



Hitting the marks

"The Eastern Cape department has no intention to do so [outsource scripts for marking] as we do not have any shortage of markers. If there are any shortages after all efforts, the province may extend the marking for a day to ensure that all scripts are accurately marked and all learners are resuited." — Eastern Cape education department spokesperson Mali Mtima

Bar is lowered for matric markers

Teachers not meeting original criteria mark simpler questions

By PREGA GOVENDER

● The Eastern Cape education department has lowered its requirement for some teachers to qualify as matric markers in physical science after applicants failed to meet the eligibility criteria.

The shock move comes as most of the more than 790,000 matrics countrywide start their exams this week.

According to a document dated January 21, an Eastern Cape teacher would be eligible for appointment as a marker if their matric class in 2016, 2017 or 2018 achieved a minimum pass rate of 50% in the subject that the teacher taught.

This was subsequently dropped to 40% for about 10 teachers applying to mark physical science after the provincial education department failed to get the required number of markers.

Eastern Cape education spokesperson Mali Mtima said the teachers whose classes scored below 50% would mark low-level questions such as multiple choice questions and "not things that require a lot of judgement. So we don't see it as a risk."

Mtima said the department went on an intensive campaign especially at former

Model C schools to recruit English home language markers because of a shortage in this subject.

"We requested teachers from schools offering English home language to apply, and this resulted in 23 applications recommended, which brought the shortage from 26 to three," Mtima said.

He said markers would not have to undergo a competency test but rather intensive training before marking started.

Responding to the lowering of the requirement for some physical science teachers in the Eastern Cape, Lucky Ditaunyane, spokesperson for matric exams watchdog body Umalusi, said: "The pass rate of learners is not necessarily an indication or measure of teacher competence to mark exam scripts."

Mpumalanga will this year send some of its matric papers to Gauteng, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal for marking.

A total of 232 scripts for agricultural sciences 1 and 2, and 18 for religion studies 1 and 2, which will both be written in Afrikaans, will be marked in Gauteng. A further 329 dramatic arts, design and electrical technology scripts will also be marked in Gauteng.

Mpumalanga arranged with Western Cape markers to mark 126 economics paper 1 and 2 scripts and 32 history paper 1 and 2 scripts that will both be written in Afrikaans. Mpumalanga's 102 isiZulu papers 1, 2 and 3 scripts will be marked by KwaZulu-Natal. Mpumalanga will return the favour by marking KwaZulu-Natal's siSwati scripts.



Prof Servaas van der Berg says all SA should hold marker competency tests.

Free State education department spokesperson Howard Ndaba said it would send its siSwati and sePedi scripts to be marked in Gauteng as "there are no suitably qualified markers to mark these scripts in Free State".

Mpumalanga, Free State, Limpopo, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape told the Sunday Times they had no shortage of markers. The other provinces did not respond.

The Western Cape is the only province that subjects prospective markers to competency tests and only those scoring 60% and above are eligible.

However, Western Cape education department spokesperson Bronagh Hammond

was not able to provide information on the number of teachers who had failed to score 60% and above.

Professor Servaas van der Berg, of the economics department at Stellenbosch University, applauded the Western Cape for administering competency tests, saying they should be conducted nationally.

"Protecting the status and quality of the matric exam is very important. These [competency tests] are obviously things that can help in this regard," he said.

He described the drop in pupil enrolment in key subjects as "concerning".

A total of 104,553 pupils registered for accounting last year compared to 92,172 this year – a drop of 12,381. Maths recorded a decrease of 11,929 pupils – from 270,516 last year to 258,590 this year.

