



(UCT OHS) Daily Maverick Interview Request - UCT Online High School

- 1. In total, how many learners were enrolled at UCT Online High School at the start of the 2022 academic year, in January?**

5,507 learners have enrolled since our school opened in January of this year.

- 2. How many pupils are currently enrolled as of 29 November 2022?**

We have 4,483 currently enrolled learners.

- 3. What is UCT Online High School's dropout rate? Please give percentages as well as actual Numbers?**

The retention rate for our learners through the 2022 school year has been 81%.

Only 5% of those who have withdrawn stated academic dissatisfaction as their primary reason for leaving the school. The majority of learners who withdrew during 2022 (60% of those who left) did so because they felt either that online schooling was not right for them or because they had found it difficult to adapt to the online learning environment. Within this group, explanations included the difficulty of keeping motivated while working online and the need for close learner supervision and one-to-one guidance. Some learners in this category also left because we have introduced a more structured term system and they had wanted the freedom to set their own pace throughout the school year. A further 14% of those who withdrew were accepted into a different school, and the remaining 21% are distributed among smaller categories such as socio-emotional reasons, home environment and not disclosed.

- 4. How many applications has UCT Online High School received for the 2023 academic year?**

We are experiencing a steady and sustained interest in enrolments for the 2023 school year. It is still too early to predict how many of these will lead to confirmed enrolments.





5. Who are UCT Online High Schools' funders?

Our school is primarily funded by the monthly tuition fees paid by our parents and guardians. In order to ensure that we can provide access to education to middle and low income families we have set our fees well below the fees charged by other private schools, and also below the additional fees charged by many state schools. To make this possible we have sought, and obtained, financial support from philanthropic organisations, private sector bursary funds and socially responsible investors. We do not receive any public sector funding or financial support.

Marking

- 6. An article published in City Press suggests that the school has about 600 staff members – a third of them teachers, a third of them support coaches and another third who mark papers. However, information contained in the Learner Handbook available on UCT Online High School's website provides that: "UCT Online High School does not mark examinations for subjects and programmes. Unless stipulated otherwise, all examinations are marked by the examination body for the subjects and programmes a learner is enrolled for."**

Our Academic Handbook, which is available to all learners, parents and guardians, clearly specifies which examinations are internal and which are external. As with all other schools, external examinations are not set or marked by us, and are overseen by SACAI, our accrediting body.

- 7. It is our understanding that UCT Online High School outsources the marking of assessments and examinations to an external third-party company – the private tutoring company, Teach Me 2. It is claimed that UCT Online High School did not inform guardians that Teach Me 2 were the markers. It is also claimed that after queries from guardians began to surface as early as February about the nature and quality of the marking, the school was not transparent with guardians, and instructed its staff not to inform them that Teach Me 2 were the markers.**

We work with a number of partner organisations in providing the full array of services that are essential for providing quality teaching and learning online and at scale. These include Teach Me 2, which engages and trains our first-level markers for internally-assessed tests and assessments that cannot be automated. Following this initial marking stage, all first-level assessments are returned to us, are reviewed, and a proportion are moderated by our fully-qualified teachers. All end-of-year examinations are graded by qualified teachers. In this, our system of assessment is analogous to the systems used by universities, where first year assignments are graded by graduate teaching assistants and then moderated by Faculty. This is not a third-party outsourced arrangement, as alleged. We conduct all aspects of moderation





ourselves, and this includes investigating all apparent inconsistencies, and technical and administrative errors.

8. Daily Maverick has been reliably informed by staff and guardians that the quality of the marking is appalling. We understand that this is an issue which has consistently been raised to management by both guardians and staff.

