



The Evaluation of the Assessment System for the NCV

2006 - 2008

UMALUSI



Council for Quality Assurance in
General and Further Education and Training

The Evaluation of the Assessment System for the NCV 2006–2008

PUBLISHED BY



Council for Quality Assurance in
General and Further Education and Training

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Acknowledgements

Umalusi would like to acknowledge the following people for their invaluable inputs and participation in the evaluation of the national assessment for the National Certificate: Vocational

The Director-General, Mr D Hindle, for facilitating the evaluation of the assessment system for the NCV

Mr Chris Nyangintsimbi: Manager: Assessment Bodies; and Project Manager for the evaluation project

Senior Management teams at National, Provincial and College levels

Managers of assessment processes at National, Provincial and College levels

Examiners and moderators

Lecturers at colleges and campuses

Learners

Evaluation teams

Colleagues at Umalusi

Acronyms

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ADCOM	Advisory Committee
CAT	Common Assessment Task
CCC	College Curriculum Committees
CD: NEAM	Chief Directorate: National Examinations, Assessment and Measurement
DoE	National Department of Education
EAP	England-Africa Partnership
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
HEDCOM	Heads of Education Departments Committee
ICASS	Internal Continuous Assessment
IT	Information Technology
FET	Further Education and Training
FETI	Further Education and Training Institute of the University of the Western Cape
FG	Focus Groups
ISAT	Integrated Summative Assessment Task
NATED	National Education Curriculum (being phasing out)
NCV	National Certificate: Vocational
PDE	Provincial Department of Education
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
QAA	Quality Assurance of Assessment Unit
SACPO	South African College Principals' Organisation
SITA	State Information Technology Agency
UK	United Kingdom
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

Executive summary

The evaluation of assessment of the National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) forms part of Umalusi's ongoing role in assuring the quality of delivery of qualifications that fall within its quality assurance scope.

The two key areas of assessment under scrutiny in this report are the assessment system itself (that is, the structures and processes for the conduct of assessment), and the standard of assessment (as exemplified through examinations, integrated summative assessment tasks (ISATs), and internal continuous assessment (ICASS), which make up external and internal elements of the NCV).

This report draws on a multi-phased information gathering process based on site visits to colleges and campuses undertaken by Umalusi in October/November 2006-January 2007 and September 2007, and site visits to the national Department of Education (DoE), provincial departments of education (PDEs) and colleges and campuses in September 2008, as well as on the monitoring and moderation reports of the NCV Levels 2 and 3 assessment processes in 2008. It therefore represents an integration of Umalusi's quality assurance activities, with cross referencing between the site visit findings and reports generated through its ongoing quality assurance regime.

The methodology involved scrutiny and collation of information gathered from the following processes and sources:

- Site visits, as well as self-evaluation instruments completed by fourteen colleges (twenty-four sites, across all provinces) from October 2006 to January 2007
- Site visits, as well as self-evaluation instruments completed by thirteen colleges (fifteen sites, across all provinces) in September 2007
- Site visits to DoE (Directorate of Assessment and Examinations), four provincial departments of education (PDEs) (Gauteng, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga), twenty-nine sites (campus and head offices) representing twelve colleges, in September 2008, including in-depth interviews specifically targeted at senior management and professional staff at all levels of the system, as well as focus group interviews with learners
- Site visits, monitoring and moderation reports with a particular focus on subjects across the following programmes:
 - Engineering and Related Design
 - Electrical Infrastructure Construction
 - Office Administration
 - Finance, Economics and Accounting
- Subject-specific interviews in five sampled subjects, with both lecturers and learners
- Umalusi's ongoing annual quality assurance procedures as applied to NCV assessments, including:
 - Moderation of marking, particularly of the marking for NCV2 as these subjects were marked internally at campuses
 - Moderation reports for internal assessment in the sampled subjects, and for the external examinations
 - The overall quality assurance report for vocational education assessment for 2008.

The key purpose of this evaluation is to acknowledge the successes, and make recommendations towards improvement, of the assessment system for the NCV by identifying factors that may be impacting positively or negatively on the quality of the assessment. Further, the evaluation aims to support the development and delivery of an effective and good quality national vocational qualification.

The assessment system: key findings

The section of the report that deals with systemic features of assessment drew on interviews held at national, provincial and college level, and on Umalusi's annual monitoring of assessment processes. The following were the key findings:

GENERAL

Given that the National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) is a new qualification, which is only in its second year of implementation at the time of the evaluation, it is inevitable that there will be teething problems. Nevertheless, it is evident that the Department of Education (DoE), provincial departments of education (PDEs), colleges and campuses have done an enormous amount of work in preparation for implementation, as well as in dealing with issues as they emerge.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The human resources in place to deal with the assessment of the NCV at national level where examinations are set have substantially improved from 2007 to 2008, which can only have a positive outcome. However, there are still resource constraints in some areas (for example, monitoring processes, and capacity in the examination setting and resulting units).

There are, however, serious human resource gaps at provincial and college level. At provincial level personnel are often stretched, as schooling rather than FET colleges is the area of expertise and primary responsibility. At college level there are substantial skills gaps in terms of lecturers with the appropriate professional expertise, which leads to concerns around competence in interpreting the curriculum and dealing with internal assessment. This is owing to factors such as high numbers of resignations, and the inability of College Councils to attract new staff (partly as a result of changes in conditions of service for FET lecturers), scarce skills in certain technical fields, and lack of sustained pre- or in-service training. The skills shortages also impact on the appointment of examiners, moderators and markers, and their levels of efficiency.

EXAMINATION PAPERS

Setting and moderation of papers at national level presented some examples of good practice and some problem areas. The time-frames for effective moderation seem to be insufficient and, in some cases, moderation of the papers is a superficial exercise, leaning more towards monitoring for compliance than moderation to improve the depth and standard of papers.

MARKING OF EXAMINATIONS

Management of marking has been identified as a problem area. Cases of markers who do not take their responsibilities seriously were noted even at national level. Umalusi's monitoring and moderation processes showed very variable standards in the quality and consistency of marking across different subjects.

INTEGRATED SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT TASKS (ISATs)

The setting (and moderation) of ISATs at national level is an emerging process, on which it is difficult to comment with any finality. However, at implementation level a number of problems were identified. In some subjects ISATs were received very late, impacting on planning for other activities at colleges, including the procurement of consumables. Further, moderation of implementation of ISATs is not carried out in any common way across different provinces, and Umalusi monitors noted differences in interpretation of scoring. These factors impact on the reliability of ISAT scores, and national standards. In addition, there is still much confusion at site level around the relationships

of ICASS, ISAT and the final examination in terms of learner results. Finally, senior management at college level frequently raised the issue of the costs of consumables for ISATs; it was not clear whether these were factored into the funding of colleges which, in turn raised concerns about the financial sustainability of the NCV.

INTERNAL CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT (ICASS)

The evaluation showed that ICASS is probably the most troubled area in the NCV, something to be taken seriously given that ICASS for vocational subjects represents 50% of the final results for a learner. Key concerns relating to ICASS are:

- The competence of lecturers to design and assess appropriate ICASS tasks, particularly in relation to applied learning and practical work
- Limited curriculum support for lecturers
- The need for a common assessment standard for ICASS
- Lack of clarity in relation to policies on absenteeism, reassessments, requirements for entry to the ISAT and the examination, and irregularities in ICASS
- An over-complex and time consuming moderation model for ICASS
- Insufficient time for effective teaching and assessment of practical work, owing to factors such as curriculum overload in some cases, large student numbers (putting a strain on workshop capacity and safety requirements) and the apparent administrative burdens of the ICASS portfolio and moderation system
- Concerns around the long term sustainability of new resources such as workshops for practical assessments, and the costs of consumables.

It should be noted, however, that some provinces and/or colleges have facilitated processes to develop common tasks and to share understandings, and that these efforts have had a positive effect on the consistency of internal assessment.

RELATIONSHIPS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

There are different understandings at national level and provincial level about roles and responsibilities in relation to the NCV. The DoE seems to have expectations of provincial undertakings (for example, monitoring of the examinations and moderation of ICASS and ISATs) that provinces are either unwilling or unable to perform because of the lack of human and/or financial resources. In addition, the DoE as an assessment body works directly with campuses as examination centres, bypassing provinces and college head offices, which has sometimes led to confused communications between different structures on examination-specific issues.

ASSESSMENT STANDARDS: KEY FINDINGS

This section reports on the quality and standard of the assessment elements in the NCV. While it draws on general observations made in Umalusi's 2008 Quality Assurance report on Vocational Education assessment, the main sources are the subject-specific interviews with lecturers, the ICASS moderators' reports from Umalusi moderators, and the Umalusi external moderator reports on the examination papers, all with reference to the five sampled subjects at NCV 2. These were Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics, Engineering Systems, Electrical Systems and Construction, and Applied Accounting.

Differences in standards in different provinces were noted, with Western Cape and Mpumalanga representing a higher standard in relation specifically to ICASS than the other two provinces. In addition, there were differences across subjects. Nevertheless, the following general trends were noted.

ICASS

Internal continuous assessment was a particular focus for the evaluation of the assessment system of the NCV for the reasons noted above.

Portfolios of Evidence (PoEs) (both those of the educators and the learners) were not in general well managed or well organised, and moderators frequently noted missing components and/or difficulty in understanding portfolios. Quality of the ICASS tasks was a major concern. While there were some exceptions, in general tasks seemed to have been badly designed, and/or at the wrong level. There was little evidence across subjects of good practical tasks that genuinely assessed application, and many of the tasks were simply knowledge tests or extracts from textbooks. The second major concern was that external moderators could not see how learner work was scored, which brought the internal moderation process into question. Tracking internal moderation was a major challenge, and generally the moderation processes for ICASS were confused and confusing. Where there were comments on the standard of learner work, this was generally perceived as poor.

ISATs

The quality of the ISATs varied across subjects. Umalusi's monitoring raised concerns around different interpretation of the tasks, and of scoring, affecting the national standard. In addition, scheduling issues might mean that learners had not yet covered the work being assessed, which would also affect the standard of performance.

THE NOVEMBER EXAMINATION

In relation to the five sample subjects, only minor problems were noted with the papers. Issues around setting and moderation processes have been noted above. This bodes well for the continued development of the assessment system for the NCV.

THE CONTEXT FOR ASSESSMENT: KEY FINDINGS

This section deals with aspects of the teaching and learning contexts that emerged frequently during the site visits and were cited as factors that impacted on assessment, linked to poor performance.

It is clear that there are different understandings of the notion of 'autonomy' for the colleges, with key concerns identified around the effect that this has had on staff appointments, and on long-term planning. Recapitalisation was, in essence, a strategy for resourcing the assessment system through the provision of capacity building and infrastructure development for practical learning and assessment. If long-term planning and budgeting for maintenance of the infrastructure and the use of consumables for practical assessment tasks have been inadequate, then the NCV funding model is brought into question. Added to funding questions are the enrolment targets for the NCV, in that the colleges experience the programmes to be very expensive to implement.

In some cases, issues around curriculum were raised during the various site visits. Despite the training provided, there is uncertainty about the professional competence of the FET college lecturers to interpret the curriculum and therefore to deliver effective teaching and assessment. The qualification's policy, subject and assessment guidelines do not seem to translate into a coherent and clear curriculum that informs successful delivery. The curriculum support and training seem insufficient. There are gaps between what grade 9 learners (as a minimum entry requirement) can do and the demands of NCV Level 2 programmes. In addition, the NCV's lack of articulation and links to employability are issues that are seen to impact on student motivation, leading to poor performance.

Problems caused by absenteeism are compounded by confusion around policies on reassessment

for ICASS, and the time loss this causes. The other issue stressed by lecturers (and learners) is the fact that many classes have mixed levels of ability, prior knowledge and age range, a feature that makes it much more difficult to teach and assess effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the key findings, recommendations are as follows:

STRUCTURAL ISSUES AND COORDINATION

Respondents at provincial and college levels have expressed concern about lack of clarity on policies issued by the DoE, particularly in terms of curriculum implementation, ICASS and ISAT and examinations, as well as the roles and responsibilities at the different levels of the system. It is, therefore, recommended that the DoE considers creating the following structures (existing structures could be used):

- Formalise existing structures or introduce ad hoc sub-committee(s) of HEDCOM to deal with concerns around the lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities at the different levels of the system in respect of monitoring and moderation; curriculum, including issues such as implementation support and review; implementation of policies, including moderation policies in respect of the management and implementation of ICASS, ISAT and external examinations.
- Appoint a task team or ad hoc committee to interrogate the funding model for the NCV.
- At national level, institute an improvement plan for those aspects that have been identified as problematic, e.g. the time available for internal moderation of papers; editing of papers; and moderation that is more monitoring for compliance than moderation for quality.
- Address human resource gaps, with specific projects such as training and appointment models for markers, (including holding markers to account), examiners and moderators, and conduct a general investigation into long-term needs such as training systems for vocational educators.

QUALIFICATION STRUCTURE AND ARTICULATION WITH OTHER PARTS OF THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

Learners entering the NCV programmes enter from different points of the system. For example, some learners exit school with grade 9, while others exit with grade 12. However, the structure of the qualification only allows for learners entering with grade 9, while colleges admit learners at these and higher levels.

Respondents at colleges have expressed concerns about (1) the ability of grade 9 graduates to offer NCV2; and, (2) the boredom of those entering with higher levels, particularly when it becomes evident that NCV2 is equivalent to grade 10. It is therefore strongly recommended that:

- A formal bridging programme is introduced to assist learners who are entering NCV2 with grade 9, particularly if their performance was weak at school. In other words, diagnostic testing should inform the placement of learners and remedial programmes made available to them.
- A strategy is developed to assist learners who are carrying subjects from lower levels of the NCV, or a decisive policy on pass requirements is implemented.
- A system of credit transfer is implemented for learners entering the programme with grades 10, 11 or 12, particularly for the fundamental subjects, and that a reduction in the duration of the programme for such learners is considered.
- The lack of clarity and/or agreements in respect of the status of the NCV in relation to Trade Testing is concerning. High level discussions on this are urgent and important. In addition, articulation, specifically with the Universities of Technology, needs urgent attention. The development of an NCV5 that will allow articulation with Universities of Technology is urgent.
- A delivery model that would suit working learners is developed.
- The decision, on whether NCV2 and 3 are exit points for this qualification is finalised and disseminated, based on inputs from stakeholders and interested parties.

CURRICULUM FOR THE NCV PROGRAMMES

There appears to be some disagreement on the existence of a curriculum for the qualification. College lecturers at campus level indicated that they are not certain as to what to teach on a daily basis. In addition, colleges and provincial head offices do not seem to have sufficiently interrogated the current subject and assessment guidelines in order to determine syllabi.