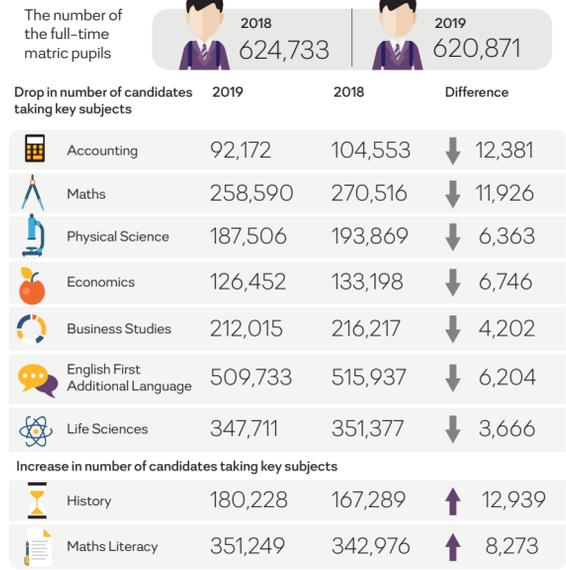
"The fact that physical science is also down, along with maths, is worrying in terms of those two being important subjects for continuing on to the sciences at university," Van der Berg said.

Nkosana Dolopi, deputy general secretary of the South African Democratic Teachers Union, slammed calls for markers to be subjected to competency tests.

"In grade 12, pupils have to do continuous assessment, which includes tests and projects. Teachers mark these tests and there's no competency test that a teacher has to undergo before marking the test."

Said Dolopi: "Teachers are qualified and were not picked from the street. Why do you doubt teachers when they have to come and mark grade 12 papers?"

Heading in here



Graphic: Nolo Moima. Source: ???

All systems go after intensive swotting

By SUTHENTIRA GOVENDER and MATTHEW SAVIDES

● SA's matrics have been locked in, sent to camp, drilled and made to attend school on weekends and holidays in rigorous preparation for the National Senior Certificate examination.

Department of basic education director-general Mathanzima Mveli told a parliamentary portfolio committee this week that vacation schools had targeted progressed pupils, pupils at risk, moderate and high achievers, pupils from under-performing schools, serial under-performing schools, schools with new grade 12 teachers and schools offering grade 12 for the first time.

Most provinces say it is all systems go for the final exams, which kick into top gear on Wednesday when pupils write English paper 1. In the final push, provinces such as Gauteng, the Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal have held matric revision camps, where intensive study sessions were conducted to increase content coverage and to give matrics "intensive exam practice".

Gauteng education department spokesperson Steve Mabona said the province's secondary school intervention programme (SSIP) was a "major strategic intervention" for struggling pupils.

"SSIP has been running since the beginning of the year on Saturdays and school holidays to sustain the improved grade 12 performance."

Mabona said matric pupils had signed a pledge to commit themselves to "behave appropriately".

"We have also done everything possible in ensuring our learners have been given the best possible chance to do well in these exams."

The Northern Cape education department held various intervention programmes including lock-in sessions, spring academic camps and whole-school-day teaching.

The department said the camps provided



Pupils of Glenwood High School in Durban — Blaine Golden, 18, and Jordan Hendrikse, 18 — prepare as the 2019 matric examinations get under way. Both pupils have an idea of their career path after matric. Golden has a contract with the Sharks under-20 rugby team and will study marketing, and Hendrikse will be doing psychology. Picture: Sandile Ndlovu

extra lessons to improve pupils' performance in mainstream subjects, where the focus was on "challenging topics that pupils struggle to comprehend and master during normal teaching periods".

Close to 1,000 pupils from identified schools were "incubated over weekends", when they participated in intense revision.

Most provinces declined to share their pass rate targets for 2019, but KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape said they are hoping for improvements.

"The province wants to improve the overall pass percentage by a minimum of 5% [an

790,405
THE NUMBER
of matric candidates

7,416
THE NUMBER
of exam centres nationwide

80% pass rate]. The province wants to increase the number of schools achieving a 100% pass," said the KwaZulu-Natal education department in a statement.

The department said radio lessons would continue until exams from gateway subjects like maths and physical science have been written.

The Mpumalanga education department said its matric pupils have been adequately equipped for the exams with morning, weekend, afternoon and winter and spring classes.

In the Western Cape, the education de-

partment is hoping to improve on its 81.5% 2018 pass rate, thanks to interventions such as exam roadshows and centralised tutoring programmes in disadvantaged areas.

The Free State education department has set itself the lofty target of a 90% pass rate, with 40% bachelor passes. Last year, the province achieved an 87.5% pass rate.

To achieve this, the department said, it had put particular focus on underperforming schools.