Comprehensive quality assurance processes have been put in place as a part of our standard workflow with Teach Me 2. Markers who are assigned scripts use marking guides developed and moderated by our staff. In addition to this, there are moderation processes for learners, guardians and staff to query a grade. We have also released our Term 1 and 3 Cycle tests and Term 2 exams, along with their memos, to afford learners and guardians an opportunity to review their scripts in preparation for end-of-year exams. This is not unusual in other schools, where a teacher, learner or guardian may review a script and identify marking queries that they would like to raise. These internal quality assurance processes are in addition to moderation processes, as regulated by SACAI, our accreditation body. It is the case that a comparatively small number of parents and guardians have raised concerns about the specific grades awarded to their learners, as is their right. In some cases we identified administrative errors, which were corrected. In other cases, the mark allocated proved to be appropriate, either because the learner had not uploaded the examination script to our platform, or because they had not done sufficient work to pass the examination.

9. Why has UCT Online High School continued to outsource its marking to Teach Me 2, even after it received backlash? It can be argued that a large part of teaching is marking children's work to get a sense of where they are and where they struggle. Additionally, we understand that one does not need to be a qualified teacher to tutor at Teach Me 2.

We agree - of course! - that an important part of teaching is marking and giving feedback. This is why it was important for us to provide a scalable solution for our learners. While first-level marking is conducted by Teach Me 2, our teachers have access to all learner submissions and grades through a range of real-time dashboards and via our online campus, allowing interventions where required. Teach Me 2 also offers a tutoring service; we do not use this service and all our tutoring is provided by our own qualified practitioners. Our use of first-level markers provides the opportunity for our teachers to spend their time engaging in high impact learning interventions, such as Ask Me Anything sessions.





This line of questioning speaks to a broader point that we've considered very carefully at UCT Online High School - what is the role of a teacher, and how do we scale good teaching effectively in South Africa?

There is already a chronic shortage of teachers in South Africa, and with an additional 43% of the country's teachers retiring in the next 10 years, the teacher shortage crisis is about to get a lot worse. For the benefit of the entire system, we need to rethink the role of teachers, and related support functions if we are to have any hope of educating the rapidly growing youth population in our country. In the very near future there will be less teachers serving more learners on less budget in our country, and the current system will come under even more strain than it already is.

Historically, the role of a teacher is extremely multifaceted. Teachers are required to be subject matter experts, content developers, lesson facilitators, markers, administrators, counsellors, coaches, social workers and much more. This multifaceted role is extremely effective when well qualified teachers provide education to learners in small classes, but as soon as the class sizes increase, the model struggles to commensurately scale quality education. The primary reason for this is due to the bundled nature of the teacher role.

This historic model is out of reach for the vast majority of South Africans. We don't have enough quality teachers, most especially in rural and impoverished areas, and the model is extremely expensive to run.

UCT Online High School seeks to unbundle the role of the teacher, and recognise that technology can and must play a crucial role in lowering cost, increasing efficiency and enabling scale in our education system - we need to leverage technology to do what it does best, and for technology to take on as much of the teaching and learning role as possible over time.

We also recognise that humans will continue to play a vital role in the mediation of education, but they are also the primary driver of cost, and as mentioned, we simply don't have enough teachers in the country. We need to reserve precious human time to only do what technology doesn't do well if we want to scale the limited pool of teachers serving an increasing youth population.

This is a hard problem to solve, especially in education, but we simply cannot keep doing what we've always done in the education system and hope for better results. The current crisis necessitates leapfrog innovations, and the team at UCT Online High School are working tirelessly to enable this possibility.





If you ask an existing teacher if technology could ever do their job, most will tell you (understandably) - no. Their job is too complex, too varied. There are parts that can never be done by technology, however advanced the AI.

What is misleading about the question is that technology doesn't 'do' jobs. Technology 'does' tasks. If you ask an existing teacher again if there are any tasks in their job that could be potentially automated? Most will say yes. One task at a time - that's how automation increasingly drives efficacy and efficiency in industries. Technology can scale almost infinitely at an extremely low cost per task. Tasks that are capable of being automated, are automated. Tasks that are harder to automate, are typically reconstituted into a series of specialised human jobs. In the case of UCT Online High School, this includes human graded assessments.

Numerous international studies have shown that a major contribution to the endemic crisis in the teaching profession is that teachers are so overwhelmed by the overwhelming number of roles they need to perform that they do not have time to teach. Given that, every year in South Africa, we have a chronic shortage of both school places and teachers. We believe that solutions such as the approach that we have developed are essential to ensure that all learners, whatever their socioeconomic circumstances, have access to the education that they deserve.

