

04 JANUARY 2026

DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION REAFFIRMS THE INTEGRITY, CREDIBILITY AND GOVERNANCE OF THE STATE NATIONAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION SYSTEM

The Department of Basic Education notes with serious concern the unfounded statements by the Freedom Front Plus (VF Plus) relating to the identification of a limited examination breach during the 2025 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations. While the Department of Basic Education (DBE) unequivocally condemns any breach of examination integrity, it is both inaccurate and analytically unsound to suggest that the integrity of the NSC is fundamentally compromised or that independent examination bodies are inherently more secure.

At the outset, it must be stated without qualification that any compromise of examination integrity is unacceptable, regardless of its scale or origin. The DBE does not minimise such incidents. On the contrary, the Department acted decisively, transparently, and in accordance with the law by publicly acknowledging the breach, instituting a National Investigation Task Team, suspending implicated officials, and initiating criminal and disciplinary processes. These actions reflect institutional accountability and systemic resilience, not failure.

Importantly, the detection of the irregularities itself demonstrates the robustness of the DBE's quality assurance and monitoring systems. The breach was identified through internal controls during the marking process, swiftly traced to its source, and isolated through established mechanisms. Credible examination systems are defined not by the absence of attempted breaches, but by the strength of their detection, response, and remediation frameworks. On this measure, South Africa's NSC continues to meet national and international benchmarks.

Assertions that examination irregularities are unique to the public examination system, or to the DBE specifically, reflects an uninformed, extremely narrow and parochial reading of national and global

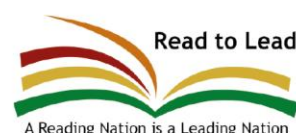
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assessment systems. International experience shows that no examination authority public or private is entirely insulated from human misconduct. Examination breaches have been documented across highly regarded systems worldwide, including paper leaks, digital compromises, and collusion involving educators and officials.

Global examples illustrate that examination vulnerabilities are a shared challenge across jurisdictions and governance models, reinforcing the reality that such risks must be managed through strong institutional governance rather than ideological comparison. Claims that independent or international examination bodies operate without risk or controversy are therefore misleading.

In South Africa, the DBE, the Independent Examinations Board (IEB), and the South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute (SACAI) work collaboratively through formal service-level agreements to ensure coherence, quality assurance, and national benchmarking. This cooperation strengthens the credibility of the national examination ecosystem rather than fragmenting it.

The narrative that the DBE exercises an unjustifiable “monopoly” over public examinations reflects a misunderstanding of South Africa’s education architecture. Multiple examination authorities are legally recognised. Notably, many independent schools, which are entitled to choose their assessment bodies voluntarily, elect to write the NSC examination administered by the DBE, owing to its integrity, credibility, international recognition, and alignment with national development and higher education pathways. Twenty-nine thousand, six hundred and thirty two (29 632) learners from 579 independent schools wrote the state examination in 2025 compared to the 17 427 that wrote the NSC examination administered by the IEB (Independent Examination Board) and 6168 that wrote the NSC examination administered by SACAI (South African Comprehensive Institute). A total of 903 561 candidates wrote the state examination in 2025.

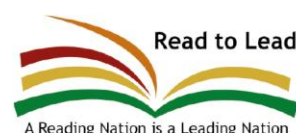
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The scale and complexity of the NSC must also be contextualised honestly. The NSC is one of the largest standardised examination systems in the world, serving nearly one million candidates annually across diverse geographic, socio-economic, and institutional contexts. To cite isolated incidents without acknowledging this scale is analytically misleading. The vast majority of examination cycles conclude without material irregularities, supported by layered internal controls, external moderation, and statutory oversight by Umalusi. Umalusi, which is the independent Quality Assurance Council, responsible for the credibility and integrity of Public examinations, has had no reason to disapprove the results of the state system over the last many years.

Calls for public schools to “choose which examination board they wish to use” or for the DBE to relinquish its constitutional mandate is not only short-sighted and impractical, but it undermines the efforts and resources invested in building a national examination system that is legally sound, internationally benchmarked, and recognised nationally and internationally. The NSC examination as administered by the DBE continues to underpin access to higher education, skills development, and employment, and is widely trusted by universities and employers.

“The Department of Basic Education rejects the insinuation that the integrity of the National Senior Certificate is in terminal decline or that public schooling is structurally incapable of safeguarding assessment standards. Such claims are unsupported, selectively framed, and politically opportunistic.” Basic Education Director-General Mathanzima Mweli stated, reaffirming the Department’s position.

“The DBE will continue to protect the credibility of the National Senior Certificate with vigilance, transparency, and resolve. Public confidence in the education system is best sustained through evidence-based discourse, institutional accountability, and continued systemic strengthening, not conjecture or sensationalism,” Mweli concluded.

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