It is therefore recommended that:

- A set of syllabi be developed in order to support college lecturers with curriculum implementation.
- Dissemination of syllabi must be accompanied with in-service training of college lecturers.

In addition, with Umalusi, plan for qualification and curriculum evaluation.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION

Respondents at colleges have expressed concerns about the competition with industry for teaching staff at colleges. In addition, the nature of the NCV requires much stronger academic grounding, as well as skills in delivery and assessment of the practical component of the subjects offered, and it seems that lecturing staff lack capacity in this regard. As a result, delivery and assessment standards are likely to be compromised. The areas directly affected are:

- Mediation and delivery of the curriculum which includes the implementation of ICASS
- Internal moderation of assessment at institutional and cluster levels
- Setting and internal moderation of examination question papers
- Marking and internal moderation of all assessment tasks, including examination scripts

It is strongly recommended that planning for a comprehensive in-service training for college lecturers be implemented. In-service training must include the implementation of ICASS and administration of ISAT and the marking of both.

In the medium to long term, the introduction of formal training for college lecturers, which will include both academic depth in the subjects they intend to teach, pedagogy and subject didactics, needs attention.

ICASS AND ISAT AND THE STANDARD OF ASSESSMENT

- College lecturers have indicated that they are unsure about the relationship between ICASS, ISAT and the external examination. Some form of synergy between these different aspects of assessment needs to be stipulated. (ICASS tasks, for example presumably should lead up to the ISAT in terms of the skills and knowledge needed in order to successfully complete the assessment.) In addition, the policy in respect of learners who fail the ISAT as a prerequisite for sitting for the external examination seems to be unclear.
- National common ICASS tasks, or exemplars of such tasks may assist lecturers to set tasks of acceptable standard and will facilitate meaningful moderation
- The policy on absenteeism from ICASS, ISAT and other tasks, resulting in the need for reassessment, should be clarified
- ISAT tasks must reach colleges in good time to facilitate planning and expenditure in respect of consumables needed for such tasks.

RESOURCING THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Concerns were raised around the alignment of policies in respect of projected enrolments, the optimum use of infrastructure and time-tabling:

- Workshops for engineering subjects are generally equipped for smaller numbers of learners than are actually needed (particularly with repeaters as part of the equation).

- The projected enrolment figures per college seem to be unreasonable, firstly because of the strain on facilities and equipment; and secondly, on account of the perceived high cost to offer the qualification. Projected enrolments, therefore, need to be aligned to specific programmes and should be based on the availability and capacity of resources such as workshops and facilities.
- Colleges seem to need support in making optimum use of facilities and equipment, particularly when practical assessments are due. Currently, time-tabling seems to be along school lines.

OTHER ISSUES

While the granting and disbursement of bursaries are clearly not directly linked to the standard of assessment, there was sufficient concern expressed at college and campus levels to highlight the matter in this report.

The allocation of bursaries needs to be finalised before colleges reopen in January, as delays in this regard seem to lead to the absenteeism of learners who rely solely on the funding in order to pay for transport to colleges.

Colleges are of the opinion that the NCV programmes are very expensive to offer. The funding model for the NCV needs interrogation.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The DoE has taken the bold step to introduce a new vocational qualification which, by all accounts, is perceived to be a huge improvement on what was available in the sector before. The NCV has the potential to meet a very important need in the education and training system, particularly if more flexible modes of delivery are introduced.

The purpose of the evaluation of the assessment system for the NCV is to support the further development and implementation of this qualification.

To this end, Umalusi will require improvement plans for those areas where concerns were raised, with particular emphasis on the assessment system and assessment standards. In addition, as a next step, an evaluation of the curriculum in collaboration with Umalusi will enhance the quality of the qualification. The 2009–2011 monitoring cycle will, therefore, evaluate progress against these improvement plans at all levels of the system.

Introduction

Umalusi's full quality assurance regime for the setting and monitoring of standards comprises three focus areas: provision, curriculum and assessment. Umalusi is committed to a long-term and ongoing monitoring process for the National Certificate Vocational (NCV), which will ultimately encompass all three areas.

This phase of the process deals with the evaluation of assessment of the NCV, which is the subject of this report. The two key areas of assessment under scrutiny are the assessment system itself (that is, the structures and processes for the conduct of assessment), and the standard of assessment (as exemplified through the elements that make up internal and external assessment of the NCV).

Given that assessment systems and practices reside within an organisational context, the evaluation draws on Umalusi's areas for the accreditation and monitoring of public and private assessment bodies, namely criteria encapsulating:

- Strategic management and leadership, (e.g. planning, policy development, resourcing and funding approaches, governance)
- Maintenance and enhancement of academic standards (e.g. interrogation of the curriculum, its assessment and its standards; professional development of teaching staff; monitoring and evaluation)
- Administration of assessment (e.g. all the logistical elements around setting, distributing, resulting, reporting and moderating all forms of assessment).

These areas provide the context for the 2008 evaluation process. As noted, however, the spotlight is on the notion of the assessment system as the driver for quality in the system, in that assessment measures the achievements of teaching and learning and represents the standard. This report draws on a multi-phased information gathering process based on site visits to colleges and campuses undertaken by Umalusi in October/November 2006–January 2007 and September 2007, and site visits to the national Department of Education (DoE), provincial departments of education (PDEs) and colleges and campuses in September 2008, as well as on the reports on monitoring and moderation of the NCV Levels 2 and 3 assessment processes in 2008. It therefore represents an integration of Umalusi's quality assurance activities, with cross referencing between the site visit findings and reports generated through the organisation's designated functions. The first two phases of Umalusi's evaluations of the NCV (2006 and 2007) examined various aspects of the implementation of this new qualification, including the state of readiness to deliver and assess the programmes and the effective management and quality assurance of the internal assessment component of the NCV. The 2008 evaluation built on this approach, but formalised and extended the study to interrogate the assessment system as a whole, including national, provincial and college levels of both internal and external assessment.

Further, the analysis resulting from the 2008 evaluation project is strengthened and supported by the findings of Umalusi's standard annual quality assurance practices as applied to the qualifications for which it is responsible. In the case of the NCV, this included moderation and monitoring of the NCV 2 and 3 internal and external assessments. The aim of drawing on the information generated by the Quality Assurance of Assessment (QAA) unit, as well as the monitoring information generated by the Evaluation and Accreditation unit, was to ensure that triangulated evidence, cross-referenced from a number of different sources and over a number of years, is presented in this report.

Through these different processes, assessment in the NCV is considered from two viewpoints:

- The *systemic viewpoint*, looking down from above: evaluating delivery of the NCV through scrutiny of the public national assessment system. This includes policies and processes for the management of the different levels of assessment (national external examinations and internal

assessment) by the different agents (DoE, PDEs, and the colleges). As the overarching national assessment agency, the role of the DoE is key. The impact of strategic issues such as those around autonomy and recapitalisation were also looked at in terms of their consequences on the quality of delivery, and therefore on the assessment system. In addition, Umalusi's QAA monitoring reports comment on various systemic issues.

- The *implementation viewpoint*, looking up from the ground: gathering information from those involved in actual delivery. In other words, this includes all those aspects that could impact on the quality and validity of assessment: the nature of the curriculum, teaching and learning at sites, human resources, learner profiles, and learners' assessment results in that system and the standards these represent. Umalusi's QAA internal assessment tasks (ICASS) moderation reports in selected subjects were analysed with a view to understanding the standards of internal assessment, and implementation issues that may have affected these standards.

The basis for understanding the findings of the evaluation is that educational reform is an ongoing and developmental process. At the time of the third phase in the evaluation in 2008, this new programme was only in its second year of implementation, and progress in addressing challenges identified in previous studies was already evident. The purpose of this evaluation is, therefore, to recognise the successes of the implementation of the new qualification and to improve the assessment system by identifying factors that may be impacting negatively on the quality of delivery of the NCV as evidenced through the assessment system. Refer to Figure 1 for an overview of the project, including plans for 2009.

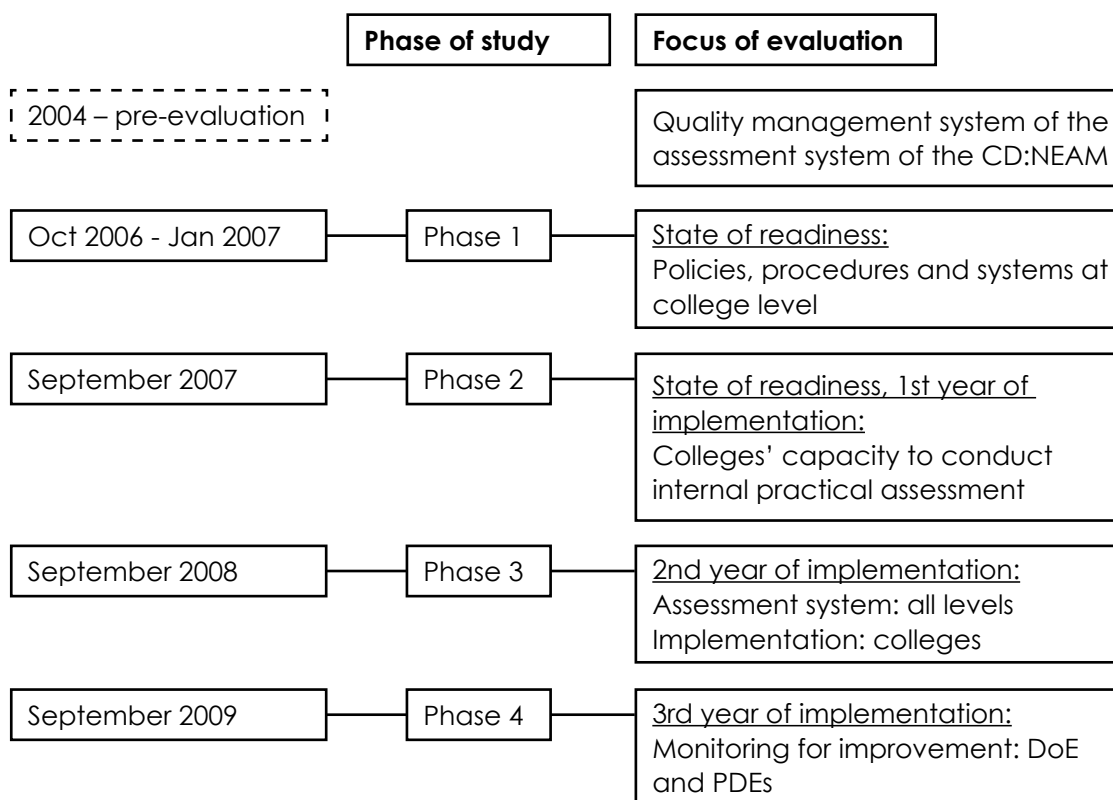


Figure 1: Overview of the evaluation of the assessment system for the NCV

Structure of the report

This report draws on both the information gathering process undertaken by Umalusi through site visits, and on the monitoring and moderation of the NCV in 2008. While the findings are integrated throughout the report in that they are brought into each section, the source of an observation is generally indicated.

Part 1 covers the methodology and scope of the evaluation as reported on in this report. Part 2 gives detailed feedback on the workings of the assessment system at the different levels (national, provincial, college and campus). Part 3 homes in on the issue of assessment standards, using the targeted subject areas as illustrative examples, and drawing on both subject-specific interviews and subject-specific QAA moderation reports. Part 4 draws out some key themes that emerged from the site visits, relating to the context of delivery and how this impacts on assessment. Part 5 sets out recommendations emerging from this evaluation.

Part 1:

Methodology and scope of the evaluation

1 THE INFORMATION GATHERED

The NCV and its assessment system represent a multi-layered system, from centralised national functions, through provincial level, to colleges and individual campuses with disparate characteristics. A process of site visits, self-evaluation instruments and interviews accessed information, viewpoints and feedback from personnel involved at different levels in the NCV over a number of years. These were supported and triangulated by the interrogation of internal assessment tasks (quality, breadth and depth), the moderation of these tasks, as well as the monitoring and moderation of nationally set examinations and practical assessments – all of which serve to paint an integrated evaluation encompassing all of Umalusi's quality assurance activities. This evaluation report is therefore based on a number of reports emanating from different parts of the system (see list of reports under 3).

1.1 SAMPLE: RATIONALE AND SIZE

Purposive sampling of sites and learning areas was used, i.e. sampling where the richest possible data can be collected. In 2007, the sample was drawn from the highest enrolment figures in the various programmes. In 2008, the sample was informed by enrolment figures, as well as programmes associated with scarce and critical skills (such as Engineering and Construction). Finally, the main choice of subjects sampled was those where the greatest number of internal practical assessments was likely to take place. In addition, Mathematics and Mathematical Literacy were included owing to the poor performance in the 2007 examination in these subjects. The various samples over the different phases of the evaluation therefore included the following:

October 2006 – January 2007

- Nine provinces
- Fourteen central offices (24 sites)

September 2007

- Nine provinces
- Fourteen sites
- Programmes: Engineering and Related Design; Electrical Infrastructure Construction; Office Administration

September 2008

- DoE
- Four PDEs, (Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Western Cape)
- Twelve colleges and Leeuwkop Correctional Services Facility, a total of 29 sites
- Three out of the twelve available learning programmes were identified (Engineering and Related Design, Electrical Infrastructure and Construction and Finance, Economics and Accounting), with the focus on key subjects in each learning programme. The subjects investigated in the sample are Mathematics, Mathematical Literacy, Engineering Systems, Electrical Systems and Construction and Applied Accounting.

In 2008 alone, a total of 174 FET personnel at various levels participated, with the additional participation of 78 learners. The details for the final evaluation in 2008 are set out in 3.

1.2 RESEARCH PROCEDURES AND PROJECT PLAN

As noted above, the formal systemic evaluation plan for the NCV had its genesis in 2006, the year before the full implementation of the NCV. This was followed by an evaluation in 2007, forming the basis of the 2008 research described in this report.

The main purpose of the 2006 and 2007 studies was to establish the state of readiness for colleges to implement the NCV. The primary focus was on the availability of policy, procedures and systems to implement the NCV and on the readiness of facilities and equipment for the assessment of practical skills (e.g. electrical, engineering, administrative), including the sufficiency of equipment, such as computers when computer-related tasks are required. The findings of the first two phases were that the system was not ready, with the following identified as key indicators:

October 2006 – January 2007

- Policies for assessment and moderation were in place, but were mostly focused on Report 191 and learnerships and/or occupational unit standards based qualifications.
- Although substantial progress had been made with the development of system for the quality assurance of internal assessment at college level, concrete plans for monitoring and moderation were still sketchy.