10. Why did UCT Online High School decide to outsource the marking to Teach Me 2 specifically, instead of having its own teachers mark the student's work? Daily Maverick has been reliably informed that, following an outcry from parents about the quality of marking, the school sent out communication to guardians claiming that all of the end of year exams would be graded internally by its teachers. However, we understand that Teach Me 2 is still marking the majority of the end of year examinations.

All our grading is moderated by our fully qualified teachers, and always has been. As already explained, our partnership with Teach Me 2 gives us access to fully trained first-level markers. Once an initial mark has been proposed in terms of the specific rubric for the answer, the learner's work is moderated by our teachers as the next level of the process. Any other arrangement would be impracticable. For example, for our end-of-year examinations that are currently nearing completion, our learners will submit 68 265 individual examination scripts for which we will have provided just over one thousand hours of moderation. The approach that we follow in grading learners' work at this scale is based on tried and tested approaches used by leading universities across the world. We are currently in the process of fully internalising functions that have previously been supplied by Teach Me 2, and while we had hoped to fully internalise the function by the end of year exams, the scale of exam marking necessitated a blended approach. On 17 November, we wrote to all parents and guardians, setting out in detail





arrangements for the end-of-year examinations. Specifically, we said: “In the spirit of continual improvement, we have identified a number of key enhancements that we are currently phasing in. These include internalising all marking for 2023. This means that exam marking will be done by our teachers and our dedicated markers (who are all qualified teachers) throughout the exam period. Following this, we will apply our post-moderation processes prior to finalising grades for this set of exams.” By internalising this function in 2023, we will be directly managing all marking processes by a network of part-time, fully-qualified teachers, who will provide the first-level marking.

- 11. It is claimed that it was often the case that Teach Me 2 took much longer than the 48 hour timeframe which it was prescribed to mark learners’ assignments, causing learners to fall behind as they were unable to progress to the next module until the mark was logged by Teach Me 2. We understand that guardians were not informed that this was a reason for a delay, but the impact this had on children falling behind caused considerable anxiety and distress among both learners and guardians.**

96% of Teach Me 2 marking was delivered on time and where it was late, Teach Me 2 typically took less than 24 hours to correct this. More importantly, we identified at the end of the first quarter of the year that some learners were falling behind their recommended pace. We analysed this in depth and found that there were a variety of reasons contributing to this trend. We responded quickly and removed any gating of progress based on marking as we moved into the second quarter, and thereafter we phased in a four-term structure over the course of the second half of this school year, which will be standard for 2023 and beyond. This system of dynamic support has already allowed many of our learners to make up for lost time. While there were some cases in which it took us longer to complete the process of first-level marking and required moderation, this was not the primary reason for learners falling behind.

- 12. Daily Maverick has seen multiple report cards where students have received zero for certain subjects. We understand that this was often because learners submitted the wrong document, but that the school’s strict resubmission policy allows for only one resubmission per term for all subjects. When children miss submissions for reasons beyond their control such as loadshedding, WiFi issues or technical glitches, they are then automatically given zero, and parents have claimed that the process of querying or rectifying this issue is complicated and generally never resolved.**





Your understanding is correct; in the large majority of cases in which a learner received a zero for first-level marking, this was because they didn't submit their School Based Assessment or failed to upload their assignment or examination script successfully to our online platform. In these cases, we did not receive a submission for the learner that could be marked. If there was only one School Based Assessment (SBA) in a term, and it was not submitted, the mark awarded would have been a zero. Even if other informal assessments were submitted, the SBA marks are the only marks that count towards their report results. If there was only one SBA in a term, and it was not submitted or submitted incorrectly, a zero would have been reflected in the report. We have provided appropriate opportunities for learners and guardians to rectify this, including a two week submission window here at the end of the year to resubmit, and some 50% of our learners have successfully used these opportunities to upload all their scripts to enable first-level marking and subsequent moderation. It is not true that these issues are "generally never resolved". Many cases have been successfully resolved and, where there are extenuating circumstances, learners, parents and guardians will have the opportunity of appealing the final outcomes for their year once all grades have been fully moderated and assembled in end-of-year reports.

