

Labour Matters: ELRC and PSCBC

NAPTOSA Urges ELRC to Study School Overcrowding and Education Quality

Lorvica Matthews and Greg Masondo

NAPTOSA has formally requested the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) to conduct a comprehensive study on the current state of overcrowding in schools and its impact on the quality of education.

Overcrowded classrooms are a growing concern, as the greater the number of learners in a class, the less individual attention each learner receives. This is particularly detrimental to struggling learners who require additional support, leading to lower academic performance and poor test scores.

Beyond academic challenges, persistent overcrowding has negative psychological effects on both teachers and learners. Teachers, overwhelmed by excessive workloads, may lose confidence in their abilities and become disengaged from their work. Learners, in turn, feel neglected and struggle to stay motivated in an environment that lacks sufficient support.

Additionally, overcrowding has a direct and severe impact on teachers' working conditions. Large class sizes increase administrative tasks, making lesson planning, grading, and classroom management more demanding. Teachers face higher stress levels, exhaustion, and burnout, which ultimately affect their job satisfaction and retention in the profession. In extreme cases, poor working conditions may lead to high teacher turnover, further destabilizing the education system.



As the demand for quality education continues to rise, it is essential to assess the extent of this crisis, determine its root causes, and explore practical, evidence-based solutions. NAPTOSA believes that the findings from this study will provide critical insights to guide policy decisions and interventions aimed at improving teaching and learning conditions.

Instead of delivering quality education, teachers have been reduced to crowd controllers in chaotic classrooms. Overcrowding not only undermines the learning experience but also raises concerns about safety and overall well-being of both educators and learners. Addressing this issue is imperative to ensure that both teachers and learners can thrive in a supportive educational environment.

There is currently a process in place where the Department of Basic Education has established a Capacity Task Team—of which NAPTOSA is a part—that is formulating regulations regarding school capacity. We will continue to keep members updated.

Early Retirement Discussions Underway at PSCBC: *Lorvica Matthews and Greg Masondo*

Early Retirement is currently under discussion at the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC). The employer has presented their research findings and proposals to the council, outlining potential approaches to implementing the programme.

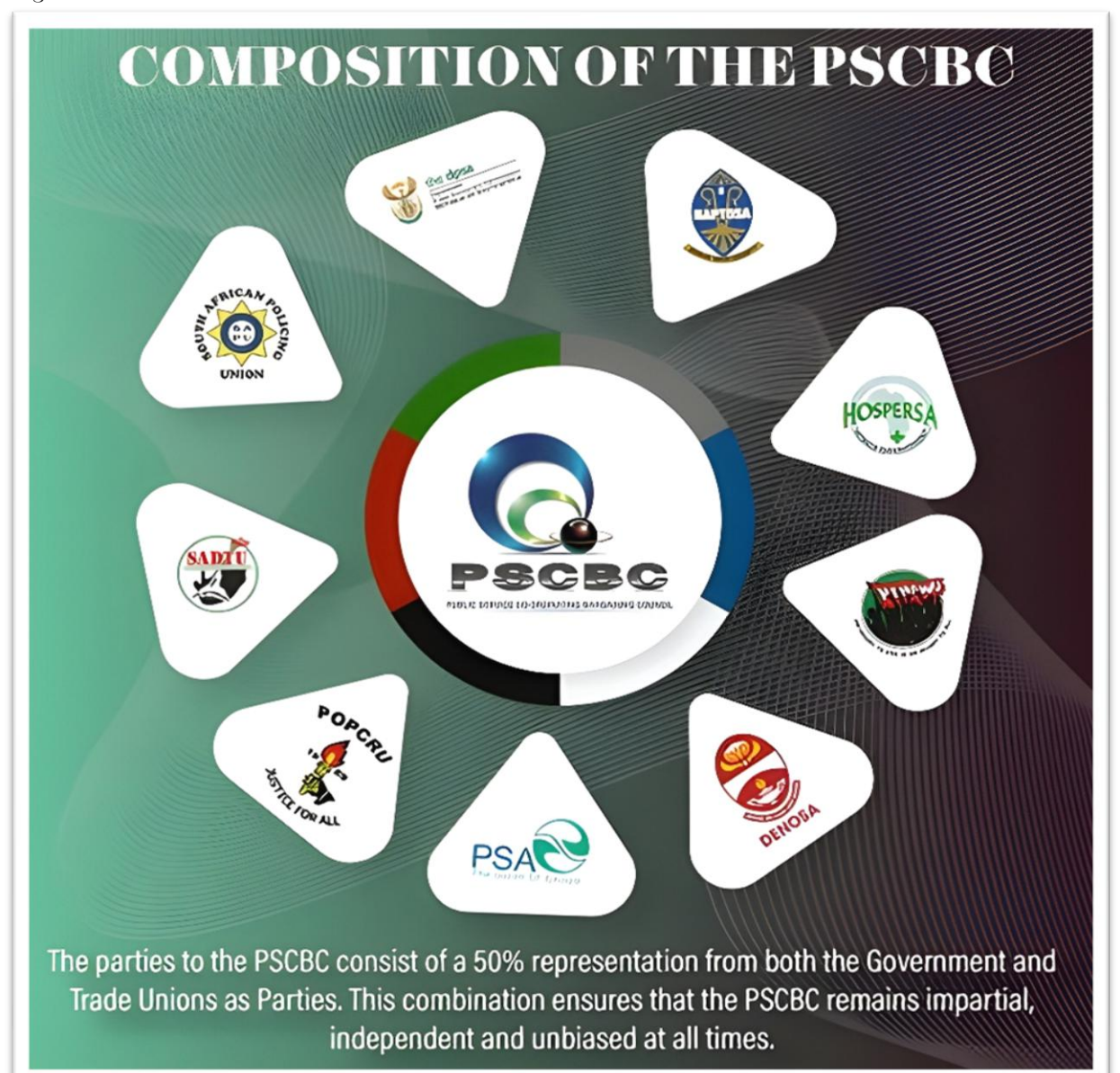
Labour has committed to engaging with sector councils to investigate the possible impacts of early retirement on various sectors, including education. NAPTOSA is particularly concerned about the potential consequences for the stability of the education system and is committed to ensuring that critical posts are protected and promptly filled.

