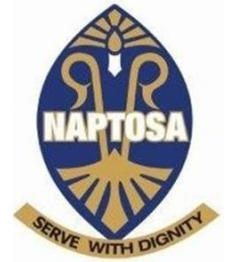


# NATIONAL NEWS FLASH

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## PUBLIC SERVICE COORDINATING BARGAINING COUNCIL (PSCBC) UPDATE

As the draft salary agreement, which NAPTOSA has signed, circulates for signing — with parties having until 18 February to append their signatures—the council could address other outstanding matters, which are outlined below.

### **EARLY RETIREMENT WITHOUT PENALISATION OF BENEFITS**

The Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) is currently engaging in consultations regarding an Early Retirement Service exit programme, proposed by the employer. This programme, which was approved by Cabinet in April 2024, aims to allow early retirement without penalisation of pension benefits, as well as offerings of financial incentives for retirement. It will be implemented over the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years and will be limited to 30,000 employees between the ages of 55 and 63.

A research report from the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) highlights the ageing workforce in the Public Service, which is set to retire with a vast number of skills and institutional knowledge. To mitigate this, there is a need for intergenerational competence transfer and rejuvenation programmes. NAPTOSA will be making recommendations with broader labour on such programmes to ensure that the experience and expertise of retiring colleagues are not lost.

Labour is also awaiting the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), which will outline the implementation plan and timelines. These will be shared with members as soon as they are made available.

### **GEMS (Government Employees Medical Scheme)**

A workshop has been scheduled for February 25<sup>th</sup>, where NAPTOSA and other labour unions, the employer, and GEMS representatives will discuss pressing concerns regarding the medical scheme. NAPTOSA has consolidated a list of members' grievances, which will be formally tabled at this workshop.

### **Key issues include:**

→ Unjustifiably high premium increases, making GEMS unaffordable for many members.

- The need for members to have greater flexibility in selecting plans (from different medical aids) that suit their financial situations while maintaining the same subsidy from the employer.
- Concerns that GEMS is deviating from its core purpose of providing an affordable alternative to government employees.

Members will be kept informed of the workshop's outcomes and any resolutions reached.

### **CCMA INVESTIGATION INTO THE DECLARATION OF 'PRE-SCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION' AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE [Section 70(B)(1)(d)]**

NAPTOSA has been actively participating in the ongoing hearings regarding the possible declaration of 'pre-school and elementary education' as an essential service. Hearings are being held in four provinces, and NAPTOSA has ensured representation at each of these sessions.

In addition to our presence at the hearings, we have submitted a formal written argument opposing this declaration. Our position is based on:

- ❖ International law and precedents.
- ❖ The South African Constitution.
- ❖ The Labour Relations Act (LRA).
- ❖ Relevant case law and past findings from the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration (CCMA) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

NAPTOSA's key argument is that education does not meet the legal criteria for an essential service. Declaring it as such would strip teachers of their right to strike, a fundamental labour right. While the best interests of learners must always be protected, restricting teachers' rights is neither reasonable nor justifiable. Instead, improving education quality should be achieved through policy reforms rather than limiting teachers' labour rights.

We will continue to monitor developments and will provide updates on the outcomes of the investigation.

NAPTOSA remains committed to protecting the rights and interests of our members. We encourage members to stay engaged and informed about these critical issues. Further updates will be shared as new developments arise. Should you have any queries or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact your NAPTOSA Provincial Office.

**Mr BL Manuel**

**Executive Director**