

## **State of Readiness for the National Senior Certificate Examinations in 2008**

In November 2008, 592 000 Grade 12 learners in 6 500 examinations centres will write the National Senior Certificate Examinations. This is the first time in the history of South Africa that all Grade 12 learners in public schools write the same examinations. There are four other 'firsts' in the 2008 school leaving examinations:

1. The examinations are set on the new curriculum known as the National Curriculum Statement
2. There is no longer higher grade and standard grade – only one grade of papers is set.
3. All learners must offer mathematics – either Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy.
4. All learners must offer Life Orientation. This subject is internally assessed.

Although there are new aspects to the National Senior Certificate there are also many aspects that are the same as those that pertained in the recent past. The following are the most important:

1. As in the past learners must offer two South African languages – one at the home language level and one at the second language level. (referred to as First Additional Language -FAL)
2. Much of the content is the same as in the old curriculum although the content has been updated and is assessed in ways that require deeper levels of understanding and comprehension.
3. Internal school-based assessment counts 25% of the final mark and the final examination 75%.

Here is a brief summary of the minimum requirements to obtain a National Senior Certificate.

All learners must offer seven subjects: two languages; maths or maths literacy; Life Orientation and three choice subjects from the approved list of subjects.

Learners must obtain a minimum of 40% in three subjects (one must be the home language) and 30% in three subjects.

Some commentators argue that these are very low requirements. There are two responses to this argument: no learner should aim to achieve these minimum requirements. All learners should aim to achieve the highest marks possible. Second, the requirements are more demanding than for the Senior Certificate or old matric. Learners are required to pass six subjects and cannot pass on an aggregate mark. In addition, the examinations are pitched at the higher-grade level and in this way are also more demanding.

Many have commented on the 'state of readiness' for these historic examinations. The Department of Education reports on the state of readiness from two angles: administrative readiness, that is, the Department of Education's readiness to administer reliable and credible examinations; and the readiness of learners to tackle these examinations with confidence.

## **Administrative readiness**

The Department of Education has been preparing to run a national examination since 2002 when national examination papers were set in five subjects. In 2006 and 2007 the national department set the examinations of eleven subjects for the former matric or Senior Certificate. In 2006 the DoE appointed examination panels for the National Senior Certificate and these exam panels were trained and began setting papers for grades 10 and 11 and 12 ahead of the final grade 12 examinations for November 2008. This provided multiple opportunities for the examiners and the Department of Education to improve the final product.

The final examinations have been delivered to provinces where the printing and distribution to exam centres takes place. Visits to all provinces show high levels of security and preparedness to run the examinations. School level invigilators have been appointed and trained. 35 000 markers have been appointed and special attention has been paid to appointing additional highly experienced teachers as markers.

The administrative systems for resulting are in place and results will be delivered to schools on 30 December 2008.

## **Readiness of learners**

The Department of Education has provided considerable support to learners and teachers in preparation for the National Senior Certificate. The most important of these support interventions are:

- Subject adviser and teacher training which began in 2005 and continued through 2006, 2007 and 2008
- Textbook catalogues of approved textbooks and the provision of these textbooks to the overwhelming majority of learners
- Examination exemplars in Grades 10, 11 and 12 in paper form and on the DoE and Thutong websites ([www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za) and [www.thutong.org.za](http://www.thutong.org.za))
- Extra tuition through face-to-face contact at Saturday, Spring and Winter Schools and lessons from expert teachers on DVD, video and television.
- *Study Mate*, a publication of exemplar exam papers and tips for all 600 000 Grade 12 learners.
- *Matric Revision (Know the Expert)* – provides tips on how to approach the main papers in the examinations.

The Department of Education has been supported in many ways by the teacher unions, higher education institutions and NGOs, publishers and all the media houses, the SABC and many private companies.

All of these partners in education have provided substantial support to improve infrastructure, ICT, teacher content knowledge and access to learning materials. The Department of Education is grateful for their ongoing support.

In the next few weeks learners should continue to work through exam exemplars and use the *Study Mate* publication for last minute preparation. On 29 October the Minister of Education publishes her final good luck message in *Study Mate*. Be sure to get your copy which contains Maths and English examination questions in this final edition of *Study Mate* for 2008.

Please go to [www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za) or [www.thutong.org.za](http://www.thutong.org.za) or you may contact Ms Z Govender on [govender.z@doe.gov.za](mailto:govender.z@doe.gov.za) for further information.