

Evaluation of the Internal Assessment and Examination System for the General Education and Training Certificate: Adult Basic Education and Training (GETC: ABET), 2012

April 2013

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ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
AET	Adult Education and Training
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education (now DBE and DHET)
FET	Further Education and Training (band/colleges)
GET	General Education and Training (band)
GETC	General Education and Training Certificate
IT	Information Technology
NATED	National Education Department (programmes)
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NCV	National Certificate Vocational
NSC	National Senior Certificate
PALC	Public Adult Learning Centre
PED	Provincial Education Department
QC	Quality Council
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
SBA	Site-Based Assessment
UMALUSI	Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- i. The evaluation of the Internal Assessment and Examination Systems for the General Education and Training Certificate, Adult Basic Education and Training (GETC: ABET) conducted in 2012, forms part of Umalusi's ongoing role in assuring the quality of qualifications which fall within its mandate.
- ii. Umalusi's statutory role in respect of the GETC:ABET is set out in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act (Act 67 of 2008, Chapter 5), as follows:
...with regard to quality assurance within its framework –
 - (i) develop and implement policy for quality assurance;
 - (ii) ensure the integrity and credibility of quality assurance;
 - (iii) ensure that such quality assurance as is necessary for the sub-framework is undertaken.

These directives frame the evaluation of the internal assessment and examination systems of the GETC: ABET.

- iii. This document reports on the overall findings of the evaluation of the assessment and examination system for GETC: ABET in public provisioning. The assessment system is understood as the policies, structures and processes for the conduct, management and administration of the assessment. These components support the achievement of quality standards for assessment for the qualification.
- iv. The evaluation was undertaken to build a progressive understanding of systemic and contextual factors that affect the quality of the assessment system, which form the basis for the recommendations to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).
- v. The evaluation involved the participation of stakeholders at all levels of the system. Site visits were conducted at the DHET itself, four selected provincial departments of education, district offices and Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs).
- vi. The inquiry concentrated on the four learning areas which attract the highest number of registrations for the examination, namely Mathematical Literacy, Ancillary Healthcare, Life Orientation and Natural Sciences.
- vii. Further, the evaluation focused on the four key areas of an assessment and examination system as outlined in Umalusi's policies, namely Strategic Management and Leadership, The Standard of Assessment and Examinations, Research and Development and Administration of Examinations and Information Technology.

viii. The most important findings in respect of these four areas are:

Strategic Management and Leadership

- a. There appears to be a lack of guidance to provincial departments and districts in respect of the DHET policies;
- b. The DHET and provincial departmental policies are not aligned, which impact on the administration of Site-based Assessment (SBA), as well as examinations;
- c. These matters are exacerbated by the fact the policies in respect of assessment and examination of the GETC:ABET are based on policies developed by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) for the National Senior Certificate (NSC);
- d. Very poor communication generally between the DHET and the lower levels of the system.

The Standard of Assessment and Examinations

- e. The consistent unreliability of the SBA mark and the gap between the SBA mark and the examination mark, brings the standard into question;
- f. Poor policy guidance in respect of the purpose and implementation of the SBA resulting in inflated SBA marks;
- g. An overall diminishing of confidence in the SBA as a reliable method of assessment;
- h. In terms of marking and moderation, feedback, especially to enhance effective curriculum delivery, is lacking;
- i. Monitoring is satisfactory and takes place at various stages, which is cascaded from provincial offices through districts to the centres.

Research and Development

- j. The absence of any research in relation to and about the sector is a serious shortfall in the assessment and examination system.

Administration of Examination and Information Technology

- k. The administrative and logistical systems for the examinations were found to be in place, and adequate;
- l. Some immediate areas for improvement include the capturing of marks and the resulting process and the management of the SBA for candidates repeating a learning area;
- m. Potential security risks in respect of leakage of question papers need to be attended to;
- n. Examination centre staff (exam centre managers, administration assistants and invigilators) should be appointed for examinations;

- o. The remuneration of staff (markers and moderators) needs attention;
- p. The certification system needs urgent attention;
- q. The Information Technology systems need updating and upgrading.

Other related findings

- r. Findings not necessarily related to the assessment and examination system, which is the subject of this report, nevertheless impact on the quality of the system. These findings relate to the structure of the qualification, the attitude to adult education and the circumstances experienced on the ground, the competence of personnel, the attitude of learners and budgets and funding.
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- ix. The report details a list of recommendations in line with the findings noted above.
 - x. An important recommendation is the establishment of a high-level panel/task team to prioritise actions on the many critical observations gleaned through the evaluation. Such a panel should particularly attend to the contextual factors which do not fall within the mandate of this evaluation, but without which the purposes of the qualification cannot be achieved.
 - xi. Part 1 of the report provides the background and introduction to the evaluation; Part 2 describes the approach, scope and methodology used for the evaluation; Part 3 discusses the detailed findings, linked to recommendations; Part 4 concludes the report.

PART 1: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Umalusi's Mandate and Responsibilities

In the course of 2012 Umalusi conducted a wide-ranging qualitative national evaluation of the internal assessment and examination systems for the General Education and Training Certificate: Adult Basic Education and Training (GETC: ABET). This is the first evaluation of the system since the introduction and the first examination of the qualification in 2000.

Umalusi was established as a Quality Council (QC) for General and Further Education and Training by the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008. As a QC, Umalusi is required to develop and manage a sub framework of qualifications that are registered on levels 1-4 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). One of these qualifications is the General Education and Training Certificates: Adult Basic Education and Training (GETC: ABET).

The object of Umalusi's founding Act, the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act, 2001 (as amended in 2008) is to enhance the quality of general and further education and training. To that end, Umalusi is required to, among other things, quality assure assessment of learner achievement at the exit points of qualifications which are registered as part of the General and Further Education and Training sub framework. It can also issue or endorse certificates of learner achievements.

