

“How do you expect me to do something about it if you don’t tell me?”

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Sub-theme: The role of assessment in improving teacher quality

High-stakes examinations at the end of formal schooling in South Africa serve two key purposes: to provide a school-leaving certificate i.e. a statement of competence as well as for university entrance i.e. a predictor of future academic success. However the predictive value of the examination is increasingly losing credibility as drop-out rates at university increase. In September 2006, the Minister of Education announced that 50% of SA’s undergraduate students fail to complete their degrees with inadequate academic preparation and financial difficulties cited as the two key reasons for the dropout. (Mail and Guardian, September 22 to 28 2006).

The inadequate academic preparation is an issue that can be addressed through useful feedback to teachers about learners’ performance in high-stakes examinations. The more focused that feedback, the more useful the information is for teaching and learning. In 2006 the IEB implemented a feedback system in all subjects that provides teachers with data on how their own learners performed in individual questions within the examination in comparison to the performance of Board candidates as a whole.

This paper will explore the difficulties experienced in implementation and the impact of the feedback on the assessment design, teaching and learning.