Education MEC Tate Makgoe said he wanted to "deliver the most credible exams this province has ever seen".

Bring on the stress and anxiety

By SUTHENTIRA GOVENDER

● When it comes to exams, a dose of anxiety coupled with stress can be good for you.

Parenting expert Nikki Bush is counselling grade 12 pupils on how to channel their anxiety into achieving optimum results.

Bush and other experts believe a certain degree of anxiety, pressure and tension in the system will push pupils to perform better.

"When there is no stress, time management goes out of the window, the ability to focus decreases, distraction increases, marks can drop at school, as can productivity at work, and we become less directed and motivated to achieve our goals."

Bush is particularly concerned about top performers on the sports field who battle to get into study mode when endorphin levels – happiness hormones released during physical activity – drop.

"There is a fair deal of pressure on the system, but these kids usually do quite well – until they stop exercising and have too much time on their hands," she said.

"We are so concerned about too much stress and pressure that we are often at risk of losing sight of the fact that there needs to be sufficient tension and pressure within a human being in order to perform and be effective."

"Getting the balance between tension and pressure right means we want to be in a state of eustress [positive stress], not distress – this is constructive stress management."

Psychologist Rakhi Beekrum said there was often a misconception that stress and anxiety were always bad.

"The reality is that some level of stress is good as it motivates us to perform better in order to achieve our goals. It is completely normal to experience a degree of anxiety during exams, particularly matric exams, which are hyped up."

"Some anxiety can help propel pupils forward and take required action to meet their goals. This anxiety becomes problematic when it interferes with the achievement of one's goals."

Some teachers struggle with state sex education lessons

By PREGA GOVENDER

● For some conservative teachers, using the word "vagina" during life orientation lessons is "culturally inappropriate" and taboo – instead they call it "cake" or *ikhekhe*.

Some don't show pupils how to use a condom because they believe it will encourage them to have sex.

These are some of the issues that surfaced during a study at six schools in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal to assess the impact of the department of basic education's new scripted lesson plans (SLPs) on pupils.

The SLPs form part of the department's sex education programme, aimed at addressing HIV/Aids, sexually transmitted in-

fections and teenage pregnancies.

Nolwazi Mkhwanazi of Wits University was the lead researcher of the project, which was conducted with researchers of the University of North Carolina in the US.

Teachers at one KZN school said they felt uncomfortable using certain words in front of pupils because culturally it was deemed inappropriate for adults to use those words with children.

"So, I have to try and work around those things. Sometimes, I don't say things as they are in the scripts but rather find an alternative," said one life orientation teacher.

Another said she avoided explaining some words by writing them and their definitions down on the board.



Sex therapist Marlene Wasserman

During training provided to teachers at schools where the SLPs are being piloted, teachers were advised against the selective teaching of the life orientation curriculum.

But one teacher told researchers that teaching pupils how to put on a condom was wrong, and it was not something he would even think about teaching his own children.

According to the research document, "the same respondent also considered certain sections of the LO [life orientation] book to be pornography".

It added: "He said that learners get excited and there was pandemonium when the educator brings graphic LO textbooks to class."

In contrast, an outspoken life orientation teacher said she did not feel uncomfortable

about teaching sexuality education.

"I laugh a lot and whenever I teach, I laugh with them. Especially when we are about to approach the sexual part. I tell it as it is, especially when we are talking about the differences between a female and a male."

One of the study's recommendations was that training should discourage the practice of teachers shaming pupils who were pregnant or engaging in risky behaviour.

The researchers said separating male and female pupils during select lessons, or parts of them, could make female pupils especially feel more comfortable to participate.

Sex therapist Marlene Wasserman said she was "completely horrified" that teachers shy away from the correct terminology.

"Desensitising educators would enable them to use correct clinical terms – this is protective behaviour – having the correct universal language allows people to negotiate sexuality."

Daniela Ellerbeck, an attorney with Freedom of Religion SA, said the state had a duty to protect those teachers who had conscientious objections to teaching certain material.

Basic education spokesman Elijah Mhlanga said teachers were receiving ongoing training. "The SLPs also provide teachers with a resource to use to teach content in a uniform way and to address the comfort/discomfort some are experiencing when they have to cover certain topics."