

Articulation of Qualifications in Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) REPORT ON ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION 4 June 2018

Introduction

This Roundtable event was initiated by the Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care & Education (PIECCE) and hosted by the National ECD Alliance (NECDA) and BRIDGE¹. It was facilitated by Carol Harington. The long term aim of this conversation is 'To develop an integrated framework for the articulation and alignment between ECCE qualifications in the three sub-frameworks'.

The objectives of the Roundtable are:

- Review the issues already identified in terms of the current alignment of qualifications from NQF 3 to NQF 7
- Discuss these in relation to streamlining progression pathways in support of professionalization of the sector
- Make recommendations around a strategy for co-creating a way forward including all key stakeholders.

The facilitator noted that there have been a number of changes in the field, in terms of new policies and new qualifications. The aim is to work effectively together in this context to support progression of practitioners and professionalization of the ECD field.

Context for Roundtable as initiated by PIECCE

Sheila Drew as the project manager for PIECCE set out the context for the Roundtable. PIECCE was originally set up with the express purpose of bringing together partners who typically have not worked together in the ECD sectors: NGOs, universities and TVET colleges. The core consortium is made up of UNISA, Saide, BRIDGE, Rhodes University, and an additional two NGOs and two TVET colleges². Subsequently, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) recognised the overlaps between PIECCE and the work being done through the EU/DHET TEECEP (Teacher Education for ECCE Project), and PIECCE now works in a wider consortium with an additional nine other universities intending to offer either the Level 6 Diploma or the Level 7 Degree in ECCE.

PIECCE's core objective is to:

¹ NECDA and BRIDGE have previously collaborated around submissions from the sector in relation to ECD qualifications.

² For a number of reasons, the TVET colleges are no longer participating through the core consortium, but will continue to give input through other means.

Contribute towards the professionalization of the ECD sector by increasing access for ECD practitioners to quality birth-4 programmes in Higher Education (HE) in South Africa.

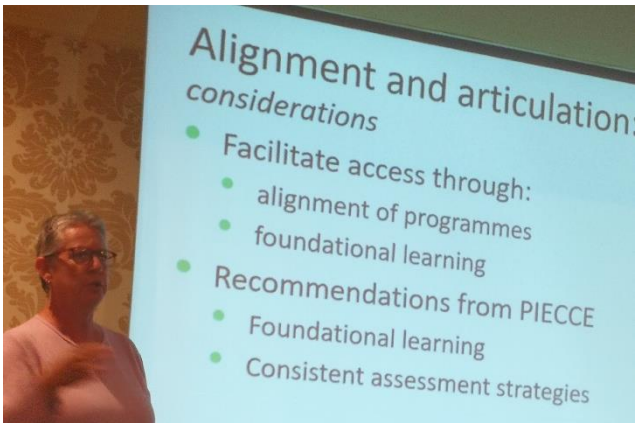
It will achieve this through its specific objective:

Develop standardised Programme Frameworks for the ECCE Diploma at Level 6 and the Bachelor of Education in ECCE at Level 7.

The Programme Frameworks will support consistency and standardisation (and thereby contribute to articulation and portability) as each of the universities develop their own qualifications, guided by the Frameworks. PIECCE itself is also guided by national ECD policies and the DHET Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for ECD Educators.

PIECCE has three outputs, all of which are relevant to progression and professionalization.

- A Collaboration Process Model for programme development. Collaboration at a number of different levels, both within and beyond the consortium, is seen as central to systemic change in ECD. The aim is to test how to support and encourage a culture of collaboration, understanding its enablers and barriers, and enabling multi-stakeholder participation. This means drawing in both training providers of all types and key regulatory players such as DHET, DBE, QCTO and ETDP SETA to debates around access and progression, with this Roundtable serving as an example of external collaboration. The development of this output is ongoing throughout the project.
- A Research Review of a representative selection of existing ECD programmes and their capacity building features. This review informed the development of the Frameworks, and can be read [here](#).
- The standardised Programme Frameworks are supported by illustrative support materials which can be used and adapted by different contextualised university programmes. This is the next phase of the PIECCE project.



In order to professionalise the sector, practitioners need access to higher education. Currently the majority of practitioners are situated in the occupational sector (which includes those with TVET qualifications). Access from Level 4 and Level 5 is difficult for a number of reasons: for example, there is some reluctance on the part of HEIs (who can determine additional requirements to minimum requirements set by policy) to accept those with qualifications from the occupational sector due to worries about quality.

