

Makoya

Official Newsletter of Umalusi

June 2021

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UMALUSI



Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training

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From the Editor's Pen

Lucky Ditaunyane

I am honoured to present the latest edition of Makoya, Umalusi's official newsletter. This edition comes at a time when we are reeling from the devastating effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. By now, many people have lost loved ones as a result of COVID-19 or know of someone who has. We are living in uncertain and difficult times.

Such times are not new. In the early 20th century the world endured two dreadful wars. Since the last few decades of the 20th century, the world has suffered from the effects of two pandemics, HIV/AIDS and, most recently, COVID-19. As we continue to make sense of the 'new normal' precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we remain hopeful that this too shall pass. The work of Umalusi as the Quality Council in the General and Further Education and Training sector must continue, despite the constraints imposed on us by the pandemic; good quality education is the cornerstone of a progressive society. Where there is a will, there is a way.

In this edition, the work of two quality assurance of assessment units, namely, School Qualifications (QAA: SQ) and Post-School Qualifications (QAA: PSQ) is featured. These units play a pivotal role in fulfilling one of Umalusi's most important legislative mandates, namely, the quality assurance of the entire value chain of the conduct, management and administration of national examinations in the General and Further Education and Training sector.



From the CEO's Desk

Dr Mafu S Rakometsi

As we come to the end of the first quarter of the 2021/22 financial year, I am pleased to report that Umalusi continues to honour its obligations and deliver on its legislative mandate as the Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training in South Africa. We do not take this responsibility lightly as our children's future depends, in part, on how well we undertake the task entrusted to us by the government. The quality of services and products offered by role players in government remains a critical catalyst for social justice in our country.

As a public entity, Umalusi is required to fulfil its mandate for the betterment of the education system in this country. That said, the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly compelled us to think creatively about our work and to find new ways of doing things. In our determination to cope with the challenges presented by the pandemic, the organisation has introduced new modes of operation to maintain focus on its strategic outcomes and deliverables. Primarily, technology has taken centre stage in our endeavour to fulfil our quality assurance mandate. This includes conducting internal and external meetings online whenever possible.

I am delighted to report that after a protracted 2020/21 academic year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, at a media briefing on 15 February 2021 Umalusi Council approved the release of the results of the national examinations. For the first time, the Assessment Standards Committee of Council conducted the standardisation of results on online platforms. All documents required for the standardisation process were shared via secure, cloud-based media. This meant that ASC members could connect from remote areas and perform the organisation's work from their own homes.

As we continue to navigate the uncharted terrain occasioned by the pandemic, we will take care that we do justice to our national duty and use the resources entrusted to us wisely. Ultimately, we wish to do everything we can to contribute to the development and growth of our country. In the light of this, I look forward to an ever more challenging but successful year. Umalusi will continue to strive to achieve its vision as a trusted authority in fostering high education standards in General and Further Education and Training. I trust that you will enjoy reading this edition of Makoya, which covers some aspects of our quality assurance of assessment mandate.



Exploring the feasibility of conducting quality assurance processes on online platforms

Johannes Ngomane



Umalusi cannot afford to abdicate its responsibility of ensuring that the NSC examinations and assessments are quality assured in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdown restrictions.



Introduction and background

On 11 March 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic. As with other pandemics before it, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the lives and livelihoods of millions of global citizens. Huber and Helm (2020) observe that the crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus has had far-reaching effects in the field of education, as schools in many countries around the world were closed immediately in 2020. It was this closure of schools in particular that prompted the world to rethink how to continue operating under the subsequent hard lockdowns. Although some parts of the world had already migrated to digital platforms, the pandemic strengthened resolve to move with speed to a digitally transformed world. Schools and all their related stakeholders were thus compelled to move to digital platforms as the new normal. This article provides an idea of what conducting quality assurance online entails and the extent to which the current systems could be adapted to online platforms.

Quality assuring the National Senior Certificate Examinations and Assessment in the COVID-19 pandemic environment.

