

8 November 2021

Report on the 2021 SAIIA Schools Quiz on International Affairs

The 29th 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.

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

We used a very similar format to the one used for the quiz in 2020, building on the lessons and successes from the previous year. The AHASlides platform was easy to use and most of the learners found it a very adequate system to use for the quiz, according to feedback received. We could purchase the subscription on a monthly basis so this year, we used the platform for the quiz workshop as well. In this way, the learners could familiarise themselves with the platform before the actual quiz. The workshop took place on Friday afternoon 30 July 2021 with a record number of learners and teachers taking part online: 90 participants were taken through the origins of the quiz, the understanding of "International Affairs", the work that SAIIA does, how to distinguish between fake news and real news and how to prepare for the quiz. Jude Wells and Caleb Kaye, both alumni and winners of previous SAIIA school quizzes, facilitated the workshop. The feedback in the chat box, and via email and Whatsapp after the workshop, from learners and teachers was very positive. The data offered and used by the learners made the workshop more accessible, however some learners struggled with loadshedding and device failure during the workshop. This is a good practice run for the quiz as learners realise what works and what doesn't and can arrange better connections and more reliable equipment for the coming quiz. The workshop provides an opportunity for learning for the organisers as well, establishing best practices for the interschool quiz.

Because of the online style of the quiz, it was once again a competition between individual pupils. The number of learners was limited to 8 per school at the outset, but in view of requests from some schools this was increased as we were able to accommodate high numbers of applicants via the

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online platform. The learners 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 budgeted for, and apply that credit to the pupil's SIM account.

With her usual resourcefulness, Pippa created a Whatsapp and email 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 also assisted in keeping the momentum going.

The Quiz Committee recruited several volunteers to set questions based on the articles sent to the learners. 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. Questions were drawn from the Mail & Guardian, IOL (Independent Online), the Daily Maverick, The Economist, 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.

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 80 multiple-choice questions on topical news articles published online in the two weeks preceding the quiz, ranging from news on charges of genocide that Omar Al Bashir is facing at the International Criminal Court to reparations that Germany has agreed to pay to the Herero-Nama population in Namibia to news of the recent Zambian presidential election and Olympic athletes protesting human rights abuses in their country.

These questions were based on 45 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 learners were given a chance to read the questions for 10 seconds or so before the four 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, 92 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 top four learners received an Acer Laptop from the Taipei Liaison Office as well as: 1st prize: R4500; 2nd prize: R 2000; 3rd prize: R1500; 4th prize: R1250; 5th-10th prize: a sliding scale of cash prizes each. Each participating school received a pile of books donated from various book shops and publishers. Please see the list of participants, noting the winners' prizes, attached.

Leading from the excitement of the 2021 quiz, the branch decided to hold its own members quiz in September, to test our members' knowledge of international affairs using similar questions as used in the schools quiz. Our members did well but the learners are still the winners by far!

Next year, we are hoping to return to our usual format of a "live" event at Bishops in August 2022. Our teacher contact at Bishops, Mr Phil Court, has expressed his wish to host the quiz again at his school next year. We will work towards developing a proposal and budget to this effect. Mr Africa Melane, our Master of Ceremonies, is also looking forward to the excitement and electrifying atmosphere of a live quiz, with the possibility of continue with the high tech app using Ahaslides and the rapid scoring mechanism which ensures a fast-paced and exciting event.

Acknowledgements

The Quiz Committee is once again deeply grateful to the Abe Bailey Trust for its support in the form of R72,000 in 2021.

Special thanks to Quiz Coordinator Pippa Segall, who remains the 'centre-pivot' in running the quiz, perhaps even more so 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.

Dr Martha Bridgman
Quiz Committee Chair

Pippa Segall
Quiz Coordinator