While those working in the occupational sector need to consider the student competencies required by HEIs, HEIs need equally to consider how to recognise 'equivalence' and the importance of experiential learning brought in by many of these students.

Sheila summarised some of the considerations for this debate:

- Access can be facilitated by better alignment of programmes in the occupational and HEI sectors.
- The role of Foundational Learning Competence (FLC) needs to be explored more deeply. FLC is required for the award of occupational qualifications, and should be seen as key to preparing students for further study – if FLC can be used in such a way as to improve skills in using language and maths literacy for study (its original intention), this process might give universities more confidence in taking in practitioners from the field.
- Other skills beyond communication and maths literacy skills can be considered as 'foundational learning'. These are skills and attitudes which help students transition to higher education, and which are typically dealt with in academic support. PIECCE views these as 'developmental education' and has addressed this concept in the Programme Frameworks.
- Consistent assessment strategies throughout the qualifications pathways could help with progression.
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) RPL is obviously critical for those students who have already been in the field: how can what they know and bring with them be acknowledged while they are supported in a new kind of learning environment?

Sheila ended by noting that PIECCE is committed to deep engagement and collaboration with the different stakeholders, and wants to enable two-way communication and recommendations between sectors working in ECD: we need to talk with each other rather than at each other. For example, ways in which TVETs and NGOs undertake work integrated learning (WIL) can inform HEIs; if we want to rethink teaching practice platforms in higher education, these discussions should inform development at Levels 3 and 4 so that there is not a disconnect for students when they proceed further. In addition, the engagement of statutory and regulatory bodies such as SAQA, the QCTO and the ETDP SETA are vital to these debates. PIECCE will consider forums through which real discussions for common solutions can be held.

"PIECCE wants to enable two-way communication and recommendations between sectors working in ECD: we need to talk with each other rather than at each other." [Sheila Drew]

To view Sheila's presentation, [click here.](#)

ECCE Teacher Education Policy Context

Michelle Mathey from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) presented on the Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development Educators (Government Gazette No. 40750, 31 March 2017).

Click [here](#) to access the Policy as set out in the Government Gazette.

She outlined the policy context since 1995 leading up to this policy, and noted the growing recognition that phrases such as ‘nation building’ and ‘national productivity’ also embrace ECD: what happens to a child in the Birth to Four phase provides the foundation for further development.

The policy – known as MRTEQ ECD – was developed with the aim of enabling access, and is underpinned by a number of principles linked to ideals of openness and inclusivity. The policy outlines key programme criteria, including:

- Different knowledge mixes (such as practical, theoretical and disciplinary learning)
- Recognition of prior learning and experience
- Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT)
- Advanced standing
- Work integrated learning
- Language proficiency.



Articulation between ECCE professional programmes

NQF Exit level	Certificates	Degrees	Diplomas
10		Doctorate	
		Professional Doctorate	
		Masters	
9		Professional Masters	
8		Bachelor of Education Honours (PG Degrees)	Post Grad Diploma in ECCE (Post professional qualification)
7		Bachelor of Education in ECCE (Initial Professional Qualification)	Advanced Diploma in ECCE (Post professional qualification)
			Diploma in ECCE (Initial Professional Qualification)
6	Advanced Certificate in ECCE (Post professional qualification)		
5	Higher Certificate in ECCE (Entry Level)		

Michelle presented a visual on articulation routes between different types of certification in the ECD field, as seen on the slide.

To view Michelle’s presentation, [click here.](#)

This was followed by points made from the floor.

