



Umalusi's Site Visits to Independent Schools in 2006

A comprehensive analysis



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February 2007

PUBLISHED BY

UMALUSI COUNCIL FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

37 General Van Ryneveld Street
Persequor Technopark
Pretoria, South Africa



IN GENERAL AND FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Telephone: +27 (0)12 349 1510
Fax: +27 (0)12 349 1511
Email: info@umalusi.org.za

www.umalusi.org.za



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Layout & production
CJ Graphics

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Summary

Intentions and significance

In the course of 2006 Umalusi's Evaluation and Accreditation Unit undertook a programme of site visits involving 100 independent schools. The programme constituted a vital step in the development of Umalusi's roles in the accreditation of independent schools and the improvement of schooling more generally. The programme has advanced the actual process of accrediting schools and has thrown some light on the situation of a variety of independent schools. This includes schools that have not applied for accreditation, those with low pass rates in the 2005 Senior Certificate examinations, and some schools of questionable provenance. The programme has also contributed to Umalusi's capacity to utilise accreditation and quality assurance in a developmental spirit, not least by deepening Umalusi's understanding of the task and the field.

The site visit programme was not designed as research. Rather, it was intended to further establish Umalusi's presence in the sector and the band, verify information provided in self-evaluation reports by provisionally accredited providers, initiate interventions with poorly performing schools in terms of their matric results and bring more schools into the quality loop.

The programme is expected to impact positively on the extension of the practice of site visits and verification to other independent schools and ultimately on the quality assurance of public schools as well.

Background perspectives

Accreditation and quality assurance

The present report is informed by a literature study and a Department for International Development (DFID) 2005 report. The literature study (in full in Appendix 1) reflects on the newness of accreditation in South African schooling. The pioneering character of the endeavour is seen to be emphasised by the linkage of accreditation to the idea of quality assurance, which is relatively unexplored internationally in the context of schooling. This literature study also shows that Umalusi's development of its approaches to quality assurance, notably the comprehensiveness of its approach, is in line with international thinking on the subject.

Independent schools in South Africa

The second recent DFID report (See Part 1) on non-government schooling provides a range of useful insights: independent schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa has grown rapidly since the 1990s. Growth in South Africa is significant, but not nearly as rapid as in a

number of other countries. The authors estimate that there are between 1 200 and 2 000 independent schools in South Africa. The high proportion of small schools with low fees, often privately owned and catering for poor communities, is striking. The South African constitutional and regulatory environment of independent schooling is described positively in the DFID study, but limited capacity to administer the regulations in some provinces is noted.

The programme of site visits

One hundred schools were identified in a nationally constructed sample intended to enable Umalusi to contrast schools in terms of their achievement in the Senior Certificate and their accreditation status. Since an important concern was to focus on schools that might need special attention, the sampling avoided including large numbers of high achieving schools, especially those registered with the IEB. (The Northern Cape was excluded from the sample; it had few independent schools and none that were low achievers in the 2005 Senior Certificate.)

Teams of evaluators, consisting of well-qualified peers (such as principals of independent schools) were trained, and provided with site-visit booklets. At least one, but often two, members of the teams conducted intensive, highly structured one-day visits. Visits included structured interviews with management, focus groups of randomly selected teachers and Grade 12 learners, and an inspection of the premises. In the case of provisionally accredited schools, the schools' self-evaluations and/or progress reports were subjected to a comprehensive verification. The evidence was recorded in the site visit booklets and was later quantified by selected evaluators who acted as monitors of the process. Every school in the sample received a feed-back report indicating the way forward in terms of required improvements, and future accreditation and monitoring requirements.

In the event, the programme yielded 87 usable records. (A range of contingencies prevented the participation or analysis of the other 13 targeted schools.) These records, together with extensive data provided by the schools, were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. A preliminary report on the data analysis then provided the basis for a plenary workshop of evaluators and other participants in the process. Feedback from the workshop informed further interpretation of the data.

The sampling does not allow the generalization of the observations from the site visits to be considered as representative of independent schools' sector in South Africa. In addition, although presented in some cases in terms of provinces, the sample was drawn nationally and does not allow for meaningful comparisons between the provinces. Nonetheless, it seemed important to capture the experience as fully as possible. The report therefore includes 28 tables and a full analysis of these in the light of the qualitative feedback

Lessons from the site visits

The key lessons emerging from this report may be summarised as follow:

Umalusi's accreditation and monitoring processes

- 1 Umalusi's approach to the development and implementation of its accreditation

practices has been collaborative, participative and developmental. The site visit programme has confirmed the wisdom of this approach.

- 2 Umalusi's process of provisional accreditation is well received and participating schools have for the most part acted on and benefited from the provisions for continuous improvement required by the process.
- 3 Nevertheless, it is clear that in spite of extensive efforts to communicate with the independent school sector, many institutions are either unaware of the accreditation process or of all its requirements. A more effective and far reaching communication strategy must therefore be devised and implemented.
- 4 While a small number of the schools in the sample could indeed be considered national assets and exemplars of inspiring education provision, most of the schools in the sample were found to be effective: these generally do not need any intervention and Umalusi's annual monitoring should suffice.
- 5 However, due to differing levels of capacity and the sheer diversity of schools Umalusi must continue with the development of benchmarks for good practice and adequate monitoring capacity in the sector through the continued use of peers as evaluators and the sharing of good practices.
- 6 To this end building in a number of "good practice workshops" would profit the independent school sector. A clear first theme emerging from the site visits would be "Ideas for Designing and Running an Effective QMS". This could involve the presentation of exemplars from schools of different types. It would probably be necessary to run such a workshop on a regional basis.

Streamlining and articulation

- 1 Observations emerging from the site visits and the literature make it clear that newly instituted accreditation and quality assurance can be most fruitful. They will be of greatest value in promoting continuous improvement in education if all role players, including the Minister's office, national and provincial departments of education, and the individual schools and their communities, are positively involved.
- 2 The programme of site visits was generally perceived in a positive light by participating schools and many compliments have been received about the way it was conceived and managed; the experience gained has developed capacity, and points to various possible refinements in future procedures. Although the reporting and verification system is well-conceived and thorough, it may need to be focused and streamlined as accreditation goes to scale.
- 3 In terms of the registration and subsidising of independent schools by provincial departments of education, improved capacity might be developed in some provincial departments of education for registering and monitoring independent schools and managing subsidies. There would appear to be cases where registration requirements and norms are not consistently applied. Some officials feel that uniform national regulations for subsidies should be agreed on and applied in the place of the present inconsistencies from province to province. Enhanced, preferably standardised, data management would also be desirable.

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- 4 Umalusi, the DoE and the PDEs should also work towards stronger articulation between accreditation and registration processes. This may include:
 - PDEs and Umalusi agreeing on tighter coordination and mutual reporting processes in respect of registration / accreditation processes.
 - It is also important to look into the possibilities of harmonising the data collection from independent schools for accreditation and registration purposes. This would be most useful to the authorities involved while lessening the reporting and accountability load on the schools.
 - 5 Strategic workshops might also be held with the DoE and PDEs and other relevant stakeholders on questions about the relationship of accreditation and registration, the harmonisation of data collection and the management of subsidies. A workshop for the provincial departments of education might also be devoted to the relevance of the site visit programme for the quality assurance of public schools

Diversity and nature of schools

- 1 A question whose answer remains opaque in spite of the evidence provided by the site visits is why many of the schools came into existence and why they prove sustainable when equivalent state schooling should be available. The question seems pressing in relation to the weakest schools, but could also be applied to the middling schools that do not offer some unique contextually justified service. Research could be very useful in understanding the existence of such schools and in guiding policy and practices in relation to them.
- 2 The focus group feedback pointed to the existence of a fair number of unregistered, “hidden”, schools of dubious provenance; this requires a specific investigation that was beyond the scope of the present project.
3. Most of the weaker independent schools do not appear to constitute a problem of great scale or urgency, and may at most need discerning intervention or further investigation on an individual basis. Exploitation for financial gain does not seem to be a serious factor in the sample of schools visited, especially given their fees. (Staff salaries, though, can be so low as to appear questionable.) However, a few schools in the sample could be regarded as problematic. Inappropriate private ownership – in some cases with no professional knowledge or interest in education and unconstrained by anything more than token governance structures – seems open to censure.
- 4 The evidence does not allow for firm conclusions about the nationality of teachers and learners, but it would seem that some schools cater especially for expatriates from elsewhere in Africa and employ expatriate teachers, who may be open to exploitation.
- 5 The sheer diversity of schools suggests the possible need for diverse strategies for accreditation while maintaining common standards. Research is needed to deepen, clarify and refine the approaches to accreditation.

Indicators of Quality

- 1 The question of indicators remains problematic and poorly understood in practice. A process of refining indicators plus a longitudinal study of their value might prove useful. Identifying and selecting the most appropriate information required from schools as ongoing indicators of quality provision to make reporting, handling and interpretation less onerous and to avoid duplication is much needed.
- 2 One of the most interesting detailed observations was the strong positive relationship, in this constructed sample at least, of educator qualifications to learner performance in the Senior Certificate. However this observation might need further exploration.
- 3 The result of this project seems to indicate that, for all its shortcomings, the pass rate in the Senior Certificate is a good rough guide to quality. The rate of endorsements for access to higher education is an even stronger discriminator. However, this must always be seen against the particular school's context and intentions.

The accreditation process should provide a useful barometer to conditions in the independent schooling sector. Quality assurance is among other things an early warning system, so it is important that a cost-effective, relatively frequent reporting system be developed that rapidly provides a reading of key indicators, both to the higher authorities and the sector itself. The present report is substantial because it comes near the start of the process. Subsequent reports are likely to be briefer, but still telling.

Part 1

CONTEXTUAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO THE SITE VISITS

The 2006 site visits and their importance

In April 2006 Umalusi set out on a programme of highly-focused site visits involving 100 independent schools. These site visits were designed primarily to inform the further management and administration of the process of accreditation and quality assurance that has been developed by Umalusi since 2002. They were not meant to form part of an academic research project, but were intended to further establish Umalusi's presence in the band, verify information provided in self-evaluation reports by provisionally accredited providers, initiate interventions with schools performing poorly in terms of their matric results and bring more schools into the quality loop.

Nonetheless the project revealed an unexpected wealth of information that could also be useful to authorities and schools and might serve to identify areas for future research and improvement of Umalusi's processes. In fact, the programme has been important in relation to a number of Umalusi's longer-term concerns.

In the first place, the process has implications for the quality assurance of the provision of schooling in South Africa as a whole, not just for private providers. Umalusi has the same responsibility for quality assuring learning in public education as in independent schooling. However, Umalusi does not accredit public schools. Instead, it must monitor the implementation of quality improvement by provincial departments (GENFETQA Act, No.58, 2001, Section 22(2) and (5)). By contrast, Umalusi is directly responsible for awarding or withholding the accreditation of independent schools (GENFETQA Act, Section 23 (1) and (7)).

It is thus in the accreditation of independent schools that Umalusi has the opportunity to hone its insights, develop its hands-on capabilities, model procedures and give concrete exemplification of the values and criteria which it promotes. The programme of school visits is thus of great value in the process of sharing and guiding the quality assurance of public provision. It plays this role through the participation of the provincial education departments as observers, as well as in the availability of the present report to provincial education leadership. The report may therefore be seen as a contribution to the development of quality in education nationally rather than in one sector alone.

Secondly, as we shall see (in Appendix 1), the newness of the endeavour means that there is no tradition of well-established practices to guide the accreditation and quality assurance of education providers in SA. Umalusi is thus pioneering an approach and establishing criteria for use in South Africa. The present report represents, among other things, an indicator of progress. The site visit programme is therefore a step forward in

the development of Umalusi's – and South Africa's – understanding of accreditation in the spirit of quality assurance.

Thirdly, it is important for Umalusi and the Ministry of Education to remain alert to the dynamics of private provision. With one recent exception, the literature and the general understanding of independent schooling has been thin and partial. Informed insight is needed to advance the interests of general and further education nationally through sympathetic, developmental interventions in the context of private provision. Insight is also needed to ensure that the potential for exploitative and unscrupulous practices is eliminated or kept to a minimum.

As will be seen below, the intentions of the programme of site visits were diverse, and were dominated by the practical and bureaucratic demands of Umalusi's responsibilities in its actual work in progress on the accreditation of schools. It was important for Umalusi to ensure that it was broadly on the right track in terms of constructive procedures and coverage of the terrain. Although the programme of visits was not designed as an exercise in academic research, the sampling and the approach in general were nevertheless designed to bring back wide-ranging multi-purpose information to inform the exercise of Umalusi's responsibilities, not to contribute to theory. Nonetheless, the information – gathered in an ambitious and moderately costly process – is interesting and in some respects unique. We have therefore attempted to make the information as accessible as possible to those concerned with the state of education in South Africa.

In what follows, we outline Umalusi's broad approach to accreditation in the spirit of quality assurance. We then look at some broader perceptions of private provision of education in South Africa. This is followed by an account of the site visits and the observations which they have yielded. In closing, we make recommendations regarding possible actions of the various role players concerned.

Umalusi's approach to accreditation and quality assurance

Umalusi, as the body with overarching statutory responsibility for quality assurance in general and further education and training in South Africa, must of necessity explore the possibility and limits of its quality assurance mission. To date its legacy (from SAFCERT) of quality control at the final point of certification in schooling has been the dominant indicator, with Umalusi drawing extensively on its insights into the results of the Senior Certificate. However, its quality assurance role is also equally located in its monitoring of the adequacy and suitability of qualifications and curriculum in the general and further bands; and in its accreditation of providers where all these aspects come together.

Umalusi's approach to accreditation and quality assurance has been guided by an extended engagement with the literature and debates about accreditation and quality assurance, as well as by frequent consultation with the key stakeholders in the process. Clear lessons from the literature, explored much more fully in Appendix 1 relate to:

- The newness of accreditation in South African education, and the newness worldwide of the idea and practices of quality assurance means that the adaptation and use of techniques that were initially designed for professions, business and industry require approaches that are cautious, innovative and

exploratory. For example, features of the business orientations and values involved in some models of quality assurance are misleading in education, and techniques, like the tendency to focus wholly on inputs and capacity may not be appropriate.

- The primary commitment of quality assurance is the improvement and maintenance of quality in the interests of the stakeholders of education.
- The need to recognise that quality assurance comes into its own in situations of rapid social change and policies of greater inclusion and therefore needs to be responsive and flexible itself. It is essential to provide the confidence in learning outcomes necessary for flexible access and progression in learning pathways.

In order to ensure maximum positive impact of its practices, Umalusi has favoured comprehensiveness rather than a lean approach to start with. This fits well with MacGilchrist et al's observation that the main message of many studies of school quality "is the danger of concentrating on too narrow a definition of achievement when assessing a school's effectiveness"(1997:p 4). They also stress that knowledge about the characteristics of effectiveness is not enough...

...to strengthen a school's capacity to raise standards and enhance pupils' progress and achievement... All important is what a school does with the knowledge; how it uses it to improve its own effectiveness. What marks out the intelligent school is its ability to apply the knowledge and skills it has to maximum effect in classrooms and across the school as a whole (1997, p 110).

The chronology in Part 2 below gives an overview of the steps Umalusi has taken in shaping its accreditation practices. In essence, the process of accreditation, as set out in Umalusi's (2004) *Framework for the Quality Assurance of General and Further Education and Training*, involves the application by the provider, the submission of evidence of eligibility for provisional accreditation including an initial self-evaluation, and a three-year period of monitored self-improvement, systems development and progress reports leading to full accreditation (or refusal of full accreditation). The fully accredited institution then submits periodic reports for further monitoring. (The programme of site visits centred on the verification of self-evaluations and/or progress reports submitted during the provisional accreditation period – at least in the case of those schools that already entered the accreditation process.)

Key features of the approach to accreditation are captured in the following extracts from the *Draft criteria for the accreditation and monitoring of independent schools* (2006):

The criteria essentially consist of qualitative measures against which a school's effectiveness can be determined...

They enable Umalusi to provide an independent account of the quality of education and training, the effectiveness of management and the sufficiency of institutional results in independent schools. In addition they highlight the strengths, weaknesses and good practice in the sector, to serve as a foundation for improving quality.

They also serve as a benchmark and guideline for school quality management. They are intended to encourage and enable schools to analyse and reflect on the quality of their provision and management and to guide the development of self-evaluation reports and improvements...

Umalusi Council recognises that while effective systems for the management and improvement

of quality are a necessity, of greater importance is the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning is the core business of a school and as such it is the focus of accreditation and monitoring processes...

Umalusi uses school performance indicators as the lens through which it views, measures and monitors the ongoing quality improvement of provision. School performance includes learner success rates, user satisfaction rates and estimates of value for money. Analysed and interpreted over time to establish trends, a profile of the quality of provision can be drawn and reported on...

The criteria enable Umalusi to report on:

- the effectiveness of leadership and governance in raising school performance;
- the effectiveness of self-regulated quality management in securing improvement and user satisfaction; this would include the areas of curriculum, planning and design of learning programmes, teaching and learning, delivery, assessment of learning, learner support, resources and results;
- achievements in terms of standards and learner success;
- the extent to which independent schools provide best value for money; and
- the extent to which independent schools meet their own objectives and national objectives in reflecting the requirements and values of the South African Constitution.

The criteria cover four broad areas that form the focus of the accreditation and monitoring processes:

- leadership and management;
- the school ethos;
- teaching and learning; and
- school performance results.

