

HUBUTANI COMMUNICATION ENTERPRISE

**REPORT TO THE BOARD OF
THE SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY (SAQA)**

REGARDING

**THE MODERATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE 2016-2017
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KHA RI GUDE ADULT
LITERACY CAMPAIGN**

October 2017

Summary

The implementation of the Kha ri Gude (KRG) Adult Literacy Campaign by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in 2016-2017 yielded 122,286 learner achievement portfolios (LAPs) to be sampled for moderation. Hubutani Communication Enterprise was contracted by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to organise, oversee and report on the moderation of the marking of the LAPs.

The moderation was carried out in the week of 18-22 September 2017 by a team of 63 moderators drawn from the management and logistics organisations administering KRG and from the DBE itself. The moderation was overseen by four Senior Verifiers under the leadership of Mr Patrick Baloyi (Director: Hubutani). A sample of 9,714 LAPs was examined (8% of the LAPs submitted and approved for moderation).

The moderators and verifiers gave qualitative feedback on the observations at the end of the process and data from the moderation was captured and analysed in the following week. The observations and the data analysis, offered in detail in an appendix, are very much in line with the historical findings of SAQA's moderation and verifications process. Hubutani therefore recommends that SAQA register the results of successful candidates on the National Learner Records Database (NLRD) as it has done over the past decade on the basis of similar findings.

A number of sensitive issues touched on below do not change this recommendation.

Historical context of SAQA's moderation of KRG

In 2007 the then Minister of Education requested that SAQA help in shaping the standing of the KRG campaign. In SAQA's subsequent engagement it was decided to institute a process of moderation leading to the formal recognition of the results against appropriate ABET Unit Standards.

The KRG curriculum, materials and assessment model were stringently evaluated against the unit standards and were found to be more than fit for purpose. A rigorous moderation process was designed and implemented. A sample of LAPs (around 40,000 out of the more than 600,000 annually in the early years of the campaign) was examined to check the quality of the marking and internal moderation. For some years, in addition, verification site visits were made, generally to a sample of 300 sites nationally. During the site visits, learners were tested independently to assess the authenticity of the LAPs, and the reliability of the LAPs as reflections of achieved skills. (The tests aimed to check whether the learners could reproduce the performance in the LAPs when completing an independent test under external supervision.)

From the beginning it was made clear that SAQA would not *evaluate* KRG. To do so would be to intrude on the management responsibility of the DBE. There was no question of looking into the pre-existing learning of the candidates (there was no form of pre-testing in KRG recruitment). There was also no available machinery for checking initial knowledge. In other words, SAQA was not in a position to test learning gains, only current levels. It confined its role to ensuring as far as possible that the skills reflected in the LAP were appropriately assessed, and were those of the person submitting the LAP, regardless of initial level of literacy.

SAQA did, however, from the beginning, report informal observations that some learners might have been fully literate already when registered for KRG. In two of the site visit reports indications from the data seemed to suggest that as many as 2%-3% of the candidates were already literate before the literacy programme. Encounters in the field suggested that some of these had registered for legitimate educational reasons. (Reasons given: Their education had been thin; their literacy had fallen into disuse over the years; they had specific learning needs which they hoped that KRG would satisfy.) SAQA's most recent reports also suggest some concern that this tendency might be getting out of hand. (3% of the targeted 4 million or so KRG learners would amount to 120,000.)

This matter has been noted at length because of audit findings by the DBE of an increasing tendency over the years to fraudulent admissions to KRG. Some Voluntary Educators and their supervisory structures seem to have felt under pressure to maintain their stipends in contexts where the market for adult literacy had been exhausted. SAQA's newly capacitated NLRD has enabled SAQA to confirm the suspected level of literate, and even highly qualified, people who have been registered as KRG learners.

In other words, it was SAQA's responsibility to assess the validity of the results on the KRG LAPs, regardless of the initial literacy of the learner. False retrospective expectations have been circulated that SAQA's moderation should have exposed the malpractice. This argument had a direct impact in the cancellation of this year's verification site visit programme, and has reflected negatively on SAQA's contribution to a remarkable achievement for the 97% of legitimate learners reached by a fine – but not perfect – programme.

Specific background to the 2016-2017 moderation

In the course of 2016 KRG won the top Unesco award for world literacy programmes. Unesco had been impressed, inter alia, by the rare phenomenon of an adult literacy campaign being subjected to significant external quality assurance.