Once the standard operating procedures for early retirement are made available, we will work closely with the employer to refine them, ensuring they align with the best interests of both educators and the sector as a whole. Additionally, NAPTOSA strongly advocates for a structured transfer of skills to prevent gaps in expertise and institutional knowledge.

Under this premise, NAPTOSA has formally requested the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) to conduct research on the potential impact of the early retirement programme within the education sector.

The findings will be crucial in shaping informed policy decisions that balance workforce sustainability with the sector's long-term needs.

We remain committed to safeguarding the interests of educators while ensuring that the education system continues to function.





REFLECTIONS ON THE 2025 DBE BASIC EDUCATION LEKGOTLA

By Michelle Mosupye

The 2025 Basic Education Sector Lekgotla, held from 28 February to 1 March, brought together government, unions, academia, industry, and global education bodies to chart the future of South African education. NAPTOSA's focus was on foundational learning, teacher development, inclusivity, and the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence in schools.

Key voices, including the African Union and G20 Education Task Team, underscored the need to eliminate learning poverty and align national policy with Agenda 2063. Experts from UNICEF, OECD, and academia highlighted the power of quality Early Childhood Development, ongoing teacher support, and global collaboration for system-wide reform.






Inclusive education was a standout issue. Organisations like BlindSA and DeafSA urged urgent reforms to support learners with disabilities through specialist training and accessible learning resources—an area strongly supported by NAPTOSA.

Teacher development took centre stage, with strong calls to invest in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), vocational education, and continuous professional learning. NAPTOSA's Deputy President, delivered a powerful message: unions are essential in shaping education policy. He reminded stakeholders of the *National Education Policy Act's* requirement for continuous, consultative engagement with unions to ensure meaningful, teacher-informed reforms.

The rise of Artificial Intelligence in education sparked critical debate, with a clear consensus:

AI must be used ethically, enhance inclusion, and never replace the human touch in teaching. Teachers must be equipped to use AI tools meaningfully in their practice.

Key Recommendations from the Lekgotla:

-  **Foundational Literacy & Numeracy:** Prioritise structured learning programmes, improve teacher training, and use baseline testing to track progress.
-  **Early Childhood Development:** Expand access to quality ECD, strengthen practitioner training, and ensure inclusive learning materials.
-  **Psychosocial Support:** Develop a five-year trauma-informed strategy to improve mental health and wellbeing in schools.
-  **Teacher Professional Development:** Embrace micro-credentials, peer learning communities, and coaching to upskill teachers.
-  **ICT & AI in Education:** Finalise e-education policies, ensure fair access to tech, and use AI responsibly to support—not replace—educators.

