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FROM THE CEO'S DESK

Assessment across assessment bodies

Every year some 600 000 candidates register for the National Senior Certificate (NSC), popularly called 'matric': it is a qualification in high demand in the South African education landscape.

This is because it serves many purposes, providing as it does access to further studies such as higher certificates, diplomas and degrees. It is also an entry-level qualification for employment.

It is important that the National Senior Certificate should be understood, primarily, as an indicator of school leaving achievement. It is not simply an indicator of university readiness.

The NSC is also used by some researchers to evaluate the success of the South African education system. It represents the most public and high stakes' set of examinations in South Africa. Every year teachers, parents, learners, researchers, legislators, and the general public deliberate on questions prompted by matric examinations. Confidence in the NSC examinations is an indication of confidence in the education system as a whole.

The National Senior Certificate is currently assessed by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Independent Examinations Board (IEB). (Umalusi recently upgraded

“This includes monitoring the writing of the exams, the marking process and, finally, the standardisation process. Umalusi approves the release of the results by both assessment bodies.”

the IEB's accreditation to assess the qualification from 'provisional' to 'full', following the Minister of Education's approval of the accreditation policy.) The DBE, in the main, assesses public schools, while the IEB assesses independent schools exclusively. Not all independent schools write the IEB examinations as some have opted to write the DBE examinations.

The DBE and the IEB teach and assess the NSC according to policies determined by the Minister of Basic Education. This is currently carried out in terms of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). From 2014, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) policy will replace the NCS.

Umalusi's role as guardian of standards

Umalusi, as the quality council tasked with overseeing general and further education, ensures that the papers set by the DBE and the IEB comply with policy in terms of degree of difficulty and an appropriate spread of questions across the high, medium, and lower orders of cognitive demand. The assessment bodies set the question papers, moderate them internally and then submit them to Umalusi. Umalusi's moderators then ensure that the papers set by the assessment bodies meet the requirements of the NCS and the subject assessment guidelines. Umalusi uses the same moderators for all subjects to ensure comparable standards across assessment bodies. As stipulated in its legislated mandate, Umalusi subjects the question papers to rigorous and high standards. If the papers do not meet Umalusi requirements, they are rejected and sent back to the assessment body for correction, or resetting. The assessment body has a limited number of opportunities to submit the paper to the required standard, failing which it is directed to use the paper of another assessment body. This seldom happens as all assessment bodies are committed to high standards of assessment.

Umalusi, as an impartial and independent statutory body, oversees the examinations written under the auspices of both the DBE and the IEB. This includes monitoring the writing of the exams, the marking process and, finally, the standardisation process. Umalusi approves the release of the results by both assessment bodies.

When the results are released, the assessment bodies issue a 'statement of results', an interim document for those wanting to register at institutions of higher learning or to apply for jobs. The 'statement of results' is issued and signed by the heads of the provincial Departments of Education for examinations assessed by the DBE and by the Chief Executive Officer of the IEB. Neither the DBE nor the IEB are empowered to issue certificates, so the 'statement of results' serves a temporary purpose until Umalusi issues formal certificates, around April and May of the following year.

Umalusi uses data provided by the different assessment bodies to issue the certificates. This data must be unimpeachable, since certificates contain important information about a learner's achievements.

The certificate does not reflect the name of the school or the assessment body, but carries the name of the quality council, Umalusi; the name and identity number of the learner; marks achieved; and the level of the pass which the learner has attained: Bachelor's, Diploma or Higher Certificate. The certificate is signed by the Chief Executive

Dr Mafu Rakometsi is the Chief Executive Officer of Umalusi, Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training.

Officer of Umalusi. There is only one matric, or National Senior Certificate, in South Africa, irrespective of the assessment body under which the examination was written.

SA's matric 'Internationally comparable'

The certificates Umalusi issues represent an internationally comparable qualification. Umalusi, together with Higher Education South Africa (HESA), jointly studied and benchmarked the NSC against the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE), the International Baccalaureate (IB), and the Namibian National Senior Secondary Certificate (NSSC), as an example of a Cambridge qualification that has been localised. In general, it was found that there was a high degree of overlap between the CIE, IB and NSSC in topics covered, and in breadth and depth of the content covered. The study concluded that the NSC was generally comparable with these international qualifications. The IB A-level courses were found to be more demanding than the NSC, while the CIE O-level qualifications (IGCSE) were at a level slightly below that assessed by the NSC. Ultimately it was found that the NSC is in line with international practice, and learners with this qualification are well placed to compete in this increasingly internationalised world.

Research a core function

Umalusi conducts and commissions research projects to enhance its quality assurance systems and processes. Research is one of its core functions to ensure its qualifications remain relevant and internationally comparable. Umalusi's research findings are also used to inform the processes of its assessment bodies.