At the same time, though, the official DBE auditing process in 2016 uncovered a range of management shortcomings or possible abuses that brought KRG into disrepute in the press and elsewhere. A lengthy disciplinary process led to the ending of the contract with the consultant manager of KRG. For some time it was

unclear whether KRG would continue. It had passed its initial end date, but had not quite reached the targeted number of learners envisaged in the original investment. A decision was made by the DBE to run a final 6 month programme, with somewhat more than 170,000 learners registered. This yielded around 145,000 LAPs for moderation. However, because of the questions raised about the suspected registration of literate and well-qualified candidates, SAQA and Umalusi were able for the first time to put the ID numbers of all candidates through their national databases. This revealed over 20,000 registrations that could be disqualified because of previous qualifications above the literacy level. Thus, only 122,286 LAPs were available for sampling for moderation.

Internal DBE management personnel had been required to take over the running of KRG. They were not well briefed by the outgoing management, and especially not concerning the relationship with SAQA and its moderation process. The result was a seriously belated decision to go ahead with moderation. This created contracting difficulties for SAQA. When the process was eventually agreed it was too late to run the verification site visits. The original moderation of marking without site visit verifications was reverted to.

Formerly, the DBE had involved its regional KRG Coordinators as moderators under SAQA supervision. Now it turned out that the Coordinators' contracts had ended and there was no budget to re-employ them. At short notice the DBE, the private KRG management agency and the contracted logistics company delegated staff members to conduct the moderation. The moderation was conducted over five days at the St George's conference hotel in Irene.

The 2016-2017 moderation process

The sample

During a visit to the logistics warehouse for KRG, Hubutani guided the selection of a systematic sample in such a way that each Coordinator's region around the country would be selected while keeping the specific choices random and external. This procedure ensured adequate representation in terms of the distribution of KRG over provinces and languages. (Where the numbers in a province were very small, additional packs of LAPs were selected to ensure some coverage.) It was not possible to sample for language as provinces like Gauteng and the Western Cape have unpredictable mixes of language in each site. However, because of language dominance in other provinces, the distribution of languages was likely to be broadly representative.

It must be noted that the sample is not demographically representative. Some provinces were considered by the DBE to have come close to satisfying the original quota for the campaign, while others (notably Gauteng) needed to be privileged in the final round. The figures for province and language in the appended tables are thus far from being in proportion to the general population distribution in South Africa. The actual distribution of the sample can be seen in the appropriate tables in the appendix.

A sample of 13,050 was delivered to the moderation venue. Because of limited time and personnel in the moderation event, only 9,714 individual LAPs were moderated. The coverage for Coordinator's region was maintained, however, by making sure that a proportion (generally half) of all packs in the sample was moderated.

For details of the actual sample see Appendix 2.

Programme of the moderation event

Since nearly all of the moderators had no experience of KRG (other than as administrators or process managers), a full day's training and guidance was undertaken. The moderators were briefed on the whole learning programme, and were taken through the LAPs. Trial moderations were supported by a set of guidelines and detailed processing forms, before moving to the standard data sheets. (All of these instruments were identical to the moderation materials used in previous years.) The four senior verifiers mentored the moderators through the following days.

Given the inexperience of the moderators, allowance was made for teamwork, where uncertainties and difficult cases were shared around a table of moderators, and with a group verifier. (This turned out to be time-consuming, but encouraged the engagement and thoughtfulness of the moderators.)

Towards the end of the moderation, as it became apparent that there would not be time for a total moderation, the moderators were asked to moderate only a proportion of each pack. All packs were thus moderated, ensuring that each coordinator / region was subjected to moderation. (This would have had a minor impact on the representation of languages in the sample. Notably, a relative lack of markers for isiZulu meant a reduction in the number of individual LAPs moderated, though all the packs in the sample were moderated.)

The moderation involved a general overview of each LAP, followed by detailed checks of the marking summary and sign off (internal moderation) and assessment of the quality of marking of specific tasks in the LAP. Each marking sample was classed as excellent, adequate or problematic, and as needing to be marked up or down (or remain the same).

Although the focus was strongly on the moderation of the quality of the marking, moderators were asked to look out for evidence of authenticity, especially relating to handwriting and consistency of performance. A comments column allowed the moderator to note specific features of the LAP that were relevant and were not reflected in the symbolic classification. The most common comments expected related to matters like incomplete processing, specific points of carelessness, cases where the handwriting indicated that different people had completed the LAP. In addition, moderators were asked to comment on the whole pack of LAPs from one site. Problematic features like: all candidates at the

site having copied the same story or letter; all candidates making identical errors; consistently incorrect marking of a particular element.

The moderators and senior verifiers were encouraged to reflect throughout on the process of moderation, and on the general authenticity and meaningfulness of the evidence in the sets of LAPs they were handling. At the closing of the moderation some of these reflections were recorded.

All moderation reports were checked and signed out by senior verifiers.