- Why would a student go from Level 6 Advanced Certificate (green route) to a Level 6 Diploma (red route), given that these two qualifications are on the same NQF level?
- Why can students not enter into a Bachelor of Education with a Level 4 (equivalent to Grade 12)? Noted that they are able to do this if they have matric with a Bachelor's pass, but universities do not generally recognise other Level 4 qualifications. To portray a full picture, we need to see minimum admission requirements from a policy point of view on this slide, and understand how many universities put in additional requirements.
- The Higher Certificate in ECCE now appears to sit in Higher Education space, but offerings from other sectors should be brought into the picture as access into the Diploma.
- Those who don't have a diploma or a degree pass at Grade 12 would probably do the Higher Certificate at Level 5, which then becomes an access route into ECCE as a profession.
- However, we also need to take cognisance of the occupational qualifications offered by TVETs and NGOs at this level, which need to facilitate access into HE and should also be illustrated on this slide. While universities might not agree with the curriculum offered by the occupational qualifications, we need to think about what is in these curricula when we design Level 6 and 7.
- This raises the question of the target audience for the Diploma. Is it for those going into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) straight from school, or those who are entering with experience and occupational qualifications?
- Given that not every student is a new teacher, RPL becomes key for those who have been in the field a long time.

It was agreed that ultimately it would be useful to have a visual map which covered admission requirements, qualifications and articulation options from all sectors and sub-frameworks.

Other comments made include:

- There are some disparities between Birth to Four and Grade R qualifications in terms of language requirements. Currently these are being dealt with on an institutional basis, but could affect CAT.
- Noted that DHET is currently conducting a series of workshops on an implementation protocol for the improvement of teaching practice, and the debate today needs also to be informed by what is happening in that forum. Sheila Drew and Hasina Ebrahim from PIECCE are currently part of that roundtable.
- It is still not clear where ultimate responsibility for ECD lies. Practitioners have been developed under DSD policies, regulations relating to baby care fall predominantly under DOH, qualifications under DHET, while HR policies currently fall under DSD, with some indications that these may move to DBE. This matter is still under discussion. Issues of salaries affect decisions regarding qualifications – why would someone do a degree if it does not lead to an improvement in salary? The National ECD Policy talks about an integrated ECD package and collaboration between the different ministries, but there are still questions in relation to implementation.

- There are also considerations around how ECCE occupational qualifications might link to pathways for social workers.

Facilitator Reflection: Carol Harington

"We need to keep two things in mind as we continue the conversation:

- ✚ Picture the person who wants to achieve any of these qualifications: the ECD practitioner. If as HEIs, NGOs and TVETs we all have a different person in mind, then we need to try and align our understandings.
- ✚ What are the benefits of taking these career pathways for any of the practitioners we picture? "

Articulation as a foundational mechanism for professionalization

Dr Shirley Lloyd from the NQF Directorate in DHET noted that her work deals with co-ordinating developments in national RPL policies, and with resolving articulation queries from an NQF perspective. She gave an example of one anomaly: the TVET NATED programmes in Educare (N4, N5 and N6), which are followed by 18 month's practical experience in a workplace such as an educare centre, lead to a national diploma at NQF 6; graduates are recognised by SACE who will register them as educators in the ECD environment, and yet this diploma does not necessarily allow for smooth transitioning into a professional degree pathway. (Click [here](#) to view a presentation on TVET offerings made by Melanie Vermaak at a PIECCE meeting.)

Shirley noted that SAQA and the Quality Councils all fall under the overarching NQF Act, with SAQA having the responsibility for articulation and CAT policies; sometimes, however, policies in different departments are not aligned. Her aim in the presentation was to use the SAQA Level Descriptors as the lens through which to address some of the articulation challenges.

Level Descriptors are statements that describe the nature of learning achievements at each level of the NQF, through providing a broad indication of the types of learning outcomes and the assessment criteria that are appropriate to a qualification at that level.

