

QUESTIONNAIRE

Professionalising the Early Childhood Development Educator (birth to 4) Workforce through a policy-driven initiative.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Kindly complete the questionnaire by answering the questions as fully as possible. The completed questionnaire can be returned to Adendorff.z@dhet.gov.za

Participant:

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A. Implementation of the Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development Educators.

The ¹MRQECDE policy, aimed at producing a graduate birth to 4 years educator workforce, has far reaching consequences for the ECD sector. In light of this, please provide your considered responses to the questions below:

1. What role does your organisation/institution/department play in relation to early childhood development?

Answer deleted for protection of privacy.

¹ Minimum Requirements for Programmes leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development Educators

2. In your opinion, does the MRQECDE policy have any implication for your work? Why or why not?

This policy has been a game changer in ECE. It allowed for programmes to be offered in HEIs. This means that it has lifted the field from only being in the NGOs field to an expansion of the training of ECE educators. Additionally, the policy allowed for a rethink of many issues. For example, in its appendix it lists the basic competences. This allowed for thinking about knowledge and practice standards to unite the HEIs in the Diploma and the Degree so that students can easily have portability of credits from one institution to the next. But it is also important to ensure a minimum quality standard across all HEIs. The policy became a key drive to think about the type of ECE educator we want for South Africa. The principles and other sections of the policy is clear that we need intentional educators that are thinking through the many situational realities they would encounter. Another plus with the policy is that it shows a clear career path from NGO certificate levels right up to the doctorate level. This has allowed us to think about RPL and the critical interventions with NGOs so that their programmes are in sync with the demands that will be made for practitioners as they make their way into the Diploma and the Degree. Through the PIECCE project, I enjoy the collaboration that has emerged amongst the HEIs, the NGOs and the TVETs and the policy certainly values this nature of working. I had the opportunity of visiting multiple sites which gave me ideas on how to shape the TP component of the qualifications amongst other things.

3. Do you think that your organisation/institution/department may have a role to play in contributing to the successful implementation of the MRQECDE policy either at present, or in the future? If so, what, in your opinion, would this entail?

Answer deleted for protection of privacy.

4. Do you see the implementation of the MRQECDE policy as a necessary initiative for the ECD sector? Why, or why not?

Definitely. I view the policy as expanding the landscape of training in the field. It is leading to a number of conversations to enhance the status of the policy e.g.

- Collaboration for a harmonised ECD sector for workforce development and in this case the educator workforce.
- Rethinking the conceptualisation of ECD educators and the curriculum model.
- Examining RPL procedures to meet the demands of new qualification.
- A robust knowledge mix which pays attention to knowledge, skills, professional dispositions makes us rethink the current focus in the field – mainly the what and how. The why is brought in more strongly.
- Practitioners now have a clear career path.
Everyone has to up their game as we now have systemic response to ECD for the educator workforce.
- The policy is certainly going to create new conversations as the DBE becomes the lead for ECE. We don't want a push down from schooling but a push up from birth onwards.

5. What do you see as the constraining factors that may hinder or prevent the successful implementation of this policy?

- The long drawn process for accreditation.
- Teacher educator shortage for birth to four and training programmes to build their competence.
- Developing systems to check that students do not have criminal records (Children's act requirements)
- Acceptance that some practitioners will remain at certificate level.
- Reluctance of some NGOs to work together with universities.
- The new normality brought about by Covid 19 and how it affects tuitions, teaching practice etc.
- Thought leaders for ECD with special reference to workforce development
Building a research agenda which includes educator supply and demand provincially.
- No employment and thus not making the qualifications attractive.
- Financial constraints – hence the need for Fundza to be extended downwards to ECE

- ECD still needs to feature in the Educator subsector planning of DBE and DHET.

6. What do you see as the enabling factors which could contribute to the successful implementation of this policy?

- A new opportunity for ECD practitioners to stay in the field and hence contribute to a stable workforce in the field.
- The status raising of the field.
- The new conversations on harmonising the systems for the educator workforce and then outwardly to other systems dealing with workforce development for ECE
- A new research agenda and mobilisation for topics to be researched for postgraduate students.
- Dedicated funding for WIL as it will have different combinations than Foundation Phase. Fully supported mentorship and coaching.

7. Are there any aspects of the policy which you would recommend to be changed?

- A better organisation of the knowledge and practice standards.
- More flexibility given that ECD is in the informal sector currently.
- See for example articulation from the FETC into the Diploma – present different scenarios to help those that are competent to come into the diploma
- More on technologically oriented ECE teacher training given the new normalities.
– can be approached in the competence section more than what currently appears there.

B. Views on the professionalisation of the Early Childhood Development Educator (birth to 4) workforce.

1. What in your view does the term “the professionalisation of the ECD educator (birth to 4) workforce” mean?

In the very basic way professionalisation for me refers to the conditions that allows a workforce to develop into a grouping that is recognised for the work it does. Currently this recognition is weak and riddled with problems that requires a major systems change to

allow for ECD practitioners to become professionals in education, health, social work and community development. There needs to be a core that unites all ECD workers and specialisations according to the profession. This is clearly not happening to professionalise the field.

