Makoya

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UMALUSI

Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training

CONTENTS

Biki Lepota

This edition of Makoya spotlights the theme of the standardisation of examination results.

The choice of this theme was informed by the sometimes misleading commentary in the mainstream media, especially after the release of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results. Closer scrutiny of these comments reveals that some critics are implying that improvements in pass rates can be explained by Umalusi's manipulation of marks during its standardisation processes. The fact is that such claims are unfounded, and speculation is made to appear as fact.

Bearing this in mind, the current issue has lined up five articles that provide a context for Umalusi's quality assurance approaches and processes. The CEO's comprehensive summary of the legislated areas of Umalusi's work sets things in motion.

This is followed by an unsolicited and uplifting contribution by Prof. Percy Sepeng on the power of standardisation.

In his contribution, Ashley Naicker focuses the discussion on Umalusi's use of norm referencing in maintaining the standard of examinations over a period of time. Continuing along the same lines, Simon Mokganya makes a case for the use of the analytical hierarchy process in determining the difficulty of examinations.

Eliazer Lechaba and Vanessa Naidoo provide a richer background to Umalusi's reasons for not currently accrediting independent schools that offer online teaching and learning.

Regarding information communications technology, Victor Mathebula provides an update on how far Umalusi has travelled in terms of migrating to cloud computing.

This edition concludes by highlighting Louis Ramakulukusha and Sylvester Ngoepe, whose recent achievements have been entered in the sporting annals.

Hopefully, the articles in this edition will provide a new perspective on the work of Umalusi.

Enjoy!

Umalusi: Its guardianship of the basic education and post school education and training in South Africa

Dr Mafu S. Rakometsi
Chief Executive Officer

In terms of its founding Act[1], Umalusi is South Africa's quality council for general and further education and training (GFET). This sector is made up of schools, colleges, and adult education providers.

The original mandate of Umalusi, which focused mainly on the maintenance of education standards, changed to that of a standard-setting quality council in 2008 with the promulgation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act.

This legislation mandates Umalusi to:

(i)   ensure the development of qualifications and curricula as required;

(ii) accredit providers to offer the qualifications;

(iii) accredit private assessment bodies to assess the qualifications; (iv) quality assure assessments;

(v)   conduct or commission research; and

(vi) issue certificates to qualifying learners.

Umalusi is responsible for assuring the quality of the following qualifications and their underpinning curricula:

* National Senior Certificate (NSC) offered at schools,

* Senior Certificate, as amended (SC(a)), offered at adult centres,

* National Certificate (Vocational), NC(V) L2–L4, offered by technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges,

* NATED Report 190/191 (N2–N3), offered by TVET colleges, and

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[1]   General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act, 2001 (GENFETQA Act) (Act 58 of 2001), as amended in 2008

- General Education and Training Certificate: Adult Basic Education and Training (GETC: ABET), offered at adult education and training centres.

By the end of 2022, Umalusi had granted full accreditation status to approximately 1100 institutions (independent schools, private further education and training colleges and private adult education and training colleges).

The Independent Examinations Board (IEB) and South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute (SACAI) are private assessment bodies acredited by Umalusi to assess the NSC and GETC: ABET. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) are public assessment bodies examining qualifications quality assured by Umalusi.

In fulfilling its mandate to uphold standards, Umalusi has since 2008 undertaken evaluations of examination papers linked to the NSC, a school-leaving qualification. The goal has been to establish the degree of comparability between the current year's examinations and those of previous years. On the one hand, the findings from this process feed into the standardisation of assessment results, called grading in other systems, while on the other hand they provide feedback to the examination setters, examination moderators, and teachers.

The qualifications mentioned above serve huge numbers of diverse learners. For example, in 2022, upwards of 1,2 million candidates sat the end of the year examinations for the four qualifications. The examinations are not administered by Umalusi, but by the public assessment bodies (DBE and DHET) and by Umalusi-

accredited private assessment bodies, namely the IEB and SACAI.

Umalusi oversees these examinations and assessments. More specifically, its role in national examinations is limited to external moderation of question papers and standardisation of examination marks. Once the papers have been set and internally moderated by the assessment bodies, they are externally moderated by Umalusi.

This is also the case with school-based assessment (SBA) tasks. Upon conclusion of the marking of these examinations, candidates' marks are submitted to Umalusi for standardisation.

Standardisation of results is a quality assurance process that is based on statistical and analytical principles. Its goal is to mitigate the impact on learner performance of factors other than learners' subject knowledge, abilities and aptitude. The marks presented for standardisation constitute up to 75% of learners' final marks. The other portion is made up of marks achieved by learners in site-based assessment (SBA). After standardisation of external marks, learners' SBA marks are statistically moderated. This is another layer of quality assurance implemented before the standardised results are approved for release to learners by the assessment bodies.

