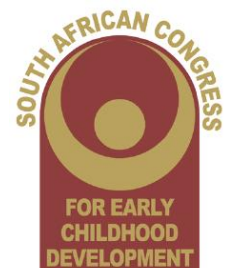

Collaboration of ECD Networks (CECDN): Provincial Dialogues on the ECD Function Shift

Collective ECD Civil Society Response

January 2020



Contents

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
SECTION 1: DIALOGUE CONTEXT, AIMS AND PROCESS.....	8
RATIONALE	8
BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE CECDN	9
• South African Congress for Early Childhood Development (SACECD):.....	9
• National ECD Alliance (NECDA):	9
• BRIDGE Innovation in Learning Organisation (BRIDGE)	9
DIALOGUES ON THE FUNCTION SHIFT	10
The CECDN Dialogues	11
National Dialogue:	11
Provincial Dialogues:.....	12
SECTION 2: CONSOLIDATED PROVINCIAL RESPONSE.....	14
RATIONALE	14
Defining the Function Shift.....	15
Key ECD civil society responses to the Function Shift	15
THEMES OF ENGAGEMENT	16
1. Policy and legislation	16
2. Training and curriculum	20
3. Registration and Infrastructure	29
4. Communication and advocacy	30
5. Finance and ECD donors.....	33
6. Monitoring and evaluation.....	35
7. Health and nutrition	37
8. Social protection	38
9. Human resources / Workforce	41
SECTION 3: RECOMMENDATIONS	44
WAY FORWARD	49

Acknowledgements



This report and the series of dialogues on which it is based was made possible by funding from the DG Murray Trust.

CECDN would like to thank the DG Murray Trust for their support, which enabled the diverse members of ECD civil society to express their views, needs and expectations relating to the Function Shift of ECD services from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education.

CECDN would also like to thank:

- *The **dialogue participants** who contributed their insights and recommendations, based on their lived experiences*
- *The **facilitators** of the dialogues*
- *The **organisations** that hosted the dialogues*

Report Writer:

Margie Vorwerk (BRIDGE)

Input:

Abigail Crawford (NECDA)

Rene King (NECDA)

Rex Molefe (NECDA)

Leonard Saul (SACECD)

Monica Stach (NECDA)

Sheila Drew (ISF)

Thandeka Rantsi (BRIDGE)

Vuyiswa Ncontsa (BRIDGE)

February 2020



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence

Documents linked to this report:

1. *Meeting Highlights of the CECDN National Dialogue*
2. *Consolidated Participant Comments*

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

B.Ed.	Bachelor of Education
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements
CECDN	Collaboration of ECD Networks
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CoP	Community of Practice
CSI	Corporate Social Investment
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DGMT	DG Murray Trust
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoH	Department of Health
DSD	Department of Social Development
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EC	Eastern Cape Province
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ETDP	Education, Training and Development Practices
ELDA	Early Learning and Development Area
FS	Free State Province
GP	Gauteng Province
ISF	Intersectoral Forum [on ECD]
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
L	[NQF] Level
LIMP	Limpopo Province
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MP	Mpumalanga Province
NC	Northern Cape Province
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NECDA	National Early Childhood Development Alliance
NECT	National Education Collaboration Trust
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIECD	National Integrated Early Childhood Development
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NMF	Nelson Mandela Foundation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
NW	North West Province
PEC	Provincial Executive Committee
PIECCE	Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RTO	Resource and Training Organisation
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SACECD	South African Congress for Early Childhood Development
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
SONA	State of the Nation Address

TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WC	Western Cape Province
WIL	Work Integrated Learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Section 1 of the report describes the rationale for the dialogues and the process followed.

Since the announcement by President Cyril Ramaphosa during the 2019 State of the Nation Address (SONA) that government would be migrating responsibility for early childhood development (ECD) centres from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the Department of Basic Education (DBE), and would proceed with the process towards two years of compulsory ECD for all children before they entered Grade 1, several information-sharing and consultative processes have taken place around the 'Function Shift'.

These included dialogues hosted by the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) and the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF) as well as BRIDGE ECD Community of Practice engagements on the results of a survey conducted by the Collaboration of ECD Networks (CECDN). The DBE also subsequently mandated NECT to conduct provincial consultations on its behalf.

ECD civil society stakeholders recognised the need to consult directly with the sector, and particularly to reach those members most closely involved with ECD whose voices were not usually heard. This led to the DG Murray Trust (DGMT) approaching CECDN to provide ECD civil society with a platform to interrogate issues and freely express their views, needs and expectations relating to the Function Shift. The collective inputs could then be used to engage both the sector and government. This led to funding approval for a national dialogue and series of nine provincial dialogues.

The Collaboration of ECD Networks (CECDN) is a partnership between three organisations which focus on different areas and types of work within the ECD sector: the South African Congress for ECD (SACECD) is a national mass-based NGO that represents the interests of early childhood development workers; the National ECD Alliance (NECDA) is a network of ECD NPOs and sector experts whose members provide capacity building, high quality training and resourcing to the ECD Sector; and BRIDGE Innovation in Learning Organisation (BRIDGE) is an NPO which runs communities of practice aimed at sharing knowledge, working practice and innovation.

The national dialogue involved CECDN's civil society partners in discussions to frame the provincial dialogues and assist CECDN to prepare for the process of stakeholder consultation. This included interrogating participants' understanding of the Function Shift, examining synergies with the NECT consultation process, identifying themes of engagement and providing input to inform a guiding

document. Attendance would target civil society constituencies that would be directly or indirectly impacted by the Function Shift; government would not be excluded from participating.

The provincial dialogues were communicated, arranged and conducted through CECDN partner platforms and networks. While attendance varied from province to province, the dialogues were generally well received by the various ECD communities. A total of 822 participants attended, approximately 91% of the targeted 900.

Dialogue processes and inputs were captured and distributed to participants after each event. The inputs from the nine provincial dialogues have been consolidated to produce this resource that CECDN believes will be useful to both the ECD sector and to government in implementing the Function Shift.

Section 2 reflects the collective response of ECD civil society to the Function Shift. It also reveals how ECD is currently experienced by those 'on-the-ground' and exposes many of the obstacles to delivering universal, high quality ECD services.

The themes of engagement, which reflect the work streams of the Intersectoral Forum on ECD, a forum dedicated to the implementation of the National Integrated ECD Policy 2015, served to stimulate discussion and structure responses:

1. Policy and legislation
2. Training and curriculum
3. Registration and infrastructure
4. Communication and advocacy
5. Finance and ECD donors
6. Monitoring and evaluation
7. Health and nutrition
8. Social protection
9. Human resources / Workforce

The information collected under each theme has been distilled to identify key ideas, using an inductive approach. These key ideas have been presented as far as possible without interpretation and illustrated with selected participant comments. Despite the multiplicity of ECD civil society contexts represented at the dialogues, the responses show a notable degree of concurrence. Some views reveal misconceptions or a lack of information; these have been included for the insights they provide into sector conditions and needs. Despite the validity of participants' concerns, many of the comments expressed during the provincial dialogues do indicate a worrying lack of information and understanding in a number of areas of ECD, on the part of those working in the field.

Dialogue participants clearly saw themselves as actively representing children; their discussions reflected a deep interest in the care and well-being of children, together with an understanding of their needs and how to provide for them.

Based on the dialogue responses, the most contentious element of the Function Shift for ECD civil society is the provision that 'All children eligible for Grade RR (4 turning 5 by June in the year of

admission) **will move** from DSD registered ECD centres **to public or independent schools** or DBE registered centres within 15 years’.

Participants articulated clearly and consistently that they do not consider the school environment to be developmentally appropriate for children in the Grade RR age group, either physically, cognitively, socially or emotionally. Major concerns are the lack of suitable infrastructure including toilets and safe, stimulating play areas; the risk of bullying by older children; and the standardised systems and high child/ teacher ratios that inhibit the creation of secure, nurturing learning environments.

There is a strong conviction that children of 4 – 5 years of age should be accommodated within the ECD sector (i.e. in DBE registered centres). Achieving this will require government to inject funding and provide leadership to address the barriers that currently stand in the way of providing quality ECD services to all South Africa’s children. Allied to this is the conviction that successful implementation of the Function Shift is dependent on government developing a full understanding of ECD, the ECD sector and the issues that affect it, to enable informed decision-making.

Dialogue participants are deeply concerned that the transfer of responsibility to the DBE could result in inappropriate formalisation of the Grade RR curriculum and teaching methodologies. They signalled the importance of upholding play-based pedagogical approaches and indicated that preparation for the Function Shift would need to include a drive to educate schools and district officials on play-based pedagogy.

Participants expressed frustration at not being consulted, as well as willingness to contribute and to work together with government for the benefit of the sector. They cautioned against undermining what has been achieved by the sector and urged government to build on the foundation provided by the expertise, facilities and initiatives that already exist. Participants also observed that the work of implementing Grade R is ongoing and continues to require government’s attention.

The sector’s overwhelming need at present is for information, as well as confirmation that it is being heard (particularly in relation to the Function Shift, including transition measures, but also on ECD matters generally). A recurring theme is the need for policy that enables access, supports improvements in quality, and crucially, is universally applicable. Participants also stressed the value that well-conducted M&E would bring to the sector but are strongly critical of current practices.

The theme of training and curriculum drew the largest number of responses. The Function Shift is seen as creating both a necessity and an opportunity to improve practitioner qualification levels and resolve ECD curriculum issues. The position is similar in respect of the Human resources/ Workforce theme, where the Function Shift is viewed as a threat to older or less qualified members of the current workforce, and as potentially advantageous to those able to capitalise on the expected increase in study and employment opportunities.

The scope and variety of dialogue inputs reflects the complexity of ECD provision in South Africa, and points to the importance of unpacking the Function Shift carefully. All stakeholders, including parents, need to have an understanding of the processes and their consequences. At the same time, the many obstacles that currently limit provision have to be addressed urgently.

In *Section 3*, the report makes several substantive recommendations. These reflect the views and needs expressed by civil society as well as the CECDN coordinating team’s holistic understanding of the ECD sector and the issues that affect it.

The report concludes with the suggestion that it does not represent the end of a process, but should instead be viewed as the start of a consultative journey in which CECDN partners with government to disseminate information and address critical issues within the ECD sector, including implementing the Function Shift.

