



7 West Street, Houghton, 2198  
P O Box 875, Highlands North, 2037  
Telephone: +27 11 483 9700  
Facsimile: +27 11 483 9797  
Email: [assess@ieb.co.za](mailto:assess@ieb.co.za)  
Website: [www.ieb.co.za](http://www.ieb.co.za)

## **International Institutions of Tertiary Study**

### **To whom it may concern**

### **The IEB as an accredited examining body in South Africa**

This letter serves to introduce the IEB (Independent Examinations Board) to you, should you not already be aware of our existence as a respected examining authority in South Africa. Annually there are a number of South African students, who write the IEB school-leaving examination, who apply for entry to study at universities across the world. This letter serves to inform you of our organization and hence to give you some idea of the learning background of our students.

### **A Background: The South African curriculum and school-leaving qualification**

You may be aware that South Africa examined its main school-leaving qualification, the National Senior Certificate (NSC), for the first time in 2008. This qualification is the culmination of the curriculum that was introduced by the new democratic government when it came into power in 1994. The final phase of the curriculum for Grades 10 to 12 (16 to 18 year olds) was implemented in Grade 10 in 2006.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements which cover the schooling of learners from Grade R (Reception Year) to Grade 12 are available from the Department of Basic Education's portal [www.thutong.org.za](http://www.thutong.org.za). The policy requirements for the new qualification are also available on this website. Should you have difficulty in accessing these, please do not hesitate to contact our office and we will make the documents available for you.

In 2009 the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (UK NARIC) conducted an evaluation of the National Senior Certificate qualification, using the IEB examination as the basis for evaluating the assessment of the qualification. UK NARIC, as you are probably aware, is the National Agency appointed by the UK Government to provide official information and expert opinion on international qualifications in the UK. All UK Universities are UK NARIC members. Attached please find the Executive Summary of that report in which it is stated that the NSC subjects are considered to be broadly comparable to the GCE AS-level, with the Advanced Programmes comparable to GCE A-level.

### **B The IEB as an integral part of the examining system in South Africa**

Examining of the NSC in South Africa is conducted by three accredited assessment authorities. The largest of these is the state. The national Department of Basic Education is responsible for setting the examination papers and the examination itself is conducted by the nine provincial

departments of education. The second examining authority in respect of size is the IEB (Independent Examinations Board). We assess on average 8 300 Grade 12 students per annum.

Our systemic dispensation enables all three examining authorities to assess the same curriculum but provides the opportunity for each assessment body to determine its own assessment requirements. The IEB assessment requirements for the NSC are available on the IEB website [www.ieb.co.za](http://www.ieb.co.za). Again, should you have difficulty in accessing these documents, please do not hesitate to contact our office and we will make the documents available for you.

The IEB believes that it is through the assessment of the curriculum that its true worth and value as an educating tool can be exploited. The way in which a question is asked will either encourage the 'opening up' of young minds to see new ideas and possibilities or it will focus the mind narrowly onto the facts taught and presumably learnt during the year; the approach in assessment can either offer learners an opportunity to express their own opinions and show that they have used sound thinking skills and a reliable knowledge base to come to their conclusions or at the other end of the scale, it will encourage the re-gurgitation of learnt opinions. The IEB aims to harness the positive impact of good assessment techniques on learning and teaching and through its instruments, open the minds of teachers and learners to the higher order thinking skills encouraged in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements and required in our modern world. Schools have indicated to the IEB that parents choose IEB schools because of the IEB school leaving examination which encourages the production of students, well-prepared for the rigors of tertiary study.

The IEB is an integral part of the national education system and as such it is subjected to the rigorous external moderation and external quality assurance (QA) processes conducted by Umalusi<sup>1</sup> (previously called the SA Certification Council), a statutory body set up by government for this purpose.

This quality assurance process allows for prescriptions on examination procedures and processes, teaching and learning and external moderation of the final examination as well as a maximum allowable internal assessment component of no more than 25%, which is also subjected to statistical adjustment. Hence a school-leaver examined by the IEB needs to satisfy the selfsame procedural requirements as the school-leaver from the state system. The final certificate will in be issued by Umalusi once it is satisfied that its quality assurance processes have been fully met.

