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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**INVESTIGATION INTO THE CAUSES OF
DELAYS IN THE RELEASE OF SOME
NATIONAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE (NSC)
RESULTS IN 2008**

REPORT BY MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE

CHAIRPERSON: SNP SISHI

31 JANUARY 2009

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INVESTIGATION INTO THE CAUSES OF DELAYS IN THE RELEASE OF THE NSC 2008 RESULTS

Executive Summary

The results of the 2008 National Senior Certificate (NSC) are based on the first set of rules of new subject combinations and certification requirements in 30 years. The results were released on 30 December 2008 by the Minister of Education, and Member of Parliament, Mrs. GNM Pandor. The 2008 examinations, despite the challenges relating to the implementation of the first NSC examination, were successfully administered and the results were released to 533 561 candidates.

However, the Minister of Education was concerned about the delay in providing results for 56 351 candidates in the 2008 NSC examination including a large number of candidates who did not turn out to write ("no shows"). In response to these concerns, the Minister appointed the Chairperson of the National Examination Irregularities Committee (NEIC) to assemble a Ministerial Committee to conduct an investigation into the delays and report on this matter by 31 January 2009.

The NEIC Chairperson was appointed on 13 January 2009 to lead the Ministerial Committee and was expected to present the report on 31 January 2009. The Ministerial Committee commenced with the analysis of the statistics on the outstanding results and identified four provinces with high numbers of outstanding marks. These provinces were Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Gauteng. A full investigation was conducted in these provinces and in the case of the other provinces, a detailed report was received based on a questionnaire and tele-interviews were conducted to solicit additional information.

The 2008 NSC examinations was unique in that in this year, a new curriculum, a new examination computer system and associated administrative processes were implemented. These major innovations were compounded by the decision by the Council of Education Ministers (CEM) and Heads of Education Departments Committee (HEDCOM) to delay the start to the 2008 NSC examination from 15 October 2008 to 3 November 2009 in order to extend the time available for teaching and learning. This decision was then implemented by the Inter-provincial Examinations Committee (IPEC) despite the fact that the date of the release of the results remained the 30 December 2008. In essence, the 47 days scheduled to cover the marking, capturing and processing of results was reduced to 27 days.

The Ministerial Committee confirmed that of the 589 912 candidates that registered, 29 614 candidates were absent from the examination. Therefore on 30 December 2008, of the 56 351 candidates that were not resulted, 26 737 results which represents 4.5% of the total number of candidates that registered for the 2008 NSC examination, were in fact outstanding.

The overall findings of the Ministerial committee were that the delay in the release of the results of the 26 737 candidates could not be attributed to a single factor but a collection of variables that impacted on the examination processes and procedures.

On the basis of qualitative and quantitative evidence at the disposal of the Ministerial Committee the following recommendations are made:

- (a) All provinces must ensure that the candidate registration data is finalized by 30th of June in each examination cycle. No changes to candidates registration must be allowed beyond this date unless there are special reasons for this change which must be approved by the Head of the Department or his/her designee.
- (b) In the case of subject changes, all changes must be finalized not later than the first week when schools open for Grade 12 each year. This would ensure that the candidates are not disadvantaged in terms of the teaching and learning and this would also not compromise the reliability of the registration data. Subject changes any time beyond this date will place in question the reliability of the SBA mark. The SBA and the content requirements should have been completed over three years and therefore an SBA mark that is compiled over a few months of the Grade 12 year must be considered as an irregularity.
- (c) There is also a need for greater control and monitoring of subject changes by the PED and the DoE to ensure that the processes comply with the *Regulations pertaining to the Conduct, Administration and Management of Assessment for the National Senior Certificate (2008)*. The Regulations state that approval for changing a subject in Grade 12 must be obtained from the Head of the Assessment body, provided the following are furnished:
 - i. a letter of motivation from the learner's parent or guardian.
 - ii. a letter from the Principal, either supporting or providing reasons for not supporting the change; and
 - iii. a letter from the subject teacher, outlining the programme to be followed to assist the learner in covering those aspects of the curriculum statements for the previous grade that were not covered.