Collectively the information gathered during the evaluation against the criteria should answer the following questions:

- Is the school managing and supporting the quality of its provision effectively?
- Does the school meet its own and national objectives as defined in its vision and mission statements?
- Does the ethos of the school create an enabling environment for learning and reflect appropriate values?
- Is the teaching and learning offered by the school of sufficient quality?

These broad statements are then elaborated in detail and summarised for use. As the detail is picked up in the questions and issues raised in the site visits, it is not necessary to set them out here. The document can be accessed on www.umalusi.org where it can be seen that Umalusi has been attentive to the debates and positions outlined above.

Background to independent schooling in South Africa

Before moving on to the record of the site visit programme, a brief picture of independent schools in South Africa may be helpful.

During Umalusi's programme of site visits to independent schools DFID released its study of *Non-government Secondary Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Lewin and Sayed 2005). Focusing on South Africa and Malawi, this publication offers a comprehensive survey of private provision of secondary schooling in South Africa itself: previously insight could be derived mainly from monographs and argumentative papers. Catholic

education has been served by Christie (1990) and Potterton and Johnstone (n.d.). Recently Hofmeyr and Lee (2004) have alerted us to the radically changing profile of private schooling away from its elite image. Information has otherwise been scattered in the partial records of associations of private providers – notably the Independent Schools Association of SA (ISASA) – and in the sometimes incomplete provincial registration records.

Lewin and Sayed’s most striking finding is of the rapid increase in non-elite non-government provision in South Africa, although the increase would not seem to be nearly as great as in other Sub-Saharan states. Comparatively speaking, the policy and regulatory environments for private provision in South Africa, shaped by provisions in the national constitution, are shown to be well-conceived, liberal and possibly even generous in the subsidising of independent schools. On the other hand, there is a complex and ambivalent set of views of private provision among education leadership. At the same time there is uneven capacity in the different provincial departments of education to implement policy regarding registration, subsidy and monitoring. Cross-reference is made to Lewin and Sayed’s data in the analysis of the figures generated by the site visit programme. Here we extract the South African profiles from Lewin and Sayed’s exceptionally useful summary tables. Observations from the site visit programme are largely in harmony with those of Lewin and Sayed, but provide interesting overtones as well.

Profile of non-government provision of secondary schooling in South Africa

(Extracted from Lewin and Sayed, 2005, Table 24, pp. 112-114)

Size of Sector	Relatively small but varied, with between 1200 and 2000 providers. Rapid growth from a small base since 1990. New school registrations peaked in 2000, since when growth appears to have slowed. About 6% of independent schools in the sample enrol more than 500 students and a further 41% more than 200. The remainder are small schools, 17% of which have less than 50 students.
Equity	Most independent schools operate at mid to high-fee levels, beyond the level of affordability of the poor. Quality and performance are very low in low-fee schools. High cost schools perform as well as or better than the best government schools with which they compete.
Access	Most independent schools are urban or sub-urban. Few have rural catchment areas and few are in townships. Schools remain characterised by differences in religious and community orientation linked to cost, entrance criteria and location. Low-cost schools have few entry criteria and admit foreign students who can register easily.
Ownership	Most independent schools have Christian religious affiliations (71%). About 31% are church owned, 22% are owned by Trusts, 22% by companies and about 25% by individuals or families.
Governance	Elite, top-end schools have good governance structures which conform to regulatory requirements. Middle and low-cost schools tend to be commercial, with proprietor governance. Non-government schools generally often have hierarchical management structures with low levels of transparency or staff involvement.
Fees	About 21% of schools operate with fees above R20 000, 17% R12 000-20 000, 24% R6 000-12 000, 34% R1 000-6 000, and only 4% below R1 000

Subsidies	Low-fee schools depend on subsidies based on fee-levels and other criteria including examination performance. Lower fee schools receive the maximum 60% subsidy based on the average cost per student in the Province. Subsidy amounts have been falling, bringing into doubt the financial viability of low-cost schools. If schools receive subsidies they must be registered as non-profit organisations which allows tax exemption.
Quality	High-cost schools have extensive facilities and very low pupil : teacher ratios. Low-cost providers are often in unsuitable rented accommodation with no sports facilities, specialised rooms or equipment.
Curriculum	All schools follow the national curriculum and take South African examinations. * Some high-cost schools may take international qualifications. Faith-based schools provide a particular religious ethos. Few but the highest cost schools offer innovatory teaching and learning.
Achievement	High-cost schools produce results comparable with the best public schools, many of which are Ex Model C schools. Mid-range schools are comparable or better than average public schools. Low-end independent schools may achieve better than the worst public schools and may fail if they do not.
Teachers	Teachers need to be qualified and registered if schools receive subsidies and most are, though they may be temporarily registered whilst upgrading. Their employment falls under labour law. Low-fee schools may have problems paying salaries, especially where subsidies are delayed or not paid.
Regulation and Facilitation	The regulatory system in South Africa is extensively legislated and often enforced, especially as it relates to subsidies. It places a significant overhead on providers, especially small schools, to respond to all its requirements. Some aspects of the regulatory system are more inhibiting than facilitating.

* This is not strictly accurate. Some registered independent schools offer a foreign curriculum. (Ed.)

Looking more closely at the figures, Lewin and Sayed (2005:p 25) quote Unesco statistics indicating that the proportion of secondary learners enrolled in private schools (compared with national figures) in South Africa doubled between 1990 and 2000 – and this at a time of growth in national enrolment. However, they point out that the growth in South Africa is modest compared to a number of Sub-Saharan countries.

Lewin and Sayed's own figures (2005:p 51) show that independent schools form large minorities within total secondary provision in Gauteng (14,1%) and the Western Cape (8,0%), and are tiny minorities in all other provinces, with by far the lowest proportion in the Eastern Cape (0,5%).

Probably the most interesting single set of figures relates to fees. This indicates that schools with annual fees above R30 000 represent only 6,4% of independent secondary schools, while schools with fees below R6 000 represent 37,9%. (2005:p 52.)

Lewin and Sayed's categorisation of independent secondary schools in relation to fees, religious affiliation and ownership is revealing, and is again worth quoting in full (p 52–53):

The following categories emerge when fees are cross-tabulated with religious affiliation.

- Elite schools: 35% of schools charging over R20,000 per annum were Anglican; most of the rest were inter-denominational Christian; 14% claimed to be secular;
- Top-end schools: 46% of schools charging fees between R12,000 and R19,999 were classified as inter-denominational Christian; 39% were Catholic;
- Upper middle: 36% of schools charging fees between R6,000 and R11,999 were inter-denominational Christian; 24% were charismatic; and 19% were Catholic;

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- Lower middle: 65% of schools charging fees between R1,000 and R5,999 were classified as inter-denominational Christian.

Anglican, Methodist and Jewish schools are concentrated in the highest fee range. Over half (54%) of Catholic schools in the sample charge above R12,000 as do 58% of secular schools. 46% of interdenominational schools and 48% of charismatic schools charge below R6,000...

... when fees are cross-tabulated with ownership:

- High-cost schools are most commonly owned by Churches and Trusts, very few are privately owned;
- Upper-middle fee schools are predominantly Church owned;
- Lower-middle fee schools are mostly owned by individuals or families.

In broad terms these observations support and clarify the observations of the site visit programme.

Part 2

SCOPE, INTENTIONS AND APPROACH

Introductory facts and figures

The site visit programme was based on a constructed sample of 100 independent schools in 8 provinces and produced 92 reports but only 87 usable data sets for detailed analysis.

The schools fell into four broad and overlapping sets:

- Having a Senior Certificate pass rate of more than 60%, versus
- Having a Senior Certificate pass rate of 60% and less in 2005; and/or
- Provisionally accredited, versus
- Not provisionally accredited.

Each school submitted a detailed profile.

Each school was visited by a trained evaluator, in some cases accompanied by a monitor. Each visit consisted of a tightly scheduled programme including individual interviews with management, focus group meetings and inspection of facilities and equipment. The evaluator verified the self-evaluation information in the case of schools that had submitted a monitoring report to Umalusi. (The verification required qualitative observations for the most part). For all schools visited a Site Visit Booklet was filled in. Subsequently much of the information was captured as quantitative data to facilitate analysis and interpretation,

The site visit programme yielded several hundred items of information for each school¹.

Information gathered included:

- Extensive contact details
- Information about accreditation status, ownership, location, for-profit status and other data reflecting the nature and status of the school, such as pass rate in the Senior Certificate in 2005, fees, subsidies, date of establishment, affiliations and subject offerings
- Demographic and other information about learners and educators
- A range of details about performance over time in external examinations
- Details about facilities and resources
- Extensive information about compliance of provisionally accredited schools with requirements and process for full accreditation
- Schools' reasons for not being provisionally accredited and/or for pass rates of 60% or less in the Senior Certificate in 2005

¹ Supporting documents for this part of the report can be obtained on request from Umalusi. They include a listing of the schools visited, the names and details of monitors and assessors, the training programme for monitors and assessors, the site visit booklet, the electronic data capture template and the self evaluation and progress reporting formats for the schools.

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- Information about the schools with a pass rate of 60% or lower, including pass rates over three years, the reasons offered for the poor achievement and the measures being put in place to improve achievement

Most of the above information is presented and analysed in Part 3.

Broad aims of the site visits

There were four broad aims in conducting the site visits to independent schools in 2006.

- 1 Umalusi must be seen to exercise its statutory responsibility to quality assure education and training in the general and further education bands. This includes a range of tasks concerned with monitoring and developing the validity of certification, and more generally promoting the meaningfulness of what happens in South African education provision:
 - the accreditation of independent schools;
 - guiding the improvement of public schools according to the same criteria;
 - moderating and certificating exit examinations; and
 - quality assuring the work of assessment bodies.
- 2 The Evaluation and Accreditation Unit was committed to carrying forward its work in progress on the accreditation of independent schools, notably by monitoring the response to the first two steps in the development of Umalusi's accreditation role. By the start of the site visit programme the following were in place:
 - Guidelines and criteria for the process had been drafted and redrafted in ongoing consultation with the independent school sector; and
 - The related process of provisional accreditation had been instituted, so that many schools were already at the end of the first year of the three year provisional accreditation period.
- 3 In the interests of its mission, Umalusi needed to move into a more pro-active and visible role in the quality assurance of independent schools.
- 4 There was also a need to develop Umalusi's own institutional capacity in terms of a more concrete understanding of the nature of the sector and to give shape to its practices; the present programme will inform the processes in subsequent rounds.

Specific goals of the site visits

The specific goals of the site visits were to:

- 1 Understand the reasons for the low achievement of independent schools with a pass rate of less than 60% in 2005 and the measures being implemented by the schools to improve their matric results in 2006;
- 2 Start to develop an endogenous set of benchmarks for good practices² in independent schooling;
- 3 Gather information to inform Umalusi's future approach to potentially at risk schools and undesirable practices;
- 4 Locate and identify unregistered or unaccredited schools in order to draw them into

² Consultations in the follow-up to Umalusi's 2005 evaluation of assessment bodies led to agreement that the standard quality assurance term "best practices" might be useful in an industrial situation, but that the diversity and contextual variation in education meant that the term "good practices" was more suitable.

the accreditation process and create greater clarity about the extent and nature of the independent school sector in South Africa;

- 5 Verify the accuracy of information provided by provisionally accredited schools as submitted in self-evaluation reports; and in the light of this
- 6 Assess the initial impact of – and response to – the three year provisional accreditation process launched in 2005.

Questions that the site visits should clarify

Highly concrete and practical questions needed answers or clarification:

- 1 Poor matric results:
 - Regarding the performance of unaccredited schools in matric exams – is there a correlation between accreditation and results?
 - What are the factors that contribute to poor results?
 - Which elements of good practice are related to good results?
 - Do subsidies make a difference to results?
- 2 Verification of provider information:
 - Is there a correlation between accreditation and results?
 - Are the claims made by provisionally accredited providers during self-evaluation true?
 - To what extent is the data consistent with the self evaluation?
 - Are schools as compliant as they claim to be?
 - To what extent have recommendations for improvement been implemented?
- 3 Unaccredited and/or unregistered providers:
 - Why are certain schools remaining outside the quality assurance loop?
 - Is the “fly-by-night” element one to be concerned about? Are learners being exploited?
 - Are subsidies being paid to under performing schools or those that do not meet the criteria?
 - What is the general impact of “accreditation” / registration?
- 4 Effective strategies for dealing with the situation:

How should Umalusi respond to ...

 - Providers that make false claims for accreditation?
 - The need to improve its monitoring and verification system?
 - Unaccredited providers outside the quality assurance loop?
 - Schools with poor results?
 - Promoting good practices in the sector?
 - Future research?
- 5 And what should the national department and provincial departments of education consider doing?

-
- About improving “systems” for private schools
 - Implications for the public schools

Planning and approach to the site visits

1 Selection of schools

Since the project had the character of a pilot study, only 100 schools were targeted. (This would amount to about 5-8% of the estimated number of independent schools operating in South Africa.) Although all 100 were contacted and visited, the survey yielded only 87 usable records. The thirteen schools whose records were not used in this report fell away for a number of reasons. In some cases it was impossible to contact them or conclude arrangements with them. In others the school had gone through a major change of management or location very recently and its records were not available. In two cases schools had been taken over by the provincial department and were no longer independent.

Of necessity, the sample was drawn from the known body of independent schools. The main source was the DoE’s set of records relating to Senior Certificate results and examination centre registration. In addition, some schools were included at the request of PDEs. The sample was constructed to include all independent schools with a pass rate of 60% or less in the Senior Certificate of 2005 – this meant that approximately one half of the sample consisted of schools that had under performed. (In the event this was less than one half because the 13 schools not reached were all weaker achievers.) The remaining high achieving schools were seen in part as providing a control group, but also as helping to benchmark good practices.

A second concern in constructing the sample was to include both schools that were provisionally accredited, and those that – for whatever reasons – had not yet put themselves forward for accreditation.

Schools selected in the national sample turned out to be distributed unevenly among eight of the nine provinces, and included a spectrum from rural to city centre schools. (The Northern Cape schools were not included because the DoE record did not reflect any independent schools with a pass rate of less than 60% and also due to the small number of registered and accredited independent schools in this province – South Africa’s least populous – province.)

2 Selection and training of evaluators and moderators

Umalusi selected evaluators and monitors who:

- are current senior teachers and principals at their schools
- are suitably experienced and qualified
- have considerable experience with Umalusi’s quality assurance programmes

In addition, the PDEs were invited to monitor a sample of site visits.

The site visits were organised on a provincial basis. Each of the participating provinces had a panel of evaluators and at least one monitor to oversee and quality assure the work of the evaluators.

The training of the evaluators and monitors included developing an understanding of Umalusi's mandated role, the objectives of the site visits, their roles and responsibilities in conducting the site visit and report writing. In the interests of confidentiality and fairness evaluators and moderators were required to sign an oath of secrecy and a code of ethics.

Evaluators and monitors shared constructively in the creation of the procedures and questionnaires, and contributed to a review of the initial contents of the present report. (The broad process has been explained in Section 2 above.)

3 Chronology: The development of Umalusi's accreditation practices

2001:	The idea of accreditation of independent schools is implicit in GENFETQA Act No 58 of 2001;
2002:	Umalusi starts to conceptualise policy and create capacity and structures for accreditation of private providers;
2003:	Umalusi commences with provisional accreditation;
2004:	Umalusi is restructured to create an Evaluation and Accreditation Unit. Provider workshops are held for the first time and provisionally accredited schools are requested to conduct a self-evaluation for submission in 2005. Umalusi starts the ongoing consultative process for developing the Accreditation and Monitoring Criteria for Independent Schools;
2005:	The Accreditation framework and accreditation and monitoring criteria are finalised and approved by the Council; Independent schools submit their first self-evaluation reports which are evaluated and reported on; Provisional accreditation and provider workshops continue.

4 The unfolding of the site visit programme

In 2006, provisional accreditation continues. The programme of site visits is undertaken, with the following schedule:

April 06	Initial planning for present site visit project
May 06	Independent schools submit their second monitoring report and some are granted accreditation candidacy
June 06	Meeting with PDEs; design of broad procedures and instruments; Instruments piloted at two schools
July 06	Recruitment of evaluators and monitors; revision of instrument after feedback; first training meeting
August 06	Site visits commence; debriefing and support action with monitors
September 06	Site visits concluded
October 06	Evaluators and monitors submit reports to Umalusi; design and implementation of process of analysis; plenary of Monitors and Evaluators to review initial contents of report
November 06	Preliminary report to Umalusi Council and participating schools received feedback reports

Internal evaluation of the site visit process

At the end of the site visits the evaluators or monitors completed an evaluation of the visit to each school. Nine evaluation points were dealt with, yielding the following observations after analysis.