NAPTOSA's Commitment

The Lekgotla confirmed what NAPTOSA has always stood for: real transformation begins with empowered teachers and inclusive policies. NAPTOSA will continue to engage, advocate, and lead to ensure education reform benefits every learner and every teacher in South Africa.



NAPTOSA leadership with Director General Hubert Mathanzima Mwele



NAPTOSA's President Thabo Manne, Ms. Rene Marnce (VP) and Nkosiphendule Ntantala (DP)

NAPTOSA Calls for Urgent Investigation into Over-Enrolment Crisis in Special Needs Schools: Lorvica Matthews and Greg Masondo

NAPTOSA has urgently requested the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) to investigate the growing crisis of over-enrolment in Special Needs (LSEN) Schools. The alarming overcrowding in these schools poses significant risks to both learners and teachers, compromising the quality of education and the overall well-being of all involved.

Compounding the issue, the progress of constructing additional LSEN schools must be thoroughly assessed. Many LSEN classes in mainstream schools are severely overcrowded, often mixing inappropriate age groups, which hinders effective teaching and learning. The lack of dedicated facilities is exacerbating an already dire situation, calling for immediate intervention.

Another pressing concern is the urgent need for accreditation of the Technical Occupational Curriculum (TOC) and the Differentiated Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (DCAPS). These curricula remain unaccredited by UMALUSI, resulting in a severe lack of necessary resources, further disadvantaging learners with special needs. Without proper accreditation, schools struggle to provide learners with quality education and skills development.

Furthermore, NAPTOSA has called for a thorough review of the staffing of Inclusion and Special Schools (ISS) units. The increasing influx of learners requiring specialised education demands a well-resourced and adequately staffed system to provide the necessary support. Without sufficient personnel, the ability of ISS units to function effectively is compromised, ultimately impacting the learners who rely on these services the most.

NAPTOSA remains committed to advocating for immediate action to address these critical issues. The union urges all relevant authorities to prioritise the needs of learners with special educational needs and disabilities, ensuring that they receive the quality education and support they deserve.

Special Attention Needed for the TVET Sector: Lorvica Matthews and Greg Masondo

The Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector requires urgent and dedicated focus. Despite its critical role in shaping skilled professionals, policy development for this sector often follows an indirect and ineffective route. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) formulates policies within the General Public Service Sector Bargaining Council (GPSSBC) and later presents them to the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) for mere rubber-stamping. This approach sidelines meaningful engagement and undermines the voices of key stakeholders in the sector.

A major concern is the relegation of the Public Colleges Administration Measures (PCAM) to the periphery. The PCAM is a fundamental document that defines the duties, responsibilities, and expectations for all staff within the education system. It ensures fair workload distribution, sets clear performance standards, and provides a structured framework for managing lecturers. Marginalising the PCAM weakens the governance and operational efficiency of TVET colleges, further straining an already challenged sector.

NAPTOSA remains committed to advocating for TVET colleges. This sector cannot be abandoned. Strengthening policies, ensuring proper engagement, and reinforcing the importance of the PCAM will help restore dignity and efficiency in TVET institutions. NAPTOSA stands firm in its resolve to protect the interests of Lecturers and students alike, ensuring a stronger and more sustainable future for technical and vocational education. We firmly believe that, since TVET falls under education, it naturally resonates within the ELRC. Therefore, we will continue to fight for the ELRC to remain its bargaining council.

South Africa: Education unions call for copyright reform to protect learning Equity and Inclusion Education, Research and Copyright

Mirjam Nilsson



Background

Education International (EI) and its member organisations are calling for urgent copyright reforms to remove barriers to quality education for all and ensure that teachers and students have access to the learning materials they need.

Restrictive copyright laws in South Africa and many other countries make it difficult—sometimes even illegal—for educators to adapt materials for students with disabilities, use online content in classrooms, or develop decolonised curricula.

At the Copyright & Public Interest Conference, co-sponsored by Education International and held from 3-6 February in Cape Town, EI affiliates the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), and the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT), joined librarians, legal experts, academics, policymakers and creatives to advocate for balanced, flexible copyright laws that support education and the public good—not corporate interests.

