total number of graduates from public HEIs in 2017 was 197 045¹¹. This means that NSFAS funded students constituted 25.5% of graduates in 2017.

4.2 Which institutions

Figure 11 illustrates the disaggregation of this overall statistic by institution. The figure shows that NSFAS funded students continue to constitute a very small proportion of 2017 graduates at the University of Stellenbosch (5.9%) and University of Pretoria (10.4%), while at the University of Zululand (77.4%) and Mpumalanga (85.2%) they represent over 70% of graduates. Rather than interpreting this as a measure of success per institution, this indicator merely illustrates to us the extent to which NSFAS funding has contributed to national and institutional graduation numbers for that year.

Furthermore, while the variation in proportion by institution is important to reflect, it is a statistic that must be interpreted carefully. The proportion that NSFAS funded students constitute of the overall student population at a university plays an important role, as well as the proportion of funded students that are first time entering and continuing. For example, based on 2019 data, we know that Universities of Venda, Zululand and Limpopo all had above 80% of their enrolment being NSFAS funded (82.5%, 81.1% and 81.1% of enrolment respectively), whereas only 15% of SU student enrolment in 2019 was NSFAS funded.

While the 2017 statistic represents a decline of the overall proportion that NSFAS beneficiaries constitute of the national graduating cohort, the figure shows interesting shifts in the proportion that NSFAS beneficiaries constitute of the graduating cohort at particular universities.

¹⁰ The method of identification of graduation status relies on HEMIS data, the most recent validated data is 2017.

¹¹ Department of Higher Education (DHET) (2019) Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa: 2017. March.

