

## To whom it may concern

### The IEB as an accredited examining body in South Africa

This letter serves to introduce the IEB (Independent Examinations Board) to you, should you not already be aware of our existence as a respected examining authority in South Africa. Annually there are several South African students, who write the IEB school-leaving examination, who apply for entry to study at universities across the world. This letter serves to inform you of our organisation and hence to give you some idea of the learning background of our students.

#### **A Background: The South African curriculum and school-leaving qualification**

You may be aware that South Africa examined its current school-leaving qualification, the National Senior Certificate (NSC), for the first time in 2008. This qualification is the culmination of the curriculum that was introduced by the new democratic government when it came into power in 1994. The final phase of the curriculum for Grades 10 to 12 (16- to 18-year-olds) was implemented in Grade 10 in 2006.

The NSC examination is based on the Department of Basic Education's Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) which cover the schooling of learners from Grade R (Reception Year) to Grade 12. The CAPS documents are available from the Department of Basic Education's portal: <http://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/CurriculumAssessmentPolicyStatements>. The policy requirements for the qualification are also available on this website. Should you have difficulty in accessing these, please do not hesitate to contact our office and we will make the documents available to you. The IEB assesses this curriculum with specific emphasis on higher order academic skills. The IEB assessment requirements for the NSC – our Subject Assessment Guidelines - are available on the IEB website [www.ieb.co.za](http://www.ieb.co.za). Again, should you have difficulty in accessing these documents, please do not hesitate to contact our office and we will make the documents available to you. We are also able to make copies of recent examination papers available on request.

The IEB offers South African learners an opportunity to write the Advanced Programme examinations in Mathematics, English and Afrikaans. These are extension courses and are aimed at top students in the specific subject areas. Learners offer these courses in addition to the NSC. The curriculum, assessment documents and examples of examination papers are available on the IEB website [www.ieb.co.za](http://www.ieb.co.za). Should you have difficulty in accessing these documents, please do not hesitate to contact our office and we will make the documents available to you.

In 2009 the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (UK NARIC) conducted an evaluation of the NSC qualification, using the IEB examination as the basis for evaluating the assessment of the qualification. UK NARIC is the National Agency appointed by the UK Government to provide official information and expert opinion on international qualifications in the UK. It is our understanding that all UK Universities are UK NARIC members. Attached please find the Executive Summary of that report in which it is stated that the NSC subjects are broadly comparable to the GCE Advanced Subsidiary (AS)-level, with the Advanced Programmes (Further Studies Programmes) comparable to GCE A-level.

Furthermore, the UK National Information Centre for global qualifications and skills (UK ENIC) conducted an evaluation of the NSC qualification and the Further Studies Programmes in 2022 and confirmed that the NSC was broadly comparable to the GCE AS-level, with the Further Studies Programmes comparable to GCE A-level.

## **B The IEB as an integral part of the examining system in South Africa**

Examining of the NSC in South Africa is conducted by three accredited assessment authorities. The largest of these is the state. The national Department of Basic Education is responsible for setting the examination papers and the examination itself is conducted by the nine provincial departments of education. The second examining authority in respect of size is the IEB (Independent Examinations Board). Our Grade 12 student cohort in 2022 was  $\pm 13\ 000$ .

Our systemic dispensation enables all three examining authorities to assess the same curriculum but provides the opportunity for each assessment body to determine its own assessment requirements.

The IEB believes that it is through the assessment of the curriculum that its true worth and value as an educating tool can be exploited. The way in which a question is asked will either encourage the 'opening up' of young minds to see new ideas and possibilities or it will focus the mind narrowly onto the facts taught and presumably learnt during the year; the approach in assessment can either offer learners an opportunity to express their own opinions and show that they have used sound thinking skills and a reliable knowledge base to come to their conclusions or at the other end of the scale, it will encourage the re-gurgitation of learnt opinions. The IEB aims to harness the positive impact of good assessment techniques on learning and teaching and through its instruments, open the minds of teachers and learners to the higher order thinking skills encouraged in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements and required in our modern world. Schools have indicated to the IEB that parents choose IEB schools because of the IEB school-leaving examination which encourages the development of students, ensuring they are well-prepared for the rigors of tertiary study.

