

# Can't attend university? There are other options for higher education...

By [Eloise Nolte](#)

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As thousands of matric learners across the country start writing their final exams, many are wondering what their next steps will be.



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After surviving one of the most challenging academic years in decades, matriculants will also be entering one of the toughest job markets of our time. The impact of Covid-19 on the economy has seen South Africa's [expanded unemployment rate rise to 42%](#).

Now more than ever, the decision that learners make after completing their school career is critical to their career prospects. While many opt for university, there is an ever-growing list of alternatives for learners who don't want to go to university, who can't afford it, or who don't qualify.

There are also options for those who don't manage to complete matric. This is not the time to be disheartened about the future, this is the time for adaptation, innovation and hope.

## Understanding the NQF

With a Grade 10, 11 or 12 qualification learners can move upwards in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels.

In South Africa, the NQF is the system used to measure levels of learning. There are 10 NQF levels and they fall into three categories: General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework, Higher Educational Qualifications Sub-Framework, and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework. The 10 levels are:

	Academic Route	Vocational/Skills Route
NQF level 1	General Education Certificate: Grades 4 to 9	GEC
NQF level 2	Grade 10	National (vocational) Certificate level 2 and NATED 1
NQF level 3	Grade 11	National (vocational) Certificate level 3 and NATED 2
NQF level 4	National Senior Certificate Grade 12	National (vocational) Certificate level 4 and NATED 3
NQF level 5	Higher Certificate	Higher Certificates and Advanced National (vocational) Cert. N4 – N6
NQF level 6	National Diploma and Advanced Certificate	National Diplomas and Advanced Certificates
NQF level 7	Bachelor's degree, Advanced Diploma, Postgraduate Certificates	
NQF level 8	Honours Degree & Postgraduate Diploma	
NQF level 9	Master's Degree	
NQF level 10	Doctorate Degree	

Understanding these levels and how they work can help learners to find vacancies for which they're qualified. Achieving the next NQF level also doesn't necessarily involve going to university. Many of these qualifications can be achieved through distance learning (something today's learners are familiar with), adult education and training institutions, or through technical and vocational education and training colleges.

Learners can start by looking at the fields that are most in-demand today, and assess whether their interests fit these fields of study before exploring how they might go about completing the next NQF level.

## Moving through the ranks

According to [recent reports](#), applicants with skills in business management, accounting, office administration and information technology (IT) have continued to be among the most in-demand during 2020.

School leavers looking to enter the business management and accounting space might be interested in working with the well-regarded Institute of Certified Bookkeepers (ICB). Many of the ICB's courses don't require a matric but can provide learners with an NQF level 6 qualification, which is higher than a matric.

For example, learners might consider starting with an ICB foundation level national certificate in bookkeeping which, upon completion, results in a recognised National Certificate. They can then work their way up from there, through another three levels, to achieve a National Diploma in Financial Accounting.

## Other options

Currently, there is a [severe shortage of artisans in SA](#), with several options in this space that learners might want consider as well. National trade courses in essential career paths such as boilermaking, welding, fitting and turning, electrical and motor trade — all critical for engineering-related fields — can help learners to gain a foothold in the current market. These qualifications are known as N1, N2 and N3 qualifications, and enable learners to apply to a college to complete a Higher National Diploma afterwards.

Learners might also consider looking into specialised accredited courses.

It's important that learners know that there are alternatives to university. In a world that is constantly changing, traditional educational routes aren't the only answer.

Think creatively, and watch as different career options open up.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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