Umalusi's role in terms of the quality assurance of the GETC: ABET is to enhance the credibility and the value - both intrinsic and extrinsic - of adult learning at NQF level 1. Its functions are set out in the NQF Act (67, 2008 Chapter 5, 27), as follows:

...with regard to quality assurance within its sub-framework –

- (i) develop and implement policy for quality assurance;
- (ii) ensure the integrity and credibility of quality assurance;
- (iii) ensure that such quality assurance as is necessary for the sub-framework is undertaken.

The Umalusi Council executes this function through its established annual processes and procedures. The Council reports on each of the assessment and examination processes and makes evaluative judgements on the credibility of the examinations.

Umalusi judges the quality and standard of the assessments by determining:

- the level of adherence to policy in implementing assessment-related processes;
- the efficiency and effectiveness of the systems, processes and procedures for monitoring the conduct of examinations;

- the quality of marking, and the quality and standard of internal assessment;
- the cognitive challenge of examination papers; and
- the quality of the presentation of examination papers.

In addition, the Council is expected to report on the adequacy and suitability of qualifications and standards.

For this reason, from time to time, Umalusi drills down deeper and undertakes systemic evaluations with a view to determining the extent to which the different levels of the assessment and examination system, including the National Department of Higher Education and Training, the Provincial Departments of Education (PEDs), district offices and examination centres, adhere to its policies and procedures in order to:

- provide feedback on quality of the assessment and examination system;
- make recommendations to the DHET in respect of the necessary improvements of the standard of the internal assessment and examinations;
- point towards matters for consideration in terms of the adequacy and suitability of the qualification;
- contribute to the national debate regarding the importance of adult education and training as an integral component of the national post-school education and training system.

Furthermore, Umalusi's responsibilities for quality assurance mean that its concern reaches beyond the specific acts of assessment, to the performance of the whole system. Inevitably, the report bears in some ways on the delivery system of the GETC: ABET as a whole.

1.2 About the GETC: ABET

The GETC: ABET endorses an officially-recognised qualification in adult learning at the first exit level of the National Qualification Framework (level 1) (NQF level 1) as well as crowning adult learning achievement at the fourth level of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) (also known as ABET Level 4).

The GETC: ABET, while differentiated from the content of schooling, is in principle regarded as on the same level as the Grade 9 in schooling and certified as an exit Level 1 qualification on the NQF. It came at the end of what was known until recently as the GET band.

To satisfy the need for adult education approaches, with content and outcomes relevant to the world of work and adult responsibilities, the GETC: ABET is based on NQF unit standards and not on the school curriculum.

The unit standards were selected according to criteria that intended to give the qualification a range suitable to general education rather than more focused workplace related learning.

The GETC has a number of purposes. These include:

- Motivating adult learners and giving them confidence in the quality of their achievement;
- Providing credible information for potential employers or providers of further education and training in relation to these achievements;
- Providing a professional framework and goals for the provision of teaching and learning during structured instruction through AET levels 1-4;
- Offering key insights to the provincial and national leadership of education regarding the performance of the adult learning system;

However, from the outset various aspects of the GETC: ABET have been a matter of dispute and contestation. In the early 2000s Umalusi initiated a number of working groups together with the then DoE to explore questions (many of which still remain unanswered), such as:

- The scope of the requirements (should they cover only key learning areas or the full range of learning areas required in schools? What was the balance of general, vocational and workplace-based learning that could be sustained in the GETC: ABET for adults?);
- The unit standards-based approach (should there not be a curriculum that allowed common content and comparability?);
- The location (did adult education and training not belong best in the workplace learning terrain, and therefore within the then Department of Labour, or subsequently in the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) rather than in a national education department?); and
- The approach to assessment (should it be the subject of a national assessment at all?).

A particularly problematic issue has been the commitment to site-based assessment (SBA). SBA is seen to be an excellent approach in terms of pedagogical virtues, and for its fit with many adult education values. However, the weakness of SBA reliability and comparability is widely recognised. The DHET now sets common tasks for SBAs with guidance and moderation of standards. However the problem remains challenging.

Further, the GETC: ABET has been chronically troubled by relatively low uptake, poor throughput and low performance on the final assessment.

The DHET has made various thrusts for improvement of the performance of the GETC. This included raising remuneration and offering training for assessment officials. In the course of 2011 there was a remarkable success in raising the performance. The numbers for full certification on the GETC: ABET rose from 7884 nationally in 2010, to 13294 in 2011, a near doubling of the success rate.

This must, however, be seen against the claimed national enrolment in adult education and training levels 1-4 of 300 000 adult learners, and the estimated 107 000 learners enrolled initially for the GETC: ABET. The DHET reported a 4% certification rate in 2011 and Umalusi was only able to accept raw marks for 56% (13 learning areas) out of the 23 learning areas offered for the GETC: ABET. (Figures are from DHET Annual Report 2011/12 and Umalusi's press release on results at the start of 2012.) With the new rules of combination in the GETC: ABET from October/November 2010 – more learners passed the GETC: ABET.

However, it is when the numbers and success rates in terms of the four learning areas investigated for this evaluation is scrutinized that the extremely poor throughput rate becomes apparent (see below):

Table 1.1: Subject throughput rates – Oct 2010; June 2011; Oct 2011

Subject	Exam date	Enrolled	Written	Passed
Mathematical Literacy	2010-10	54118	11851	301
	2011-06	20889	8139	226
	2011-10	61945	11318	321
Ancillary Health Care	2010-10	27297	4483	317
	2011-06	7417	1857	67
	2011-10	32406	4220	216
Life Orientation	2010-10	47695	7314	470
	2011-06	8420	1617	180
	2011-10	53631	6494	411
Natural Science	2010-10	19670	3124	96
	2011-06	6624	2247	51
	2011-10	18626	2468	84

With the creation of the DHET after 2008 and the location of adult education and training in its portfolio, responsibility for ABET and the GETC: ABET moved from the Department of Education (now Department of Basic Education - DBE) to the DHET. Policy and guidelines for the assessment and rules of combination for the award of the GETC through certification, is determined in policy by the Minister of Higher Education and Training. Examinations and standardised tasks for site-based assessment (SBA) are set centrally by the DHET. The provincial departments of education are responsible for the management, administration and conduct of both internal assessment and external examinations.