- 1 Umalusi's logistical arrangements were highly rated in 90% of cases, with only one case of serious dissatisfaction, and the remaining responses only a little less than satisfied.
- 2 In only 11% of the cases the effectiveness of the programme design was felt to be somewhat less than satisfactory, with one seriously dissatisfied.
- 3 The relevance of the presentation to the school was felt to be slightly less than satisfactory in only 13% of the cases.
- 4 Only in 2 cases were there slight reservations about the constructiveness and usefulness of the interviews with the principal and senior management.
- 5 The verification process of self-evaluation evidence is the only area where there were evaluator reservations that are worth noting. In 20 cases evaluators considered the process was not "well constructed or conducted in a mutually constructive and informative manner". The qualitative records suggest that some schools found the requirement confusing and/or threatening and responded negatively to the questions of the evaluators. In the plenary discussion of this matter, however, the evaluators insisted that the process had been valued by nearly all schools, and that the general high scores were valid. A number of the schools showed eagerness and pride in showing how they had managed their evidence. The principal of the school ranked as one of the best by two critical readers of the site visit booklets commented on this process: "Umalusi has helped us to focus – to see in which direction to channel our efforts". The evaluators pointed out, though, that even some of the best schools had gaps in their record keeping, or did not see the necessity for the level of explicit record keeping required as they had their information in their informal institutional memory.
- 6 In 97% of cases there was full satisfaction with the information and insights provided by the focus groups.
- 7 In 98% of cases there was full satisfaction with the usefulness of the inspection of the premises.
- 8 In 92% of cases there were no reservations about the clarity and usefulness of Umalusi's documentation and guidelines for the site visit. The remaining 8% had only slight reservations.
- 9 In 95% of cases the evaluator was able to compile a school-specific report easily using the information gathered during the site visit.
- 10 Evaluators or monitors made recommendations. These were to:
 - Develop relevant policies and procedures to guide all key practices at the school
 - Ensure that the school's compliance with health and safety regulations is continually assessed by appropriate bodies
 - Make the instruments more user friendly

The reports on the visit close with a set of varied observations on the experience. Again, the opportunity to record negative perceptions was scarcely used. Only four participating schools were reported as being difficult to contact, or with whom it was difficult to sustain contact. No evaluators recorded that they had been confronted with queries that they could not answer. One incident of “unpleasant or confrontational attitudes from the school” is recorded, although here the qualitative report suggests that the differences were resolved amicably. At very few schools are serious allegations recorded from staff or learners. (This relates to intimidation by a small group of learners reported by some educators and learners and attributed to poor discipline and codes of behaviour that are not being enforced.)

On the whole, the data and the quality of qualitative records speak very highly for the way in which the site visit programme was conceptualised and managed. The problems noted provide useful pointers to correction.

Note:

When brainstorming possible recommendations to the schools regarding the site visit process (in the interests of electronic data capturing) the panel of monitors generated the following points. These seem worth noting as grounded perceptions, even though they were not necessarily endorsed in the responses of the evaluators:

1. Develop relevant policies and procedures to guide all key practices at the school
2. Management should improve communication with all the relevant stakeholders at the school
3. Establish an internal quality assurance structure that will facilitate the process and procedures of monitoring and reviewing the performance of policies. The structure should also facilitate the development of Self Evaluation and Progress reports for Umalusi
4. The management team should adequately involve all stakeholders in developing policies, monitoring and reviewing them
5. Ensure that the school's compliance with health and safety regulations is continually assessed by appropriate bodies
6. Conduct regular client satisfaction surveys and use findings to inform further planning at the school
7. Encourage and promote continual observance of the school ethos
8. Keep a proper record of minutes of staff meetings, review committee meetings and other meetings
9. Make provision for adequate learner support, particularly in respect of subject choices and career guidance for grade 10-12 learners
10. Ensure that parents play an active role in the education of their children

Limitations

The aims and goals of the site visit programme set out above lay emphasis on the project's role in terms of developing Umalusi's capacity to conduct informed, developmental processes in its work in accreditation and school improvement. The present report has been composed with the intention of making accessible as much of the information emerging from the survey as possible. Apart from guiding Umalusi's future approaches, the report will presumably throw new light on the situation of the independent school sector in South Africa.

However, while the survey has been conducted systematically and with considerable care, *Umalusi makes no claims regarding the representivity or generalisability of the analysis to the independent school sector as a whole. The analysis certainly does not allow for comparisons among the provinces, as the sample was based on national data relating to school achievement. Apart from the specific factors in the construction of the sample, constraints can be found in inaccuracies in the DoE data used in the selection of the set.*

The insights yielded relate thus to the sample, with all its contingencies, and cannot be seen as representative of the whole sector. Furthermore, neither the officials who designed the survey nor the panels of evaluators and monitors were uniformly qualified with the ethnographic, statistical or survey competencies that might have allowed for generalisability. In addition, there are inevitable constraints as well as benefits in using peer evaluators in a competitive sector. The monitors and evaluators were nonetheless well qualified, and all appear from the qualitative data to have been fair minded in their assessment.

The central factor in the design and analysis of the site visit programme was the school's pass rate in the Senior Certificate examination. Although this is useful (and the only pragmatic starting point) it is also limiting. The issue is briefly discussed in Part 3.

In spite of the limitations, the data is analysed as fully as possible in Part 3. Inevitably, future researchers and commentators will generalise the findings here; they are requested to note the limitations.

Part 3

RESULTS OF THE SITE VISIT PROGRAMME

Orientation

This section is essentially descriptive, and analyses the results of the site visits without broader interpretation, which will be found in Part 4. The description draws in the first place on the quantitative data, but supplements this with qualitative insights from the site visit booklets and from the plenary workshop of monitors and evaluators.

The tables and occasional listings in this part of the report contain much information about the sample that cannot be exhausted in the text without going to tedious lengths. The data pertains to patterns and trends across provinces, in relation to school achievement in the Senior Certificate, responses to the challenge of sustaining or raising quality and more particularly to the process of verification within provisional accreditation.

The tables and listings have been organised into themes, but inevitably some of the information overflows the boundaries of the categories within which it is given.

The analysis makes considerable use of pass rate on the Senior Certificate. The reasons for this, its usefulness and limitations, are discussed elsewhere in the report.

Wherever relevant, a primary category in the analysis is that of Province. This is the case because the direct responsibility for registration and regulation of independent schools lies with the provincial departments of education. At the same time the boundaries of the provinces were drawn on the basis of broad socio-economic and demographic features, and there is some interest in the different profiles of the sample of schools in each province.

The reader is however reminded of the necessary limitations of sample and approach discussed in the previous section.

The nature of the sample

In the case of a constructed multi-purpose sample the only way to understand what it “represents” is to describe the sample as fully as possible. Throughout the analysis the primary points of reference are:

- 1 Results in the Senior Certificate Examinations in 2005: As indicated in other parts of this report, in spite of reservations, the matric results are the most reliable general and comparable single point of reference when considering questions of quality. For the sake of most of the analysis, the dividing line is between schools with a pass rate higher than 60% (n=55) and a pass of 60% (n=32) and lower. Occasionally, however, more extreme contrasts are used for analysis, and in one case the pass rate with exemption is used.

- 2 Umalusi accreditation status: This is a key variable in terms of Umalusi's interest in the site visits. (It has turned out, however, to be the least interesting discriminator at this early stage, and is used sparingly.)
- 3 Fees: Although fees cannot be regarded as indicators of quality and did not feature in the sampling, they do point the way to likely qualities, and are important in any explanatory framework.
- 4 Province: location is not only important for what it indicates about the likely environment (e.g. relatively rich or poor; predominantly urban or rural), but is essential because of the primary responsibilities of provincial authorities relating to the registration, subsidy and monitoring of independent schools. However, we reiterate that while the information is useful for provincial departments, competitive comparisons between the provinces cannot validly be made from the data.

Demographic and socio-economic features of the sample

As can be seen in **Table 1**, the sample includes a large number of high-achieving schools in the Western Cape, with 26 out of 87 schools. Gauteng, which would be expected to have far more independent schools in terms of Lewin and Sayed's (2005) figures, has only 15. The remainder range between 3 and 10 each. This distribution is the result mainly of the selection of the sample.

TABLE 1: Accreditation, pass rates, fees and age of schools by province

Province	Number of schools	Pr. Accredited	Senior Certificate Pass Rate		Annual Fees			Subsidised	School Inception Dates			
			Average	Range	Average	Lower Range	Upper Range		1850 – 1900	1901 – 1950	1951 – 1993	1994 – 2006
EASTERN CAPE	9	5	38.1	19-58	R 4,354.44	R 1,440.00	R 8,870.00	6		1	2	6
FREESTATE	3	3	73.7	50-100	R 7,507.50	R 1,650.00	R 13,365.00	2		1	1	1
GAUTENG	15	9	50.8	23-100	R 11,899.29	R 2,300.00	R40,000.00	9		4	2	9
KWAZULU-NATAL	9	7	59.5	18-100	R 8,391.25	R 2,400.00	R25,200.00	3		1	3	5
LIMPOPO	10	6	50.7	27-100	R 4,295.80	R 1,020.00	R 8,640.00	5			4	6
MPUMALANGA	10	7	48.3	27-100	R 5,558.70	R 2,400.00	R 9,000.00	5				10
NORTHWEST	5	4	68.0	49-100	R 6,180.00	R 3,800.00	R 8,800.00	3			2	3
WESTERN CAPE	26	20	81.0	20-100	R 22,530.28	R 2,200.00	R 47,760.00	7	4	2	4	16
Total	87	61	58.8					40	4	9	18	56
Percentage		70%						46%	5%	10%	21%	64%
Average						R 8,839.66						

In **Table 1** the Western Cape sample is seen to be high in pointers to quality. 77% are provisionally accredited as against the average of 70%. The average Senior Certificate pass rate is 81% against a national average of 58,8%. The average fees are double those of the next highest province (Gauteng), and the Western Cape also has the highest annual fee encountered in the site visits at R47 760. It is therefore understandable that only 7 out of the sample of 26 (27%) are subsidised, compared with the national average of 40% subsidy; in Gauteng 9 out of 15 schools in the sample (60%) are subsidised. Predictably, given South Africa's historical development, by far the oldest schools are in the Western Cape – but even there 62% of the schools had been established since 1994. (See later discussion of age of school and achievements.)

The Eastern Cape schools (9) are perhaps a more representative figure in relation to Lewin and Sayed's figures. The analysis here is slightly weakened by the fact that, according to the provincial evaluators, the report of the best school visited was not included in the analysis. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that the additional figures would have changed the general pattern in this sample of low achievements, low fees and a high rate of subsidy.

From **Table 2** it is evident fully 81% of the sample is urban, mainly suburban (63%) with a minority inner-city (18%). In the Eastern Cape, 7 out of 9 schools in the sample (78%) fall out of the suburbs, while in the Western Cape fully 24 out of the 26 schools are classified as suburban and even in KZN, with its huge rural and informally housed population, 8 out of the 9 schools are urban. Feedback from the evaluators indicates agreement with Lewin and Sayed that very few, if any, of the suburban schools can be found in former "townships" rather than in the more privileged suburbs. (The categorisation relating to location was added by evaluators after the site visits and is based on their impressions. Some schools were not classified, which explains certain

TABLE 2: Demographic information about schools by province

Province	Number of schools	Location				Learner Enrolment				Staff Complement	Learner/Staff		
		Rural	Peri-Urban	Suburban	City Centre	Total	Average	Lower Range	Upper Range		Ratio	Low Range	High Range
EASTERNCAPE	9	2	2	2	3	2,090	232.2	68	654	158	11.8	5.23	24.2
FREE STATE	3			3		766	383.0	113	653	101	5.6	2.26	14.51
GAUTENG	15		1	11	3	5,353	446.1	48	1,148	464	10.5	3.2	15.72
KWAZULU-NATAL	9			6	2	2,663	295.9	56	536	248	10.9	5.77	19.15
LIMPOPO	10	1		5	3	3,990	399.0	62	720	295	15.6	3.1	42.35
MPUMALANGA	10	2		4	4	3,408	340.8	62	552	195	12.0	3.1	17.76
NORTHWEST	5		5			1,366	273.2	64	552	130	10.0	9.1	13.95
WESTERN CAPE	26	1		24	1	7,726	309.0	9	1,299	1279	7.0	2.85	15.25
Total	87	6	8	55	16	27,362				2,870			
Percentage		7%	9%	63%	18%								

Note: A number of schools were not coded for location. This explains the inconsistencies in the numbers and percentages for the location data.

differences in totals. The category “peri-urban” was intended to refer especially to informal settlements; the well-publicised non-government schools at Orange Farm outside Johannesburg would fall into this category.)

Still in **Table 2**, the Gauteng schools in the sample were generally the largest, but the single largest school is in the Western Cape, with 1299 learners. The smallest schools are also in these two provinces, with 9 learners in one Western Cape school. A very low average ratio of learners to educators is found in the small Free State sample (5,6%), but the ratio of 7% in the Western Cape is probably more telling. On the whole the schools have favourable learner/educator ratios. This is supported by the qualitative reports which suggest that even many of the weaker schools are valued for the relative smallness of classes and the friendliness of relationships. The evaluators commented warmly in the plenary workshop on the welcoming, family-values feel of many of the schools. However, there are schools – even among high achieving schools – with moderately high learner/educator ratios. The very high ratio of one school in Limpopo (42,35%) needs further investigation.

Table 3 reports on the distribution of educators and learners in the sample in terms of gender and race.

Overall, there are almost twice as many women educators than men. Interestingly, though, the numbers are almost equal in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. On the other hand only 24 out of 100 (24%) in the North West sample are men, 86 out of 319 educators (27%) in the Gauteng sample and 193 out of 659 (29%) in the Western Cape sample.

TABLE 3: Table 3: Gender and race of learners and educators by province

Province	Number of schools	Gender				Race									
		Grade 12 Learners		Educators		All Learners					Educators				
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Non SA	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Non SA
EASTERN CAPE	9	276	361	42	43	1853	24	1	0	0	76	3	1	17	0
FREESTATE	3	188	179	21	59	1427	13	33	0	0	28	0	0	27	0
GAUTENG	15	246	377	86	233	3304	212	1761	976	9	91	6	107	229	0
KWAZULU-NATAL	9	93	187	56	91	1399	17	882	250	0	33	11	81	65	1
LIMPOPO	10	352	295	57	65	3443	2	20	6	0	147	1	17	25	16
MPUMALANGA	10	376	387	68	60	3022	20	321	26	0	107	0	28	25	
NORTHWEST	5	40	45	24	76	1146	26	2	192	15	10	0	0	67	0
WESTERN CAPE	26	631	795	193	466	960	1203	95	5428	0	18	78	2	661	1
Total	87	2 202	2 626	547	1 093	16 554	1 517	3 115	6 878	24	510	99	236	1 116	18
Grand Total		4 828		1 640		28 088					1 979				
Percentage		46%	54%	33%	67%	59%	5%	11%	24%	0%	26%	5%	12%	56%	1%

Gender ratios are more balanced among the learners. Girls predominate overall (54%) – with only a third of learners in the sample in KZN being boys – possibly because three of the schools in that sample are single-sex girls schools. (The available figures for the gender of learners relate only to Grade 12, but this is in some ways more telling than total enrolment figures.)

The distribution of educators by race is striking in the overall predominance of whites (56%) as opposed to blacks (26%). Profiles of distribution in the provinces are interestingly different. Thus some 76% of the educators in the Eastern Cape sample are black, against a huge predominance of white educators in the Western Cape sample. Perhaps predictably, the largest number of educators in the KZN sample is classified as Indian (52%). (The anomaly in the totals in the two sets of figures must be attributed to the schools' imperfect completion of the different sections of the self evaluation forms.)

The distribution of learners by race follows the trend of national distribution without being strictly proportional. On the whole these figures would be broadly supported by Lewin and Sayed's findings.

Feedback from evaluators would seem to suggest that the data in the column headed "Non SA" relating to both learners and educators under-represents the number of foreign teachers teaching in these schools. For example, an evaluator reports that one school alone was entirely staffed by expatriate Zimbabweans. There is likely to be some reluctance to report the nationality of educators, and perhaps also learners.

Table 4, on p 26, reports on figures for ownership status, profit status and religious affiliation, but should be seen as merely suggestive. They do not reflect the schools' self-descriptions, but the evaluators' estimation after the event. The trend for the largest group of schools overall to be owned privately (by an individual or family cc, for example) is borne out by Lewin and Sayed. However, the number classified as "for profit" seems anomalous, given the pressures from tax and subsidy regulations for independent schools to describe themselves as non-profit public benefit organisations (PBOs). (Given the relevance of these issues for registration and accreditation, and especially from the point of view of public protection, Umalusi together with the provincial departments of education might look more rigorously into the real financial and governance standing of many schools.)

Membership of a schools' association has the potential to be an important support element for quality assurance. However, there is an extremely low reporting of membership of such associations.

In terms of assessment bodies, the mention of the Independent Examinations Board as the examining body by four schools is what one might reasonably expect in a random sample of South African independent schools. No additional significance can, however, be attributed to this number in this sample.

TABLE 4: Type and affiliation of schools in the sample

Province	Number	Ownership Status			Profit Status			Religious Affiliation					Association					Assessment				
		Board/Trust	Private	Religious/Charity	Non-profit	For Profit	Unknown	Roman Catholic	Other Christian	Islamic	Jewish	None	Association Christian Schools of SA	Association of Black Independent Schools	Association of Muslim Schools	Body	Catholic Schools Association	ISASA	Limpopo Independent Schools Association	Independent Schools Forum	IEB	Own Provincial Department of Education
EASTERN CAPE	9	3	5	1	1	2	4		5			4					1				1	8
FREE STATE	3	2		1		1	2		1			2										3
GAUTENG	15	1	6	5		8	4	2	2	3			1	3	3							15
KWAZULU-NATAL	9	1	4	3	3	5	1		1	2		4			1		1					9
LIMPOPO	10	2	3	4	2	7			6			3					1	5				10
MPUMALANGA	10	1	9		3	6	1		3	2		5			1		1		1			10
NORTH WEST	5	2		3	2	3			4			1	1								1	4
WESTERN CAPE	26	9	11	6		11	15		9	1	1			1			10				2	24
Total	87	21	38	23	11	43	27	2	31	8	1	19	1	1	6	3	14	5	1	4	83	
Percentage of 87 schools	100%	24%	44%	26%	13%	49%	31%	2%	36%	9%	1%	22%	1%	1%	7%	3%	16%	6%	1%	5%	95%	

Offerings and facilities

Table 5 lists the subjects offered in the sample of schools in descending order of frequency.

