



## Is the IEB National Senior Certificate examination more difficult than other National Senior Certificate examinations in our country?

All schools who offer the National Senior Certificate follow the National Curriculum Statements which outline the learning requirements in each subject. The IEB has its own Subject Assessment Guidelines (SAGs) which provide the structure and weighting of each examination component - examination papers, oral and practical requirements and school based assessment requirements. All South African examination bodies are accredited by Umalusi, the statutory quality assurance body. The IEB is hence accredited to operate by Umalusi. Umalusi being the national certification body issues the National Senior Certificate. The IEB issues an IEB statement of results to its learners.

Umalusi moderates all externally set examination papers to ensure that they comply with the National Curriculum Statements and the examination requirements of the examination body. They also assess whether the examination papers are more or less assessing at the level one should expect of a Grade 12 learner.

There is no scientific way of proving whether one examination paper is assessing at the same level as another, simply because the issue of standards and comparability of standards is more complex than the examination paper itself. It embraces provisioning which includes the ability, qualification and application of teachers. It includes the physical resources at schools and support for learners at home, which includes issues of language proficiency, access to IT, support from parents. Then there are the more obvious expressions of standards namely the examination paper itself, the administration and conduct of the examination, how irregularities are dealt with as well as how the papers are marked and finally, resulting.

The IEB is of the opinion that the way schools prepare learners for

the examination makes the IEB examination accessible to the learners. To look at an analogy: if you are preparing for the down-run of the Comrade's Marathon, your training, while it may be as demanding in respect of time and distances, will differ from what your training runs would be if you were preparing for the up-run. Because the impact of the race on your knees in a down-run is different from the impact on the knees in an up-run, preparation for the down-run requires training on different roads to ensure that the knees for example are adequately prepared for the down-run. In the same way, because of the IEB way of assessing, teachers approach the preparation of learners differently to prepare them to cope well with the difference.

Hence, the way of teaching learners in an IEB school prepares them for the IEB examination in the same way as teaching in other schools prepares their learners for the examination they will write. And just as preparation for an up-run does not prepare you for a down-run in the Comrades Marathon, preparation for an IEB examination does not prepare you for the examination of another examining body and vice versa.

# Is the IEB examination internationally benchmarked or recognised?

The National Senior Certificate (NSC) is a relatively new qualification, written in South Africa for the first time in 2008.

The international standing of the major school leaving and university entrance qualification in a country that has the status that South Africa has on the African continent is critically important not only for learners who may wish to study abroad but also for placing students who enter South Africa to study. More importantly the external recognition of the South African qualification is important for our South African society and parents in particular who take the education of their children seriously. They need to be re-assured that the standard of education in our country as evidenced in the main school leaving examination is of an acceptable standard internationally.

In 2009 after the first examination session for the NSC was conducted, the IEB approached UK NARIC to conduct a benchmarking exercise on the National Senior certificate. UK NARIC is the National Agency, managed on behalf of the UK Government, to provide an official source of information on international qualifications to organisations recruiting from outside the UK and to individuals wishing to work or study in the UK.

International recognition of a qualification takes into account the number of years of schooling that leads up to the final assessment, the number of subjects the qualification requires students to study, the content of the curriculum as well as the quality assurance associated with the assessment.

The benchmarking study was based on UK NARIC's approach to credential evaluation, taking into account the design and assessment framework, broader observations of the curricula restructuring process, course objectives and learning outcome statements, the structure of the final award, level descriptors, the assessment process, grading structure and comparisons and finally quality assurance and control mechanisms. A sample of subjects was used in the study including English Home Language, Mathematics (including Paper 3), Advanced Programme Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences and Geography.

In its Executive Summary, the UK NARIC report highlighted the following:

1. The features of the NSC indicate a qualification with an underlying level that is both robust and fit for the purposes of examining senior secondary school levels. In terms of the qualification's comparability, the report concludes that the National Senior Certificate at Grade 12 is broadly comparable to the GCE AS-level.
2. For those candidates who undertake the IEB Advanced Programme in Mathematics, the report is satisfied that the additional content is more reflective of the requirements of the GCE A level. Furthermore, it is noted that there are considerations to develop an advanced paper for English Home Language, it could be surmised that an advanced paper could further enhance the comparability of the subject to GCE A level standard.

These findings were echoed in a 2010 study carried out by Umalusi, the South African quality assurance body for further and general education and training.

The IEB has numerous examples of IEB students who have applied to and been accepted into foreign universities in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia.

## Entrance tests

Just as it is the case with many local universities, students who wish to study at foreign institutions are required to write entrance tests. The words of an IEB student, Adele Rossouw, a student at Roedebeek School South Africa in 2008, who was accepted for study at 5 overseas institutions in 2009 and who has chosen to study at Yale University in the US, are pertinent:

"It should be noted that an IEB National Senior Certificate is not sufficient to exempt South African applicants from the additional entrance examinations required by most overseas universities. This is not because a South African IEB matric represents any form of substandard education, but simply because of the necessity of a benchmarking mechanism by which to evaluate top candidates from around the world. Bearing in mind the international level of competition which applicants to, for example, an American Ivy League university face, one should recognise that sound academic knowledge is but the foundation for success on such a level of competition. In addition, the successful applicant needs to possess the intellectual dexterity which is the mark of the exceptional student, and which allows for easy transition to a largely unfamiliar educational system, and for the development of knowledge in an international setting."

This opinion is echoed by Higher Education South Africa.

## The Combined NSC and Abitur qualification

The Combined NSC and Abitur was assessed for the first time in 2009. It is a qualification offered at the 3 German schools in South Africa – Deutsche Schule Johannesburg, Kapstadt and Pretoria - and is recognised formally by the German and South African education authorities. It consists of subjects assessed by the Abitur authorities in Germany and the IEB in South Africa. A successful learner has access to both South African universities and German universities.