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> *Over the past two decades, Umalusi has conducted several benchmarking studies to determine the standing of its qualifications relative to international qualifications.* "

Over the past two decades, Umalusi has conducted several benchmarking studies to determine the standing of its qualifications relative to international qualifications. In a study by Ecctis, commissioned by Umalusi in 2022, the NSC was benchmarked against the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IB DP), the Kenyan Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), the New South Wales (NSW) Higher School Certificate (HSC), the Zimbabwean Forms 5–6 Advanced Level, and the Cambridge Assessment International Education AS & A Levels.

The finding of the study was that the NSC provides its holders with an internationally comparable level of education. This is why Umalusi conducts research: to gauge the comparability and currency of the certificates it issues. The launch of this report in September 2022 served as a special birthday present to Umalusi, which celebrated 20 years of existence in the same month.

Umalusi has forged strategic partnerships with stakeholders of repute, both nationally and internationally. Nationally, the partnerships with the university sector have yielded five accredited journal special issues:

- Per Linguam, 28(2) in 2012,

- Perspectives in Education, 32(1) in 2014,

- Perspectives in Education, 34(4) in 2016,

- Journal of Education, 70 of 2017, and

- Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies (SALALS), 40(1). These issues were all guest edited by Umalusi.

Globally, Umalusi is a key player in assessment associations. It is a member of the Southern Africa Association for Educational Assessment (SAAEA), the Association for Educational Assessment in Africa (AEAA) and the International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA). To date, five national, regional and international conferences have been organised on assessment-related matters under the auspices of these associations. Journal articles and conferences have provided a golden opportunity for Umalusi to explore new ways of setting and maintaining education and training standards.

Once again, Umalusi will host the AEAA's 40th Annual Conference from 19 to 23 August 2024 at the Century City Hotel Urban Square, Cape Town. More information will be posted on the Umalusi website in September 2023.

The final phase of Umalusi's quality assurance cycle is certification of learner achievement. In 2022, Umalusi issued over 1 million certificates for the end of the year national examinations. This was a significant increase from approximately 650 000 certificates issued in 2002. The holders of these certificates will make a significant contribution to society, both locally and internationally.

As a learning organisation, Umalusi has derived valuable lessons from its study visits to institutions that perform similar work in Africa, Europe and the USA. Having guarded the standards of South African schools, colleges and adult education over the last 20 years, Umalusi is able to look back with pride on what it has achieved.

Unseen Custodians of Education: An Ode to Umalusi and the Power of Standardisation

Within the confines of our educational framework, a cohort of individuals labours ceaselessly to guarantee impartiality, parity and excellence. These individuals, who have been assigned the crucial duty of establishing equivalence in qualifications obtained after completing secondary education, are the unacknowledged champions of the Umalusi Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training.

Their influence, despite being sometimes overlooked, extends well beyond the boundaries of academic outcomes – they determine the future of huge numbers of South African learners annually.

The educational concept of standardisation endeavours to mitigate discrepancies in evaluation that may arise from differences in the level of difficulty of examination papers across different years. This essential procedure guarantees that no student is unfairly disadvantaged or advantaged by an examination that is deemed too difficult or too easy.

Professor Percy Sepeng
Sol Plaatje University

The objective is not to unjustly manipulate learners' raw scores but rather to establish a uniform criterion for assessment, thereby guaranteeing that a distinction awarded in one year holds the same value as a one granted in another.

Umalusi's standardisation guardians are dedicated to promoting equity and academic excellence by providing an inclusive platform for learners to demonstrate their capabilities, irrespective of their birth year. The successful execution of the process necessitates a comprehensive understanding of educational assessment, an adeptness in statistical analysis, and an unyielding commitment to the tenet of impartiality.

The act of standardising matriculation results holds significant implications for the education sector in South Africa. Achieving a balance between the upholding of rigorous criteria and the accommodation

of uncontrollable factors is imperative. This implies the presence of a sophisticated evaluation mechanism that can flexibly and prudently adjust scores to serve the needs of all students.

However, the scope of Umalusi extends beyond basic numbers and percentages. It safeguards our children from the adverse effects of uncertain factors, such as alterations in educational programmes, socioeconomic circumstances and even worldwide pandemics. The efforts of the Assessment Standards Committee (ASC) of Umalusi Council involved in this work are aimed at preventing learners from being disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control.

