

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: QUALITY ASSURANCE OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

This document is intended to contribute to a better understanding of Umalusi's quality assurance mandate, scope and initiatives, as they apply to independent schools and their assessment bodies.

1. Quality assurance mandate and scope

1.1 Why does an independent school have to be accredited?

Accreditation is a legal requirement for independent schools in terms of the following legislation:

- General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance (GENFETQA) Act, 2001 (as amended)
- National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act, 2008 as amended,
- Policy and Criteria for the Quality Assurance, Accreditation and Monitoring of Independent Schools and Private Assessment Bodies as promulgated by the Minister of Basic Education on 29 October 2012 (Government Gazette 35830), as amended;
- the Regulations regarding the criteria for the Quality Assurance, Accreditation and Monitoring of Independent Schools and Private Assessment Bodies (Government Gazette 41206 of 27 October 2017).

1.2 What is accreditation?

Accreditation is the outcome of a quality assurance process of evaluating an independent school to determine whether it has the capacity to offer a qualification or programmes leading to a qualification registered on the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework.

Accreditation attests to the capacity and the quality of the offering in an independent school in respect of the independent school's implementation of the curriculum in support of the qualification, at the required standard.

1.3 What is registration?

Registration of an independent school refers to a process that independent schools must undertake with Provincial Education Departments in order to operate in South Africa in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution of South African and the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996. An Independent School must be registered with the Provincial Education Department prior to seeking accreditation with Umalusi

1.4 Are all schools expected to apply for accreditation with Umalusi?

According to the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance (GENFETQA) Act, 2001 (as amended), Umalusi is required to quality assure independent schools that are registered in accordance with the South African Schools Act (SASA), 1996, as amended.

Furthermore, according to section 3(1) and (2) of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act, 2008 as amended, every qualification or part-qualification offered with the Republic by education institutions must be registered on the NQF in accordance with the NQF Act.

Therefore, Umalusi accredits registered independent schools that offer qualifications or programmes leading to qualifications registered on the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework (GFETQSF). Currently, the only qualification offered by independent schools that is registered on the GFETQSF is the National Senior Certificate (NSC).

Public schools are not required to apply for accreditation.

1.5 How do I apply for accreditation?

Application for accreditation is an online process which can be accessed on Umalusi's website: www.umalusi.org.za. Click on the link "**Accreditation for Private Providers**". You will then be guided through the online application process.

<https://www.umalusi-online.org.za/OA/>

1.6 Our school offers a foreign / international curriculum. Are we expected to apply for accreditation with Umalusi?

In terms of section 3 of the National Qualifications Framework Act (NQF) foreign qualifications offered in South Africa are required to be registered on the NQF. Once a qualification is registered on the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF), then the school would be required to apply for accreditation.

1.7 What is Umalusi's quality assurance approach for independent schools?

In line with its quality assurance mandate, Umalusi uses a set of criteria to accredit independent schools to offer a qualification that is registered on the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF). In terms of independent schools, this refers to the National Senior Certificate (NSC) and the curriculum leading to it (which is the National Curriculum Statement, including the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements – CAPS). Umalusi's main focus in regard to independent schools is their internal quality management of education provision.

The criteria for the accreditation of an independent school to offer a qualification on the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework are as follows:

- Criterion 1: School Ethos
- Criterion 2: Leadership, Management and Communication
- Criterion 3: Teaching and Learning
- Criterion 4: School Results

1.8 Is the accreditation of independent schools optional or compulsory?

Accreditation is compulsory for independent schools that offer the curriculum leading to a qualification that is registered on the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF); currently the National Senior Certificate.

1.9 We are in the process of establishing a school. Do we start with accreditation or registration?

Your school must first be registered with the relevant provincial education department as an independent school (to obtain a "licence" to operate) before it is accredited by Umalusi.