SECTION 1: DIALOGUE CONTEXT, AIMS AND PROCESS

RATIONALE

During the 2019 State of the Nation Address (SONA), President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that government would “migrate responsibility of early childhood development (ECD) centres from Social Development to Basic Education, and proceed with the process towards two years of compulsory ECD for all children before they enter Grade 1”.

While not a new¹ concept, the SONA announcement set in motion government’s first official steps towards making the Function Shift a reality. The issue has been a topic of interest within the ECD sector for some time; however, in the absence of any official statement from government, these conversations have taken place without a clear directive or any government presence. Since the SONA announcement there have been notable facilitations on the issue, which indicate government’s intention to proceed with the Function Shift.

This report presents the ideas that surfaced during a series of consultative dialogues with ECD civil society on the Function Shift. The impetus for these dialogues was a realisation of the importance of consulting directly with those most closely involved with ECD and representing their multiple voices.

Presented by the Collaboration of ECD Networks (CECDN), the dialogues provided a platform for the diverse members of ECD civil society to interrogate and confront issues in ECD, and to freely express their views, needs and expectations relating to the Function Shift. The dialogues were premised on an understanding that government and civil society shared the aim of providing universal access to quality ECD, and focused on what was needed to achieve this.

¹ The *National Development Plan 2030* (2012) outlined clear proposals for achieving universal access to ECD services by 2030, one of which was to ‘Make 2 years of quality preschool enrolment for 4 and 5 year olds compulsory before Grade 1’. The intention has also been expressed in other policy documents such as the *Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education* (2001).

Value of the report

The CECDN believes this document will prove useful as a resource not only to the ECD sector, but also to policy makers and officials responsible for implementing the Function Shift, and that it will contribute to the broader purpose of improving ECD quality and reach.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE CECDN

The Collaboration of ECD Networks is a partnership between three organisations that focus on different areas and types of work within the ECD sector. These partners are:

- **South African Congress for Early Childhood Development (SACECD):**

SACECD is a representative, national, mass-based non-governmental ECD organisation. It represents the interests of over 6 million young children from birth to 6 years old, early childhood development workers and the early childhood sector in general. SACECD operates from a national office in Pretoria and is represented by nine provincial executive committees (PECs).

- **National ECD Alliance (NECDA):**

NECDA is a country-wide network of ECD NPOs and sector experts. It was formed in 2005 to strengthen the ECD sector, with a view to building a better future for children by promoting children's rights to ECD, strengthening NPOs and advocating for ECD. Member organisations and experts provide capacity building, high quality training and resourcing to the ECD Sector. NECDA currently represents and serves approximately 93 member organisations across South Africa.

- **BRIDGE Innovation in Learning Organisation (BRIDGE)**

BRIDGE facilitates convenings in the education space with the intention of eliminating duplication and sharing knowledge, working practice and innovation in education. One of BRIDGE's focus areas is ECD. This involves running communities of practice that convene multiple sector players on a quarterly basis. BRIDGE also partners with other NGOs in the ECD space to implement projects that advance the innovations and insights that come out of its communities of practice.

The CECDN gives expression to the work of the ECD Intersectoral Forum (ISF) Steering Committee which represents ECD civil society organisations and networks on the ECD Intersectoral Forum² (ISF). The ISF Steering Committee serves as a strategic line of communication that channels pertinent sector issues raised at the ISF to the CECDN, and channels updates and plans from the CECDN to the ISF. CECDN's role is to engage civil society on the issues raised by the ISF (using its partner networks); to use the input collected during engagements to inform and develop civil society's

² The ECD Intersectoral Forum (ISF) is led by the Department of Social Development (DSD) and comprises a range of stakeholders including the DSD, the DBE, ECD civil society and funders.

responses; and to feed these responses back to the ISF Steering Committee, which communicates them to the ISF.

The objectives of the CECDN

CECDN was established to hold and represent the views and voices of the ECD community in their differences and multiplicity. It is also important for the CECDN not only to represent the diverse voices, but also to use the strengths of the individual partners to mobilise the ECD community towards solutions that can lead to sustainable and impactful change in the sector. It is for this reason that CECDN works to address common sector challenges and undertook both to engage and consult with the sector on the Function Shift, and to represent the sector's views to government.

DIALOGUES ON THE FUNCTION SHIFT

Chronologically, the dialogues that have taken place in the sector, and that are relevant to this reporting context, include:

- The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) initial dialogues held in Gauteng (November 2018 and April 2019)
- The Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF): Where does Pre-Grade R belong? (April 2019)
- BRIDGE ECD Community of Practice engagements on the results of a CECDN survey on the Function Shift (April 2019)
- CECDN National Dialogue (July 2019)
- NECT / DBE Provincial Dialogues (July-October 2019)
- CECDN Provincial Dialogues (August-October 2019)

The NECT dialogues on the Function Shift (held in late November 2018 and in April 2019 after the official announcement), can be regarded as marking the start of consultations on the issue. In fact, the NECT would be mandated to conduct consultations throughout the country on behalf of the Department of Basic Education (DBE).

At the NECT dialogue of April 2019, the DG Murray Trust (DGMT) approached CECDN to provide a platform for consulting with ECD civil society. This reflected a realisation that it would be important for the needs and views of ECD civil society to find expression through a process and a document that could engage both the sector and government. This led to funding approval for a national dialogue and series of nine provincial dialogues.

The government-mandated dialogues through the National Education Collaboration Trust and the CECDN dialogues took place concurrently between July and October 2019.

The CECDN Dialogues

National Dialogue:

The purpose of this dialogue was to gather CECDN's civil society partners and obtain their input to guide the CECDN in the process of stakeholder consultation. Attendees were encouraged to use consultations that they may have experienced in their own contexts, to frame their thinking.

The key discussion points that guided this dialogue included:

- **Defining the issue at hand:** This interrogated participants' understanding of the Function Shift. The CECDN team provided a verbatim definition as per the joint DBE and DSD presentations on the Function Shift (see Section 2).
- **Synergies with the NECT process:** The NECT, which had been mandated by DBE to consult the ECD sector including government and civil society, provided an outline of their process. At this point, CECDN and NECT had already discussed the possibility of collaborating on their respective dialogues and had determined that separate consultations by each entity were necessary (to allow for the urgency of the NECT process as well as the lengthier consensus-building of the CECDN process) even though they served a similar purpose. With CECDN focusing primarily on civil society, the entities would find synergies and opportunities to collaborate during (and even after) the process of consultation. Mr Duncan Hindle, representing the NECT, affirmed this at the national dialogue.
- **Nature and process of the dialogues:** Participants gave input into the nature and process of the provincial dialogues. Key to this discussion was the acknowledgement that the CECDN team would not be able to interface with every stakeholder and would need to communicate its limitations at the outset. It was reiterated that the dialogues would not debate or mediate the Function Shift itself, but would instead focus on surfacing issues in a constructive way that respected different interests and elevated the voices of those who were usually not heard.
- **Preparation for, and product of the dialogues:** With regard to preparing for the provincial dialogues, the need for a guiding document emerged. This document would be provided to stakeholders beforehand to assist them in thinking about the key issues to consider. (The document was later found to be more beneficial for briefing dialogue facilitators.) The product of the dialogues would be a consolidated response rather than a position paper. Incorporating what people had expressed would inform the position of the sector and would reflect the views and opinions of those who had been consulted. Disagreements should also be captured. Whatever the resulting product, it should be the sectoral response to the Function Shift and needed to reflect sector views in a way that invited government to engage.
- **Themes of engagement:** These were based on the work streams of the Intersectoral Forum on ECD, with the addition of Human resources/ Workforce as a separate theme. The themes are listed in the next section. *Transitional measures*, and *risks and opportunities*

were observed to cut across all work streams. These would need to be addressed in each area and would inform the structure of the provincial dialogues.

- **Who should be included in the dialogues:** The discussions identified key people to be included during and after the provincial dialogues and identified strategic stakeholders. The scope of ECD civil society was discussed at length. It was agreed that ECD civil society included all constituencies that would be directly or indirectly impacted by the Function Shift. Government should not be excluded from the CECDN provincial dialogues, even though it was running its own consultation process.

Click [here](#) to view the Meeting Highlights of the CECDN National Dialogue.

Provincial Dialogues:

The provincial dialogues were communicated through CECDN member platforms and reflected collaboration in the true sense in terms of logistics and facilitation. The process included:

- Use of the framework document created by the CECDN coordinating team. Based on input from national dialogue participants, this document contained questions on each theme that were intended to facilitate discussion and stimulate deep thinking.
- Venues were organised and mostly offered free of charge by NECDA and SACECD members.
- Facilitators were sourced through the CECDN partner networks.
- Catering was mostly arranged through the hosting organisations, except in a few cases where the CECDN coordinating team made the arrangements.
- Invitations were issued by network partners through their formal platforms and by social media including twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp.
- BRIDGE was responsible for overall coordination and the knowledge management component which included the drafting and the finalisation of this report.

Attendance varied from province to province, but in general the ECD community came out in numbers at the majority of dialogues. The table below summarises attendance figures:

Province	KZN	GP	FS	MP	LIMP	NW	NC	EC	WC	Total
Number of attendees	90	98	137	138	57	130	38	24	110	822

The target overall was 900 participants. A total of 822 attended; approximately 91% of the target. Attendance was lowest in the Northern and Eastern Cape. In the Northern Cape, this could reflect the limited presence of CECDN networks. A challenge specific to the Eastern Cape was the fact that the NECT had held a dialogue at the same venue prior to the CECDN dialogue; it was reported that people had found it difficult to differentiate between the government-led and the CECDN consultations.

The remainder of this document outlines the information gathered from the provincial dialogues. In other words, what was envisioned as the collective response of ECD civil society to the Function Shift, makes up the rest of this document.

SECTION 2: CONSOLIDATED PROVINCIAL RESPONSE

This section presents the collective response of ECD civil society regarding the Function Shift.

RATIONALE

Information was collected at each of the CECDN provincial dialogues in respect of the themes of engagement identified at the national dialogue:

1. Policy and legislation
2. Training and curriculum
3. Registration and infrastructure
4. Communication and advocacy
5. Finance and ECD donors
6. Monitoring and evaluation
7. Health and nutrition
8. Social protection
9. Human resources / Workforce

The dialogues produced a substantial body of rich and varied information, either generated directly by participants during group activities, or recorded by BRIDGE during plenary discussions. After each dialogue a record of the proceedings and the information collected was distributed to participants.

