


M28**More than 100,000 matrics are in line for free TVs, thanks to a coronavirus plan**

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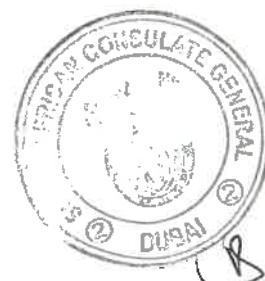


(Getty)

- **South Africa's Universal Service and Access Agency is looking for local suppliers of 32-inch HD LED TVs, for an order it thinks could run to about 100,000 television sets.**
- **Those TVs will be distributed to households with indigent Grade 12 pupils, the agency says.**
- **Matrics without TVs will be left behind during the coronavirus disaster, it believes.**
- **Applications for and distribution of the free TVs will be via the Post Office.**
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More than 100,000 of South Africa's matrics could be in line to receive free high-definition televisions from a state-owned organisation that connects rural areas to the digital world.

On Monday the Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa (Usaasa) published a fast-track tender for local manufacturers that can supply 32-inch HD LED TVs for indigent grade 12 pupils across the country.



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During the coronavirus crisis the government has made "laudable" efforts to set up free virtual classrooms and getting the public broadcaster to prioritise education content, the agency says.

But "these efforts will not reach indigent household that do not have [set-top boxes] installed or those that do not have TVs. That will lead to the unreachable households with indigent learners being left behind in their studies and end up not being ready to write and pass their final grade 12 examinations."

To counter that, Usaasa envisages a process through which poor matrics apply via the SA Post Office for a free, digital-ready TV.

Based on the number of grade 12s on social grants, eligible pupils could number a little over 111,000, Usaasa estimates.

Assuming suppliers can deliver TVs at about 25% below the floor-level retail prices for such TVs in South Africa right now, that will make for around R160 million worth of television sets.

Usaasa anticipates that the TVs will be delivered over a period of two months. Bids for suppliers close on 2 July.

Each set must have built-in speakers and a remote control, according to bid specifications, and they must come with onboard digital tuners, so they can be used "for the purpose of receiving educational material via digital broadcasting network services".

Usaasa operates the Universal Service and Access Fund (USAF), originally envisaged as a mechanism to connect left-behind rural communities to South Africa's telecommunications network, where commercial operators could or would not.

According to its last annual report the USAF achieved a 9% score on its performance targets. At the end of March 2019 it had R1.35 billion in cash available, having spent a little under R360 million in the year, nearly all of it on a project to supply set-top boxes that make analogue televisions capable of using digital terrestrial broadcast signals.

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