

Opening remarks by the CEO of Umalusi, Dr MS Rakometsi, at the media briefing to pronounce on the 2023 end of year national examination results, 15 January 2024, Lefokotsane Boardroom, Thuto-Mfundo Building, Umalusi, Pretoria

Acknowledgements

1. Thank you, Programme Director.
2. Let me acknowledge the presence of the following people:
 - Professor Yunus Ballim: Chairperson of Umalusi Council
 - Representatives of the four assessment bodies
 - Department of Basic Education (DBE)
 - Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)
 - Independent Examinations Board (IEB)
 - South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute (SACAI)
 - Umalusi Executive and Senior Managers
 - Journalists from different media houses
 - Ladies and gentlemen.
3. Good morning to you all.
4. I would like to firstly express our deep appreciation to all the media houses that are present here today. Your presence is a guarantee that the message of this briefing will reach everyone across the length and breadth of our country.

Welcome and purpose

5. Welcome to this media briefing organised to make a pronouncement on the 2023 end of year national examination results. These are the results of the examinations that were administered by the public and private assessment bodies between October and December 2023 in respect of the:
 - a) National Senior Certificate (NSC) – assessed by the Department of Basic Education (DBE); Independent Examinations Board (IEB), and South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute (SACAI),
 - b) National Certificate Vocational (NCV: L2 - L4) – assessed by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET),
 - c) NATED Report 190/191 (N2 - N3) – assessed by the DHET, and
 - d) General Education and Training Certificate: Adult Basic Education and Training (GETC: ABET) – assessed by the DHET, IEB and SACAI.

Briefly about colleagues who passed on

6. Before I get into the business of the day, let me use the opportunity to announce with great sadness the passing away of three colleagues who were giants in their own right in the assessment and quality assurance system of our country, South Africa. They are:
 - a) Dr Fred Calitz, who served as the Executive Officer of the South African Certification Council (SAFCERT), which was the forerunner to Umalusi, passed away on 20 October 2023.
 - b) Dr Morgan Naidoo, who served Umalusi as a member of the Assessment Standards Committee (ASC) during the term of the fifth Umalusi Council, that is 2018-2022. Previously, he was the Chief Director of Examinations in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.
 - c) Professor Peliwe Lolwana, the founding Chief Executive Officer of Umalusi passed away on 17 December 2023 and was buried on 22 December 2023. In conjunction with the Quality Councils and Wits REAL, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is

organising a memorial service to take place on 25 January 2024 at 14:00 - 16:00 at Wits University, in Johannesburg.

d) May their souls rest in eternal peace.

7. Another matter worth mentioning is that this is the last media briefing for Mrs Mary-Louise Madalane, Senior Manager for Quality Assurance of Assessment – School Qualifications Unit. She will be going on retirement in May 2024. We thank Mrs Madalane for the contribution that she has made to Umalusi in the various roles that she has played over the years.

An update on fake certificates

8. Programme Director, I find it necessary to provide the public with an update on the progress made in connection with the problem of selling and buying of fake and /or fraudulent certificates, something which was covered widely in the media over the last six months.
9. Since the State of Readiness Media Briefing held on 13 October 2023 during which we, amongst others, informed the public about the safeguards implemented to ensure the authenticity and credibility of Umalusi certificates, eleven (11) suspects have been arrested by the South African Police Service (SAPS) on different dates. The first two (2) suspects were arrested in Burgersfort in Limpopo on 27 October, one suspect was arrested in Pretoria in November, the next three (3) were arrested on 20 November, and the last five (5) were nabbed on 13 December 2023 again in Burgersfort, Limpopo.
10. On the other hand, the Hawks arrested an employee of the Department of Higher Education on 11 December 2023 for fraudulently issuing a diploma certificate for cash. The suspect has been charged with corruption and his court case has been postponed to 19 January 2024. That is in five days from now.

