

◆ OBE INFO ◆

FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CURRICULUM SERVICES JANUARY 2004

EQUITY

Girls in the Province have increased their participation in Mathematics and Physical Science and have obtained more distinctions in Maths, Phys.Science and Biology than the boys:

Maths (139 to 126), Biology (189 to 99) and in Physical Science (85 to 84).

An exciting development in 2003 has been the vastly improved performance of township schools.

Of the 49 schools in the province that obtained a 100% pass rate (up from 23 in 2001), 9 were from the townships (3 in 2002).

Of the 126 schools which obtained 90% or more (up from 72 in 2002), 54 were from the townships (up from 8 in 2002). This is given in graphic form in an annexure. This is significant in the context of the results - all schools are now starting to produce quality education

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT IN GRADE 12

Again, the results for 2003 were above our expectations and we all had reason to celebrate the hard work of all concerned. **The praiseworthy 70.7% pass rate of 2002 increased to an excellent pass rate of 79.90%, an improvement of 9.2%. The 2002 endorsement rate of 18.8% improved to an endorsement rate of 22.8%, thus showing a continuing improvement in quality.** The following **factors** could be seen to have brought about the improvement in the results:

- As always, **powerful and focused guidance** from our MEC, Mr D.A.Kganare, who has overseen an improvement from a mere 42% in 1999 to 80% in 2003 – a near doubling of performance.
- **Outstanding and innovative leadership** by our SG, Dr M.C. Nwaila, who has overseen an improvement of 20.9% in two years and whose vision extends to all levels of the system, not only a grade 12 'quick fix'.
- Strong support and dedication from **Management** both in the districts and at head office. The entire structure of the department has been revamped over the last two years and the increase in the number of senior managers has had a strong influence on the results
- An extremely **professionally run, leak-free examination**.
- **Common Grade 12 exams** in June (and in some districts in September as well), coupled with improved management of **Continuous Assessment**.
- Dedicated and ongoing interventions by **School Management Developers and Learning Facilitators** bringing about both administrative and subject improvements.
- **Easter, Winter and Spring schools** in all district as part of the innovative **Holistic Intervention Programme** which concentrated on schools with a pass rate below 40% - this resulted in 29 of 33 failing schools moving out of this category (from 71 to 14 in two years).
- The very successful **mentors** who brought about truly dramatic improvements in the schools where they worked – the average pass percentage of the 64 schools mentors worked with was **73.3%**, from a starting point of 0 – 45%.
- **National interventions** in the form of special attention given to Mathematics, the Sciences and History as well as various incentive schemes for teachers and scholars.
- **Retraining of teachers** in key subjects (e.g. Mathematics)
- **Donor-funded interventions** supported in terms of finances and human resources by the Flemish, Cuban, Canadian, US, Danish and German governments.
- Continued support from **Teacher Unions and local NGOs**.
- **Splitting of teacher support** into FET and GET sectors and increased numbers of LFs.
- Continued involvement of **parents** through SGBs
- Ongoing contributions from **Whole School Evaluation**.
- Improved **communication with schools**.
- Improved levels of **dedication** by thousands of teachers.
- Continued improvement in **logistical support** to the system and more rigorous standards and processes in the appointment of new staff.

Mentors

The province truly owes a heartfelt word of thanks to these 23 principals who took **64 schools (20% of the schools in the province)** under their wing, while still guiding their **23 schools** to excellent results. They were thus involved with **26%** of the schools in the province.

They assisted **28 of these 64 schools** not only beyond the level of well performing schools (above 60%) but into the category of **excelling schools** – a truly outstanding performance.

The schools they assisted achieved an average pass rate of **73.3%** - up from the low 40%. Some schools e.g. Thahameso, Diphetoho, Refeng Thabo, Seemahale improved by more than 50% while 7 others improved by more than 40%.

The province is truly proud of the improvement in these schools that started below 40% in 2001.

