



Republic of Zambia

MINISTRY OF GENERAL EDUCATION

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF GENERAL
EDUCATION, HON. DAVID MABUMBA, MP, ON
EXAMINATION REFORMS**

Mr. Speaker,

I wish to announce to the nation that the Ministry of General Education, through the Examinations Council of Zambia, has embarked on examination reforms. The reforms are aimed at ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in the way examinations are conducted, arising from the experiences of the 2018 examination malpractices.

The strategic objectives of the reforms includes the following:

- 1) improve the development of Examination papers.
- 2) enhance distribution and storage of exam papers in order to curb examination leakages and other forms of malpractices;
- 3) provide flexibility in the rules and procedures governing the award of examination centre status for grades 7, 9 and 12 exams including grades 9 external and GCE;
- 4) reduce the period and cost of conducting exams; and
- 5) introduce continuous school based assessments for grade 7, 9 and 12 exams; and
- 6) strengthening the institutional and legislative framework of the Examination Council of Zambia.

In order to achieve the above objectives, the following works are in progress:

1.0 IMPROVEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXAMINATION PAPERS.

The ECZ has started technical consultation on the Implementation of the Electronic Item Banking and Test Construction facility that will cause the papers to be stored in form of items (single questions), while the paper will only be assembled when it needs to be printed and in an automated manner. The automation will reduce the human involvement to the subject officer during the finalization of the examination papers, creating an opportunity for responsibility among subject officers and randomness of the questions that make a paper. Further the question paper will have a water mark depicting a centre code and centre name on each page of the question papers.

2.0 DISTRIBUTION AND STORAGE OF EXAM PAPERS

Mr. Speaker,

The Examinations Council of Zambia embarked on the zoning of Examinations Centres to enhance the distribution, storage and security of exams. The proposed reforms here are that exam papers when printed will be delivered directly to the provincial examination distribution centre. The DEDCs and zonal examination distribution centre will collect exam materials from the PEDC while the Lone school exam storage facility will collect from DEDC. As part of the zoning project a total of 1,495 Zonal Centres have been identified in the provinces and districts. Field visits were made by the Ministry and ECZ staff to verify the security enhancement requirements for all strong rooms and a report has been compiled and ready for implementation.

It is therefore expected that individual examination centres will not keep examination materials, except schools that will be classified as Lone school storage facility. Additionally, all strong rooms will be guarded and technologically secured. This reform is work in progress and the public will be informed accordingly at the appropriate time when the works are completed.

3.0 GRADE 9 EXTERNAL EXAMINATION AND AWARDING OF EXAMINATION CENTRE STATUS

Mr. Speaker,

As the nation may be aware that in order to allow those who fail to make a Grade 9 Certificate at their first attempt a chance to sit for the papers they had not passed, combine their results to make a Grade 9 Certificate and proceed to senior secondary education, the Ministry of General Education authorised the Examinations Council of Zambia to introduce the Grade 9 External examination effective 2017. Between 2017 and 2019, the Candidature for the Grade 9 External examination has grown from about 12,498 to 82,684. This growth of in candidature is reflective of the fact that the Grade 9 External examination is a necessary examination to ensure that no one is left behind.

While this examination has proved to be important to our people who wish to improve their results and access the next level of education especially, the following have been the challenges associated with it:

1. There has been public outcry that the examination is not affordable to the majority of our vulnerable children, especially in rural areas because of the high costs of the fees pegged at K75 per subject and K70 entry fee. Additionally, the candidates were paying K500 from 2012 to 2016 to combine the results into one certificate. Effective 2017, the candidates have been paying K650 to combine the results into one certificate;
2. There has been a concern that the schools with Grade 9 External are too few in the districts causing the candidates to walk long distances to access the examinations. Grade 7, Grade 9 Internal, Grade 12 and GCE examinations; and
3. There have been observations to the effect that schools are compulsorily charging the candidates large amounts of money for tuition, centres fees and other fees outside the law.

In order to make this important examination affordable and accessible to all categories of our learners, I would like to inform the nation of the following policy measures taken:

1. Reduction of Examinations Fees

Effective the year 2020 examination onwards, the Grade 9 External examination fees will be the following;

- a. Entry Fee for this Examination shall be reduced from the current Seventy Kwacha (K70) to Five Kwacha (K15) per candidate;
- b. Subject Fee shall be reduced from the current Seventy Five Kwacha (75) to Twenty five kwacha (K25) per subject;
- c. The fee for combining Grade 9 Statements of Results has been reduced from K650 to the K300 that they were paying from 2012;
- d. The public are hereby informed that it is illegal for schools to charge tuition fees as a compulsory fee before the candidates register for the examination. Members of the public must therefore report such school authorities to the relevant authorities for disciplinary action.

This reduction implies that Government through the Ministry of General Education has to increase the funding to the Examinations Council of Zambia to close the financing gap created by the reduction of fees.

2. Awarding of Examination Centre Status

We have observed with concern that learners in schools that do not have examination centre status have had to travel long distances to write their examinations in schools that have examination centre status. Some of the reasons why schools have been denied examination centre status are non-availability of specialised facilities as laboratories, workshops, strong rooms and others. As a Ministry, we wish to indicate that such facilities are required first and foremost, for teaching and learning, before they are used for examinations.

It therefore does not make sense for the Ministry to allow the learners to learn without such facilities and expect them to sit and pass an examination at the end. The Ministry has therefore embarked on a programme, working through the Directorate of the National Science Centre to ensure that all schools, both primary and secondary, have the necessary facilities for learners to learn and later on be examined from their learning environment.

