



ISASA

Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa

Quality Values Diversity

The National Senior Certificate

An Overview

January 2008

Quality Values Diversity

1. The National Senior Certificate (NSC) - what is it, and why has the name changed?

The National Senior Certificate (NSC) will, from 2008, replace the current Senior Certificate as the Grade 12 school-exit qualification. The addition of 'National' to the term Senior Certificate is to indicate that from 2008 all of the examination papers will be set nationally.

2. Why have we got a new Grade 12 school-leaving qualification?

As in a number of other countries, both developed and developing, school and higher education curricula are being revised in response to the knowledge and skills required for the increasing demands of the 21st century, globalisation and other forms of progress.

3. Is Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) a bad choice that will fail?

The previous curriculum in South Africa focused on the learning of children from the perspective of what teachers were required to teach i.e. a syllabus, listing topics and in a very few cases, the skills related to the subject that the teacher must cover during his/her teaching programme.

The Revised National Curriculum Statements (now called the NCS), are based on the principles of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) and describe learning from the perspective of the child, namely, what the child is required to understand and be able to do, after the teaching has taken place – the outcome displayed by the learner at the end of the educational experience.

In both instances learning is the important issue. But in the first instance the system is focused on what the teacher has to do while in the second the focus is on what the learner has achieved. Clearly the latter is a much more educationally sound approach – after all, it is the knowledge and skills that the child has acquired through the learning process that is important rather than the teaching that the teacher has done.

The NCS therefore defines the knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values that learners must learn and describes them in 'outcome statements'. This change in focus has had an impact on how assessment is designed, i.e. the starting point in the design of the assessment is to determine what answer from a child will illustrate his/her understanding of a topic.

In the previous curriculum the tendency was to ask questions that will have been covered by the teacher during his/her teaching programme or which closely resemble questions learners will have been exposed to during class. Such practices encourage "drill and practice" rather than understanding.

One must not however believe that the new curriculum does not require learners to learn and master some fundamental skills and knowledge, even through drill and practice. What the new curriculum enforces is that knowing the fundamental skills and knowledge is the first step to understanding and application, and finally to analysing and evaluating, i.e. the higher levels of learning. Those fundamental skills and knowledge are not the end. In the previous curriculum, higher order thinking skills were not specifically emphasised in the syllabus, although they may have been acquired incidentally in the classroom of an inspired teacher. The new curriculum focuses explicitly on exposing learners to higher order thinking in all their subjects.

It is misleading to say that outcomes-based education has failed across many countries. What has been problematic in many instances is the transition from theory to practice or implementation – finding the balance between appropriate indicators of quality (for purposes of accountability and evidence of learning) and actual learning and teaching. Some systems have over-emphasised assessment and the associated administration and in that process, have overloaded teachers with tasks that are not related to their teaching.

This is not so much a problem of the philosophy of outcomes-based education as much as a problem of inappropriate implementation strategies. This is a perennial problem in education and one we need to be particularly aware of in South Africa.

A related issue is the quality of the teaching force to be able to adjust to the shift in focus required by outcomes-based education, particularly in the design of assessment. The danger in this instance is to prescribe in detail to teachers what they should be doing in the classroom. This strategy is useful in any educational paradigm where teachers' competency is in doubt, an outcomes-based system or otherwise. The key however is to find the amount of prescription that one needs to empower teachers to develop on their own; this is clearly a 'moving target' and dependent on the individual teachers within a school. In some countries, the over-prescription of teaching strategies has been blamed on outcomes-based education when in fact it is related to perceptions of teacher competency.

4. Will the National Senior Certificate have international recognition?

The present Senior Certificate is benchmarked internationally and so will the new National Senior Certificate be. The NSC with endorsement (university entrance) will be equal to the GCE AS level and the Scottish Higher standard, and the learning outcomes are equivalent to the Australian Senior Certificate which provides admission to Higher education.

5. Is it true that learners will not have to learn English?

There has been considerable alarmist media mischief about this. The rules of the NSC are written in such a way that although English is not in itself a compulsory subject virtually every child in the country will study English, either as the language of instruction or as a second South African language.

6. In what way is the NSC different from Matric?

There are new subjects offered and redundant subjects have been excluded. All learners have to take four compulsory subjects, namely either Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy, Life Orientation and two South African languages. Learners will also choose three additional subjects. In all subjects existing content has been updated and new content added. It is planned that there will be ongoing revision and development of content for the foreseeable future.

7. What will the assessment be like?

There will be significant changes to the methods of assessment. Exams will move away from being largely mere recall and there will be a much greater focus on higher order thinking and analysis, increased reading and writing required and an outcomes oriented approach which

will test a variety of skills. The final assessment for the NSC will be 75% based on an external exam and 25% on internal assessment which will be externally moderated.

8. Are standards dropping?

No, they are being raised. An analysis of the present system of Matric over the last few years shows a decline in the degree of difficulty in the exam papers with fewer cognitively challenging questions. This has led to grade inflation in results which is particularly evident in the increasing number of 'A's achieved each year by schools with largely unchanged groups of entrants. The syllabus is out of date and much of the teaching has been reduced to exam spotting and training learners to do well in exams rather than developing them intellectually. A new curriculum and new assessment system in South Africa is well overdue.

9. Why have Standard and Higher Grade been dropped?

Standard Grade has tended to be a second-class option and while having that option may have helped many learners to 'pass Matric' it has not been of much value thereafter. In addition many schools, both public and independent, advise Standard Grade for learners to ensure that the school has a higher 'pass rate' and thus deny the learners many life-chances.