One of the main focus was on South Africa's Copyright Amendment Bill (CAB), which has been delayed for years despite its potential to bring South Africa's copyright laws in line with global best practices. The projected learner ratios (as seen below) left much to be desired as to HOW it would translate into the classroom.

Was I a criminal for using that song in my class?

In his keynote address, Education International President and SADTU General Secretary, Mugwena Maluleke, underscored the urgent need to decolonise education and remove copyright barriers that prevent teachers from delivering quality, inclusive teaching.

Reflecting on his own childhood in rural Limpopo, Maluleke recalled how being forced to learn in English and later Afrikaans denied him and his peers the right to education in their own language—one of the many ways knowledge access has historically been restricted in South Africa. The same systemic barriers continue today through copyright laws that prevent teachers from accessing and adapting learning materials.

"The right to education is a fundamental human right. Our teachers should not be criminalised for striving to provide quality education to our children. Unfortunately, copyright laws for education are often overly restrictive, creating barriers for teachers and the right to education," Maluleke stated.

The EI President added a personal anecdote about using music in the classroom to teach mathematics: "—Was I a criminal for using that song in my class?" he asked, questioning whether such an innovative teaching method should be considered a crime under current copyright laws.

Beyond the classroom, the impact of restrictive copyright laws extends to artists, students, and people with disabilities, further widening inequalities.



South Africa's restrictive copyright system

Speakers across multiple panels at the conference highlighted that South Africa remains one of the most restrictive countries when it comes to copyright exceptions for education, research, and cultural heritage. Tobias Schönwetter, Director of the Intellectual Property Unit at the University of Cape Town, opened discussions by emphasising that the Copyright Amendment Bill does not introduce radical changes—many countries already have fair use provisions.

"The South Africa Copyright Amendment Bill isn't introducing a radical new approach to copyright. Many countries around the world already have fair use. It has been proven over and over again that it balances the rights of creators and users. Let's not get lost in redundant discussions—let's move forward," Schönwetter stressed.

EI calls for immediate action: South Africa must lead the way

Education International and its member organisations in South Africa, SADTU and NAPTOSA, are calling on President Cyril Ramaphosa to sign the Copyright Amendment Bill into law without further delay.

The Bill has faced strong opposition from multinational corporate lobbyists, despite aligning with global best practices and balancing the rights of creators and users. Without fair use laws, teachers, researchers, and students in South Africa are forced to operate in legal grey zones, restricting access to knowledge and undermining quality education.

EI's main demands reflect the urgent need for a copyright system that protects the right to education and empowers teachers, rather than restricting their ability to access and use knowledge in the classroom. Teachers must be able to use and adapt materials to provide quality, inclusive education without fear of legal repercussions. Their voices must be included in copyright reforms to ensure that policies support real classroom needs.

In addition, teachers need proper training and resources to navigate copyright laws effectively and make full use of available materials. At the global level, international WIPO treaties are essential to advance national reforms and protect cross-border collaboration in education and research, ensuring that knowledge remains accessible to all.

Education International Website



Young learners are also creators and developers of artistic and digital material in school, but also later in the workplace. It is imperative to educate them on copyright and intellectual property so that we can prevent them from entering into restrictive contracts.

Hema Hariram
Senior Executive Officer, NAPTOSA

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NAPTOSA Staff amplifying the 'Go Public, Fund Education' Campaign!





NAPTOSA Day: A Nation Painted in Blue and Gold:

Lorvica Matthews

27 February was proudly marked NAPTOSA Day, a celebration of our unity, strength, and commitment to the education sector. Across the country, members showcased their NAPTOSA pride, painting South Africa blue and gold through powerful videos and images that flooded social media.

Every province joined in the festivities, organising provincial celebrations that highlighted the spirit of our union. NAPTOSA leadership in the Eastern Cape took a bold stand, marching to the Department of Education to hand over a memorandum demanding safer schools – a clear message that the safety of staff and learners remains a priority.

NAPTOSA Day will now be an annual event, growing stronger each year. With our 20th anniversary coming up in 2026, we eagerly anticipate the creativity and passion our members will bring to next year's celebrations. Here's to another year of solidarity, strength, and service!

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