The information in this section has been distilled from these records. Participant comments were consolidated per theme, then sorted and grouped according to content. This inductive approach revealed the commonalities amongst the comments as well as their relative prominence, and enabled the main ideas expressed at the dialogues to be identified.

This section presents these key ideas, supported by illustrative participant comments. The comments are intended to show the multiplicity of views, as well as any contrasting views. While we have sought to reflect participant input without interpreting it, a degree of organisation and generalisation has been unavoidable, in the interests of coherent presentation.

The volume of information presented a challenge, as did the categorizing of comments that cut across themes. This has resulted in some overlaps. It is also apparent that in some cases the views expressed stem from misinformation or a lack of information. These contributions have been retained for the insights they provide into the lived experience of members of the ECD community.

The comments reflect the perceptions of people in the field and show how they are affected – within their own contexts – by the issues and influences that impact on ECD provision. Although some comments may arise from inaccurate or incomplete information, the concerns they express are valid, as is the sense of urgency they convey.

At the same time, it is clear that dialogue participants saw themselves as actively representing children, and their contributions reflect their deep interest in the care and well-being of children.

While ECD civil society does not hold a monopoly on understanding the needs of children, it has been closely involved with the question of what these needs are, and how to provide for them.

Click [here](#) to view the verbatim comments captured during the nine provincial dialogues.

Defining the Function Shift

Joint communication from the Departments of Basic Education and Social Development provides the following definition.

The Function Shift means moving functions from DSD to DBE:

1. The overall function of leadership and coordination of the National Integrated ECD Policy **will move** from the DSD to the DBE at national and provincial level as from 2019 (proclamation);
2. A **systematic relocation** of the responsibility for ECD from the DSD to the DBE;
3. All children eligible for Grade R (5 turning 6 by June in the year of admission) **will move** from DSD registered ECD centres to public or independent schools or DBE registered centres by 2030;
4. All children eligible for Grade RR (4 turning 5 by June in the year of admission) **will move** from DSD registered ECD centres to public or independent schools or DBE registered centres within 15 years; and
5. The comprehensive 1st 1000 days will be led by the DoH with support from DSD and DBE.

Key ECD civil society responses to the Function Shift

Judging from the dialogue responses, the most contentious element of the Function Shift is the provision for children in the Grade RR age group to be moved to a school environment. The overriding message from ECD civil society is that Grade RR children should remain within ECD (i.e. in DBE registered centres) as the primary school environment is not developmentally appropriate for children of 4 – 5 years of age: either physically, socially, emotionally or cognitively. This position was articulated clearly and consistently at every one of the provincial dialogues. Some major concerns are the lack of suitable infrastructure including toilets and safe, stimulating play areas; the risk of bullying by older children; and the standardised systems and high child/ teacher ratios that inhibit the creation of secure, nurturing learning environments.

Another major concern is that the transfer of responsibility to the DBE could result in inappropriate formalisation of the Grade RR curriculum and teaching methodologies. Participants signalled the importance of upholding play-based pedagogical approaches and indicated that preparation for the Function Shift would need to include a drive to educate school and district officials on play-based pedagogy.

The sector's overwhelming need at present is for information, as well as confirmation that it is being heard (particularly in relation to the Function Shift, including transition measures, but also on ECD matters generally). A recurring theme is the need for policy that enables access, supports

improvements in quality, and crucially, is universally applicable. Participants also stressed the value that well-conducted M&E would bring to the sector but are strongly critical of current practices.

Participants cautioned against undermining what has been achieved by the sector and urged government to build on the foundation provided by the expertise, facilities and initiatives that already exist. They also observed that the work of implementing Grade R is ongoing and continues to require government's attention.

The theme of training and curriculum drew the largest number of responses. The Function Shift is seen as creating both a necessity and an opportunity to improve practitioner qualification levels and resolve ECD curriculum issues. The position is similar in respect of the Human resources/ Workforce theme, where the Function Shift is viewed as a threat to older or less qualified members of the current workforce, and as potentially advantageous to those able to capitalise on the expected increase in study and employment opportunities.

The sector is intensely aware that without extensive government funding and leadership to address the impediments that negatively affect ECD provision, it could never hope to provide universal access to quality ECD services. Government funding to the sector would have to cover the complete spectrum of provision requirements. Successful implementation of the Function Shift would also depend on government developing a full understanding of ECD, the sector and the issues that affect it. This is essential for informed decision-making. ECD civil society is eager to contribute and to work together with government to implement the Function Shift and strengthen the sector.

The content that follows provides more detail on ECD civil society's 'on-the-ground' experiences and views.

THEMES OF ENGAGEMENT

1. Policy and legislation

Interrogate policy and standardise the application of legislation

The Function Shift is being seen by the sector as an opportunity to interrogate policy and standardise the application of legislation across the country. These actions are necessary as variations in interpretation by different departments and levels of government have created confusion and significant challenges for the sector. Participants noted that government's knowledge and understanding of ECD is limited and called for government to involve the ECD sector and use its input when reviewing and developing policy.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Municipal by-laws often stand at odds with provincial and national guidelines and policies.
- The ECD sector should be able to collaborate with the Department of Public Service and Administration and assist in their review of various ECD policies in the proposed Function Shift.

-
- The issue of policies affects the whole eco-system of ECD. We need to look into the ‘ecology’ of ECD in both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras, and how far ECD has evolved with regard to policy development.
-

Need for coordination and leadership to deliver integrated ECD services

While ECD policy is integrated, the leadership and coordination function of DBE is critical to ensure the delivery of integrated services to young children and their families. ECD involves much more than just education, especially for young children, and all the relevant departments need to work together. The Function Shift is being seen as an opportunity to ensure that this happens. The roles and responsibilities of government entities and departments will have to be clearly defined.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Despite the Function Shift to the DBE, there will still be vital roles in the system as a whole for the DoH and DSD. The important question is: How to integrate? This will require leadership and coordination by the DBE.
 - DSD policies to be integrated with DBE policies – as current policies often contradict each other.
 - The integrated approach seems to be on the back burner. How will we be able to keep the integrated approach that is in the integrated policy?
-

Focus on increasing access and improving quality

Changes or new developments in policy and legislation should focus on increasing access and improving the quality of ECD provision. UNICEF and UNESCO studies indicate that large numbers of South African children are not accessing any form of ECD services. The sector recommends that the mixed model delivery approach be recognised in order to realise universal access to quality ECD service provision. The mixed model approach is cost effective and encompasses home-based, and centre and non-centre based service provision.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- The ECD community is eager to support the National Integrated ECD Policy because there is a need to create access for children who are without ECD.
 - The core focus should be on the quality of education. This means practitioners should have at least a Level 4 qualification and should use the National Curriculum Framework when designing learning programmes for children younger than four.
 - If we want to make our pre-schools into pre-schools of excellence, we need to remember to look at their management as well as the roles and responsibilities of the boards, trustees and governing bodies.
-

Amending and implementing

Participants signalled a need for a separate ECD Act. (Certain Acts should be evaluated and could be improved on. The Children’s Act and Schools Act, for example, could facilitate improvements in ECD.) Participants noted that policies

policy

must lead to legislation, and that both policy and legislation should be amended within a certain time period. During the policy review, government should consult with ECD centres to determine the feasibility of implementing policy expectations. Resources should be allocated to enable policy to be implemented.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Financing/resourcing policies e.g. per child, per day; South African Schools Act to include the compulsory 2 pre-school years.
- Consult ECD centres on whether it will be possible for us to achieve the policies.

Need to accommodate diverse contexts

Participants also drew attention to the need for government policy on ECD to accommodate and be implementable within South Africa's diverse contexts. There are also province-specific differences to be taken into account.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Policy has to recognise that ECD facilities in informal settlements are unable to achieve the kind of infrastructure that would be achievable in better-resourced areas.
- Government support is needed out in the community in the form of infrastructure and nutrition, etc. It is about community development and adult education as well as the health, well-being and education of children.
- Hold government accountable for creating policies that are in context with the areas of implementation (e.g. informal settlements).
- Some problems are province specific and so there can be no one-size-fits-all approach.

Concerns about government capacity to implement the Function Shift

There are concerns that the inadequate implementation of existing policy is an indication that a similar situation is likely to occur with the Function Shift. Participants emphasised the need for government to work quickly to develop and implement new policy relating to the Function Shift. At the same time, the Function Shift must be "properly unpacked and thought through". Participants are also seeking assurance that where help is currently needed (e.g. regarding compliance) it will be provided, i.e. not put on hold until the new policies are in place.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Government is still trying to implement current policy and legislation. Lots of children are still not in ECD facilities, yet government is incorporating new policy and legislation to implement the Function Shift.
- Practitioners do not have time to wait until 2030 for changes to take place – they need better working conditions and recognition from Government now.
- Will the DBE really be able to afford children quality education under the

current state of low-quality education outcomes and services and low capacity?

- DBE has not yet shown that it has the capacity to accommodate Grade R.
- We feel a lack of trust when we look at what is happening in Grade R and the way it has been integrated into the school system. In driving access to Grade R, government has achieved quantity, but not quality.

Formation of an independent body for ECD

The concept of one or more structures to facilitate professionalisation, training and coordination was put forward in a number of different contexts, with the aim of improving the quality of ECD provision.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- ECD should have its own umbrella body (such as SACE).
- The power of trade unions is too strong. Independent boards must go into all teaching environments.
- There should be a whole different department dedicated to the young child.
- There should be an ECD agency that is responsible for the coordination of the NIECD Policy 2015. This agency can be housed within the DBE but must have representatives from all the critical departments involved in offering ECD services.

Expectations and queries relating to the Function Shift

The sector has certain expectations as well as queries regarding policy in relation to the Function Shift. Policies should be clear and state what will happen, when and how. This must be communicated to “people on the ground”. Policy interventions are needed that speak to the employment, conditions of service, remuneration and retention of practitioners. Queries reflect a range of concerns that go to the heart of ECD activities and people’s livelihoods.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- There needs to be something in the policy that protects the sector.
- Policy and legislation should be written for all to understand and be disseminated properly.
- Source qualified individuals or organisations to assist struggling ECD centres with compliance.
- Will the DBE fund practitioners to study and develop themselves ahead of the Function Shift roll out?
- What level of qualification will be required to move into the Foundation Phase, and what funding support will be available?
- Will there be an opportunity to work with the DBE? Will we be recognised as formal structures to then feed into particular primary schools? We need to be strategic about this – how can government support that which is already in place?