Professionalism on the other hand has to do with the knowledge, the skills and the dispositions that makes the professional. There are unit standards and the new policy that gives hint to this but the problem is about how this is interpreted in the implementation. I have seen transmission modes of pedagogy that defies the logic of a student engagement model for quality ECE. The starting point is the deficit student. This has to give way to more affirming conceptualisations that allows for agency, critical thinking and reflection if we are going to carve a niche as professionals for ECD.

2. Do you think that qualifications in higher education should be a requirement for becoming an ECD educator for babies, toddlers and young children from birth to 4 year old? Why, or why not?

Currently this cannot be the case because of where we are. We are a certificate led “profession”. Incrementally, we should be Diploma-led and then a Degree-led profession. The deficit model of ECDs cannot to heavy theoretical work amongst other things are gone. Some will and we must put our energies on the new generation but acknowledge the needs of the older generation as they phase out.

3. Do you think that the higher education qualifications provided for in the MRQECDE policy should be a requirement for being a principal/centre manager of an ECD centre? Why, or why not?

Definitely, being a leader and manager in an ECD centre is a very specialised role. I have seen many just traversing the role of practitioner and manager but not really knowing what needs to be done. Hence in our Short Course on Early Learning Support this is one of the core modules. We need change agents who will be able to manage quality and lead for change. I am exploring a PGDip in ECD Leadership. The work will begin with a rapid analysis followed by responsive curriculum development for leading ECD in SA and beyond.

4. Do you think that the higher education qualifications provided for in the MRQECDE policy should be a requirement for being an ²ECD supervisor? Why, or why not?

Yes, the supervisor must be at a higher qualification than those that they supervise. The 2014 audit revealed this to be a problem and we must address this.

5. How do you think the MRQECDE policy will affect ECD practitioners currently involved in the care and education of babies, toddlers and young children from birth to 4 yrs old?

Please explain.

- It would certainly give them the knowledge, skills and dispositions they need to care for and educate children from birth to four.
- I have seen many use a push down approach from schooling and doing school readiness in a formal way. Toddlers are given writing implements and expected to perform tasks like colour worksheets inside the line.
- A play based approach needs to be made mainstream and this can be appreciated if practitioners understand child development and early learning.
- If their curriculum is well designed in their studies then they will know development, linguistic and culturally appropriate pedagogies and how to effect with them with different age groups.
- We can expect to see much more thoughtful responses to babies and toddlers. I have seen a lot of custodial care – cloth and feed and watch safety. Stimulation of the mind is on the periphery.

6. Do you agree that the ECD educator workforce should be professionalised and if so, what are your recommendations for enabling and/or promoting the MRQECDE policy implementation, and for professionalising the ECCE workforce?

Most certainly. This will put ECD on the brink of a new era. It will see the implementation of children's rights in new ways and must be fully supported. The following is important:

- Pay attention to the system that is developing the ECD workforce.

² "ECD supervisor" refers to provincial supervisors employed by the DSD or DBE or supervisors/mentors employed by NGOs

- Ensure that ECD is included in the educator sub-sector plan and that it is informed by a situational analysis and has dedicated funding for implementation.
- Everything the FP educators enjoy should be brought down to the ECD Educator workforce.
- Professional bodies need to fully recognise the ECD educator workforce.
- Fundza L should be extended to ECD students.
- Teacher educators should be recruited through DHET support for capacity building and all ECD teacher educators must go for training on birth to four as many are not from this field.
- An advocacy campaign should be launched to allow for recruitment of new Generation ECD educators. Begin with high schools
- Allocate enough resources for WIL in partnership with ECD NGOs as they have expertise, We need mentors, coaches, supervisors and training programmes for them.

7. What do you see as the constraining factors in professionalising the ECD educator workforce in South Africa?

- Too much of disharmony and turf guarding
- Too much of push down from educator workforce for schooling – we need to recognise the uniqueness of the field too and cater for this.
- Lack of status – unattractive to students.
- Narrow and limiting practices that sideline the pedagogy of playful learning.

8. Please add any comments or other insights related to the topic of professionalising the ECD educator workforce or the professionalisation agenda of the policy on MRQECDE, should you wish to do so.

I am very passionate about the ECD workforce development and I feel that the policy has provide a new leverage point for moving the field forward. I do worry about the entrenched view that NGOs know better about ECD because of historical location. This era is acknowledge as valuable and has helped with the advocacy and this is very important. The time now is to advance the agenda of the ECD workforce through harmonising the field and moving towards systems building. The Government needs to be the main player

in the ECD workforce development with its accountabilities. The NGOs are now critical partners who have to work collaboratively with TVETS and HEIs. Where this is understood, synergies are developed and work is going ahead. For example, 3 NGOs in KZN are working with our department to map out a pre university programme to help practitioners to ease into the Diploma in ECCE. This augurs well for seamless transitions and the findings of this pilot project can be scaled up. In parting, the best educators must be deployed in the early years if we are going to shape a new citizenry for SA as a democracy and whatever comes in the post Covid 19 era.