

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@dheth.gov.za

Participant:

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1. 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 omitted for protection of privacy

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

Answer omitted for protection of privacy

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 omitted 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?

To be honest, I am not yet sure. The main objective in the ECD sector is improving the learning outcomes of children. This would require practitioners who teach effectively. Traditionally we have assumed that a formal qualification will translate into teachers updating their knowledge and transferring this knowledge into more effective instructional practices. Both local and international research seems to suggest that millions are spent yearly on teacher training and qualifications, but that this does not translate into improved learning outcomes. Other training techniques, such as on-site coaching, has proven to be somewhat more effective in changing teaching practices. I wonder, therefore, whether a system which incorporates on-site coaching in its programme, may be more effective in improving teaching quality.

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

I am not sure whether this policy is accompanied by a costed implementation plan. If not, I would guess that funding may be a big barrier to practitioners accessing opportunities to upgrade their qualifications.

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

- Enabling access to the practitioners who are in need of a qualification upgrade through scholarships
- Ensuring that the upgrade of a qualification actually translate into more effective teaching practices that will lead to improved learning outcomes.

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

Zelda, I am unfortunately not very familiar with the policy. Any answer I provide here would be an uninformed one.

2. 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?

I have understood it to mean that ECD practitioners should have formal qualifications, clearly defined conditions of service, more standardised remuneration and some form of a career path.

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?

No, I do not think so, or at least not at this stage in ECD. Teaching in the early years (birth to 4) is a skill and practitioners first needs to be trained on the ‘how to’, rather than the ‘why’. I am concerned that the push to have tertiary qualifications will cost our country massive amounts of money, and that this will not necessarily translate into practitioners who will know *how to* teach well. The theory is not as important at this stage as the implementation of good teaching practices. Once teachers have mastered the skill, we can introduce the theory of and higher order understanding of child development. Like learning any skill, you learn through practice, modelling, seeing best practice and receiving feedback. The theory only becomes important once you know what to do, and how to do it.

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?

This will depend on the current supply of practitioners with this level of qualification. At this point, we do not have the data to say anything concrete about this, but my sense is that we do not have enough practitioners who have this level of qualification to make it a requirement. Also, until the funding to ECD programmes is increased, there will be no financial benefit to the practitioners/ principal for attaining this qualification. Again, I am not very familiar with the training programmes, but my understanding is that a principal needs many additional skills that a practitioner does not require such as basic financial management, basic HR management, nutrition planning and management etc. Are these skills covered in the higher education qualifications?

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?

In the long-run I think this may be necessary. However, if we opt for a coaching model, the skills of teaching well and other soft-skills such as encouragement, building a trust relationship, motivating practitioners etc may be more important.

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.

I am not sure, sorry. My sense is that there is a big push from government to ensure that all practitioners are at least at an NQF level 4.

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?

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

I agree that there should be formal conditions of service, more standardised remuneration, recognition of prior learning and that practitioners should be considered essential service workers. I am not sure whether achieving these requires through more formal tertiary qualifications is necessary. If it does, then we need to ensure that the training focusses on teaching practitioners the 'how to teach', rather than the theory.

7. 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?

The sheer number of practitioners that would require additional qualifications, the cost that will be involved in ensuring that practitioners obtain the qualification, and the additional cost of increasing the remuneration of the newly qualified practitioners.

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.

We need to develop a quality assurance and improvement system linked to the qualification system to ensure that we can measure the quality of the instructional practices by practitioners and we can provide targeted support to the areas in which they struggle. Support in this context is meant through a trusting relationship, rather through a strong accountability and monitoring relationship.