The following features of this table might be noted:

- The prominence of the “gateway” subjects (English, Maths, Physical Science, IT and Business Studies).
- The frequency of English 1 in spite of the fact that the majority of learners are likely to be English 2 speakers.
- The relatively low frequency of African languages, either first or second or both, especially in the lower achieving schools. (Afrikaans was encoded under African languages.)
- The low frequency of the Visual Arts, strikingly in the lower achieving schools.
- The offering of a European language as an absolute marker of the higher achievers in this sample. i.e. Not one lower achieving school offers another European language.

A number of observations from the data about curriculum and assessment did not lend themselves to tabulation:

TABLE 5: Subject offerings of the schools in the sample

Subject	All Schools	Percent Offering Subject	Schools >60% pass	Percent Offering Subject	Schools < 61% pass	Percent Offering Subject
Number	87		55		32	
English 1	83	95.4%	52	94.5%	29	96.9%
Maths	81	93.1%	52	94.5%	28	87.5%
Physical Science	78	89.7%	49	89.1%	29	90.6%
IT	76	87.4%	49	89.1%	27	84.4%
Both Maths and Physics	73	83.9%	47	85.5%	25	78.1%
Business Studies	73	83.9%	44	80.0%	29	90.6%
Geography	71	81.6%	47	85.5%	24	75.0%
Accounting	71	81.6%	42	76.4%	29	90.6%
African Language 2	63	72.4%	38	69.1%	25	78.1%
History	51	58.6%	36	65.5%	15	46.9%
Life Orientation	48	55.2%	36	65.5%	12	37.5%
Economics	47	54.0%	23	41.8%	24	75.0%
African Language 1	41	47.1%	22	40.0%	19	59.4%
Both African language levels	27	31.0%	13	23.6%	14	43.8%
Visual Arts	27	31.0%	25	45.5%	2	6.3%
Life Science	27	31.0%	24	43.6%	3	9.4%
English 2	23	26.4%	11	20.0%	12	37.5%
Tourism	21	24.1%	14	25.5%	7	21.9%
Both English levels	19	21.8%	8	14.5%	11	34.4%
European Language	19	21.8%	19	34.5%	0	0.0%
Agriculture	13	14.9%	1	1.8%	12	37.5%

- English is the first language medium of instruction in 83 of the schools
- German and Arabic are listed as second medium of instruction in one school each
- Four schools list Afrikaans as the main medium of instruction, two in North West and two in the Western Cape

Common tasks for assessment (CTAs) are centrally-set projects intended to improve the validity of site-based assessments. 75 schools claim that they conduct CTAs. Only 12 out of the 87 schools did not report conducting CTAs. The 12 were distributed across 6 of the 8 provinces represented. Half of the schools not conducting CTAs were high achievers in terms of Senior Certificate pass rate.

TABLE 6: Learner support services offered

	All Schools	Percent Offering Subject	Schools > 60% pass	Percent Offering Subject	Schools < 61% pass	Percent Offering Subject
Number	87		55		32	
Additional tutoring	60	69.0%	44	80.0%	16	50.0%
Counselling	42	48.3%	32	58.2%	10	31.3%
Saturday or holiday school	41	47.1%	24	43.6%	17	53.1%
Field trips	16	18.4%	13	23.6%	3	9.4%
Guidance for parents	8	9.2%	6	10.9%	2	6.3%
Social work	5	5.7%	4	7.3%	1	3.1%

The striking feature of **Table 6** is the considerably higher frequency of all offerings of Learner Support Services in the higher achieving schools – except for Saturday or holiday schools, which are marginally more commonly run by the lower achieving schools in the sample. In general the table supports the impressions from the site visit booklets and, in further analysis below, that additional tutoring is taken most seriously as keys to achievement in the Senior Certificate.

The provision of extra-curricular activities by the schools in the sample – as reflected in **Table 7** – is the low frequency of cultural activities. Sport is offered by some three quarters of all the schools, but it should be noted that the site report booklets contain a range of complaints from learners in the less well-endowed schools that generally lack sports facilities. These complaints are about the thinness of opportunities for sport or even an entire lack of sport in spite of claims to offer it. The lack of facilities, especially in inner-city and other poorly resourced schools, may account for the relatively greater frequency of debating and chess in the lower achieving schools.

TABLE 7: Extra-curricular activities offered

	All Schools	Percent Offering Subject	Schools > 60% pass	Percent Offering Subject	Schools < 61% pass	Percent Offering Activity
Number	87		55		32	
Sport	67	77.0%	43	78.2%	24	75.0%
Drama	22	25.3%	14	25.5%	8	25.0%
Social outreach	21	24.1%	17	30.9%	4	12.5%
Debating	20	23.0%	11	20.0%	9	28.1%
Choir	20	23.0%	14	25.5%	6	18.8%
Music	16	18.4%	11	20.0%	5	15.6%
Chess	15	17.2%	8	14.5%	7	21.9%
Gardening	2	2.3%	2	3.6%	0	0.0%

TABLE 8: Special classrooms available

	Percent All Schools	Percent Offering Service	Percent > 60% pass	Percent Offering Service	Percent < 61% pass	Percent Offering Service
Number	87		55		32	
Computer room/s	74	85.1%	52	94.5%	22	68.8%
Library	49	56.3%	34	61.8%	15	46.9%
Laboratory	49	56.3%	39	70.9%	10	31.3%
Home Economics centre	18	20.7%	13	23.6%	5	15.6%
Woodwork centre	2	2.3%	2	3.6%	0	0.0%

In **Table 8**, the popularity of computer rooms is striking, especially when contrasted with the surprisingly low frequency of the provision of libraries by the schools. Less than half of the lower performing schools have libraries, and in numbers of cases the site visit booklets point out that these are empty or do not amount to much. The difference between the availability of laboratories in higher and lower performing schools is even more marked: 70,9% against 31,3%. Limited provision for vocational subjects is very clear from this table.

According to **Table 9**, the evaluators were satisfied with the premises in most of the schools. The greater majority of schools attracted no negative observations. The site booklets have numbers of observations relating to the quality or charm of the buildings, grounds and facilities. A handful of poor schools are responsible for virtually all of the negative observations. Buildings that were never meant to be schools, especially in squalid, dangerous inner city areas, appear to be a cause for concern, even where there appears to be something of value in the actual work of the school. In the plenary workshop, some evaluators expressed fear for the lives of the learners because of the

TABLE 9: Incidence of premises rated as unsatisfactory

	Number of schools	Percentage of schools
Total number of school responding	87	
House or warehouse adapted into school	12	14%
Storage facility for question papers and scripts	12	14%
Hostel facilities (where applicable)	12	14%
Sports fields	10	11%
Suitability of buildings for teaching and learning	7	8%
Boys toilets	5	6%
Girls toilets	5	6%
Staff toilets	4	5%
Management Information System	2	2%
Examination Centre	2	2%

dilapidated premises they had witnessed. These are reflected in 8% of the reports. Sanitary conditions sometimes leave much to be desired, but these are found in only 6% of the reports. The examination centre is more commonly satisfactory than the storage facilities for papers.

Accreditation, reporting and verification processes

Sixty-one of the 87 schools were provisionally accredited, while 28 stated that they were not accredited. In **Table 10**, 28 schools give reasons for not being provisionally accredited. (Two were in fact provisionally accredited, but had been late-comers.) Eighteen schools or 64% of the set, express ignorance of the accreditation requirements. Several point out that “we had never heard of Umalusi before now”. Apart from the four that say their application is still pending, seven offer circumstantial reasons for not applying.

Umalusi asks schools to provide annual self-evaluation and progress reports in the process towards full accreditation. Not all provisionally accredited schools had provided these:

- In 2005, 16 self evaluation reports had been submitted by the participating schools – almost exclusively top schools.
- In 2006, 21 self evaluation reports had been submitted by the participating schools – from a range of schools including top and middling.
- In 2006, 13 progress reports had been submitted (all except for one) by schools that had submitted self evaluation reports in 2005.

Of the 61 provisionally accredited schools, 35 offer reasons why they had not submitted reports:

- 19 did not know about the self evaluation or progress reports

TABLE 10: Reasons cited for schools' not being accredited

	Frequency
Total number of school responding	28
We did not know that we are required to apply for accreditation. (Interpreted by several evaluators as meaning that the schools concerned did not realise that this was compulsory.)	18
Our application is still pending	4
There was a change of ownership and the former owners did not inform the current owners about Umalusi processes	2
The previous principal did not tell the present principal about Umalusi processes	1
The school has moved premises	1
Disruptive change in the ownership of the school	1
Other reasons, suggested by the focus group of monitors, were not picked up in the data capturing, but originated nonetheless in the experience of the site visits. These were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate facilities/resources • Inadequate support from learners' parents • Lack of motivation and dedication from the teachers • 'We just had our first Grade 12 class in 2005' • 'Our new principal was still finding his/her feet.' 	

- 6 were informed too late about the reports
- 1 did not have the R690 evaluation fee
- 1 was under new ownership and the new owners were not informed about the process
- 8 offered unlisted reasons that can be seen in the qualitative record

The 37 schools that had submitted documentation were asked to provide the evidence for the claims in the documentation. The evaluators rated the evidence (0-3), and the ratings were subsequently grouped and weighted to reflect scores for particular areas of concern. As was pointed out earlier, the scores were so high across all the questions that the results reported in **Table 11** have very little interest beyond the very positive level of approval.

For Review of Management and Monitoring, 25 schools (68%) scored either full marks or above 75%; only 6 (16%) scored below 50%. For all the other areas the scores are generally very high. Possibly the only interesting observation to be made is that the 6 (16%) schools with low scores for Staff Training are shown on inspection of the data

TABLE 11: Weighted and grouped scores from the verification of self-evaluation reports

Total number of school responding = 37	
Grouping 1: Review of management and monitoring	Grouping 2: Management Information System
This category is the only one in which there is some spread of scores. Full score: 8 (included in top 25%) Top 25%: 25 From 50% – 75%: 4 Below 50%: 6 No score: 2	Full score: 31 Between 66-90%: 6
Grouping 3: Staff training	Grouping 4: Guidance and support
Full score: 18 Between 66-94%: 13 Between 0-55%: 6 (mostly successful and well-heeled schools)	Full score: 32 Between 66-92%: 5
Grouping 5: Assessment	Grouping 6: Effectiveness of teaching and learning
Full score: 22 Between 80-97%: 15 Between 55-79%: 2	Full score: 23 Between 81-99%: 8 Between 19-66%: 6

to be mostly among the highest achieving schools.

In **Table 12** overleaf the evaluators' judgement of 29 schools' responses to the reporting process indicate, on the whole, a highly satisfactory reaction to the process. This view was re-enforced in the plenary workshop. Accounts in the site visit booklets of certain schools' management and information processes show systems that might be the envy of highly successful businesses.

The most positive assessments shown by **Table 12** is that the evidence of 22 of the 29 schools was fully consistent with the claims in the self-evaluation report, and 6 were satisfactory – a total of 98% are thus quite acceptable. Weakest was the addressing of

TABLE 12: Evaluator judgments of schools' responses to the reporting process

Number of observations = 29	Not at all	Inadequately	Adequately	Fully
The school has addressed all areas of improvement	4	6	6	13
Staff members participate in developing the progress report	4	3	8	14
Staff members have free access to all internal quality management policies	3	1	6	19
The self evaluation process has made a difference to internal quality management	2	1	8	18
The school has already implemented the improvements indicated in the progress report	7	3	6	13
The verified evidence is consistent with the claims made in the self evaluation report (2005) (n=31)	1	2	6	22
The school has addressed areas of non-compliance that were identified in 2005	4	4	7	14

identified areas of improvement, but even here 66% had acted fully or adequately. For Umalusi, the most pleasing assessment is that for 18 schools the self-evaluation process is seen to have made a substantial difference to internal quality management, and for 8 more it has been positive – thus 90% positive in all. As a result of the site visit programme, Umalusi is in a position to track and monitor the handful of schools rated as very weak in their response to the reporting process.

Schools' responses to the quality challenge

Schools' reasons for a low Senior Certificate pass rate are analysed in **Table 13**. Thirty of the 32 schools in the sample with pass rates of 60% or less offered reasons. (Schools were free to offer more than one reason.)

TABLE 13: Reasons cited by schools for low pass rates

Number of schools responding = 30	Frequency
Lack of motivation and dedication from the learners	16
Inadequate support from learners' parents	9
Inadequately qualified grade 12 teachers	6
We did not have enough grade 12 teachers	5
Lack of motivation and dedication from the teachers	4
Inadequate facilities/resources	3
We just had our first grade 12 class in 2005	3
Our new principal was still finding his/her feet	3
Inadequate support from the school management team	1
There has been a change in the ownership of the school	1
Inadequate support from the board of governors	0

The most common reason put forward is the learners' lack of motivation and dedication. This reason recurs in various places in the site visit booklets for low achieving schools, being mentioned by principals, teachers and, perhaps most vehemently, by current matric learners. The reason is never interrogated further, but may relate to the second most common reason – inadequate support from parents. In some cases this is explained on the basis of parents' physical distance from the school. Most schools including some of the poorest, claim that they strive to involve parents. Collectively, complaints about the motivation and dedication of teachers and the lack of availability of qualified teachers also make up a significant block of reasons. The impression of the most problematic schools reflected in the site booklets is of situations in which there are two or three well-loved and valued educators, possibly including the principal, who make the situation worthwhile for the learners. But educator morale in the poorest schools is in a number of cases undermined by extremely low remuneration, by the authoritarianism or distance of the owner and/or the school management team, leading to high staff turnover or, especially in the case of foreign teachers, a feeling of being trapped. (It should be remembered that these problems seem to affect no more than 10% of the sample.)

By far the most common corrective response to poor results, as reflected in **Table 14**, is extra classes – and as we saw above, this is, in fact, the most common offering in learner support. More parental involvement, better staff appointments, and continuous review of procedures and performance also get significant mention. On the other hand, better compliance with Umalusi's technical requirements for the running of the Senior Certificate examinations does not enter the picture.

TABLE 14: Measures intended to improve Matriculation results in 2006

Number of schools responding 30	Frequency
Extra classes for matric learners	27
Provision for parental involvement	13
Appropriate staff appointments	11
A process to continually review and improve the effectiveness of the measures developed by the school	10
Regular monitoring of matric learners' performance	9
Effective monitoring of learner class attendance?	7
Compliance with legislation in respect of an appropriate exam venue?	5
Effective monitoring of learner attainments?	4
Effective monitoring of planning and delivery of lessons?	4
Individual mentoring of matric learners	3
Compliance regarding training of invigilators?	2
Effective monitoring of educator attendance	0
Compliance regarding handling of irregularities	0
Compliance regarding monitoring of the examination venues	0
Compliance regarding adequate security measures for the receipt and storage of question papers, collection and dispatch of candidates' answer scripts	0

The three focus groups of school management and randomly selected educators and learners in all the schools yielded many highly specific local recommendations reflected in the site visit booklets – build a less noisy school hall, change the school dress requirements, stop some of the male educators nitpicking so much, and so on.

The more common forms of improvement recommended in 78 of the schools are reflected in **Table 15**. The most frequent call was for more extramural activities, especially sport (and facilities for sport). Given that the high achieving and high fee schools generally have impressive extra-murals, this priority was unsurprisingly felt most strongly by the lower achieving schools. Making provision for a variety of learning materials comes next. This should be seen as a call for more learning support materials, and especially IT resources and instructional media.

Creating sufficient opportunities to involve teachers in policy also gets relatively frequent mention. This is not surprising after a reading of the site visit booklets, where it is clear that there is a strong correlation between poor performance and a sense of alienation and exclusion from management on the part of the staff. The problem is closely related to the next most frequent recommendation, which is for better communication between management, educators and learners – a problem found even in some of the larger and most efficiently managed schools. Although this recommendation was mentioned only 16 times, compared to 30 for more extra-murals, it is likely to be significant in that it tends to be the first recommendation when it appears.

TABLE 15: Focus group recommendations for improvement of school

Number of responses from 78 school visits	Frequency
Expose learners to more extramural activities, particularly sport	30
Make provision for a variety of learning materials	20
Management has to create sufficient opportunities to involve teachers in policy development, monitoring and review	19
Better communication between management, educators and learners	16
Make provision for more learner support (e.g. career guidance, counselling, etc.)	15
More support is needed from the provincial department of education	9
Management needs to attend to high staff turnover (especially with regard to grade 12 teachers)	8
Ensure that appointed teachers are registered with the South African Council for Educators (SACE).	6
Need to ensure adequate support from the board of governors	3
Make provision for more subject choices	3
Need to ensure adequate support by Heads of Department for subject teachers	2
The appointment of teachers that are provisionally registered with teachers (with SACE) must be reviewed on an annual basis.	0

TABLE 16: Main challenges identified by the evaluation process

Number of responses from 70 school visits	Frequency
Development of key policies of the school	37
Involvement of all stakeholders in planning, monitoring and reviewing the performance of policies	20
General fundraising	19
High staff turnover	13
Implementation of the FET	8
Insufficient subsidies from relevant provincial departments	8
Compilation of portfolios of evidence by small schools	3
Parents who interfere in school management	0

The main challenges emerging from the evaluation as reflected in **Table 16** would seem to show a strong Umalusi evaluator perspective. From their point of view it was clear that at least 37 of the schools needed to give priority to the development of their key policies. In **Table 17** this perspective is very powerfully reinforced, with the recommendation in 48 cases – all in top priority mode – that the schools concerned should develop relevant policies and procedures to guide all key practices at the school. The establishment of an internal quality assurance structure is mentioned in 43 cases. The rest of the recommendations in **Table 17** deal in one way or another with challenges arising from Umalusi's quality assurance reporting requirements.