Concerns

- **The drop in numbers in Mathematics and the Sciences has continued** and affects the quality of the examinations. The Grade 9s of 2004 need to be targeted to popularise Mathematics and the Sciences with particular emphasis on the girl child.
- The number of subjects where the average is a worry has decreased. However, the following subjects are still far from satisfactory:
- **Mathematics SG, Biology SG, Physical Science SG, Physiology SG, Agric. HG and SG Economics HG and Geography HG and SG.**
- Problems with **Mathematics and the Sciences** are worldwide and to be expected. As a province we should continue with the interventions presently on the go as all these subjects have shown a fairly steady improvement over the last three years.
- This however has not been the case with **Geography**. As this is an important subject for endorsement, we must come with innovative and creative solutions in 2004 as almost a third of our learners take Geography. Perhaps it has been neglected as a result of special emphasis on Maths, the Sciences and History.
- **Economics** too needs special attention as the average dropped and the commercial subjects are growing in popularity.

Majority Language of Learning and Teaching

Although the average of English Second Language continues to improve satisfactorily as a subject, it remains a provincial and a national problem that the vast majority of learners do not have the language skills to deal adequately with writing matric in their second or third language. The following should be noted:

- The improvement of English for the purpose of teaching and learning is not just the responsibility of the language teachers but of every Grade 12 teacher.
- It is in fact **English across the curriculum** that needs drastic attention.
- As it only receives token attention in the teaching of English Second Language, marks should be awarded for English across the curriculum as part of the **Free State CASS model for English**.
- Possibly marks should be included in **all other subjects** for language so that teachers take language across the curriculum seriously. This matter will receive immediate attention.

The whole question of the improvement of the standard of the English of the learners must receive concerted attention during the course of 2004.

The Way Forward

- Continue giving **subject and management support** to all schools with the necessary curriculum guidance as has been highlighted already.
- The necessary support in terms of **textbooks** ordered and delivered timeously. Continued high level of logistical support.
- Continue with the highly successful **mentor** programme but ensure during 2004 that skills transfer is taking place so that the system can continue with the excellent improvement caused by this intervention.
- Continued focused support in terms of the **Holistic Intervention Programme** and more contact on a regular basis between Curriculum Services and the mentors in order to maximise this support.
- Continued innovative and successful **District interventions**.
- Constant linkage with and support for **national and international interventions**.
- Improved linkage between **Whole School Evaluation** and curriculum support.
- Continue to run a **quality assessment** system with a secure Grade 12 examination of a high standard as was

AVERAGE PERCENTAGES OF LARGER SUBJECTS

Afrikaans First Language HG	58.94%	English First Language HG	58.84%
Afrikaans Second Language HG	44.57%	English Second language HG	48.56%
Sesotho First Language HG	56.12%	Setswana First Language HG	53.90%
IsiZulu First Language HG	56.06%	IsiXhosa First Language HG	58.54%
Mathematics HG	54.38%	Physical Science HG	45.22%
Mathematics SG	38.74%	Physical Science SG	39.13%
Commercial Mathematics SG	63.83%	Hotel Keeping / Catering SG	54.81%
Biology HG	46.76%	Physiology HG	53.71%
Biology SG	37.39%	Physiology SG	33.46%
Economics HG	37.35%	Business Economics HG	44.13%
Economics SG	40.16%	Business Economics SG	44.32%
Accounting HG	59.23%	Typing SG	52.27%
Accounting SG	52.78%	Computyping SG	52.07%
Geography HG	39.20%	History HG	49.35%
Geography SG	35.34%	History SG	43.11%
Biblical Studies HG	40.00%	Home Economics HG	51.50%
Biblical Studies SG	40.77%	Home Economics SG	47.15%
Agricultural Science HG	38.13%	Computer Studies HG	67.22%
Agricultural Science SG	32.97%	Computer Studies SG	56.01%
Technical Drawing HG	51.10%	Mercantile Law SG	51.07%
Technical Drawing SG	47.88%	Woodwork SG	61.82%
Travel and Tourism SG	52.15%		

The subjects in larger print above still need concentrated attention and special interventions where possible.

It is clear that most subjects are starting to perform at acceptable levels.

MEDIA FURORE RESPONSE TO MEDIA COMMENTS ON GRADE 12 RESULTS

In the light of a constant barrage of uninformed criticism in the press of the 2003 Grade 12 results, it is useful to look at the whole process of the examinations and to see how many and varied the people are who are involved, and thus how difficult, if not impossible it would be for political interests to influence these results.

Support and INSET for educators

Comments have been made by academics that 'there is no improvement in teaching'. This unsubstantiated and unresearched comment is unworthy of an academic. It has also been claimed that the various interventions across the country are simply a 'quick fix' and that they haven't necessarily improved teaching.

