

## **IEB Reassures Students of Fair Treatment in Resulting of Physical Sciences**

As pupils await the results of their Grade 12 matric exams, the IEB has provided reassurances that learners who wrote the Physical Sciences Paper 1 which contained an error in the first question rendering it unanswerable, have not been compromised.

Umalusi approved the IEB results at its press conference on 21 December 2009 and referred specifically to the error in the Physical Sciences Paper 1. Regarding the IEB Physical Science, Prof Volmink, the Chair person of Umalusi, indicated that the Umalusi Assessment Standards Committee has taken into consideration the report from the IEB on the direct and the indirect impact of the error in Physical Science Paper 1 on learner performance. The Committee has considered the degree of error as well as the degree of difficulty and has effected the necessary adjustments to ensure that this cohort of learners are not disadvantaged in Physical Science either in comparison with other 2009 subjects or with the 2008 Physical Science cohort. Umalusi is satisfied that learners deserving to pass will have passed and learners deserving distinctions will have attained that status.

“It is extremely regrettable that this error occurred – the first ever in the history of the IEB – as a result of a technical printing problem. While the paper was checked, audited against standard quality vetting procedures and signed off – the error crept in as a result of a misalignment in computers that resulted in a difference between the proof-read paper and final printed version. Extensive measures have been put in place to ensure that such an incident cannot occur again,” explains Anne Oberholzer, CEO of the Independent Examinations Board.

“The IEB managed the marking in terms of established procedures for managing papers that have a problem. In this instance it was an error in the paper. The same procedures apply when there is reason to believe a paper has been too difficult or too easy. The performance of learners in the problem question was ignored. Umalusi monitored the marking process and oversaw the standardisation process as well as the final resulting process.

“The first task was to try and determine what the impact of the error had been. The IEB collected data during the marking to see how learners managed the problem. Determining the true impact also included assessing the extent to which learners were affected in respect of time. A combined view was taken of the learner’s performance throughout the year, their school-based assessments as well as their exam performance being taken into account to ensure that students were not compromised and that the final resulting process was fair to all learners.

“Recognised standardisation techniques which include a critical examination of their performance in other subjects were employed in finalising results,” explains Anne Oberholzer.

While the IEB in no way wants to downplay the incident, it is however essential that the error is put into perspective in terms of the impact as there have been a number of inaccurate reports and rumours doing the rounds, adds Oberholzer.

“The question score was worth 16 marks out of a total of 400 for the examination papers. In processing final results, the question was ignored. It would have accounted for 3% of the total marks attainable after the inclusion of the school-based assessment component. Some news reports and rumours pegged this as high as 56 marks which is entirely incorrect and untrue.

“Furthermore it is good practice in any exam situation for students to be taught to employ exam coping techniques in terms of managing difficult questions, questions that may be slightly outside of their syllabus and as in this case, an error in the question. Most learners at independent schools are trained to manage their time allocation for each question and to return afterwards to any questions they could not manage, once they have completed all the other questions. The data collected by the IEB indicated that the vast majority of the 4243 students who wrote the Physical Sciences examination completed the paper and employed the correct exam-coping techniques, which they have been taught by their teachers. While the error is in no way being downplayed and has been treated in the most serious light by the IEB, there are tried and tested strategies in place to manage the problem and the IEB has drawn on this experience of other examining bodies, both local and international, as well as Umalusi,” explains Anne Oberholzer.

“We are extremely upset that the error found its way into the paper as the IEB prides itself on the highest possible standards of quality and learner support. We do however want to assure learners that the resulting process has taken the reaction of each individual learner into account. After determining the impact of the error on learners, the examining panel and the IEB were in a position to make appropriate recommendations to Umalusi. All additional information gathered by the IEB, including an analysis of learner performance in their school-based assessment, was also presented to ensure that the final resulting process took note of trends across all aspects of the assessment, and in reaching its final conclusions, Umalusi decisions have been fair to all learners.

The full set of IEB results will be released to learners on 30 December 2009. They will be available at schools and on the IEB website.

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