TABLE 17: Main recommendations for improvement arising from the evaluation

Number of responses from 71 school visits	Frequency
Develop relevant policies and procedures to guide all key practices at the school	48
Establish an internal quality assurance structure that will facilitate the process and procedures of monitoring and reviewing the performance of policies. The structure should also facilitate the development of Self Evaluation and Progress reports for Umalusi.	43
Ensure that the school's compliance with health and safety regulations is continually assessed by appropriate bodies.	28
The management team should adequately involve all stakeholders in developing policies, monitoring and reviewing them.	21
Conduct regular client satisfaction surveys and use findings to inform further planning at the school.	18
Management should improve communication with all the relevant stakeholders at the school	10
Make provision for adequate learner support, particularly in respect of subject choices and career guidance for grade 10-12 learners	9
Keep a proper record of minutes of staff meetings, review committee meetings and other meetings	8
Ensure that parents play an active role in the education of their children	4
Encourage and promote continual observance of the school ethos	1

The site visit booklets show that many of the schools are grappling (generally willingly) with the kind of policies demanded by a quality assurance regime, but it is not only weaker schools that may be at a loss or lack the capacity to design and implement good policies. As we have seen, quality assurance processes in general need to guard against complexity beyond fitness for purpose. Lewin and Sayed point out that smaller independent schools can be swamped by reporting requirements, especially when they have quite different though overlapping reporting demands from the provincial department of education, South African Revenue Services and Umalusi. In this regard, the suggestion of rationalisation and training and support for the design and running of quality management systems would seem to be an urgent requirement.

Other frequently mentioned challenges were fundraising and high staff turnover.

The main indicators of good practice listed in **Table 18** are not strictly indicators, but rather contributors to good practice. The list is self-explanatory. It is interesting, however in the way that it can be “factorized” into three overwhelming factors, supported by many observations in the site visit booklets:

- Strict (but rational and transparent) discipline on the part of management, educators and learners, reflected in codes and effectively implemented. (The worst schools would seem to have codes that are either never or erratically enforced.) Humane, internalised discipline and performance would seem to flourish in the schools with an authentic religious ethos.
- A support system for the learners, with counselling, effective parental engagement fostered by the school, healthy extra-murals and, above all, extra classes.
- Well-designed communication systems, with open communication and participation by stakeholders in planning, feedback, responsibility and action.

TABLE 18: Main indicators of good practice identified by school focus groups

Indicator	Frequency
1. Extra classes for matric learners	29
2. Strict monitoring of attendance rates (teachers and learners)	28
3. Effective maintenance of discipline	25
4. Ethos/Religious character of the school	25
5. Effective support system for learners (e.g. career guidance, counselling, etc)	22
6. Commitment by teachers and learners	21
7. Continual involvement of all stake holders in school planning, monitoring and evaluation	20
8. Daily and weekly staff meetings/briefing sessions	14
9. Constant interaction with neighbouring schools	7
10. Adequate involvement of learners in extramural activities	6
11. Common planning template for teachers	5
12. Outreach programmes, particularly those that are conducted by learners	4

Relationships between factors in school performance

1 Senior certificate attainment: provincial contrasts

The full national sample of 87 independent secondary schools collectively entered 4543 candidates in the 2005 Senior Certificate examinations. Of these, 1325 (22,6%) failed, while 1388 (30,6%) obtained the certificate, 1704 (37,5%) achieved endorsement (access to higher education) and 489 (8,3%) obtained distinctions. These national figures for the sample are found in **Table 19 (p 38)**, which goes on to contrast the achievement within each provincial set. As should be expected, the Western Cape set reflects few failures, far more endorsements than certificates, and almost as many distinctions as certificates (Possibly partly due to the fact that more well-performing schools were visited in this province than in any other). In the Eastern Cape the majority fails, only a third obtain certificates, 4,3% gain endorsements and there are no distinctions. The other provinces range between these two extremes. The Mpumalanga set achieves almost as poorly as the Eastern Cape set.

2 Senior Certificate attainment: high- versus low-achieving schools

Table 20 highlights the considerable differences between the attainment of the high-achieving and low-achieving schools. Most strikingly, the failure rate in the high-achieving schools is 10%, but 57,3% in the low-achieving schools. The ratio of endorsements achieved between the two set of schools is 58,9% to 6,0% respectively, and of distinctions, 17,6% to less than 1%.

TABLE 20: Comparison between results of schools obtaining pass rates of more than 60% and those with less than 61% pass rate

	Number Wrote	Number Failed	% Failed	Number of Certificates	% Certificate	Number of Endorsements	% Endorsements	Number of Distinctions	% Distinction
Pass rate > 60%									
	2 703	270	10.0%	730	27.0%	1 593	58.9%	475	17.6%
Number of schools*	55	14		49		48		37	
Pass rate < 61%									
	1 840	1 055	57.3%	658	35.8%	111	6.0%	14	0.8%
Number of schools*	30	30		30		23		6	

Note: See note to Table 19 for interpretation guide. Since the number of schools in the higher group is nearly double the number in the lower group, comparison should focus on the percentages. Notionally doubling the number of distinctions and schools with distinctions in the lower group gives a clear idea of the difference as well.

3 Accreditation and achievement

Table 21 shows that schools provisionally accredited by Umalusi have a higher pass rate in the Senior Certificate examinations than those not accredited. However, it is clear at the same time that a number of high achieving schools are not yet provisionally accredited. It is too early in the process of developing accreditation for the impact to be reflected in results. At best one might say that the schools that

TABLE 19: Summary of selected schools' 2005 Senior Certificate attainment by province

	Number Wrote	Number Failed	% Failed	Number of Endorsements	% Endorsement	Certificate	% Certificate	Number of Distinctions	% Distinction
NATIONAL									
	4543	1325	29.2%	1704	37.5%	1388	30.6%	489	10.8%
Number of schools*	85	53		71		78		42	
EASTERN CAPE									
	508	314	61.8%	22	4.3%	173	34.1%	0	
Number of schools*	9	9		6		8		0	0.0%
FREE STATE									
	277	101	36.5%	31	11.2%	146	52.7%	6	2.2%
Number of schools*	3	2		3		3		1	
GAUTENG									
	768	163	21.2%	298	38.8%	227	29.6%	82	10.7%
Number of schools*	15	6		11		12		9	
KWAZULU-NATAL									
	393	101	25.7%	160	40.7%	81	20.6%	38	97.0%
Number of schools*	10	4		8		9		4	
LIMPOPO									
	535	198	37.0%	139	26.0%	173	32.3%	36	67.0%
Number of schools*	10	5		9		9		4	
MPUMALANGA									
	546	338	61.9%	100	18.3%	180	33.0%	30	55.0%
Number of schools*	10	7		10		10		6	
NORTH WEST									
	86	17	19.8%	16	18.6%		0.0%	1	1.2%
Number of schools*	5	3		4		5		1	
WESTERN CAPE									
	1 430	93	6.5%	938	65.6%	354	24.8%	296	20.7%
Number of schools*	25	10		23		24		17	

- Note: Although the sample consisted of 87 schools, only 85 presented attainment summaries for 2005.
- The table should be read as follows. For example: The sample in the Free State consisted of 3 schools, 2 of which shared the 101 failures (which constituted 36,5% of the learners who wrote). All three were responsible for the 31 endorsements and the 146 certificates (which constituted 52,7% of those who wrote). Only one school had learners who obtained distinctions, of which there were six – or 2,2% of all learners in the sample in the province.

timeously and successfully entered the process also tend to be somewhat more effective than those that did not.

TABLE 21: Relationship between school accreditation status and the school Senior Certificate pass rate

	Average pass rate	Pass rate range	Percent achieving 100% pass rate
Provisionally accredited	83%	18–100%	27%
Not provisionally accredited	60,7%	24–100%	42%

4 Age of school and achievement

Based on a hypothesis put forward by Umalusi staff that the older a school was the more effective it would be, **Table 22** presents an analysis of age and results. The outcome is not conclusive. While it is clear that the very new schools, established since 2000, have the lowest average pass rate, just under a third of these still obtain a 100% pass rate. The very oldest schools perform very well on the whole, but curiously, those in the sample that are between and 13 and 50 years old perform less well than those established between 1994 and 1999. The nature of the sampling does not allow for these findings to be taken as more than pointers, but it would seem that age alone is not especially useful in guiding quality assurance judgements.

TABLE 22: Relationship between the age of the school and its Senior Certificate pass rate

Date of Establishment	Number	Average % Pass	Number with 100% pass rate	Pass rate range %
1849–1899	4	100.0%	4	All 100
1900–1945	8	87.8%	5	50 –100
1946–1993	19	74.3%	7	24 –100
1994–1999	33	79.5%	18	26 –100
2000–2006	20	58.5%	6	19 –100
No date given	3			

5 Educators' qualifications relative to learner achievement

Most of the educators in the national sample (84%) hold either a diploma or a degree – the number is almost equally divided between the two. Post-graduate qualifications are held by 4,6%, and 7,4% are unqualified. Only 4,1% have “other” qualifications, mainly technical or commercial. These percentages are derived from **Table 23**, which shows the number of teachers in the sample holding different levels of qualifications and the average of these per school.

There is a clear difference between the distributions of qualifications in different provinces. 61,3% of educators in the Western Cape set have degrees, including post-graduate degrees. Degreed educators in the sets for the other provinces are: Eastern Cape 34,6%; Free State 15,3%; Gauteng 31,5%; KZN 38,6%; Limpopo 36,3%; Mpumalanga 22,7%; North West 27,1%. (As previously, this should be seen in the terms of the nature of the sampling.)

TABLE 23: National and provincial distribution of teacher qualifications in schools sampled

	Unqualified	Diploma	Degree	Masters	Doctorate	Other	Total
NATIONAL (Number)	160	906	897	84	16	88	2 151
Ave/school	2.0	11.3	11.2	1.1	0.2	1.1	
EASTERN CAPE (Number)	25	33	36	1	0	12	107
Ave/school	3.1	4.1	4.5	0.1		1.5	
FREE STATE (Number)	7	34	8	1	0	9	59
Ave/school	2.3	11.3	2.7	0.3		3	
GAUTENG (Number)	11	205	92	9	5	14	336
Ave/school	0.8	14.6	6.6	0.6	0.4	1.0	
KWAZULU-NATAL (Number)	13	76	64	0	0	13	166
Ave/school	1.6	9.5	8.0			1.6	
LIMPOPO (Number)	29	90	66	14	0	21	220
Ave/school	2.9	9	6.6	1.4		2.1	
MPUMALANGA (Number)	36	104	47	3	0	16	206
Ave/school	3.6	10.4	4.7	0.3		1.6	
NORTH WEST (Number)	17	34	15	3	1	0	70
Ave/school	4.3	8.5	3.8	0.8			
WESTERN CAPE (Number)	22	330	532	49	9	20	962
Ave/school	1.0	15.7	25.3	2.3	0.4	1.0	

It is also interesting to look at the average number of teachers per school. Although this is a function of the different average size of schools in the different provinces, it is nonetheless an indicator of the extent to which the school can create something of a community of professional practice. In the Western Cape, the average school in the sample has 25 educators with a first degree, against a national average of 11. The three schools in the Free State sample each have 2 or 3 educators with a first degree (probably in the school management team). Gauteng is somewhat better, with about 7 (first) degreed educators per school.

Tables 24 and 25 view the relationship between educator qualifications and different pass rates in the sample. To reduce blur in the figures the middle range has been cut out. **Table 24** shows that the low-achieving schools have a staff complement with 20,7% unqualified and only 24,1% with degrees. High achieving schools have only 3,4% unqualified staff and nearly 50% staff with degrees.

In **Table 25** the focus is on endorsements for university entrance and distinctions in the Senior Certificate, both generally regarded as more telling indicators than a pass alone. Twenty high performing schools entered 1000 candidates, of which 444 achieved endorsements and 84 distinctions. The 20 lowest achieving schools entered

TABLE 24: Relationship between staff qualification profile and percentage pass rate in sample

Schools with:	Number of schools	Unqualified	Diploma	Degree	Masters	Doctorate	Other
100% Pass rate	38						
Number		47	568	607	67	12	78
Ave number/school		1.2	14.9	16.0	1.8	0.3	2.1
Proportion (%)		3.4%	41.2%	44.0%	4.9%	0.9%	5.6%
18-60% Pass rate	29						
Number		95	216	110	6	2	30
Ave number/school		3.3	7.4	3.8	0.2	0.1	1.0
Proportion (%)		20.7%	47.1%	25.0%	0.01%	0.004%	6.5%

1132 candidates who achieved 49 endorsements and 11 distinctions. In other words, of the combined endorsements of these two sets, the lowest achieving schools produced 10%, the highest achieving schools produced 90% of the endorsements achieved. The set of highest achieving schools employed 9% unqualified educators as against 38,3% educators with degrees. By contrast, the set of lowest achieving schools employed 26% unqualified educators as against 23,3% educators with degrees.

TABLE 25: 2005 Senior Certificate endorsements and distinctions in schools related to staff qualifications*

	Wrote	School Certificate				Staff Qualifications						Total staff
		Endorsements	% Endorsements	Distinctions	% Distinctions	Unqualified	Diploma	Degree	Masters	Doctorate	Other	
20 Top producers of endorsements	1000	444	44.4%	84	8.4%	40	189	150	18	2	45	444
20 Lowest producers of endorsements	1132	49	4.3%	11	1.0%	80	133	67	3	1	21	305

*Note: As elsewhere in this report, staff figures relate to the staff of the whole school, not only to those teaching in Grade 12

There would seem to be a significant, perhaps highly significant, correlation between qualifications and school achievement on the Senior Certificate in this sample. For example, it would seem to be stronger than the learner/educator ratio. There is considerable debate about the role of educator qualifications in the quality of learning in schools, and one would need to contrast the present observation with

other observations of related factors like experience. Although the sample of schools does not allow confident generalisations to the independent school sector as a whole, the immediate set of data is not strictly subject to the reservation about representation.

6 Various contrasts between high- and low-achieving schools

Creating something of a summary, **Table 26** takes a number of key factors and looks contrastively at how they appear in the top and lowest achievers in the sample of 87 independent secondary schools.

The top 10 achievers are all found in the three most prosperous and industrial provinces. The majority of the bottom 10 achievers are from the more poorly resourced provinces. All of the top achievers are suburban. Only half of the lowest achievers are suburban.

TABLE 26: Contrastive profiles of 10 schools in top and bottom ranges

	Lowest 10	Top 10
Province	7 from most poorly resourced provinces; 1 each from Gauteng, Western Cape and KZN	7 Western Cape, 2 Gauteng, 1 KZN
% Pass rate	Average: 24.1%	Average: 100%
Endorsements	n = 11; Average per school: 1.1	n = 492; Average per school 49.2
Pass with distinction	n = 2; Average per school: 0.2	n = 206; Average per school 20.6
Annual Fees	Average: R3,753; Range: R1,440–R5,550	Average: R35,859; Range: R25,200–R47,760
Educator numbers and qualifications	Unqualified: 20; Diploma: 58; Degree: 35; Other (technical etc.): 12. TOTAL 125	Unqualified: 11; Diploma: 122; First Degree: 278; Masters 38; Doctorate: 4; Other: 1. TOTAL: 454
Enrolment	Total: 2 080; Average: 208; Range: 56–462	Total: 5 320; Average 532; Range: 117–1299
Learner/educator ratios	Average: 16.6	Average: 11.7
Classrooms	Total: 115; Average: 11.5; Range: 4–19	Total: 302; Average 30.2; Range: 10–59
Classroom/learner ratios	Average: 18	Average: 17.6
Subsidy	5 Subsidised	None subsidised
Location	1 Rural; 1 Peri-urban; 4 Suburban; 4 Inner City	All suburban
Established	6 Since 2000; 4 in 1990s	1 est. 1849; 1 est. 1922; 6 between 1994 and 1999; 2 since 2000
Provisionally Accredited	6 (60%)	9 (90%)
Religion	2 Christian; 8 Non-religious	2 Christian; 8 Non-religious
Ownership	8 Privately owned; 1 Trust; 1 Religious	5 Privately owned; 4 Trust; 1 Religious
Key facilities	Library: 5; Laboratory: 0; Sports facilities: 4	Library: 7; Laboratory: 10; Sports facilities: 7
Premises	2 noted generally unsatisfactory; few specific complaints	All satisfactory

While the top 10 all achieve a 100% pass rate and large numbers of endorsements and distinctions, the lowest 10 have an average pass rate of 24,1%, with an insignificant number of endorsements and distinctions.

The fees of the top 10 average R35 859 per annum, with the highest at R47 760. The average for the lowest 10 is R3 753, with the least at R1 440 and the greatest at R5550. In other words the average fees of the top 10 are nearly ten times higher than the average for the bottom 10. The greatest fee is 33 times higher than smallest bottom fee. (The lowest fees may well be lower than the school fees of most government schools, pointing to a dependence on state subsidies.)

The educator numbers and qualifications summarise what has already been discussed in the previous section. As with the selection of contrasting sets, the difference is even more marked here than in the discussion above.