13. What is UCT Online High School's pass rate?

This is our first year of operation, and our learners are still writing their end of year examinations. Our pass rates, and the proportion of learners promoted, granted progression or required to repeat a grade will be known once the examinations and examination moderation is completed. It is also not common practice to publish pass rates, outside of the matric results. With our first group of Grade 12s starting in 2023, we would then look to publishing any result, per the industry standard.

Guardian experiences

14. Guardians have claimed the vision UCT Online High School sold them in the beginning of the year was that the learner was at the centre, and that there would be regular feedback provided on learner progress. Guardians have told Daily Maverick that they feel this vision has not been carried out this year. They have claimed that there was consistently no support, constructive feedback or transparency from the school. Guardians have cited a lack of communication from the support coaches and the school regarding learner progress, which led them to assume that everything was fine until they received their child's report cards. Guardians also expressed disappointment that many lessons, as well as parent meetings, were pre-recorded as the school created the impression that there would be live virtual teaching.





These opinions are the views of a small number of parents and guardians who have engaged with us on their dedicated Facebook page, or who have lodged complaints through our formal complaints process. The large majority of parents and guardians are happy with the progress of their learners and are fully committed to their participation in the work and mission of our school.

All our learners receive comprehensive support and communication from our team. By way of example, our Support Coaches and teachers alone have engaged with 329,546 personal Whatsapp and emails with guardians and learners over the last 11 months.

Our Guardian Portal offers every parent and guardian a wealth of easily available information - far more than is provided by conventional schools. You will find a guide to using this facility by following this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bGD7_mMP8&t=2s.

In addition, we have sent out over 500 school-wide informative email updates to learners, parents and guardians over this last year, covering every aspect of the work of our school and the opportunities we offer. However, we have found that parent and guardians' open rate for emails has often been as low as 20%, and that many of the queries that we receive relate to information that we have already released.

Because of this, we will be making further enhancements to our guardian portal, and introducing a new Guardian Mobile App early in the new school year, to enhance the ability of parents and guardians to access relevant information from the convenience of their phone.

We have never given the impression that we would offer live classroom teaching, and we will not be doing so; live classroom teaching would seriously disadvantage our many learners from lower income families who do not have access to unlimited bandwidth, and in our opinion, is an ineffective use of teacher time considering the systemic problems identified above. However, we do offer numerous forms of live engagement, including Ask Me Anything sessions with teachers, and the opportunity for any learner to take part in live sessions with leading UCT academics.

15. Additionally, guardians have told Daily Maverick that much of what they felt the school promised them in the beginning of the year, in terms of a vibrant and social community for their children through a range of extracurricular activities, was not delivered on.

This is not true. We have offered all our learners a choice of over 50 virtual clubs and societies, including our school choir. Parents are enabled to organise in-person meetups through the





conveniently integrated meetup app on our guardian portal. We host weekly assemblies. Our Student Wellbeing Team offers “Movement Thursdays”, and there is a daily live check-in for learners with their Support Coaches every morning. We have recently launched the Grade 11 Leadership Squad. We provide a full suite of careers services.

Here is a recent observation by one of our Support Coaches that is testimony to the quality of the engaged experience that we offer to all our learners:

“I've seen learners who had never touched a laptop before, figure it out and thrive online. I've seen learners who have nothing, show up and give absolutely everything. I've met with learners each morning who smile, make me laugh and appreciate the opportunity to be in an Online High School. I've witnessed learners who would previously be in boarding school, away from their families, work so hard to make sure they do well, as online school means they can travel with their parents for work and another learner whose family are caravanning along the coast of South Africa, surfing all the best beaches with their kids, all because they can take their school with them and still focus on their studies.”

16. Guardians have cited numerous technical issues with the online portal and the app linked to the school's online platform. These include technical errors with submissions and the guardian's dashboard not being synchronous with the learner's dashboard. They have claimed that when they raised their concerns with the school management, the school diverted the blame, saying guardians needed to contact the app makers.