In addition, Umalusi hosts and takes part in seminars, conferences and public events to enhance public debate on key educational matters, to share its research findings in important areas, and to contribute to a growing understanding in South Africa of the complexities of quality in education.



Dr Mafu Rakometsi



Umalusi declares South African examination system ready for 2013 exams



Dr Mafu Rakometsi

Umalusi, the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, has declared the South African examination system ready for the 2013 final examinations.

While the focus at this time of the year is normally on the National Senior Certificate (NSC) or matric examinations, Umalusi is also responsible for quality assuring the General Education and Training Certificate for adults (GETC) and the National Certificate Vocational (NCV).

It is a mammoth task to ensure that the system is ready to assess a large volume of learners in so many examination centres throughout all nine provinces. For the NSC alone, the 2013 examinations will be written by 707 136 learners in more than 6 699 examination centres, overseen by about 65 000 invigilators. They will be marked by more than 35 000 markers in 118 marking centres countrywide.

public assessment systems – the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training – the accredited private assessment body, the Independent Examinations Board (IEB), and the provisionally accredited South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute (SACAI).

Umalusi is delighted to announce that SACAI, which will pilot its full National Senior Certificate exams in 2014, has been granted provisional accreditation.

Overall, Umalusi is satisfied with the preparations for the end-of-year exams. It is confident that the general education system is adequately prepared to run these assessments successfully.

That is not to say that Umalusi does not have concerns regarding the upcoming national examinations. Key among these is the status of the Limpopo and Eastern

“ Umalusi is delighted to announce that SACAI, which will pilot its full National Senior Certificate exams in 2014, has been granted provisional accreditation. ”

Umalusi subjects the systems and processes involved to scrutiny at every stage of the assessment process. All examination papers must be moderated and approved by Umalusi before they can be written. The internal assessments in schools also fall within Umalusi's mandate, and these are monitored and learners' tasks are moderated. The final marks, which contribute to the overall results, are also statistically moderated to ensure consistency and reliability. Finally, the administration of national examinations is monitored, marking is verified and the final results are statistically moderated.

In early 2011 Umalusi took the unprecedented step of revealing its statistical moderation processes to the public. This was to ensure that the nation had faith in the manner in which examination results were processed. In subsequent years Umalusi has continued this practice. The process of statistically moderating results is standard practice across the globe, done to ensure that fluctuations in difficulty from one year to another are corrected.

As the quality assurer for this important sector of the South African education system, Umalusi's role is to monitor the

Cape education departments, which are currently under administration. Umalusi has recommended to the Department of Basic Education that these provinces need intensive monitoring to mitigate any unintended consequences of this situation. For its part, Umalusi will intensify its monitoring where it deems it necessary to do so.

Also, Umalusi has identified various critical posts within provincial education departments that remain vacant. This situation cannot be allowed to continue as it inevitably puts the system under additional, unnecessary strain.

Finally, there are critical budgetary constraints within certain provincial education departments that are coupled with such staff vacancies.

These, Umalusi believes, present an ongoing risk. 

Umalusi launches accreditation

by Mr Chaile Makaleng

The General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance (GENFETQA) Act, 2001 (as amended in 2008) provides for the quality assurance, accreditation and monitoring of private education institutions and private assessment bodies in accordance with policies and criteria approved by the Ministers of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training respectively. The policies and criteria contemplated by the GENFETQA Act are for private Adult Education and Training centres, private Further Education and Training colleges, independent schools and private assessment bodies.

In anticipation of the approval of the policies and criteria referred to above, Umalusi has been implementing provisional accreditation since 2003. Without the approval of the policies and criteria for private education institutions and private assessment bodies, Umalusi was unable to grant accreditation, as contemplated by the GENFETQA Act. The delay in the approval of the quality assurance and accreditation policies and criteria was mainly due to the protracted review of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The quality assurance and accreditation policies and criteria were eventually approved by the Ministers of Education. These were published on 28 May 2010 through Government Gazette 33237 (i.e. for Adult and Vocational Education and Training centres) and on 29 October 2012 through Government Gazette 35830 (i.e. for independent schools and assessment bodies).

The approval and publication of the quality assurance and accreditation policies and criteria by the Ministers of Education were considered by Umalusi to be major milestones in the course of its work as a Quality Council for general and further education and training. The approval and publication of the policies and criteria created the requisite legal basis for Umalusi to grant accreditation, as contemplated in the GENFETQA Act.

To celebrate, Umalusi launched the new process of accreditation on Thursday, 13 June 2013 at the Gallagher Convention Centre in Midrand. The launch was also intended to draw the attention, directly and indirectly, of all stakeholders to Umalusi's conceptual shift from provisional accreditation to accreditation.