The IEB is an integral part of the national education system and as such it is subjected to the rigorous external moderation and external quality assurance (QA) processes conducted by Umalusi<sup>1</sup> (previously called the SA Certification Council), a statutory body set up by government for this purpose.

This quality assurance process allows for prescriptions on examination procedures and processes, teaching and learning and external moderation of the final examination as

---

<sup>1</sup> Statutorily known as the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training

well as a maximum allowable internal assessment component of no more than 25%, which is also subjected to statistical adjustment. Hence a school-leaver examined by the IEB needs to satisfy the self-same procedural requirements as the school-leaver from the state system. The final certificate is issued by Umalusi once it is satisfied that its quality assurance processes have been fully met.

It is worthwhile for me to point out the following in Umalusi' s letter of accreditation to the IEB (September 2007), where they noted *“the:*

- *Rigour which the IEB applies consistently in developing examination question papers of an acceptable standard.*
- *Amount of research and development that informs the delivery of quality assessment products.*
- *Efficient and effective assessment systems that are underpinned by sound values and the internalisation of such values by all who participate in the management and administration of assessments.”*

In July 2017 Umalusi wrote a letter to the Namibian Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture confirming the status of the IEB as an accredited assessment body. The following excerpt from the Umalusi letter is worth noting:

*“Umalusi confirms that the IEB is a credible independent assessment body operating in South Africa. The IEB ensures that it keeps abreast with developments in assessment by actively participating in regional and international assessment associations. The qualifications assessed by the IEB enjoy international recognition.”*

As an indication of the high regard that the IEB enjoys within the South African examining system, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has appointed the IEB to assess all non-official languages (i.e., Arabic, French, German, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Latin, Mandarin, Portuguese, Spanish, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, and Modern Greek) on behalf of the state. This means that the IEB conducts all assessment (including oral performance) for all learners in South Africa who offer these languages. Further to the non-official languages the DBE has also entrusted focused subjects such as Maritime Economics, Nautical Sciences, Equine Studies and Sports and Exercise Science to the IEB for national assessment.

The IEB also partnered with Umalusi, with the approval of the Department of Basic Education, to assess the South African units of the Joint Abitur – NSC qualification that was developed for the three local German schools, recognised in both Germany and South Africa. The compulsory four recognised NSC subjects are assessed by the IEB, and the remaining five subjects are from the Abitur. This was assessed for the first time in 2009 and is still part of the South African system, further illustrating the recognition given to the IEB as an assessment body within the South African system.

## **C Performance of IEB students**

The pass rate of IEB students is impressive, averaging 98-99% each year. The key point to note is the fact that, of the number of candidates who annually enter for the examination, in the region of 87% achieves a pass that qualifies them for admission to bachelor's degree studies. It is accepted that the IEB's annual groups of candidates are known to be performing the best of the school-leaving cohort from

all examining authorities and the percentage of school leavers with matriculation endorsement is the highest. This can be verified from respected organisations such as Universities South Africa (USAf), previously known as Higher Education South Africa (HESA), Umalusi or the national Department of Basic Education. I would be happy to provide you with the contact details of relevant officers at these institutions who could assist you, should you wish to make enquiries.

Furthermore, the IEB draws its examination candidates from the independent schooling sector only. State schools by law are required to write the examinations of the state. Schools in the independent sector must be registered by state authorities before they may operate to ensure that their provisioning is equal to or better than state schools. In addition, they are required to be accredited by Umalusi through a rigorous process of external quality assurance. Many of the independent schools that write the IEB examination are also quality assured by the Office of Independent Schools Evaluations Southern Africa (OISESA), a body established by the independent sector itself to ensure that provision of its member schools is of an exemplary standard. Finally, before a school is registered as an examination centre, the IEB conducts its own approval process, which includes a consideration not only of the facilities but the processes of teaching and learning. We at the IEB are confident that the schools offering our examination are exemplary learning institutions, offering learners the very best standards of teaching and support, both in terms of physical resources and learning support.