To answer this, one should look at what support there is now for teachers in the field in contrast with what happened in the past:

- In the mid-1980's, the entire DET teacher component was served by 5 subject advisors – in 2003 this figure increased to 185, to be increased to 215 in 2004. The increase in the number of supportive field workers has coincided with improved results at Grade 12 level. These field workers hold thousands of workshops annually.
- Since 1996, thousands of teachers have received bursaries to improve their qualifications – the number of un- and under-qualified teachers has decreased dramatically. Between R25m and R30m is spent annually to improve the quality of the Free State education corps.
- Common papers are set for the province in June to prepare learners and teachers for the end of the year
- Common national papers are set in 6 gateway subjects and from this teachers have learnt how to set appropriate papers within their schools.
- Extra tuition has been arranged for all Grade 12 learners in special Easter, Winter and Spring schools. Selected specialists in Grade 12 subjects, including lecturers from Universities and Technicians help with these schools and act as role models for the teachers.

MEDIA FURORE continued

Teacher support continued

- There are special projects to improve Mathematics and Physical Science, other key subjects and curriculum management with funds and expertise provided by the Flemish, the Cuban, the Canadian, the Danish and the US governments
- Improved management skills have been supplied internally by means of regular courses run by provincial officials (management is supported by approximately 100 dedicated officials in the field – many more than in the past).
- Management and curriculum development skills in schools are further augmented by the highly successful mentor scheme where successful principals have been deployed to assist principals of struggling schools. The improvement in the results of these struggling schools has been far greater than the improvement rate in the province as a whole. These schools now have an average pass rate of 73.3% as opposed to below 40% in 2001.

It is thus absurd to maintain without research that the standard of teaching has not improved. All the interventions mentioned above have been aimed at improving the standard of teaching.

Continuous Assessment (CASS)

For the past three years, the province, in line with the rest of the country, has instituted a system whereby work done by learners throughout the year contributes 25% of the total mark at the end of the year in Grade 12. This CASS component, in spite of what was stated in the press, is thoroughly moderated in our province with external moderation by UMALUSI (UMALUSI is the national watchdog for standards and safeguards the legitimacy and credibility of external examinations – it is independent of the National or Provincial Education Departments).

The greatest benefit of the CASS system is not that it adds marks to the learner (only applicable to 25% of the total and is only allowed to be 10% higher than the exam mark – this means it can make a 2.5% difference to any learner) but that it adds **value** to the system. By working consistently throughout the year, the learner is better prepared for the final exam and is thus in a position to perform better

Examination papers

Perhaps the most absurd comment of all from the press - 'Examiners have been instructed to set easier papers'.

To understand how ridiculous this is one should understand the rigorous process any paper goes through before it is approved. After a thorough screening, examiners are appointed for a three-year period. These appointees are always acknowledged experts in their field and are appointed irrespective of race, gender or political affiliation. An internal moderator is appointed within the province, again an expert with many years of experience as an examiner. All papers are submitted to an external moderator appointed by UMALUSI. These external moderators are almost invariably lecturers or professors from Higher Education Institutions who safeguard the standards in the interests of their institutions. Many of these external moderators functioned as such before 1994 and are certainly not politically motivated nor have they ever been.

The writing and marking of the examination

The examinations themselves were leak-free this year (any aberrations are quickly picked up by the results graphs, as a final check, and there was no sign of anything untoward this year) and ran more smoothly than in previous years as systems all over the country became more practised. This was confirmed by UMALUSI monitoring in all provinces.

Markers are appointed only after a considerably more rigorous process than in the past (for example, only teachers whose own classes perform well qualify for appointment). Thus the standard of marking has improved on an annual basis since 1996 by constantly upgrading the criteria required for a teacher to qualify as a potential marker.

MEDIA FURORE continued

Standardisation of marks

After the marks have been entered and the results produced, UMALUSI sits with each province (represented by the Head of Education of each province with an appropriate team) to examine the marks for each subject and decide whether they should be accepted as written (the raw mark), or whether adjustments are needed as a result of a paper detrimental to the learners or on the other hand a paper that favoured candidates to the detriment of proper standards. The teacher unions are also invited to these deliberations.