> **In light of the intricacies of the educational terrain following the COVID pandemic, the significance of standardisation in the realm of assessment is amplified.**

In light of the intricacies of the educational terrain following the COVID pandemic, the significance of standardisation in the realm of assessment is amplified. One of the functions of this buffer is to mitigate the inherent inequalities of our education system, which were further exacerbated by the pandemic. As the academic year draws to a close, and learners nationwide anticipate the release of their matriculation results, it is fitting to acknowledge the unheralded custodians of standardisation at Umalusi. The steadfast commitment of the ASC to upholding just and impartial evaluation criteria serves as the fundamental basis of our educational framework.

As we recognise the significant role played by these individuals, it is imperative that we ensure their efforts are duly acknowledged, their contributions are valued, and their commitment to providing quality education is celebrated.

The attainment of a just, impartial, and developed educational terrain for every child in South Africa is reliant on the efforts of these individuals. On behalf of the School of Education (SoE) and the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Programme Development (CTLPD) at Sol Plaatje University (SPU) I wish to express our genuine gratitude.

We also greatly appreciate the significant contribution of Dr Mosia's office in ensuring the success of our recent engagement with Umalusi.

On June 14 2023, we had the honour of hosting Dr Mafu Rakometsi, Chief Executive Officer of Umalusi, and Biki Lepota, spokesperson for Umalusi, at the SPU. The Umalusi delegation shed light on the vital role that Umalusi plays in maintaining educational standards and equity in our nation and shared some insights into its processes. The CTLPD presented a discussion titled "Why and how Umalusi standardises examination results", which was focused on Umalusi's advocacy programme. The event was well-attended by scholars from the SPU.

This event was most enlightening and provided useful insights into the intricacies of standardisation, the problems it confronts, and the steps it implements to protect the fairness and legitimacy of our education system. Those who attended learned more about the standardisation process and the underlying principles of standardisation.

We express our gratitude to Dr Rakometsi and Mr Lekota for their invaluable contribution and for shedding light on the significant yet often unnoticed efforts undertaken by Umalusi. Their commitment to promoting education excellence and equity was a source of motivation for both staff and students.

We anticipate developing this partnership, collaborating more closely for the advancement of South Africa's education system. Collectively, we can ensure that the expertise possessed by these influential individuals is transformed into knowledge accessible to everyone.

Percy Sepeng is a Full Professor and a former member of the ASC of Umalusi Council. He writes for Sol Plaatje University.

Maintaining comparability of examination results through ''norm referencing'

Introduction

As a quality council, Umalusi is mandated by legislation (General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance (GENFETQA) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) acts), to develop and manage qualifications on the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework (GFETQSF NQF Levels 1–4).

One of the ways in which Umalusi manages its sub-framework is by maintaining set standards across all its qualifications through rigorous quality assurance processes.

Ashley Naicker

These processes culminate in the standardisation of examination results. Umalusi derives its role from the GENFETQA act which states "[T]he Council may adjust raw marks during the standardisation process". Umalusi is responsible for standardising the final examination results of the four assessment bodies that examine subjects linked to the GFETQSF. These bodies are the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Department

of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) and the South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute (SACAI).

Standardisation Discourse

South Africans place great emphasis on the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results – Grade 12. The significance of the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) and the General and Further Education and Training Certificate for Adults (GETC) has also grown over the years. Learners' opportunities for further education and employment depend to a great extent on their results in the NSC, NCV and GET examinations. Every year, national trends in these results stimulate debate about the nature and quality of education in the country, and the issues that shape it. Commentators and the greater South African population continue to wonder about the fairness of one such issue: why are examination results standardised? Other questions relate to the possibility that marks are manipulated, and to the external influences on the adjustment of results. Their suspicions are further fuelled by their misunderstanding of why subject marks are in some cases adjusted upwards and in others, downwards, and why some are not adjusted at all.

Rationale for the standardisation of results

Since the dawn of democracy, accessibility to education has improved for all South Africans. Even so, numerous challenges to fairness and equity persist. To ensure the maintenance of educational standards, the country needs to jealously guard the credibility, comparability and currency of school-leaving certificates. Herein lies a perplexing challenge: to redress the existing unfairness and inequity while at

the same time maintaining the credibility, consistency and comparability of results.

In large-scale, high-stakes examinations such as the NSC, NCV and GETC variability in candidates' performance is unavoidable despite the best efforts of assessment bodies and other role players. Variability may arise from the standard of question papers, the standard of administering the examinations, the quality and consistency of marking and other related factors. Umalusi addresses such variability by standardising examination results, which may lead to subject marks being adjusted in cases of extenuating circumstances.