There were some initial technical issues at the beginning of the year involving the specialised third-party application that we use for online invigilation (which is also used by many other reputable academic institutions). Many of these have now been resolved although it is inevitable that some learners will find the use of new and unfamiliar digital applications challenging. We continually monitor our provision of IT services against generally used benchmarks and we have achieved an average monthly uptime of greater than 99.76% throughout this school year, with uptime of 100% for 8 of the 11 months of the year.

17. Teachers have claimed that they have been given considerably less agency as the year progressed. For example, it is claimed that teachers used to be able to see when a learner failed on the platform and then they could reach out to them. That was then removed. Teachers say they are unable to know when a learner fails unless they reach out to the teacher. Teachers have also claimed that the school management had begun diverting emails for teachers to support coaches.





This is not true. When we launched our school at the beginning of this year we offered live sessions for learners who failed our Mastery Checks, which are designed to prepare learners for the formal School Based Assessments that would follow. However, we found that this remediation model was not adequately addressing learner needs and that there was a low learner uptake of this facility. Consequently, we are now transitioning to data-driven interventions, enabling us to intervene when the evidence shows that individual learners require additional support. Teachers are still able to support learners who require further academic support and have always been able to see their learners' performance on the online campus, and still can. Support Coaches are responsible for offering complementary pastoral care to our learners, and teachers refer learners to Support Coaches where this is warranted. This has always been our approach, with the priority of adequately supporting our learners.

18. Guardians have told Daily Maverick that UCT Online High School has deleted negative comments from parents who have highlighted issues at the school on its Facebook page. Additionally, some parents have claimed that they have been blocked from having access to the public UCT Online High School page. Daily Maverick has been reliably informed by staff at UCT Online High School that the social media team was instructed to delete negative comments.

This is also untrue. Our social media team only removes public comments that violate our Social Media Policy, which is agreed to by every guardian and learner on enrolment, as outlined in our Learner Code of Conduct and Guardian Code of Conduct. We take genuine negative comments very seriously, and these are thoughtfully responded to publicly, for the benefit of the guardian or learner, as well as for prospective guardians, and they remain on our Facebook page. Additionally, guardians and learners who post to Facebook are always contacted offline by our team to assist in resolving their specific issue. With regards to our closed Facebook group, guardians are only removed as members when their child is no longer enrolled in UCT Online High School.

19. Why has UCT Online High School decided to reduce its number of teachers next year?

Communication from UCT Online High School which was sent to guardians and learners in October 2022, states that the school would be restructuring the roles and responsibilities of some of its team members in 2023. It does not stipulate that the school has slashed its teaching staff of 128 teacher positions to 71 learning facilitator positions which we understand from internal communication that Daily Maverick has seen. The documents that Daily Maverick has seen clearly request staff to maintain confidentiality and to not raise the restructure with learners or guardians. If asked directly about the





proposed restructuring, they are instructed to use a canned response. We understand that at UCT Online High School many teachers have class sizes of over 400 learners. Effectively reducing the number of teachers – or learning facilitators – which UCT Online High School plans to do from next year, we understand would create an environment where there would be roughly one learning facilitator per 1,600 learners.

It is common practice in any restructuring process to require confidentiality from affected individuals so that the process can be carried out fairly. Nevertheless, we have communicated the full range of changes that we intend to make to our guardians and learners.

Based on our comprehensive data set, and related insights, from our first year of operation, we are introducing a range of enhancements to our learning and teaching model that will be fully implemented for the start of the new school year in January. This has necessitated a realignment of staffing roles. In addition we have scaled back our targets for enrollment in 2023 because of the deteriorating economic environment, already evidenced by the number of learners who have had to withdraw because of tuition-fee debt; as a private school we do not receive any state subsidies and we are dependent on fee revenues to continue operations. As a consequence of these factors we are completing a restructuring process, following the requirements of labour legislation, which will result in some of our current staff leaving us. In addition, earlier this year we built up our staff capacity to welcome an additional 2500 learners in June (based on the 13,000 applications for our January 2022 cohort) but only welcomed 400 in June. This has meant that we've been over capacitated for the majority of 2022, which is being corrected through our restructuring exercise.