UMALUSI is represented by academics who are experts in the analysis of statistics. Many of these statisticians, just like the external moderators, have performed this function since before 1994 and being academics, have the same vested interests in protecting standards.

This process is very clear-cut and it is important to note that marks are adjusted downwards as well as upwards, depending on the raw mark. It should be noted that this process **has always taken place**.

As a body UMALUSI thus have two important functions – to protect the integrity and credibility of the examination by ensuring the maintenance of standards as well as protecting the learners against poorly set or unfair papers. That adjustment is an unusual occurrence can be seen from the fact that of the 240+ matric papers, adjustments were made in only 30 – for the rest, the raw marks were accepted.

To claim that either 'standards have dropped' or 'marks were manipulated' is an insult to the integrity of UMALUSI. Under no stretch of the imagination can this independent and basically conservative body (conservative in the best possible sense) be seen as a tool of the government of the day.

Future prospects of matriculants

The media and their pet 'experts' have belaboured the point that the Grade 12 examination does not prepare matriculants adequately for either the workplace or Higher Education as if this is a revelation they have just recently discovered. This is a world-wide problem and has been recognised as such for at least the last two decades in South Africa. Consequently South Africa, with the full participation of all teacher unions and the blessing and participation of Higher Education has introduced Outcomes Based Education to infuse skills, knowledge and values into the present content-based approach. This is seen as the solution to the problems presently experienced both by employers and by Higher Education. The Grade 12 learner of the future will be research-oriented, problem solving and be a creative innovative thinker, without losing the basics which are essential to any good education.

Strangely enough, these same so-called educational experts are also quick to criticise OBE without offering a viable alternative.

Higher Education

The comment that the standard of first year students is declining is a truly unenlightened and blinkered view that needs to be looked at in some detail.

Since 1994, the number of learners from previously disadvantaged communities who obtain University endorsement has increased enormously. It should be remembered that these learners overcome the huge disadvantage of completing matric in a language unfamiliar to them (would 10 distinctions have been possible for an Afrikaans speaking learner writing matric in English or perhaps even in Sesotho?). Furthermore these learners have only taken English second language, the purpose of which is to improve communication in a second language, not to prepare learners to learn in a language as if it were their first language.

Many universities have recognised this problem and introduced bridging courses in English for such learners because at Higher Education level they are expected to work from academic tomes written at the highest and most academic level English can be found – a daunting task for an English speaker, never mind for someone for whom English may be a third language. If one considers the issue with sensitivity, one realises that the problems a student has at first year level may largely be as a result of language, not as a result of a lowered matric standard.

MEDIA FURORE continued

Overall improvement

Before 1994, the white departments regularly achieved a pass rate of 97 – 99%. The white media were profuse in their congratulations and praised the high standards achieved.

What has changed? The ex-white schools (their composition has also changed with the passing of time) still achieve an average pass rate close to 100% as a result of the continued benefits of good resources, excellent teaching and a work-conducive environment. Here nothing has changed. In the Free State 64 of these schools achieved a pass rate above 90% in 2002 and 62 were above 90% in 2003.

What has changed is that the formerly neglected majority is no longer as neglected as in the past. Resourcing has improved (although not yet anywhere near where it should be). Teachers are much better supported (as shown earlier). A culture of learning and teaching is growing in schools where it did not exist before. Pride is developing in ever improving results. Success is breeding success, as common sense and the OBE approach teach us. At the end of 2003, 54 township schools achieved a pass rate above 90% in contrast with only 8 in 2002.

Conclusion

It is clear that the whole examination system now in operation has more than enough checks and balances to ensure a sound, reliable and credible result. Furthermore, literally thousands of people, not least the teachers and learners, have worked extremely hard for many years to achieve these outstanding results. Uninformed and irresponsible comments as we have seen since December 30 are mischief making and political game playing at its worst, from which the only outcome will be disillusionment on the part of matrics who deserve better. It is indeed the role of the media to be critical, but only on the basis of established facts.

PLEASE CONTACT 0832981119 OR 4054852 (051) IF YOU HAVE ANY QUERIES RELATING TO CURRICULUM ISSUES.

WELL DONE TO ALL EDUCATORS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE IMPROVED GRADE 12 RESULTS AND EVERYTHING OF THE BEST TO ALL SCHOOLS FOR 2004.