Umalusi is responsible for the external moderation and quality assurance of assessment and examinations.

However, in spite of its notional importance in the national education landscape, the GETC is relatively marginal in the system. It stands high in moral regard for its relationship to redress and equity, but it remains at the bottom of the pile compared with the matric certificate or even the NATED programmes offered in Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges. The lack of status is accentuated with the qualification's location within the ambit of responsibility of the DHET, where it is compared with university degrees and doctorates. The question, "What does the GETC offer access to?" remains an open question, and was raised a number of times in the present evaluation.

Umalusi has been responsible for the quality assurance of the assessment of the GETC: ABET for the past 12 years. Throughout this time Umalusi has been working together with the national departments to clarify direction regarding the nature, scope, curriculum and assessment processes of the GETC: ABET. While there have been small changes and cumulative improvements made because of this relationship, the GETC: ABET is much as it was at its inception, and many of the problems emerging through this current evaluation were present early on in the existence of the GETC: ABET.

1.3 Assessment of the GETC: ABET

The structuring of official assessment for the GETC closely parallels that for the National Senior Certificate (NSC):

- The DHET deals with policy and guidelines and sets core examinations or assessment tasks;
- The provincial departments of education, who manage and conduct the assessment of the GETC: ABET, set specific examinations and monitor the implementation of the SBA, which is mainly in the hands of local Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs);
- Umalusi moderates the question papers and takes responsibility for the quality assurance of the results; this includes standardisation and statistical moderation for the release of results (with possible adjustments). Umalusi also moderates the SBA and monitors the conduct of the examinations.

In addition, Umalusi must be satisfied that the provincial departments of education have the capacity to oversee, manage and conduct the assessment processes required. This capacity includes having appropriate policies, capable staffing, logistics and data management technology - and on the ability to implement this capacity in context.

The present report focuses specifically on the evaluation of capacity (including actual implementation) to manage assessment at all levels of the system.

PART 2: APPROACH, METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

Umalusi approaches systemic evaluations in a developmental and collegial spirit. It nevertheless conducts evaluations in keeping with its mandate, its policies and criteria. Evaluation instruments are derived from the four key competencies required of an assessment and examinations system, namely:

- Strategic Management and Leadership;
- the Standard of Assessment and Examinations;
- Research and Development; and,
- Administration of Examinations and Information Technology.

While Umalusi is aware that the quality of provisioning within the adult education sector continues to have challenges, and that these challenges will impact on the quality of assessment, its mandate in respect of this evaluation is to make a judgement about the assessment and examination systems for the GETC: ABET.

The assessment and examination system is understood to include the policies, structures and processes for the conduct of assessment and examination. These components are seen to support the achievement of quality standards for assessment.

The evaluation of the system enables Umalusi to determine the strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement to be undertaken by the DHET, and is informed by the DHET's own strategic vision and implementation plans for the GETC: ABET.

2.1 Sampling

The evaluation was conducted at the National Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), four provincial departments of education (PEDs), two district offices per province and two Public Adult Learning Centre (PALC) per province, focusing on only public provision (see below):

Table 2.1: Sample for the systemic evaluation

Department	Districts	PALCs
DHET	Chief Directorate: Examinations	-
Gauteng	1. Gauteng North (D1) 2. Johannesburg West (D12)	1. Taamane 2. Morakupule Santho
Kwazulu Natal	1. Pinetown district 2. uMlazi district	1. Thandiwe 2. Malvern

Department	Districts	PALCs
Eastern Cape	1. East London 2. Fort Beaufort	1. Embekweni 2. Bhofolo
Western Cape	1. Metro North 2. Mpumalanga	1. Elsie River 2. Chris Hani Sec School

2.2 Interviews

A team of evaluators interviewed officials at all levels of the system by means of the evaluation instruments. Interviews included requests to inspect examples of policies, procedures, the actual systems for data management, logistics, etc.

A set of questions, designed to gather responses that would shed light on the standard or quality of planning, implementation, management and review in regard to assessment and examinations relating to the GETC, were posed. Responses to the pre-determined questions were evaluated in accordance with the following rating scale:

Unsatisfactory	Some elements are satisfactory	Most elements are satisfactory	All elements are satisfactory	
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The evaluation process involved interviews with senior district curriculum and examination officials, managers of processes, scanning/collecting of hard evidence, inspecting premises and facilities and recording of findings.

The following officials were interviewed:

Table 2.2: Interviewees (see the accompanying annexure)

Department	
DHET	
Gauteng District offices PALCs	
Kwazulu Natal District offices PALCs	
Eastern Cape District offices PALCs	

Department	
Western Cape District offices PALCs	

See attached list (Appendix 1) of other people with whom the evaluation teams interacted.