September 2007

- Construction of workshops and simulation rooms and the installation of equipment and machinery were not concluded by September 2007. This was often due to infrastructural problems, and logistics such as delays in municipal approval for construction work, e.g. the need for an increase in voltage to accommodate the new machinery.
- Training of college staff to implement the new curriculum and of college councils to undertake new responsibilities was seen as inadequate. Many lecturers were artisans who were comfortable with the practical skills of the learning programme but not with the academic component, which forms a significant part of the NCV programme.
- There were complaints about the poor quality and late arrival of textbooks.
- The integrated summative assessment tasks (ISATs) were not externally moderated, and moderation standards and structures for ICASS were in their infancy. Lecturers did not feel confident about their understanding of the curriculum, and the roles of ICASS and ISAT.

The 2008 evaluation built on these ongoing themes and their impact on assessment. The final stage, to be implemented in 2009, intends to utilise the combined findings over three years as the basis for improvement plans at all levels and to monitor the remaining provinces, (North West, Northern Cape, Limpopo, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal) in line with their self-evaluation reports and improvement plans.

Throughout the evaluation, a deliberate attempt was made to be transparent and consultative. The rationale and purpose of the systemic evaluation were discussed with all major role-players from the outset. In addition, in all cases, evaluation instruments were sent to respondents well in advance of the site visits to provide an opportunity to comment and seek clarification. **Table 1** outlines the full project plan, time-frames and the current status of each activity, with a focus on the 2008 evaluation:

Table 1: Project plan and progress

	Activity	Time-frame	Status
1	Workshop: development of systems for internal assessment – college staff	March 2006	Concluded
2	Workshop: development of systems for internal assessment – DoE and PDEs	July 2006	Concluded

	Activity	Time-frame	Status
3	Present project to South African College Principals' Organisation (SACPO)	May 2007	Concluded
4	Present project to ADCOM	July 2007	Concluded
5	Consult with the Director-General (DG) of the intention to evaluate the assessment systems for the NCV	February 2008	Concluded
6	Meet with SACPO	February 2008	Concluded
7	Brief the DOE:NEAM directorate	April 2008	Concluded
8	Discuss the evaluation process with DOE:NEAM directorate	June 2008	Concluded
9	Make a presentation at ADCOM on the evaluation	July 2008	Concluded
10	Write a letter to the DG on the confirmation of dates of the evaluation and the personnel required. The DG confirmed the above in writing.	July 2008	Concluded
11	Inform PDEs and colleges and request them to send representatives to a consultative meeting	July 2008	Concluded
12	Hold a consultative meeting with PDEs and colleges on the evaluation plan and process	August 2008	Concluded
13	Conduct evaluations at DOE, PDEs and colleges	September/October 2008	Concluded
14	Hold a debriefing session on the evaluation plan, process and report writing	October 2008	Concluded
15	Draft a summary of the findings and brief DOE	November/December 2008	Concluded
16	Submit draft reports to PDEs and colleges for clearance on adequate coverage and accuracy of the information covered	October/November 2008	Concluded
17	Submit the final draft report for sending to the members of the Council	06 February 2009	Concluded
18	Approval of the report by Council	February Meeting of 2009	Concluded
19	Disseminate the report to the NDOE, PDEs and colleges	March 2009	Ongoing

1.3 SUMMARY OF INFORMATION SOURCES

The evaluation of the NCV aimed to identify possible inhibitors and to recognise good practice. Thus, the data was gathered from multiple sources.

- i. Abbreviated reports of evaluation in 2006 and 2007
- ii. Documentary evidence setting out the system in the form of policies, procedures and guidelines, to check the degree of conformity between the policy framework for the NCV and its assessment with the realities on the ground. The aim was to ascertain how these affect the assessment system, and to check whether people operating at the different levels in the system share the same understandings.
- iii. In-depth interviews, to understand the relationship between the assessment system per se and various factors in the environment that impact on it at all levels of the system (including learners). There was an explicit attempt to ensure validity in terms of the voices heard, through the fact that the interviews were:
 - detailed, and conducted by senior personnel from Umalusi who could probe and evaluate the commentary being received;
 - specifically targeted at senior management/ professional staff at all levels of the system, in order to get the opinions of those who are experienced and well-informed; and
 - extensive, in that a substantial number of interviewees over the three-year period were sampled, to the extent that generalisation can take place.
- iv. Moderation reports of the sampled subjects, including moderation reports on Educator portfolios and Learner portfolios, and of the examinations, for NCV 2008.
- v. Umalusi's 2008 Report on the Quality Assurance of the Vocational Education and Training Assessment.

2 THE EVALUATION PROCESS: SCOPE AND SUMMARY

2.1 MODERATION AND MONITORING

As noted in the introduction, this evaluation integrated all the quality assurance activities of Umalusi in order to make connections between the different kinds of information gathered through the site visit process, self-evaluation instruments, and interviews and from Umalusi's standard annual quality assurance procedures. The latter are concerned primarily with the standard of assessment, but look in some detail at various factors and processes that support the standard. The moderation and monitoring instruments are used to assess the quality, depth and breadth of assessment tasks and examination papers, and effectiveness of various processes.

The 2008 Report on the Quality Assurance of the Vocational Education and Training Assessment reports on the NCV in general, as follows:

- Moderation of question papers
- Moderation of ISATs
- Moderation of ICASS
- Monitoring of the conduct of examinations
- Moderation of marking
- Standardisation of results
- Challenges for NCV

ICASS Moderation Reports for 2008 for the five subjects in the four provinces (Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Mpumalanga and Gauteng) selected for this evaluation were consulted. At each site a sample of both educator and learner portfolios was reviewed (**Table 2**).

Table 2: Moderation of sample subjects across four provinces

Subject	Number of sites at which portfolios were sampled	Moderator's Report on Examination
Engineering Systems	24 sites, 12 reports	Yes
Electrical Systems and Construction	27 sites, 14 reports	No external moderator appointed
Applied Accounting	23 sites, 12 reports	Yes
Mathematics	23 sites, 9 reports	Yes
Mathematical Literacy	12 sites, 4 reports	Yes

Part 3 (Standard of Assessment) of this report gives the criteria against which portfolios and examination papers are moderated, and discusses the findings for the sampled subjects.

2.2 THE SITE VISITS, PERSONNEL INVOLVED AND ACTIVITIES

In early 2008 Umalusi consulted with DoE prior to finalising the project plan and scope, as outlined in Table 1 in 1.2. The final evaluation site visits took place from September to October 2008. **Table 3** gives the details of the visits and the personnel involved, followed by a description of the activities undertaken.

Table 3: Overview of site visits and participants in 2008

	Description	Number of participants	Position profile of participants
DoE	Three-day visit to 1 Directorate: Directorate of Assessment & Examinations	11 DoE personnel + 2 DoE Internal Moderators	The Deputy Director-General and Chief Director and Director Management team DoE moderators (individual interviews)
PDEs	One-day visits to 4 PDE head offices in: Gauteng Mpumalanga Western Cape Eastern Cape	6 4 2 9	Senior staff of the provincial departments attended, such as Chief Planners and Chief Education Specialists. In two provinces (Gauteng and Eastern Cape) the Chief Director: FET participated.
FET Colleges (Head Office)	One-day visits to 12 colleges: Gauteng Central Johannesburg College Leeuwkop Correctional Services Sedibeng College South West Gauteng College Tshwane North College Mpumalanga Nkangala FET College Gert Sibande FET College Western Cape College of Cape Town Northlink College Eastern Cape Buffalo City College Lovedale College Port Elizabeth College	3 7 3 2 3 2 1 3 3 9 12 6	At all colleges Senior Management attended. This included CEOs, Campus Heads, Principals, Deputy/ Vice Principals (Academic), Heads of Departments, and various lecturers.
FET Colleges (Campus level)	Subject-specific interviews held at different college campuses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maths and Mathematical Literacy: 9 sites • Applied Accounting: 5 sites • Engineering Systems: 9 sites • Electrical Systems and Construction: 6 sites <p>This represents 17 sites when more than one campus per college was visited.</p>	48 13 13 12	Lecturers in the subject, some at Post Level 1 and some at Post Level 2
Learners	Focus groups interviews	78	
Total	29 sites visited, with multiple parallel interviews conducted by Umalusi team members	174 (plus 78 learners)	Umalusi team: Chief Operating Officer, Senior Managers, Managers

The site visits were designed for comprehensive sharing of information. Umalusi requested all levels to prepare presentations on various aspects of the NCV, ranging from strategic vision through to operational aspects, with specific focus on assessment. Umalusi in turn presented on its quality assurance roles and the purpose of the evaluation. These presentations provided a context for thorough discussion of various aspects of the NCV, in conjunction with either group or individual interviews according to the purpose of specific interview schedules or parts thereof. The site visits also provided opportunities for Umalusi to examine relevant documentation and to look at the adequacy of the premises to carry out designated functions. **Table 4** summarises activities at site visits.

Table 4: Summary of activities undertaken at site visits

	Activities
DoE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DoE presentations on the strategic vision for public FET colleges, on the assessment system for the NCV, and an update on the rollout of the NCV • Umalusi presentation on its quality assurance role in relation to NCV • General discussions on purpose of the evaluation, and issues arising from presentations • Briefings on various aspects of the assessment system • Structured interviews with different managers on specific aspects of the assessment system (external and internal), based on the Umalusi instrument for DoE as an assessment body • Observation of examination production facilities • Perusal of documentary evidence • Field-specific interviews with moderators • Physical facilities inspected.
PDEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations by PDE on strategic vision and roll out of NCV at provincial level • Umalusi presentation on its role in the evaluation process • Group interview, based on the Umalusi instrument for PDEs • Perusal of documentary evidence • Physical facilities inspected.
FET Colleges (College level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations by colleges on strategic vision, and overview of policies, procedures and planning relating to NCV • Umalusi presentation on its role in the evaluation process • Group interview, based on the Umalusi instrument for colleges (Head Office level) • Inspection of the premises • Perusal of documentary evidence.
FET Colleges (Campus level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured interviews with groups of lecturers on subject-specific issues, based on Umalusi instrument for colleges (campus level) • Inspection of facilities/ workshops/ resources used for the subject • Perusal of documentary evidence.

2.3 THE INSTRUMENTS

These included the moderation and monitoring instruments, and the in-depth interview schedules. The latter were designed as a tool for high-level evaluators to capture common responses, and to elicit detailed views and information in terms of various categories. Different instruments were developed for the different levels of the system. All instruments are available on request.

2.3.1 Umalusi QAA instruments

These refer to Umalusi's standard quality assurance instruments, adapted for the NCV, such as templates for moderation and monitoring.

2.3.2 DoE

The evaluation instrument for the site visit addressed the highest level of the assessment system from two perspectives:

- The strategic vision and plans for the implementation of the NCV
- The management of assessment at national level.

The instrument aimed at gaining an understanding of the NCV assessment system from two perspectives: a systemic view, in terms of planning, overall management and support for the various levels and roles in the implementation of different components of the system, and an operational view, in terms of various functions that need to be carried out for implementation.

These operational elements include:

- Appointment and training of examiners, markers and internal moderators
- The setting and internal moderation of examination papers
- Internal moderation of ICASS and ISAT
- Editing, distribution and tracking of examination papers
- Management of examination processes: registration of candidates and examination centres
- Monitoring the administration of the examinations
- The management of marking
- Resulting and certification processes.

In addition, the DoE evaluation included an interview schedule for examiners, markers, a DoE internal moderator for ISAT and a DoE internal moderator for ICASS¹.

2.3.3 PDEs

This evaluation instrument for the site visits aimed at getting insight into how provinces see their role in the implementation of the NCV, with attention to how the categories of questions impact on assessment issues. The interview schedule covered the following areas:

The strategic vision and plans for the implementation of the NCV and its assessment

- Resourcing (linked to the recapitalisation programme) with reference to provision for conducting assessment
- Teaching and learning resources, textbooks and learner support materials
- Staffing and skills development in assessment
- Conduct of the examination
- Assessment and moderation practices and systems.

2.3.4 FET colleges (Head Office level)

This evaluation instrument for the site visits was used for interviews with Senior Management and Management of the college. It aimed at gathering information on:

- Strategic vision and plans as they pertain to the FET college in respect of the NCV and its assessment
- Operational matters in the implementation of the NCV assessment both internal and external.

The question categories were as follows:

- Strategic issues
- Resourcing
- Curriculum
- Assessment (ICASS and ISAT)
- Moderation
- Examinations
- Marking
- General.

¹ In the event, only two internal moderators were available for interviewing, and these were not the individuals requested.

2.3.5 FET colleges (Campus level)

This evaluation instrument was used for interviews with campus managers and lecturers of the college. It addressed operational matters in the implementation of the NCV, with a specific focus on the implementation of internal assessment.

Questions were grouped as follows:

- In relation to learners:
 - Admission
 - Attendance
 - Learning
 - Support.

- In relation to lecturers:
 - Curriculum
 - Assessment
 - Teaching
 - Moderation.

2.3.6 Learner focus groups

These questions were aimed at getting a sample profile of learners at NCV 2, and getting their general views on their programmes. Learner experiences were looked at in relation to possible impacts on assessment.

Questions covered:

- Grade 9/last school year performance
- Reasons for enrolling for the NCV
- Placement test
- Positive/negative attitudes towards the programme
- Student support
- Attendance
- Teaching/lecturers
- Practicals.

2.4 REPORTING

This final detailed report is based on the specific reports generated by the evaluation project and site visit process, and on information and trends extracted from Umalusi's QAA Moderation and Monitoring reports on the NCV 2008. The site visits culminated in a debriefing and review session with all those involved.

Reports consulted for this final report are summarised in **Table 5**.

Table 5: List of reports informing Main Report

Nature of report	Number
Abbreviated report – 2006/2007 evaluation	1
DoE (site visit)	1
PDEs (site visits)	4
College Head Offices (site visits)	12
Campus (subject specific, 5 subjects, site visits)	29
Consolidated Subject reports for sampled subjects (synthesised from subject-specific interviews)	4 (Maths and Mathematical Literacy combined)
Campus (learner focus groups, site visits)	15

Nature of report	Number
Moderation reports (subject specific, Umalusi QAA moderation process)	51 (See 3.1 for detailed breakdown)
Monitoring reports on monitoring processes (Umalusi QAA moderation process)	4
2008 Report on the Quality Assurance of the Vocational Education and Training Assessment (Umalusi QAA)	1

Part 2:

The assessment system

Umalusi uses scrutiny of assessment systems and processes, and of the quality of learner achievement, to monitor the qualifications for which it is responsible. Wide-ranging questions on a number of different aspects of the implementation of the NCV were asked during the site visits, with the aim of supporting understanding of how different elements impact on the quality of assessment.