In this regard, standardisation has served the country well. Standardisation is an internationally accepted practice used to maintain comparability and consistency of results from one year to the next and to prevent factors unrelated to the learner's subject knowledge from influencing his or her performance. This places highly credible and comparable certificates in the hands of successful examination takers, affording them the opportunity to access higher education and the world of work irrespective of their socio-economic background.

The evidence considered during standardisation

Umalusi conducts various quality assurance processes on an examination administered by an assessment body. The qualitative and quantitative findings are collated and presented to the Assessment Standards Committee (ASC) for its scrutiny and decision-making. The qualitative information provided includes evidence-based reports, post-examination analysis and qualitative input reports received from chief markers and internal moderators

for each subject. In addition, relevant quantitative data from the current year and previous years are included in standardisation booklets in the form of statistical tables and graphs.

The development of the norm and its use

The interpretation and inferences from all statistical information presented in the standardisation booklet hinge on the historical average for each subject, commonly referred to as the norm. Umalusi uses norm referencing to interpret the subject performance of the current cohort of candidates. This is achieved by comparing the performance of current candidates in the external component of the summative examination to the historical average (norm) for that subject. The external component of the examination may include a written examination, oral assessments, practical assessment tasks (PAT), or in the case of the NCV, integrated summative assessment tasks (ISAT).

This then begs the question: what constitutes a norm? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a norm as "an established standard or average, an achievement usually derived from the average or median achievement of a large group". Umalusi creates this large group by collating the raw marks achieved by candidates in each subject over the past three to five years and calculating the mean and median. In the case of examination results, the mean, or average mark, is the sum of all the marks obtained in a particular subject divided by the number of candidates who wrote that subject, while the median is the position of the middle mark when the marks obtained in a subject are sorted in ascending or descending order.

Umalusi defines the norm as

> *the average of the total raw marks of the immediate past five comparator examination sittings in all qualifications (in the case of the NSC, the past five years), excluding outliers. One exception is the NATED programme where the immediate past six examination sittings are considered.*

In cases where there are fewer than the stipulated number of examination sittings, the norm will be based on a minimum of three examination sittings.

Umalusi and the assessment bodies generate the norms for each subject prior to an examination sitting. The assessment body then submits the norms to Umalusi for verification. Umalusi verifies and identifies any outliers, and submits the final set of approved norms to the assessment body to include in the statistical tables and graphs in the standardisation booklet. In cases where the subject does not have enough subject history to develop a norm (fewer than three examination sittings) Umalusi generates and submits an interim norm until the subject has sufficient history. Furthermore, in cases where a distribution contains outliers, the norm is calculated by excluding data from the outlying examination sitting.

An outlier is defined as a value that "lies outside" or is much smaller or larger than most of the other values in a set of data. In the case of historical data (previous years' marks), the outlier year is the year in which the mean of the raw marks lies outside the mean of the raw marks of the other years in the data set. The mean, which includes all values in a dataset, is distorted by outliers. Therefore, the median is used to determine outlier years.

Umalusi uses raw marks from a maximum of five years for this reason. Umalusi currently adopts the following process to identify and exclude outlier years per subject before generating the final norms:

- Computing the medians for the historical years;

- Arranging the medians in ascending order;

- Computing the differences between the first two and the last two medians:

- if the difference is greater than 10% then the extreme median (lowest or highest or both) is regarded as an outlier.

Table 1 below provides an example of how the this process identifies the outlier years:

Table 1: Identifying outliers:

Exam Sitting	Median Marks	Exam Sitting	Medians in ascending order	Differences
Year 1	39	Year 5	19	First two = 32,5 – 19 = 13,5
Year 2	40	Year 4	32,5	
Year 3	42	Year 1	39	
Year 4	32,5	Year 2	40	Last two = 42 – 40 = 2
Year 5	19	Year 3	42	

The difference for the first two medians arranged in ascending order is 13,5, which is greater than 10; therefore, Year 5 is an outlier. This means that the norm for this subject will be calculated excluding the data from the outlying examination sitting, in this case, Year 5.

Conclusion

> " *Calculating the norm by excluding the outliers ensures a credible historical lens through which other factors of variability may be explored and fair decisions concluded based on sound academic reasoning.* "

The standardisation process is governed by a set of rules referred to as standardisation principles. The first of these principles states that "in general, mark adjustments should not exceed 10 percentage points of the norm. That is, no adjusted mark should be beyond the norm or historical average". Calculating the norm by excluding the outliers ensures a credible historical lens through which other factors of variability may be explored and fair decisions concluded based on sound academic reasoning. In this way, Umalusi mitigates variability and ensures comparability and consistency in learner performance across the various subjects within a given year and across years. In the context of the South African schooling landscape, fairness and credibility of the adjustment of marks in the maintenance of the comparability of results are reaffirmed through norm-referencing.