Enrolments show that the top 10 achievers are on average two and a half times larger than the lowest 10. The same difference applies to the smallest and the largest schools in each set.

The ratio of learners to educators in the lowest achievers is one and a half times as high as in the top achievers. However, it is clear that these figures are much lower than the norms for government schools. Repeated comments reported in the site visit booklets (especially from the focus groups) that show that smaller classes are highly valued – perhaps even more as redeeming features in the lowest achieving schools than in the high achievers. There is however, a small number of gross deviations from this feature which will require individual attention.

On the whole the availability of classrooms is much the same among high achievers and low achievers, and the ratio of learners to classrooms is almost the same for both groups. Comments in the site visit booklets make it clear, though, that the quality of the space could hardly be more different. According to the site visit booklets, noise, heat, broken windows and ceilings and poor furniture are likely to be found in most of the lowest 10 schools.

Five of the lowest achieving schools are subsidised, while none of the top achievers are. In terms of the top achievers this is understandable as the lowest of their fees are well above the maximum for subsidy. That the lowest achieving schools obtain subsidies is a problem given that all of their results fall below the approval line. (This matter is discussed in the next section of the report.)

The top 10 are mostly relatively new schools: 8 were established after 1994. (One is 157 years old.) The lowest 10 are mainly very young – 6 established since 2000, the rest in the 1990s.

Nearly all of the top 10 are provisionally accredited, but only 6 of the lowest 10. (Given other features of these schools, the number provisionally accredited may be seen as surprising.)

There is little difference between the two sets in terms of religious profiles, especially considering the uncertain attribution here. Ownership categorisation is also uncertain but the fact that 8 of the lowest 10 achievers are listed as privately owned fits both the evidence in the site visit booklets and Lewin and Sayed's figures (2005, Table 9 p 54) show that 44% of schools with fees between R1 000 and R5 999 are

owned by an individual or family – the largest single chunk of private ownership.

The comparison of facilities and premises matches what was written about them above, with the contrast in the possession of laboratories now absolute. It is surprising, though, that 3 of the top 10 lack sports facilities, especially considering the fee structures.

7 Relationship between subsidies, performance and fees

Forty schools in the overall sample of 87 reported that they received subsidies.

Table 27 first shows the three schools that have the highest fees while receiving subsidies. They would appear to be unproblematic, and all achieve 100% passes. The modest and variable rates of subsidy seem to fall below the minimum norm in two cases.

TABLE 27: Illustrative profile of schools receiving a subsidy (To avoid naming the schools they are differentiated by letters.)

Top of the range	Annual Fees	% Pass rate	% Subsidy
A	R11000	100%	15%
B	R9600	100%	9%
C	R8800	100%	8%
Bottom of the range			
D	R3600	26%	15%
E	R1440	24%	35%
F	R2200	20%	50%

Note: One school recorded as subsidised and with a 23% pass rate appears to have been unable to supply either annual fees or percentage subsidy.

The three schools with the lowest fees receiving subsidies have pass rates well below the 50% requirement, and quite anomalously variable subsidy rates. There may well be explanations, either in terms of inaccuracies in the schools' reporting, or in complex histories and contexts for this situation, but it would seem to demand regularization.

Table 28 looks at the fees and pass rates of schools receiving subsidies in the provinces. In all provinces the fees fall well within the range prescribed in the norms.

(Only one school in the Western Cape has fees above the norm, but this turns out on inspection to be a school that receives a subsidy from abroad; the proportion of subsidy was not included here.)

On the other hand, schools that achieve below the prescribed pass rate receive subsidies in four provinces: Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West. Officials at the plenary workshop explained that there was a transitional situation where the 50% pass rate requirement was still being phased in.

8 Area of concern – independent school subsidies

Schools reported whether they received subsidies and the percentage of their budget covered by the subsidy. Given the figures reflected in **Table 28** there could be reason either to doubt some of the figures or to puzzle about the relationship of national policy to provincial implementation.

Lewin and Sayed point to possible problems in provincial capacity to administer registrations and subsidy. The group discussion at the plenary of evaluators, which involved provincial officials, revealed very different attitudes to independent education in the different provinces. Some officials were concerned about what they

felt to be the lack of accountability of private providers. On the whole these officials came from the provinces with many of the lowest achieving privately owned schools. Some officials were critical but tolerant of private provision, while others prided themselves on the quality of their independent schools, on their relationship with these schools, and on the mutually beneficial interaction of private and public providers. However, all the officials, including the most critical, recognised that the very existence of independent schools – particularly in remote or under-provided areas – was evidence of a need, and they recognised their responsibilities to help in the interests of the learners involved.

TABLE 28: Relationship of percentage subsidy to fees and percentage Senior Certificate pass rate

	Number of schools	Annual Fees	% Pass Rate	% Subsidy
EASTERN CAPE				
Average		R 5,115.00	41%	21%
Range		R1,440 – 8,870	24 – 58%	7 – 40%
FREE STATE	2			
Average		N/A	61%	72%
Range		N/A	50 – 71%	68 – 75%
GAUTENG	9			
Average		R 5,479.00	91%	25%
Range		R2,300 – 1,1000	23 – 100%	4 – 60%
KWAZULU- NATAL	3			
Average		R 4,610.00	91%	31%
Range		R4,500 – 6,930	73 – 100	30 – 31
LIMPOPO	5			
Average		R 4,579.60	60%	34%
Range		R3,850 – 5,300	34 – 100%	25 – 40%
MPUMALANGA	5			
Average		R 4,665.40	72%	19%
Range		R2,400 – 6,000	27 – 100%	9 – 30%
NORTH WEST	3			
Average		R 6,700.00	83%	14%
Range		R4,800 – 6,500	49 – 100%	8 – 25%
WESTERN CAPE	7			
Average		R 8,067.86	78%	20%
Range		R2,200 – 16,760	72 – 100%	9 – 54%

It also emerged that national policy was not uniformly well understood. More seriously, some of the officials pleaded for a national set of regulations, rather than the current, sometimes conflicting regulations of the different provinces.

Lewin and Sayed (2005, p46-47) provide a helpful summary of policy on subsidies:

Provincial legislatures have discretion over education budgets and can determine how much is to be spent on independent schools, using the Norms as a guide. Criteria for funding include whether the school is registered, has a proven track record, and does not compete with a nearby overcrowded public school of equivalent quality. In addition, to qualify for a subsidy secondary schools must have a matriculation (grade12) pass rate above 50%, the repetition rate in grades 11 and 12 should not be more than 20%, and the school is not to engage in practices which artificially increase the grade 12 pass rate (Norms 1998, section 146 and 147).

The allocation for subsidies depends on a sliding scale which gives a 60% subsidy to eligible schools whose fees are up to half the provincial average public cost per learner in ordinary public schools for the previous fiscal year. A ceiling on subsidies is set at schools with fees two and a half times the provincial average cost – presently not much more than R12 000. Schools at this level can obtain a subsidy of 15%.

Umalusi is concerned about two aspects in respect of the implementation of the policy on school subsidisation. Firstly, the evidence generated by the sample indicates that rates of subsidy would seem to be anomalous, if not arbitrary. The 60% maximum is adhered to except in the Free State where the range appears to be above the norm in all three cases. The range of subsidy, varying greatly from 4% to 75%, may be open to rational explanation, but seems to be an argument for uniform national regulations.

Secondly, it would seem that some schools prune the number of candidates writing the Senior Certificate, and that they therefore present themselves falsely as top achievers, for example, by advertising a 100% pass rate because their only candidate passed.

In addition, there were occasional references in the qualitative data to the phenomenon of part time candidates whose results are not reflected in the main database and may therefore allow schools to avoid the identification of poor pass rates.

There seem to be few if any schools in the sample that misrepresent their results as better than they are. As can be seen in **Table 27**, eight of the schools with a 100% pass rate put forward fewer than 10 candidates, but the profile of their results does not raise any suspicion. Only one is in a position to claim a 100% pass rate with only one (non-endorsement) candidate. Four of the schools with a pass rate between 18% and 60% enter very low numbers of candidates, but the figures do not suggest any deliberate policy to mislead.

While it would therefore seem that the latter concern does not deserve intense attention, this does not mean that the possibility should be forgotten.

In this part of the report we look first at the broad picture emerging from the site visit programme, and then revisit the aims and goals of the project and the specific questions which it set out to answer. Of necessity this section cannot cover all of the points of interest made in Part 3.

Insights from the site visits

1 A widely ranging variety of schools in the sample

A complex typology of schools might be generated from the sample of independent schools involved in the site visits. The picture which emerges from a reading of the site visit booklets and other qualitative feedback, and from the quantitative data, is of:

- Large, often secular, schools charging annual fees upward of R40 000 per year for excellent results, “character”, knowing “the right people” and polish.
- Small schools priding themselves on their smallness, charging moderate fees (less than R20 000 and often less than R10 000) cherishing special values mainly linked to a specific religious affiliation, and also achieving excellent academic results.
- Business schools and what used to be called “cram colleges” or second chance colleges, charging middle range fees (often for tuition in unique subjects) to large numbers of students, some of them part-time.
- Struggling schools, generally small, mainly in rural areas or the inner city offering something “better than nothing”, where learners or parents perceive there to be no acceptable alternative, with a principal/owner and staff – very possibly from other parts of Africa – producing very low pass rates for annual fees generally well below R5000 (lowest reported is R1440).

Within this typology there is great individuality. Tolstoy’s famous opening to *Anna Karenina* comes to mind in this respect: “All happy families are alike but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion.” In the case of the schools – most of which consciously strive to be like happy families – this aphorism must be qualified. The good schools manage to be good in varied ways. Some are run like successful, highly motivated corporations, with lots of highly qualified team work; others are more like charming homes serving deep traditions of culture and learning. Some glow with a loving and tolerant religious ethos, others with ambition and enthusiasm. They all to

a greater or lesser degree make fine statements for education as a profession. Most of these schools achieve high pass rates and distinctions, but there are also good schools that consciously practise open access and provide opportunities for repeaters and dropouts. Their raw results may not look great, but their achievement may still be impressive.

There are thus ranges of effectiveness which led to an informal classification of the site visit booklets into the following groupings (frequency indicated by a percentage at the end of each statement):

- Inspired by a profound mission, with great value added to its often modest costs – the kind of school (generally smallish) that begs to be lifted up as a national exemplar. One would feel lucky and privileged if one's child were admitted to a school like this (7%).
- Excellent and admirable, with many fine, highly professional qualities – but perhaps no more than is justified by the costs. One would be privileged if one could afford to send one's children to a school like this, although the edge over the best public schools would be debatable (28%).
- Good or adequate. One might be satisfied to be able to send one's children to a school like this, but there would need to be special contextual reasons for choosing this school rather than an equivalent public school (36%).
- Representing a special achievement: Such schools may not be inspired or excellent in all ways, yet stand out either because they overcome serious contextual challenges, or because of a distinctive mission, whether relating to special skills or learners with special needs (15%).
- Low achieving schools with redeeming features, usually managing to be caring, valued by learners and educators, who are defensive of the school though aware of its shortcomings (5%).
- Really unhappy schools, with poor leadership, indifferent management, profoundly depressing environments, and learners and educators who would escape if they had a way out (9%).

One question the site visits did not manage to answer with any clarity was that of the *raison d'être* of the schools. In the case of the really good schools and the schools with distinctive purposes the existence of the school is easy to justify, and the basis of its continuity is obvious. But for a number of the schools, especially the very bad ones, but even those that are rather ordinary, we lack insight about why they came into existence and the reasons that they continue to exist in the face of at least equivalent public provision.

As we saw in Part 1 of this report, one of the challenges of quality assurance is to acknowledge and nurture uniqueness and responsiveness, while still being systematic and maintaining a modicum of uniformity in the norms. Although the discussion below indicates that the site visit programme endorses Umalusi's broad approach to quality assurance, the diversity of schools might point in the direction of deliberate differentiation in some specifics of the approach.

However, it is especially the 14% or so of problematic schools that need attention. If the site visit programme were even roughly representative of a total of, say, 1 600 schools, this would mean that there could be around 200 schools in need of either major support or the refusal of accreditation and closure. Given the deliberate biases built into the sampling, this estimate could be way out. But even if it were halved it would suggest a tough situation waiting to be dealt with.

2 Schools' responses to Umalusi's approach

Without exception – according to the evaluators and monitors – the 87 schools welcomed Umalusi's attention and commended the way in which the site visits had been organised and run. The schools were often eager to put their quality and achievements on show. The weaker schools, especially in poor and remote areas, were needy and sometimes explicitly grateful to be contacted. (There may be reason for concern that the visits raised expectations of positive intervention beyond Umalusi's capacity or the proper role of a quality assurance body.) However, signs of anxiety and an initial desire to avoid the encounter were also experienced at schools of various kinds. These fears were generally overcome by the openness and non-judgemental character of the visits.

Interviews with senior management and the inspection of premises and capacity were useful. (The safety of premises, especially in some inner city schools in near derelict buildings, left much to be desired in some three cases.)

But it was the two focus groups with randomly selected members of staff and Grade 12 learners that provided the richest evidence in the verification of the points in the school's more formal accounts of itself. On the positive side, it was possible to see beyond the raw performance indicators (in other words cumulative details of the Senior Certificate results) to the less easily measurable qualities of the school. In many cases, the insights were reassuring, even inspiring. In two cases, however, they revealed deeply unsatisfactory features of the management or the school community, with drunkenness, absenteeism and lack of motivation all round being mentioned. But it was far more likely that the school's discipline was valued by learners and educators alike, while some of the most poverty-stricken schools showed pride in the midst of their failings and need.

3 Impact of the provisional accreditation process

Over two thirds of the sample were provisionally accredited, and showed a slightly higher average pass rate than those not accredited. But the relationship was not strong or general. Those not provisionally accredited most commonly cited lack of awareness of the requirement for accreditation as their reason for not entering the process. Of those provisionally accredited, just over half had completed the necessary reports for verification by the assessors. Those who had not submitted reports most commonly indicated that they did not realise that this was a compulsory requirement.

The evaluators' report that the schools that participated in the fairly arduous verification exercise approached it with a good spirit. There do seem to have been some problems related to the sheer detail required, and a number of stronger schools appear to have practised a form of passive resistance. Two reasons put forward for

this in a meeting of evaluators were that the schools had all the information needed “in their heads” and were irritated at having to codify it, and a more general objection to excessive bureaucratic requirements to return forms.

Nonetheless, most of the schools participating in the verification process were rated positively or highly in their implementation of the requirements of the accreditation process.

4 Emerging perspectives on quality

Based on frequency of mention in the site visit reports, the factors bearing positively on quality are support to students (expressed especially in extra classes in Grade 12), strictly monitored discipline (especially related to attendance) and (religious) values. The importance of commitment of educators and learners and involvement of stakeholders was also mentioned only slightly less often.

The figures linked to the site visits suggest that, for all its shortcomings, the pass rate in the Senior Certificate is a good rough guide to quality. The rate of endorsements for access to higher education is an even stronger discriminator. However, this must always be seen against the particular school’s context and intentions.

5 Educators’ qualifications as a factor in the pass rate

A striking finding in the analysis of the extensive array of data related to the site visits is the strength in this sample of the positive correlation between educator qualifications and the pass rate. This stands out in the case of the general percentage pass rate on the Senior Certificate, and even more strongly when looking at the production of endorsements for university entrance. In the set of higher achieving schools educator qualifications are skewed clearly towards degrees, while in the set of lower achieving schools the reverse is true, and educators with diplomas predominate, supported by many unqualified members of staff.

Other factors like learner/educator or learner/classroom ratios appear to have a much slighter influence.

The extent to which the aims and goals of the site visit programme were satisfied

Here we revisit each point in the light of the evidence and argument offered above.

1 Broad aims: (Reference: 2.2)

- *Umalusi must be seen to exercise its statutory responsibility to quality assure education and training in the general and further education bands. This includes the accreditation of independent schools and guiding the improvement of public schools according to the same criteria.*

The account above shows how seriously and fully Umalusi has approached its responsibility for accreditation and school improvement. Feedback by the teams of peers and provincial officials suggests that the programme has brought credit to Umalusi, and a positive response to the institution of accreditation. The value for public schooling is essentially that of example and influence, both of which have been fostered by the site visit programme.

- *The Evaluation and Accreditation Unit was committed to carrying forward its work in progress on the accreditation of independent schools, notably by monitoring the response to the first two steps in the development of Umalusi's accreditation role.*

The site visit programme, including the publication of the present report, constitutes a moment of high impact in the trajectory set out in the Chronology in Part 2. A high standard has been set for future action.

- *In the interests of its mission, Umalusi needed to move into a more pro-active and visible role in the quality assurance of independent schools.*

After several years of consultation, system building and technical implementation, the site visit programme has clearly moved Umalusi into a highly visible position of positive initiative in the accreditation and quality assurance of independent schooling. This should also serve as a springboard into its less direct role in public schooling.

- *There was also a need to develop Umalusi's own institutional capacity in terms of a more concrete understanding of the nature of the sector and to give shape to its practices; in this sense the present programme is a pilot for later monitoring and evaluation.*

The site visit programme has contributed inestimably to Umalusi's capacity to accredit and quality assure independent schools in an informed and constructive manner. Experience, human contact and understanding of the sector have been extended and deepened. At the same time, technical capacity for the management and analysis of accreditation data has been built. There is new confidence in its basic approach and capacity but also a more informed basis for streamlining and focusing the work in future.