In this section the focus is on systemic and process aspects of the assessment system. (Part 3 deals with the issue of the standard of the assessments) It draws on the comprehensive interviews conducted, on observations made and documentary review undertaken at site visits, and includes cross references to other sources of information (e.g. Umalusi monitoring reports) where appropriate. National, provincial and college level findings are explored. Discussion ranges through communication issues, conceptual understandings, and operational issues in relation to ICASS, ISAT and examinations. A key aim is to point to areas in which there are conflicting understandings of roles and responsibilities; a second major purpose is to gather perspectives on which elements of the assessment system are working, and which may need review.

1 NATIONAL LEVEL

1.1 GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Two positive observations can be made on the Chief Directorate: National Examinations, Assessment and Measurement (CD:NEAM) at the outset of this section: first, that the staff complement overall has been dramatically increased since Umalusi's previous monitoring visit to this Directorate² to meet the needs of the NCV; and second, that detailed plans, procedures and regulations for the management of assessment in general have recently been finalised. In addition, there appears to be ongoing development of support documentation for these procedures and regulations.

While the planning has been comprehensively done, it appears that the timelines were very intense; it was not clear how well the achievement of the plans was monitored, and whether the targets were met. The estimation of time needed to develop such a multi-layered assessment system may have been too short. This is illustrated by issues such as the following: staff in colleges were only trained very briefly before the programmes were introduced; the NCV was not piloted but went full scale with immediate effect; and the appointment of additional staff in the FET section of CD:NEAM only very recently, when in fact their support was needed well before the end of 2008. (Umalusi visits to various colleges in 2007 back this up, in that some facilities and equipment were not ready for use in time for the ICASS and ISAT to have been implemented in a completely convincing and credible manner.) These issues are noted in the 2006 and 2007 reports described in Part 1, 1.2.

The work of developing the system has been intense and detailed. Monitoring and support for its ongoing and successful implementation is however vital, especially with the limited curriculum support officials available in the provinces. Currently there is only one official at national level allocated to each province. It is acknowledged by the Department itself that more attention needs to be paid at national level to systematised monitoring of implementation. A framework for monitoring is currently being developed by the DoE. This needs to happen so that planning can be done to address problem areas and improve implementation.

2 The first study on the evaluation of examination systems for public FET was undertaken in September 2004. The main finding was that there were inadequate staff numbers, especially in the unit that does translation and editing. The problems in this unit appear to persist.

1.2 COMMUNICATION WITH OTHER LEVELS

Coordination across provinces is done through the Heads of Education Departments Committee (HEDCOM), and a committee of HEDCOM for FET colleges has been proposed. (Its predecessor has come about as a result of the recapitalisation process and planning meeting held with PDEs, and with which they wish to continue.) This committee is, however, primarily a planning and administrative structure, and there is an identified assessment and curriculum gap (especially in relation to standardisation of ICASS) in respect of its functions, which means that its mandate may need to be extended. The sector lacks suitable coordinating structures that deal with curriculum and assessment issues at national level, that is, the equivalence of HEDCOM sub-committees such as CMC and IPEC. ADCOM is an existing body established to provide advice for FET assessment, and includes appointed members from provinces and from SACPO. It may be appropriate to build linkages between ADCOM and the new committee for the purposes of better communications. ADCOM has recently established four committees to address issues related to assessment, Information technology (IT), policy and administration.

Provincial departments and colleges are further communicated with through examination instructions. In addition, the DoE indicated that there is an annual legotla, a post-examination analysis session that serves to provide feedback and to inform intervention strategies. The DoE also has an 'adopt-a-province' programme that monitors progress on a personal level in order to intercept problems before they become serious issues. It was, however, acknowledged that this is sometimes not as effective as it could be owing to staff capacity and priorities at both national and provincial levels.

Historically, as an assessment body for national examinations, the DoE works directly with campuses, which function as registered examination centres. This means that province and college levels are sometimes bypassed, which has led to confused communications. The DoE appears to have a general intention for PDEs to build their capacity to oversee the administration of the examinations. In 2008, PDEs were specifically expected by the DoE to a) organise the marking process and appoint markers, and b) monitor the implementation of the NCV and ICASS moderation. Ultimately they will be asked to set certain papers. In the light of these kinds of developments, a more focused communication strategy may need to be developed. Currently there appear to be some disparities between how the scope of roles and responsibilities to be undertaken at different levels are viewed from national and provincial perspectives. These will be noted below when provincial responses are dealt with.

1.3 OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Overall, the technical management of the setting, administration and delivery of the national examinations is generally efficient, and well supported by the regulatory framework of policies, procedures and examination instructions. To track progress in this area, a comparison was made with the findings of the pre-evaluation³ in 2004 (see Figure 1). Some areas of weakness are noted in the detailed sections below. The main problems experienced were a result of the poor timing of activities, which had a knock-on effect on everything else, including the quality assurance activities undertaken by Umalusi.

The two other components of the assessment system, ISAT and ICASS, are still beset by various challenges, as discussed later in the report.

1.3.1 Appointment and training of examiners, markers and moderators

Examiners and moderators

It is borne in mind that the NCV is a new qualification, and that therefore a new cadre of examiners and moderators needs to be built up. The DoE has tried in these first rounds to use those who were

³ This evaluation was of the phasing-out Report 191. Nevertheless, the comparison takes note of possible ongoing examination system issues regardless of which qualification is offered.

involved in the development of the curriculum. However, difficulties in recruiting good examiners and moderators were acknowledged, owing to the following:

- Many of the NCV programmes are themselves in the areas of scarce skills, and expert practitioners may no longer be in the college sector. Colleges themselves noted that many of those who undertook NCV training have subsequently resigned.
- The review of conditions of employment because of college autonomy means that lecturers are reluctant to take on these functions, as they have to put in for leave.
- Colleges are still the gatekeepers of who is available, and often do not want to release personnel for examiner and moderator duties.

While the processes that are in place for identifying and appointing examiners and moderators are adequate, longer term and succession planning is obviously needed. This issue was raised in 2004 and also noted 'the difficulty of obtaining qualified examiners in certain subject areas' (p 6).

An issue identified is the management of the performance of examiners and moderators, as there is no clear policy for dealing with inadequate work. In addition, time pressures may mean that replacing an examiner or moderator is not an option.

Training for examiners and moderators has taken place (with positive comment from two DoE internal moderators), although training specifically focused on the setting of ISAT has been identified as a gap. There are guidelines on the setting and moderation of examination papers, although these could be more detailed on roles and responsibilities (e.g. the kind of guidance a moderator should give an examiner) throughout the whole process rather than focusing primarily on the papers. Nevertheless, compared to 2004 where the training was limited, this is a positive step forward albeit not fully effective.

Markers

The DoE appoints markers based on the recommendations of the college head. A panel of experts in the subject considers applications and makes recommendations to DoE. Markers are given contracts to sign. The DoE requires a clearance letter from the colleges before markers are allowed to mark.

The criteria for selection include currently lecturing at the level at which the marker will mark, and specified qualifications in the subject. However, the DoE finds that markers do not always have the right qualifications and experience. Similar issues to those noted by examiners in respect of employment by Council and not the Department have also resulted in non-availability of markers. Other factors identified are the low confidence that potential markers have in delivering the curriculum and the conditions of service (and pay) for markers. In addition, the planning was initiated at a late stage, which influenced the availability of markers.

The identification, appointment and training of markers are generally problematic: markers are not motivated, and often do not take their responsibilities seriously enough (e.g. DoE noted they do not come prepared for memorandum discussion sessions or, in some cases, do not attend; this is borne out by the 2008 Umalusi report). There is no progression model in place to incentivise markers to become examiners.

In sum, the following areas need to be addressed for markers, examiners and moderators:

- Giving more status to being an examiner or moderator
- Considering a new appointment model to make it easier for lecturers to take up appointments, and colleges to release them (e.g. a rotation model)
- Develop a progression model from being a marker, to senior marker, to an examiner or moderator (internal and external)
- Systematise marker development, training, and performance.

It seems that the problems that beset the DoE in 2004 in respect of examiners, moderators and markers are largely still problematic, e.g. in the 2004 report 'the concern is that the Department only has a reactive response to complaints about a particular examiner/moderator [and marker] and do (sic) not have systems of the human resources in place to monitor the quality and content of the examination [or the marking]' (p. 7).

Lack of experience and expertise in the sector is an issue that needs urgent attention, not only through participation in the examination paper setting process, but through formal academic programmes. While provinces and colleges link staff shortages to the FET Act and changed conditions of service, there has for a long time been an absence of meaningful pre-service training specifically for vocational educators. College lecturers have tended either to be either artisans who battle with pedagogical issues, or those who have come from the schooling or NATED sector without industry experience. The system requires institutionalised formal training as well as in-service programmes. In a report drawn up by the Further Education and Training Institute (FETI) of the University of the Western Cape, in partnership with the UK Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (Project EAP 75, 2008, p 7 and 8), it is noted that:

College lecturers in the old dispensation were not required to have specific teaching qualifications...where information on college lecturer training programmes at universities [in South Africa] could be obtained, it shows that these institutions have in the absence of national vocational teacher training programmes been offering adapted version of school-teacher preparation programmes based on Norms and Standards for Educators in schools (2000). Although the Department of Education (2004) has engaged in research on human resource needs in the FET college sector there has not really been a coherent strategy for addressing the development of college personnel...⁴

1.3.2 Editing, translation and tracking of papers

The unit has developed a style guide and various process guidelines in order to carry out the functions of editing language, format and technical aspects of the papers. Editing, typing and proofreading are carried out in a secure environment.

However, there is a capacity issue in the unit, which leads to pressure and to errors in the papers. Five editors edit 1 500 papers annually, including NCV, NATED and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET). Previously there were ten editors doing the same work, but five of these have gone to the schools unit. They periodically use the editors from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) as well (about 3 weeks per year). Under pressure, quality is compromised, for example, there were 32 errors in one paper in 2007.

Translation of all papers (mainly for Western Cape and Northern Cape) is undertaken by two editors/translators. There is an acknowledged scarcity of translation expertise and the DoE is looking into outsourcing this function. This problem was noted again in Umalusi's 2008 report in relation to translation into Afrikaans.

Areas for improvement are identified as follows:

- Feedback on the papers from colleges and provinces appears to be ad hoc; there is no formal process in place.
- The quality of the work needs to be improved, either through outsourcing or bringing in more staff to relieve pressure. This confirms the comments made in the 2004 report, i.e. 'there are human resource shortages in the language and editing field'.
- While resources such as dictionaries are kept in the offices, reference books or subject texts should be available for checking specific terminology.
- The manual tracking system needs to be replaced by an electronic system.

4 FETI, 2008. England-Africa Partnerships in Higher Education. Report on the training of FET college lecturers in South Africa, England and other international contexts.

In sum, these areas need to be addressed through a quality management plan for this unit.

1.3.3 Moderation issues

Moderation of the examination papers is undertaken according to detailed guidelines, and the Umalusi moderation instrument is used. While the processes seem to be in place, it was noted that there are sometimes communication problems between examiners and moderators, for example, moderators tend to 're-write' papers rather than guide examiners. The DoE also noted that in the setting of examination papers, one important layer in establishing the standard of assessment is missing: the DoE wants to introduce 'scrutineers', i.e. students who will sit for the papers to be used 18 months later, whose results will be scrutinised by university lecturers and teachers.

One of the most critical issues on the process of moderation for examination papers noted in the 2008 Umalusi report is that of time-frames, for example, late submission means there is insufficient time for detailed interrogation and suggestions, and rushed changes allow errors to creep in. This seems to have become a recurring problem. Also, the November 2007 and March 2008 supplementary question papers were not submitted for external moderation at the same time, so it was not possible to compare the standards.

ISATs are set nationally by examiners and then go through the same quality assurance process as for examination papers, namely internal moderation and external moderation by Umalusi. One problem identified is that the ISAT is received too late in the year to be able to inform the preparation of ICASS as a build-up to the ISAT. (Given that the concept of the ISAT is new, there are inevitably teething problems: issues around standards and implementation are discussed elsewhere.) However, it needs to be noticed that capacity in terms of resources for effective monitoring of both ISAT and ICASS may be lacking. The lack of capacity may also have led to recommendations by external moderators being ignored.

For both examinations and ISATs, internal moderators interviewed at the DoE raised questions as to whether a moderator can moderate across the whole programme consisting of different (related) subjects.

In relation to ICASS, the DoE appears to see its role as primarily concerned with setting out the ICASS requirements in relation to the Subject and Assessment Guidelines, and putting in place plans for the multi-layered moderation process (campus level, college level, provincial level, DoE level and Umalusi level). However, there are numerous challenges emerging around ICASS. While moderation is obviously taking place, it seems that both internal moderation and monitoring on the part of the DoE (not moderation) is primarily for compliance and does not necessarily deal with subject knowledge and depth of the assessments. The quality assurance, therefore, deals with format and administrative features of the tasks and PoEs, for example, number of tasks, templates for marks, and content requirements of portfolios. These comments were also noted in the 2004 report: "the focus of CD: NEAM is only on delivering a service of assessment but not on the quality of the assessment" (p. 22).

Key issues that came up at all levels include the following:

- Questions around the expertise of college lecturers to set and assess ICASS to appropriate standards
- Lack of comparability across campuses, colleges and provinces in terms of the standard (the efforts underway around Common Assessment Tasks will be discussed below)
- Lack of consistency and set criteria in terms of moderation processes at college and provincial level
- Confusion as to the role the scores submitted for ICASS play in a learner's final results
- From the Umalusi moderation process, lack of clarity on how ICASS marking is done to any common standard and the scoring and weighting associated tasks and sub-sets of tasks.

Given that ICASS scores are supposed to count for 50% in the vocational subjects in NCV

programmes, the role and standards of ICASS needs serious scrutiny.

Issues relating to standards of all the assessment forms involved in NCV are discussed in Part 3.

1.3.4 Management of marking

The marking process is of great concern. It seems that the DoE does not have sufficient funding to roll out marking as originally planned, particularly in NCV2. The policy requires that an exit level qualification is externally marked but this could not be implemented at NCV2 in 2008 as it has proven to be too expensive. The next best approach decided upon was that each college would be a marking centre for itself and its own campuses, with lecturers marking their own papers. While the DoE has put an elaborate monitoring and moderation plan in place, this decision means that external marking will no longer take place at NCV2 and NCV3, with the concomitant problems that may emerge. Nevertheless, the DoE intervention involved the following: moderation by senior lecturers, as well as deployment of the DoE panel of examiners and internal moderators; random selection of scripts to a venue where they were moderated by experts; and, finally, the conveyance of all scripts to a central DoE venue to be moderated, where the Umalusi moderator also joined the team.

However, the college reports on this evaluation have noted high levels of concern from senior management in terms of the reliability and quality of marking. These issues are worrying; at the site visit the DoE itself admitted that it is concerned about the under-preparedness of markers, markers who do not attend memorandum discussion sessions and the lack of communication between marking centres.

