



basic education

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Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Dear Professor Jonathan Jansen, you are a major disappointment to the noble profession of researchers

By Elijah Mhlanga

The good old professor is at it again; yes the same one who, last year, misled the whole country when he said that the school year was over following the forced closure due to COVID-19. He continues, in a piece published last week, to embarrass himself by exposing his ignorance on the workings of the basic education sector. It would be laughable if not so tragic; hence his untruths cannot be left unchallenged.

Prof Jonathan Jansen makes a statement that the Minister of Basic Education and the Director- General have bamboozled the public with numbers and thus have misled the public. The assumption made is that the South African public is numerically illiterate and hence can be easily fooled by numbers, and that these numbers relating to the performance of the Class of 2020 are not presented in their entirety. On the contrary, the South African public is provided with a comprehensive report on the results of the Class of 2020, which is available on the DBE website (<https://www.education.gov.za>), and this report is analysed critically by all the research institutions and educationists that have an interest in the performance of the schooling sector. This is, therefore, an indictment on the South African public, that they can be misled by figures presented by the Department of Basic Education.

Prof Jansen is also prone to dramatics when he describes the Minister as having presented herself as the savior of the expected bloodbath. At no point was the Minister drawing attention to herself or requesting for the nation's applaud that she had rescued the Class of 2020 from an even greater catastrophe. The Minister merely articulated the expectation of many educationists that the performance of the Class of 2020 would be dismal, given the disruption to teaching and learning and the loss of actual face-to-face engagement with their teachers. The Class of 2020 proved us wrong, and hence they were being acknowledged for this significant achievement.

We are also not sure what the learned Professor refers to as the "real struggle behind the scenes" when referring to the meeting between the Assessment Standard Committee and the so called "political hacks" in the terminology of Prof Jansen. The meeting between Umalusi and the Department of Basic Education is chaired by the Chairperson of the Umalusi Council, and in attendance are the key stakeholders which include the Teacher Union representatives, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), Universities South Africa (USAf) and in previous years, regional African representatives. At this meeting, the DBE presents its proposals for the adjustment of marks, after having spent many long hours interrogating all the evidence relating to the performance of the Class of 2020. These proposals are either accepted or rejected by Umalusi, the Assessment Standards Committee. Where there is disagreement, the DBE is given another opportunity to re-present their proposals with additional motivation and the final decision of Umalusi is then accepted.



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There is no debate and discussion, and there is no way that any political influence can be brought to bear on this process which is open and transparent. In the standardisation process of 2020, the Assessment Standards Committee exercised no special treatment on this class. Of the 65 subjects that were presented for standardisation, 48 were accepted on raw marks, which implies that the candidates' marks were accepted without any changes. There were only 9 subjects that were adjusted upwards, the lowest in the last six years, and there were 8 downward adjustments, the highest in the last six years (excluding 2018, where there were 11 downward adjustments). It is also quite amazing that the Professor makes these absurd statements relating to a meeting that he has not attended or ever participated in.

The Professor is also a major disappointment to the noble profession of researchers in that he makes statements relating to such an important matter based on suspicion. He has no evidence to claims that there was "sympathetic marking", or that school based assessment was made more lenient and that some subjects have become easier. He should first conduct research on these hypotheses and, based on his findings, we can then take him seriously. It is also interesting that Prof Jansen utilises one criterion to determine quality, and based on percentage of distinctions, he claims that the Western Cape outpaces the other provinces. Quality is that which the entire system is pursuing, and we are aware that quality is based on a host of indicators, and the number of distinctions is but one such factor. Hence, his judgment in this regard is seriously skewed. Professor Jansen, get your facts straight first before you start typing your next piece about basic education.

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