The evaluation team(s) visiting the sites consisted of:

Table 2.3: Evaluation team(s)

Department	Team leader	Team members
DHET	Chris Nyangintsimbi	Annemarie Janse van Rensburg (Mrs) Mary-Louise Madalane (Mrs) Eardley Twigg Chaile Makaleng (Senior Manager: E&A)
Gauteng	Mrs M Madalane	Mr M Ramagoshi Ms E Magongoa Ms S Sibanyoni Ms N Itsweng Mr N Phetla Mr C Nyangintsimbi

Kwazulu Natal	Mrs M Madalane	Mr T Aphane Ms N Itsweng Ms M Monnakgotla Mr C Nyangintsimbi Ms N Ndhrazi Ms N Mbuli Mr I Baatjes
Eastern Cape	Mrs M Madalane	Mr C Nyangintsimbi Mr M Ramagoshi Ms E Magongoa Mr M Rakgatlha Mr D Gumede Mr T Aphane Mr I Baatjes
Western Cape	Mrs M Madalane	Mr C Nyangintsimbi Mr C Makaleng Ms N Itsweng Mr N Phetla Mr B Mphahlele Ms S Sibanyoni Mr M Rakgatlha

2.3 Learning areas

The inquiry concentrated on the four learning areas which attracted the highest number of registrations in the GETC in 2011, namely:

- Mathematical Literacy;
- Ancillary Healthcare;
- Life Orientation; and
- Natural Sciences.

2.4 Data collection

As noted above (see 2.2) the evaluation process relied on gathering information from different sources at different levels of the system for the purposes of determining the extent to which there is alignment of policy and practice at the different implementation and delivery sites (among DHET, PEDs, districts and PALCs). It also served to triangulate findings and confirm consistency of responses. Evaluation instruments were designed to capture both systemic and operational data.

A programme was drawn up for the site visits and generally followed the following format:

Programme for Site-visits

09:00 – 09:30	Arrival – Day 1		
09:30 – 09:35	Opening and welcome	Department	
09:35 – 10:00	Presentation – purpose of the visit	Umalusi	
10:00 – 10:20	Strategic vision for the GETC	Department	
10:20 – 10:50	The assessment of the GETC – roles and responsibilities (PDE, District, PALC)	Department	
10:50 – 11:00	Discussion	All	
11:00 – 11:15	Tea		
11:15 – 16:30	Evaluation and interrogation of evidence (parallel sessions)		
11:15 – 12:30	Items 1 and 2	Items 3 and 4	Item 5
Session 1	Interviews	Interviews	Interviews
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch		
13:30 – 15:30	Interrogation of evidence	Interrogation of evidence	Interrogation of evidence
Session 2			
15:30 – 15:40	Debriefing Umalusi team		
15:45 – 16:00	Concluding remarks and announcements		

Day 2 and 3: Site visits to Districts and PALCS

2.4.1 Data and documents collected at National level

The evaluation team visited the National Examinations Directorate for two days (10-11 July 2012).

The Chief Education Specialist and the Deputy Chief Education Specialist were interviewed at the DHET.

In-depth interviews and visual inspections were undertaken along the following themes:

- Group 1: Examination Information Technology (IT) System, resulting and certification processes
- Group 2: Setting, conduct and marking of national examination assessment instruments
- Group 3: Monitoring of examination centres and provision of examination material to centres

Key documents gathered include:

- A. DHET National Examinations and Assessment: Draft Turnaround Strategy 2012 – Improvement Plans
- B. FET Colleges and Adult Education and Training Centres: Preliminary report on the Exam and Assessment Results, November 2012 exams
- C. Presentation to Umalusi: Dissemination of Policy through training sessions with College Examination Officials. 11 July 2012

D. Document pack of Annexures:

- i. Management and Monitoring Operational Plan 2012/13;
- ii. Directorate: Examination Management and Monitoring staff list;
- iii. Monitoring/ Audit visits of examination centres 2011/2012.

2.4.2 Data and documents collected at Provincial level

Four provincial site visits were undertaken between October and November 2012 (Western Cape, KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape and Gauteng).

At provincial level, curriculum officials that are responsible for the assessment (curriculum) and those that manage examinations for the GETC were interviewed. The officials interviewed were the staff responsible for the management of the administration of site based assessment and for the administration of examinations.

The following key documents were collected for analysis:

1. Assessment Body Vision, Mission and Value system
2. Documents on structural relationships and reporting lines
3. Annual management meeting programme
4. Provincial Department policy and or regulations on the administration of the GETC examinations
5. Monitoring reports on policy implementation
6. General Code of conduct for assessment body
7. Documents that spell out the policy on handling of irregularities, process followed, reporting lines and decision making
8. Records of implementation of the policy
9. List of the current members of the irregularity committee
10. Evidence of formal agreement to keep classified information private.
11. State of readiness" for November 2011/June 2012 conduct of examinations report
12. Management policies in respect of all aspects: e.g. appointment, training programme, guidelines, review, moderation, performance management, monitoring, marking, etc.

13. Examination instructions
14. Research reports
15. SLA with SITA
16. Policy on monitoring examinations
17. Policy/criteria for the appointment of invigilators
18. Policy on the establishment of marking centres
19. Monitoring instruments
20. Monitoring reports
21. Minutes of meetings held in relation with any of the above activities

2.4.3 Data collected at District level

As at the Provincial level, the officials interviewed were the staff responsible for the management of the administration of site based assessment and for the administration of examinations.

The following key documents were collected for analysis:

1. The Organogram of the district and physical location of offices.
2. Documents setting out structural relationships and reporting lines
3. Annual management meeting programme
4. General Code of conduct for staff
5. Documents that spell out the policy on handling of irregularities, processes to be followed, reporting lines and decision making
6. Evidence of formal agreement to keep classified information private.
7. "State of readiness" for June 2012/ Nov 2011 conduct of examinations report
8. Policy on security systems
9. Logging and distribution records
10. Retrieval systems
11. Tracking of the Mathematics Literacy question paper, memo and scripts of June 2012/ Dec 2011

12. Tracking devices
13. Criteria for qualification as an examination centre
14. Policy and guidelines for administration of examination.
15. Procedure for management of irregularities
16. Provision of resources required for effective administration of examinations
17. Specific responsibilities for chief and other invigilators
18. Training programme for invigilators
19. Training material for the training of invigilators
20. Circular pertaining to examinations and SBAs
21. Code of conduct for invigilators
22. Evidence of recommendations made on the appointment of markers
23. Evidence that due processes were observed when making recommendations
24. List with names and credentials of the internal structure that considers the applications
25. Evidence of verification of applicant's information supplied by centres.
26. Criteria on the registration of learners
27. Software used for registration of candidates
28. Criteria on the appointment of invigilators
29. Invigilator training program and training material
30. List of monitoring teams.
31. Monitoring program
32. Policy/guideline on the moderation of SBA
33. Minutes of meetings pertaining to any of the above activities

2.4.4 Data collected at Public Adult Learning Centres level

At the PALCs mainly the head of the adult centre or his/her designate was interviewed.