Findings

Quantitative ratings

The tables in Appendices 3 and 4 support the following observations:

The majority assessment of the overall marking of the whole LAP was good (85%) – either acceptable or excellent. When three individual activities were examined, slightly more excellent marking was detected (average 58%) compared with the whole LAP marking (average 43%). The marking of the Activity 7 was rated highest (average 48%). The inadequate and problematic marking came out at out at 15%. Problematic marking (that is, the marking was exceptionally careless or inaccurate and also that serious irregularities had been neglected) stands at 5%.

There is an increase in the rating of marking as excellent compared with the trends in the first five years of KRG moderation. This could be the result of the tighter DBE controls over the submission process, but might also be due to the inexperience of the moderators.

The moderators believed that for most (about 83%) of the portfolios the marks given were an accurate reflection of the quality of the learning demonstrated and could remain unchanged. Their opinions were somewhat divided on the remaining 17% or so of portfolios where they disagreed with the marks – some should be brought down, some raised. Of these disputed marks there is a tendency to want the marks lowered (10% versus 7%% raised). The moderators did not record this data for 15.3% of the LAPs.

The rating of the level of the learner's performance had a similar pattern to that of previous years, with a slight increase in the estimation that some marks were too high.

Qualitative perceptions

The moderators generally found their involvement interesting and illuminating. Many felt that they had grown in insight regarding moderation and assessment, with some describing their involvement as a fruitful and eye-opening experience. They also felt inspired by the vision and mission of KRG (and new respect for their work as administrators of the programme). They valued following the effort and growing achievement of learners through the LAPs. Comments included mention of:

- Enjoyment of the learners' stories
- Striving to see through the eyes of the marker. (The challenge to keep the focus on the quality of the marking by the voluntary educator, rather than assessing the learner, remains surprisingly demanding.)
- The serious difficulty of judging the authenticity of the handwriting of new writers.
- Sometimes intriguing detective work when anomalies arose.

There were few comments on the moderation sheets. **PATRICK – I FIND I DON'T HAVE YOUR ANALYSIS OF THESE COMMENTS: PLEASE GIVE URGENT ATTENTION.**

At the end of the process the moderators and senior verifiers were very positive indeed about the moderation process and about KRG in general. The few critical observations were about minor details.

Recommendation

Hubutani recommends that SAQA should record the achievements of successful candidates on the NLRD, as has been done in the past.

The process and findings are decidedly similar to those of previous years, when the award of the two ABET unit standards was authorised.

Some closing observations

The moderation of KRG this year does nothing to undermine the view of previous reports that the instructional model, the materials and the implementation planning were all excellent.

It is a great pity that KRG has fallen into disrepute in the last year or so. Hubutani considers some of the reasons for this to have been:

- The ageing and staling of an institution that should have been renewed along the way but wasn't. Appendix 1 lists a range of recommendations for changes and corrections that were submitted by never acted on by KRG management. These only related to the assessment practices; it can be assumed that other improvements in the management were not made.
- The creation of temptation: In the original South American model for KRG voluntary educators were only allowed to run programmes over two years. After that they would be tempted to "invent" more learners in their immediate community, and that the financial interests at play in their adult literacy work would lead to fraudulent practices. Signs that this was happening in South Africa emerged increasingly after a few years, but were only acted on too late.

Although Hubutani thoroughly endorses the broad model of KRG and the excellence of its materials, it re-iterates important observations made in previous reports on the

moderation:

1. The 6 months allocated to KRG learners was too short. Very many learners and educators reported this. The content of the courses in literacy and numeracy is too ambitious for an initial adult learner, especially older, slower learners. In future, either less ambitious content or more time should be recommended.
2. The success and appeal of KRG generated quite intense appeals for more of the same kind of thing higher up the learning ladder. Many learners joined KRG in the hope of gaining knowledge and skills that it didn't offer: For example, English language; higher levels of numeracy or book-keeping; practical everyday lifeskills. These concerns should be borne in mind if community colleges take off.
3. The assessment model was innovative but not adequate. Most adult literacy campaigns have not been subject to serious individual assessment or certification. The result is that their achievements are usually merely symbolic and lack credibility. KRG offers a remarkable advance in this respect. However, portfolios (with many virtues for learning and tracking learning) are incapable of the reliability needed for credible summative assessment and certification. There are many arguments around the assessment and examination of adult literacy learners, but if the learners are to benefit in a useful manner, either on-going, effective quality assurance or evaluation is needed (expensive, difficult to manage) or some form of external, national testing is needed (reliable if professionally done, but capable of being insensitive and alienating).

It would be a tragedy if the model and example of KRG were not kept alive in South Africa, and also if the positive and negative lessons from the experience were not taken seriously.