2 Specific goals of the site visits (Reference: 2.3)

- *Understand the reasons for the low achievement of independent schools with a pass rate of less than 60% in 2005 and the measures being implemented by the schools to improve their matric results in 2006.*

Reasons put forward for low achievement are generally superficial, but moderately useful. A deeper investigation of the problem in public and private provision needs to be undertaken. There are three sets of reasons: the one blames a range of factors from poor environment, learner apathy, teacher inability, general indiscipline, lack of parental support and so on – responses which beg as many questions as they answer. The second refers to an open admissions policy, which allows in matric candidates who are not remotely ready for the challenge. Here the school generally regrets the policy and is already changing it. The third are those whose mission it is to admit dropouts and those who have failed and give them a second chance to prove themselves academically.

Action to improve achievement also fails to deal with deeper issues: instead of looking at improving the quality of motivation, teaching and learning in the classroom, and other forms of support, the most popular response is to offer extra lessons and vacation schools. Low achieving schools especially favour this resort – only to follow with frequent complaints that attendance at extra tuition is disappointing.

-
- *Start to develop an endogenous set of benchmarks for good practices in independent schooling.*

Here again the observations regarding good practices are superficial and pragmatic. On the whole, the idea of an indicator is poorly mediated. Good (or bad) schools are not necessarily aware of what really drives their success or failure. Aspects like tough but loving discipline and family-like support rate highly, as well as systematic management. Yet a reading of the site visit booklets suggests the overwhelming importance of unique vision and leadership, and of professional commitment by the educators. In addition, figures show that higher professional qualifications are positively correlated with achievement. It is these deeper qualities that give the life to good discipline, ethos and cognitive excellence.

- *Assess the initial impact of – and response to – the three year provisional accreditation process launched in 2005.*

As can be seen in various parts of Part 3 (and also Part 2,) the general response in this sample to Umalusi's action for accreditation is almost universally positive. Among schools that had entered the accreditation process, there was a high degree of compliance to Umalusi's requirements and a lesser, but still meaningful implementation of recommendations for improvement.

Schools not yet in the accreditation process pleaded ignorance of the requirement or reported some very specific historic inhibition to entering the process. None objected to it. Some of the most at-risk schools welcomed the visits and the promise of external interest and guidance that they seemed to offer. In spite of the positive response, though, there were cases where schools clearly felt threatened by the process, and where they tried to cover up shortcomings.

The better schools claimed that they valued the impact of Umalusi's requirements. It is far too early to assess impact on more tangible indicators like examination results or enrolment. As usual in situations of innovation in education, it was the more capable institutions that seemed to benefit most from the accreditation process. Finding ways to help low achieving schools to benefit will need special strategies and possible modifications to procedures that are currently beyond their capacity.

- *Gather information to inform Umalusi's future approach to potentially at risk schools and undesirable practices.*

The site visit programme has provided information and insights which are pregnant with ideas for future action. These are followed through in the recommendations in Part 5.

- *Verify the accuracy of information provided by provisionally accredited schools as submitted in self-evaluation reports*

The intensive verification process was very positive indeed on the whole, with very few examples of unsatisfactory information; a small handful of schools can be clearly identified for Umalusi's attention in this regard.

- *Locate and identify unregistered or unaccredited schools in order to draw them into the accreditation process and create greater clarity about the extent and nature of the independent school sector in South Africa.*

A number of unaccredited schools were involved in the site visit programme. As a result, they have committed themselves to apply for accreditation. A list of the names and location of formerly unidentified schools has been drawn up: one of the questions in the focus group discussions was about other local schools that should be contacted.

3 Questions the site visits clarified (Reference: 2.4)

Highly concrete and practical questions needed answers or clarification:

- Poor matric results:
 - *Regarding the performance of unaccredited schools in matric exams – is there a correlation between accreditation and results?* As we have seen, provisionally accredited schools are higher achievers than non-accredited schools, though there are reservations within this statement. It is too early for these higher results to be attributed to accreditation; rather, it is a case that higher achievers are more likely to go for accreditation.
 - *What are the factors that contribute to poor results?* The reasons given by the schools can be seen in Part 3. For the most part they blame the learners. More persuasive reasons from a reading of the whole experience of the site visits is that poor results are fundamentally related to poverty, poor educational leadership skills and ill-trained, poorly-qualified, under-prepared and ill-paid staff.
 - *Which elements of good practice are related to good results?* Overwhelmingly good results are attributed above all to excellent, internalised discipline, and to lots of support for learners within a caring, family-like ethos.
 - *Do subsidies make a difference to results?* There are fine, low-fee schools that are among the best visited. These schools might not exist without subsidy. There are also schools with long records of poor achievement and shoddy management that claim to be subsidised. Under these circumstances the data from the site visits cannot provide a clear answer to this question.
- Verification of provider information:
 - *Are the claims made by provisionally accredited providers during self-evaluation true?* Yes, they appear to be remarkably reliable in most cases.
 - *To what extent is the data consistent with the self evaluation?* For the most part the data is recorded as consistent.
 - *Are schools as compliant as they claim to be?* Yes. With some exceptions which have been noted for Umalusi's action. The schools concerned seem to be quite honest about their levels of compliance (or non-compliance, for which they offer reasons).
 - *To what extent have recommendations for improvement been implemented?* The score for

implementation of improvements is lower than the score for other aspects of the verification process, but may still be described as pleasing. Schools give various reasons for not implementing recommended improvements, but most seem willing to implement.

- Unaccredited and/or unregistered providers:
 - *Why are certain schools remaining outside the quality assurance loop?* The overwhelming reasons given related to ignorance of the requirement, but other historical reasons are given, including one of not being able to afford Umalusi's fee.
 - *Is the "fly-by-night" element one to be concerned about? Are learners being exploited?* These questions remain difficult to answer after the site visits. Few if any of the low achieving schools visited could be described as exploitative, especially considering their extremely low fees, but comments about unregistered, unknown neighbouring schools suggest that there may be some very questionable practices to be investigated. The problem of ownership by outsiders with little interest in, or knowledge of education, would seem to need special attention. The possible exploitation of educators, especially of foreign origin, should also be looked into.
 - *Are subsidies being paid to under-performing schools or those that do not meet the criteria?* It should be clear from the evidence set out at the end of Part 3 that there is a problem which needs investigation and explanations before possible action. The recommendation of national regulations for the management of subsidies must be taken seriously.
 - *What is the general impact of "accreditation"/registration?* The best answer to this is: already positive in high achieving schools, and highly promising in the low achieving schools – if Umalusi manages to sustain its current quality of professionalism, if the PDEs play a fuller, clearer, role, and if appropriate political will and business support can be brought to bear on this sub-sector. Hopefully, accreditation action for independent schools will highlight the need for careful monitoring of similar action in public education.
- Effective strategies for dealing with the situation:

The questions under this heading are dealt with in recommendations following.

Part 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

It would seem that Umalusi is securely on the right track, both in its accreditation practices for independent schools and in its modelling of a process that could be helpful in quality assurance and improvement of public schools. Therefore it can confidently follow its present trajectory, in the spirit of constant improvement it expects of independent schools.

One of the clearest lessons of school-improvement literature and of Fleisch's studies of improvement efforts in Gauteng is that the project requires "outside-in" and "inside-out" action. Schools themselves – management, SGB, staff, learners, parents – must promote improvement from within. But external pressure, guidance and support are essential. Districts, provincial departments, assessment bodies, associations of schools and teachers, business leadership, central authorities and bodies like Umalusi all have a contribution to make. Without support from a significant numbers of these players and stakeholders the effort will have limited hold. While Umalusi is by no means the main actor in the process, it might be seen as a kind of nerve centre, a centre of intelligence, memory and information to guide – but also as the shepherd (as its name indicates) guarding educational standards and the interests of learners, parents, communities and the national community.

It should be stressed, then, that few of the recommendations below can be successfully carried through by Umalusi alone. The active participation and responsibility of other role players is vital.

Recommendations that affect Umalusi's approaches

Umalusi's response to the findings from the site visit programme is to provide more of the same (with continuous refinement), to actively inform agencies such as the national and provincial departments of education also with the powers to act, and encourage them to respond appropriately. Facilitating workshops on issues of key concern emerging from this report will be a valuable consequence of the site visit programme.

The following recommendations are set out in response to the questions that were raised at the start of the site visit programme. (Reference 2.4)

1 Umalusi's response to providers that make false claims of accreditation

The schools in the sample did not appear to make false claims. Where this might occur, the school would be requested to rectify the situation and would be given a first warning that its accreditation would be jeopardised by lack of confidence in its ability to provide valid information.

2 Improving Umalusi's monitoring and verification system

Regarding the refinement of its procedures, the site visit programme seems to suggest that these need little improvement, but has provided valuable lessons in the design of data collection and management. Given that Umalusi must ultimately concern itself with many more independent schools (estimated at between 1200 and 2000), procedures will have to be simplified and streamlined, with major but discerning use being made of information communication technology. It will be most important to develop a limited, clear and purposeful set of indicators. At the same time, Umalusi is likely to continue its widely valued commitment to process and insight.

A focused reduction of indicators seems called for, possibly on a random basis, so that schools cannot predict which indicators will be looked at more closely. As the system is extended it will be necessary to build capacity and systems for information management.

Umalusi will use the data collected in this project to inform, interrogate and streamline accreditation processes and documents.

3 Umalusi's response to unaccredited providers outside the quality assurance loop.

Schools that have been identified and visited or at least contacted are properly required to set a date by which they will enter the loop. This will be strictly followed up. It might be necessary to commission a dedicated study with specialised investigative tools to locate and identify all unaccredited schools. Umalusi may have to use incentives to get them into the process. At the same time, the provinces with insufficient data bases regarding independent schools would be encouraged to improve these.

4 Umalusi's response to schools with poor results

With one or two possible exceptions, the weakest schools confirmed the value of positive rather than disciplinary official intervention. A range of possibilities for intervention emerges from reflection on the site visits: guidance in matters of governance or management of quality; measures to increase independent schools' access to provincial resources (such as curriculum support and cluster structures) and in some cases, incorporation as provincial schools. Official responses would best be made on a case-by-case basis which takes into consideration unique local circumstances. Participation across sectors in cluster meetings seems to be valued highly where it is engaged in, and must be more widely encouraged. It would also seem important that the weaker schools be encouraged to join a relevant association as a support in quality development. A surprising number of schools in the sample are not members of an independent schools' association. (Such associations are considered to be useful partners for benchmarking quality assurance and continuous improvement.)

Umalusi may address the needs identified in the findings as follows:

- The first is to encourage cluster-style interaction with neighbouring schools, both successful schools and those with similar problems. (This is already being done with success in some areas.)

- Secondly, Umalusi could convene a national or roaming workshop jointly with the DoE, the Provincial Departments of Education and perhaps a local university and college, designed to help schools to improve their standards.

Both of these interventions could be made in conjunction with public schools in the region.

5 Umalusi's response to the main challenges

- **The regulatory environment**

As highlighted by the project, Umalusi should recognise that the regulatory environment needs to be rationalised as it is a source of confusion and duplication in various areas. Schools are required to report duplicate or overlapping data to their associations, provincial departments and Umalusi. This sometimes places extra demands on resource-poor schools in terms of the management and administration needed. It was also found that ready sources of information are overlapping, ill-defined and difficult to access by Umalusi, the authorities, and researchers in general. So, for example, the availability, scope and reliability of data to identify the sample in the present project were very variable from province to province.

This problem of an overload of bureaucratic reporting is found in public education provision as well, but is worsened in the independent sector by the fact that independent schools must be run as businesses or Public Benefit Organisations, requiring further reporting, especially to the SA Revenue Services. Umalusi may incorporate such additional data, where it is not confidential, into its quality assurance processes.

- **Capacity for quality management**

The main challenge identified is the management of accreditation requirements, and especially the running of an effective quality management system. Capacity building in the area of policy development and quality management is a critical need.

Here again Umalusi may convene a roaming workshop and use schools with quality management systems (QMSs) that are efficient and developmental to provide inspiration and serve as exemplars. While it appears that Umalusi's procedures, portfolios and data management forms are well-regarded and effective, it is aware that these need revision and streamlining.

In the light of the wide range of schools, Umalusi should consider that some thought might be given to the use of levels or stages of accreditation. This would especially be intended to accommodate schools in challenged situations – notably schools that are new, small and have a weak resource base. They might, for example, be assisted to grow in the complexity and comprehensiveness of their QMS.

Secondly, the site visit project identified the need for Umalusi to give attention to the electronic capture and management of data, and to reshaping the data collection instruments in ways that facilitate digital capture and

processing. It may be that many of the schools are ready to present data directly on line if electronic formats are provided.

In addition, the findings confirm that Umalusi should initiate discussions with the DoE, PDEs and the effective independent schools associations to look at the possibility of harmonising the demands on independent schools to provide information of a similar type in very different formats for registration, accreditation, association membership and taxation purposes. (Common formats would make it easier for all stakeholders to access rich data. At the same time, care would have to be taken not to limit the independent roles of each stakeholder.)

In general, the findings indicate that Umalusi should continue with the development of benchmarks for good practice and adequate capacity in the sector through the continued use of peers as evaluators and the sharing of good practices. In addition to the once-off series of workshops suggested above, annual good practice workshops may also be instituted.

Finally it is clear that in spite of extensive efforts to communicate with the sector, many institutions are either unaware of the accreditation process or of all its requirements. Umalusi should therefore work on a more effective and far-reaching communication strategy.

6 Umalusi's response to promoting good practices in the sector

This might be combined with the recommendations for the promotion of better results above (5.1.4), or it could be done separately, but in the same manner.

Recommendations for consideration by the Departments of Education (DoE & PDEs)

While the sampling for the site visit programme was done on a national basis and not on a provincial basis there are nevertheless some useful pointers in the report that the education department(s) may take note of:

1 Registration status of independent schools

The PDEs should investigate the registration status of the list of schools identified by Umalusi as "hidden" schools, where there is some possibility of exploitation of learners and staff, where teaching and learning may be deeply problematic and where all involved are threatened by unsanitary and dangerous environments. Umalusi would supply listings confidentially to the provincial authorities.

2 Common registration criteria

The national and provincial authorities should consider setting up common national criteria for registration of schools and examinations centres.

Umalusi, the DoE and the PDEs should also work towards stronger articulation between accreditation and registration processes. PDEs might consider making accreditation a prerequisite for registration of schools as exam centres.

3 Provincial subsidies for independent schools

The official rules and formulae for the allocation of subsidies to needy and

deserving independent schools have been carefully worked out in order to satisfy constitutional rights and obligations in a disciplined, fair and accountable way. It would seem, however, that the rules and formulae are subject to various levels of confusion, neglect or potential abuse. For example, the requirements regarding the Senior Certificate pass rate and the employment of unqualified teachers appear to be overlooked in some instances.

More generally, the capacity of provincial departments to carry out their responsibilities in relation to the registration, monitoring and subsidy of independent schools is sometimes lacking. Provincial departments should also strive for a constructive relationship with independent schools and encourage fruitful interaction between them and public schools.

The development and implementation of uniform national policies for subsidies for independent schools constitutes therefore one of the most urgent recommendations of this report. The national policy and norms are well constituted, so this recommendation should be relatively easy to carry out. Once this has been done, monitoring of subsidised schools, would become more consistent and regular.

There might be good reason to carry out an immediate investigation into possible inconsistencies in the present allocation of subsidies to low-achieving schools.

Recommendations for consideration by the schools

The usual irony applies in terms of the schools' responsibilities for self-improvement: the strong schools carry them out, usually voluntarily as part of their professionalism; the weaker schools may not have the capacity to conceive, initiate and implement much self-improvement. It is here that well-conceived intervention or links might be considered. Such action would of necessity be of an enabling, access-giving, nature, rather than direct provision.

Nearly all of the schools might give additional attention to the monitoring of the implementation of their own improvement plans. It is possible that improvement intentions are too ambitious, either in scope or in time scale. Targets need to be carefully and cautiously set. In terms of monitoring, a member of staff or a small working group might be given the responsibility to report quarterly on improvement targets. (Umalusi might clarify the extent to which it expects targets to be met.) Even the weakest schools could fruitfully carry out such exercises, though they may well have no experience of the practices involved, and could benefit from guidance.

A problem raised in a number of schools that may need further investigation is the role of ownership. In a number of cases the owner (whether the principal or some external agency), operating without an effective board or other governance structure was seen by other stakeholders to be controlling and inhibiting. The lack of appeal structures and the lack of parental involvement in some boards was a notable aspect of the disempowerment experienced in this situation. The problem is exacerbated when the owner of the school is neither an educator, nor an individual or organisation with an educational vision. This can go together with a disabling lack of transparency regarding the financial management of the school. Such schools may experience a considerable

reduction in potential because of the general sense of helplessness generated by the ownership structure.

Recommendations for research

As indicated already, the reasons for the existence and continuity of certain independent schools need to be studied. The needs being served by private schools especially in rural areas must be better understood. At the same time, an investigation should be undertaken around the insufficiency of public provision in rural areas or the feasibility of expanded public provision to obviate the need for (poorly performing) private schools in certain contexts.

In addition, an investigation might be made into the appropriateness of differentiation of accreditation requirements and procedures for different types of schools with different purposes and levels. The Senior Certificate pass rate proved to be a useful starting point for broad analysis, but should be used cautiously in judging individual schools. For example, a few “Matric Schools” which take in drop-outs and repeaters at the start of Grade 12, may be seen as high achievers even with the low percentage of passes they obtain. However, this affirmation is based mainly on conjecture. More finely grained studies of the meaning of the matric examination as an indicator of good education and a predictor of various kinds of achievement are constantly demanded.