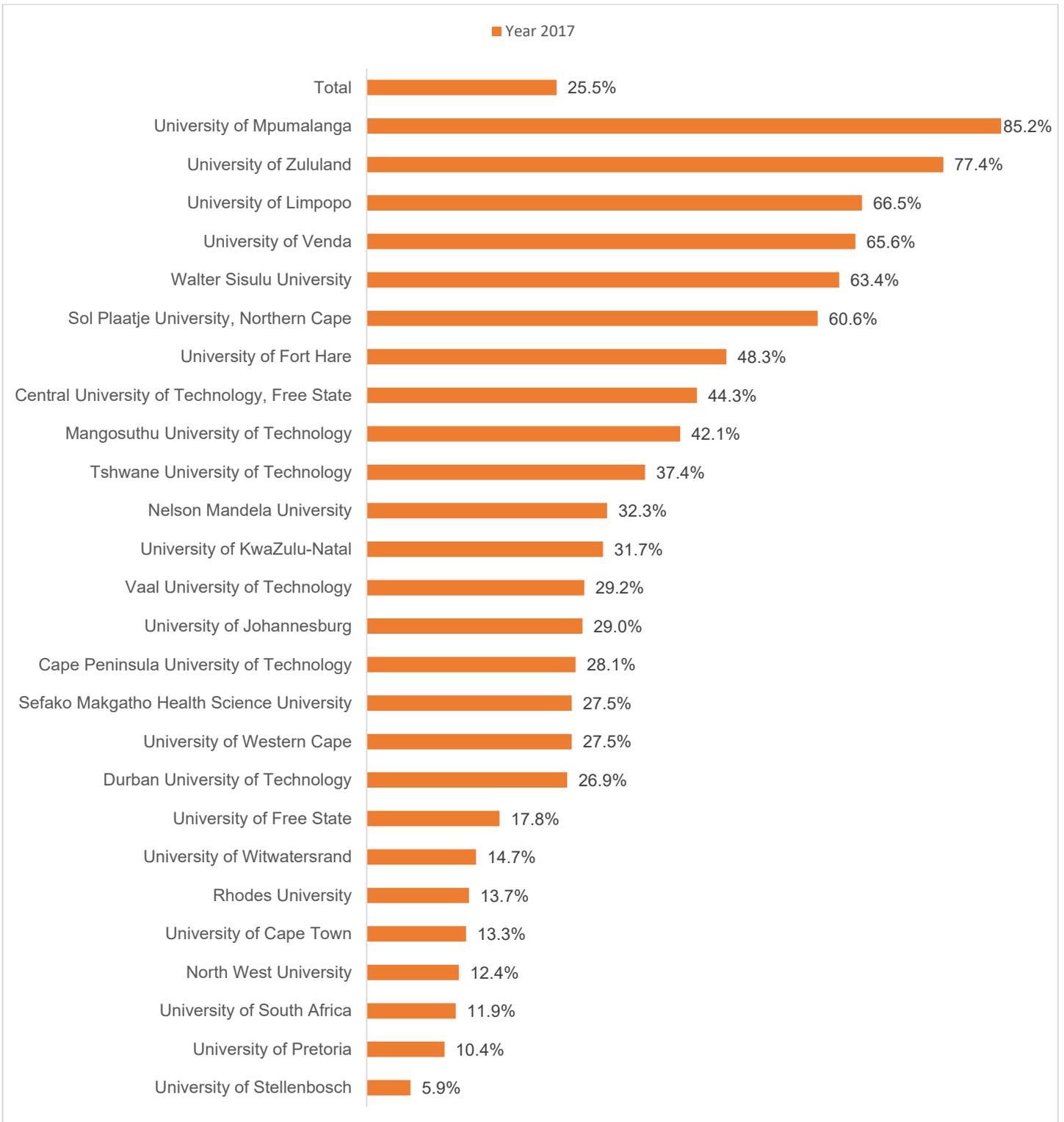


Figure 11: Number of NSFAS graduates per institution as a proportion of overall graduates per institution,

4.3 In which fields of study

Finally, it is of national interest to reflect the fields of study that NSFAS funded students graduate in, to understand how we are contributing to building the national skills base in defined areas. Compared to the statistics for 2016, Figure 12 illustrates a substantial shift in the proportion of graduates coming from the Humanities fields (from 27% in 2016 to 47% in 2017), contribution to the production of skills in the SET fields remained the same as last year (at 24%) and a decrease in the proportion of graduates from the Education (from 26% in 2016 to 14% in 2017) and Business and Commerce fields- (from 23% in 2016 to 15% in 2017) is evident.

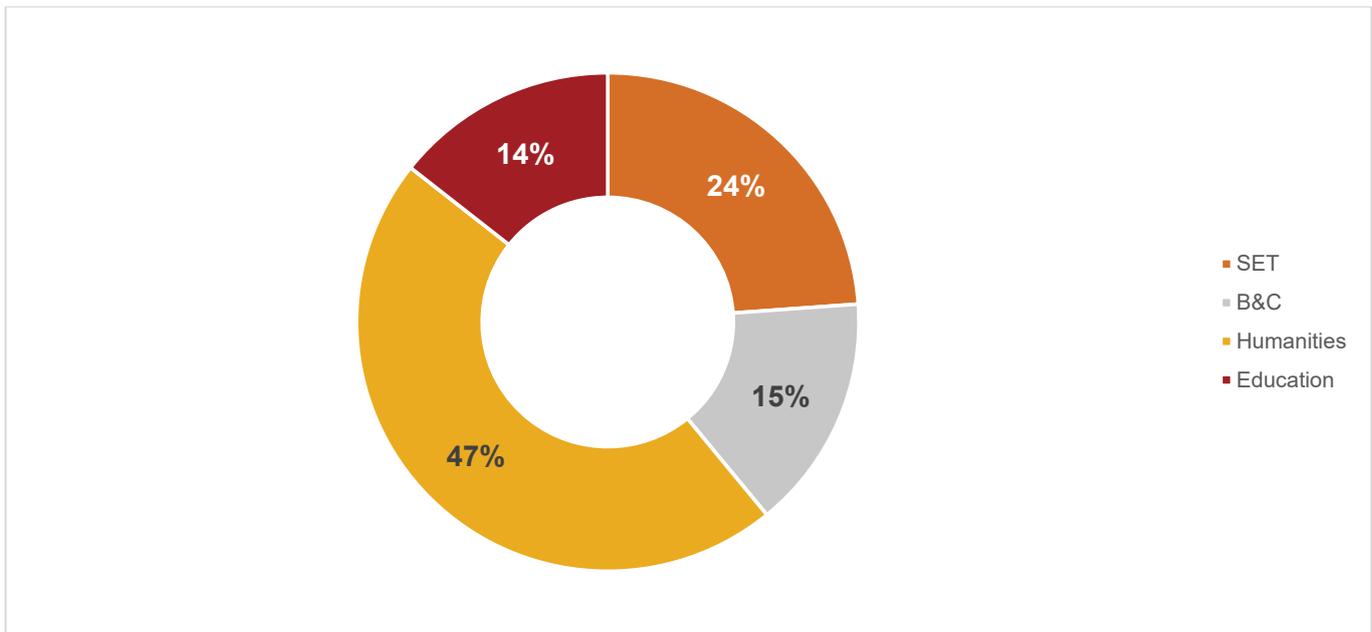


Figure 12: Proportion of NSFAS funded graduates by broad field of study, 2017

Within the broad SET field, the biggest proportion of graduates come from Physical Sciences and Mathematics and Statistics (20% respectively) and the smallest proportions from Military Sciences (0%) and Family Ecology and Consumer Sciences (2%). Within the broad Humanities field of study, the majority of graduates come from the Languages, Linguistics and Literature fields (38%), with the minority coming from Visual and Performing Arts (3%). For Humanities, the proportional distribution profile is largely consistent with that of 2016, it is just for SET where the profile is slightly different from that noted for 2016 where the largest proportion of SET graduates came from the fields of Physical Sciences and Life Sciences.





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