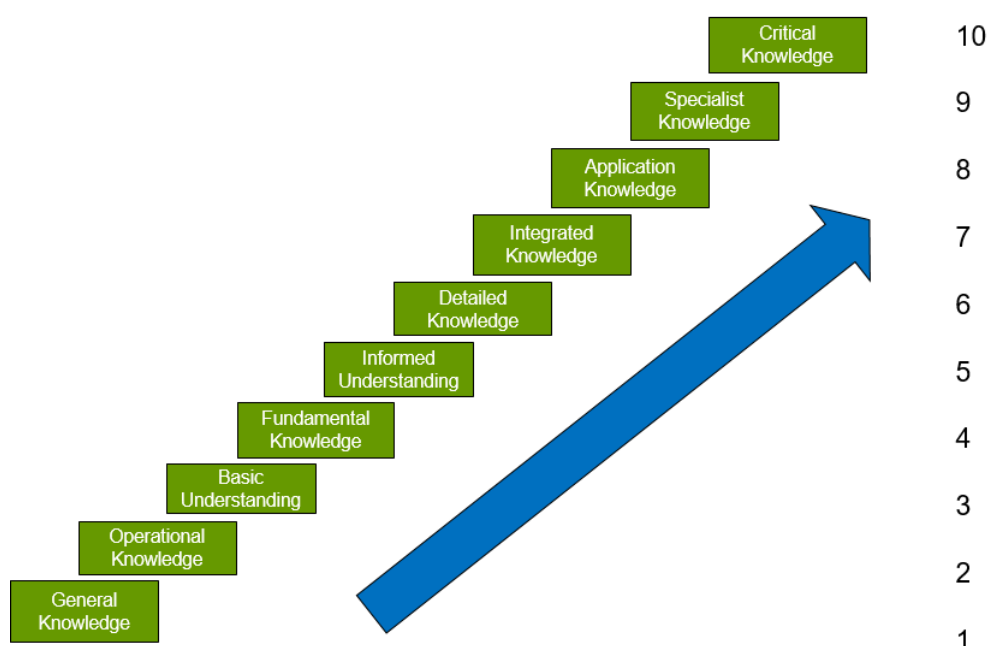
The Level Descriptors are the best starting points for qualification design. Most critically, because they capture shared understandings of levels of cognition and application, they can serve as enablers for articulation between different qualifications. They can be used to establish 'parity of esteem' between different qualification types, and between learning achieved through different routes. Parity of esteem is a key NQF concept, meaning that learning and skills of all kinds (e.g. academic, technical and vocational) should be equally valued: in particular, it means that recognised qualifications at the same level should be respected in the same way and granted a similar status.

The descriptors cover different forms and types of learning outcomes, irrespective of where and how the learning has been achieved (e.g. an institution or workplace, through formal or informal learning and so on). Ten categories of knowledge are used to describe applied competence at the different NQF Levels; each category is then unpacked in terms of different levels of complexity.

COMPETENCY CATEGORIES	
Scope of knowledge	Accessing, processing and managing information
Knowledge literacy	Producing and communicating information
Method and procedure	Context and systems
Problem solving	Management of learning
Ethics & professional practice	Accountability

The following slide gives an example of how the category ‘scope of knowledge’ might play out at different NQF levels, in terms of cognitive complexity.

Example 1: Scope of knowledge



Shirley also set out the nine principles of articulation, as well as outlining the different roles and responsibilities of SAQA, DHET, the three quality councils, and training providers. The principles illustrate that articulation between different pathways can be both systemic (i.e. governed by

regulation and protocols which ensure articulation opportunities through the sub-framework and qualification registration procedures) and specific (e.g. through inter-institutional arrangements, or agreements with professional bodies and the use of professional designations).

In sum, coherence between qualifications can be determined by level descriptors when these are properly contextualised and linked to professional knowledge of a specific field. These can also support the implementation of RPL systems, help establish parity of esteem, facilitate CAT and enhance programmatic alignment.

To see the presentation dealing with articulation principles and roles and responsibilities, [click here](#).

To view the presentation dealing with Level Descriptors and equivalence between qualifications, [click here](#).

Review of key challenges identified for practitioner progression in the current landscape

Colleen Osborne, speaking as a NECDA member, took participants through a mapping of existing qualifications and their pertinent issues.

[Click here](#) to go to the annotated review of ECCE qualifications.

She said that, in terms of the qualifications lower down the NQF levels, most NGOs are working with the poorest of poor – those ECD practitioners who may not even be getting a stipend of R1000.00 per month. She also noted that these practitioners are no longer only the ‘gogos’, but represent an increasing number of young women who are themselves single mothers wishing to work close to home and to fulfil the big need for childcare in their own communities. These practitioners want a decent salary as well as the opportunity to improve themselves.

Due to time constraints Colleen selected a few key points from the document.

- There is still a lack of clarity on whether or not the Level 3 qualification will be developed as a part qualification or a whole qualification.
- For those practitioners with little formal education it is difficult to get to Level 3 (when it exists) or Level 4, especially without finances or academic skills. Do we need to re-investigate the reinstatement of NQF Level 1 as an entry qualification? The old legacy NQF 1 qualification is still being used and broken up into short courses, but these are not credit-bearing. A gradual and well-supported developmental road is needed for those starting from a very low base.
- The issues raised about the Occupational Certificate at Level 4 have been well-documented and discussed, and include in particular problems with the need for registered workplace sites for assessment, questions around where assessors will be found and the practicalities of implementation.