Comparisons with learner/teacher ratios in conventional schools are inappropriate and misleading because we do not divide each grade cohort into conventional classes, and as explained above in this document, the conventional role of a teacher is unbundled into a series of specialist roles in our model. Some of these roles are performed by technology and pre-created content, and others are supported by a suite of human roles including learning facilitators, support coaches, technical support officers, learning designers, project managers, data analysts, administrators and so on.

Our specialist learning facilitators use each learner's unique digital footprint, along with learning analytics and real-time data reports, to provide targeted academic support.

20. Why has UCT Online High School not informed guardians and learners explicitly about these changes, in order for them to make informed decisions?





We understand that this restructuring has been vehemently opposed by a number of teachers who argue that it would mean even less teacher support for students, and would not be taking their needs and interests into consideration. They have claimed that the product offered by UCT Online High School this year has negatively affected students, and these incoming changes are not going to be beneficial.

We have fully briefed parents, guardians and learners in a series of emails. All affected staff have been fully consulted, as is required in law, and we have taken all points of view seriously. Of course, some of our affected staff disagree with our approach, many of whom's alternative suggestions are to provide a more traditional education experience, which would require us to significantly increase our price point in order to offer the model of education sustainably. Considering our mission, these are not viable suggestions.

Others have accepted the necessity for these changes, have made valuable suggestions which we have adopted, and have applied successfully for other roles in our organisation. The changes we are making are directly premised on the data, and related insights, we have generated in our first year of operation. We are confident that the changes that we are making will both fully meet the needs of all our current learners and will, in many respects, offer them an enhanced experience next year.

(Teach Me 2) Daily Maverick Interview Request - Teach Me 2

First Media inquiry: Daily Maverick

We understand from the information available on Teach Me 2's website, that to become a tutor at high school level, the only qualification required for the job is a matric certificate with at least 80% in the school subjects you seek to tutor. But we can't see any information on your website about the requirements/qualifications needed to mark school-level assessments. Please can you provide clarity on this.

1. Do you need to be a qualified teacher to be a marker at Teach Me 2?



1.1 What are the requirements needed to be a marker at Teach Me 2?

Our Markers are divided into two categories:

Type A Markers are teachers registered with the South African Council for Educators (SACE) or teachers in training who meet the requirements to register with the SACE, which means having completed a B.Ed or PGCE and showing appropriate teaching experience.

Type B Markers are people who have achieved a minimum of 80% in matric for the particular subject that they wish to mark.

Only Type A Markers are allowed to mark mid and end of year exams.

To become a Type A marker at Teach Me 2, you will need to either be qualified as a teacher and registered with the SACE.

We vet all those applicants and constantly refine this pool of markers based on the requirements of the UCT Online High School to ensure that only the best available markers are allocated to mark at the UCT Online High School.

We understand that Teach Me 2 markers are currently marking the majority of UCT Online High School's end-of-year exam papers. UCT Online High School has claimed that the Teach Me 2 markers that are grading these papers are all qualified teachers.

2. Please can you comment on whether these markers are qualified teachers or not?

Only Type A Markers are assigned to mark exams.

2.1 Are these markers subject specialists in the subjects they are marking?

Type A Markers are allocated marking in their specialist subject/s the vast majority of the time.

The exception would be in times of extreme surge where we allocate spill-over marking to a pool of reliable Type A Markers who mark outside of their specialist subject/s.

All markers mark subject to the memos provided by the UCT Online High School.

3. Please can you provide clarity on Teach Me 2's relationship/partnership with UCT Online High School?

We are a contracted 3rd party service provider until the end of the year (2022) at which point the UCT Online High School will be taking over the management of marking. We recruit and place markers for the UCT Online High-School under their instruction and they curate and moderate the markers and also carry out extensive post moderation of the results.

4. You said that only Type A Markers are assigned to mark exams. For the marking of the rest of UCT Online High School's tasks throughout the year, such as its School Based Assessments (SBAs) and other tests, was this done by Type A or Type B makers?