-
- When will the DBE start registering ECD centres and what are the criteria for registering?
 - Will the new Grade RR fall under CAPS or the NCF?
 - Will subsidies still be forthcoming?
 - Work with us and not against us as practitioners.
-

2. Training and curriculum

This theme drew the largest number of responses. Information covers three main areas: (i) practitioner qualifications and training; (ii) learnerships; and (iii) the ECD curriculum.

Practitioner qualifications and training

Address the lack of articulation to create progression pathways

Dialogue participants highlighted the need to create progression pathways for practitioners by addressing the lack of articulation between ECD qualifications. All ECD-related qualifications should be audited; programmes should be standardised, and norms and standards set. These processes should be collaborative, involving the DHET, DSD, DoH, RTOs, local universities and TVET Colleges.

The barriers to progressing beyond NQF Levels 4 and 5 in the occupational stream are a major issue. Many practitioners who work with children aged 0 - 4 have incomplete levels of schooling. Although some in this situation do achieve recognised Level 4 and 5 qualifications through TVET colleges and accredited NGO or NPO providers, most universities will not admit them, even for the new Level 6 Diploma in Grade R Teaching – even though policy allows for this.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- There is a huge chasm between qualifications currently in existence for ECD vs the B.Ed. – audit existing qualifications in ECD.
 - The L4 qualifications we have as practitioners are not taken seriously. We are told L4 is equivalent to matric – so why can't we go on after L4 to do L5? Most of us with L4 want to do L5, to empower ourselves.
 - All qualifications registered on the NQF, by SAQA, should be recognised in this transition. The ECD sector shouldn't have to work outside of that framework. Universities and other institutions should cooperate in this process so that practitioners with various NQF qualifications can be admitted into universities, if they wish to study further.
 - Currently the B.Ed. confines practitioners to one age cohort (i.e. 0-4 years old). Practitioners being able to work throughout the foundation phase speaks to articulation opportunities within the sector.
 - The new qualification to be rolled out from 2020 is the Higher Education
-

Certificate, which progresses to the Diploma and then Degree in ECCE: these are focused on the birth to 4 years group, but offer no pathway into Grade R, and conversely, there is no pathway for Grade R teachers to transition into working with Grade RRs.

- Just as there are levels and stratification of the B.Ed. degree e.g. Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and Secondary Phase, there should be the same delineations in ECD studies.
- We need to urge developers of practitioner training curricula to audit what level of qualification does exist in registered and unregistered ECDs³.
- We need to be practical in terms of expectations and standardise according to the NQF.
- Qualifications are designed to suit certain aspects and they are not broad enough.
- Government is saying they want to implement Grade 9 as school leaving – why not take this up and create a route for people to specialise in ECCE after Grade 9?

**Dedicated body
to ensure the
quality of
training**

There is a need for a designated body to ensure the quality of training provision in the ECD sector. More attention must be paid to the quality of training. In particular, practitioner training programmes should include a practical component and evaluate candidate performance in this area. Providers should be accredited, and qualifications registered. Trainers should keep up to date and remain relevant. These factors would result in increased value being placed on the achievement of ECD qualifications.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- There should be a national body for training and evaluation.
- Many RTOs do not meet the requirements to register with DHET. Some RTOs run training courses, despite the fact that they do not meet the stipulated requirements.
- Level 4 and 5 curricula must be revised to include Teaching Practice evaluations.
- Equal standard training levels are required, and DBE needs to stand behind and support this.
- Training in terms of the NCF should be performance based, not attendance based.
- Relook at offerings by TVET Colleges.
- Establish independent assessment boards – they need to look at [the provision and quality of] experiential training. Assessment boards must include ECD specialists to audit across the ECD and B.Ed. overlap.

³The term 'ECDs' is commonly used by many in the sector to mean ECD centres.

-
- Workshops and training must only be provided by accredited institutions registered with SAQA.
 - The NQF Amendment Bill should be strengthened and extended to ECD to curb bogus providers and fake qualifications.
 - DBE should look into standardising the training of ECD practitioners.
-

Problems with the issuing of certificates

A related issue is the absence of certificates, or delays in the awarding of certificates to successful candidates.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Certificates must be provided timeously – they must be for registered qualifications, not attendance certificates (and they must not expire).
 - Recognise DBE trained practitioners by providing them with certificates.
 - Practitioners on training are not on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) hence no certificates are received after the training. All training institutions and service providers should register their learners on the NLRD.
-

Improving practitioner qualification levels

The Function Shift is seen as creating both a necessity and an opportunity to improve practitioner qualification levels. Practitioners are keen to improve their qualifications and believe that government should take responsibility for facilitating and funding the training of ECD practitioners, as it does with teachers in schools. This should include the provision of bridging courses and in-service training to enable practitioners who are qualified on lower levels to upgrade their qualifications, and using RPL processes to recognise practitioner competence.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- DBE should support all those with NQF Levels 4 and 5 to obtain suitable qualifications. They are the ones that trained us but now they don't take us seriously. Let us not waste money but use it for our children and our benefits.
 - Provide bridging qualifications specifically designed to enable ECD practitioners with NQF Levels 4 and 5 to move into schools.
 - The DBE must not concentrate only on skills development (Levels) but must include programmes to universities and properly registered colleges because some ECD practitioners have matric and should be able to enter a 3-year programme.
 - We need to have RPL in terms of recognising skills and experience gained from working in an ECD centre over the years. Government should consult those working on the ground on how to formalise this.
 - RPL should be taken into consideration for entry into Levels 4, 5 and 6.
 - Let government/ DBE take ECD seriously and provide unqualified and underqualified practitioners with proper training to obtain L4 and L5 qualifications.
-

Funding practitioner training

There is an expectation that government should play a bigger role in funding practitioner training to promote equitable access and offset the high costs that are a barrier to accessing training. This is particularly needed to enable practitioners to develop themselves ahead of the Function Shift roll out. At the same time, participants emphasised the importance of ensuring that funding benefits the ECD sector and is not misused.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Funza Lushaka bursaries should be available to people training as ECD practitioners.
- Provide bursaries, learnerships and internships for ECD qualifications and practitioners.
- Government should follow through with assessments before granting bursaries to ensure that the right people are selected and to give people a fair chance before just saying “no”.
- Practitioners paying towards their own studies would lead to more commitment from them.
- Stipends should fall away as people study only to access the stipend but do not become part of the ECD sector. Removing stipends will ensure that people passionate about ECD study towards it.
- Practitioners need to take the time to consider and assess whether they can keep up with the demands of studying before they go ahead and make use of available funding.

A variety of delivery modes

A variety of modes of delivery should be used to ensure that professional development and training opportunities are widely available and accessible. Key aspects to be considered include language, time, locality and provider expertise. (Financial support is addressed elsewhere.)

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- We need to first ensure we have a workforce at tertiary level to properly train ECD teachers and to bring them on par with DBE teachers.
- There should be a variety of empowerment opportunities (online/ distance, face-to-face, blended) that practitioners can use to obtain a certificate, diploma or degree.
- Training opportunities must be provided in rural areas as these are severely lacking.
- ECD Forums should be acknowledged as a way to offer training.
- Government should provide professional teachers in each ECD region to develop groups of practitioners in that region.
- ECD practitioners should get points just as DBE teachers get CPD points for attending training.
- Hold quarterly workshops to improve ECD employee skills.

-
- There needs to be holiday condensed training – colleges should provide Saturday learnerships so that there is the choice to attend these. [Some argued against DBE offered training taking place on Saturdays, as practitioners have their own families and responsibilities to tend to over weekends and should be afforded that opportunity.]
 - Training for learnerships should be re-instated on Saturdays and courses to upskill educators should take place over holidays.
 - Private independent accredited training providers (as opposed to TVET Colleges) should also be prioritised through this transition and be afforded the same respect and status. Funding should also be channelled to these training providers.
 - Emphasis needs to be placed on use of home language in the training and development of practitioners. This would lead to consistency in qualifications because people would understand what's expected.
-

Learnerships

Learnerships – selection of candidates

The topic of learnerships received numerous criticisms as well as recommendations for increasing their value.

The first requirement would be a more effective process for selecting candidates. Recruitment should focus on identifying people with a genuine interest in ECD, and with some prior experience of ECD. There is a strong feeling that learnerships should prioritise those who are already working in ECD facilities.

If people who have no real interest in ECD are accepted onto learnerships, there is a probability that they will not complete the training or will not remain in ECD. This can be detrimental to the children in their care, and wastes resources.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Before DBE selects people for training, they should get input from the ECD forums on whom to take. DBE brings matriculants to the ECD centres for learnerships – but the challenge is that often they have no aptitude or interest in the children, spend their time playing on their phones, and don't want to help if children soil themselves.
 - DBE should not bring their own people – they should consider us, the existing practitioners.
 - Instead of finding people that aren't interested in ECD, rather go to centres where people aren't qualified and train them up. Start with people that have a passion and upskill them so they can increase their income.
 - The government keeps training people that do not have the heart for ECD. The government should prioritise existing people in the sector that have worked for a minimum of 2 years in a facility. It should offer training to someone who has not had training and even those without matric.
 - People accept the opportunity from DBE not because of passion for children
-

or the sector but because they are desperate and want the stipend.

- Training of employees and not retaining them affects the children psychosocially as practitioners are always coming in and out. Training is a long and expensive process.
- Adopt a policy for internships where if people leave within a year, they have to pay back a certain amount as a strategy to increase retention. [Many did not agree with this suggestion.]

**Learnerships –
reduce barriers
to entry**

The lack of a matric certificate excludes many people who currently work in ECD from entering NQF Level 4 learnerships. Although matric is not required for entry to the L4 qualification, it is required to enter the learnership. Another issue is the upper age limit of 35 years, which excludes older practitioners. This is felt to be discriminatory, as there are many mature women with experience in the sector who as a result are unable to access accredited training. A way forward has to be created for people in this situation.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Learnerships benchmark a requirement of matric – by doing that they are disregarding the highest authority of education (SAQA) because for you to be admitted to Level 4 you don't have to have matric, so why is it that when learnerships are being issued matric is made a requirement?
- There should be no age restrictions – rather combine experience with qualifications.
- Some workers without matric don't qualify for learnerships but are hard workers – we ask the DBE to create a scheme that will give a skill, with a certificate, to those who cannot get on to learnerships.