- It is unclear where the responsibility for the current Level 5 qualifications sit: both the Higher Certificate and the Diploma are legacy qualifications. Level 5 may be the pinnacle for many ECD practitioners, so this is a key question for NGOs.
- Who will employ and pay those with Diplomas?
- Will universities still require a matric certificate with degree endorsement for entry into the B Ed or will Level 4 or 5 certificates be sufficient?
- What is the status of the Level 6 Grade R diploma? Will it continue to draw people away from the ECD field as it offers a more formalised workplace opportunity, or should Grade R be pulled into the ECCE space as it is still pre-school?
- Many practising ECD practitioners need to study while working, so there is a need for more part time and/ or distance education opportunities. (It was noted that UNISA is considering raising the Academic Points Score requirements for people moving up from higher certificates because the demand is so great.)
- What are the options regarding getting access to FLC materials in order to meet the Occupational Certificate Level 4 requirement?
- We need to look at upgrading the ECD trainers themselves, and any synergies with qualifications for community workers and social workers who work in the ECD space.

Closing thoughts and agreements

- There was a sense that the time was insufficient to address these questions. It was noted, however, that this must be seen as the start of an ongoing conversation with key stakeholders and the relevant regulatory bodies.
- Many of the challenges described appear to be anecdotal and need to be supported by statistics and evidence. They can then be framed in relation to policy, as this is what should guide all discussion.
- In response to this point, it was noted that there are real implementation issues and human consequences which were not foreseen by policy. By definition, policy documents cannot cover all eventualities.

All agreed that further structured dialogue on articulation, building on existing forums and collaboration, needs to happen. Suggestions included:

- The National Interdepartmental Committee on ECD (NIDC-ECD) has a Training and Curriculum Subcommittee. Perhaps this group needs to send a delegation to the sub-committee? It was noted, though, that this subcommittee has a wider focus area than articulation between qualifications. But perhaps this sub-committee could make suggestions for the articulation process?

- SAQA has undertaken research into a number of articulation initiatives across the country, and has targeted ECD, Community Development and Engineering as key areas for enabling and supporting articulation. (Click [here](#) to read the report National Articulation Baseline Study, and [here](#) to read the report: ‘NQF Research Seminar: Understanding the National Articulation Baseline Study Findings’). SAQA aims to hold a conference in September, and SAQA would like to undertake joint planning with stakeholders in ECD for this conference in relation to articulation. The proceedings of today’s discussion could feed into this event.
- Do we need to create different task teams for specific areas of articulation?
- It was also suggested that any other questions and issues be formulated in writing and passed on to BRIDGE to accompany the report.

There was agreement that the vital government and regulatory bodies such as SAQA, DBE, DHET, DSD, QCTO and ETDP SETA need to be part of the process, as well as bodies such as NECDA, the BRIDGE CoP and PIECCE. Given the inter-sectoral nature of these issues, SAQA appears to be an appropriate body to provide an opportunity to engage. We are all trying to build the bridges that will enable practitioners to progress in ECCE. The core working group that initiated this Round Table will take forward the discussion with SAQA in terms of next steps.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Apologies were received from QCTO, ECD Congress, DHET CET, DSD and a TVET College.

Name & surname	Institution
Abigail Crawford	NECDA
Carol Harington	ELRU/Facilitator
Colleen Osborne	NECDA
David Modiba	DHET TVET
Hasina Ebrahim	PIECCE UNISA
Heidi Bolton	SAQA
Kaley le Mottee	BRIDGE
Marie Louise Samuels	DBE
Maswazi Tshabalala	ETDP SETA
Melissa King	BRIDGE
Michelle Mathey	DHET
Rene King	NECDA
Rex Molefe	Motheo Training Institute Trust (& member of NECDA & CoP)

Ruby Motaung	PIECCE TREE
Sarah McGuigan	PIECCE Ntataise
Sheila Drew	PIECCE Saide
Shirley Loyd	DHET
Vuyelwa Ntuli	DBE
Vuyiswa Ncontsa	BRIDGE