As a stakeholder in the field of education in South Africa, Umalusi is mandated by the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance (GENFETQA) Act (No. 58 of 2001, as amended in 2008) to develop and manage its sub-framework of qualifications, to quality assure assessment at exit points, to approve the release of examination results and to certify candidate (NSC) achievements. Umalusi quality assures the National Senior Certificate Examinations and assessment processes of the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) and the South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute (SACAI).

The quality assurance of the NSC examinations and assessment processes involves the moderation of question papers and of school-based assessment and practical assessment tasks, the monitoring of the state of readiness to conduct examinations, the audit of appointed markers, the monitoring of the writing of examinations, marking guideline discussion meetings, and the marking of examinations, and the verification of marking, standardisation and resulting, and certification.

Two of the assessment bodies quality assured by Umalusi use off-site models of external moderation while the third uses an on-site model. Both methods have their advantages and disadvantages. The COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and safety protocols have made such everyday activities challenging. The question that arises is how to digitise these processes

without compromising the quality assurance process itself. In this regard, Abdous (2009) argues that “it is hard to isolate this process [quality assurance] from the contextual factors influencing it”. In other words, the test of the feasibility of transforming our current systems and processes to online platforms is whether contextual factors influencing the quality assurance process have an effect on the process of digital transformation. Some requirements for successful digital transformation of quality assurance of the moderation of question papers, for instance, include the following: legislative framework to direct the process;

- Policies and guidelines to help all those involved in the implementation process;
- The availability of secure technology (both software and hardware);
- The availability of personnel with the ability to use the technology;

- A specially designed system to guarantee the safety and security of question papers;
- Buy-in by assessment bodies.

What is the way forward?

Umalusi cannot afford to abdicate its responsibility of ensuring that the NSC examinations and assessments are quality assured in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdown restrictions. An online system must be developed and implemented as soon as possible if the currency of the NSC is to be maintained. Such an exercise will require rigorous and appropriate research by professionals in the fields of both education and information technology (IT). In addition, all role players in the quality assurance process should be willing to readily adapt and implement an envisaged online system.

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Quality Assurance of GETC: ABET processes under the COVID-19 pandemic

Frank Chinyamakobvu

“As the country entered Alert level 5, all three assessment bodies were forced to cancel the June 2020 GETC: ABET examinations. This was done in compliance with restrictions pronounced by the President to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.”

The quality assurance of assessment of the General Education and Training Certificate: Adult Basic Education and Training (GETC: ABET) qualification is located in the Quality Assurance of Assessment: Post School Qualifications (QAA-PSQ) unit. The GETC: ABET qualification comprises a total of 26 learning areas (LA) offered by three assessment bodies: the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), a public assessment body that assesses all 26 LAs available in the GETC: ABET qualification, and the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) and the Benchmark Assessment Agency (BAA), both private assessment bodies. Depending on the number of learners who register to sit the GETC: ABET examination, the two private assessment bodies offer a maximum of seven LAs. It is important to note that Umalusi quality assures all assessments offered by these three assessment bodies.

In 2020, as most countries worldwide, South Africa declared a national lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant that Umalusi had to change the way in which quality assurance processes were conducted. The availability of technology to deal with the challenges brought about by the pandemic made it possible to perform various quality assurance activities online.

Quality assurance by its very nature is a specialised skill. In Umalusi's endeavour to execute its role effectively in the education and training sector in South Africa, it enlists the services of contract workers to moderate

assessments to ensure that they are fair, valid and reliable. Umalusi conducts training to ensure that moderators are familiar with the expected outcomes of the qualification. Under normal circumstances, moderator training would be conducted face-to-face. As more information about Covid-19 and its transmission through human contact became available, Umalusi was obliged to reschedule its training workshops and conduct training online instead.

As the country entered Alert level 5, all three assessment bodies were forced to cancel the June 2020 GETC: ABET examinations. This was done in compliance with restrictions pronounced by the President to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The June 2020 examinations were merged with the November 2020 examinations. Those candidates who were unable sit for the June examinations were allowed to join the cohort that would write in November 2020.

Realising the effectiveness of online teaching, assessment bodies requested student portfolios of assessment so that they could be internally moderated. In all instances, Umalusi was apprised by the DHET of its plans for the management of internal assessments. Similarly, private assessment bodies shared their plans, which were required to be consistent with Covid-19 regulations.