11. Police investigations are ongoing and Umalusi will continue to work closely with the law enforcement agencies in whatever way possible to ensure that the scammers or fraudsters are made to face the full might of the law.
12. Umalusi would like to reassure the public that its certificates have robust safeguards to protect their authenticity and credibility. Let me make it crystal clear: the mandate of Umalusi is to issue **authentic certificates** to qualifying candidates. Umalusi has got not business with fake certificates.
13. Fake certificates are issued by scammers or fraudsters who are not employees of Umalusi. We advise all employers both in the public and private sectors to consider verifying their current and future employees' qualifications through the verification agencies whose contact details are available on the website of Umalusi (www.umalusi.org.za). On the landing page, you simply click on the **Certification & Verification** icon.

Today's business

14. Returning to today's business, on 13 October 2023, we declared publicly that the public and private assessment bodies were ready to conduct, administer and manage the 2023 end of year national examinations. We gave a full account with reasoning in terms of how Umalusi arrived at the overall conclusion that the system was ready. We are here today, as I have said already, to make a pronouncement on the outcome of Umalusi's quality assurance processes for the 2023 national examination results of both the public and private assessment bodies. The pronouncement is based on the outcomes of the quality assurance processes that Umalusi conducted during the examination writing and marking processes between October and December 2023.

An overview of Umalusi quality assurance processes

15. Umalusi draws its mandate in relation to quality assurance of exit-level national examinations from the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance (GENFETQA) Act (58 of 2001), as amended in 2008. The Act confers a range of powers and functions on Umalusi in respect of all the qualifications on the sub-framework of qualifications (NQF Level 1-4), including the:
 - a) external moderation of assessments and examinations conducted by all public and Umalusi-accredited private assessment bodies; and
 - b) standardising examination marks during the standardisation process.
16. Prior to the commencement of the examinations, Umalusi had externally moderated and approved (i) question papers, (ii) Practical Assessment Tasks (PAT), (iii) School-Based Assessment (SBA) Tasks, (iv) Site-Based Assessment (SBA): Common Assessment Tasks (CAT) and portfolios, (v) Internal Continuous Assessment (ICASS) portfolios, (vi) Reviewed Integrated Summative Assessment Tasks (ISAT) and (vii) the conduct of the ISAT. Subsequently, Umalusi audited the state of readiness of the system to conduct, administer and manage the examinations.
17. During the examination writing and marking phases, Umalusi
 - a) monitored a selection of examination centres,
 - b) participated in marking guidelines standardisation meetings in sampled subjects,
 - c) conducted verification of quality of marking at selected marking centres based on sampled scripts, and
 - d) verified the quality of marking in sampled subjects.
18. Post the marking processes, the marks achieved by learners were submitted to Umalusi for standardisation purposes.

19. All these processes were conducted in public and private assessment bodies. This clearly signals that Umalusi is entrusted with a very important task of assuring the quality of the entire value chain of the national examination process. That is why on the occasion of the official opening of this Thuto-Mfundo Building on 5 September 2023, the Minister of Basic Education, Mme Angie Motshekga remarked as follows:
20. “Members of the Umalusi Council bear a significant responsibility, guided by the legal frameworks, to consistently prioritise the organisation's mission. Their decisions are pivotal in upholding the quality of education in South Africa ... I am optimistic that the Council's future endeavours will further elevate our standards and enrich our educational strategies”.

Observers of the process

21. This year Umalusi had the privilege of performing its standardisation processes under the observation of officials from the Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ). The colleagues spent the whole week observing carefully how Umalusi conducts its standardisation process relative to their approach, which is called grading. Their attendance of our meetings affirmed Umalusi's publicly stated position that its standardisation processes are open to the scrutiny of peers on the continent and across the world.
22. Nationally, the process was observed by senior officials representing (a) Universities South Africa (USAf), (b) South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), (c) South African Council for Educators (SACE), (d) South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), (e) National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), (f) South African Public Colleges Organisation (SAPCO) and (g) Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie (SAOU). For Umalusi, the attendance of standardisation meetings by observers from different stakeholder organisations gives credibility to the process.

