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SA Physics Olympiad goes on-line

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South Africa, SA, like every other country around the world, has a huge, latent talent, much of it in the rural areas, that needs to be identified, nurtured and monitored. Olympiads and Competitions have the capacity to do this, but to give access to many learners to enter these Olympiads and Competitions means that Multiple Choice Questions, MCQ, need to be used. The SA Agency for Science and Technology Advancement, SAASTA, runs a very successful SA National Youth Science Olympiad, SANYSO. This Olympiad tests learner's knowledge of both Physics and Chemistry as SA teaches Physical Science. It reaches up to 30 000 learners each year from both SA and some of the SADC Countries, and notably, many from rural areas.

During the International Year of Physics, in 2005, the SA Institute of Physics, SAIP, launched the SA Physics Olympiad, SAPHO, by selecting learners from the SANYSO and other Olympiads and Competitions in SA. The aim here was to identify learners with an above average ability in Physics. It has worked most successfully as a 50 MCQ Olympiad, using the usual pencil-and-paper grid approach. After a most successful trial run last year, for a limited group of learners, with an on-line Olympiad, SAPHO 2018 will be an on-line Olympiad.

In this presentation I will look at different forms of MCQ assessments made possible by taking the digital route and how the on-line SAPHO will give a superior assessment of a learner's Physics ability. There are of course still challenges, the principal one lies in setting the paper; not in finding the questions, but in providing the detractors to assist in the final assessment. It becomes a time-consuming exercise but I am confident that the time is well invested and the rewards will hopefully show this.

Apply to be considered for a student award (Yes / No)?

No

Level for award (Hons, MSc, PhD, N/A)?

No

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