**Learnerships –
improve WIL
implementation**

To improve learnership implementation and the quality of training received, there has to be closer cooperation between the training provider (RTO/TVET College) and the ECD centre providing the work experience/ Work Integrated Learning (WIL) component.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Regarding learnerships for L4 and L5: There must be a proper induction to learnerships for both the learners and the centre management – the principal, the SGB and especially the designated supervisor of the learners. The management needs to know what days the learners are supposed to be at the centre and what assignments they are supposed to do, so the management can work together with the department.
- Practitioners no longer implementing/not working due to signing of learnerships without including centre SGB and supervisor.
- In colleges, learnerships are attendance-based and not performance-based, meaning students seldom grasp the learning.

The ECD curriculum

Develop curricula to improve ECD provision

The Function Shift is seen as creating an opportunity and a context to develop/improve the curriculum, particularly for 4 - 5 year olds. Any curriculum development initiatives should draw on the experience of the ECD sector. Comments indicate that it would be beneficial for ECD centres to receive standardised curriculum guidelines and support from the DBE, provided that ECD play-based principles are adhered to. The sector is anxious to have clarity on what form the curriculum for Grade RR will take.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Will the new Grade RR fall under CAPS or NCF?
- Key ECD stakeholders involved in the provision of ECD should be included in curriculum development processes.
- DBE should make more use of civil society. There should be more of a collaborative workshop approach where government works with the private sector/NGOs and uses their knowledge to design the curriculum and programmes. Programmes are not up to scratch.
- We can't have unqualified academics designing curriculums that are out of touch with the educational realities and requirements of young children.
- The curriculum should be maintained and regularly updated.
- Ensure that all schools/ECD centres are working at the same level.
- Changing the curriculum is a risk. DBE must be clear about which curriculum will be appropriate for the 4 - 5 year olds as they are currently in limbo.
- Need for differentiating by age – we can't use CAPS when children need concrete play-based learning.
- We [practitioners] need a curriculum that is fit for purpose, while this Function Shift is rolled out.
- There must be relevant training and curriculum materials, and these must be distributed across the sector.
- Training [of practitioners] and ECD curricula should align with the National Integrated ECD Policy, 2015 (NIECD) for NQF Levels 1 - 4 & 5.
- ECD curricula should include values – values are shaped between 3 - 6 years and ECD plays the biggest role in shaping children's values.
- The DBE must give direction on the curriculum that is to be used in the sector.

The following contrasting view was noted:

- Why do we have to conform to one particular curriculum? Why not look at us as professionals and allow us to choose the curriculum – as long as it is registered, and you reach the assessment standards in that grade.

**Tensions
between ECD
and school level
curricula and
methodologies**

There are significant differences between the curricula and methodologies used in ECD and those in schools, and in the training of ECD practitioners and schoolteachers. This creates tensions and highlights the need for greater integration in the training and professional development of ECD practitioners and Grade R - 3 teachers. Participants also called for government bodies involved with ECD to come to consensus and to work together more effectively (e.g. the DBE and the ETDP SETA).

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

ECD practitioner vs teacher training:

- There is a huge discrepancy between training through universities and resource and training organisations (RTOs). The way they implement the curriculum is different. Academics are theory-based, and RTOs are more hands-on.
- People trained to teach in primary schools are not trained for ECD and don't understand the appropriate pedagogy or how play impacts on the brain.
- NCF & Grade R: How do practitioners get holistic training? More integration is needed for a seamless progression from birth to Grade R.
- Differences in the professional development of practitioners/ teachers for the age group 0 - 4 years, and for Grade R - 3, cause confusion. The curriculum used in practitioner training is not clear.

ECD vs school curriculum and methodologies:

- There are tensions between the facilitation of the learning (pedagogy) in ECD, and the formal teaching and learning approaches in DBE schooling.
- CAPS is not play-based so there is a problem with Grade R CAPS and the gap between the NCF and CAPS.
- The ECD curriculum and the school curriculum do not correlate. There is no progression from the one to the other.
- Grade R has placed children into the Foundation Phase CAPS curriculum, rather than in a play-based pre-school centre, which some might see as preferable. What approach will be adopted in bringing Grade RR into this scenario, and what will the effect of the Function Shift be on the children? This is a fundamental policy issue needing urgently to be addressed by the DBE.

**Curriculum
support and
resources**

Participants identified a need for ongoing, substantial curriculum support, including the provision of resources to implement the curriculum. Participants called on government to support the sector with appropriate equipment and materials, as well as training in using them, "in the very same way as schools are supported".

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- The lack of support to implement the curriculum is a risk – DBE officials need to visit and monitor ECD practitioners on their use of play-based pedagogy.
- Clear understanding of the curriculum is needed.
- There is a need for criteria to support and standardise the implementation of the NCF.
- People don't know how to implement the curriculum that they have been taught as they don't understand how to use the NCF curriculum – people need to be taught how to use these resources – there needs to be something clearer.
- There must be relevant training and curriculum materials, and these must be distributed across the sector.
- The DBE should give the same learning resources and equipment to independent ECD centres as they give to schools.
- Schools have many resources that they do not use – DBE should provide ECD centres with these resources that are not being used in the schools.
- The government should provide appropriate materials. This especially goes for children aged 4 - 6 years old (Grade RR and Grade R).
- Toy libraries can be sent to rural areas – funding should be given for this.

**Capacitating
school principals
and district
officials in ECD**

The Function Shift will create a need for school principals and School Management Teams (SMTs), as well as District Officials, particularly those involved in monitoring and evaluation, to understand ECD principles and requirements. Some participants expressed concern that a lack of understanding of ECD has resulted in instances of Grade R teachers being misused.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- The Function Shift will mean that school principals need to be trained on ECD to capacitate them to meet the educational and developmental needs of children.
- Primary school principals tend to be a stumbling block in collaboration efforts between ECD and primary schools. They do not understand the importance of collaboration between the schools and ECD centres.
- Government officials who monitor and evaluate the Foundation Phase curriculum will have to be trained to monitor the ECD curriculum so that they will be able to monitor Grade RR.
- Grade R teachers are called out of their classes to go and do menial administrative tasks, leaving children without supervision. This will be worse with the incorporation of Grade RR into schools.

**Urgent request
for feedback**

Dialogue participants asked to be given information timeously on how the Function Shift will impact on qualification requirements and the curriculum for

Grade RR.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- The DBE must inform the sector of changes in time.
-

3. Registration and Infrastructure

Complex and challenging process

The process of registering ECD centres is complex and challenging. Town planning by-laws and building plan approval requirements hinder other registration processes. Many by-laws are outdated and are not applicable within all contexts. Registration is particularly difficult in informal settlements, which is seen as discriminatory.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Registration requirements discriminate against ECD centres in informal settlements – where children especially need ECD.
 - Instead of making it difficult for ECD centres in informal settlements to register, government should support ECD centres in informal, under-resourced areas, so that the children in these areas can be better served.
-

Address impediments to compliance

In connection with the Function Shift, dialogue participants called for the impediments to compliance to be addressed so as to simplify the process of registration and to make it more affordable. This should include relaxing by-laws and repealing outdated requirements to allow for ECD centres to be established within informal communities where they are needed. Compliance requirements should be standardised so as not to vary from one municipality to another, and there should be greater integration of requirements by the various government departments. Government would need to take the lead by enacting policy to enable these changes.

Participants called on government to do more to communicate the correct processes of registration, including the DBE's compliance requirements, for example by holding workshops. Other suggestions for improvement include "separating registration processes from social services work", ensuring higher standards of service from officials, and instituting an online registration process incorporating progress monitoring. There is also a strong view that the costs associated with compliance and registration should be subsidised.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Relax by-laws and work within the environment of the child; brick structures, toilets, space ventilation, kitchens etc. do not exist in informal settlements but children do! They need to be better served.
-

-
- Registration by-laws in different municipalities and requirements of DSD and DBE contradict each other – these must be standardised in each province.
 - Hold government accountable for creating policies that are in context with the areas of implementation.
 - The different government departments that impact on registration need to collaborate or integrate to avoid confusion on registration requirements.
 - The DBE and DSD should provide ECDs with support, including financial support, to be compliant, as ECDs provide a service on government’s behalf and support government in terms of its mandate.

Government investment in ECD centres

An emerging solution would be for government to invest in community based ECD centres. This would increase their capacity to meet the growing demand for ECD services, particularly for Grade R and Grade RR, while keeping children in their communities. There would be fewer compliance problems if government assumed responsibility for providing the structure. The focus should be on using existing infrastructure, by funding the improvement of existing ECD facilities, and using unused government and community buildings. Under-utilised buildings such as community halls and churches could also serve as ECD centres during the week. Municipalities should become more closely involved in supporting community ECD centres, providing them with permanent sites and recognising and promoting them as places of learning and safety for young children. Government support to these ECD centres should include funding to improve practitioner qualifications, payment of salaries and the provision of equipment and learning resources.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Cluster existing ECD facilities and fund them to become centres of excellence.
- DBE should provide our ECD centres with funding (the money) for infrastructure.
- Government must build a centre next to each primary school so that we can provide them with well-developed children.
- Government must provide centres with learning resources and equipment at the beginning of every year.
- Develop rural centres instead of shutting them down.
- Without government support mushrooming and improper infrastructure will continue to be on the rise.

4. Communication and advocacy

Responses in this category related to communication about the Function Shift, and communication with and within the ECD sector in general.