1.10 Is it a problem if our teachers are not registered with the South African Council for Educators (SACE)?

Yes. According to Chapter 3 of the SACE Act of 2000, "no person may be employed as an educator by any employer unless the person is registered with the council". Put simply, it is illegal for principals or owners of schools to appoint teachers who are not registered with SACE. More importantly, Umalusi will not accredit schools whose teachers are not registered with SACE.

1.11 Does Umalusi accredit private providers of curriculum material, including teaching and learning aids?

No – Umalusi accredits private education institutions that are offering a qualification that is registered on the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework (GFETQSF); currently the National Senior Certificate.

1.12 We have a combined school (i.e. primary and high schools). Do we have to apply for accreditation as one school or as separate schools?

If your combined school has one EMIS number, and one executive principal/head of institution or two principals, and is at one address, then you need to submit only one application with relevant sections for the primary and high schools.

However, if the primary and high schools have separate EMIS numbers and/or are on separate premises, then you have to submit and pay for two separate accreditation applications.

1.13 Are pre-schools required to apply for accreditation?

No. Only schools offering grades between 1 and 12 are required to apply for accreditation with Umalusi.

1.14 We have a small school with very few learners and staff members. Do we have to apply for accreditation like all other schools?

Yes. Independent schools that offer the curriculum leading to the National Senior Certificate are obliged to be accredited with Umalusi and to further comply with the monitoring and evaluation requirements of Umalusi.

1.15 Our school has moved to new premises since we applied for registration. How will that affect our accreditation application?

Accreditation is linked to the EMIS registration and registered physical address of the school. Therefore, if your school has one EMIS number but is operating at different physical addresses, you need to contact your provincial department of education to

ensure that the EMIS registration and registered physical address of the school are linked. If the school moves premises, once accredited, Umalusi must be informed within 14 days and an application for change of premises must be submitted to Umalusi within 30 days.

- 1.16 Will our school be registered as an examination centre even if it is not accredited by Umalusi?

No. In an effort to ensure full compliance with relevant legislation, Umalusi expects all public and accredited private assessment bodies to ensure that their exam centres are accredited. So, your independent school may not be registered as an exam centre if the school is not accredited by Umalusi.

- 1.17 Our school was granted 7 years "blanket accreditation" from 2013 to 2020. Are we required to do anything before 2020?

Yes. Schools with "blanket accreditation" are required to go through the full accreditation process at the time specified by Umalusi. Every school with "blanket accreditation" should by now have submitted a self-evaluation report. The outcome of the application for accreditation supersedes the "blanket accreditation". If your school has not submitted a self-evaluation report by now, then the "blanket accreditation" will no longer be valid, since your school has not adhered to the conditions of the "blanket accreditation",

Should a school not comply with the requirements, the school will be reported to the provincial education department and assessment body as "not compliant with Umalusi's processes", which means that the school will not be registered as an examination centre. The "blanket" accreditation may also be withdrawn.

Please contact the Evaluation and Accreditation unit to establish the requirements for your school.

- 1.18 Where can one view a list of accredited schools?

Accredited schools are listed on Umalusi's website. This information can be accessed at www.umalusi.org.za under "search Accredited Service Providers".
<https://www.umalusi-online.org.za/enquiries>

- 1.19 There are surely independent schools out there which are not accredited. Is Umalusi doing anything about them?

Yes. Umalusi is identifying unaccredited schools through the list of independent schools provided by the Provincial Education Departments and the Department of Basic Education. Should you be aware of any school that may not be registered or accredited please send its name and/or contact details to info@umalusi.org.za. Umalusi will alert the relevant Provincial Education Department accordingly.

- 1.20 How much do we have to pay for the accreditation application?

A full schedule of fees is indicated on page 6 of the "Open Letter to Applicants – Independent Schools", which is available on the Umalusi website: www.umalusi.org.za.