The question of indicators of good practices and how they relate to learner achievement remains problematic and poorly understood in practice. A process of refining indicators plus a longitudinal study to establish their value might prove useful. Umalusi should identify and select the most appropriate information required from schools as ongoing indicators of quality provision in order to make reporting, handling and interpretation less onerous and to avoid duplication

In general the present report should be studied as part of the exploration of areas for in depth investigation and research. The correlation of teacher qualifications with high achievement is a particularly interesting observation, which may feed into an area of considerable controversy and debate. How the observation might impact on accreditation practices needs further study.

There is little doubt that the emerging practices of accreditation and quality assurance have great promise for school improvement in the medium to long term. The processes involved potentially yield much information of interest for research into the state of education and into school improvement efforts. At the same time research is needed to deepen, clarify and refine the approaches to accreditation and the essential insight demanded by quality assurance.

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Appendix

Accreditation in the spirit of quality assurance: untried practices in formal education

The quality assurance community of a country has a crucial role to play in the improvement of standards and quality of the education system. First, it can do this by giving the country a meaningful language to talk about quality in its context to which it must attempt to build consensus as a point of reference for measuring quality. Secondly, once the problem is understood, quality assurance communities would assist by stabilising benchmarks which are reasonable to aspire to, as radars for quality improvements. These benchmarks can then be used as inspection and system assessment tools to gain insights on how the system is performing and reaching these benchmarks. There is nothing about making institutions accountable through accreditation or inspections, but these should be the means of getting institutions to reach and go beyond the set benchmarks, and not the end by itself. (Lolwana, 2006:15)

Accreditation is a well-established institutional practice. Any person or agency deemed to have the right qualities may be accredited or entitled by a higher or more general authority to carry out a specialized function. Ambassadors, ministers of the church and professionals generally require accreditation by an appropriate body.

In some countries education institutions, including public schools, have a long history of accreditation, often using a peer evaluation and approval process. However, until the GENFETQA Act (No.58 of 2001) accreditation of schools was not practised in South Africa. The long-standing requirement that non-government providers of instruction register with the state education authorities could only be considered as a step towards accreditation, since it generally lacked the necessary processes of evaluation and monitoring. Registration was also seen as an oppressive practice aimed at undermining alternatives to apartheid education (French, 1982). The closest one comes to accreditation in South Africa is in instances such as the licensing of a Further Education and Training College by a particular corporation to train, say, in the repair of a specific make of TV. Oversight by professional bodies of university departments offering professional qualifications is another example of accreditation.

Umalusi (2006:4) clarifies the idea of accreditation in this way: “Accreditation focuses primarily on assuring the provider’s performance in respect of the quality of provision and the provider’s capacity to support and manage the qualifications, curricula and programmes it offers”.

Accreditation would commonly be a relatively simple matter of compliance with requirements for certain qualifications and experience, and perhaps also resources and facilities. Periodic evidence of sustained satisfaction of the requirements might be required. However, accreditation becomes more complex when it is coupled with the idea of quality assurance, implicit in Umalusi’s designation as Council for Quality Assurance of General and Further Education and Training. A quality assurance approach to accreditation is implicit in the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) developed for public schools by the Department of Education (DoE), and is explicit in the criteria and guidelines for provider accreditation published by SAQA and different SETA ETQAs.

As will be seen, quality assurance – or rather, some interpretations of quality assurance – demands a far more active developmental commitment to the promotion of quality in education than the mere monitoring of compliance with criteria or unique acts of assessment. Potterton (2006) shows vividly how much quality depends on the richness and depth of the mediating educational encounter and the experience of the school.

Quality assurance is a relatively new notion in general and further education. The enthusiasm for the idea seems to have migrated, notably in the United Kingdom, from business and industry through training into vocational education in the late 1980s, and from there into higher education. The term continues to be tied largely to processes of industrial production and commercial service provision. This is shown by an internet search for the usage of the term, which indicates that outside of industry and commerce it is given very limited use in areas like state health care, vocational education and training (VET) and is used to some extent in higher education. Quality assurance became particularly popular during the rise and fall of the fad for Total Quality Management (TQM) in the 1990s. (As can be seen in the references, there was a flurry of literature about quality assurance and school quality in the 1990s.) Unlike TQM, quality assurance has recently become a fairly standard term, though this does not mean that there is an easy consensus about its meaning and practices.

However, only in South Africa is quality assurance systematically used in relation to the provision of schooling or general education. The use of the term here was raised to a high level of currency after the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework in 1995, with its Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) for different sectors, including formal education, as one of its signal features. The need for quality assurance in education is stressed by Taylor and Vinjevoold in their report on the poverty of teaching and learning in many South African schools: “One of the most urgent priorities must be the establishment of quality assurance mechanisms at all levels of schooling”. (1999:231) (However, Taylor and Vinjevoold are more concerned with recommending systemic assessments rather than the quality assurance with which the NQF is more concerned.)

The newness of both accreditation and quality assurance of South African education provision³ means that a considerable effort must go into exploring, establishing, clarifying, testing, and adapting procedures and practices through implementation. The present report provides feedback on a vital stage in this effort, while recognizing that the context of the idea of quality assurance has a certain tenuousness in South Africa. As Chisholm (2006) writes: “...South Africa was also a key test-site for the concept (of a NQF) as a whole. Policy entrepreneurs have lent their expertise to South Africa and South Africans have lent theirs to the region. After a decade of experimentation, even those who initially consulted on it are now in serious doubt as to the South African model”.

Practices and issues in quality assurance

Quality assurance can be seen as a consolidation of common sense, experience and best practices in management that has been specified in great detail and laid down as standard procedures. “The words ‘quality assurance’ (QA) have a wonderful mystique about them,

³ A proviso: the former system of school inspections had many features of quality assurance. However, it lacked the transparency of procedures, criteria and standards and the participative emphasis that are meant to characterize quality assurance. In any event, the experience and practices of the inspectorate were largely obliterated by post-apartheid education policy.

giving the impression of a complex set of skills which few of us will ever acquire... the truth is that QA is a grandiose term for any well-run management system” (Freeman, 1993:14). Thus, the European Commission in its *Fundamentals of a Common Quality Assurance Framework for VET in Europe* (2001, revised 2005) sees quality assurance as essentially “continuous and systematic”. The framework details five aspects of the management of provision demanding quality assurance: planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment, review (feedback and procedures for change) and methodology. Methods for quality assurance include self-assessment, a monitoring system, and, where needed, measurement tools. The key to the process lies in the design of detailed specifications, criteria, and perhaps also performance indicators and exemplars for each subject, skill or discipline. Given the assumption of a context of rapid change in markets and technology, regular review of the quality assurance process itself is also stipulated.

Other quality assurance frameworks may characteristically focus on aspects like: infrastructure; job or performance management (including record keeping); competence and organisational culture (including motivation, team work, integrity, communication). Yet others will give priority to market responsiveness and client satisfaction. Adequate Quality Management Systems (QMSs) may be central in some approaches to quality assurance. In an interestingly different formulation, Whitaker writes this about quality assurance:

Quality assurance was conceived as a means of underwriting the contractual relationship between an organization and its clients or customers. This requires attention to the interface between the organization and its external environment. In education this involves relationships with parent and the community; the sharing of aims and aspirations for pupils and their learning, and the presentation and explanation of outcomes and results. A more subtle principle of the quality concept is the idea that organizations also have a network of internal customers and suppliers – complex chains of givers and receivers – and it is to these that quality considerations need to be applied. The pursuit of a collaborative management culture is an elaboration of this principle, seeking to build powerful relationships of service and trust between the participants in the corporate exercise – between pupils and teachers, between the pupils themselves and between the various partners in the management of the school. It is the pursuit of interdependence and the recognition that it is in the way that we give and take in the daily process of work that quality most importantly resides. If we can offer a quality service to our colleagues and pupils then we need have no fear that our outcomes will be unsatisfactory (1993:149).

Strictly speaking, quality assurance focuses on the quality of inputs rather than the quality of outputs or products. But even establishing what the inputs are can be difficult. Fleisch’s studies of the dilemmas and failures of different approaches to school improvement in Gauteng support the new consensus articulated notably by Fullan that...

...successful educational change requires both central policy mandates, such as system-wide standards, and school-by-school assistance. Centralised or state policy mandated changes are often good at ensuring distribution of resources and setting ambitious standards, but cannot directly impact on the daily functions of teachers and learners in the classroom. Similarly, without external pressure, school-based improvement projects often do not have the right mix of incentives and sanctions to translate support into new practice. Increasingly, best improvement practices attempt to engage change at both levels (Fleisch, 2002:95).

And Lolwana points out that:

Quality and standards concepts in education are complex and often span a continuum, which starts from access and infrastructural concerns to relevance and standards issues. In its transformation trajectory, South Africa has experienced the dilemmas of having to address varying quality needs in its attempt to grapple with quality concerns in education, as the question of standards is not a simple one, because standards mean different things to different people (2006:4).

However, it should not come as a surprise that educators and school managers are often ambivalent, and sometimes hostile, to the discourse of quality assurance. Singh (1990) repeatedly articulates the indignation of education professionals at the intrusion of the instrumental rationality of business through illegitimate quality procedures. Even in industry, resistance may arise in response to complex procedures that are not perceived to be related to the real needs of the job. In general education, the procedures and discourses of quality assurance, apart from looking complex, can seem disconcertingly alien to the values and achievements proper to good schools. Thus, while references to the market and client satisfaction might just be useful in highly focused training contexts, the terms lead to puzzlement in a school. Private provision has a marginally closer relationship to the market than public provision, perhaps. But it is extremely difficult to pin down the clients or stakeholders, though it might be possible to create a priority order of immediacy, such as: the learners, the parents, the community, the society as a whole, the future, the past, future employers, the economy, a globalised world, a particular ethos – all these are in one way or another “served by” the school. Different schools will order these beneficiaries differently, and the stakeholders may well have conflicting interests and demands. As Barnett writes:

What counts as quality is contested. The different views of quality generate different methods of assessing quality... Given the contested character of ‘quality’ performance evaluation should be framed so as to permit the equal expression of legitimate voices, though founded on the teaching staff’s critical self-reflections (1994:68).

By the same token the notion of education or a school efficiently marketing products and services is questionable and even offensive to some. The offence may be reduced by arguing that qualities, orientations, capabilities and so on are the “products”, or that the results of adequately complex assessments like the matric examinations are products. But what is cherished in education is not only the results of exit assessments, but the quality of the experience, the ethos, the quality of nurture, the values imparted in daily interactions and so on. These are held to be meaningful in themselves and lead to immeasurable results not amenable to industrial-style quality assurance. They are, however, aspects of educational achievement which can and must be represented in some forms of evidence, even if such evidence is a matter of cumulative impressions, argument and professional judgement rather than hard data.

In the face of the objections, it is possible to affirm quality assurance in education. This is because it allows an emphasis on the quality of processes and their likelihood to produce the desired outcomes, and therefore also allows for approaches appropriate to institutions of general education. However, these approaches must be shaped and implemented quite differently from the quality assurance of a franchised fast-food outlet, even though many of the same terms are used. In the present report, the

accreditation and quality assurance procedures that are being interrogated have been used in ways intended to be sensitive to ethos and professional judgements. As Sallis argues: at its best, the quest for quality management underlying quality assurance involves

a humanistic philosophy which makes the manager the servant of his or her customers... However, management cannot succeed without leadership, and this consists of enthusing others in the organization so that they similarly want to serve their customers, internal and external, with a similar devotion... A major aspect of the leadership role is to empower teachers to have the maximum opportunity to improve the learning of their students.” And Entwistle (1998:183) states – in spite of reservations – that ‘quality assessment has raised the profile of teaching within institutions, and has made the procedures through which quality is assured more transparent and effective.’ (1994:238-239).

Before considering how Umalusi has dealt with the challenges and tensions in designing and implementing accreditation and quality assurance, it will be helpful to consider some of the theories about why quality assurance has become as salient as it has over the past twenty years or so.

Why quality assurance?

There are various reasons why quality assurance has come to the fore in education and training. These reasons provide insights into the meaning of quality assurance that may be as useful as the description of common procedures: they create openings for variation and innovation to support the deeper purpose rather than sustaining modus operandi that probably lack universal applicability.

At a technical level, quality assurance is recommended in order to pre-empt failure or under-performance. The concept has been shaped by the perception that looking at the products of a process alone (“quality control”) comes too late if one is serious about improvement and client satisfaction. What is important is whether the capacity and systems are in place in order to produce the desired quality. Ideally, in fact, it should never be necessary to inspect the product, as the quality assurance process should allow for complete confidence that the product will be up to standard. It is client satisfaction that should be attended to. In reality the value of looking at products is seldom neglected. In education, well made summative assessments (like the matric exam) can provide complex though not comprehensive insights. Umalusi of necessity combines the quality assurance of exit assessments with quality assurance for accreditation. In the present report extensive use is made of Senior Certificate results where they serve as the major guiding variable in estimating quality. This approach is supported by Sammons et al, who take the position that...

...whilst academic outcomes are not the only ones which should be valued, we argue that they are of crucial importance: in a society... where ‘high stakes’ testing is institutionalized via the public examination system, those examination results remain a major indicator of school performance and have a substantial impact on young peoples’ employment prospects and likelihood of entering further higher education (1997:7).

Apart from the instrumental reasons, there are broader historical, political and economic reasons for the rise of quality assurance: these relate to managing change (with demographic, technological and market dimensions) and enabling more flexible articulation of qualifications.

The rapidity of change in social structure, technology and the nature of work, and the related erosion of stable certainties about what constitutes adequate education or training – not to mention Sammons et al's observation (1997, p.224) of the radical shift away from the hierarchical factory model of schooling itself – have meant that traditional assumptions about how to judge, assess and certificate learning are no longer fit for their purposes. Quality assurance ostensibly leaves much more authority in the hands of the local management of education, allowing it greater flexibility and the exercise of good judgement in balancing the demands of the profession or the discipline and of responsiveness to social and market conditions. However, to allow for stakeholder confidence in the use that local management makes of this freedom, agreed criteria, procedures, norms and standards must be followed and monitored (or externally audited). Ideally, the local management should participate with the external authority in a consensual cycle of continuous improvement. (In reality, some quality assurance systems have been perceived as externally imposed, officious, burdensome and irrelevant. But quality assurance should be self correcting to allow for its own continuous improvement towards true fitness for purpose.)

An emphasis on systems of quality assurance is particularly important where, as in South Africa, there is a policy intention to encourage the (contested) convergence of education and training. According to Blom:

... the dichotomy between education and training seems to have become blurred and this has led to a greater emphasis on quality assurance and accountability as the basis of trust amongst national and international partners, particularly between partner organisations that are offering 'formal education' and 'workplace based training' (2006:11).

Linked to the pressure of globalisation for internationally intelligible qualifications on the one hand, and the pressure for education and training to promote equity and diversity, this observation helps to understand the prominence in South Africa of quality assurance – with its aspiration to promote both comparable standards and flexibility. It would seem, though, that this observation is of much greater relevance within a standards-based vocational training context than in a general education system focused on whole qualifications.

The need for quality assurance is put pithily, yet in a qualified way by Freeman:

... training and education cannot expect to escape the current drive towards higher quality and being more answerable to the customer. They will therefore need some means of measuring their performance more sensitively than in the past and some means of improving on past performance. However such a need is phrased, it is pointing towards some form of quality assurance (1993:166).

In spite of the claims for quality assurance and accreditation, it must be recognised that these are modest building blocks in the complex national struggle to improve schooling. Research from around the world has shown how elusive our understanding of the nature of school quality, improvement or effectiveness is, and how contradictory the factors that promote these from context to context are. In South Africa studies like those of Fleisch (2002) and Taylor and Vinjevd (1999) show how complex, almost intractable, the improvement of teaching and learning can be. Yet they also make it clear that the quest for the improvement of schooling is vitally important. The act of systematically

recognising good schools and supporting the improvement of weak schools is most important and must itself be strengthened and continuously improved.

Ultimately the task of developing quality is much broader still. Much hinges on the driving vision from the top in our society. Received images of standard good practices are not enough. It is worth quoting, in closing, a remarkable statement on this subject by Soudien:

The state ... has to lead by example. It has to take on the responsibility of winning people over to its interpretation of what is in their best interests. In the process it has to declare what the appropriate standards should be that it desires for itself and for the people within its authority. The political significance of this is great. In taking this political responsibility, it has to imagine itself into the world of the people and to think critically about how school and the everyday might be brought into a state of alignment. It has to take seriously the UNESCO injunctions of achieving the development of a well-trained core of teachers who can mediate a relevant curriculum 'that can be taught and learned in a local language and build upon the knowledge and experience of teachers and learners'. This is at the heart of what is required and demands that the state become a much more pedagogically minded state. In becoming this pedagogically minded state it has to do more than we are currently seeing in many countries, including South Africa, where the school is being held to standards which the system is not geared to achieving. It is not that these standards are wrong but what we are seeing here is the state thinking against local conditions and the local environment as opposed to from within these local conditions. While elements of national systems are attuned to the interests and investments of local conditions, such as components of the new curriculum in South Africa, they are only add-ons. Thinking in relation to where the people are demands a much deeper understanding of how to engage with the complexity of the local (2006).



37 General Van Ryneveld Street
Persequor Technopark
Pretoria, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)12 349 1510
Fax: +27 (0)12 349 1511
Email: info@umalusi.org.za
www.umalusi.org.za