The 2008 Umalusi quality assurance report raised some serious issues about the marking. The moderation process showed that there were very uneven standards of quality and reliability in the marking. Moderators found instances of inconsistent and inaccurate marking, mistakes in addition and transfer of marks, and inconsistent application of formats. Differences of up to 30% in the marks allocated by the marker, internal moderator and external moderator were found.

If the PDEs are going to be tasked with marking as suggested by the DoE, planning and budgeting for this role needs to be addressed.

1.3.5 Registration of candidates and examination centres

In general, the administrative processes dealing with the registration of candidates and examination centres seem to be in place and functioning well.

The main area of concern is the fact that there is no communication between the DoE and Umalusi in respect of the accreditation status of private FET colleges when such a college is registered as an examination centre. There also does not seem to be communication between the DoE directorate responsible for examination and assessment and the DoE directorate responsible for the registration of private FET colleges. This means that a college may not be registered as an institution, but could very well be registered as an examination centre. In the 2004 report it is noted that there was no policy to ensure that examination centres continue to meet the criteria or for the revoking of examination centre status (p. 5). Likewise, in the 2007 sample it emerged in a visit to Pretoria Gardens Technical High School that "the school does not offer any NCV programmes but serves as an examination centre for certain private FET providers" (p. 12). Also, the lack of control over correctional services centres is worrying.

1.3.6 Resulting and certification

The Department has a comprehensive document detailing the processes for Resulting and Certification for FET Colleges (NCV programmes). The document provides a management plan as well as an outline of all of the steps from marking to the release of results.

One major weakness in the system is the IT system for resulting. The system is maintained by the State Information Technology Agency (SITA) and is supported by only one programmer, whereas

previously there were five. The system is old and any new developments are merely add-on programs that invariably effect undesired changes elsewhere in the system. The old system that was designed for the NATED programmes had to be tweaked to cater for the NCV. It was indicated that that has resulted in the ICASS marks for certain subjects not being statistically moderated and hence the accuracy of the resulting process has been compromised. This situation clearly needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency, and the DoE has appointed an IT expert to look into the NCV processes.

With respect to the resulting process, the following is in place:

- The Curriculum unit signs off on the subject structure and weighting parameters.
- Examination marks are captured using the double capture method.
- The ICASS and ISAT marks are received from the colleges as flat files – however there is no proper verification to check that the DoE has captured the correct ICASS and ISAT marks.
- After standardisation decisions have been effected, printouts for all subjects are generated and checked.

2 PROVINCIAL LEVEL

2.1 GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

According to the DoE, the roles of the PDEs include quality assurance of the internal assessment component of the NCV, curriculum support, and monitoring and support for the external examinations, including activities such as forwarding names of markers to DoE, appointing a Marking Centre manager, and undertaking logistical arrangements around examinations.

There is little consistency across the provinces in terms of capacity to undertake these different functions; in general, PDEs have human resource limitations, and in some cases FET colleges is just a small sub-directorate within schools, and there are currently no subject advisors for the FET curriculum. The case was strongly made by three provinces visited in September 2008 (the exception is Mpumalanga) that some of the support and monitoring functions around the NCV with which they are tasked are not in their planning or budgets, and are therefore seen as 'unfunded mandates'. While some provinces take up these challenges, others say that they simply do not have the human resources to undertake them. In addition, the point is made again that confusions arise between DoE directives which are sent directly to examination centres, and PDE roles around monitoring compliance of colleges.

General issues around assessment that emerged in the interviews are as follows:

- 'Quality Assurance' of internal assessment should reside in the College Councils. PDEs can undertake monitoring for compliance, e.g. facilitating the organisation of ICASS portfolios, but are not sure of their role in moderation per se (noted by all provinces except Mpumalanga). The Western Cape Education Department (WCED), for example, monitors the ICASS systems, but says it does not have the capacity to moderate the quality of the ICASS tasks. In 2007 it had appointed moderators from the college cadre; however, it became evident that the DoE and Umalusi used the same people to moderate, so it defeated the purpose of moderation. Also, the 2007 moderators had to be contracted by the WCED, but the budget did not make provision for this, so moderation was discontinued in 2008.
- There are inconsistencies in terms of the moderation of ISATs: WCED does not moderate the conduct of ISATs, while both GDE and Mpumalanga say they moderate at different levels of detail, and the Eastern Cape does not moderate the ISATs or ICASS.
- Two provinces (WCED and GDE) expressed the view that the current moderation approach is over-complex, and needs to be streamlined.
- Provincial officials (both within provinces and across provinces) themselves have different views on whether curriculum support for the NCV is their responsibility, and whether they have the resources to undertake this.

- There are variations in provincial structures that hamper a common approach by provinces. For example, the GDE currently has two separate directorates – Curriculum, and Institutional Development and Support. Although the GDE has an examinations directorate, this directorate is only responsible for schools examinations. The Curriculum Directorate currently oversees the NCV examinations. The GDE needs to address this separation urgently as it impacts negatively on the implementation of NCV assessment. A similar issue applies in training: GDE claims to have done some training, but training resides in a different directorate. GDE is the only province that claims to have had a role in training for the NCV.
- All PDEs take on a monitoring role around examinations, but there are some divergences around understandings of how markers and internal moderators are appointed. PDEs are reluctant to take on many of the examination-related activities, as they view these as the DoE's responsibility.
- There is no systematic approach to feedback on the examinations, either to the colleges or examination centres, or from the colleges to DoE. DoE views this as a provincial competence, but provinces and colleges complain that they do not get reports from the DoE. This matter has been unresolved since the 2004 evaluation. The 2004 report notes that "feedback to the colleges regarding the results to improve provisioning is not effective", (p. 21). At the time it was recommended that:

Alternative systems are developed and followed-up, firstly to ascertain whether the feedback of the examination results do have any impact on provisioning and secondly, to put systems in place that [will ensure] that the feedback may result in improved provisioning in the college sector.

In spite of these issues, two provinces have been quite active in providing support, especially in terms of facilitating the development of a Common Assessment Task in order to work towards standardisation of assessment. In the Western Cape, the colleges participate in Programme Focus Groups (FG), which form part of the structure of the College Curriculum Committee. These have developed Common Assessment Tasks that are currently being used. In addition, the WCED has developed an electronic tool for reporting on moderation and implemented the tool in 2008.

The WCED is of the opinion that too much moderation is taking place and that this leads to much duplication, but it has to comply with the DoE directives. However, the feeling is that it infringes on teaching and learning time. According to WCED, colleges are requesting that the Portfolio of Evidence as the primary assessment tool be reviewed.

The Gauteng and Mpumalanga departments of education coordinate the centralised moderation of ICASS. Colleges are required to submit samples of ICASS portfolios for moderation. The PDE appoints the internal moderators. A Common Assessment Task has been introduced (as one of the ICASS tasks) and these PDEs intend to use this as an internal benchmark for standardising their ICASS marks.

3 COLLEGE LEVEL

All colleges visited have assessment and moderation policies and plans in place, which were made available on the site visits. Most of the colleges had reviewed these policies within the last year in order to address the NCV.

Issues that came up around assessment processes at college level are summarised in the tables below, in terms of the categories ICASS, ISAT and external examinations.

3.1 ICASS

Table 6 represents the collated views of interviewees at the site visits of 2008, in response to a range of questions. While ICASS was a focus area in the 2007 evaluation, the 2008 reports were deliberately more detailed and therefore are used for an analysis of trends and issues. However, throughout this part of the report, the findings are verified against the earlier phases of the evaluation. In this part of the report, the focus is on processes rather than standards.

Table 6: 2008 interviewee views on ICASS

ICASS			
College	Common Assessment	Comments made on moderation processes	Concerns raised by college personnel
College of Cape Town (W Cape)	Yes. Campuses focus on different programmes and share with provincial Focus Groups.	Use the WCED moderation tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient assessment of practical skills • Workload associated with too many levels of moderation
Northlink (W Cape)	Yes, for Fundamentals. Some CA tasks are developed across colleges, facilitated by provincial Focus Groups.	Use the WCED moderation tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have received different versions of policy documents, and different instructions for ICASS requirements • Time constraints i.r.o ICASS • Confusion i.r.o how ICASS marks relate to final result
Lovedale (E Cape)	No	Processes for moderation of ICASS are not clear to lecturers, but they are trying to establish a cluster moderation model.	
P E College (E Cape)	No	Academic heads conduct moderation of the product, but not of the process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The assessment of practical skills is time consuming and complex, and needs the enabling conditions of sufficient resources and equipment, and manageable learner numbers
Buffalo City (E Cape)	Yes, in the Fundamental subjects.	Difficulties of moderating where there are no CA tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerned about Human Resources (skills drain and vacancies) i.r.o. of expertise to teach and manage ICASS
Central Jhb College (Gauteng)	Yes, for Maths Literacy across campuses.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time constraints for ICASS, especially for practical tasks • Confusion around interpretation of ICASS guidelines
Sedibeng	Yes, One task developed by subject committee.		
South West Gauteng (Gauteng)	Yes, across campuses, set by individual lecturers.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time constraints • Expertise of staff
Tshwane North (Gauteng)	One common test, but the problem is that different campuses are at different points in the curriculum.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not have a common policy for the administration of ICASS for different subject; finds this difficult because the subjects are so different
Leeuwkop (Gauteng)	No	No moderation by PDE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not part of recap process • Limited resources • Untrained educators • Time issues with prisoner availability
Gert Sibande (Mpumalanga)	Yes, across campuses developed by subject committees.	Have confidence in their own internal moderation processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time constraints • Learners at different levels

It is clear that there is some activity towards the use of Common Assessment Tasks, but the next steps would be to evaluate these and to plan towards the development of truly common benchmark assessments nationwide. Senior management and lecturers themselves are not always confident about the quality of the tasks developed. Certainly, the moderation reports reviewed suggest that many ICASS tasks are limited or problematic. The issue of standards is explored in more detail in Part 3 of this report, through the moderation reports. Most lecturers in the subject interviews raised problems relating to practical assessments in terms of learner numbers and resources, and, in particular, in relation to insufficient time to carry out practical assessment tasks properly.

A concern that came up frequently was the issue of reassessment. Reassessment as a policy causes a number of problems. These include inefficient use of teaching time, questions around fairness for those who are not reassessed, what instruments to use for reassessments, and the impact on learner attitudes to assessment. Colleges noted that they need clearer guidelines on how to deal with reassessment. In addition, while the national policy caters for irregularities in ICASS, most colleges noted that they do not have an Irregularities Policy in place. It is not clear, therefore, how instances of cheating or fraud are addressed and reported on in colleges, or how this impacts on moderation decisions. This matter featured in the 2007 evaluation as well: while most colleges had assessment and moderation policies in place, issues such as late or non-submission of tasks, authentication of learners' work, absenteeism and multiple assessment opportunities, were notably absent (p. 16).

3.2 ISAT

Table 7 represents the collated views of interviewees at the 2008 site visits, in response to a range of questions. As above, the trends and issues are verified against the 2007 evaluation. Likewise, as for ICASS (**Table 6**), the focus is on processes rather than standards.

Table 7: 2008 interviewee views on ISATs

ISAT		
College	Processes	Concerns raised by college personnel
College of Cape Town (W Cape)	ISAT received on time but would like to get it the year before, to incorporate into planning. This is vital if ICASS is to be used as a building block towards ISAT.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs and resources, e.g. the college has estimated that ISAT for ICT will cost R5 600 per learner. The costing for the NCV was incorrect and lacked research into what the requirements of the curriculum and practicals would be, making the ISATs unimplementable. Student fees were raised by 10% this year, but this is not enough, because the steel price has gone up by 65%, and the cost of wood has gone up by 55%. The college cannot afford these consumables.
Northlink (W Cape)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs and resources, e.g. in Hospitality the students are required to wear a uniform, but there is no funding provision for this. Also, the practical fees are not included in the funding formula for the NCV and the college must bear the cost. The funds for the NCV are 90% student fees. The colleges are running at a loss for the NCV.
Lovedale (E Cape)	Received in April.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops are too small to accommodate all the learners.
P E College (E Cape)	Received in April/May.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumables are too expensive. Even private funding could not absorb the cost.
Buffalo City (E Cape)	Received late, this affects the ordering of consumables.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs and resources: sometimes consumables specified are not easily available.
Central Jhb College (Gauteng)	External moderation appears to be for compliance only, not evaluative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR capacity to implement both ISAT and ICASS seen as limited.

ISAT		
College	Processes	Concerns raised by college personnel
Sedibeng	Received on time, but problem with getting consumables.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR capacity to implement both ISAT and ICASS seen as limited. • HR capacity issues noted. • Don't understand the relationship between marks for ICASS, ISAT and examinations.
South West Gauteng		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time constraints • Expertise of staff.
Tshwane North (Gauteng)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time constraints • Costs of implementation
Leeuwkop (Gauteng)	No moderation by PDE.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not part of recapitalisation process • Limited resources • Untrained educators • Time issues with prisoner availability
Gert Sibande (Mpumalanga)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many learners for too little equipment

The key concern around ISATs is their costs in terms of consumables, and the fact that realistic funding provision has not been made. Senior management, in particular, expressed concerns around the financial viability of the NCV. Any variations in the nature and range of consumables supplied to learners will impact on the credibility of the overall national results. The site visits yielded generally negative comments on the standard of the ISATs. These will be discussed in Part 3.

3.3 EXAMINATIONS

Colleges in general have very little control or opportunities for input in respect of the marking process, the appointment of markers and the training of markers. This also applies to their role in the approval of examination centres, training of invigilators, distribution of papers and administration of examinations. This is due to the structural relations between DoE as an assessment body and campuses as examination centres as already noted.

Part 3:

Assessment standards

Umalusi's key mechanism for quality assurance of the assessment system as a whole is its focus on the **standard** of the assessment for qualifications for which it is responsible. The monitoring and evaluation of the systemic and process aspects of assessment have been dealt with in Part 2 of this report. In this section we report on the quality and standard of the assessment elements (that is, the national examinations, the ISATs, and ICASS) in the context of this evaluation.

The purpose of this section is to report on how the findings from Umalusi's established quality assurance procedures, as well as earlier phases of the evaluation, resonate with the trends identified through the evaluation process based on the 2008 site visits and interviews.

1 SOURCES FOR THIS SECTION

Umalusi has produced its annual report for 2008, Report on the Quality Assurance of the Vocational Education and Training Assessment, which covers all the NCV programmes. While this section of the report draws on the 2008 report, its primary sources are the following:

- Umalusi's QAA moderation reports on ICASS (2008) for the sample subjects in the evaluation
- The analysis of the subject responses in the context of the Umalusi evaluation, based on Consolidated Subject Reports from interviews with lecturers during the 2008 site visits
- Umalusi's QAA examination moderation and monitoring reports (2008) for the sample subjects in the evaluation.