The following key documents were collected for analysis:

1. Mapped management structure and reporting lines
2. Contextualised examination policy
3. Code of conduct for the administration of the examinations
4. "State of readiness" for Nov 2011/June 2012 conduct of examinations report
5. Guideline for running examinations
6. Policy requirements for exam centres
7. Training programme for training of invigilators
8. Code of conduct for invigilators
9. Procedure for irregularities
10. Policy on security systems
11. Logging and distribution records
12. Tracking procedure for examination papers (receipt and distribution)
13. Policy / guideline on the registration of candidates.
14. Document highlighting the responsibilities of the chief invigilator and invigilators
15. Criteria for recommendation of markers
16. Evidence of recommendations made on the appointment of markers
17. Evidence that due processes were observed when making recommendations
18. List and credentials of the internal structure that considers the applications
19. Criteria for appointment of invigilators (if using contract staff)
20. Manual for Training of invigilators
21. Reports on the monitoring of Exams
22. Guidelines on the collection, packing and distribution of examination scripts

23. SBA moderation reports

24. Minutes of meetings related to any of the above items.

2.4.5 General observation – data collection

At all sites basic information, data management systems and capacity were found to be in place in spite of limitations of resources and pressure of time.

Commendable levels of commitment and concern of the people involved at all levels were observed. While there are systemic problems that need to be addressed with some urgency, the one satisfactory aspect seems to be in the technical administration of the assessment system (but even here the lack of capacity and resources may translate into risks to the integrity of the assessment and examinations).

PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As noted earlier, the evaluation of the internal assessment and examinations system for the GETC: ABET was conceptualized along the policies and criteria of Umalusi, in particular those relating to the performance of the assessment and examination system. While the evaluation therefore goes deeper than the annual monitoring before and during the assessment cycle, (which involves moderation of question papers; moderation of internal assessment; monitoring the conduct of the examination; verification of marking; and, standardizing examination and internal assessment results), the evaluation is limited to the following key areas:

- Strategic Management and Leadership;
- The Standard of Site-based assessment and Examinations;
- Research and Development; and
- Administration of the Examinations.

However, the assessment and examination system cannot be divorced from the implementation and delivery system. Indeed, the assessment and examination system will be strongly influenced by the problems experienced and contexts of the implementation and delivery system.

Therefore, in this part of the report, the findings and recommendations in relation to the four key areas noted above will be provided first. This will be followed by other matters observed during the data collection phase. These matters are of equal importance for the improvement of the GETC: ABET.

3.1 Strategic Management and Leadership

According to the Umalusi policy, the criterion 'Strategic Management and Leadership' is described as:

The assessment body's leadership is instructive and provides strategic direction and governance oversight based on acceptable practices. The strategic initiatives, interventions, policies and procedures of the assessment body promote fair, valid and reliable assessments. The assessment body is sustainable and financially viable and demonstrates commitment to quality improvement in providing feedback annually to the institutions that are its examination centres. The assessment body is sufficiently and professionally staffed. The leadership and management identify and manage the organisational risks effectively.

It is against these requirements that judgements and recommendations are made:

3.1.1 Quality of leadership

The quality of leadership, at all levels of the assessment system is felt to be wanting. This issue became more evident as various officials complained about the lack of direction, and the difficulty in obtaining answers in respect of policy implementation. Much of this is ascribed to the 'newness' of the DHET's functions, a lack of resources and inherited problematic relations with the PEDs.

3.1.2 Policy

A key finding in respect of the national policy on the conduct of examinations of the GETC: ABET is that the current DHET policy has not been reviewed at any stage since it was implemented with the introduction of the qualification. The adequacy of policy provision and its articulation are therefore untested and was consistently reported as problematic by respondents at all levels of the system.

Further, there seems to be a lack of alignment between national and provincial policies and requirements. There is virtually no cascading of resources and assistance to district levels, through to the PALCs.

3.1.3 Communication

While DHET acknowledges that it is still in transition with regard to some of its functions following the establishment of the Department of Higher Education and Training, through Presidential Proclamation No. 48 of 2009, there primarily appears to be a breakdown in the vertical communication about policy between the different levels of the system. Thus, with regard to the relationship between DHET and the PEDs, the latter report that:

- they rely on national guidelines but communication from DHET is generally a problem;
- they receive little or no communication from DHET with regard to their function and responsibilities;
- the management structures in DHET are not effective;
- they have a challenge with the analysis of results as DHET is not providing results in time to the PEDs;
- clarity is needed in the policy from DHET about irregularities in respect of assessment and examinations, especially with regard to the punitive measures that go with the types of irregularity listed;
- the current national assessment system for the GETC qualifications makes it impossible to combine learners' results, which makes it difficult to give a true picture of achievements at a provincial level;
- the GETC: ABET assessment and examination are conducted on the basis of policies developed by the DBE for the NSC. The GETC has no policies of its own, which means that there is a policy gap which DHET needs to fill;
- documents designed for NSC are used for GETC: ABET without proper customisation for this qualification;
- provincial departments of education are not clear as to their responsibility towards the conduct of the assessment and examination of the GETC: ABET and their roles with respect to adult education matters;
- there seems to be no clarity in respect of when adult education is to be taken over by DHET; and
- related to the above, clarity is needed as to the role of provincial departments of education in the transitional period leading up to this shift.