Strict compliance with the above will enhance the credibility of processes leading to the processing of the National Senior Certificate results.

- (d) After the finalization of the registration of candidates on 30th June of each cycle, the Department of Education must conduct an intensive audit of the registration database to validate the accuracy and completeness of all candidate registration. Provinces should not be allowed to continue with the subsequent examination processes if the candidate registration is either incomplete or inaccurate, since

accurate candidate registration is vital for all subsequent examination processes, which includes printing and packing of question papers, organizing marking centres, appointments of markers, etc.

- (e) The drop down menu on the IECS that allows the user to select the correct data base to be accessed should be changed so that the user selects the data base (Grade 11 or Grade 12) on first entry into the system and that remains as the default setting until the setting is changed.
- (f) The Department of Education must finalise the draft policy on user access, security and closure of certain modules of the IECS. This will allow for the registration module to be closed after the registration data has been finalized and also to limit access to the IECS post the registration process.
- (g) Greater advocacy and mediation of the new NSC policy needs to be undertaken across all provinces. It is not adequate to communicate via a circular to schools. Circulars and other documents explaining policy and procedural changes must be communicated via "face to face" meetings with school principals so that a common understanding can be established and questions can be dealt with effectively. A common application of policy will ensure a more accurate registration of candidates and hence a reduced number of incomplete results.
- (h) The DoE must develop a common process map for the registration of candidates on the IECS. Although PEDs are utilising a common national computer system, provinces follow different approaches in the registration process and therefore national control becomes a challenge. A greater degree of national co-ordination is necessary for future examinations.
- (i) For 2009, IPEC must give consideration to utilising the identity numbers where they are available and the unique computer generated number can be used in cases where the identity number is not available. It is estimated that the ID documents are available for approximately 70% of the candidates. It is the intention of the DoE to adopt the ID number as the unique identifier for all candidates and if this practice is made mandatory candidates will very soon realize that acquiring their identity documents is a pre-requisite to writing the NSC examination. The other advantage of using the ID number is that candidates that need to be placed on manually generated mark sheets can be easily tracked and captured on the system.
- (j) The IECS must be programmed to avoid duplicate candidate entries being accepted. The recommended procedure is that once a second candidate is captured with details similar to an existing candidate, the system administrator may override this function if after investigation he/she has established that the candidate is in fact not a duplicate.

- (k) Provincial Education Departments must proceed to apply disciplinary procedures against any official found to have contributed to the late processing of the 2008 National Senior Certificate results.
- (l) Releasing the results in the year of the examinations must be reconsidered if examinations continue to commence in November of every year.
- (m) More support and training is required to strengthen the administration of examinations in the Mpumalanga Province. Appoint a Provincial System Administrator in the Mpumalanga province to replace the current official who has been relieved by the Provincial MEC for Education of such a responsibility. Further, the infrastructure must be urgently upgraded.
- (n) Increase and upgrade of the KwaZulu-Natal network capacity so as to provide more efficient infrastructure support to the IECS.
- (o) A more comprehensive user acceptance test should be adopted to confirm efficiency of the functional requirements of the IECS.
- (p) More appropriate technical acceptance tests to confirm the technical specifications followed by the mandatory certification of the system (quality of the coding, security and interoperability with Government standards). The test will also include more comprehensive stress testing, performance of the system on the network infrastructure (WAN) from all access points and bandwidth requirements.
- (q) Provisioning of support structure on provincial level for technical and functional support to the IECS. It could be centrally managed by a service desk (helpdesk).

Finally:

- (r) Lift the level of accountability of the national examination system and ensure a more autonomous governance of public examinations in South Africa in line with international practice by, implementation of the decision of the Council of Education Ministers (CEM) to establish a National Examination Board for educational assessment.

THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE CAUSES OF DELAYS IN THE RELEASE OF THE NSC 2008 RESULTS

1. INTRODUCTION

In terms of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act No. 27 of 1996), the Minister is responsible for norms and standards in education and for the monitoring of these standards to ensure compliance. This includes curriculum delivery and examinations and assessment. Further, in terms of the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act (Act No. 58 of 2001) the functions of the Director-General with regard to external assessment includes promoting the integrity of the external assessment system, monitoring the conduct of the Umalusi Council and assessment bodies; and informing the Minister of any irregularity reported in terms of section 19 of this act. The Minister may also institute an investigation into any irregularity

In the context of the above legislation, the Minister of Education, Ms GNM Pandor, MP, is concerned about the delay in providing results for 56 351 candidates in the 2008 NSC examination. In this regard she has appointed the National Examination Irregularities Committee (NEIC) to conduct an investigation into the delays and report on this matter by 31 January 2009 (Annexure A). The Minister is also concerned about the large number of "no shows".

2. THE MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE

The Ministerial Committee to conduct the investigation comprised of the following persons:

- (a) SNP Sishi: Chairperson: Ministerial Committee
- (b) JPC Basson: Lead Investigator of the Ministerial Committee. Director: Quality Assurance and Development: South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)
- (c) JPK Lotter (Higher Education South Africa): Executive member of the National Examinations Irregularities Committee. Lead Investigator of the Ministerial Committee
- (d) Ms RJ Mello (SADTU Education Convener): Executive member of the National Examinations Irregularities Committee
- (e) RJ Burger (SAOU): Executive member of the National Examinations Irregularities Committee
- (f) A M Raubenheimer: National Government Information Technology Officer Council (GITO Council)
- (g) RR Poliah: Head Secretariat for Inter-provincial Examinations Committee (IPEC) and the Ministerial Examinations Irregularities Committee. Director: Examinations and Assessment (schools)
- (h) Ms A J van Rensburg: Secretary of the Ministerial Examinations Irregularities Committee. Specialist on Certification and Information Technology.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

In undertaking the above task the Ministerial Committee distinguished between the following categories of candidates that did not receive their results:

- (a) Candidates who were absent for one or more subjects/papers in the 2008 NSC written examination.
- (b) Candidates whose SBA marks were outstanding as at 30 December 2008.
- (c) Candidates who had written the 2008 NSC examination and their marks were outstanding due to technical and other reasons.

In investigating the causes for the delay in the release of the results the investigation team focused on key processes leading up to the release of the results. The investigating committee took into account that if the processes preceding the release of the results are not meticulously managed, this could result in a range of problems that could impact negatively on the finalizing the results. Therefore the following *Terms of Reference* were informed by the considerations cited above:

- (a) Registration of Candidates
- (b) Generation of Mark Sheets
- (c) Collection and Control of SBA marks sheets
- (d) Control of Examination mark sheets
- (e) Capture of SBA and Examination marks
- (f) The Integrated Examination Computer System (IECS)
- (g) Examination irregularities
- (h) Processing and release of results
- (i) Training of invigilators, chief markers and district officials

Methodology

The selection of the methodology used in the investigations was informed by limitations imposed by time constraints, the extensive nature of the investigation as well as the relevant experience and expertise of the panel members. In this regard special attention was paid to the administrative, management and control systems employed by the Provincial Education Departments (PEDs), provincial Examinations Directorates and the specific role of the Integrated Examination Computer System as well as associated administrative processes.

The Ministerial Committee (**Annexure B**) scrutinised all examination processes linked to the final release of results. In this regard the Committee sought to establish reasons why 6.1% of the candidates did not receive their results on 30 December 2008.

This entailed visiting the provinces to interview officials responsible for the key examination processes and to audit the processes and systems utilized by PEDs in the processing and release of results. All PEDs were expected to submit detailed reports on their examination processes during the 2008 examination cycle and advance reasons based on evidence as to factors that contributed to the delay in the release of results.

Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and Limpopo provinces had the highest number of outstanding results (**Annexure C**). It was therefore decided that these four provinces should be visited to conduct an on site audit of their systems and processes and the remaining provinces were requested to submit written reports based on a questionnaire provided (**Annexure D**). The written reports were analysed and additional information was solicited through tele-interviews. The provincial visit commenced with an introductory session with the senior officials of the PEDs and the technical staff involved in the management of examinations in the province and thereafter the officials responsible for the specific functions were interviewed. All officials were encouraged to provide any further supporting documents or evidence to substantiate their response to the questions during the interview process.

Once the committee members concluded the field work they presented all qualitative and quantitative evidence to the Chairperson of the committee as indicated in the Annexure. Each member was assigned to independently write a report on the selected sections they were assigned to investigate and this decision was based on the expertise and experience of each member.

The Chairperson of the Committee further appointed representatives of Higher Education South Africa, Mr JPK Lotter, the Senior Project Manager of the Matriculation Board and an executive member of the National Examinations Irregularities Committee; as well as Mr JPC Basson, the Director of Quality Assurance and Development at the South African Qualifications Authority to be Lead Investigators in charge of the entire investigation process and in ensuring uniform application of the investigation methodology across the nine provinces. Lead investigators were also required to proof read the final report to ensure that the secretariat has accurately represented the perspectives of the entire committee in its interpretation of all evidence gathered. The Chairperson of the Ministerial Committee allocated only the administrative responsibilities and supportive roles to all officials employed by the Department of Education to enhance the objectivity and credibility of the investigation process. As himself the employee of the national Department of Education the Chairperson ensured that all decisions taken are supported fully by the Lead Investigators. In order to ensure participation of some of the key stakeholders in the committee two executive members of the NEIC also representatives of both SADTU and SAOU were appointed in the committee. Due to the limited time available to assemble the team the Chairperson was unable to secure participation of the member of NAPTOSA who sits in the NEIC. The Chairperson will seek to fully brief the NAPTOSA representative once the Minister has approved the report. Once the report was finalised all the members of the Ministerial Committee were required to sign and endorse the report. Further, special reports were solicited from individuals or organizations seen as in possession of potential evidence to assist the committee to execute its mandate (**Annexure U**).

4. FINDINGS

4.1 SYSTEMIC MATTERS RELATED TO THE 2008 NSC EXAMINATION

Provincial Education Departments have made significant advances in the management and administration of national examinations over the last few years and this has been attested to by our international peers and some of the best Educational Assessment Boards in the world as well in the quality assurance reports presented by Umalusi. However, 2008 was a year with special challenges emanating from the implementation of the first NSC examination for all Grade 12 learners. It is therefore necessary to foreground these challenges so that the findings of the investigation by the Ministerial Committee can be understood in the context of these challenges.

The Ministerial Committee established the following in respect of the problems that confronted the provinces in the implementation of the new curriculum:

(a) Policy implications of the NCS

The implementation of the new curriculum in Grade 12 in 2008 entailed a number of policy changes which had to be communicated to teachers and administrators. The NSC is the first completely new set of rules of combination for such a national qualification in more than thirty (30) years. It is the culmination of the first ever comprehensively revised national school curriculum and a national examination in South Africa. These curriculum changes were essential, but resulted in the following unintended consequences:

- i. Despite the fact that provinces utilised structures in the districts and circuits to facilitate the implementation of policy and processes, not all policies were clearly understood and adhered to. Therefore, the examinations units had to deal with a number of requests for subject changes. When late subject changes were effected without due consideration of the implications of School-Based Assessment in the new subject this was picked up by the IECS during the processing of results.
- ii. Curriculum packages were selected by schools without considering the resource implications.
- iii. When schools realized the deficiencies in their resources and readiness, they resorted to applications for subject changes that affected the candidate registration database and where such changes were made too close to the examination date, this impacted on the processing of the results.
- iv. Another common error detected was the confusion between the different languages levels i.e. Home Language, First and Second Language.