

2020 SAIIA Schools' Quiz on International Affairs

The 28th Annual SAIIA Western Cape Schools' Quiz on International Affairs continued in the historic period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically designed to draw learners of all backgrounds from among the schools in the Western Cape, and to encourage them to read world news – especially news and analysis about South Africa's international affairs – the quiz has since 1993 had an impact on several generations of high school learners, many of whom go on to study or work in international affairs, according to alumnae of the programme. The quiz was, however, offered to participants in a very new format. It was entirely online!

Due to the social distancing requirements of South Africa's lockdown regulations to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, the quiz was conducted online via Zoom, combined with the subscription platform 'AHASlides'.

The decision to move the quiz online was taken in early June by the SAIIA WC Quiz Committee, once it became clear that the pandemic and associated school closures were likely to continue for the year. The change followed consultations with the teachers at various participating schools, signed up for the regular team format (which has entailed over 200 pupils with their teachers and often parents gathering at a large hall at Bishops Diocesan Boys High in Rondebosch), as well as with the input of the Abe Bailey Trust, the main funders of the quiz. Once the decision was taken, the quiz committee quickly began work to pull things together for the quiz workshop on 17 July and for the quiz itself, on 20 August. The result, we believe, was a successful set of events which, while missing the excitement of youth gathering to compete as school teams, had the advantage of keeping everyone safe from the virus while providing the opportunity to the current cohort of high school learners to participate, and also exposing them to an even wider array of international affairs news coverage than in past years owing to the migration to online news sources.

Background to the New Quiz Format

The first step by Quiz Coordinator Pippa Segall was to identify IT support services. She selected a firm called 'ThinkTeam' to assist in pulling the technical side of things together. Once the quiz technical platform was decided upon, with advice from ThinkTeam – who originally quoted to construct a bespoke platform for the quiz, but instead found a ready-made platform in AHASlides at a much reduced cost to SAIIA – Pippa purchased a subscription to AHASlides for the month of the quiz.

At the same time, she worked to get the word out to the teachers and their pupils that instead of involving school teams, the quiz would be a competition between individual pupils, limited to 8 per

school. They were invited to log on wherever they were using their phones or laptops or other devices, to take part. Data was offered to those who expressed the need, as many did not have wireless internet connections at home and the costs were outside their means. Pippa was able to purchase the data online using quiz funds set aside for transport, and apply that credit to the pupil's SIM account.

With the committee, work began on question setting and reconceptualising the quiz format itself. How could we bring the pupils on board in an exciting way, ready to do the work of reading articles ahead of time and preparing for the quiz, without the team dynamics and regular input from their teachers? With her usual resourcefulness, Pippa created a Whatsapp group of all pupils as well as their teachers signed up from schools across the range of Cape Town's communities, and maintained communications with this group of over 100 in the weeks leading up to the workshop and quiz. She answered questions, resent reading materials, and generally offered encouraging support, all via her cell phone or laptop. The workshop, detailed below, also assisted in keeping the momentum going.

The SAIIA WC volunteer corps of question setters was also brought on board with the new format and the wider array of online materials from which questions could be drawn. In the end, questions were drawn from the Mail & Guardian, IOL (Independent Online), the Daily Maverick, Eyewitness news (EWN.co.za), Al Jazeera and the BBC, as well as from policy briefs and reports taken from the research outputs on the website of SAIIA National (www.saiia.org.za), as selected by the Quiz Committee Chair.

Pre-Quiz Workshop

The pre-quiz workshop was offered, online, to pupils from new or developing schools on 17 July, a few weeks prior to the quiz. Mr Jude Wells and Mr Caleb Kay, previous quiz winners who are now studying international affairs at UCT, moderated the event over the SAIIA Zoom account, noting the answers to the mini-quiz designed as a practise run over the Zoom Chat function. As with previous years, the two presenters introduced the learners to the field of international affairs and offered advice on preparing for the quiz. According to the online Zoom record, 80 pupils took part.

The Quiz Event

Following an introduction over Zoom presented by Cape Talk Radio Host Africa Melane – whose expertise with such a medium of presentation was evident – the quiz was presented as a series of 60 multiple-choice questions on topics ranging from international clashes in Kashmir, to the nomination of Kamala Harris as Joe Biden's running mate, to the AfCFTA, to China's response to the coronavirus pandemic. These questions were based on 35 newspaper articles sent to them in the days before the quiz by email or Whatsapp, and had been carefully curated by the team of question setters and

some experts in international affairs from the SAIIA staff. (See attached questions and highlighted answers.)

The quiz software did present some challenges. To quote Pippa, who reported back on our experience of the day:

The online platforms were a huge learning curve for us and quite stressful, but we did it together with the help of my son, Tomas. Africa Melane came to our SAIIA offices to MC the quiz and he was masterful in keeping things going whilst we sorted out the back-end technical glitches and scoring issues.

The learners were given a chance to read the questions for 10 seconds or so before the three answer choices appeared, and then were to make their choice as quickly as possible. Those who answered correctly within the first few seconds received a higher score for that question than those who took time to answer. This was built in, to discourage cheating whether by looking at notes or searching on Google for the answer.

After every five or ten questions, Africa Melane came back online on Zoom and gave them a break from the intensity of the quiz questions with his usual flair, and then announced the top five participants as of the last round of questions. These scores were provided to the quiz team off-screen on the quiz platform.

In the end, 89 participants persevered on the quiz platform to compete in the quiz. There were clear leaders for the first 5 positions, so no tie-breaker was required. The decision to reward the top ten scoring participants was to acknowledge the hard work that was evident from these quick-responding high scorers. The prizes were awarded as follows: 1st prize: R3000; 2nd prize: R 2500; 3rd prize: R1500; 4th prize: R1000; 5th-10th prize: R500 each. Please see the list of participants, noting the winners' prizes, attached. The images appearing with the names were the self-selected icons representing each participant.

The comments in the chat box of the Zoom meeting were telling. The learners were sometimes asking for clarification, but were more often expressing excitement about getting the correct answer (the participants could see on the AHASlides screen whether they'd answer correctly or not); the record of comments captures the general energy of young people putting their all into the task at hand.

Acknowledgements

The Quiz Committee is once again deeply grateful to the Abe Bailey Trust for its support in the form of R147,000 in 2020, as well as their ready agreement to move the quiz online as the extent of the schools' closures became evident midway through 2020.

Special thanks to Quiz Coordinator Pippa Segall, who remains the 'centre-pivot' in running the quiz, perhaps even moreso with the new format of an online quiz.

Finally, to the learners and their teachers, we again convey our admiration for their hard work and enthusiasm. This event continues to inspire those who pull it together with hope regarding the youth of South Africa.

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