The lack of clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities in respect of the GETC: ABET, of the national and provincial departments, is inhibiting the support for and coordination of the adult education sector. The absence of an AET Chief Directorate should be noted.

At a practical level the problem is experienced as not knowing where in the system to go for authoritative guidance about policy or required practices, and extremely poor communication. Provincial and local officials generally feel isolated.

3.2 The Standard of Assessment and Examination

This criterion is described in the Umalusi policy (2011) as follows:

The assessment body's assessment approach and systems are credible in that assessments are administered against the policy requirements and standards of qualifications registered on the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Framework and their attendant curricula. The assessment body produces assessment products of an acceptable standard and oversees the quality of internal and external assessment at all its examinations centres. Assessment standards and practices are benchmarked and quality assured. Standards of assessment are maintained and improved through appropriate and effective monitoring and moderating mechanisms.

3.2.1 The qualification and its curriculum

A key point to note in respect of the Standard of Assessment and Examination is that an assessment regime cannot be separated from its attendant curriculum. The nature and structure of the qualification were frequently commented on by respondents. The GETC: ABET is delivered through unit standards and not through a common, core curriculum. PEDs reported that the structure and the format of the qualification are deficient in many ways:

- The unit-standard based format has resulted in a wide range of interpretations because no curriculum has accompanied the qualification. The absence of a core curriculum is compounded by the lack of learner support materials (suitable text books, for example). Educators try to fill this gap by teaching to the Site-based assessment (SBA) tasks, using their own judgement and interpretations of what the tasks mean and how the assessed content should be taught.
- Further, respondents are of the opinion that the lack of a comprehensive policy, encompassing the qualification and its curriculum, is inhibiting the development of a meaningful assessment policy. The current policy has never been reviewed and PEDs consequently follow the provisions of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) in this regard.
- The qualification also does not make provision for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

These aspects have an impact of the quality of assessment.

3.2.2 The standard of the SBA

Many respondents commented on the management of the SBA. DHET sets common SBA tasks and examination question papers which are internally and externally moderated before they are disseminated to the provincial departments for administration, (although provincial respondents seem to require clarity on this - for example, it is not clear whether the national moderation at ABET Level 4 is taking place and whether this is as effective as it could be).

Despite this the challenges of the consistently unreliable SBA mark and the concerning gap between the SBA mark and the exam mark, remain:

- PEDs report that neither teachers nor learners understand what is required in the SBAs, and that the teaching focus seems to lean towards the SBA due to the lack of a curriculum.
- PALCs in general agree that educators tend to teach SBAs only. They claim that some educators use SBA as teaching content, which results in the lowering of standards, and comment that Level 4 workbooks do not address the SBAs.
- This confirmed the response of DHET officials about how teachers seem to teach to the SBA, leading to not only inflated SBA marks but also a skewing learner performance.

In general, district officers said that the implementation of SBA appears to be suffering. Some interviewees called for reverting to full-scale examinations without the SBA. It was felt that the SBA has not been properly applied, which has led to a diminishing of confidence in it as a method of assessment. This is partly because training on SBA is inadequate and late, or does not happen at all.

The GETC: ABET has a substantial weighting of internal assessment marks that form part of the final examination mark. It is therefore critical to establish the standard and quality of the management of the internal assessment as this component may present a threat to the credibility of the qualification.

3.2.3 Marking and moderation

Marking, recording of marks and internal moderation processes were also commented on extensively:

- PEDs send their final marks to the DHET, which is accountable for the whole assessment process nationally. Respondents said that feedback from DHET to all affected parties in the assessment and examination processes could improve, particularly in terms of the feedback. Where feedback is designed to enhance effective curriculum delivery, it is particularly valuable.

- Currently, feedback is provided only through the internal moderator's report, a consolidated Chief Marker's report, and marking memos that are made available after a predetermined period.
- DHET acknowledged that feedback to all affected parties in the assessment and examination processes could indeed improve.
- Respondents in general, stated that all exam processes are monitored at various stages, and monitoring is cascaded from provincial offices through districts to the centres. However, respondents say that the process can always be improved and refined, especially as each year the same centres are chosen for moderation in some provinces.

3.3 Research and Development

The absence of academic research, or research into trends, in relation to, and about, the sector and how such lack of research may lead to a decline in assessment standards was raised. The Umalusi policy (2011) says that

...the work of the assessment body is informed by appropriate research and assessment approaches [which] are innovative, benchmarked and fit for purpose. Research findings are used to improve assessment products, systems and approaches as well as to provide feedback to education institutions in order to drive the improvement of teaching, learning and internal assessment. The capacity of professional and administrative staff employed in the assessment process is developed.

3.3.1 Research

The DHET has not commissioned any recent research on the assessment and examination of the GETC: ABET. The lack of research and analysis, and consequently, feedback to the system, is a serious shortfall in the assessment and examination system.

While the DHET has indicated that the department is currently reviewing its assessment guidelines, it is not clear whether the DHET has a policy that guides the systematic review of its policies, internal processes and procedures in respect of the GETC: ABET assessment and examination.

3.3.2 Data

There were many responses in respect of the lack of, or unreliable data:

- Respondents indicated that they have great difficulty in obtaining authoritative and credible quantitative data about the GETC: ABET.
- Data management is inefficient, for example, much is said about the high drop-out rate, but this does not seem to be documented anywhere. There are claims about the high teacher turnover, but this is also not documented.

Without reliable data management the extent and magnitude of the challenges that face provision and assessment will never be fully understood.

- Another example is when the PEDs indicated that the performance of learners improved after the DHET's introduction of common assessment tasks, but this assertion is not supported by data. The data available at the PEDs seem to blur the throughput ratios and therefore the degree of efficiency of the system.

