

For immediate release:

10 October 2019

Umalusi approves the writing of the 2019 matric examinations

Umalusi, the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, has granted approval to various assessment bodies to administer the oncoming end-of-year examinations. The Council has conducted a thorough assessment of the readiness of the basic education system to manage and conduct the 2019 national examinations. To this end, the Council is generally satisfied that all assessment bodies are ready to undertake this massive task.

In the past few months, public and independent assessment bodies have worked hard to ensure that their examination systems comply with Umalusi's policy and directives regarding the administration, management and conduct of examinations. As a Quality Council, Umalusi's role is to monitor and verify the work of public assessment bodies - Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) – and private assessment bodies - Independent Examinations Board (IEB), the South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute (SACAI) and Benchmark Assessment Agency (BAA).

In terms of the National Senior Certificate (NSC), also known informally as 'matric', the 2019 examinations administered by DBE will be written by approximately **629 197** full-time and approximately **122 471** part-time candidates with a total of approximately **751 668** candidates - this is a decrease of more than 40 000 candidates compared to 2018. These examinations will take place at more than **6 900** centres across the provinces. On the other hand, IEB has registered **11 839** full-time candidates across the country and **840** part-time candidates at **215 full-time** examination centres

including one (1) in Mozambique, seven (7) in Namibia and six (6) in Eswatini. SACAI has registered **2 073** part-time candidates and 570 repeat candidates with a total of **2 643** candidates at **77** examination centres.

Umalusi focuses on the following 8 areas as part of its quality assurance of assessment regime: management, registration of candidates and examination centres, school-based assessment, printing, packaging and distribution of question papers, conduct of examinations, marker selection and appointment of marking personnel, systems for the capturing of marks and management of examination irregularities. Umalusi appreciates the effort made by DBE and provincial education departments (PEDs) to put tight security systems in place to ensure that the integrity of examinations is not compromised. The PEDs also continue to introduce innovative ideas to address identified gaps in the system and this augurs well for the improvement of the system in general.

However, the audit conducted by Umalusi officials has highlighted with great concern evidence of shortage of markers in key subjects with high enrolments at the time of the audit in the following provinces: Northern Cape (Agricultural Sciences Afrikaans markers), Western Cape (History Paper 2), and Eastern Cape (English First Additional Language, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences and Afrikaans markers). While contingency plans have been put in place to address these shortages in the interim period, this matter requires the urgent attention of all affected provincial departments. Furthermore, there are high levels of vacancy rates in critical areas within examinations directorates at the following PEDs: Limpopo, Northern Cape, Mpumalanga, Free State, KwaZulu Natal, North West and the Eastern Cape. Nevertheless, PEDs have put measures in place such as allowing available staff to work overtime to mitigate the shortage of staff.

When addressing the media, the CEO of Umalusi, Dr Mafu Rakometsi, gave Umalusi's position regarding the proposed General Education Certificate (GEC) by DBE. He said, "In principle, Umalusi supports the idea of a GEC provided it is properly understood as a transitional qualification rather than an

exit qualification. One of the advantages of the GEC is that it could provide valuable national data to gauge the performance of our education system. However, Umalusi will firstly evaluate the GEC qualification and then issue a formal statement on the outcome of that process.”

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