1.21 Are schools offered any discounts on the accreditation fees?

There is a rebate in place for the self-evaluation and site visit fees, however there are a number of factors that will be taken into consideration before a rebate is approved to a school; factors such as whether the school qualifies for a subsidy or not, if the school is registered as a non-profit organisation, the annual fee income, etc. Schools must apply for a rebate at the time of submitting the online Letter of Intent to apply for accreditation.

1.22 Our school has reservations about evaluators seeing our confidential documents such as audited financial statements.

Appointed evaluators are required to sign a code of ethics and oath of secrecy. Furthermore, evaluators/moderators are strictly monitored during the evaluation process.

1.23 Who evaluates our self-evaluation and monitoring reports?

Self-evaluation and monitoring reports are evaluated by qualified and experienced evaluators and subject specialists who are appointed and trained by Umalusi for that purpose.

1.24 Can our school ask an education consultant to compile our self-evaluation report or to develop school policies for us?

Although it is obviously the prerogative of schools to use consultants in portfolio and/or policy development, it is Umalusi's considered view that policies compiled by consultants do not always provide an opportunity for staff members and learners at the school to participate actively in their development. Subsequently, it is unlikely for staff members to take full ownership of the processes of policy implementation, monitoring and review. In the main, Umalusi believes that an increased role of consultants limits the entrenchment of an internal culture of quality management.

1.25 Can we use generic policies of our association in order to support our compliance with the accreditation criteria?

Yes, but they should be customised to suit the specific context of your school.

1.26 How would Umalusi know if the required policies and procedures were not merely developed for the sole purpose of submission and that they don't necessarily inform/guide practice at the school?

In order to ensure that submitted policies and procedures guide the actual day-to-day operations at the school, Umalusi conducts verification site visits. The main focus of the site visit is to ascertain whether schools have evidence of policy implementation, monitoring and review of the policies they submitted as part of their portfolio of evidence.

1.27 Our school's internal policies are not documented, but are known to all staff members, learners and parents. Is it really important that they should be documented?

Yes. Policy documentation will ensure consistent and effective implementation, monitoring, review and general improvement of their effectiveness.

1.28 How do we know that the evidence we provide will sufficiently support our compliance with the criteria?

Quality Promotion meetings are held across the provinces during the course of the year to assist schools on the evidence required for the self-evaluation report, and what to expect during the site verification visit.

1.29 Surely, our narrative should be sufficient to support our compliance with the accreditation criteria?

No. Narratives serve to explain what the school perceives to be its strengths and weaknesses in relation to the compliance criteria. Compliance is mainly determined by the relevance and adequacy of supporting evidence provided by the school, which can be confirmed through observation of the actual implementation of the policies.

1.30 Can the primary school and high schools (of a combined school) get different accreditation decisions from Umalusi?

If the primary and high school make an application as a combined school with one EMIS number and the whole school is on the same premises, there will be one outcome for the whole school. If the primary and high school apply for accreditation separately, then there can be different accreditation decisions for each.

2. Site visits

2.1 Our school has just participated / is participating in a site visit conducted by our association. Is it necessary to also participate in an Umalusi site visit?

Yes. Accreditation by Umalusi is a legislative requirement for schools offering the curriculum leading to the National Senior Certificate and is granted by Umalusi to independent schools that participate actively in its quality assurance initiatives and meet the minimum standards in each of the criteria for accreditation.

2.2 The independent school sector is fairly competitive. Why should our school be site visited by principals or senior teachers from other independent schools?

Schools are always informed prior to the site visit about their site evaluators thus the schools are given an opportunity to express their unhappiness with any of the evaluation personnel Umalusi assigns to the school. Also, site evaluators and team leaders are made to sign relevant documents to ensure that they conduct themselves ethically. Furthermore, it is Umalusi and not the site evaluator that makes the final accreditation decision.

2.3 How experienced and qualified are Umalusi's evaluators and subject specialists?

The evaluators and subject specialists who are appointed by Umalusi are highly experienced and suitably qualified in the education field, including educationists, school heads and senior teachers. Appointed evaluators and subject specialists further undergo specialised training by Umalusi in the accreditation processes.