The sample was made up of the following subjects:

- Mathematics
- Mathematical Literacy
- Engineering Systems
- Electrical Systems and Construction
- Applied Accounting.

These subjects were chosen as representing sufficient enrolment numbers so as to be representative of the system, and in terms of three of them having a clear practical component. While it is borne in mind that they are examples of how the NCV system is unfolding, they are also illustrative of the general issues facing the NCV as reported on in other sections of this report.

The aim of this section is not to give detailed feedback on these subjects, but to extract trends in relation to the general issues and concerns around assessment that have been raised in other parts of this evaluation report.

2 METHODOLOGY⁵

2.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ICASS

ICASS tasks are set by lecturers at college and campus level. Umalusi currently moderates ICASS through on-site monitoring at selected sites, and central moderation of Educator and Learner PoEs at provincial level.

5 More detail on these processes can be found in Umalusi (2008) Report on the Quality Assurance of the Vocational Education and Training Assessment.

The site visits gathered information on the following in relation to the state of internal assessment:

- Resources: physical, human and learning and training materials, assessment resources.
- Assessment: policies and procedures for internal assessment and moderation, tasks and portfolios.

The moderation of a sample of portfolios is done against the following criteria:

- Educator portfolios: content, assessment tasks, evidence of internal moderation of tasks, recording and reporting.
- Learner portfolios: structure and organisation, assessment tasks, evidence of internal moderation of assessment products.

2.2 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ISATs

The ISAT tasks are set by the Department of Education. External moderators are appointed by Umalusi to:

- evaluate selected ISAT tasks and report on these to Umalusi and the DoE;
- conduct on-site moderation of the process and products of ISAT; and
- evaluate the overall conduct of ISATs against the following criteria:
 - Planning
 - Implementing
 - Internal moderation.

In this report, comments on ISATs are drawn primarily from the Consolidated Subject Reports from the 2008 site visit interviews.

2.3 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE EXAMINATIONS

2.3.1 Moderation of question papers

DoE-appointed examiners and moderators set the examination papers. Umalusi appoints subject matter experts as external moderators to moderate the question papers, according to a moderation template. The criteria cover the following:

- Content coverage
- Cognitive demand of the questions
- Internal moderation processes
- Language and bias
- Predictability of the questions
- Adherence to policy and guidelines documents
- Relevance and correctness of the marking memorandum
- Technical criteria relating to the presentation of the question papers
- Judgement on overall impression and standard of the papers.

2.3.2 Monitoring of the administration and conduct of the examinations

Umalusi monitoring covers the following three phases of the examination, viz. the state of readiness to administer the examinations, the writing of the examinations and the marking of the scripts. To this end Umalusi monitors and reports on the following:

- State of readiness of the PDEs for the monitoring of the examinations in the nine provinces
- State of readiness of the examination centres to conduct examinations
- Effectiveness of the systems in place for the appointment of invigilators, chief invigilators, markers, chief markers and marking moderators
- Processes related to the administration and conduct of the examinations.

2.3.3 Moderation of marking of the examinations

In general Umalusi's approach is to deploy moderators to undertake the following:

- Memoranda discussions
- Post-marking moderation of a sample of scripts.

Umalusi monitors are deployed to observe and report on systems, processes and practices at the marking venues.

3 FINDINGS

3.1 ICASS: MODERATION REPORTS

The moderators' reports for 2008 across the five subjects had many points in common. The most frequent observations are therefore noted below, illustrated in the context of a subject where appropriate.

In general, Western Cape and Mpumalanga reflected a greater number of positive moderation reports across all four subjects. This is in terms of both organisation of portfolios and quality of ICASS tasks. This bears out the evaluation findings, in that where there is supported and facilitated sharing of expertise (whether across campuses or colleges, or through provincial intervention such as Focus Groups or subject committees), tasks are of a higher standard, lecturer confidence and competence is enhanced, and there is a greater understanding of both the function of portfolios and a desired common standard.

Problems identified through the moderation process are summed up as follows.

Lack of organisation of educator and learners portfolios

The most common complaint is of incomplete documentation, with the following most frequently omitted:

- Completed mark sheets/ accurate scoring, reporting and recording
- Registers for assessment tasks
- Assessment plans and schedules
- Feedback loop
- Clarity on timing and scope on moderation processes.

Overall organisation of the whole PoE and external moderation process could be improved. This possibly reflects the general confusion around ICASS, and complaints around the administrative burden of ICASS, that emerged during the site visits.

Quality of ICASS tasks

Although there were a number of exceptions where tasks and portfolios were identified as being of sufficiently high quality to serve as exemplars, the following observations were frequently made:

- In some instances the standard of the tasks was difficult to determine as so few tasks were included.
- Tasks are elementary and repetitive and do not address the range of cognitive levels.
- Many of the tasks are simply knowledge tests, or are copied directly from textbooks with model answers presented as the memoranda; practical assessments are not well designed and it is difficult to tell which tasks are intended as practical or application tasks.

Applied Accounting reports noted that "practicals are a challenge as the tasks sometimes look like test or textbook exercises". In Mathematics (with the exception of a few sites in the Western Cape) many of the tasks were seen as below standard, with the frequent observation that progression (and feedback on individual progress) was not addressed, and possibly not well understood.

Engineering and Electrical moderators frequently made the point that the ICASS tasks do not build up to ISAT or are not related to it. In these two programmes in particular, moderators appear frustrated in not being able to ascertain the nature and scope of the practicals; an indication of what practical tasks were done is either not included in the portfolios, or practicals appear under the guise of knowledge tests. This links to comments made during the evaluation process by colleges themselves, in relation to difficulties in administering practicals in terms of the time, and delays in receiving ISATS or being able to access resources and consumables (see Part 2).

Lack of clarity on the assessment process in order to determine student performance

Moderators found it difficult to ascertain how lecturers reached the marks given to learners, owing to the following:

- Incomplete (no mark allocation) or rigid mark memorandums or assessment checklists
- No indication of how a learner is awarded marks
- Lack of differentiation between tests, assignments and practicals.

One Applied Accounting report noted, for example, that "... a lot of challenges can be identified around marking, calculations, and ways of determining progress". While many of the moderator reports in all four subjects noted that "student performance was in general very poor", moderators also said it was often difficult to "separate out" whether this impression was because of poor tasks, bad marking, or confused portfolios – or, indeed, in some instances they felt they could not comment at all on learner performance. Given that ICASS represents 50% of a learner's performance, this is of great concern. The fact that lecturers (on the whole) seem unable to make sure that students present work that is of a clear and acceptable standard endorses the concerns raised around assessment skills and competence in the FET sector.

It is presumably for these reasons that none of the moderator reports recommended mark adjustments to the student portfolios. All reports for Maths, Maths Literacy and Engineering ticked "no adjustment". Electrical reports on 13 sites left this section blank (commenting "there is no order to draw a conclusion" for seven sites, and "the marks do not tally with the records" for six sites). The Applied Accounting reports did not complete this section, based on the fact that no marks were given by internal moderators. It must, however, be noted that ICASS marks are statistically moderated, based on the adjusted examination mark.

Internal moderation

This is often described as a checklist exercise that does not address quality, a comment made frequently during the 2008 site visits for the evaluation process. In other words, it is not helpful. There seems to be general confusion around when and how moderation takes place (e.g. the difference between pre-assessment and post-assessment moderation), and how to allow for revision of tools or adjustment of marks post-moderation. Accommodation for any consequences of internal moderation is absent in the current process. Feedback to learners either as a result of assessment or of moderation does not seem to take place (with some exceptions), and moderation often does not happen either in time, or in ways that have any impact on teaching, learning and assessment. Once again, this confirms findings from the 2007 evaluation: "most of the moderation was done only once...and thus too late to enhance the development of the learners" (p. 18).

A comment from the Consolidated Report on Applied Accounting illustrates a fairly typical view. "There is overkill with regards to moderation, with duplication of administrative reports and moderated report sheets, too many mark sheets, and too many different templates and requirements to meet." There is a need to streamline the process and it has been suggested that college could appoint administration assistants to complete mark sheets so that lecturers can spend time teaching. It must also be noted that the portfolio moderation templates used by the Umalusi moderators are somewhat over-elaborate; compliance should clearly focus on a few key areas for a specific purpose, rather than a host of detail which is difficult to collate into an overall judgement.

Essentially the point and purpose of moderation at different levels, by different agents and at different times is not well understood; the model is itself over-complex and resource intensive. This point was made in the Umalusi 2008 report, and by respondents in the evaluation process at both provincial and college level. Both the purpose/s and focus area/s of moderation need to be reviewed in the context of a more streamlined model.

These findings confirm the 2007 evaluation: "From the interviews conducted and the moderation of portfolios it is evident that the standard of internal assessment and moderation differ from province to province, college to college and even campus to campus of the same college" (p. 16). Also, "the cognitive demand of portfolios is of concern. Most sites...put too much emphasis on knowledge and too little attention was given to the practical component" (p. 17)

3.2 ISATs: CONSOLIDATED SUBJECT REPORTS

The two Fundamental subjects of Mathematics and Mathematical Literacy do not include ISATs. The ISAT tasks for the three relevant subjects in this evaluation (Applied Accounting, Engineering Systems and Electrical Systems and Construction at NCV Level 2) were not included in the 2008 ISAT moderation process. This section therefore draws on the consolidated subject reports from the evaluation process interviews, in relation to the findings of the evaluation and general observations from the 2008 QA report.

The 2008 Umalusi Quality Assurance report notes the following areas of challenge for ISATs in general:

- The quality of ISATs (standard, sequencing, guidelines, assessment criteria, and instances of errors) is very different across subjects, ranging from high to low.
- Time-frames for implementation varied between provinces and colleges, with late receipt of ISAT tasks leading to problems with procurement of consumables for completion of tasks.
- Scheduling and implementation of ISATs was also affected by learner absenteeism, staff turnover, and confusion at some sites as to the nature and purpose of ISAT in relation to ICASS.
- While some colleges were very well equipped, others had shortages of resources (because of large enrolments) such as workspace, tools, equipment and consumables for practical work. This impacts on overall fairness and comparability of results.
- Tasks could be interpreted, amended and scored differently, compromising the overall comparability of results.
- Moderation of implementation and scoring appeared to be lacking.

As before, these comments confirm the findings in earlier phases of the evaluation. Of great concern is the fact that there was "no evidence of constructive feedback to either educators or students" as a result of internal moderation (p. 20), so the question to be asked is 'to what extent did internal moderation take place?'

Comments from colleges in Part 2, (3.2) echo concerns around consumables and scheduling, and stressed the cost issue. The general lack of clarity and divergent views on the part of the provinces on the moderation and monitoring of ISATs is outlined in Part 2, 2.

The **Engineering Systems** interviews captured various concerns that impact on assessment in general, including ISAT. Poor attendance and a high rate of absenteeism affect the process of continuous assessment, and the continuity that is supposed to happen between ICASS and the ISAT. Lecturers at different colleges had different understandings about regulations concerning the completion of ICASS as a prerequisite for undertaking ISAT. Some colleges claimed they had received formal instructions that all learners are entitled to sit for ISAT and the examination, regardless of their attendance record and completion of ICASS, while others were not aware of this regulation. The point here is twofold: first, the performance of those who have not completed the ICASS tasks is likely to be poor, as the ICASS is meant to be a preparation for ISAT; and second, there is some policy confusion on the enforcement of attendance rules.

ISATs in this subject area were received by different colleges at different times, ranging from April to August.

There are concerns about the availability of skilled lecturers in the subject. Gauteng, in particular, has had a high resignation rate with lecturers not being replaced, and Western Cape noted that many of the lecturers in engineering fields are approaching retirement.

While the recapitalisation process has meant that there are well equipped training facilities available, many lecturers expressed concern about the planning in relation to numbers. They said that already workshops are too small to accommodate the numbers of learners enrolled. This affects the effective and safe carrying out of practical activities and assessments, as well as the ISATs.

Finally, lecturers are concerned about the credibility of Grade 9 reports, noting that learners who enter NCV 2 with Grade 9 battle with the quantity and nature of the learning they are expected to do. Lecturers find it difficult to design ICASS to accommodate different levels of ability, and at the same time prepare learners for the ISAT.

The **Electrical System and Construction** interviewees were positive about the ISAT, generally agreeing that the activities to be performed are well designed. The ISAT was received timeously on the whole, ranging from February to April at different colleges.

The main issues raised were to do with costs. The materials required for both ICASS and ISAT are expensive (for example, cables and jointing kits can be used only once), with the result that the opportunities to involve all learners are limited. Not everyone gets a chance to practise and to be assessed, and the activities have to be done through group work. Obviously this has an impact on the scoring for ICASS, and the practice needed to prepare for ISATs. There are indications that in some instances learners were drilled on the ISAT task only, as this would save the available material. In other instances the late arrival of consumables means that continuous assessment did not take place at all, but this appears to be owing to procurement policies, a situation that colleges themselves should address. Finally, it was noted that some of the consumables required by the ISAT task are not available in the country, and that allocated funds are insufficient for ordering it from the USA.

While workshop structures and equipment generally meet the requirements for ISAT, these lecturers also raised the issue of numbers of learners. It was commented that "the numbers expected in the workshop make it impossible for learners to work in a real workplace situation and thus a number of safety activities which need to be observed by learners are compromised".

The issue of learners being at different levels in the same classes and workshops also came through in these interviews, from the point of view that this eats into efficient learning time. There is not enough time to assess insight, application and analytical ability of all learners in an integrated manner. Timetabling that doesn't accommodate practical work may also mean that the lecturer cannot assess all learners within the available period as they have to leave the workshop for the next group to come. It is not clear why individual colleges cannot design their timetables to take this into account, but this issue was raised in general discussions during the site visits as well.

Issues relating to costs and logistics for practical components of the NCV were a key concern raised throughout the evaluation, in particular by senior managers at site visits concerned about future financial implications.

The consolidated report on **Applied Accounting** opened with the following statement:

The experience at each of these (5) campuses was so different with regards to implementation of this programme that it was difficult to believe that this is a National Qualification. The differences ranged from interpretations of the guidelines, the level of teaching, the assessment and the management of the programme.

Details of the report suggest that these differences are primarily related to whether or not there is provincial support in the form of Focus Groups or subject committees, to assist with assessment planning in particular.

At the time of site visits in September 2008, some colleges had not yet received the ISATs, which mean that ICASS had not been designed in relation to the ISAT. While in some subject areas lecturers develop ICASS tasks to build up toward the ISAT, this is not necessarily stated as a requirement in the policy. It may only be simply be a question of poor policy interpretation, but it does seem to reduce the meaningfulness of ICASS tasks if they are not linked with ISATs.