The lockdown required individuals to take certain precautions, such as observing social distancing rules, wearing masks, keeping rooms well ventilated, avoiding crowds, washing hands on a regular basis and

coughing into a bent elbow or tissue. Regulations did not permit large gatherings, with the result that Umalusi had to cancel the external moderation of oral language assessments.

The DHET selected a total of eight subjects, based on high enrolments, for on-site standardisation of marking guideline discussions. This decision was influenced by the fact that the country was on Alert Level 1. Although the eight subject representatives met at a central venue for face-to-face discussions, the meetings were broadcast to all nine provinces to allow provincial representatives to take part in the discussions. Provincial representatives were required to cascade the decisions taken during online discussions to all markers in their respective provinces. The standardisation of marking meetings for the remaining 18 subjects were hosted online without participants meeting in person. Discussions for these learning areas were led by the national chief markers and internal moderators. Umalusi's external moderators attended the standardisation of marking guideline meetings to monitor the proceedings, to provide guidance where needed, to make final decisions. Subsequently, Umalusi

approved the final marking guidelines for marking in virtual discussions for all learning areas.

Marking was conducted during Alert Level 3 and plans were adjusted accordingly. All markers met at a central venue where strict Covid-19 protocols were observed. Umalusi moderators were sent to various meeting venues to conduct the verification of internal assessment and examination scripts. Meetings were also held at central venues by the two private assessment bodies, the BAA and IEB.

However, unlike the IEB, which combined the standardisation of the marking guideline activity with the marking of learner scripts and the internal moderation of site-based assessment portfolios, the BAA separated these three processes.

All the assessment bodies are to be commended on the way in which they conducted the quality assurance processes amid the Covid-19 lockdown. Personnel from all sectors – learning centres, colleges and assessment bodies and the quality assurer – are to be congratulated on their commitment to ensuring that learners were supported.



Appointment of markers: What has Umalusi got to do with it?

Doctor Phokwani



Umalusi conducts an audit of appointed markers to ensure that sufficient and competent markers are appointed in order to safeguard the credibility of marking.



Towards the end of each academic year, Umalusi hosts a media briefing to pronounce on the state of readiness of assessment bodies to conduct the final examinations. In most instances, mention is made of the appointment of qualified individuals to mark the examinations, and of any shortages of markers that are envisaged.

The question is, therefore, what is the role of Umalusi in the appointment of markers. In 2019, in his report on the state of readiness of assessment bodies to conduct, administer and manage the 2019 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Umalusi indicated that in some parts of the country there was a shortage of markers for the Afrikaans versions of Grade 12 subjects. This sparked considerable interest in the media, and Umalusi was inundated with calls from individuals offering their services to mark the papers in question. Unfortunately, Umalusi's role and responsibilities do not include the appointment of markers.

In 2020, following the merging of the June and the November 2020 NSC examinations, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) again anticipated a shortage of markers, because of an increase in numbers of candidates registered to write the combined examinations. In order to avoid this, the DBE invoked section D.4.3 of the Personnel Administrative measure, which reads:

In respect of an examination paper where no suitable candidate can be recruited with the set minimum

qualifications or experience, the HoD concerned may approve the appointment of a suitable candidate with other appropriate post school qualifications or with less than the required experience after consultation in this regard with the relevant teacher unions.

In order to operationalise this, the Director General: DBE advised provincial education departments (PED) to relax the selection criteria for appointment by considering teachers who were currently teaching Grade 11, provided they had taught the subject at Grade 12 level for at least two years within the last five years. However, in the case of Languages Paper 2 (Literature), the applicants would be required to have taught the Grade 12 prescribed works examined in 2020.

This was viewed in some quarters as a lowering of standards in the marking of scripts, and calls were made for Umalusi to intervene. This again pointed to a misunderstanding of Umalusi's mandate as far as the appointment of markers is concerned. This article is thus intended to clarify Umalusi's mandate, roles and responsibilities in the appointment of markers.