Communication about the Function Shift:

Need for clear information on the Function Shift

Participants welcomed the opportunity of the CECDN dialogues to engage with the Function Shift but expressed concern that there had been no direct communication from the DSD. This, together with uncoordinated information being received from different departments fuelled confusion and sent mixed messages. Participants emphasised the importance of receiving clear information.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- It's concerning that we are not hearing from the DSD – it is up to the DSD as our current department to convene the sector and consult with us.
 - Too many sources of information lead to different interpretations.
 - The sector must be given clear information regarding the completion of Grade R and the introduction of Grade RR: how this will be catered for, where it will be housed, and whether the children will move.
-

Disseminating information

Information should originate from a single source, but should be made widely accessible through a variety of media, and continuously updated. Communication should be tailored to the language needs of the audience, with translators being used if required. Workshops could also be used to reach the sector, as could intermediaries such as the SACECD.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- There should be one access point with regards to communicating the Function Shift and its progress.
 - Use a variety of different media to publish the process – radio, SABC, TV, newsletters, campaigns/ imbizo.
 - There needs to be an integrated communication strategy to avoid conflicting messages about the Function Shift from different government departments and civil society structures communicating different things. To avoid the spreading of rumours, it is government's responsibility to send communication out, and then for each sector to comment.
-

Concerns about lack of consultation

Dialogue participants expressed concern at the lack of consultation with the sector. They feared that their concerns would not be heard, and they would not be able to make a meaningful input into the process. This could result in decisions being made without a full understanding of the conditions pertaining to a significant proportion of South Africa's ECD sector.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- It is a risk that decisions are being made without consultation of those working on the ground.
-

-
- We must be given time to speak for ourselves.
 - Consultations/ roadshows should be held with key ECD stakeholders, i.e. principals and practitioners.
-

Communicating with parents and stakeholders on the Function Shift and quality in ECD

Communication should extend to providing parents and other stakeholders with information on the Function Shift and informing them about the meaning of quality in ECD.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- There should be a clear communication strategy across different government departments. Above and beyond this, there should be clear communication channels and/or platforms that include all stakeholders in local communities, i.e. local businesses, NPOs, parents and ECD practitioners.
 - Stakeholders – DBE, DSD, DoH and parents – must have a clear understanding of ECD and the consequences of migration.
 - Communication does not filter down to parents. This especially creates gaps in parents’ understanding of policies and legislation.
 - Parents need to be educated about ECD. Placing 4 year olds into primary school is wrong as this is not learning through play – but the expectations of parents are for reading, writing, and arithmetic, not learning through play.
-

Communication in general:

Centralise ECD information and communication

ECD information tends to be fragmented and situated in different places. Dialogue participants strongly supported the creation of an ECD information hub (or hubs) that would house all ECD related government documents and provide easy access to them (both physically and digitally). Communication with the sector should also be centralised through a single communication portal for all ECD stakeholders. It was noted that a single source of information dissemination could lead to greater accountability.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- There should be a centre or ECD Hub in each province. This centre should have everything related to ECD and should house all the necessary forms and information about ECD etc. This will also lead to better decision-making and consultation. Each department that is involved with ECD, particularly DSD, DBE and DoH, should have a representative that is deployed at the provincial ECD Hub.
 - The creation of a web link/ booklets and documents containing comprehensive information and universal forms that are needed in the sector. Documents should be comprehensive enough to include all the necessary information to use the forms.
 - The Department should develop a comprehensive communication strategy in addition to the existing strategies. Communication should be centralised
-

through an ECD repository.

- This is an opportunity to strengthen ECD forums so that they benefit the sector by for e.g. providing information on legislative requirements. The sector would then be better placed to help itself and provide effective community input. At the same time, [it is important to] protect the autonomy of ECD forums, so they do not just become conduits for channelling government information. ECD forums have to remain independent and able to raise any issue that is needed.

An alternative view was that a particular, existing organisation or association should take on the role of intermediary between the ECD sector and the DBE.

- DBE should communicate with the SA Congress for ECD for anything to do with ECD, i.e. Congress should be the intermediary between ECD and the DBE.
 - The CECDN, NECT or a similar association should be the sole representative of the ECD sector, throughout the Function Shift implementation process and beyond. This association should function like an advisory body which can source and disseminate accurate and current information that is communicated to the sector.
-

5. Finance and ECD donors

Government responsible for funding ECD provision

There is an expectation that government should take responsibility for the education of children, and as such, that it should be wholly responsible for funding ECD provision. This should include funding independent ECD facilities. Practitioner training and development is another area where expectations for government funding are high, particularly in terms of meeting increased requirements relating to the Function Shift.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- ECD centres need to be able to provide free schooling with the support of government.
 - The DBE should give learning resources and equipment to independent ECD centres, in the same way as they (the DBE) give them to schools.
 - DBE must fund the full budget of the ECD centre; for example, salaries, food and maintenance.
 - If ECD migrates to the DBE, the subsidy model must change to a funding model, without prescriptions. Currently, funding comes with prescriptions on what percentage of the money must be allocated towards salaries, operations etc.
 - ECD centres should be classified by quintiles and given resources accordingly.
 - The DBE must speed up processes to train and equip existing practitioners so
-

that they can be capacitated to deal with the changes that the Function Shift will bring. This also means allocating money towards the training and development of practitioners through support mechanisms like bursaries and opportunities to study further.

Concerns about DBE capacity to assume financial responsibility

At the same time, there are concerns about the DBE's ability to assume responsibility for children affected by the Function Shift. The requirements and financial implications need to be considered carefully. Participants also expressed anxiety about how subsidies might be affected.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Is there a resourcing and financing strategy in place?
 - Does the DBE have the infrastructure and resources? Where will the money come from to build the proper facilities? Government cannot provide for current school requirements, e.g. toilets.
 - Will DBE take over funding for these children who they intend to migrate?
 - Is funding available for all the resources needed for this age group?
 - How will subsidies be processed? There may be a loss of subsidies for ECD centres.
 - Funding is limited all around. Without funding, good quality ECD is at risk.
-

Function Shift impacting negatively on donor funding to ECD sector

The Function Shift could potentially impact significantly on donor funding to the sector, if children of Grade RR age were to be moved to schools. Donors are reluctant to directly fund government, so the ECD sector as a whole would lose funding. Others saw the Function Shift as an opportunity for the private sector to enter into mutually beneficial Public-Private Partnerships with government. The Function Shift could also stimulate support and funding from corporates.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Nationalising ECD would mean a loss of CSI funding and international donors. It would also create loopholes for corruption and mismanagement.
 - How flexible would government be in terms of accommodating donor criteria for funding?
 - Funding will be lost to the sector while government decides on policy around the Function Shift.
-

Loss of fee revenue within the sector

Providing Grade RR at public schools would directly reduce the amount of funding available to the sector as a whole through parents choosing to send their children to no-fee schools, rather than to independent ECD centres. On the other hand, parents would incur additional costs for after-care services and transport.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

-
- Impact on existing business in respect of revenue stream, i.e. loss of fees as parents could choose to register their children at schools paying less or no fees, resulting in a loss of jobs and income for ECD centres, and a direct impact on the economy.

Strengthen the ECD sector with government support and funding

There is strong support for the approach of retaining Grade RR children in ECD centres, with government injecting additional funding into the sector to strengthen ECD provision.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Instead of moving all children in the Grade RR age cohort to schools, government could instead sponsor those children who are able to gain access to ECD centres. This would use the same money that government would otherwise use to pay the Grade RR teachers.
- Cluster existing ECD facilities and provide them with funding, so they become centres of excellence.
- Implement all changes within the current ECD sector: training, resources, support in respect of compliance issues, funding.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

Poor quality (or misdirection) of current M&E processes

The ECD sector has strong opinions on what M&E should entail, who should do it, and how it should be done.

Participants identified numerous problems in the way M&E is currently being carried out. The primary issues are that what passes for M&E consists instead of 'policing'; it focusses on the wrong aspects; and it is carried out by officials with little or no understanding of ECD.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- M&E is done by government social workers; they only do facilities monitoring and have 'scary' attitudes.
- The ECD sector is monitored by DSD social workers who have no background knowledge of ECD. This means they cannot assist in identifying gaps.
- Monitoring should use identified criteria and provide guidance. There is a lack of support needed to implement the curriculum. Officials need to visit and monitor ECD practitioners on play-based pedagogy.
- Centre Inspectors want to implement CAPS and not NCF. Centre Inspectors need to be capacitated – they have high school or primary school experience and therefore cannot cope with ECD.

Function Shift an

The Function Shift is welcomed as an opportunity to improve the quality of ECD

**opportunity to
use M&E to
improve quality
of ECD provision**

provision overall. M&E could contribute significantly, if used correctly. It is felt that, if DBE were to regulate and monitor the sector, gaps and shortcomings could be identified earlier and steps taken to address these. At the same time participants flagged the danger of making ECD the responsibility of one department only, as the “involvement of the other departments, although not visible, is paramount”.

Several suggestions to improve M&E processes and increase the benefits to the sector emerged from the discussions. M&E processes should be transparent. Those conducting M&E visits to ECD centres should use a developmental rather than a punitive approach. This should emphasise providing feedback on previous M&E visits and helping where there are challenges. The current narrow focus of M&E should be broadened to address the full range of requirements and activities relating to ECD provision. A holistic M&E system informed by a theory of change should be implemented. This would require the setting of norms and standards, which should be uniform for private, public and rural and urban centres, and the creation of a new monitoring tool. There should be less paper-work and more online documents, for tracking purposes.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Irrespective of where children will be located, DBE has a strong role to play in monitoring and overseeing programme development and practitioners.
- The shifting of responsibility for ECD centres to the DBE may be an advantage for ECD centres as there may be improvement in the structure of ECD centres and M&E as well as in training of practitioners.
- Officials should inform centres of intended M&E visits, not just arrive. Government should show us what they are coming to evaluate.
- M&E has to involve curriculum content (social), implementation, planning, practitioner qualifications, SAQA accreditation, and experience.
- Guidance for practitioners in terms of monitoring and evaluation needs to be created.

**Need for ECD
sector
involvement in
M&E**

Dialogue participants are united in wanting greater ECD civil society involvement in M&E processes. The idea of using ECD specialists (training providers and qualified practitioners) to conduct M&E was expressed widely and forcefully. In any event, officials tasked with conducting M&E should be knowledgeable about ECD, the ECD sector and M&E processes.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- The ECD sector should give input to inform M&E processes.
- DSD social workers struggle to identify gaps and assist practitioners in the ways that they need. The government must bring forth qualified ECD practitioners to work as assistants to the social workers doing M&E. The ECD

practitioners will have a better understanding of the field, while the social workers can bring technical expertise related to registration.

- Officials who carry out inspections must be properly trained so they know what to look for when they inspect centres. Social workers doing M&E should be workshopped, so they know about ECD, just as practitioners are workshopped.

M&E tools and training for practitioner use

Practitioners acknowledge the value of M&E in improving the quality of ECD provision. They would welcome guidance, tools and training on classroom monitoring and assessing children, which should be based on the NCF.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Importance needs to be placed on monitoring and evaluation.
- M&E tools should be provided, not for monitoring of furniture etc., but to assess the children – we need to be better qualified to assess children and need to know how to use M&E tools for classroom monitoring.