The robustness of the analytical hierarchy process in determining the difficulty of examinations

Simon Mokganya

The standard setting of examinations is informed by how well or how poorly candidates perform in a particular subject and the difficulty level of the examination. The analytical hierarchy process (AHP) is applied in various fields such as education, economics and public health.

AHP is a mathematical technique that ranks subject difficulty over time. It is colloquially referred to as "eigenvalues" – values that retrospectively rank subjects by difficulty in a particular examination sitting. The eigenvalues also guide the Assessment Standards Committee (ASC) when adjusting marks, which impacts affects the assessment of candidates' performance thereby ensuring comparability of standards of subjects over time.

In linear algebra, eigenvalues are special values that define the roots of a matrix (e.g. a data structure). Eigenvalues are described by a magnitude similar to the physics concept of scalar quantities. Umalusi currently uses the AHP technique to rank the difficulty of subjects. Thus, this article focuses on the change over time in the difficulty of gateway subjects and three languages with high enrolment rates over five examination periods, from the November 2017 to the November 2022 examinations.

Table 1: DBE NSC subjects with high enrolment, classified by gateway and language types

| No.	Name of subject	Subject type
1	Accounting	Gateway
2	Afrikaans Home Language	Language
3	Business Studies	Gateway
4	Economics	Gateway
5	English First Additional Language	Language
6	English Home Language	Language
7	Geography	Gateway
8	History	Gateway
9	Life Sciences	Gateway
10	Mathematical Literacy	Gateway
11	Mathematics	Gateway
12	Physical Sciences	Gateway

Methods

The data for the twelve subjects used in this article were obtained from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) database of the National Senior Certificate (NSC). A subject pairs-analysis data file was extracted from the database. This file compared two subjects (the anchor and the paired subject) in which all candidates were enrolled. The Venn diagram in Figure 1 shows this intersection.

The magnitude of the ratio between the average marks of the anchor and the paired subject determines the calculation criteria in the AHP process. The resultant eigenvalues are ranked in descending order. The smallest value indicates the most difficult subject and the largest indicates the easiest. This article presents a retrospective five-year analysis of the relative difficulty of subjects from 2017 to 2022.

As such, the five-year average was a benchmark value against which the other examination periods were compared to understand whether the difficulty level of a particular subject had changed.

Figure 1: Venn diagram showing the hypothetical intersection of subjects in a cohort of candidates in an examination sitting
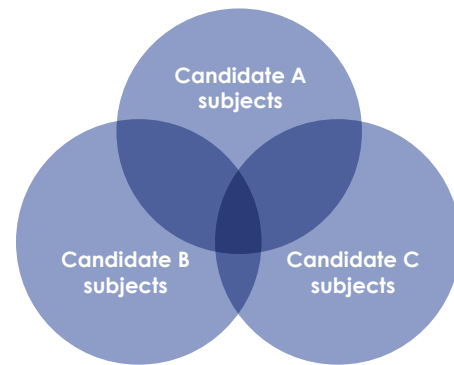
Results and discussion

The interpretation of the eigenvalues in Figure 2 is that the lower the eigenvalue, the more difficult the subject. The five-year average is calculated as the average of the eigenvalues from 2017 to 2021. It does not include 2022, as this was the latest examination period to be standardised.