Section 3(4)(l) of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (No. 27 of 1996) makes provision for the determination of national education policy regarding curriculum frameworks, core syllabi and education programmes, learning standards, examinations and the certification of qualifications. This provision is subject to the stipulations of any law establishing a national qualifications framework (NQF) or a certifying or

accrediting body. As quality council for the General and Further Education and Training NQF sub-framework, Umalusi is mandated in terms of section 27(i) of the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 (Act No. 67 of 2008) to:

- develop and implement policy for quality assurance;
- ensure the integrity and credibility of quality assurance; and
- ensure that such quality assurance as is necessary for the General and Further Education and Training sub-framework is undertaken.

The recruitment, selection and appointment of markers is the responsibility of the assessment bodies. The criteria for the appointment of teachers for examination-related work, including marking, are contained in the Personnel Administration Measures (PAM), determined by the Minister of Basic Education in terms of the Employment of Educators' Act, 1998 (Act No. 76 of 1998) and the Regulations in terms of the Act (Annexure K) pertaining to the conduct, administration and management of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination. Appointed markers are charged with the responsibility of marking the NSC examinations Grade 12 examination scripts, a qualification certified by Umalusi. Umalusi therefore has a direct interest in knowing who these markers are and whether they possess the necessary qualifications and experience that will translate into the required knowledge and skills to perform the duty at hand.

Umalusi conducts an audit of appointed markers to ensure that sufficient and competent markers are appointed in order to safeguard the credibility of marking. In its drive to achieve this ideal, Umalusi audits the selection and appointment of markers to ensure that assessment bodies comply with the NSC regulations as stipulated in Section 4.1 of the PAM, and that personnel with the appropriate skills and experience are appointed. But what does this have to do with standards and quality assurance?

The marking of learners' responses demands that markers possess specialised competencies (knowledge,

skills, values and attitudes) in the specific subject; if not, learners may be unduly advantaged or disadvantaged. If incorrect decisions are made in the appointment of marking personnel and these remain unchecked, this could have dire consequences for the credibility and integrity of the NSC qualification, of which Umalusi has oversight.

Thus, the role of Umalusi in the appointment of markers is one of oversight. Umalusi audits the appointments made against criteria set out in the PAM; when appointing markers, assessment bodies should subject their processes to these criteria to ensure that they are fair. This is in keeping with Umalusi's mandate to ensure the integrity and credibility of quality assurance. Every quality assurance process or mechanism put in place by an assessment body should be subjected to external moderation or audit, which in this case is quality assurance by Umalusi. In this way, Umalusi satisfies itself that suitable personnel are appointed in appropriate positions. If correct appointments are made, Umalusi can be assured of consistent marking standards across assessment bodies, manifested in limited marking errors across the assessment bodies.

Once the appointed markers have been audited, Umalusi makes pronouncements on the process; these statements cover issues of compliance with the relevant policy prescripts. Following Umalusi's report on cases of non-compliance with requirements, assessment bodies are required to intervene and ensure that suitable personnel are appointed. The assessment bodies are given an opportunity to correct the identified issues prior to the commencement of the marking process. Umalusi monitors the marking process to confirm whether these concerns have been addressed. If an assessment body is still found to be non-compliant, it will be issued with directives for compliance and improvement and will be directed to submit an intervention plan detailing intervention strategies and actions to address these directives and to prevent a recurrence. This process is intended to ensure compliance and improve the quality and standard of marking processes.



Moderating the conduct of integrated summative assessment tasks/practical assessment tasks (ISAT/PAT) in 2020 amid COVID-19

Ashley Naicker



This year, Umalusi has introduced intervention measures to mitigate some of the challenges experienced in 2020, both those caused by COVID-19 and other recurring problems.



The National Certificate (Vocational) [(NC(V)] qualification assesses vocational subjects using an internal assessment component and an external assessment component, both with equal weighting in the final subject mark. The internal assessment is made up of five Internal Continuous Assessment (ICASS) Tasks, two of which are Practical Assessment Tasks (PAT). The two PATs contribute 50% to the ICASS mark and the three remaining tasks contribute 50%.