7. Health and nutrition

Nutritional needs catered for in ECD

Moving Grade RR children to public schools may compromise nutritional support to vulnerable children. ECD centres provide three (or four) meals a day and feed all the children. In contrast, school feeding schemes generally provide one meal per day. There are also concerns that schools' criteria for selecting children to receive food may exclude some children in need. ECD places considerable emphasis on adequately meeting children's nutritional requirements by providing age-appropriate menus, portion sizes and feeding routines. Children's eating habits are monitored and alternatives are provided in the case of allergies. The nutritional requirements of children with special needs can also be catered for. Participants questioned whether the same care would be taken in primary schools.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Young children need adequate nutritional support to promote growth and development, and for prevention of malnutrition and stunting.
- The nutritional needs of children will be compromised because school menus cannot accurately cater to their nutritional and developmental needs.
- At school a balanced diet is not considered, and kitchens dish up for all ages at the same time, with the same quantity.
- Cooks at schools should be trained for the optimal nutrition of children. This includes training on meal portions, food hygiene and preparation.
- DoH, DBE and DSD need to come together to provide sufficient and healthy food so that ECD centres do not only depend on the ECD subsidy.

-
- Training is key for ECD practitioners and parents – education on health and nutrition will result in healthier lifestyles and better food choices.
-

Exposure to health risks in schools

There are concerns that the primary school environment will increase young children’s exposure to health risks.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Children aged 4 - 6 still have fragile immune systems, and over-crowded classrooms and inadequate sanitation would increase the risk.
 - The hygiene of children will not be closely monitored in schools, because of the influx of learners and lack of adequate health systems.
-

Use ECD centres more effectively to monitor children’s health

ECD facilities should be used to a much greater extent for child health monitoring and disease prevention programmes.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Clinics promise to come to ECD centres for vaccinations, but they do not come.
 - Regular lice inspections [should be conducted].
 - Health department to do regular visits and check-ups.
 - Health visits – Monitoring visits by DSD, DoH.
 - Clinics must work with the ECDs, have a local ECD database and keep databases of children up to date.
-

8. Social protection

The main emphasis of the comments was on the school environment’s lack of suitability for children of Grade RR age.

School environment unsafe for young children

The primary school environment is seen as developmentally inappropriate and even dangerous for pre-Grade R children. How would young children’s safety be ensured at public schools? Challenges included the risk of bullying by older children, the absence of assistance and supervision during toilet visits, and the shorter school operating hours which would leave young children vulnerable after schools close for the day.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Formal school hours are less than those of ECD – increased danger of child trafficking, bullying, raping.
 - In ECD a practitioner accompanies the children everywhere. In schools, children are just let out at break times and have to fend for themselves.
-

-
- Who is going to be the custodian of social protection?
 - Aftercare services at schools should be offered so as to have the young children supervised beyond the school day.
-

School environment developmentally inappropriate

Typical public primary school environments are not considered conducive for meeting young children’s developmental needs. The standardised systems and high child/ teacher ratios make it unlikely that children’s individual physical, emotional, social and cognitive development needs would be adequately met. Challenges include inappropriate infrastructure, large classes that are not conducive to creating secure, nurturing environments, and weakened parental engagement.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Overcrowding in classes and surroundings causes stress in children and practitioners and threatens holistic development.
- Grade RR aged children are not ready for a primary school environment and infrastructure, e.g. toilets that are not fit for small children, lack of safe and stimulating play areas.
- The language of bonding between practitioners and children is different from that between teachers and learners – young children will be horribly disadvantaged at schools.
- Practices in schools are developmentally inappropriate for young children – how will meal, toilet and rest routines be accommodated?
- Schools lack infrastructure appropriate for facilitating learning through play.
- Disruption of parent-teacher communication – having to wait until the next day to see a teacher.
- Children to be kept at ECD centres where there is safety and love.

It was noted that infrastructure and learning environments of ECD centres may not always be conducive for learning, and that non-compliant centres cause harm by not creating the necessary developmental foundations.

Guard against too-early formalisation of learning

Dialogue participants are deeply concerned that the transfer of responsibility to the DBE could result in inappropriate formalisation of the pre-Grade R curriculum and teaching methodologies. Too-early formalisation would compromise flexibility and creativity in learning, adversely affecting development. To ensure that the learning-through-play pedagogical approach is upheld, preparation for the Function Shift should include a drive to educate schools and district officials on play-based pedagogy. The Function Shift also creates the opportunity to educate parents about quality in ECD and the central role of play in children’s development.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Guard against the ‘schoolification’ of ECD. There is already pressure from some parents for ECD centres to teach children to read and write. This is not what ECD should be doing. It shows a lack of understanding of the ECD curriculum and play-based pedagogy.
- Loss of focus on the “whole” child – it is important to remember that play is part of social care as well as stimulation.
- Taking children to school too early may delay their holistic development.
- There must be a very strong move to educate teachers and district officials on the appropriate pedagogy and how play impacts on the brain, before even considering moving children to schools for Grade RR. We can’t have worksheets as evidence of progress in Grade RR.
- How can the sector help parents understand the proposed Function Shift and the implications thereof on children? Taking children to school too soon can have an adverse effect on their development.
- Will play time for the younger children be provided and monitored? We need to make sure that children aren’t just receiving paperwork in Grade R and Grade RR.

Integrated approach to ensure children’s well-being

Another important concern is that the Function Shift should be implemented in such a way that it promotes an integrated approach to providing for children’s well-being. This would require the DBE, DSD and DoH as well as municipalities to work together, with the DBE taking a leadership and coordinating role. The various functions and responsibilities of the different bodies would have to be clearly defined.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Despite the Function Shift to the DBE, there will still be vital roles in the system for the DoH and DSD. The question is: How to integrate? This requires leadership and coordination by DBE.
- Providing integrated collaborative care includes parents, social workers, other educators, relevant local government officials etc., so that integration takes place on a local level.
- Both the DSD and DBE should clearly stipulate and divide their functions, so that there is no ambiguity, chaos or confusion.
- The DSD should regulate and support the social wellbeing of children e.g. Hygiene, Health and Nutrition, Social Protection. The DBE must regulate and support the development function e.g. curriculum, teaching material and M&E.

Accommodating developmental challenges and

The ECD environment is considered better able to accommodate young children with different ability levels, developmental barriers and special needs.

special needs

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- In schools, children are rolled over to the next level even if they haven't learnt what they are supposed to. Because ECD classes are smaller, ECD is able to pick up on learning problems and take steps to correct them.
- There needs to be inclusive education in terms of children with disabilities when the children move into the different school environment.

Equip practitioners to provide social protection

Participants drew attention to the need for training and professional development to equip practitioners and ECD centres to provide a socially protective environment to the children in their care. In addition to the relevant pedagogy, programmes should develop an integrated knowledge of the policies and systems that affect and protect children, how local government works, and an understanding of how to assist or refer individual children who need support. It was noted that giving ECD practitioners access to support services on their own account, would also benefit the children in their care.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Psycho-social support services for ECD practitioners so that they can cultivate the tools to help themselves and the children in their care. Children must be prioritised and protected.

9. Human resources / Workforce

Dialogue input relating directly to practitioner qualifications and training has been incorporated into the Training and Curriculum theme.

Function Shift – both a threat and an opportunity

The Function Shift is seen by some as a threat to their continued employment. It is also seen as having the potential to improve earnings and access to employee benefits for those practitioners who are able to capitalise on the expected increase in study opportunities. It will be important to engage the DBE on qualification criteria and levels, and to develop career pathing for the ECD workforce.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- There is a lack of clarity on minimum qualifications for ECD teachers – the DBE must clearly state what the relevant qualifications for working with Grades R and RR are.
- Provide clarity on the minimum requirements for ECD practitioners to be employed by the DBE to teach Grade RR. This must include information on upgrading existing qualifications, e.g. admission requirements, RPL processes, bridging courses.

-
- Government needs to support ECD practitioners so they can have qualifications recognised by the DBE so they can get salaries and benefits that other educators have.
-

Retaining the current ECD workforce

Of particular concern is the importance of preserving the employment of the current ECD workforce, which includes a large cohort of mature people, mainly women, who have a wealth of experience but lack relevant qualifications.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- All workers in the ECD sector should be accommodated in the Function Shift irrespective of age if they are willing to align with the Function Shift.
 - The DBE should absorb and upskill existing ECD practitioners.
 - Instead of bringing in matriculants as childminders in Grade R classes in schools, DBE should use practitioners with NQF L4 and L5 ECD qualifications and should pay them the same.
 - Assistant practitioners should not be forgotten about – many don't have qualifications, but they shouldn't lose their jobs.
 - Experienced practitioners will be at risk of losing their jobs to younger graduates.
 - Use RPL for older, experienced practitioners – older practitioners need to be trained, not kicked out of their jobs.
 - Bursaries (to obtain qualifications) should be offered to practitioners who are already practicing but are not accredited to do so.
-

Providing for broader sector training needs

Participants identified a need to capacitate the ECD workforce more broadly. In addition to early childhood care and education, ECD facilities require a range of management and operational skills. Training should be accessible and financial assistance should be provided. It is also important for this broader training to be recognised by the sector, by society and by the relevant authorities (i.e. recognised certificates to be awarded). Training should be provided to all who work in ECD, not only to practitioners.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- There must be capacitation of practitioners through free training and workshops around legislation, norms and standards, compliance and planning, and human resources.
 - The ECD workforce encompasses others besides practitioners: assistant practitioners, gardeners, cooks, cleaners, security guards etc.
 - There is no training for cooks, or in first aid or use of fire extinguishers.
 - Financial management and computer skills should be incorporated into the training programmes of practitioners.
 - Aftercare courses for assistant practitioners need to be made available as ECD centres have longer hours.
-

-
- Skills should be developed for all. The content of workshops and training must be understandable by older practitioners.
 - Some challenges in terms of training and upgrading qualifications are: affordability; access for practitioners in rural areas; financing the training. People's age could also be a hindrance.
 - We need to ensure that the ECD workforce at higher levels (ECD centre managers/principals) also undergo training.
-

Remuneration issues

The remuneration of practitioners is a significant area of concern and conflict. Private and NPO registered ECD centres in disadvantaged areas struggle to pay the minimum wage. Some participants called for legislation to regulate the employment of ECD practitioners.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Stringent labour law requirements are a risk to ECD; they place the employer at a disadvantage. Many centres work with the impoverished and cannot afford to pay minimum wages. They are at risk of being closed down by the Department of Labour. This then puts the children on the street. How will the DBE handle this when DSD isn't even interested?
 - ECD practitioners should receive benefits e.g. medical aid, housing allowance.
 - There is a need to develop a costed and comprehensive Human Resource Strategy for ECD.
-

Payment of stipends

The payment of stipends to Grade R practitioners, rather than salaries with employee benefits, is another significant area of contention. Other issues are the substantial provincial differences in stipend amounts, and late or missed payments.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- Stipends should be changed to salaries and the amount should be increased after Level 4 and 5 ECD qualifications are obtained.
 - DBE should pay all unqualified staff with work experience the minimum wage (R3500 pm).
 - Provide practitioners with PERSAL numbers.
 - All 9 provincial education departments should have to follow the same universal system, with the same payment amounts and conditions.
 - Grade R stipends should be paid monthly, on time, directly into practitioners' bank accounts (some practitioners reported that stipends are not paid regularly and missed payments are not made up when requested).
 - ECD practitioners are considered volunteers; they are not regarded as professionals.
-

Implications for sustainability of ECD centres and RTOs

The Function Shift is seen by some as posing a threat to the continued existence of independent ECD centres. Many ECD facilities came about through the entrepreneurial efforts of their owners. If Grade RR children are moved to schools, this will impact on centre income and sustainability, and result in job losses for practitioners. The movement of children could also lead to a reduction in the need for the services of RTOs/ ECD NGOs which play a significant role in ECD as holders of expertise and providers of services and training. There is also a concern that practitioners who succeed in upgrading their qualifications will leave the ECD sector for employment in schools.

