

## **OPENING REMARKS BY DIRECTOR-GENERAL, MATHANZIMA MWELI, AT THE UMALUSI STANDARDISATION MEETING, THURSDAY, 6 JANUARY, 2022**

The Chairperson of the Umalusi Council, Professor Volmink, members of the Umalusi Council; the Chief Executive Officer of Umalusi, Dr Mafu Rakometsi, the Chair of the Assessment and Standards Committee, Prof Yunus Ballim and members of the Assessment Standards Committee, UMALUSI officials, Heads of Provincial Education Departments; representatives of the South African Qualifications Authority, the Quality Councils, University South Africa (USAf), Teacher Union representatives, the heads of examinations, and all other examination and curriculum officials and colleagues.

Let me commence by extending my sincere appreciation to all leaders in education, parents, educators and learners, for your efforts in making the 2021 academic year a reality. Having gone through the trauma of 2020 and 2021, there was a high degree of anxiety, fear and uncertainty, but you have demonstrated your resilience and commitment to education.

We are gathered here this morning to present to Umalusi proposals relating to the performance of the Class of 2021, a class similar to the Class of 2020 that was confronted with an unprecedented crisis. This class was disrupted in their schooling over the last two years, a double whammy, and although 2021 was a more stable year, the impact of the loss of more than 50% of their Grade 11 year, has serious consequences for this class. The crucially important foundation that Grade 11 work builds in preparation for Grade 12, was weakened. We will therefore see the deleterious effect of lost teaching time, in particular on those subjects that are time-intensive such as the languages, and subjects that are heavily dependent on language for utility, such as Mathematical Literacy.

### **Media Enquiries:**

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This class is also the first class to be presented with the amendments to Section 4 of CAPS, which impacted on twenty (20) of the 67 subjects of this class. A further unanticipated hurdle that confronted this class was the load shedding that would have adversely affected their final preparations for the examinations.

A total of 733 746 full time registered to write the 2021 NSC examination, the largest full time cohort over the last few years. A total of 123 487 more full-time candidates and 46 942 more part-time candidates registered to write the examination. Of the 733 746 candidates that registered for the examination, 700 604 candidates wrote the examination, which reflects the lowest percentage of “no shows” (4.5%), over the last few years. The increase in the number of full-time candidates can be attributed to a number of factors and one of the key factors is the change in the assessment regime, in Grade 10 and 11, which was prompted by, the need to create maximum time for teaching and learning. The school based assessment in Grade 11 was increased from 25% to 60% and examinations were replaced by controlled tests. Hence, the change in assessment practices, resulted in a different outcome. These learners would therefore have written their first fully-fledged examination in their Grade 12 year, which was part of the Preparatory examination.

When we look at the principles of the science of learning regarding how we learn, it becomes clear that the Cohort of 2021 was heavily impacted during their Grade 11 year due to reduced teaching time. Learning is strengthened through the retrieval practice. This must be done multiple times and over time, including revisiting subject content across multiple sessions with good, specific and focused feedback from teachers and others, such as peers. The Class of 2021 was deprived of this advantage.

The unique learning context, necessitated a robust, targeted and differentiated learner support programme for this cohort.

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The sector increased not only the learner beneficiaries and scope of the interventions but also the number and type of interventions offered to this class. The largest learner support programme, namely the vacation and Saturday classes, were initiated from the early part of the year and only ended on the day that the examination is written. Through the vacation schools, on average, the Class of 2021 received extra tuition during the vacation periods for a combined minimum of 20 days, for at least 6 – 8 hours per day, in at least 3 – 4 subjects per learner. By implementing the final push support plans, which included dedicated examination and revision classes and camps, learners were literally “walked or ushered” into the examination room. This is the first year that support programmes continued up to the last day, while examinations were in session.

Today’s standardisation of the 2021 NSC examinations, is a special meeting that deserves distinctive attention for a number of reasons. These learners not only had to deal with a reduced exposure to face to face teaching and learning but they also had to contend with the anxieties and trauma of COVID-19. Countless families have been pushed to the limits of financial endurance from lost jobs and income. Not only this but also many families have lost family members and friends due to the pandemic. Children have lost their parents, grandparents and care-givers. We often do not consider the psychological effect of this pandemic on learners. One of the purposes of standardization is to ensure fairness from year to year and the disadvantages suffered by the Class of 2021 cannot be ignored, as part of our social justice obligations. To quote a statement from one of the founding documents of the Umalusi council, which clearly emphasises this imperative: Standardisation is used to mitigate the effect of factors other than the learners` knowledge, abilities and aptitude on the learners` performance.

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In closing, I wish to thank the Umalusi Council and its sub-committees for their long and arduous efforts in sustaining and preserving the integrity and credibility of the National Senior Certificate and other qualifications that fall within their sub-framework. We are optimistic about today's engagements and will respect the final decisions of the Council, in every regard.

**ISSUED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION**

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