Among other dignitaries at the launch were Umalusi Council members (Professor Timothy Dunne, Professor Dan Kgwadi, Ms Lindeka Mlanjana and Dr Zilungile Sosibo); members of committees of Council (Mr Bruce Phillips, Dr Deborah Mampuru,



Evaluation and Accreditation Unit

Ms Dipiloane Phutsisi, Mr Mashudu Netshandama, Ms Nicola Young, Mr Rodney Pettit, Ms Kylie Janssens, Mr Sakkie van der Merwe, Professor Roy du Pré, Mr Matolo Khalo and Ms Sharon Blignaut); the Chief Executive Officers of the Council on Higher Education (CHE); Mr Ahmed Essop, the Chief Executive Officer of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA); Mr Joe Samuels, the Chief Executive Officer of the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU); Dr Nick Taylor, Associate Professor at the Wits School of Education; Professor Peliwe Lolwana, former CEO of Umalusi; officials from the Department of Basic Education and provincial education departments, private assessment bodies and pilot project participants, and a representative of the National Alliance of Independent Schools Association (NAISA), Mr Sandile Ndaba.

The keynote speaker was Mr Cameron Staples, President and Chief Executive Officer of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). NEASC was established in 1885 and serves more than 2000 public and independent schools, colleges and universities in New England, USA. Umalusi's interaction with NEASC dates to 2003 and the two organisations are considering ways of formalising their important strategic relations.

Mr Staples spoke on accreditation as one of the most important levers for school improvement. Inherent in NEASC's facilitation of school improvement are the 'research-driven standards' that it uses to accredit private and public education institutions. He clarified that although membership of the association is voluntary, universities and (student) funding institutions give

Umalusi launches accreditation (continued)

preference to schools and colleges that are accredited by the NEASC. Mr Staples also indicated that his association's key organising principles were self-regulation and peer-review; and that the association's approach provides for "honest, objective and comprehensive evaluations carried out with the utmost integrity and commitment to research-driven standards".

The highlight of the evening was the awarding of accreditation certificates to independent schools, AET centres, FET colleges and the Independent Examinations Board (IEB). The private education institutions and the IEB were the first to be accredited by Umalusi, in accordance with its new accreditation decision-making process. In the new decision-making process, the Accreditation Committee of Council (ACC) applies its mind to all applications for accreditation, with a view to recommending accreditation decisions to Council for final approval.

Umalusi congratulates the first group of private education institutions and the IEB on their well-deserved accreditation. Private education institutions are accredited for seven years. The IEB was accredited indefinitely, dependant on their continued compliance with standards.

The positive comments received from the attendees indicated that the accreditation launch was of a standard that made Umalusi proud. We express our sincere gratitude to all who attended and, in particular, to institutions that took part in the accreditation pilot project.

Umalusi is well aware that the accreditation launch signaled the commencement of hard work in quality assuring, private

education institutions and assessment bodies. It also served to enhance Umalusi's resolve to fulfil its legislative quality assurance mandate.



The Services Subjects Project: a model for cross-sector collaboration

by Dr Celia Booysse

Since November 2011, the QCC unit has been involved in a large-scale and ongoing project around the so-called 'services subjects' – that is, Hospitality, Tourism and Consumer Studies. The prompt for this project came from two directions: firstly, when Umalusi was requested to quality assure the new CAPS curricula, the DBE requested that Tourism be included as one of the subjects. The second impetus came from the fact that, when Umalusi presented The 'f' in NCV report, the colleges were concerned that we had started with the fundamental subjects rather than examining the vocational side of the qualification. So, the research into the NC(V) programmes in these areas complemented the NSC CAPS curriculum investigation.

Furthermore, the challenge of quality assuring practical subjects has been one which Umalusi has recognised. It had commissioned work by Jeanne Gamble to provide

a theoretical framing for understanding the assessment of practical subjects. And, since Umalusi had no previous research experience in the fields of tourism and hospitality, much of the initial energy went into understanding the background to these subjects: their inception, rationale and their role in qualifications such as the NSC and the NC(V), as well as their possible impact in and on the South African educational and economic context.

During this fact-finding process, Umalusi's willingness to listen and engage brought about an organic enlargement of the number of parties interested in the project: as a result, the present research project has representation from an exceptionally broad range of stakeholders, all of whom have requested to be included in the services subjects project. The teams thus have enthusiastic and responsible representation from both Departments of Education, the Independent



Back from left to right: Mr Marc Raijmakers, Ms Monica Koen, Mr Lulamile Stuurman, Ms Erica Aalsma, Dr Celia Booysse
Front from left to right: Ms Tilly Reddy, Ms Melanie Anthony, Ms Aimee Hoeve

“The success of the Educator Seminars was evident in the increased numbers attending the sessions as well as in the feedback from those who attended.”