Verbatim comments from the dialogues:

- The government took Grade R from us, and now they want to take Grade RR. What will be next? We are entrepreneurs and losing that age group will lead to loss of employment.
- Decisions taken at high level directly impact us as business owners, and government can change its position at any time. I used my own resources to open centres – and will be out in the cold if government closes them.
- ECD centres don't have enough funds to pay salaries equivalent to those of public/private schools, hence practitioners will leave for better pay once qualified.

SECTION 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations draw on the views and needs expressed by civil society at the provincial dialogues as well as the CECDN team's holistic understanding of the sector and the critical issues within the sector.

1. Recommendation: Policy and legislation

Review the current ECD policy by setting up a structured review process which will identify (i) aspects of current policy which need to be kept but are currently not properly coordinated or implemented; (ii) current relevant policies and legislation which need to be changed; and (iii) any new provision to accommodate migration concerns.

A successful review process will:

- Identify bottlenecks and impediments within all ECD related policy that negatively affect the provision of ECD services.
- Apply contextual principles to develop policy that can accommodate and be implementable within South Africa's diverse communities and their structures, e.g. townships and informal settlements.
- Develop mechanisms to deal with the challenges in the implementation and coordination of the NIECD Policy. This should include the formation of an independent body responsible for spearheading the implementation of ECD policy. Such an organisation should include

representatives of all government departments and civil society organisations involved in ECD, and the representatives should have executive authority to hold the departments or organisations accountable.

- Review the roles and functions of existing coordination and implementation structures as mandated by ECD policy (such as the ECD Intersectoral Forum, the Inter-Ministerial Committee on ECD and the National Inter-Departmental Committee for ECD).
- Review and standardise municipal requirements and by-laws to improve access for registration of ECD sites in all settings and contexts.
- Develop mechanisms to increase and accelerate the provision of access to quality ECD through the mixed mode strategy promoted by the NIECD Policy of 2015.
- Put in place legislation to regulate the employment of the ECD workforce.
- Draw up an implementation plan for the reviewed policy.
- Communicate changes timeously, and to the entire ECD sector.

2. Recommendation: Training, professionalisation and career paths

Develop a comprehensive strategy to (i) increase practitioner qualification levels and competence; (ii) allow for easier access to training, and movement across different provider sectors; and (iii) increase recognition for lower level qualifications and other forms of certification.

The strategy should include:

- Qualification articulation within ECD and beyond, into the Foundation Phase.
- Quality of programmes and training provision.
- A targeted selection process to identify candidates for training with an interest in children; cooperation between training providers and management of ECD centres providing the workplace-based learning component; and more rigorous performance-based assessment.
- Alleviating barriers to entry and progression (other than lack of articulation) through RPL, bridging courses, and a variety of delivery modes including use of home language.
- Coordinated funding mechanisms that increase funding for practitioner development and promote equitable access to training.
- Interim measures relating to the Function Shift.
- Using civil society expertise in extending and strengthening ECD training provision.
- Developing a database and tracking system to track qualified and unqualified practitioners.
- Disseminating information to the sector relating to qualifications, training programmes and funding.

3. Recommendation: ECD curricula

Review existing curricula for birth to 6 years old, to ensure that the curricula (i) address the challenges in implementing the NCF; (ii) are developmentally appropriate for a child's progression up to and including Grade R; and (iii) address the alignment and articulation between the NCF and CAPS.

Factors to consider are:

- Internationally recognised ECD principles such as the importance of play-based learning.
- Use of ECD sector expertise in developing the curriculum and guiding implementation.
- Dissemination of information on curriculum requirements to the ECD sector.
- Mechanisms to support implementation, including guidelines, material, training, equipment and resources.
- Capacitation of school management and district officials on ECD principles and pedagogies.

4. Recommendation: Registration

Simplify the process and requirements for registration of ECD sites with the aim of achieving optimal access to ECD services for all children who need these services.

This should address the following:

- Identifying impediments to compliance and the registration of sites and programmes.
- Provision of support to register unregistered and partially registered ECD sites.
- Relaxing by-laws and repealing outdated requirements to allow for ECD centres to be established within communities where they are needed.
- Standardisation of compliance requirements throughout South Africa.

5. Recommendation: ECD infrastructure

Create the infrastructure for ECD provision, by investing in ECD sites (i) which give access to ECD in communities where it is most needed; and (ii) where children can receive developmentally appropriate ECD services.

This includes:

- Local government, in partnership, taking responsibility for the building and maintenance of early learning facilities.
- Using existing infrastructure for dedicated ECD delivery.
- Government widening provision to access through the mixed-mode delivery model.
- Enabling ECD centres to become official feeder sites into schools. (This would require ECD centres and schools in the same communities to work together.)

6. Recommendation: Communication and advocacy

Develop a comprehensive, coherent communications strategy for the ECD sector that (i) explains what the Function Shift is and how it will impact the sector; (ii) enables regular communication on Function Shift implementation developments using accessible media platforms; and (iii) centralises ECD information and makes it easily accessible to the sector.

This would need to address:

- Mechanisms for providing information about the implementation of the Function Shift as currently communication from government to the sector on this matter is inadequate.
- Misinformation and a lack of information and understanding about policy and its constraints, to enable robust engagement on ECD issues.
- Mechanisms to facilitate communication on issues relating to ECD at government department level.

7. Recommendation: Finance and ECD donors

Develop a comprehensive, coherent funding strategy for the ECD sector that (i) enables access to quality ECD services for all children who need it and (ii) develops a sustainable ECD sector.

This would need to address:

- The scope of government responsibility for funding and resourcing ECD (provision of infrastructure, training, practitioner salaries and employee benefits, subsidies, provision of equipment and nutrition).
- Mechanisms for delivering the funding and resources.
- Mechanisms for monitoring the distribution and use of funding and resources.
- Using donor funding to advantage in extending and strengthening ECD provision.

8. Recommendation: Monitoring and evaluation

Develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy for the ECD sector that (i) is developmental in approach; (ii) enables coordination amongst the various government departments involved in ECD provision; and (iii) is conducted by appropriately qualified officials with a good understanding of both ECD and M&E.

Factors to consider are:

- The objectives and scope of M&E in the ECD sector.
- Tools, methods and processes for conducting M&E in the ECD sector.
- Selecting and capacitating officials in ECD principles and play-based pedagogies to conduct M&E for the ECD sector.
- Using existing expertise and specialist skills within the ECD sector to strengthen M&E implementation and outcomes.

9. Recommendation: Health and nutrition

Develop a strategy to meet the health and nutrition needs of young children in ECD facilities as well as in Grade R in public schools.

This should address:

- Mechanisms to support the nutritional needs of young children (appropriate menus and servings; adequate number of meals throughout the day; safe and hygienic handling of food).
- Using ECD facilities effectively to provide health services to young children.
- Processes to monitor that children receive the right food and the right health services (this speaks to coordination of services).

10. Recommendation: Social protection

Develop guidelines for creating conducive environments for young children that enable children to interact with their environments (i) without facing harm; and (ii) in ways that promote their holistic development.

These guidelines should enable children to:

- Reach age appropriate milestones through relevant pre-school teaching methodologies underpinned by play-based pedagogy both inside and outside of the classroom.
- Be safe from potentially harmful situations that may occur within or outside the learning environment (this would include the provision of extended aftercare and referral services).
- Receive an integrated package of services (including health and nutrition, early learning and social services) as stipulated by the NIECD.
- Receive care and stimulation from a multi-disciplinary team whose members are trained in the social protection and holistic care of children and supported in their roles.

11. Recommendation: Human Resources / workforce

Develop a comprehensive human resources strategy that (i) enables the sector to provide quality ECD services; (ii) extends the reach of these services to include all children who need them; and (iii) meets the needs of the sector.

The strategy should include:

- Capacitating the ECD workforce more broadly on a range of management and operational skills required to run ECD facilities effectively (financial; health and safety; human resources; caring for infrastructure, grounds and equipment).
- Maintaining the employment of the current ECD workforce. Preference should be given to people who are already working in the ECD sector for training, bursary and employment opportunities (this should include older members of the workforce).
- Determining future sector training needs and providing for these.
- Provision of full remuneration packages for practitioners and support staff. This would require recognition and standardisation of minimum skills development training programmes and qualification requirements for the ECD workforce across different contexts.

WAY FORWARD

Rather than as the end of a process, this report, together with the dialogues it describes, should be viewed as the start of a consultative and dialoguing journey undertaken by CECDN with the sector it represents.

The dialogues called attention to sector members' thirst for information and eagerness to engage on the issues that affect them and the children in their care. As the Function Shift unfolds, the importance of disseminating information from government to the ECD sector will increase. The dialogues also clearly communicated civil society's desire to see the Function Shift implemented in ways that will address both the needs of the child and those of the current workforce.

The CECDN sees a role for itself as government's dialoguing partner for Function Shift processes and believes that any future dialogues should be channeled through the collaboration. It also hopes to play a role in strengthening ECD provision by partnering with government to address critical issues that affect the ECD sector, including implementing the Function Shift.