

For immediate release:

30 October 2020

Umalusi approves the writing of the combined June and November 2020 matric examinations

Umalusi, the Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training, has granted approval to private and public assessment bodies to administer the combined June and November 2020 national examinations for the National Senior Certificate (NSC). The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a peculiar academic year in which assessment bodies were compelled to reschedule their mid-year national examinations to November 2020.

This means that for the first time, June and November candidates will be combined to form part of the same cohort. Thus, making it the largest cohort to sit for national examinations in recent times. This has undoubtedly put a strain on the entire education system, including Umalusi's capacity to conduct quality assurance of assessment. However, with proper planning, the challenges presented by COVID-19 are not insurmountable.

Umalusi conducts quality assurance of assessment to ensure that assessment leading to the award of certificates in schools, adult education centres and technical and vocational education and training colleges is of the required standard. This is in order to ensure that the certificates issued by Umalusi are credible. To this end, the Council has conducted a thorough assessment of the readiness of the basic education system to manage and conduct the combined June and November 2020 national examinations. Therefore, the Council is generally satisfied that all assessment bodies are ready to undertake this massive task despite COVID-19.

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 NSC examinations. As a Quality Council, Umalusi has fulfilled its role in monitoring and

verifying the work of the following assessment bodies - Department of Basic Education (DBE), Independent Examinations Board (IEB), and the South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute (SACAI).

The registration of DBE candidates for the combined June and November 2020 examinations has been successfully completed by all provinces, and the national registration outlook as provided by DBE is as follows:

NSC (November 2020)	
Full-Time	616 021
Part-Time	113 846
Total	729 867
NSC (June 2020)	
Full-Time	155 935
Part-Time	5 164
Total	161 099
Senior Certificate (amended)	
Part-Time	167 733
Grand Total	1 058 699

DBE's NSC examinations will be written at approximately 1 406 examination centres across the country and marking will be conducted at about 215 marking centres. IEB has registered 13 201 NSC candidates who will write at 246 examination centres across the country. SACAI has registered 2 871 part-time NSC candidates who will write at 72 centres across the country.

This year, Umalusi adopted a Risk Management Based (RMB) approach as its strategy to evaluate the level of preparedness of assessment bodies to conduct the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations. The rationale behind the use of the strategy was to enable Umalusi to identify risks that may compromise the delivery of credible examinations on time, and advise the affected assessment bodies accordingly.

As part of the RMB approach, Umalusi focuses on the following eight areas to fulfil its quality assurance of assessment mandate: 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 received three sets of reports in relation to the DBE's state of readiness for the combined June and November 2020 NSC examinations:

- a. DBE review and support visits reports: review meetings were conducted remotely through an online platform,
- b. DBE self-evaluation reports: state of readiness presentations were received as well as self-evaluation reports,
- c. DBE verification reports: evaluation presentations were received.

The three sets of reports were instrumental in providing useful information in the finalisation of the State of Readiness report for 2020 in light of challenges presented by COVID-19.

As the assessment body with the largest cohort of candidates, the findings of the quality assurance process for DBE can be summarised as follows:

- a. Staff shortages in examination sections/units due to vacant positions were identified, however, the Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) put measures in place to ensure that examination deliverables are not compromised.
- b. The 2020 registration of candidates has been finalised and final enrolment information was made available. The PEDs are ready to provide registered candidates with admission letters for the 2020 November examination cycle.
- c. The question papers for 2020 November examinations have been moderated and were approved on time and consignments for their printing were also managed successfully by the DBE.
- d. All PEDs commenced with the selection and appointment of marking personnel later than usual due to the lockdown restrictions. However, all PEDs have finalised the appointments and Umalusi verification of appointed markers is underway and will be completed prior to the start of the writing of the examinations in November 2020.
- e. Audits of examination centres to host the combined June and November examination are finalised in all the 9 PEDs.
- f. The number of marking centres were increased across the PEDs due to the number of scripts expected from the combined examinations and also to adhere to the social distancing requirements.

Umalusi appreciates the effort made by all assessment bodies in putting tight security systems in place to ensure that the integrity of national examinations is not compromised despite the trying COVID-19 circumstances. 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.

When addressing the media, the CEO of Umalusi, Dr Mafu Rakometsi, reiterated Umalusi's position regarding the mooted 'trimming down' of question papers by stating the following: "while we are all concerned about the difficulties caused by COVID-19, Umalusi does not advocate for the downgrading or trimming down of the quality of examinations. In particular, tinkering with the content of question papers – we do not support that line of thinking."

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