Both Type A Markers and Type B Markers mark the School Based Assessments and other tests.

5. You said that only Type A Markers are assigned to mark exams. For the marking of the rest of UCT Online High School's tasks throughout the year, such as its School Based Assessments (SBAs) and other tests, was this done by Type A or Type B makers? What is the case for UCT Online High School's end-of-year exams? Are all the Type A Markers marking the subjects that they specialise in? If not, how many exam papers are not being graded by subject specialists?

All UCT Online High School's end of year exams are heavily moderated and at the moment the moderation has a close to 80% error free rate. For those that have errors, minor corrections and comments are sent back to the Type A Markers for remarking which is common in any moderation scenario. It is under those conditions that the Type A Markers are allocated work predominantly in their specialist subjects and occasionally outside of that. As an example, an English teacher may be qualified in English and History, grading a History paper, even though their preferred subject specialisation is English. The percentage of end of year exams being marked by subject specialists is 100%.

Quality of grading is of the utmost importance to the UCT Online High School and to us and we are doing everything in our collective capacities to manage the quality for the benefit of the learners.

Second Media inquiry: Daily Maverick

Guardians and teachers at UCT Online High school who have spoken to Daily Maverick have claimed that the quality of marking at the school is "appalling". Their allegations are supported by multiple complaints Daily Maverick has seen from guardians who have posted on a private UCT Online High School Guardian Facebook group, and the public review platform, Hello Peter. The teachers who spoke to us claimed that when they were asked to moderate a proportion of the assessments first graded by Teach Me 2, in many cases there was as much as a 30% discrepancy between the mark awarded by Teach Me 2 and the mark subsequently awarded by the teacher.

1. What is Teach Me 2's response to the above allegations?

We have over 2000 markers that work directly with UCT OHS. Teach Me 2 and UCT OHS have collaborated throughout the year to refine that pool of markers and remove markers who do not meet the standard (and prioritise those who are excellent).

As the UCT OHS teachers you've spoken to have evidenced: moderation is crucial to identify problematic markers. Obviously, moderation will not catch every problem. This is a challenging problem of marking en masse, as any teacher who marks Matric final exams will attest to, and not a problem particular to UCT OHS. Over and above standard moderation procedures, UCT OHS has additional moderation protocols that they have put in place, which at times results in Markers being removed from the system. I'm sure they would gladly share their full moderation process with you.

To date, we've marked over 500,000 submissions from almost 5000 learners. Within that volume there was undoubtedly a small fraction of submissions that would have eluded moderation and, unfortunately, not been up to standard. We investigate every query and are working closely with UCT OHS to continuously refine the pool of markers and the marking process to ensure a fair application of assessment practices for learners.



(UCT) Daily Maverick Interview Request - UCT

1. What is the University's response to these allegations?

12 December 2022

Response to Daily Maverick's query on UCT Online High School

The University of Cape Town (UCT) is aware of a few issues raised around the UCT Online High School (OHS). The university is also aware that the UCT OHS team is committed to working tirelessly to address any issues as and when they arise. The issues are addressed as soon as they are raised directly with UCT OHS or picked up by the school's team through any other platforms. Any parent or learner who experiences any issues is urged to contact their dedicated support coach to ensure they are speedily resolved.

As much as there have been a few issues with UCT OHS, the university is aware that over 90% of the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Both the university and UCT OHS are inundated regularly with positive feedback from learners, parents and staff who have had a great experience. (We are happy to provide a sample of this feedback to Daily Maverick, and/or link the publication up with some of the people who have provided this feedback).

For an entity that has been in existence for just over a year, this positive feedback is confirmation that UCT OHS is on the right track, while the challenges can only serve to get the school to improve and become even better. There is no doubt that any newly set up entity will never be perfect in all ways in the first year of operation. But there's also no doubt the UCT OHS team is committed to resolving any issues, improving continually and offering the best online learning experience, not only to the current 90% plus with positive feedback but to all.

ENDS

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Elijah Moholola

Spokesperson
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town