Examination Board (IEB), Higher Education South Africa (HESA) as well as a number of prominent academics from several universities. It has also been especially rewarding to be able to work with the Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sports SETA (CATHSSETA), the National Department of Tourism (NDT) and valuable representatives from industry and private colleges. In short, this project has stimulated such interest beyond the usual educational circles that, as the project has proceeded, Umalusi has come strongly to believe that the inclusive process is bringing multiple benefits to bear, and that the project begins to offer a model for co-operation between education –in all its various guises – and the critical players in industry who are the recipients of learners from our qualifications. The mutual benefit of working with other government departments also helps to communicate the learnings from the project more widely than would otherwise be possible.

The first report emanating from the project, called *At your service: towards an informed understanding of the NC(V) Tourism and Hospitality programmes*, was launched during 18 –19 March 2013. It includes findings from research into the implementation of an integrated model in Western Australia. The report findings have been shared at seminars, the Tourism Leadership Dialogue, and the Skills System Multi-stakeholder workshop in July 2013. In October 2013, the research model and recommendations were presented, at the request of an interested and pro-active FET college, to delegates from the Netherlands, the Koning Willem 1 College and to the staff of the College of Cape Town.

These knowledge-sharing opportunities and engagement with research done in other countries serve further to strengthen the collaboration between Umalusi, the DHET, NDT and CATHSSETA. The October meetings have resulted in further commitment to complete the review of the NC(V) Tourism and Hospitality subject curricula, and to work towards an integrated teaching, learning and assessment model.

At both the annual 2012 and 2013 National Tourism Careers Expos (NTCE), in East London, Umalusi was requested to organise and host the accompanying Educator Seminars, yet another example of the strength of the Umalusi, NDT and CATHSSETA partnership. The main purpose of Umalusi’s involvement was to share the research findings and to coordinate workshops on effective assessment as an integrated part of the learning process.

The success of the Educator Seminars was evident in the increased numbers attending the sessions as well as in the feedback from those who attended.

Both CATHSSETA and the NDT are generous partners in this research and dissemination process and all are committed to the further research, currently being written up on, the nature of quality assuring and strengthening practical assessment in both the NSC and NC(V) qualifications.



The GENFET Qualifications Sub-framework is regulated

by Ms Elizabeth Burroughs



Ms Elizabeth Burroughs

“People familiar with the sub-framework that Umalusi has promoted will notice two changes to its representation.”

In December 2012, Minister Blade Nzimande of the Department of Higher Education and Training determined as policy the three sub-frameworks that comprise the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The Government Gazette of 14 December provided a visual table of the NQF with its 10 levels, the sub-frameworks, and the qualification types determined by the Quality Councils, per NQF level, for their sub-frameworks.

The qualifications councils were urged to submit their respective sub-frameworks to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) for final regulation, with a request that certain aspects of the policies be strengthened or highlighted: articulation within and across the sub-frameworks was a major issue; and the nature of quality assurance associated with the different sub-frameworks was another.

Much intensive behind-the-scenes work between SAQA and two of the Quality Councils resulted in two of the three sub-frameworks being published as policy by SAQA, in the Government Gazette of 2 August. The third Quality Council, the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), encouraged SAQA and the Minister to determine the two sub-frameworks, even though its sub-framework was not yet finalised. CEO Ms Joyce Mashabela said the QCTO recognised that determining the sub-frameworks would provide the stability and legal certainty needed for further development of the national education and training system. QCTO would, she said, follow suit as soon as possible.

The two sub-frameworks came into effect on the date of publication. For Umalusi and, doubtless, for the Council on

Higher Education, the date marks the end of a process which began long before the NQF Act of 2008 declared Umalusi one of the three Quality Councils responsible for the development and management of a sub-framework of qualifications for general and further education and training. The translation of the sub-framework into policy provides a new level of authority – and responsibility – for some of the most critical qualifications in education and training.

People familiar with the sub-framework that Umalusi has promoted will notice two changes to its representation. The first is that, to align it with the NQF published by the Minister, Level 1 is now at the bottom of the sub-framework, while Level 4 is at the top. Level 5 on the sub-framework is not represented for now, partly because of the constraints of the legislation: Umalusi's founding Act refers to General and Further Education and Training (NQF Level 1–4). The good news, however, is that Umalusi has been given some time to develop one or more qualifications in the Level 5 space, a project which will be initiated soon.

While the gazetting of the sub-frameworks will not make headline news nationally, its importance for the work Umalusi is required to do should not be underestimated.