There were, however, a number of general comments made at all colleges. Concerns about the level of the learners were voiced, in that the Grade 9 learners are seen as unprepared for the workload, and often too immature to deal with college life. Once again the difficulty of teaching mixed classes was strongly noted (there are examples of classes where some learners are only 15 while others are in their twenties), with the consequences on the design and implementation of the assessments. This difficulty is compounded when learners who did not pass level 2 have proceeded to level 3.

The issue of absenteeism noted in the other learning areas also came up, as did confusion around regulation of this. One college with an 80% attendance policy claims it received a directive from the PDE stating that it could not disallow students from doing the ISAT or writing the examination even if they had not met attendance requirements. This undermined the discipline around absenteeism, as learners soon get to know that the policy is not implementable. Bursary criteria do not address absenteeism and, indeed, the lateness of bursary payments sometimes contributes to absenteeism as learners do not have money for transport. Absenteeism has various impacts on assessment, but it was particularly noted that many assessments had to be repeated to accommodate absent learners so that lecturers can complete their mark sheets. This eats into teaching time, and disadvantages those who have not been absent.

The point made in the ICASS moderation reports was endorsed here, namely that lecturers do not know how to design practical assessments for this subject and ICASS simply takes the form of tests or exercises. Additionally, the Consolidated Subject Reports raised two points on the timing of the ISAT. The third term is extremely assessment-heavy, in that there are practicals, tests, ISATs and trial examinations taking place. All the campuses indicated that there is not enough time to complete the curriculum, work has to be rushed to the detriment of slow learners, and the result is that the ISAT could be testing work that has not yet been done. It was suggested that ISAT be moved to the last term.

In general, observations emerging from Consolidated Subject Reports resonate with general comments made during the site visits, in relation to the sense that the NCV curriculum and its assessment requirements as a whole have not taken into account various realities around timetabling, enrolment numbers, the nature of practical training and assessments, and the FET college sector in general.

3.3 THE STANDARD OF THE EXAMINATIONS

3.3.1 External moderators' examination reports

The 2008 report notes an overall improvement in the quality of the examination papers from 2007, and commends in particular the inclusion of relevant case studies and technological developments in questions. As areas for improvement it notes the following:

- Too great an incidence of language and typing errors in papers, an issue highlighted in Part 2 of this report
- Errors in some memoranda that were not picked up in the internal moderation process
- Some instances of papers where critical thinking is not sufficiently addressed
- Further development of the quality of internal moderation.

- Most critically, the time-frames for the entire process of setting and moderation are not always adhered to. This undermines the rigour of the examination paper-setting process, and sometimes means that changes are not properly implemented.

The five learning areas in the 2008 evaluation illustrated these trends as follows:

- **Engineering Systems:** The external moderator's report noted that "this paper shows a remarkable improvement from last year's paper." The cognitive and content coverage was good, and the paper was generally compliant with the criteria.
- **Electrical Systems and Construction:** Umalusi was unable to appoint an external moderator for this subject, in itself a comment on the scarce skills in this subject area.
- **Applied Accounting:** The internal moderator's report was missing and has been requested. The paper was however passed, as it was compliant in most respects, although the 40-40-20 policy was not strictly adhered to. One error in the memo was noted.
- **Mathematical Literacy:** Some technical and layout issues were noted. One question was deemed ambiguous, and the comment was made that the mark memorandum could be more flexible in allowing for alternative interpretations. The paper complied with content and cognitive coverage.
- **Mathematics:** The examination met the criteria in all respects, and was seen as well-balanced and fair. One question was identified as too long.

3.3.2 Monitoring of the administration and conduct of examinations

A major concern is with the model adopted by the DoE for the marking of NCV2, in particular. This, together with the late dissemination of the marking plan compromised the marking process. The NCV2 was internally marked and moderated at college level. A sample of scripts was then subjected to external moderation. This model conflicts with the Umalusi requirement that external assessments be externally marked for all exit level qualifications.

4 ASSESSMENT STANDARDS AND THE CURRICULUM

This section has so far reported on the standard of the assessments. What must be borne in mind, however, is the interplay between curriculum and assessment: if lecturers are unsure about what it is they should be teaching, they will not be able to assess effectively, or be clear about how to prepare learners for the final national assessment.

To this end some of the challenges identified in relation to the curriculum are noted below. These comments are distilled from both the 2008 college interviews and the four Consolidated Subject Reports.

4.1 CURRICULUM SUPPORT

Lecturers do not know where to turn to for advice about the curriculum, as there are no subject advisors for the FET college sector. The clustering of subjects may mean that their HoDs cannot help. While some provinces have set up College Curriculum Committees, Focus Groups or similar structures, many provinces do not have the capacity to do this. However, where there was a shared process for interrogating the curriculum at either college or provincial level, lecturers felt more confident. It was also commonly noted that the NCV curriculum may demand a methodology which some lecturers are not familiar with. The DoE training provided on the NCV has been seen as insufficient, in terms of both initial training and follow-up training. Lack of curriculum support undermines lecturers' ability to deal effectively with ICASS.

4.2 LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

At college level it was commented that the curriculum is viewed as being pitched at too high a level, with the theoretical component being too difficult. However, there were divergent views

on this in relation to lecturers' views on different subjects as outlined in the subject reports. We must also ask whether it is perceived as 'too high' in terms of equivalence to NQF levels, or too high for the type of learners who have enrolled, or too high for the current cohort of lecturers. In whatever way these questions are answered, the implications for qualification design in relation to the purpose of the qualification, and in relation to its target audience, need to be unpacked. At the same time as being perceived as being too high, however, there is also a perception amongst learners and parents that the NCV 'goes back' to Grade 10. The comment that learners with Grade 9 are not prepared for entry into NCV 2 was made in all subject areas.

The Internal Moderator for Mathematics at the DoE expressed a number of concerns about the Maths curriculum, noting that there are serious progression and gap issues, which increase the perceived difficulty of the curriculum. The Consolidated Report for Mathematics and Maths Literacy reflects a similar concern, in that there is a huge gap between what the Grade 9 learners know and the starting point of the NCV level 2 Maths curriculum.

4.3 TIME ALLOCATION

Lack of time is seen as having a huge impact on effective delivery. The time-frames given in the qualification design are seen as unrealistic, as teaching time is seriously eroded when the following issues are factored in:

- Time taken up by practical work and practical assessments
- Ineffective timetabling, for example, timetables being drawn up for specific periods for subjects, which don't take into account setting up a workshop for a practical activity, or clearing up afterwards. Some views were expressed that block release is a much more effective way of handling practical work.
- Time taken up by carry-overs from previous years.
- Time taken up by assessment and PoE requirements.
- The overload of seven subjects, many of which are time intensive because of the practical components.

In short, there is a view that the qualification has been modelled on a school curriculum approach, without making provision for the special characteristics of vocational training.

Part 4:

The context for assessment

The instruments were designed to elicit a rich and detailed picture of the implementation of the NCV. Ultimately the quality of the assessment system and its results is dependent on a host of contextual and delivery factors. This section of the report, therefore, identifies recurring themes that have a significant impact on assessment. It is particularly in the context for assessment that trends from the earlier phases of the evaluation are confirmed.

These themes have been summarised into four broad areas as follows:

- Strategic issues, including autonomy, recapitalisation and planning
- Curriculum and qualifications design
- Human resources
- Contextual factors

Points made in the four areas are summarised below, and their impact on assessment noted. There is no doubt that many of the observations made frequently during the 2007 and 2008 site visits illustrate realities that have an impact on the success rates of learners as reflected in the poor pass rates in 2007 and 2008. The evaluation of the NCV focused on assessment as the ultimate result of teaching and learning and, therefore, where poor performance is the order of the day, it is incumbent on implementers to investigate the reasons for poor performance.

Some of these realities are illustrated by response to the question, 'What are the main causes for the poor performance in the NCV in 2007?' which was posed during the site visits. Responses are summarised in **Table 8**. Interestingly, there are close synergies between these common responses and the four areas noted above.

Table 8: Views on poor results⁶

Factor	DoE	Province	College	Campus level
Premature implementation		3	5	
Lack of expertise/ support to interpret curriculum		3	8	3 subject reports
Curriculum training inadequate	1	2	3	
Curriculum is too difficult			3	Lack of consistency in views, although problems with Maths and Engineering levels identified by a number of lecturers
Lack of selection criteria/ admission requirements too low			4	
Learner profile: weakest school learners expected to cope with difficult curriculum			7	All 4 subject reports
Student absenteeism/ poor attendance			4	All 4 subject reports
Student attitude and motivation			7	All 4 subject reports

⁶ This table summarises the views expressed by participants in 2008 site visit discussions on the reasons for poor results in 2007.

Factor	DoE	Province	College	Campus level
Mixed ability classes			3	All 4 subject reports
Human resource issues: skills drain, loss of staff and vacancies		4	4	All 4 subject reports
IT Systems caused problems with resulting	1			
Variable or lack of PDE capacity	1			

1 STRATEGIC ISSUES

1.1 AUTONOMY, RECAPITALISATION AND PLANNING

There seem to be varying interpretations on what **autonomy** for the colleges actually means, both now and in the long term. The question was raised by one province as to whether public institutions funded by the state to whatever degree can in fact be called autonomous, as they must be accountable to the state and adhere to national policies and identified priorities.

The feature of autonomy most commonly agreed to was the provision in the FET Act for colleges to handle their own staff appointments, conditions of service and salary structures. So far this is viewed as having had a negative effect on human resources in the college sector: college personnel have been very unsettled by the notion of being employed directly by Council, and by being excluded from OSD agreements, and this has led to the exit of many qualified staff (either to remain on the provincial payroll in a different context, or to go to private providers or to industry). At the same time colleges seem to be experiencing difficulties in attracting qualified and quality staff to fill these vacancies.

Staffing shortages and skills gaps will obviously result in poor quality assessment practices in the internal assessment component, and inadequate preparation of learners for external assessment.

Two other important points were made by both provinces and some colleges on the issue of autonomy. Autonomy should imply financial self sufficiency, and, linked to this, the freedom to take one's own decisions. Neither of these conditions seems to be in place in the college sector. This is illustrated by two other areas of discussion, namely the recapitalisation process, and enrolment targets.

Recapitalisation is a once-off intervention. The funding has certainly been used (effectively on the whole) to provide the workshops, equipment and resources needed to implement the NCV in the short term, and to carry out the practical assessments required. Many colleges, however, raised concerns about longer term planning, ongoing maintenance of workshops and equipment (note that as a learning environment rather than a genuine workplace, there is more wear and tear on equipment), consumables and escalating costs. Examples of the costs of consumables, and views that these have not been factored in to overall NCV planning and funding, have been given in Part 2 of this report.

Linked to this are the DoE's target and enrolment goals for colleges. The National Plan for FET colleges says that 80% of the offerings of FET colleges should comprise the NCV by 2012. However, colleges raised the following issues:

- In some current scenarios where 20% of provision is NCV and the rest is NATED and occupational (unit standard-based) programmes, there is already a drain on resources as other programmes are subsidising the NCV. Student fees for NCV are capped at R2 000, but some colleges estimate that in reality it costs R13 000 per student.
- The target planning does not take into account who the potential clientele of a FET college might be, considering distinctions between urban or rural learners, and their needs and wants, particularly in relation to employment opportunities.

- The target planning also does not take into account the impact of student numbers on the following: (i) teacher/ learner ratio; and (ii) the inadvisability of large classes in a workshop owing to health and safety requirements. Some colleges claim that the numbers in classes are already untenable, and that the solution is not simply 'more workshops'. Targets and enrolments set by the DoE are seen as unrealistic.

These interlinked points have consequences for the quality of assessment. Recapitalisation was in essence a strategy for resourcing the assessment system. If long-term planning and budgeting for maintenance of these resources and the use of consumables for practicals has been inadequate, or if NCV enrolment targets cause financial stress, then the sustainability of the assessment system comes into question.

2 CURRICULUM AND QUALIFICATIONS DESIGN

2.1 CURRICULUM POLICY

The NCV Qualification framework and policy, supported by the Subject and Assessment Guidelines, are seen by the DoE as constituting the curriculum. However, colleges (and some lecturers in the sampled subjects) commonly noted that lecturers have difficulty in interpreting these documents into a concrete teaching programme. The framework and its supporting documents are seen as an 'assessment curriculum' rather than a teaching curriculum. The issue of what constitutes a useable and effective 'curriculum' is placed on the agenda.

The detailed comments on the curriculum and its links to assessment have been discussed in Part 3.

2.2 ARTICULATION OF THE NCV: CAREER ROUTES FOR LEARNERS

There was some discussion around articulation issues; in particular, how the NCV relates to occupational training, to trade qualifications, and to higher education. NCV graduates cannot take trade tests, and there is no clarity around occupational routes or higher education. This is particularly serious in the light of learner expectations, especially around employability. All the focus group interviews with learners suggest that they are surprised (and resistant) to the amount of 'academic' study they are expected to do, and had been expecting far more emphasis on practical skills and trades in order to get a job (a point also made strongly in the Applied Accounting and Engineering Systems subject reports). This brings into question the effectiveness of the advocacy and marketing around the NCV. It also speaks to some of the motivation issues identified in learners.

3 HUMAN RESOURCE ISSUES

Human resource issues affect every level of the system. Although, as noted in Part 2, the Assessment and Examinations Directorate staff capacity has greatly improved since the previous evaluation in 2004, there are still some gaps (for example, in terms of monitoring of ICASS and examinations). The situation is much worse at provincial levels, where there is a great deal of variation in terms of resources and capacity. One of the common complaints is that very few provincial officials come from an FET college background. Many of these officials are given NCV responsibilities in addition to school responsibilities, with the inevitable prioritisation of the school sector. When this is linked to the lack of clarity around roles and funding outlined in Part 2, it illustrates why provinces have difficulty in carrying out some of the functions with which they are tasked.

The HR issues are at their most serious when the professional capacity of the college lecturers delivering the NCV comes under scrutiny. The 'skills drain' which seems to be occurring because of OSD and autonomy issues has been outlined above in 1. However, a number of other issues need to be noted:

3.1 GENERAL TRAINING

College lecturers typically come from either a school background, or from Industry. Those from a school background may have difficulty in adapting to the college context and vocational orientation, while those from an industry background may have the technical skills but not the teaching skills. There is a gap in the system as regards the institutional base for initial training of qualified lecturers for the college system, while there is little consistency in provision of in-service training courses for college personnel.

3.2 PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE

Questions have arisen around the competence of many lecturers to deliver the NCV curriculum: some of those from an NCV background may lack the experience to undertake the practical components, while those who have come from industry may lack the theoretical knowledge. Added to this is the fact that many experienced lecturers have left the sector: colleges reported vacant posts, and there is an obvious lack of succession planning. College councils do not appear to have sufficient financial resources to recruit and retain staff with the required expertise. Apart from the impact on teaching and learning, personnel issues have an impact on the status of the NCV: any qualification delivered by people whose credentials are suspect is bound to lose credibility in the market.