IEB candidates have readily been accepted into overseas universities in several countries. The following is a selection of Ivy League and World Top 100 institutions abroad that have accepted learners from IEB schools based on their NSC results:

Berkeley California (USA)  
New York University (USA)  
Brown University (Rhode Island, USA)  
Pennsylvania (USA)  
Durham University (England)  
Princeton (New Jersey, USA)  
Edinburgh (Scotland)  
Simon Fraser University (Canada)  
Harvard University (Massachusetts, USA)  
St Andrews (Scotland, UK)  
Kent (Canterbury)  
Twente (Netherlands)  
London School of Economics (UK)  
University of Buckingham Medical School (England)  
Melbourne University (Australia)  
Wharton School of Business (USA)  
New South Wales (Sydney, Australia)  
Yale (Connecticut, USA)

There are several other highly reputable institutions that accept students based on their NSC. These include:

University of Glasgow (Scotland)  
University of Groningen (Netherlands)

Monash University (Australia)  
University of Queensland (Australia)  
University of Western Australia, Australia

University of Exeter, UK  
Queen Mary University of London, UK  
University of East Anglia, UK  
University of Reading, UK  
Cardiff University, UK  
University of Massachusetts, USA

Annexure A herewith lists further Tertiary Institutions that have accepted and accept learners with an NSC.

The key issue is that these learners have for the most part successfully completed their studies.

In addition, the IEB has received correspondence from multiple foreign universities that attest to quality standards:

- Derek MacLeod, the International Officer for Middle East, and Africa for the University of Edinburgh (August 2010):

*Following a long conversation with colleagues of mine in our Admissions team for our College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, we've finally been given notification that the IEB NSC has been approved for entry to our courses in that College, as well as already being accepted for entry into our other Colleges in Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science and Engineering.*

*This development is the first change in some time to our entry requirements for our Medicine (MBChB) course as up until now, only A-levels, Scottish Highers, the IB and Irish Leaving Certificates were accepted for this course.*

- Francesca Casci, the Lead International Officer of Africa, and South Asia for the University of Aberdeen (February ,2019):

*"My colleagues from medicine have agreed that applications from students holding the NSC qualifications will, with immediate effect, be eligible to apply for entry to the University of Aberdeen MBChB. That means that we now accept NSC qualifications for all of our undergraduate programmes."*

- Jack Whaley, the Country Development Officer for Sub-Saharan Africa & Mauritius for the University of East Anglia (October ,2017)

*"It looks to me as if about half the credits on the syllabus are for some kind of literary study, and quite a few of the others are in respect of reading and interpreting skills that would be relevant too. So, it's a bit like the Language and Literature A level here. I think there's enough to treat it as a counting qualification."*

*Our School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing has a long-established international reputation in literary studies and is considered a UK Top 10 English department. So, I hope that the comments from our course director are well received by you and your colleagues. This information will now make it easier for us to accept and process applications from students who apply for a course where an English A-Level or equivalent is required.*

It is important to note that when foreign universities ask for an English Proficiency Test to be taken by students it is not because of the standard of IEB NSC English Home Language (as is evidenced by both the above and the UK Naric Report findings) but because of South Africa having 11 official languages. The English test is normally a requirement when a student is doing foundation / pathway, or a visa requirement for a particular country. If the university does not waiver this in the Confirmation of Acceptance document (CAS), then it must be done.

This is recognition of the extremely good work done by the teachers and learners in IEB schools.

## **D Conclusion**

I trust that this information will assist foreign university authorities in considering applications from South African learners who have written the IEB NSC examination as their school-leaving examination. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information that may assist you in making your decisions. My contact details are as follows: email: [DikgoleC@ieb.co.za](mailto:DikgoleC@ieb.co.za); Tel : +27(11)4839719; fax: +27(86) 5292521.

Information contained herein in relation to Umalusi and the DBE can be verified as follows respectively: Umalusi: [info@umalusi.org.za](mailto:info@umalusi.org.za), telephone +27(12) 3491510 for the attention of the Chief Executive Director Dr Mafu Rakometsi, website [www.umalusi.org.za](http://www.umalusi.org.za); DBE: [info@dbe.gov.za](mailto:info@dbe.gov.za), telephone +27(12) 357 3000 for the attention of the Director General Mr Mathanzima Mveli, website [www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za).

Yours faithfully



**Ms Confidence Dikgole**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**February 2023**