The General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework

NQF level	Qualification types and qualifications					Certificates for units of learning
Level 1	General Certificate (GC)					Subject (LA) certificates/ statements for adult learners
Designated variants	General Certificate of Education (GCE)		General Education and Training Certificate: ABET	General Education and Training Certificate for Adults		
Level 2	Elementary Certificate (EC)					Subject statements towards one or more qualification designated variants
Designated variants			National Certificate (Vocational) 2	Elementary Certificate		
Level 3	Intermediate Certificate (IC)					Subject statements towards one or more qualification designated variants
Designated variants			National Certificate (Vocational) 3	Intermediate Certificate		
Level 4	National Certificate (NC)					Subject statements towards one or more qualification designated variants
Designated variants	Senior Certificate and National Senior Certificate (Colleges)	National Senior Certificate (NSC)	National Certificate (Vocational) 4	National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA)	National Independent Certificate (NIC)	

Monitoring the conduct of examinations. “So what?”

QAA Unit takes monitor training to new heights

by Ms Confidence Dikgole

The Quality Assurance of Assessment (QAA) Unit hosted a three-day monitor training session from 2-4 July at the OR Tambo Protea Hotel.

The session had three aims:

- To bring Umalusi’s monitors up to speed with the latest trends and practices in monitoring and evaluation.
- To ensure common understanding of Umalusi’s mandate regarding quality assurance of examinations, and how the monitors fit into this process.
- To provide practical training in monitoring of marking and capturing of marks.

In his opening address the CEO, Dr MS Rakometsi, applauded the monitors for carrying out his instruction when he welcomed them as new appointees in 2010. This was that they wear “the right cap, the Umalusi cap” and act on the mandate of Umalusi at all times in their monitoring role. This, the CEO said, had been carried out very well in their three years of monitoring-related activities.

The three-day session entailed theoretical training on days 1 and 3, when the focus was on Umalusi’s mandate regarding quality assurance of examinations and how the monitors fit into this “bigger picture”. Day 2 featured practical training, with visits to two Gauteng Department of Education marking centres and a capturing centre. The visits sought to bring two key issues to the monitors’ attention. Firstly, the critical aspects on which the monitors needed to focus on during the monitoring of marking to ensure that the credibility of marking is upheld. Secondly, to introduce the monitors to the process of mark capturing – an area that monitors had not previously focused on during their monitoring activity. Because the QAA Unit has declared 2013 the year of ensuring quality marking, there was a need to increase capacity.

The highlight of the training session was a keynote address by Ms Dez Jason, of the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation in the Presidency (DPME). She illustrated how Umalusi’s monitoring function fits into the broader monitoring and evaluation agenda of the government. This perspective assisted in streamlining the processes to achieve better results. Ms Jason premised her presentation on a broad statement and question: “Monitoring by Umalusi of the writing and marking phase of the examination: so what?” Attention was drawn to the fact that monitoring must be done with a view to influencing the system in one way or another and that it cannot be a routine process that adds no value. Ms Jason provided concise definitions of “monitoring” and “evaluation” to explain the differences between the two processes:

Monitoring is a “systematic, continuous collection and analysis of information to improve decision-making and organisational learning”. It answers the question “What is/is not happening?” For example, were all question papers received and sealed? Is the environment conducive for writing examinations?

Evaluation, on the other hand, “is about evaluating the worth and significance of an activity to determine its relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact or sustainability”. Its purpose is to provide a judgement on an activity or process. It answers the questions: “Why is it working?” or “Why is it not working well?” Have the correct things been done during exam administration, and have they been done well, to ensure the effectiveness of exam administration?



Umalusi monitors and staff members

Monitoring the conduct of examinations. “So what?”

QAA Unit takes monitor training to new heights (continued)

The relationship between monitoring and evaluation:

Evaluation	
Ongoing	Periodic (when most useful)
Focus: tracking progress against stated goals, objectives and activities	Focus: improving effectiveness
Conducted internally	Conducted externally or internally
Answers the question: What is/is not happening	Answers the question: Why something is/is not happening

Ms Jason further indicated that while the focus of evaluation can be on exam administration systems, it is equally crucial for Umalusi to evaluate its own monitoring processes periodically to determine their effectiveness.

The culmination of the workshop was a gala dinner at which the monitors were awarded certificates of service by the Acting COO, Mr Vijayen Naidoo, on behalf of the CEO of Umalusi. Mr Naidoo commended the monitors for rendering their services unselfishly as they traversed the length and breadth of the country to ensure the credibility of examinations.

Two monitors, Messrs James Mabotja and Hennie Franzsen, were awarded certificates of long service. These were among the first monitors to be appointed in 2000 when SAFCERT (now Umalusi) began its monitoring role.