In the case of vocational subjects, the external assessment comprises the Integrated Summative Assessment Tasks (ISAT) and an external examination. The two PATs contribute 25% to the final subject mark while the ISAT accounts for 15% of the final subject mark. Combined, the ISAT and PAT contribute 40% to the final subject mark, as illustrated in the table below:

Component	Weighting Per Component	Task	Weighting Per Task	ISAT/PAT
Internal Assessment	50%	2 Tests	10%	
		2 PATs	25%	25%
		1 Internal Examination	15%	
External Assessment	50%	ISAT	15%	15%
		External Examination	35%	
TOTAL			100%	40%

The ISAT and the PAT evaluate the practical skills of students through their performance of assessment tasks that simulate a workplace or real-life process and/or product. The ISAT is completed in phases throughout the year, over a specific period, or as a once-off task, depending on the nature of the subject. Consequently, in order to maintain credibility and uphold set standards, Umalusi quality assures the conduct of the ISAT and the two PATs at a sample of sites where the NC(V) programme is offered.

The year 2020 brought the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had an impact on all spheres in South Africa. The education sector has been one of the hardest hit. On 26 March 2020, the Disaster Management Act: Declaration of a National State of Disaster: COVID-19 (coronavirus) was legislated. This led to a national lockdown with serious

implications for all quality assurance processes planned by the Quality Assurance of Assessment – Post School Qualifications (QAA: PSQ) unit of Umalusi. While most quality assurance processes were realigned from onsite and face-to-face activities to offsite and online platforms, the moderation of the conduct of ISAT/PAT could not be reorganised. The practical nature of these assessments demands on-site visits and a different quality assurance approach.

During October 2020, Umalusi negotiated and deployed 40 moderators to moderate the conduct of ISAT in 41 subjects at 62 sites across the nine provinces. Each moderator was sent to one or two sites. Umalusi sampled sites that had not been visited before, sites that had not been visited in the recent past (three years) and those that required a follow-up visit based on areas of non-compliance during previous moderation visits. All moderators were duly trained to observe mandatory COVID-19 protocols and to verify whether sites were complying with all standard operating procedures for the prevention, containment, and management of COVID-19.

The moderation of the conduct of ISAT/PAT was conducted onsite by:

- a. Verifying the purchase and stock of ISAT/PAT equipment and consumables through scrutiny of purchase orders, stock registers and stock at hand;
- b. Confirming the suitability of workshops used to conduct the ISAT/PAT and checking whether sanitisers and social distancing markings were visible;
- c. Verifying the authenticity of candidates' evidence and/or final product of the ISAT/PAT using non-surgical gloves, sanitisers and observing social distancing; and
- d. Conducting observations and interviews with a sample of candidates on a section/task of the ISAT/PAT to verify their applied competence and to ensure that social distancing and other Covid-19 protocols had been followed.

The successful implementation of the PAT/ISAT depends on thorough planning and preparation, taking into consideration the availability of resources/facilities, the number of students, staffing requirements, staff competency, procurement procedures and timing of tasks. However, the moderators' reports revealed that colleges were beset by challenges of planning, execution and assessment of ISAT/PAT. Procurement of equipment and consumables was particularly difficult during national lockdown.

There were also difficulties with staffing at some sites, where staff members with comorbidities were required to remain home until further notice. In addition, some staff members who had tested positive for the virus were forced to remain in quarantine for 14 days or longer. Consequently, there were not enough staff members to carry the workload of ensuring the continuity of the conduct of ISAT/PAT. In particular, the closure and re-opening of colleges had a severe impact on their operations. Contingency planning and rescheduling of the conduct of ISAT/PAT to ensure their completion during the 2020 calendar year occurred at all sites visited.

Moderators observed the following contingency measures adopted at certain sites:

- a. Sites improvised by arranging for group work where individual work would have been required under normal circumstances;
- b. Modification of the specifications of the ISAT/PAT to complete them on time; and
- c. Students accessing the computer laboratories in small groups in order to observe social distancing. This raised difficulties, however, as it took much longer for the entire group to complete the tasks.

Despite the difficult circumstances brought on by COVID-19 and the accompanying challenges, the national lockdown also presented opportunities for most sites to adapt and implement contingency measures without compromising the completion or integrity of the conduct of ISAT/PAT in 2020.