3.4 Administration of the Examination and Information Technology

The Umalusi policy (2011) describes this criterion as follows:

The assessment body conducts credible external examinations in that it is effective and efficient in the management of all administrative and logistical processes associated with the conduct of examinations. Learners are registered for the examination at the commencement of the qualification (in the case of the NSC grade 10) by the assessment body. Security systems with a low tolerance for irregularities are implemented and irregularities are reported and dealt with as required in Umalusi policy. The assessment body meets all Umalusi's requirements in respect of the registration and resulting system and is able to submit learner datasets that meet Umalusi specifications. The assessment body has efficient and reliable systems for the capture, storage and management of learner achievement data and is ethical in reporting and safeguarding the accuracy and security of learner results. The assessment body ensures that it has full ownership of its data from inception. All the requirements of regulations pertaining to the conduct and administration and management of an examination in respect of a qualification apply and are met. Delivery of the examination is monitored and evaluated with the purpose of supporting continuous improvement.

In general, the logistics in respect of the administration of the examinations are sound, with areas of accountability adequately defined. The criteria for the registration of candidates are in place and the system of data capturing has checks and balances, throwing out exceptions which are corrected promptly, thus preventing irregularities.

However, a number of other issues were commented on:

3.4.1 Examination centres

- Not enough examination centres close to the people they service are available;

3.4.2 No regular review of registration of examination centres by PEDs is undertaken.

3.4.3 Security

- There appears to be a potential security risk with the leakage of question papers in some cases, and thus security needs to be attended to;
- The transporting of papers between nodal points and centres could be improved;
- DHET is considering improved security measures for the development of question papers, printing, packaging and distribution of question papers and the conduct of the examination.

3.4.3 Staff

- Staff should be appointed for adult education and training exams, including personnel such as exam centre managers, administration assistants and invigilators;
- There is a scarcity of qualified subject specialists;
- The remuneration of markers and moderators is low and discourages staff to apply;
- Markers and moderators are not remunerated for travelling and accommodation;
- The PED criteria for the appointment of markers are felt to be lacking or unclear; assessment expertise is compromised as PALCs rely on the ability of facilitators from the district to handle more than one level of a learning area;
- Officials of DHET provided evidence to demonstrate that the recruitment and appointment of examiners and internal moderators are conducted in accordance with a predetermined set of criteria and related regulations and that the department's own policies and procedures with regard to the recruitment, appointment and training of examiners and internal moderators are being complied with. However, provincial departments of education indicated that they struggle with making appointments, and that staff turnover rate is high.

3.4.4 Certification

- There are critical systemic challenges such as the certification system;
- The certification of learners should be prioritised and attended to. In some cases, there is a certificates back-log of up to 10 years, especially with regard to re-issues and replacement certificates.

Mop-up of assessment data for resulting and certification after each exam cycle needs to be prioritised by PEDs to ensure that all learners are certified.

3.4.5 Registration

- Outputs and reasons for fluctuation in registration numbers are not adequately explained;
- Continuous monitoring of trends and resultant corrective actions are needed.

3.4.6 Information technology

- The IT system needs improvement. A number of issues, including outdated and insufficient equipment were noted;

3.4.7 Communication

- Communication between the adult education and training and examinations sub-directorate need to be improved; the examinations unit is inundated with requests from ABET level 4 learners wanting to register for NSC.

3.4.8 Mark sheets

- No national mark sheet exists.

3.5 General systemic issues

In addition to the issues raised in relation to the four Umalusi criteria, many concerns were raised in respect of the delivery system, in particular in respect of the competence of staff:

3.5.1 Professionalisation of adult education practice

- There is very little evidence of the professionalisation of staff. Very few educators have acquired a suitable professional qualification in adult education. This implies that very little effort goes into growing the expertise of the sector;
- The competency of educators, examiners, markers and internal moderators was repeatedly highlighted by respondents as being a cause for concern;
- The expertise of teachers is generally believed by all respondents to be a cause of the continued poor performance in the GETC, and it was emphasised that the following should be focused on:

- the sourcing of candidates should be prioritized;
- a system to attract candidates to this sector should be developed;
- educators must get support from curriculum advisors; and
- educators must be trained.
- There are no permanent educators in the system, with the result that the teaching staff consist mainly of educators employed elsewhere. It seems that the adult education teaching programme is not a priority to them;
- The employment of temporary teachers poses major challenges to the maintenance of discipline;
- Temporary educators whose availability is not assured and educators' conditions of service were also raised as issues:
 - Adult education and training educators tend to be employed on a contractual basis, not on a full-time basis, while in some learning areas, educators are unqualified or inexperienced;
 - Teaching is often undertaken at night by educators who work full-time and teach adults at night (the so-called "Double Packers");
 - Because educators are employed on a temporary basis, they have a tendency to resign or leave ABET employment when offered other work. This tendency especially occurs after they have received training as invigilators;
 - The retraining of temporarily-appointed educators continuously takes place; PEDs are compelled to train new staff annually;
 - Districts called for Learning Area committees, and said that the facilitators for Level 4 should be members of these committees;
 - Districts spoke of a lack of competent markers and moderators and complained of staff's inability to compile reports;
 - PALCs suggested that the three levels of moderation should be managed by qualified educators so as to improve assessment; and that facilitators should facilitate learning areas in which they are qualified.

3.5.2 Funding and resourcing

A lack of funding and restrictive budget allocations was cited by several respondents, as contributors to the problems with adult education. Respondents claimed that budgets are dwindling and that there is little effort to seriously motivate for "adequate funding of the programme based on pre-determined outputs".

Financial viability was described as being a sustainability issue, along with retention of expertise and risk management.