The 2013 monitor training session was a resounding success. The workshop outcomes were achieved. Umalusi will continue to strengthen the relationship established with the DPME, to continue to enhance Umalusi's monitoring and evaluation role.



Mr Vijayen Naidoo, Mr Ngwato Mabotja (Umalusi's longest serving Monitor) and Ms Confidence Dikgole

Towards a construct for assessing high level language ability in the NSC examinations

by Mr Biki Lepota

The second of the 2013 annual Seminar series held on 16 July 2013 at the University of Pretoria, had as its theme 'Towards a construct for assessing high level language ability in the National Senior Certificate examinations'.

The seminar was part of an annual series hosted jointly by Umalusi, the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) and the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). Upwards of 70 delegates from the higher education sector, national and provincial departments of education, teachers and teacher union representatives attended.

Mr Marco Macfarlane, Umalusi's Senior Researcher, welcomed guests and explained that the Grade 12 examination was faced with challenges in achieving equivalence in the assessment of the 11 official languages, a result of their historical differences. The main concern for Umalusi, he said, was that learners whose first language is other than Afrikaans or English obtain, on average, higher marks overall in Grade 12 Home Language examinations than those whose first language is one of the two languages. This, he believes, suggests a disparity in the levels of difficulty between the Home Language examinations.

Albert Weideman, Professor of Applied Language Studies in the University of the Free State's Department of Linguistics and Language Practice and CEO of the Inter-Institutional

Centre for Language Development and Assessment (ICELDA), started the debate by arguing that the first prize in achieving equivalence was to find a theoretically defensible definition of what must be measured by a Home Language examination. Such a definition can be found in the CAPS documentation which, he said, shows that the curriculum espouses a variety of discourse types. On the basis of his team's analysis of curriculum aims, Professor Weideman argued that what Home Languages must assess was a differentiated language ability in a number of discourse types that involve texts of different types; and a generic ability that incorporates task-based, functional, and formal aspects of language. These are what constitute high level language ability and, for that reason, must form part of a contextual and theoretical framework within which language teaching and assessment take place.

Ms Colleen du Plessis, a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of the Free State, presented an analysis of questions from previous Home Language examination papers across several languages. The main goal of her presentation was to show that despite there being a common assessment policy, Home Language examinations continued to assess learners differently. Consequently, she called for the reallocation of both the content and the marks allocated to each of the three external papers. She emphasised that only through adding a standardised 60 mark component at the bottom of each examination,



Mr Chaile Makaleng, Mr Emmanuel Sibanda, Prof. Elize Koch, Ms Yasmine Dominguez-Whitehead, Ms Veerle Dieltiens, Ms Collen du Plessis, Prof. Albert Weideman, Mr Biki Lepota

across the 11 official languages, could the greatest level of equivalence be achieved.

Responding to whether the six discourse types would be applicable to all home languages despite differences in the number and the range of texts suitable for the dominant discourse types, Professor Elize Koch said that, in principle, it

“These are what constitute high level language ability and, for that reason, must form part of a contextual and theoretical framework within which language teaching and assessment take place.”

would be possible to have the construct transferred across all 11 languages. She argued that the best approach to operationalise such a construct would be to develop construct-equivalent Home Language examinations instead of translation equivalents.

She said it was important to note that full scalar equivalence might not be achievable given the differences between languages, since this calls for testing across the languages, incrementally, around a common construct.

Professor Koch argued that it was necessary for the system to implement mother tongue-based bilingual education in the African languages beyond Grade 4, with a clear programme of materials development (discourses and text types), and teacher education, to develop cognitive language ability across the curriculum as well as in the African languages.

In concluding the discussions, Mr Biki Lepota argued that the debates needed to move beyond the level of pass rates and mean scores because such values did not provide an accurate picture of the comparability of examinations. He said the most important aspect of comparability, and one which remained unexplored, was that of the abilities measured by the examinations in the different languages. He presented a number of initiatives linked to validating the proposed construct. These included round-table discussions on the construct prior to it being articulated in the form of specifications and item types, determining similarities and differences between the NCS and CAPS, and defining the degree of alignment between the curriculum and assessment.

The seminar could not have succeeded without the professional and administrative assistance of various Umalusi staff. The Statistical Information and Research Unit is grateful to all for their support. 



Umalusi shares best practice at SAAEA Lesotho conference

by Mr Biki Lepota

Mr Chaile Makaleng, Ms Annemarie Janse van Rensburg, Ms Helen Matshoba, Mr Biki Lepota, Mr Andy Thulo, and Mr Siphamandla Nxumalo

Umalusi's 10-member delegation at the 7th Southern African Association for Education Assessment (SAAEA) Conference in Lesotho in July presented four papers, all of which were well-received and enriched the debates on assessment challenges.

