

**The Examinations Council of Zambia:  
Transforming the reputation of a governmental  
institution**

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**MANAGEMENT DECISIONS**

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The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

The issues and challenges presented in the written case are complex and still ongoing, which indicates that there is no actual solution to the managerial question yet. However, there have been some reactions and decisions made by the ECZ since 2013, to tackle these challenges. Hence, in this part, we will explain the actions taken by the ECZ so far and describe the effect they have had on the issues and challenges.

## **Reactions**

The ECZ has been trying to raise awareness of the severity of the problem among the students, the teachers and members of the public, in order to reduce the increasing rate of malpractices. However, the numbers of these malpractices keep rising. The ECZ has urged people who forge certificates to stop, since it is a very serious offence. They have stated to the public through the media that they will continuously work to ensure that no forged documents are allowed to pass, which is an ongoing challenge and process. There have not been many public statements communicated externally by the ECZ, although they are communicating this internally in order to address the challenges. Hence, the following management decisions demonstrate that the ECZ is taking the matter seriously.

## **Management Decisions**

The ECZ has taken some actions in order to deal with the challenges they were and still are facing with the main goal to rebuild their reputation.

### **Short-term actions**

#### *Development of the Strategic Plan 2016 to 2020*

The development of the Strategic Plan was the first step in creating a coherent strategy for the whole ECZ and was an enormous milestone in addressing the challenges the ECZ was facing. The plan identifies the critical areas where the Council needs to improve in order to not only become efficient in examinations administration but also to be perceived as such by stakeholders. The plan was developed through a broad-based consultative process amongst members of staff and key stakeholders. The plan is now a living document that directs the work of ECZ but is equally flexible enough to be modified as changes in the environment require shifts in direction for the organisation.

### *Establishment of the Corporate Affairs Office*

The stakeholders and the public play an important role regarding the corporate brand reputation. Until now, the ECZ has been a closed entity since it was founded. However, the recent establishment of the Corporate Affairs Unit under the office of the Chief Executive Officer, coordinates the dissemination of information on issues relating to the Council, in order to keep key stakeholders and the general public well informed. The unit has taken a proactive approach in ensuring that the council's reputation is not only enhanced but also protected and sustained. The general public is now aware of the strategic contributions the ECZ makes to entire education system and this has enhanced brand recognition while making the institution more relevant in the public eye.

### *Changes in the conduct of examinations*

Due to the increasing cases of examination malpractices at Grade 12 level, the Council maintained the Grade 12 examination timetable but swapped the timing for theory and practical examination papers. Contrary to the past examinations, the Grade 12 examination now starts with theory and ends with practical examination papers. This change reduced the time the theory papers were kept in the field before being written, thereby reducing the chance for candidates to benefit from the leakages and other forms of cheating. This did not address the core of the issue, since students found other ways to cheat. Instead, the change resulted in an increase in the number of students that tried to go into the examination room with pre-written materials. However, the enhanced vigilance arising from the awareness creation activities by the ECZ, made the invigilators more alert and thereby increasing the number of the candidates they caught trying to cheat.

### *Partnerships with strategic institutions*

The ECZ have partnered with stakeholders to intensify the monitoring and conduct of examination, in order to achieve maximum levels of credibility and minimise occurrences of malpractices countrywide. It has continued to collaborate with national, district and zonal security committees with the security wings, closely monitoring the entire examination processes. Because of this collaboration, the examination materials are now secure in the strong rooms in schools and there have been reduced cases of 'break-ins'. Candidates don't have access to the question papers before it is written and this makes the examination process more credible and transparent.

### *Improved communication*

The only good way to maintain trustworthiness and build the corporate reputation is by effective communication. The Council established a Toll-Free Line 8383 on all the existing networks in Zambia. This short code (8383) is for both Voice (Toll-free line) and Short Message Service (SMS). Members of the general public are now able to report examination irregularities or make general enquiries on Council services. The establishment of the Website and the setting up of the Facebook page has increased public participation and response to examination processes. For example, the Toll-free has yielded positive results as the public can use this facility to report malpractices. Following the launch of the Toll free, the majority of those who intended to cheat have been caught and eliminated from the entire examination process in the last few years.

### *Security printing of ECZ Certificates*

In the recent past, there have been individuals on the market who have been forging ECZ Certificates for a living. In order to deter this trend, the ECZ has introduced security printing of Certificates with features that cannot be reproduced or imitated. Plans of enhancements in security printing of ECZ Certificates are ongoing with innovations relating to information communication technology. The Certificates conferred to candidates who pass the ECZ examination are now personalised, making it more difficult to forge the certificates. Furthermore, plans are underway by ECZ, to lobby the Ministry of General Education to allow would-be employers to be certifying applicants' qualifications with the ECZ to ensure that only those with genuine results are shortlisted and employed.

### *Other measures taken by the ECZ*

The ECZ has developed assessments schemes for the examinations, which is a comprehensive framework to serve as a guide for general assessment. Further, the ECZ has introduced an SMS Result Release System (SRRS), where the learners can access their results through a mobile phone, instead of waiting for the original results transcripts to be delivered to the schools.

## **Long-term measures and future plans**

Beyond the short-term measures that the ECZ has taken, they have also developed some long-term measures and plans that they will incorporate in the future. These are:

### *Vision for 2030*

A vision for 2030 has been created for the republic of Zambia and that is; “To become a prosperous Middle-income Nation by 2030”. In this vision for the whole country, there are several points regarding the educational system of Zambia. The vision created by the ECZ states that: “The Examinations Council of Zambia will be a leading examining board in providing accurate and timely assessment and certification systems reflective of the competencies of learners and the education system in a prospering economy.” The ECZ will work in line with the Ministry of Education policy guidance, in order to create and modify policies that will guide its operations in several strategic areas. The ECZ states that they see themselves having an important role in achieving the vision 2030 goals by contributing effectively in providing quality school assessments to the learners. For example, the ECZ aims to conduct the assessments and examinations in order to find evidence of the understanding, teaching and learning of the curriculum. Further, the ECZ undertakes assessments on a regular basis in order to measure the extent to which students’ master the literacy and numeracy skills. The assessments are done in order to audit the education system.

### *Decentralisation to ensure good Customer Service*

The ECZ is making plans to decentralise its operations. The idea is for the public to access council services in areas closer to their homes. Currently, all the council services are centralised, only located in the capital city of Lusaka and thereby posing a challenge to customers who stay outside the town. Therefore, this decentralisation will enhance service delivery and ultimately build its corporate reputation.

### *Amendments to the ECZ Act*

The Act of 1983, on which the Council was established, has some gaps. In its current state, the ECZ cannot prosecute cases of examination malpractices and others. It relies on the goodwill and trust of law enforcement agencies, and it has proven to be a challenge to win cases in the courts of law even with overwhelming evidence. The ECZ has already started consultations with the National Assembly of Zambia to amend the Act, in order to make it more punitive, reduce occurrences of examination malpractices and expedite the litigation process.

### *Automation of the examination processes and systems*

The main cause of irregularities is that most of the processes are not automated but manual. There is too much clerical work involved before, during and

after examinations have been conducted. Automation will increase the administration and processing of examination, thereby reducing the opportunity for people to cheat during the entire examination process. It will lead to efficiency and good reputation as the entire process will be transparent. This cannot be implemented in the present and is therefore, a future plan.