However, it is worthwhile for me to point out the following in Umalusi's letter of accreditation to the IEB (September 2007), where they noted the:

- Rigour which the IEB applies consistently in developing examination question papers of an acceptable standard;
- Amount of research and development that informs the delivery of quality assessment products;
- Efficient and effective assessment systems that are underpinned by sound values and the internalization of such values by all who participate in the management and administration of assessments.

As an indication of the high regard that the IEB enjoys within the South African examining system, the Department of Basic Education has appointed the IEB to assess all non-official languages (i.e. Arabic, French, German, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu and Modern Greek) on behalf of the state. This means that the IEB conducts all assessment (including oral performance) for all learners in South Africa who offer these languages.

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<sup>1</sup> Statutorily known as the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training

The IEB also partnered with Umalusi, with the approval of the national Education Department, to get the Joint Abitur and NSC qualification that was developed for the three local German schools, recognized in both Germany and South Africa. The compulsory four recognized NSC subjects will be from the IEB examinations and the remaining five from the Abitur. This was assessed for the first time in 2009 and further illustrates the recognition given to the IEB as an assessment body within the South African system.

### **C Performance of IEB students**

The pass rate of IEB students is impressive. The key point to note is the fact that, of the number of candidates who annually enter for the examination, in the region of 80% achieve a pass that qualifies them for admission to bachelor's degree studies. It is accepted that the IEB's annual groups of candidates are known to be performing the best of the school-leaving cohort from all examining authorities and the percentage of school leavers with matriculation endorsement is the highest. This can be verified from respected associations such as Higher Education South Africa (HESA, previously known as SAUVCA), Umalusi or the national Department of Basic Education. I would be happy to provide you with the contact details of relevant officers at these institutions who could assist you, should you wish to make enquiries.

Furthermore, the IEB draws its examination candidates from the independent school sector only. State schools by law are required to write the examinations of the state. Schools in the independent sector must be registered by state authorities before they may operate to ensure that their provisioning is equal to or better than state schools. In addition, they are required to be accredited by Umalusi through a rigorous process of external quality assurance. Many of the independent schools that write the IEB examination are also accredited by the Independent Quality Assurance Agency (IQAA), a body established by the independent sector itself to ensure that provision of its member schools is of an exemplary standard. Finally, before a school is registered as an examination centre, the IEB conducts its own approval process, which includes a consideration not only of the facilities but the processes of teaching and learning. We at the IEB are confident that the schools offering our examination are exemplary learning institutions, offering learners the very best standards of teaching and support, both in terms of physical resources and learning support.

It is also important to note that the performance level of the IEB candidates in the previous school-leaving qualification on average is in the high mark cohorts which were internationally recognized at a higher level

IEB candidates have readily been accepted into overseas universities in a number of countries including the USA, UK and Australia, and have successfully completed their studies. Our records show that the results of the IEB NSC can be used as a good indicator for further study. For example, a study at the University of Cape Town (UCT) showed that 98% of IEB students in 2005 - 2007 either completed the degree course successfully or entered further study. There is no reason to believe that this pattern has changed.

In addition, in August 2010, the IEB received the following information from Derek MacLeod, the International Officer for Middle East and Africa for the University of Edinburgh:

Following a long conversation with colleagues of mine in our Admissions team for our College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, we've finally been given notification that the IEB NSC has been approved for entry to our courses in that College, as well as already being accepted for entry into our other Colleges in Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science and Engineering.

This development is the first change in some time to our entry requirements for our Medicine (MBChB) course as up until now, only A-levels, Scottish Highers, the IB and Irish Leaving Certificates were accepted for this course.

This is recognition of the extremely good work done by the teachers and learners in IEB schools.

#### **D Conclusion**

I trust that this information will assist foreign university authorities in considering applications from South African learners who have written the IEB examination as their school-leaving examination. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information that may assist you in making your decisions. My contact details are as follows: email: [oberholzera@ieb.co.za](mailto:oberholzera@ieb.co.za); telephone: 27-11-4839794; fax: 27-11-4839797.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oberholzer', with a long horizontal flourish underneath. The signature is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

**Anne Oberholzer  
Chief Executive Officer  
21 September 2011**