Themed 'Challenges of educational assessment in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 21st Century', the conference was hosted by the Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL) at the Maseru Sun Hotel, from 29–31 July 2013. Umalusi CEO Dr Mafu Rakometsi led the delegation made up of Messrs Emmanuel Sibanda, Lucky Ditaunyane, Chaile Makaleng, Chris Nyangintsimbi, Andy Thulo, Siphamandla Nxumalo, Biki Lepota, and Mesdames Helen Matshoba and Annemarie Janse van Rensburg.

Mr Nxumalo discussed the role of language in assessment and education: challenges faced by African learners in South African schools, while Mrs Janse van Rensburg looked at the performance of learners with special educational needs in the National Senior Certificate. Mr Sibanda and Mr Thulo presented an analysis of site-based assessment and Grade 12 examination marks in South African schools and the paper delivered by Biki Lepota, titled 'Is the playing field levelled?' investigated question equivalence across a selection of Grade 12 Home Language examinations, with specific reference to Paper 3.

Of the discussions introduced by the 40 papers that were presented, a key highlight was the whole notion of harmonisation of exit-level school qualifications in the SADC region. An initiative driven by the SAAEA Research Forum, under the chairpersonship of Dr Mafu Rakometsi, it is underpinned by the thinking that there is a need for a better understanding of similarities and differences among the education systems in the region to best respond to the SADC Protocol on Education and Training (1997). The protocol urges member states to reserve up to 10% of all available space in the higher education sector for students from the region.

The conference provided Umalusi staff with a golden opportunity to learn from and share experiences and best practice with SADC colleagues, in the areas of curriculum design, delivery and assessment.

The social programme did not disappoint either. Seen in the picture above are Annemarie, Andy, Biki, Helen, Siphamandla, a local conference organiser, and Chaile, on the sandstone plateau of Thaba Bosiu, which was used by Moshoeshe I as his citadel when he established the Basotho nation. It is Lesotho's major national monument.



e-Assessments, best practice under microscope at AEAA Conference

by Dr Celia Booysse

An Umalusi delegation attended the 31st Association for Educational Assessment in Africa (AEAA) Conference in Arusha from the 12th – 16th August. Dr Mafu Rakometsi, Mr E Sibanda, Dr C Booysse, Mr A Thulo and Ms H Matshoba represented Umalusi at the conference which was hosted by the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA).

Our South African delegation was one of 28 nationalities represented, and delegates from India, Liberia, Barbados, China and Gambia attended for the first time.

Emmanuel Sibanda and Andy Thulo presented a paper, 'An analysis of Site Based Assessment and Grade 12 examination marks in South African schools' while Helen Matshoba presented on 'Making a Case for Life Orientation to be a nationally examined subject in the South African National Senior Certificate'. Both Dr Rakometsi and I were requested to chair sessions.

Dr Joyce Ndalichako (CEO: NECTA) and Mr Philipo Augustino Mulugo, the Deputy Minister of Education and Vocational Training in Tanzania, both described assessment as being at the heart of quality education. The guest of honour, Ambassador Seif Ali Iddi, the Second Vice President of Zanzibar, gave the opening address.

The conference was shaped by its sub-themes which included, amongst others: innovations in assessment practices and their implications in improving the quality of education; the role of classroom assessment practices in improving the quality of education; enhancing teachers' capacity in assessment; the impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in educational assessment and the relationship between continuous assessment and final examination scores. The dynamics of languages in assessment and on learning outcomes were considered as were the challenges associated with assessing soft skills for quality education.

In the keynote address, Professor J Galabawa suggested the need for a dual focus – on both competitiveness and efficiency – in approaching assessment. He emphasised that capacity building, partnerships and an improved understanding of the impact of contextual factors – both school and non-school – on education was required. He emphasised, too, the importance of holistic education and striving to guide learners to reach their full potential in their cognitive, emotional and creative capacities. Professor Galabawa argued for assessment as a guiding practice not merely as a summative judgement.

In the main, presenters at the conference focused on the following in relation to assessment: the impact of language acquisition; using assessment to develop core competencies; building teacher capacity in assessment practices; the importance of courses on effective

assessment in teacher training, and the role of classroom assessment. Some presenters alluded to the importance of the quality of feedback in classroom practice and the positive impact it might have on instructional design.

The Namibian e-assessment model, presented by Dr Abdullah Ferdous, of the American Institute for Research, Washington, DC, and Mr Cavin Nyambe, Director of National Examinations and Assessment, Namibia, drew much attention. An initiative by Dr Jan Wieggers, Executive Director of Cito, Institute of Educational Measurement, Netherlands, regarding e-assessment in Nigeria, was also commendable. As a result of presentations such as these, the South African delegates felt that Umalusi ought to investigate e-assessment practices, computer-based assessment and computer-assisted national examinations more closely.