Figure 2: A retrospective analysis of subject difficulty from 2017 to 2022 ranked from most difficult to least difficult
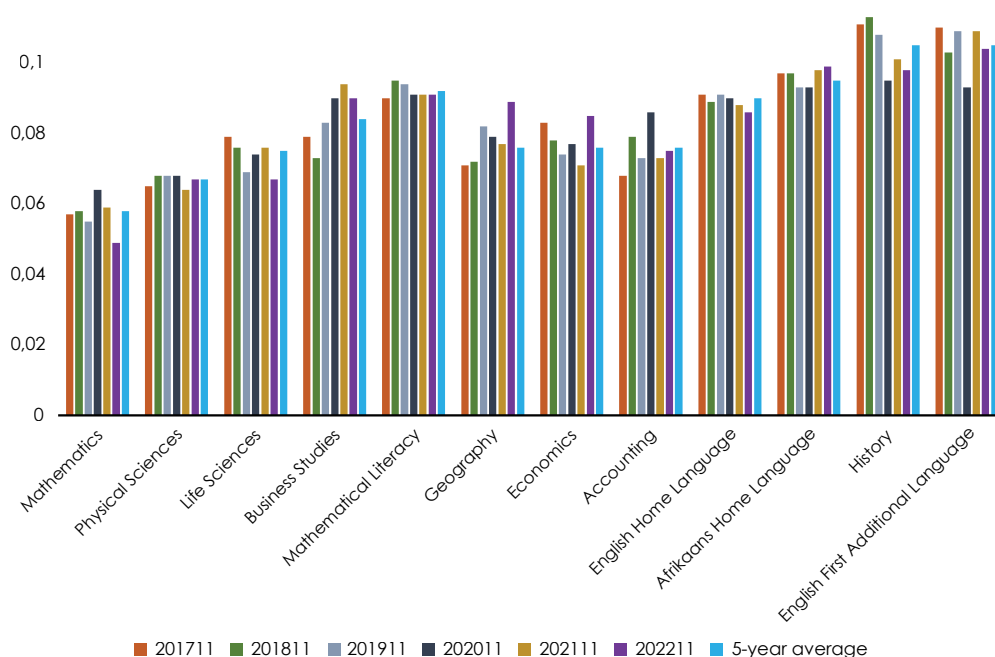
Figure 2 shows that Mathematics was the most difficult subject in the five-year history and the most difficult in 2022, while the easiest examination was in 2020. From the perspective of the five-year average, Mathematics has maintained its position as the most difficult subject in the DBE NSC. Physical Sciences was the second most difficult subject in the five-year history and the most difficult in 2022.

However, it was easiest in the 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2022 examination periods. As with Mathematics, Physical Sciences has maintained its position as the second most difficult subject in the DBE NSC. Life Sciences was easiest in 2017.

Accounting, Geography and Economics demonstrated similar difficulty rankings over five years. History, Mathematical Literacy and English Home Language had consistent difficulty levels over five examination periods. Relatively, English First Additional Language (FAL) was the easiest subject in the five-year history. English FAL and History maintained their positions as the easiest subjects over the five years.

These findings may provide a preliminary understanding of the performance in all the subjects and invite a contextual investigation of the standards of the curricula and examinations of the NSC qualification.

Conclusion

This article established that AHP is a fundamental tool in determining subjects' relative difficulty. It serves as an additional source of information on the setting of examination standards. Mathematics remains the most difficult subject and has not had any changes in this regard. In 2020, History and English FAL had their most difficult examinations but remained the easiest subjects.

While we understand that subject difficulty varied over time in most subjects, it is worth remembering that contextual changes may have contributed to this variation over the five years; these include curriculum changes and changes in subject structures.

The robustness of the AHP application affirms that Umalusi is dedicated to ensuring that the quality of standards is maintained over time.

Umalusi's approach to the accreditation of independent schools offering online teaching and learning

Eliazer Lechaba and Vanessa Naidoo

Technology information has grown significantly over the past few years and has contributed to technology-driven instruction becoming a vital part of teaching and learning. Technology-driven teaching can be described as educational and learning content that is supported by information and communication technology (ICT).

It enables students to acquire new information and skills online without having to worry about the space-time shift. Online schooling in South Africa is becoming increasingly popular.

An article from cambridgeschoolonline.com states

As online schooling popularises across South Africa, numerous parents are already transitioning their children to virtual education. In contrast to conventional schooling, online schooling provides greater safety and flexibility. Students need not worry about bullying, harassment, racial targeting, or abuse. The classes are expertly moderated since online schooling has a low teacher-learner ratio. Teachers maintain a healthy, wholesome, and enriching online learning environment. There is zero tolerance for bullying or harassment of any kind.[2]

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[2] Cambridgeschoolonline.com

Purpose of the article

The purpose of this article is to provide clarity on accreditation of independent schools offering the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) leading to the National Senior Certificate (NSC) through the mode of online tuition.

Accreditation of independent schools

An educational institution's reputation benefits greatly from accreditation. Accreditation is the most crucial factor in determining the quality of provision of education at a learning institution. The quality assurance process leading to accreditation ensures that institutions are evaluated against the same standards.

The following legislation pertains specifically to the accreditation of independent schools.

- The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act (Act No.67 of 2008);

- The South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996);

- The General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance (GENFETQA) Act No. 58 of 2001 as amended in 2008;

- Policy and criteria for the quality assurance, accreditation and monitoring of independent schools and private assessment bodies (Government Gazette No. 35830 of 29 October 2012, as amended in 2017);

- Regulations regarding the criteria for the quality assurance, accreditation and monitoring of independent schools and private assessment bodies (Government Gazette No. 41206 of 27 October 2017);

- The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades R–12, which includesThe Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) Grades R–12;

  » The national policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12; and

  » The National Protocol for Assessment Grades R–12.