This year, Umalusi has introduced intervention measures to mitigate some of the challenges experienced in 2020, both those caused by COVID-19 and other recurring problems. Sites that did not comply fully in 2020 have been sampled for the moderation of the conduct of ISAT/PAT. Umalusi moderators currently deployed to moderate ICASS, are instructed to verify the state of readiness of sites to conduct ISAT/PAT and to check whether viable contingency plans are in place in the event of stricter lockdowns. Umalusi moderators also interrogate the assessment body timetables to verify appropriate time allocation for ISAT/PAT and the timely procurement of ISAT/PAT equipment and consumables.

Bearing in mind the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Umalusi commends the DHET for its intervention strategies and welcomes its intention to review ISAT and PAT in order to adapt them to crises such as COVID-19 in the future.

Moderation of Internal Continuous Assessment (ICASS) during lockdown in 2020

Helen Koorzen



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The circumstances under which the ICASS were moderated in August 2020 were not ideal, Umalusi could nevertheless confirm that the standard of both tests was satisfactory.

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Internal continuous assessment (ICASS) forms part of the term mark for the NATED Report 190/191 Engineering Studies N2-N3 programme. It constitutes 40% of the final mark in all subjects. These assessments are internally set and managed by the colleges. Umalusi moderates the ICASS externally at TVET colleges and private colleges to ensure consistent standards in order to strengthen the credibility of the qualification

The NATED Report 190/191 Engineering Studies N2-N3 examinations are conducted three times a year. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown caused the April 2020 examinations to be postponed to August 2020. Under normal circumstances, the TVET sub-unit plans visits to colleges during each NATED Engineering trimester examination cycle to monitor and moderate the administration of ICASS. The sample of colleges depends on various factors such as irregularities confirmed during past examinations, colleges where ICASS moderation has not taken place, subjects in a particular province that have not been moderated or colleges where a follow-up visit was recommended by an external moderator during a previous visit. The sample includes both private and public colleges in as many provinces as possible in order to spread external moderators throughout the country.

The DHET ICASS Guidelines stipulate that Test One should be written during Weeks 2-4 and Test Two during

Weeks 5-8 of the academic calendar. Test One should cover 30% of the curriculum and Test Two should cover 75-80%. Umalusi plans its visits during weeks 9-10 to allow for the completion of the tests, marking, recording of marks and internal moderation by the colleges. An instrument (checklist) is used by Umalusi's external moderators to evaluate the standard of teaching and learning. The external moderators also record the physical and human resources available, view the internal assessment policies and lecturer files, and evaluate whether tasks have been moderated according to the set criteria. The DHET ICASS Guidelines also require that students at colleges complete both tests. In 2020, most colleges were able to ensure this. No college is permitted to administer examinations unless candidates have written both tests.

The introduction of COVID-19 regulations by the state, including the closing of provincial borders, meant that external moderators were unable to travel to visit colleges in August 2020. Umalusi therefore requested evidence from colleges in electronic format; instructional offerings and assessment files of lecturers and evidence from all students could thus not be included. Colleges were subsequently requested to submit the following:

- a. Approved assessment plans;
- b. A copy of the question paper and marking guideline for Test One and Test Two;

- c. Evidence that six (6) students had completed Test One and Test Two , and
- d. The mark sheets of all students registered for the specific instructional offering.

Fifteen colleges/campuses, from five provinces, submitted the above evidence to Umalusi in electronic format. This evidence was forwarded electronically to the appropriate moderators to evaluate and report on the standard of administration of the ICASS at college/campus level.

As the moderation was conducted offsite, some aspects could not be verified. Those aspects that were checked included:

- a. Development plan for ICASS Tasks;
- b. Content covered in tests;
- c. Cognitive demand and difficulty level of tests;
- d. Internal moderation of tests;
- e. Technical aspects of tests;
- f. Marking tools;
- g. Learner performance;

- h. Quality of marking; and
- i. Internal moderation of marking.

Improvements from the previous year were observed:

- a. There was a plan in place for the development of the assessment tasks at 87% of the sites, compared to 81% in 2019;
- b. The tasks were developed according to the plan/schedule of assessment at 73% of the sites, compared to 63% in 2019;
- c. Copies of previous question papers or sections from previous question papers were used as assessment tasks (tests) at only 53% of sites, compared to 75% in 2019; and
- d. The weighting and spread of content of topic(s) in both tests was appropriate at 87% of the sites, compared to 81% in 2019.