It was also suggested that the South African delegates should attend a meeting on computer-based assessment practices that would take place during the International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA) Conference in Israel in October 2013. Further discussions with the American delegate, representatives from CITO and the World Bank should also be considered. Dr Ferdous indicated that he is currently working in Namibia and would be willing to visit Umalusi to share knowledge in this regard.

The conference served primarily as a platform for sharing best practice and experiences in assessment. Apart from participating, Umalusi staff used the opportunity to network with colleagues from China to the Caribbean islands and to recognise the value of the World Bank initiatives in building stronger student assessment systems. 



Umalusi staff members with delegates attending the conference

Umalusi delivers first Braille transcripts

By Lucky Ditaunyane



Minister of Basic Education Ms Angie Motshekga



Principal of Prinshof School for the Visually Impaired Ms Lianie Moller with Zak Claasen, who achieved 7 distinctions in his NSC results

Visually impaired matriculation candidates received Braille transcripts of their National Senior Certificate for the first time, thanks to an Umalusi initiative that has been welcomed by the Minister of Basic Education.

The NSC is an important achievement in the academic life of any individual, marking as it does the end of a learner's basic education. Providing NSC transcripts in Braille for the partially sighted and blind learners of the Class of 2012 was a significant event: such visually impaired learners will no longer have to depend on others to read the content of their certificates to them. The function was held on Tuesday, 8 October 2013, at Filadelfia Secondary School in Soshanguve, Pretoria.

A highlight of the day was the presence of Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga, who said that quality education and support for learners with visual impairment was a "key priority".

"We have declared 2013 the Year of Inclusive Education. Umalusi's marvellous work is therefore very timely. The Council has really advanced the values and ethos of our democratic and inclusive society," she said.

Former learners of the Filadelfia and Prinshof Secondary schools in Pretoria were invited, about 15 of whom came to receive their Braille transcripts. Among the recipients was Zak Claasen, who obtained seven distinctions in his 2012 results. Zak was asked to read out his Braille transcript to demonstrate its usefulness.

The transcripts will now accompany all future certificates for blind and visually impaired learners. Umalusi also intends making Braille transcripts available to previous matriculants who are visually impaired.



Learners from Filadelfia Secondary School



Ms Annemarie Janse van Rensburg, Mr Jeremy Thomas and Mr Vijayen Naidoo



Edward Sebothoma

Quality assurance of distance education providers and related education material

by Mr Chaile Makaleng

Umalusi will launch a report on the results of an investigative study into the quality assurance of distance education providers and programmes for in the new year.

One of the challenges confronting Umalusi is the quality assurance of the various models of curriculum delivery and assessment of learner achievement, particularly, in the case of National Senior Certificate (NSC). Curriculum delivery through distance education is intended to address the needs of students who do not have the option of 'face-to-face' teaching and learning. Among the critical questions that Umalusi is grappling with are:

- a. Does Umalusi need to design a different set of accreditation criteria for distance education providers/institutions?
- b. How does one define a distance education provider/institution?
- c. How do distance education providers and institutions ensure the reliability, credibility and fairness of student assessments?
- d. Should Umalusi's quality assurance approach focus on the distance education provider/institution and/or the distance education learning material?

Umalusi commissioned the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) to examine these issues in a study into the distance education sector. The SAIDE report is scheduled to be launched on 7 February 2014 at 10am, at a venue to be confirmed in Gauteng.



Mr Chaile Makaleng

Umalusi to host 2016 IAEA international conference

Umalusi has officially been selected as the host for the International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA) 2016 Conference. The IAEA international conference will be held from 25 – 30 September 2016 in Cape Town.

The IAEA offers a global forum for all those involved in all forms of educational assessment – in primary or secondary schools, colleges or the workplace. Its members include examining bodies, university departments, research organisations and government agencies from more than 50 countries.

With over 500 delegates expected to attend this significant event, Umalusi is looking forward to flying the South African flag high, and contributing towards improving the standard of our education through meaningful debates and conversations with our international counterparts.

More information regarding the conference will be communicated in due course.

For more information and sponsorship opportunities please contact Mr Lucky Ditaunyane at 012 349 1510 ext 208.

We look forward to seeing you in the beautiful mother city in 2016!



Umalusi welcomes new staff

Ms Anne McCullum
Assistant Manager:
Qualifications,
Curriculum
and Certification



Ms Tshegofatjo Machaba
Assistant Manager:
Quality Assurance
of Assessment



Mr Lucas Mabena
IT developer:
Corporate Services



Ms Helen Koorzen
Assistant Manager:
Quality Assurance
of Assessment



Council for Quality Assurance in
General and Further Education and Training