23. Other teacher unions such as the National Teachers' Union (NTU) was inadvertently omitted from these important national processes. We apologise for the omission and will ensure that this is corrected in future.
24. The foregoing quality assurance processes were conducted to serve the best interests of the over 1 150 000 (one million one hundred and fifty thousand) candidates. Of that number, the NSC accounts for nearly 920 000 candidates or 80%. The remaining 20% of the candidates are distributed across the NC(V) Levels 2-4, NATED (N2-N3) and GETC examinations. The specifics will be given by Professor Ballim in the approval statement.

Towards conclusion

25. During the State of Readiness Media Briefing, Umalusi did highlight loadshedding, community protests and cheating as some of the factors that could negatively affect the integrity of the examinations. We are happy to report that all assessment bodies heeded the advice given to make alternative arrangements for the supply of power during the writing of examinations to mitigate the effect of load-shedding.
26. Regarding community protests, we have received no reports about serious cases of community protests that may have prevented candidates from writing the examinations. We would like to thank the South African public for heeding the call to protect the delicate examinations processes. It is our belief that the fairest to do for the young people of our country is to create a conducive environment for them to demonstrate their true educational potential through the examination process.
27. Umalusi appreciates the efforts of all the four assessment bodies for ensuring that candidates were shielded from all forms of hindrances. That gives the assurance that there was no compromise to the 2023 end of year national examinations' integrity and credibility.

Areas of concern

28. I would like to highlight three areas that are a concern to Umalusi. Firstly, we have previously cautioned members of the public against registering to write the examinations at unaccredited private centres or institutions. We continue to urge the public to visit the Umalusi website (www.umalusi.org.za) to access a list of all private institutions accredited to offer any Umalusi-associated qualification. You will find useful information to assist you to verify if an independent school or a private college is accredited before you can register with it. Alternatively, you can call us on 012 349 1510 and press the relevant option. It is crucially important for us all not to allow unregistered and unaccredited institutions to thrive at the expense of unsuspecting candidates.
29. The second area of concern relates to printing errors or poor print quality in some of the question papers for which I would like to cite the following examples:
- a) There was an omission of a subscript on the formula of an organic compound in Physical Sciences Paper 2 in Question 2.2 (3 marks).
 - b) The Physical Sciences Paper 2 in the North-West had missing grid lines in Question 3.5 (6 marks).
 - c) The three Civil Technology specializations (Civil Services, Construction and Woodworking) in both the English and Afrikaans versions had major printing errors in Limpopo. The poor print quality in the Civil Services specialisation affected question worth 60 marks in English version and 62 marks in the Afrikaans version. In Construction questions worth of 31 marks in the English version and 14 marks in Afrikaans were affected. The marks affected in the Woodworking specialisation were 22 and 26 for English and Afrikaans respectively.

d) Aside from printing quality, we would like to raise translation quality as something that needs careful attention. Due to poor quality of translation from English into Afrikaans, candidates could not respond to Questions 3.2.5 and 3.2.6 worth 3 marks in the Afrikaans version of Geography Paper 1.

30. To mitigate the possible impact of these errors on performance of candidates, the questions concerned were excluded from the marking process and the marks achieved upscaled using conversion tables.

31. On the other hand, it is regrettable that one of the questions in the Mathematical Literacy Paper 1 naively used the words 'Mandatory Palestine'. This was caused by the examiners and moderators being unaware of the political connotations of the words. Umalusi appreciates the fact that the DBE issued an apology in this regard.

32. Finally, Umalusi is concerned about the unresolved irregularities associated with the previous cycle of examinations, especially in the private college space involving the GETC: ABET examinations. We urge the assessment bodies concerned to give this matter the priority that it deserves.

33. At the same time, we are deeply concerned about the detected cases of group copying involving 945 candidates who wrote the NSC examinations in 2023. Of this number, 763 cases (80.7%) cases were detected in KwaZulu-Natal and 164 (17.7%) in Mpumalanga. According to the report submitted, these are cases where the candidates displayed common answers and, in some cases, same wrong and right answers. These cases are not yet resolved because the numbers are still being verified. Professor Ballim will explain in the approval statement how cases of this nature are dealt with.

34. Thank you!

Dr Mafu Rakometsi

Chief Executive Officer: Umalusi