The South African Schools Act requires independent schools to be registered with the relevant provincial education department. The NQF and GENFETQA Acts restrict Umalusi to accrediting independent schools that are registered in line with the South African Schools Act and offer a qualification on the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework (GFETQSF) of the NQF.

Practice has overtaken legislation. The provincial regulations for registration of independent schools currently pertain to "brick and mortar" schools, not online schools. Therefore, online schools are not currently registered in accordance with the South African Schools Act and fall outside Umalusi's mandate.

> **Accreditation attests to the capacity of the independent school to implement a curriculum in support of the qualification, at the required standard.**

Accreditation is the outcome of a quality assurance process that evaluates an independent school to determine whether it has the capacity to offer a qualification

or programmes leading to a qualification registered on the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework (GFETQSF). Accreditation attests to the capacity of the independent school to implement a curriculum in support of the qualification, at the required standard.

Currently, the only qualification offered by schools that is registered on the GFETQSF is the National Senior Certificate (NSC). As such, accreditation by Umalusi attests to the capacity of the independent school to offer the NSC curriculum as outlined in the NCS. This comprises the National Protocol on Assessment Grades R–12, the CAPS and the national policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements.

Thus, to be accredited by Umalusi, the school must be registered by the provincial education department and demonstrate the capacity to offer the NCS leading to the NSC.

The approved criteria for accreditation of an independent school to offer the NCS leading to the NSC are:

- Leadership, management, and communication
- School ethos
- Teaching and learning
- School results.

Accreditation decisions are based on the extent to which an independent school meets the minimum standards of these accreditation criteria.[3]

In order to gain accreditation:

- The school must demonstrate the capacity to develop and implement learning programmes, lesson plans and assessment programmes in line with the minimum outcomes of the CAPS.

- The school must demonstrate the capacity to administer quality assessment at the required standard in line with the minimum requirements of the CAPS and the Regulations pertaining to the conduct, administration and management of the National Senior Certificate examination, and provide developmental feedback to learners.

- The teachers must demonstrate capability in the conduct of internal assessment and the development of school-based assessment (SBA) tasks and assessment tools that:

  » are aligned to the CAPS,
  » are valid, fair and practicable,
  » are free of bias,
  » address different cognitive levels, and clearly state instructions.

In demonstrating capacity, the processes as indicated above must be developed, implemented and delivered by the teachers at the school, not by a service provider that provides a service to the school.

Main types of online learning in South Africa

There are currently various configurations of online learning in South Africa, some of which are outlined below:

1. Synchronous online learning

An instructor interacts simultaneously with all enrolled students online in synchronised online learning.

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[3] *Report on Accreditation and Monitoring of Private Education Institutions and Private Assessment Bodies for the period 1 April 2021–31 March 2022.*

Currently, these institutions are not registered in accordance with the South African Schools Act and therefore cannot be considered for accreditation by Umalusi.

2. Asynchronous online learning

Learners are given deadlines, assignments and pre-recorded, pre-planned content. There are no set meeting times because interaction occurs on discussion boards, Wiki pages, and blogs. Currently, these institutions are not registered in line with the South African Schools Act and cannot be considered for accreditation by Umalusi.

3. Blended learning within a registered "brick and mortar" independent school

Blended learning offers a mix of online and face-to-face instruction. Unlike classes at an online school, blended learning takes place in a school building. Learners often do the online portion in a classroom on devices such as laptops or tablets or as homework or research at home. Blended learning is sometimes called digital learning. Class time is used for discussions and hands-on projects using digital/online content to supplement teaching in the classroom. The teacher remains responsible for the development of lessons and assessment.

An independent school using blended learning methodology may be considered for accreditation by Umalusi.

4. Hybrid instruction

An independent school uses the services of an online education provider to deliver the lessons in the school. Learners attend the "brick and mortar" school and log into lessons provided online. Teachers at the school ensure that learners apply themselves to the programmes offered by the online education provider. This type of school will not meet the requirements for accreditation as it does not demonstrate the capacity to provide the curriculum leading to the NSC qualification itself but relies instead on the services of another provider.

Conclusion

If an independent school is to be considered for accreditation, it must be registered with a provincial education department. Accreditation by Umalusi attests to the capacity of the school to offer the NSC curriculum. The mandate of Umalusi is to quality assure registered education institutions offering qualifications registered on the GFETQSF.

