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Umalusi retains language compensation for matric learners

Umalusi, the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, has made a determination to retain language compensation at 3% for learners who study through the medium of English as a second language in Grade 12 from 2016 until 2022. After serious consideration of this matter, Umalusi Council decided to review its previous decision to phase out language compensation from 2014 to 2017, which entailed gradually scaling it down from 4% in 2014 to 1% in 2017.

It is worth noting that the challenges presented by the use of English as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) from Grade 4 to Grade 12 prompted the introduction of a 5% language compensation – back in 2000 - for all learners who study through the medium of English as a second language. Unfortunately, despite the Department of Basic Education's genuine efforts to address gaps created by the use of English as LoLT, much work still remains to be done to completely eradicate language disparities in the system.

Furthermore, based on the fact that the Department of Basic Education is devoting significant resources towards initiatives aimed at enhancing the language proficiency of learners, such as its initiative of English across the curriculum, and the introduction of English First Additional Language (FAL) as a subject at Grade 1 level since 2012, it is Umalusi's considered view that language compensation must be retained at 3% until 2022 - for complete withdrawal in 2023 - when the cohort that was exposed to English FAL from the foundation phase would have progressed to Grade 12.

According to the CEO of Umalusi, Dr Mafu Rakometsi, "language, and in particular proficiency in the medium of instruction, is one of the most significant factors affecting learner performance at school, especially given the fact that the majority of children study in a second language.

So, this is in essence a social justice matter. Unfortunately, in a complex and multilingual society like ours, language remains a vexing issue. However, as a Quality Council, we want the system to find ways to progressively rid itself of all inconsistencies created by the use of English as LoLT."

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