Although the circumstances under which the ICASS were moderated in August 2020 were not ideal, Umalusi could nevertheless confirm that the standard of both tests was satisfactory.



The silver lining of Covid-19: The 'new normal'

Nomaswazi Shabalala



Dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic has not been easy, and some have called it the “corona coaster”, but the new vocabulary has helped us to stay safe and informed during these frightening times.



A pandemic is defined as a disease prevalent throughout an entire country, continent, or the whole world. The loss of life and livelihood caused by the COVID-19 pandemic confirms this definition; to say that 2020 has been a difficult year would be an understatement.

How the pandemic defined 2020

Changes to the dictionary

The word “pandemic” was declared 2020’s Word of the Year as it defined the year. COVID-19 not only shaped our lives, but it also shaped our language, making the vocabulary of health professionals part of our day-to-day communication. The following words and expressions became familiar:

- PPE (personal protective equipment)
- comorbidities
- asymptomatic
- contact tracing
- flatten the curve
- frontliner
- isolation
- contagious
- lockdown
- quarantine
- social distancing

- super spreader
- epidemic
- pandemic
- ventilator

Dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic has not been easy, and some have called it the “corona coaster”, but the new vocabulary has helped us to stay safe and informed during these frightening times. While the trauma of this pandemic is undeniable, far-reaching and ongoing, there have been positive developments that deserve mention.

The new normal

On a positive note, COVID-19 has reminded us of the importance of good behaviour and habits we may have taken for granted over the years. Some of these are discussed below.

Personal health and hygiene

COVID-19 has taught us a new way of life, one in which we are more aware of personal health and hygiene. This includes regular handwashing, maintaining social distance and avoiding crowded places, coughing etiquette, respiratory hygiene, cleaner air, and the importance of mental health. These are all first lines of defence against COVID-19.

Behavioural changes

We have replaced physical contact when greeting one another with other forms of showing appreciation, and we have made a habit of wearing a mask. Healthy eating habits are encouraged to boost our immunity.

Working remotely

The global pandemic has demonstrated that we operate in a rapidly changing environment. Adapting to remote communication, monitoring, and virtual communication has become the 'new normal'. At Umalusi, successful online moderation of school-based assessment, oral and practical assessment tasks had not been envisaged before the pandemic. Virtual marking guideline discussion meetings and verification and auditing of appointed markers across assessment bodies and provincial education departments was also new to Umalusi. Although there are many advantages to face-to-face methods, Umalusi had great success with the online modality of quality assurance. This also resulted in significant budgetary savings for the organisation. We became more aware of:

- **Time management:** we learned to manage time more efficiently when working from home, and how to remain effective.
- **Discipline:** we worked efficiently without supervision.
- **Accountability:** we were accountable and responsible, reporting regularly to our supervisors on the work we had completed.

These activities became the order of the day. Nonetheless, there were technological difficulties in online meetings and in the quality assurance of certain processes. In future, we will strive to overcome these problems.

Empathy and respect

At all levels, the ability to engage empathically and respectfully with others at this time has developed, as we understand that we are all facing difficulties.

All of us have been affected in some way by COVID-19 and have been humbled and comforted by warm messages from family, friends and colleagues. This has made us more aware of the important things in life. Moreover, it has taught us to care for others in times of need.

From the new normal to a new future

It is hoped that our government will continue to strengthen the capacity of our healthcare systems and health facilities. Moreover, we look forward to the speedy vaccination of all South Africans. One lesson learnt from this pandemic is that caring, inclusive and regular communication contribute to improved understanding of individual responsibility and a greater willingness to adopt infection prevention practices as part of the new normal. This is a steppingstone to a new future.

Conclusion

We appreciate the precautions that management at Umalusi has taken to ensure that its employees are not exposed to danger, and to prevent the virus from spreading. Umalusi has provided its staff members with important COVID-19 information and resources such as masks and sanitisers. It is up to each one of us to ensure that the new behaviours we have adopted remain part of our everyday habits.

Talk to us

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