2.4 Our school was visited by Umalusi. Will there be another visit?

There may be another visit to verify further evidence or evidence subsequently submitted if your school is granted a "window period" to meet specific conditions within a given period, or receives an outcome of provisional accreditation. There may also be a visit as part of the monitoring process. Umalusi may also visit a school again if there is a complaint lodged by learners, parents, a member of the public or any government department.

3. Monitoring

3.1 How will Umalusi monitor the compliance of schools that are accredited?

With the gazetted policy and regulations on the criteria for the quality assurance, accreditation and monitoring of independent schools and private assessment bodies, schools that meet the minimum standards for accreditation are no longer granted 7 years accreditation but accreditation. With that, the approach for monitoring will be differentiated. As a minimum, schools will be required to submit a biennial monitoring report.

3.2 Is it compulsory to submit biennial monitoring reports?

Yes. Accredited independent schools are required to submit biennial monitoring reports in order to maintain their accreditation status. Umalusi may withdraw the accreditation of schools which fail to submit their biennial monitoring reports.

3.3 Are schools expected to pay a fee every time they submit a monitoring report?

Schools are required to pay an accreditation fee every 2 years post accreditation. However, should Umalusi be required to follow up on schools which fail to meet the monitoring requirements, an extra fee may be charged.

3.4 What happens to schools which do not submit their monitoring reports to Umalusi?

Their accreditation status will be reviewed and consequently the school's accreditation may be withdrawn. Such schools will be warned about the implication of their failure to maintain their accreditation status. Furthermore, the accreditation status of schools is regularly communicated to accredited assessment bodies and provincial education departments. Schools that fail to maintain their accreditation status may have their registration status reviewed by provincial education departments and their exam centre registration status withdrawn by the assessment body on the recommendation of Umalusi. The SASA, 1996 provides for the registration and withdrawal of registration of independent schools.

4. General

- 4.1 As far as we are concerned we comply with all the accreditation criteria but our accreditation letter says we are not fully compliant.

To address this, compare the evidence provided by your school with Umalusi's evidence requirements. You may address queries to the Manager of the independent schools' sub-unit at Umalusi. Schools which do not meet the minimum requirements for accreditation at the first presentation of the report to the Accreditation Committee of Council are granted a "window period" within which to meet specific conditions.

Together with the letter advising you of the outcome of your application, you will receive an indication of any conditions which must still be met in order to be granted accreditation. Those items must be attended to and evidence of meeting those conditions must be submitted to Umalusi, together with the required fee. Failure to submit evidence and pay the required fee will automatically result in an outcome of "no accreditation".

Please note that at the time of review, all the accreditation conditions must still be met. Therefore, if standards drop from the time of the initial site visit, that will be taken into account in determining the outcome of the school's application for accreditation, even if the item was not specified in the "conditions to be met for accreditation".

There is a fee payable for evaluation of evidence submitted in compliance of the conditions to be met. The fee is indicated on the schedule of fees in the "Open Letter to Applicants – Independent Schools" on the Umalusi website: www.umalusi.org.za
The fees are revised on an annual basis.

- 4.2 Is Umalusi doing anything about what may be called "monitoring overload"?

In its ongoing meetings with provincial education departments, Umalusi discusses the need for alignment of registration and accreditation requirements and processes with a view to eliminating areas of duplication.

- 4.3 Is there an appeal process if we don't agree with the final outcome of our application?

In terms of the Umalusi appeal process, a request for an appeal must be submitted within 10 working days of receipt of the outcome of the accreditation application, indicating detailed reasons for the appeal. Appeals must be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer and emailed to Mary.Malia@umalusi.org.za and Gugulethu.Nkambule@umalusi.org.za

Payment of the required fee must be made before an appeal is considered. The cost of the appeal will be determined by the nature of the appeal. Should the finding of the appeal be in favour of the appellant, the fee paid will be refunded to the applicant.

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