4 CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

4.1 THE NCV LEARNER

Numerous problems around the NCV learner group were identified. Most notable is the lack of readiness at entry; schools are encouraging weak learners to leave, and many of those who have entered NCV are hardly even at a genuine Grade 9 level. Lecturers noted difficulties in dealing with the mismatch between the demands of the curriculum and the abilities of many of their learners.

As can be seen from collated comments throughout this report, the issue of absenteeism is frequently raised, especially in relation to its impact on assessment. Assessment tasks have to be repeated, thus taking up teaching time, and learners do not progress in a coherent fashion. College management, subject lecturers and learners themselves in the focus group interviews claim that FET college learners seem to have a number of socioeconomic problems, (e.g. unstable home environments, drug and alcohol issues), some of which contribute to a high level of absenteeism. Another reason claimed for absenteeism is lateness in payment of bursaries, which in turn means no money for transport. The age of some of the learners is also problematic; those at the younger end of the scale are not ready for the college context and the age mix, and seem to need more discipline and supervision than the college can offer. While many colleges have tried to put improved learner support structures in place, cost and funding again become an issue.

4.2 ADMISSIONS AND PROGRESSION POLICIES

The most serious issue related to admission policies is the fact that lecturers may end up with mixed classes of varying ability, including learners from grades 10, 11, and 12. This has huge implications for teaching and assessment; the weak learners don't know what is going on, while the strong ones become bored. Learners in the focus groups also complained about the mismatch of ability levels. This kind of situation requires lecturers who are strong enough in their content knowledge to be able to carry out multi-level teaching, and who have the pedagogical and methodological skills to deal with mixed classes (especially where there may be quite an age range). Given the current profile of FET college lecturers, such lecturers may be rare.

Illustrative evidence of this feature is taken from the Learner Focus group interviews for NCV 2, as set out in **Table 9**.

This information was given by learners enrolled for NCV Level 2, when asked what grade they had last achieved or attended. The years in which this grade was attended range from 2007 to 2003. One learner last attended school in 1998.

Table 9: Learner grade distribution, taken from focus group interviews

Site	Last grade attended				
	Total number in focus group	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Buffalo City (John Knox)	6	-	2	3	1
PE College (Russell Rd)	2			1	1 (failed)
Lovedale (Zwelitsha)	5	1			4
Lovedale (King Campus)	9	-	1	4	4
Leeuwkop	10	1	1	7	1
College of Cape Town (Crawford)	7	5	1	1	
College of Cape Town (Athlone)	6	1	3	2	
College of Cape Town (Pinelands)	5	1		1	3
Northlink (Belhar)	5	2	3		
Northlink (Bellville)	6	1	5		
SWG College (Molapo)	6		3	1	2
Central Jhb College (Ellis Park)	6				6
Sedibeng (Vereeniging)	5			1	4
Totals:	78	12	19	21	26

Progress and concession policies on carrying over certain subjects into the following year increases the load on already weak learners, and cuts into the time they have for study. They are not likely to make much progress in this way. Lecturers also noted the impact this has on their teaching and assessment plans, as they are sometimes dealing with learners at Level 3 who have not covered the work for Level 2.

The policy allowing learners to enter for the ISAT even when they have not attended class, and may not have completed all the ICASS also has an impact on those who have been attending class, and may skew assessment results.

These contextual issues need to be seen as realities with which the colleges and their staff have to deal with on a daily basis. If there is a significant mismatch between the demands of the NCV, and the typical recipients of the programmes, some hard thinking needs to be done around issues such as the purpose and scope of the qualification at the one end, and recruitment and entry requirements for learners at the other end. It may well be that the poor results achieved so far are strongly influenced by these and other contextual issues that characterise the college sector. The implications for the current learners seriously need to be addressed. Many of them are already school rejects, and if they fail the NCV they will have lost an additional three years. It must also be noted that many of the factors suggested above may not simply be transient results of teething problems, but may continue as characteristics in the sector in the longer term.

In sum, learners who do not have the learning assumed to be in place at the start of their NCV learning will often be unable to 'catch up' in terms of internalising the knowledge and skills they are being taught. If such learners are in the majority, this adds another variable to any analysis of the assessment system or assessment results; are poor achievements the result of unfair assessments, an inappropriate assessment system, inadequate teaching, or a low level baseline?

Part 5:

Recommendations

1 STRUCTURAL ISSUES AND COORDINATION

Respondents at provincial and college levels have expressed concern about lack of clarity on policies issued by the DoE, particularly in terms of curriculum implementation, ICASS and ISAT and examinations, as well as the roles and responsibilities at the different levels of the system. It is, therefore, recommended that the DoE considers making available the following structures (existing structures such as SACPO could be used):

- Formalise existing structures or establish ad hoc sub-committee(s) of HEDCOM to deal with concerns around the lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities at the different levels of the system in respect of monitoring and moderation; curriculum, including issues such as implementation support and review; implementation of policies, including moderation policies for the management and implementation of ICASS, ISAT and external examinations.
- Capture the role of PDEs in policy (beyond what is set out in White paper 1) so that: (i) there are common understandings of PDE roles and functions; and (ii) there is some consistency across provinces. Policy would provide the basis for putting a plan for the development of capacity of PDEs in place. The plan would need to address:
 - PDE roles and functions in external examinations
 - PDE roles in the internal assessment component of the NCV
 - PDE roles in curriculum support
 - In addition, funding and budget mechanisms to ensure that PDEs can carry out these roles need to be investigated.
- Appoint a task team or ad hoc committee to interrogate the funding model for the NCV.
- At national level, institute an improvement plan for those aspects that have been identified as problematic, e.g. the time available for internal moderation of papers; editing of papers; and moderation that is more monitoring for compliance than moderation for quality.
- Address human resource gaps with specific projects such as training and appointment models for markers (including holding markers to account), examiners and moderators, and conduct a general investigation into long-term needs such as training systems for vocational educators.
- Strengthen the internal capacity in the DoE in relation to ICASS and ISAT. A particular focus here would be on review of the moderation system, and the implementation of a systematic monitoring system.
- An alternative appointment, progression and training model for markers, examiners and moderators should be developed.

2 QUALIFICATION STRUCTURE AND ARTICULATION WITH OTHER PARTS OF THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

Learners entering the NCV programmes enter from different points of the system. For example, some learners exit school with grade 9, while others exit with grade 12. However, the structure of the qualification only allows for learners entering with grade 9, while colleges admit learners at these and higher levels.

Respondents at colleges have expressed concerns on (1) the ability of grade 9 graduates to offer NCV2; and, (2) boredom of those entering with higher levels, particularly when it becomes evident that NCV2 is equivalent to Grade 10. It is therefore strongly recommended that:

- A formal bridging programme is introduced to assist learners who are entering NCV2 with Grade 9, particularly if their performance was weak at school. In other words, diagnostic testing should inform the placement of learners and remedial programmes made available to them.
- Develop a strategy to assist learners who are carrying subjects from lower levels of the NCV, or implement a decisive policy with regards to pass requirements.
- Consider implementing a system of credit transfer for learners entering the programme with grade 10, 11 or 12, particularly for the fundamental subjects. Consider reducing the duration of the programme for such learners.
- The lack of clarity and/or agreements in respect of the status of the NCV in relation to Trade Testing is concerning. High level discussions in this regard are urgent and important. In addition, articulation, specifically with the Universities of Technology, needs urgent attention. The development of an NCV5 which will allow articulation with Universities of Technology is urgent.
- Consider a delivery model that would suit working learners.
- Finalise, and disseminate the decision, based on inputs from stakeholders and interested parties, on whether NCV2 and 3 are exit points for this qualification.

3 CURRICULUM FOR THE NCV PROGRAMMES

There appears to be some disagreement on the existence of a curriculum for the qualification. College lecturers at campus level indicated that they are not certain as to what to teach on a daily basis. In addition, colleges and provincial head offices do not seem to have sufficiently interrogated the current subject and assessment guidelines in order to determine syllabi.

It is therefore recommended that:

- A set of syllabi be developed in order to support college lecturers with curriculum implementation
- Dissemination of syllabi must be accompanied with in-service training of college lecturers
- The overall time demands of the NCV curriculum need to be analysed in relation to 'real teaching time' available to colleges, including issues raised around time constraints for practicals. Such an analysis could result in common guidelines for planning and scheduling, or, in the longer term, curriculum review in collaboration with Umalusi.

4 STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION

Respondents at colleges have expressed concerns about the competition with industry for teaching staff at colleges. In addition, the nature of the NCV requires much stronger academic grounding in the subjects offered, and it seems that lecturing staff lack capacity in this regard. As a result, assessment standards are likely to be compromised. The areas directly affected are:

- Mediation and delivery of the curriculum, which includes the implementation of ICASS
- Internal moderation of assessment at institutional and cluster levels
- Setting and internal moderation of examination question papers
- Marking and internal moderation of all assessment tasks, including examination scripts

A further staff development programme should be put in place to mediate the curriculum and the assessment, especially in terms of ICASS and ISAT. This should be ongoing and sustainable, and jointly developed between the Curriculum and Assessment sections of the DoE.

It is strongly recommended that comprehensive in-service training for college lecturers be implemented. In-service training must include the implementation of ICASS and administration of ISAT and the marking thereof.

In the medium to long term, the introduction of formal training for college lecturers, which will include both academic depth in the subjects they intend to teach, pedagogy and subject didactics, needs attention.

5 ICASS AND ISAT AND THE STANDARD OF ASSESSMENT

The problems associated with ICASS and ISAT are of great concern. Not only could the credibility of results be questioned, but the inconsistencies, poor or lack of planning, and poor conceptualisation of practical assessments, defeat the very purpose of a vocational qualification, i.e. the balance between theory and practice that will enable successful learners to gain the skills and understanding needed to prepare them for employment.

- There is as yet no system in place for setting a common task for ICASS in order to try to benchmark a standard. While some provinces have facilitated such a process between their colleges, in other provinces there may not even be a common task for different campuses of the same college. To establish a standard it may be necessary, at least initially, for the DoE to develop one or two common tasks, leaving the rest of the development to the PDE and college structures. National common ICASS tasks, or exemplars of such tasks, may assist lecturers to set tasks of acceptable standard and will facilitate meaningful moderation.
- College lecturers have indicated that they are unsure about the relationship between ICASS, ISAT and the external examination. Some form of synergy between these different aspects of assessment needs to be stipulated. (ICASS tasks, for example, presumably should lead up to the ISAT in terms of the skills and knowledge needed in order to successfully complete the assessment.) In addition, the policy on learners who fail the ISAT as a prerequisite for sitting for the external examination seems to be unclear.
- The moderation model for ICASS must be reviewed in terms of simplifying the process and clarifying the key purposes. Current requirements for portfolios as the vehicle for moderation could be reviewed.
- The moderation model for ISAT must be reviewed, as there was little evidence of internal moderation, and little consistency in scoring.
- Policies on reassessment, ICASS irregularities and attendance requirements for entry into ISAT and examinations need to be clarified, standardised or developed.
- ISAT tasks must reach colleges in good time to facilitate planning and expenditure in respect of consumables needed for such tasks.
- Time-frames for the setting and moderation of examinations should be reviewed.
- Planning for the management of marking needs to be undertaken, possibly in consultation with Umalusi.

6 RESOURCING THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Concerns were raised around the alignment of policies in respect of projected enrolments, the optimum use of infrastructure and time-tabling

- Workshops for engineering subjects are generally equipped for smaller numbers of learners than are actually needed (particularly with repeaters as part of the equation).
- The projected enrolment figures per college seem to be unreasonable, firstly because of the strain on facilities and equipment; and secondly, on the perceived high cost to offer the qualification. Projected enrolments, therefore, need to be aligned to specific programmes and should be based on the availability and capacity of the resources such as workshops and facilities
- Colleges seem to need support in making optimum use of facilities and equipment, particularly when practical assessments are due. Currently, time-tabling seems to be along school lines.

7 OTHER ISSUES

While the granting and disbursement of bursaries are clearly not directly linked to the standard of assessment, there was sufficient concern expressed at college and campus levels to highlight the matter in this report.

The allocation of bursaries needs to be finalised before colleges reopen in January as delays in this regard seem to lead to the absenteeism of learners who rely solely on the funding in order to pay for transport to colleges.

Colleges are of the opinion that the NCV programmes are very expensive to offer. The funding model for the NCV needs interrogation.

In the longer term, the success of the NCV will depend on a number of factors. Areas that require further discussion might be the following:

- Gathering data on the rate of absenteeism over a period of time, and investigating its causes
- Gathering data on resignation rates and vacant posts, and working with provinces and colleges on a recruitment strategy
- Investigating ways of formalising training for vocational educators.

Finally, it is clear that some interrogation of the curriculum (scope, level and articulation possibilities) is required. This may be the focus of the next stage of Umalusi's evaluation of the NCV, in partnership with national DoE.

Conclusion and way forward

The DoE has taken the bold step to introduce a new vocational qualification which, by all accounts, is perceived to be a huge improvement on what was available in the sector before. The NCV has the potential to meet a very important need in the education and training system, particularly if more flexible modes of delivery are introduced. This qualification will become the benchmark qualification for the vocational education and training sector – a sector that for many years lagged behind the needs of the country. The massive injection of funds for the recapitalisation of the sector seems to be money well spent and will position the college sector to meet the economic, workplace and social needs of South Africa.

The evaluation of the assessment system evidenced many good practices at all levels of the system. However, it is now important to pay attention to those aspects that may inhibit the realisation of the purposes of the NCV.

The evaluation was framed by Umalusi's areas for the accreditation and monitoring of public and private assessment bodies, namely criteria encapsulating:

- Strategic management and leadership, (e.g. planning, policy development, resourcing and funding approaches, governance)
- Maintenance and enhancement of academic standards (e.g. interrogation of the curriculum, its assessment and its standards; professional development of teaching staff; monitoring and evaluation)
- Administration of assessment (e.g. all the logistical elements around setting, distributing, resulting, reporting and moderating all forms of assessment).

While there are concerns over planning, policy, resourcing, funding and governance, by and large, the leadership shown in developing and implementing the NCV is commendable.

Likewise, in terms of the logistical arrangements of the administration of examinations, streamlining and capacity building are needed but, on the whole, this area is an established process.

The key concern is in respect of the maintenance and enhancement of academic standards. Importantly, academic standards are directly associated with the credibility of the qualification and the DoE should, therefore, prioritise this area.

To this end, Umalusi will require improvement plans for those areas where concerns were raised. In addition, as a next step, an evaluation of the curriculum in collaboration with Umalusi will enhance the quality of the qualification. The 2009–2011 monitoring cycle will, therefore, evaluate progress against these improvement plans.

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