RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS FROM THE PRETORIA NEWS

1. What is the NCS and what is it all about? How different is it from the previous system?

The NCS (National Curriculum Statement) is the new curriculum that replaces the old curriculum that led to the Senior Certificate. The new certificate to be issued is referred to as the National Senior Certificate (NSC). The new curriculum is a nationally set curriculum that is internationally benchmarked, caters for modern 21st century skills and has an increased focus on African and South Africa. The duration of the NSC is three years i.e. Grades 10-12. The difference with the new curriculum is that the number of subjects has been streamlined to 29 subjects, which are based on high knowledge, high skills. For the first time in 2008, all subjects except Life Orientation will be nationally examined. Mathematical Literacy and Life Orientation, together with the languages are compulsory for all learners.

2. ***In terms of preparation what papers are pupils using to prepare themselves for the exams?***

The NSC was introduced in Grade 10 in 2006 and phased into Grade 11 in 2007 and grade 12 in 2008. Learners were prepared by educators from 2006 using approved textbooks and exemplar examination papers set by the National Examination panels. The current cohort of learners wrote a national examination in Grade 11 in November 2007, which prepared them for the standards envisaged in the new curriculum.

Exemplar question papers were developed for learners in Grade 10 in 2006, for Grade 11 in 2007 and for Grade 12 in 2008. All schools were provided with these exemplars, early in the year, which are also available from the DoE website. There are also additional exemplars that have been published in the *Study Mate* Series, which is a newspaper supplement distributed to all districts and schools. Learners will be also being exposed to the preparatory examination which will be written in September 2008. Provinces have the option to use question papers set by the school, or those that have been provincially set or question papers that have been nationally set.

3. How many subjects are going to be written this year? Will we be seeing pupils with 9 to 10 distinctions this year? How many subjects are pupils supposed to have per year? The exams start later than the usual time is there any reason why they start only later?

All learners must offer a minimum of seven subjects, which is a prerequisite for the qualification. Examinations for all subjects will be nationally set and this will ensure that a national standard is maintained across the country. Learners can offer subjects in addition to the seven subject package and therefore the possibility exists for learners to attain more than seven distinctions.

The NSC exams start later in the year compared to the Senior Certificate examinations, in order to maximise teaching time. Schools are now expected to continue teaching up to the end of October as the examination officially commences on 3 November 2008.

4. How will the certificate look like, what will be the difference from the past one? If you have a copy of it can you please send it to us?

The Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, Umalusi, in terms of the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act, (No 58 of 2001, is responsible for the issuing of the National Senior Certificate. Achievement in the different subjects in the National Senior Certificate will be reported using a seven point scale as indicated below:

Rating Code	Rating	Marks (%)
7	Outstanding achievement	80 – 100
6	Meritorious achievement	70 – 79
5	Substantial achievement	60 – 69
4	Adequate achievement	50 – 59
3	Moderate achievement	40 – 19
2	Elementary achievement	30 – 39
1	Not achievement	0 – 29

The NSC will also grant candidates admission to Higher Education to further their studies. Hence on the certificate will be indicated whether a candidate has complied with the minimum admission requirements for study towards a bachelor's degree, diploma or higher certificate.

5. Are the schools (teachers) and learners prepared for the exams? What measures have been taken to make sure of this?

The new curriculum for Grades 10 –12 has been available for teachers since 2003 and teachers were encouraged to prepare for 2006. In 2005 and 2006, the provincial education departments, higher education institutions, NGO and teacher unions have provided teacher training opportunities for Grade 10, 11 and 12 teachers. In addition, the Department of Education has developed the following policy and guideline documents to provide details on content, planning and assessment:

- *Subject Statements* for each subject
- *Policy on promotion and certification* in Grades 10, 11 and 12
- *Learning Programme Guidelines* for each subject which provide guidance on planning and teaching for 40 weeks in grades 10, 11 and 12
- *Subject Assessment Guidelines* on how to assess and the nature and format of examinations and other assessment tasks
- *Life Orientation Guide* to teachers
- *Mathematical Literacy Guide* for teachers
- Teacher training on SABC in Mathematical Literacy, Life Orientation, Physical Science and Languages.

The preparation for the NSC exams was intensified in 2008 so as to ensure that all learners are adequately prepared for the first NSC examination. These activities have included*, inter alia*, the following:

(a) All schools that are underperforming have been visited by departmental officials as part of the National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA). In many cases officials of the department including the senior management have been allocated a school to adopt and mentor. All MECs for Provincial Education Departments and their Heads of Departments (HODs) provide reports to account to the Minister of Education at the Council of Education Ministers' meetings on the implementation of the National Strategy for Learner attainment (NSLA) designed to help learners, teachers, and managers to maximize quality learning opportunities for all learners.