In the NSC, the plan is to offer only one level in every subject so that all learners are exposed to the same content and teaching. There will be differentiation within the assessment so that most can achieve a pass while the high flyers have the opportunity to excel.

10. Is Mathematical Literacy just another way of describing Standard Grade Maths?

No. Maths Literacy will be very different to Mathematics. It is contextually-based mathematics, in other words fundamental maths that is based on everyday real life and work requirements such as tax, banking, weights and measures, etc. It is intended that it will be sufficiently rigorous for the universities to accept it as one of the 'approved' subjects for entry into faculties offering non-mathematical courses.

11. Will the NSC provide access to higher education?

The National Senior Certificate (NSC) will still be the main access route to universities and primary requirement for university entrance. The exact NSC requirements for entry into universities are outlined below. Universities will use the NSC results plus the results of common entrance tests (benchmarking tests) to judge each candidate's suitability for tertiary study. This is in line with international practice and in the UK and the USA it has been the case for years. In South Africa the universities have for some time applied their own criteria to select students for different faculties.

The introduction of a new curriculum and new assessment methods means that the universities do not yet know enough about the assessment levels to confidently judge a candidate's suitability for university study based only on the NSC result. They intend to track the results for the first few years including comparing learners' grades on the NSC with their

success at university study, before they can use the NSC results alone as a reliable predictor of success at university.

There are different minimum admission requirements for **Higher Certificate, Diploma and Degree Studies**. They can be summarised as follows:

Tertiary Qualification	Admission Requirement
Higher Certificate	National Senior Certificate
Diploma	NSC + four subjects passed at minimum Level 3 (40-49%) or better, excluding Life Orientation
Bachelor's Degree	NSC + four subjects chosen from the designated list of subjects (see below) and passed at minimum Level 4 (50-59%)

12. What learning pathways are provided in the NSC?

A	Languages
B	Arts and Culture
C	Business, Commerce and Management Studies
D	Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology
E	Human and Social Studies
F	Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences
G	Services
H	Agriculture

13. What subjects are prescribed in the NSC?

A. Languages

- **11 official South African languages** at Home Language, First Additional Language and Second Additional Language levels.
- **13 non-official languages:** Arabic Second Additional Language, French Second Additional Language, German Home Language, German Second Additional Language, Gujarati Home Language, Gujarati First Additional Language, Gujarati Second Additional Language, Hebrew Second Additional Language, Hindi Home Language, Hindi First Additional Language, Hindi Second Additional Language, Italian Second Additional Language, Latin Second Additional Language, Portuguese Home Language, Portuguese First Additional Language, Portuguese Second Additional Language, Spanish Second Additional Language, Tamil Home Language, Tamil First Additional Language, Tamil Second Additional Language, Telegu Home Language, Telegu Second Additional Language, Urdu Home Language, Urdu First Additional Language, Urdu Second Additional Language.

B. Arts and Culture

- Dance studies
- Design
- Dramatic Arts
- Music
- Visual Arts

C. Business, Commerce and Management Studies

- Accounting
- Business Studies
- Economics

D. Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology

- Electrical Technology
- Engineering Graphics and Design
- Mechanical Technology
- Civil Technology

E. Human Social Studies

- Geography
- History
- Religion Studies
- Life Orientation

F. Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences

- Computer Applications Technology
- Information Technology
- Life Sciences
- Mathematical Literacy
- Mathematics
- Physical Sciences

G. Services

- Consumer Studies
- Hospitality Studies
- Tourism

H. Agriculture

- Agriculture Sciences
- Agriculture Technology
- Agricultural Management Practices

14. How are the subjects combined to obtain the NSC?

- Two official South African languages from Group A above – one being at Home Language level, the other being at either Home or First Additional Language level. One of the two languages must be either English or Afrikaans.
- Mathematical Literacy **OR** Mathematics.
- Life Orientation.
- A minimum of three further subjects from Groups B – H above. A candidate may include a maximum of two additional languages from Group A at Second Additional Language level for one of the remaining official South African languages, or another language as indicated in the list above.

Candidates may **not** offer:

- More than one from isiXhosa, isiZulu, SiSwati and isiNdebele.
- More than one from Sepedi, Sesotho and Setswana.
- The same language as a Home and a First or Second Additional Language.
- Mathematics and Mathematical Literacy.
- Both Computer Applications Technology and Information Technology.
- Both Consumer Studies and Hospitality Studies.

15. How does one obtain the NSC?

To obtain the National Senior Certificate, a learner must achieve 40% in three subjects, one of which is an official language at Home Language level, and 30% in three subjects, provided that a complete portfolio of evidence in the school-based assessment component is submitted in the subject failed.

The ratio of the external exam to the site-based assessment is 75%: 25%, with the exception of Life Orientation, where the internal assessment will be 100% of the total mark. A further 25% may be allocated to subjects that, by their nature, require other forms of school-based assessment such as practicals, orals, etc.

Scale of Achievement for Grades 10 – 12

Rating Code	Rating	Marks (%)
7	Outstanding achievement	80 – 100
6	Meritorious achievement	70 – 79
5	Substantial achievement	60 – 69
4	Adequate achievement	50 – 59
3	Moderate achievement	40 – 49
2	Elementary achievement	30 – 39
1	Not achieved	0 - 29

Time Allocation to Learning Programmes

Subject	Hours Per Week
Language 1 (LOLT)	4,5
Language 2	4,5
Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy	4,5
Life Orientation	2,0
Additional subjects (3 at 4,0 h/w each)	12,0
TOTAL	27,5