Arising from the above, the Ministry has therefore taken the following policy measures for the 2020 examinations;

- a. All primary schools shall be granted Grade 7 Examination centre status;
- b. All schools with junior secondary school classes shall be granted Junior Secondary School Leaving (Grade 9 Internal) and External Examination centre status;
- c. All schools with Senior Secondary classes shall be granted School Certificate (Grade 12 Internal) and GCE Examination centre status.

Therefore, all learners are expected to write examinations within the schools they are learning from. To implement the above decision, I direct the Provincial Education Officers to submit recognised schools to the Examinations Council of Zambia for the Award of Examination Centre numbers which will be used in 2020 before August, 2019.

4.0 REVISION OF EXAMINATION SYLLABI AND INTRODUCTION OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

Mr. Speaker

The Ministry has observed that the examination period has been too long thereby, denying the teachers and learners adequate teaching and learning time. There has been a public outcry that the third term of the school calendar has over the years been all taken by examinations due to so many papers being examined. For example it has been reported that there are 33 and 56 exam papers being administered at grades 9 and 12 respectively. Additionally, it has also been observed that practical examinations take a full month to be conducted before the theory papers start.

In this regard, the Ministry of General Education and the Examinations Council of Zambia have instituted the following reforms:

4.1 Revision of the Examination Syllabi

The Examinations Council of Zambia is in the process of reforming the examination syllabi for the Grades 7, 9 and 12 examinations. The process includes reforming the grading structure for the Grade 7 examination, reviewing the examination paper structures for all the examinations and re-engineering the interpretation of results to respond to the current trends in assessment. The process also includes possible merger of some of the examination papers, while taking care to ensure that the validity and reliability of the examinations are not diluted. This will result in the reduction of the number of question papers to be used to assess some of the subjects.

It is expected that the end result will be an examination structure that will be cost effective and efficient in evaluating learner competencies to enhance the recognition of our qualification both within the continent and globally. The specimen (sample) papers on the new examination structure are expected to be distributed in January 2020 in order for the learners to write the examinations on the new structure of papers in November, 2020.

4.2 Introduction of School Based Continuous Assessment

Reforms regarding the implementation of SBCA will be phased. Consequently phase 1 comprises practical examinations and projects which effective the 2019 examinations will be set, administered and scored as School Based Assessment (SBA) by the teachers. The Practical Assessments and Projects will therefore form part and parcel of the teaching and learning process. This means that they will cease to be timetabled, leading to offloading of four weeks of learning time to teaching and learning, two weeks from the Grade 9 practical examinations and another two weeks from the Grade 12 practical examinations. To achieve this decision, the Examinations Council of Zambia has developed Guidelines for the Administration of Practical Assessments and Projects which will be distributed to all examination centres by 30th April, 2019. All teachers are required to adhere to the implementation strategy which has been outlined in the guidelines as follows:

- a) Effective 2019, all practical assessment and projects marks shall be submitted to the Examinations Council of Zambia by the Examination Centres as School Based Assessment (SBA) marks through the Online platform by 31st July of each examination year, inclusive of 2019;
- b) Examination Centres shall print the Mark Sheets from the system and submit to the District Education Board Secretaries together with the GCE Examination scripts;
- c) The DEBS shall submit Mark Sheets from all schools in the District to the Provincial Education Officer together with the GCE Examination scripts;
- d) The PEO shall submit to the ECZ all mark sheets together with GCE examinations scripts.

Further phase 2 will involve the introduction of a weighted SBCA for grades 7, 9 and 12. The ECZ will start to develop assessment tools and capacity building of teachers before implementation of phase 2. These assessments will count towards final certification.

5.0 INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE REFORM OF THE EXAMINATION COUNCIL OF ZAMBIA

It has been observed that the weak punishment for those involved in examination malpractices and lack of clarity of mandate between ECZ and Ministry of General has also contributed to creating a weak institutional and legislative framework for the management and administration of exams.

To address the above structural and weaknesses the following are under considerations:

- (i) amend and repeal the Examination Council of Zambia, Cap 137 of Laws of Zambia to make examination malpractices felonious unlike now when they are misdemeanors;
- (ii) amend Circular No. PS 2 (12) of 1987 to streamline responsibilities of the ECZ and Ministry of General Education in the Administration and Management of examination.
- (iii) The works in (i) and (ii) above are ongoing and expected to be completed before the end of year.

Arising from the above, the theory examinations will be conducted from 1st to 27th November, 2019. The Grade 9 examination will run from 1st to 11th November, 2019; the Grade 7 Composite examination will run from 11th to 14th November, 2019 and the Grade 12 examination will run from 11th to 27th November, 2019. This means that the Examinations Council of Zambia has left September free and offloaded four weeks in October as additional time for teaching and learning.

6.0 LOCAL PRINTING OF EXAMS AND CERTIFICATES FOR GRADE 7 AND 9

The Ministry of General Education and Examination Council of Zambia will commence technical consultations on the printing of exams and certificates for grade 7 and 9 locally. The house will be informed of the decision once the consultation process is concluded.

7.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I wish to state that the Ministry of General Education is committed to reforming the examination system to ensure that the qualifications arising from the system continue to be recognised and that the system is cost effective, efficient and liable in assessing the learning outcomes of our curriculum.

It is for this reason that the reforms will continue to be informed by expertise and responsive to the demands of our education environment, through consultative processes.

Thank you