In addition, adult education and training, in general, is poorly-resourced:

- There is a shortage of adult education centres;
- Centres are often hosted by schools and lack their own resources. Thus, curriculum delivery is hampered.
- There are often no operational centres during the day and centre managers have to work within the parameters set by principals of schools with whom they share premises;
- There are often vast distances between centres. Consequently, a lot of time is spent on travelling between them; availability of transport for educators and staff is an issue;
- Respondents said that there are no text books for ABET learners, as well as no supporting learning materials;
- Reading materials are in short supply.

3.5.3 The marginalized status of the GETC: ABET

The marginalised status of the GETC: ABET within the national context is reflected commonly in most responses. This problem is also reflected in the attitude of the learners. Learners themselves are seen as contributors to the poor performance of the GETC, with poor discipline, irregular attendance and a high level of drop-out cited as issues. It was also stated that there is a general exodus by learners from the system within the first six months of the academic year. The reason for this wholesale exodus should be explored.

3.6 Recommendations

From the findings it is clear that while the examination system is relatively successful, the same cannot be said of the delivery system. The evaluation teams did not have the mandate to interrogate the delivery system, but the inadequacies and defects of the delivery system inevitably impacts on the assessment system. The DHET is urged to take a holistic, rather than a piecemeal approach, to the improvement of the adult education and training system.

The evaluation highlighted three major areas of concern, much of which has persisted from the outset. These concerns can be classified as relating to procedural, capacity and conceptual matters, which will require short, medium and longer term interventions.

3.6.1 Procedural concerns

The procedural concerns can be relatively easily rectified, by improving the administration of assessment and examination, by improving communication between the different levels of the system, by clarifying the demarcation of roles and responsibilities at these levels and by reviewing the funding of operational costs at the PALCs.

Specific recommendations include:

- The clarification of roles and responsibilities of the DHET and PEDs in relation to the assessment and examination of the GETC: ABET is essential and overdue;
- The communication channels between different levels of the system is in need of a serious overhaul;
- Feedback to the centres in respect of the trends and issues emerging from each examination cycle should be drastically improved;
- Policy should not only be aligned along all levels of the system, but should also be customised for the GETC: ABET qualification; documentation specifically for adult education should be developed rather than making use of policies developed for the NSC;
- Centres should, at the very minimum, be adequately supplied with resources for adult education, including funding, administrative staff for the operational needs of centres and learning resources;
- Principals and School Governing Bodies must take ownership of the centres they host;
- National mark sheets for use by all the centres should be developed;
- A review of registration of examination centres, focusing on compliance with policy, is urgently required;
- The data management of the GETC:ABET at all levels of the system leaves much to be desired and is in need of sustained correction; and
- IT systems should be improved to handle certification, capturing of marks and resulting.

3.6.2 Capacity concerns

Capacity concerns can be addressed through intensive training of facilitators, educators and assessment and examination personnel. Such training will be enhanced by a review of the status of educators, which will ensure that these personnel remain committed to their tasks, thereby building a professional cadre of GETC: ABET staff.

Specific recommendations include:

- The DHET should encourage and enable learning area specialisation by educators (and provide training for such specialisation);
- The competence of educators or facilitators in designing assessment tasks and in administering such tasks, needs serious attention;
- Improvement is needed in the training system of invigilators and markers, including developing criteria for the appointment of such staff;
- The remuneration system for moderators, examiners, markers and invigilators should be reviewed;
- The quality of staff in general is a particular problem, with little or no trained commitment to adult education. Notably, there seem to be few incentives for educators to specialise and remain in adult education. This inevitably impacts on the quality and capability of facilitators and assessors; and importantly
- DHET should set up a formal, comprehensive performance management system for all assessment and examination staff.

3.6.3 Conceptual concerns

The conceptual concerns will require much more intensive (and longer term) interventions. The stated purposes of the qualification, particularly the goals of 'providing credible information about achievements', 'providing a professional framework for teaching and learning' and 'offering key insights regarding the performance of the adult learning system', can by no stretch of imagination be seen to have been achieved. This may stem from the many questions that have remained unanswered since the inception and implementation of the qualification, namely:

- Is this qualification appropriate for adult learning?
- Is the unit standard-based format appropriate for effective teaching and learning?
- If so, is the assessment and examination regime appropriate for the qualification and for adult learning?
- Is the orientation of the qualification appropriate? What should the balance be between a general, vocational or occupational orientation?
- More broadly, is adult education only about basic literacy and numeracy? If so, what are the implications for access to further learning within the broader Post-school education system, and articulation within the rest of this system?

Some specific recommendations in this regard include:

- The DHET should seriously consider establishing a high-level panel or task team of experts to consider the questions and problems that have been plaguing the GETC: ABET from the outset. These questions relate to:
 - The nature of a qualification appropriate for adults;
 - The unit-standards based format of the qualification;
 - The use of SBA as a form of internal assessment;

- Articulation (including the Recognition of Prior Learning) routes for learners who have completed ABET level 4;
- The panel/task team should also commission and/or conduct research into the underlying problems and issues that have persisted since the introduction of the qualification.

PART 4: CONCLUSION

With the benefit of hindsight, as well as 12 years of experience in the quality assurance of assessment and examination for the GETC: ABET, it is clear that the GETC: ABET has not delivered on the promises of the qualification.

Further, in keeping with Umalusi's mandate to 'report on the adequacy and suitability of qualifications and standards', the evaluation has thrown this responsibility into stark relief. It is clear that the qualification is in need of serious review, particularly against the background of the emerging post-school education and training system as proposed in the Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2011). A high-level panel of experts can make a start in instituting plans to review the qualification and its assessment and examination regime.

The DHET must, perhaps with the assistance of this high-level panel, develop and implement an improvement plan that will address short, medium and long term interventions. Umalusi will use the improvement plan, together with its annual monitoring reports, to assess progress against improvement targets.

Appendix 1

List of names of respondents and participants during the evaluation