(b) Capacity development workshops on management and leadership have been conducted for the principals of underperforming schools. In cases of schools that are serial underperformers mentorship programmes have been instituted.

(c) Provinces have appointed additional subject advisors to strengthen onsite support to teachers in the area of curriculum implementation with specific focus on content knowledge.

(d) The Department of Education has provided exemplar question papers for all subjects to assist teachers and learners in their preparation for the examination.

(e) Provincial education departments have successfully reduced the backlog in physical infrastructure and in the provision of textbooks. In many schools, each learner has a textbook for each subject.

(f) Additional study materials in the form of newspaper supplements, Study Mate, were distributed to all schools.

(g) Preparatory examinations are conducted by districts and monitored by the Department of Education at national and provincial levels

The Department of Education continues to monitor and support the provincial education departments in their preparation of candidates for the upcoming NSC examination.

6. How will the matric results be released this year, what is the procedure? When is the expected release of the results? In terms of pupils committing suicide because of their marks, how is the department going to deal with that to see to it that there is no repetition of these events?

The Department is committed to releasing results in the same year the exams have been written. Therefore, the results will be released on 30 December 2008. Emphasis in the NSC examination will be on the subject performance and not on the overall performance as done previously. The new certificate does not include the aggregation of marks. All reasonable steps are being taken to ensure that the release of results does not cause undue trauma amongst our learners. Schools have been requested to arrange for counsellors to be available to support learners during the release of results.

7. How many makers are expected to mark the papers?

The number of markers is dictated by the total enrolment per subject per province. The total enrolment figures for the 2008 examination stands at 592 000. This number of candidates will require approximately 45 000 markers working across approximately 90 marking centres.

8. Will the national papers accommodate standard grade and higher grade? Why has the department decided to do away with higher and standard grade?

The NSC examination does not make provision for higher and standard grade. The disadvantage of the higher and standard grade distinction is that learners were graded even before they wrote the examination. Hence, some learners that could have coped with the higher grade were relegated to standard grade without being given an opportunity to prove themselves. In the case of the NSC, all candidates will write a common question paper, which caters for the diverse abilities of candidates. Based on their performance, candidates are then graded on a scale of 1 to 7.

9. Any problems anticipated by the department regarding the exams?

No problem is anticipated, except natural catastrophes like storms that will make it difficult to transport some sensitive examination materials. In this regard contingency measures are in place such as establishment of nodal stations

next to rural examination centres throughout the length and breadth of the country. The Department conducted the 2008 May/June Senior Certificate Examination for 403 000 candidates and this examination was executed with efficiency and integrity. In an examination of this magnitude, minor irregularities may occur, but the system has been vigilant in identifying and appropriately dealing with these irregularities. It has become a tradition that public examinations are managed and administered with precision and efficiency. Therefore, the Department is confident that we have the experience, the expertise and the capacity to administer a successful NSC examination in 2008. Our expertise in this regard has been acknowledged by many of our peers in the international community who have assisted us to establish benchmarks and standards for the execution of examinations.

The establishment of the National Examination Irregularities Committee (NEIC) by the Minister of Education in 2006, has contributed significantly to the improved reporting and handling of irregularities. The NEIC has effectively co-ordinated the handling of irregularities across the Provincial Education Departments (PEDs), and has improved the manner in which irregularities are identified, investigated and sanctioned.

10. Does the department believe that pupils will be able to cope with writing two subjects per day?

The Department is committed to minimizing the duration of examinations so as to focus its efforts on effective teaching and learning. Therefore, maximum time has been allocated to teaching. In previous years the November examination extended over 6 – 7 weeks and teaching time was restricted. In 2008, the examination will extend over four weeks and therefore on certain days candidates will have to cope with writing two papers.

The 2008 November Exam timetable was widely published for public comment and there was widespread consultation in the compilation of this timetable. Great care was taken to accommodate candidates' subject combinations as well as the differing demands of the subjects. The writing of two subjects is a widely accepted practice which prevails in the higher education institutions and in other countries.

11. Is there going to be the annual Gauteng press conference to release the results?

The MECs in each province will host their separate press conferences on 30 December 2008.

12. What sort of expectations does the department have regarding the results?

The Department is positive about the performance of learners in the 2008 NSC examination. Every effort has been made to ensure that all candidates are prepared for the examination.

13. Any advice for pupils who will be writing the exams?

Candidates are urged to be calm and to remain focused in these last two months ahead of the examination. Candidates must at all times remember that hard work and diligent application to their studies is the only route to success. Learners are encouraged to seek assistance from school, family and friends during periods of anxiety. The Department of Education is committed to ensuring the interests of learners.

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