Online education providers are not registered private education institutions and therefore currently fall outside the mandate of Umalusi.

The fact that e-learning forms part of South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 vision4 cannot be ignored. It is thus imperative that legislation to support online education is developed. Umalusi is working together with the relevant entities to develop a framework for the regulation of online schools. Once such legislation is in place, Umalusi will extend its quality assurance processes to the online schooling sector.

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[4] DBE (2020). Action Plan to 2024: Towards the realisation of Schooling 2030 – Taking forward South Africa's National Development Plan 2030. Pretoria: DBE.

Hybridising the Umalusi information communications technology infrastructure environment

Victor Mathebula

The Umalusi ICT infrastructure environment has successfully transitioned into a hybrid environment; the servers at Umalusi are now hosted both locally on the premises, and on the internet in the cloud. Cloud computing refers to the practice of using remote servers accessed on the internet to store, manage and process data instead of relying on local servers or personal computers.

This migration of the servers to cloud computing was prompted by the challenges posed by an aging ICT infrastructure. This meant that Umalusi was unable to obtain an extended warranty from service providers. This might have affected the availability of systems, which would have had a negative impact on productivity, a risk Umalusi could not afford to take.

The first phase was to set up the Microsoft Azure environment for Umalusi, and to ensure connectivity between the Umalusi network and the Microsoft Azure network.

This was followed by the migration of Umalusi's servers to Microsoft Azure and the configuration of backup schedules, the establishment of a disaster recovery environment at a different datacentre and patching to conform to our policies.

This process has almost been completed (90%). We are currently transitioning from phase one to phase two of the project. This deals with the provisioning of support and maintenance by the service provider to ensure stability by the remotely managed service team.

This will take place over a period of five years, during which the service provider will be responsible for the support of the system for one year, with internal Umalusi staff taking over for the remainder of the period, with the assistance of the service provider when necessary.

On the sporting front

Sensei Ramakulukusha earns South Africa two gold medals

Louis Ramakulukusha (Acting Senior Manager: HCM) has made Umalusi and the country proud. Sensei (meaning teacher or master in Japanese) Ramakulukusha earned two gold medals, in the Male Kata and the Kumite Divisions when representing the South African Karate National Team (KSA) at the UFAK Region 5 Championship held in Zimbabwe in June this year. Participating countries included Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe.

This is the second time Sensei Ramakulukusha has won at the FAK Region 5 Championships in both Kata and Kumite.

This achievement qualifies him for a place in the KSA National Team to represent South Africa at the All-African Championships in Casablanca (Morocco) in August this year.

Sensei Ramakulukusha has been practising karate for 34 years. He first learned the discipline at primary school, later becaming a provincial and then a national karate coach and a karate instructor. Sensei Ramakulukusha is one of South Africa's highest ranked karate sensei. He has been selected for the National Karate Team several times since 2015. He represented South Africa at the Commonwealth Karate Championships where he won his first international silver medal in Kumite. In 2022, he was awarded the Gauteng Best Male Karata of the Year, adding to his many accomplishments in this discipline

Louis Ramakulukusha

This Sensei advises that, although karate is often associated with children and young adults, this is a not the whole story: Karate can be an excellent option for adults who want to stay fit, develop self-discipline, or learn self-defence skills as it has no age restriction, unlike other sports.

Karate is highly recommended for its health, body and spiritual benefits. It is a confidence booster for women and girls as it enables them to defend themselves against any bullying or danger.

Sylvester Ngoepe

Umalusi in the Comrades Marathon

Sylvester Ngoepe (Records Practitioner: HCM) took part in the Comrades Marathon held in KZN on 11 June 2023. This marathon is a long-distance foot race with a distance of approximately 90km and an entry fee of R1200. Relating his experiences of the marathon, Ngoepe said

It was quite a challenge as we had to run around five mountains with an elevation of 1100 metres. It was also a timed run, meaning that we had to finish the marathon within 12 hours. The temperature was another factor. While it was six degrees in the morning when we started, by the afternoon it was around 23 degrees and by the time we ended the run, it was 16 degrees. I finished the race at 10:36:27 and received the Robert Mtshali Medal. Completion of this was on the bucket list for me. It was my second time running the Comrades Marathon.

You ran a good race, Sylvester.

Talk to us

37 General van Ryneveld Street, Persequor Technopark, Pretoria

Tel: +27 (12) 349 1510

Email: info@umalusi.org.za

Website: www.umalusi.org.za

(f) Umalusi_RSA

(🐦) @UmalusiSA

(📞) **ANTI-FRAUD HOTLINE**
17737

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