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## EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION COLLABORATION TRUST

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NOVEMBER 2021

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANA	-	Annual National Assessment
ATP	-	Annual Teaching Plan
B-BBEE	-	Board-based black economic empowerment
BLSA	-	Business Leadership South Africa
CAPS	-	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CEM	-	Committee of Education Ministers
CEO	-	Chief Executive Officer
CFO	-	Chief Financial Officer
CIDB	-	Construction Industry Development Board
COIN	-	Citofield / Outsourced Insight
COGTA	-	Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
COO	-	Chief Operating Officer
COVID-19	-	Coronavirus disease
CPD	-	Continuous professional development
CSI	-	Corporate Social Investment
CSO	-	Civil society organisation
CSO	-	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	-	Development Assistance Committee
DBSA	-	Development Bank of Southern Africa
DDG	-	Deputy Director General
DDSP	-	District Development Support Programme
DG	-	Director-General
DBE	-	Department of Basic Education
DHET	-	Department of Higher Education and Training
DIP	-	District Improvement Programme
DMC	-	District Management Committee
DPME	-	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
DNA	-	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DoE	-	Department of Education
DoT	-	Deed of Trust
DSI	-	Department of Science and Innovation
DWYPD	-	Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities
EC	-	Eastern Cape (Province)
ECD	-	Early Childhood Development
ECDoE	-	Eastern Cape Department of Education
ECF	-	Education Collaboration Framework
EEC	-	Education Excellence Consortium
EELC	-	Equal Education Law Centre

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EFA	-	Education for all
EFAL	-	English as (a) first additional language
ELM	-	Educational Leadership and Management
ELRC	-	Education Labour Relations Council
EMIS	-	Education Management Information System
ESA	-	Eric Schollar and Associates
ETAO	-	Education Technical Assistance Office
ETDP SETA	-	Education, Training and Development Practices SETA
FBO	-	Faith-based organisation
FET	-	Further Education and Training
FGD	-	Focus group discussion
FPLP	-	Foundation Phase Learning Programme
FREF	-	FirstRand Empowerment Foundation
FP	-	Foundation Phase
FS	-	Free State (Province)
FSS	-	Fresh Start School
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
GP	-	Gauteng Province
HEDCOM	-	Heads of Education Departments Committee
HOD	-	Head of Department
HSRC	-	Human Sciences Research Council
ICT	-	Information and Communications Technology
IEP	-	Individual(ised) Education Plan
IP	-	Intermediate Phase
IDG	-	Internet Development Group
ISPFTE	-	Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa
IT	-	Information Technology
ITE	-	Initial Teacher Education
JET	-	JET Education Services (formely, Joint Education Trust)
Jika iMfundo	-	“Turn around education” (isiZulu)
KPI	-	Key performance indicator
KZN	-	KwaZulu-Natal (Province)
LDOE	-	Limpopo Department of Education
LDSD	-	Limpopo Department of Social Development
LGBTIQ	-	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
LP	-	Limpopo Province
LURITS	-	Learner Unit Record Information and Tracking System
M&E	-	Monitoring and evaluation
MIET	-	Media in Education Trust
MP	-	Mpumalanga Province
MQA	-	Monitoring and Quality Assurance (unit)

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MTSF	-	Medium Term Strategic Framework
NAPTOSA	-	National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa
NIAF	-	National Integrated Assessment Framework
NATU	-	National Teachers Union
NC	-	Northern Cape (Province)
NDP	-	National Development Plan
NPC	-	National Planning Commission
NECT	-	National Education Collaboration Trust
NEET	-	Not in employment, education or training
NICPD	-	National Institute of Curriculum and Professional Development
NPO	-	Non-profit organisation
NRC	-	National Reading Coalition
NSC	-	National Senior Certificate
NSNP	-	National School Nutrition Programme
NSSSC	-	National School Safety Steering Committee
NW	-	North West (Province)
OPR	-	Output to purpose review
PEU	-	Professional Educators Union
PFMA	-	Public Finance Management Act
PILO	-	Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes
PIRLS	-	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PLC	-	Professional Learning Committee
PMG	-	Parliamentary Monitoring Group
PMO	-	Project Management Office
POA	-	Programme of Assessment
PPP	-	Public-private partnership
PSRIP	-	Primary School Reading Improvement Programme
PWC	-	PricewaterhouseCoopers
QLP	-	Quality Learning Project
Q1	-	Quintile 1
Q2	-	Quintile 2
REC	-	Research Ethics Committee
RfP	-	Request for Proposal
RSA	-	Republic of South Africa
SACE	-	South African Council of Educators
SACMEQ	-	The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality
SAFE	-	Sanitation Appropriate for Education
SADTU	-	South African Democratic Teachers Union
SAOU	-	Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysers Unie / South African Teachers Union
SA-SAMS	-	SA-School Administration and Management System

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SBA	-	School-based assessment
SDG	-	Sustainable Development Goal
SES	-	Socioeconomic status
SETA	-	Sector Education and Training Authority
SFDRR	-	Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction
SGB	-	School Governing Body
SIAS	-	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
SITA	-	State Information Technology Agency
SLP	-	Structured learning programme
SMS	-	Short message service
SMT	-	School Management Team
SOP	-	Standard Operating Procedure
STEM	-	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TMU	-	Teaching Mathematics for Understanding
TAC	-	Technical Advisory Centre
ToC	-	Theory of change
ToT	-	Time on task
UJ	-	University of Johannesburg
UMALUSI	-	Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training
UN	-	United Nations
UNAIDS	-	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme
USP	-	Unique selling proposition
WASH	-	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WC	-	Western Cape (Province)
4IR	-	Fourth Industrial Revolution

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) conducted by a team commissioned by the funder FirstRand Empowerment Foundation (FREF) and managed by Tshikululu Social Investments. The team comprised three lead evaluators, Profs Molefe Ralenala, Mvuyo Tom, and Elaine Unterhalter, and research teams from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and a consortium of Outsourced Insight and Citofield led by Drs Michael Cosser and Wilfred Lunga (HSRC), Dr Stephen Rule (Outsourced Insight) and Philip Browne (Citofield). The evaluation was conducted over the period of January to October 2021.

NECT came into being after the publication of the National Development Plan (NDP) in 2011 and more directly through the publication of the Education Collaboration Framework (ECF) in 2013. The organisation was established to harness the energies of a variety of stakeholders either working in the education sector or interested in making a contribution to improving education outcomes: the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and its provincial counterparts; the private sector (and in particular companies funding or wanting to fund education); teacher unions; and civil society – in particular non-governmental organisations. The objective was to create new levels of trust amongst stakeholders seeking the same result: improved teaching and learning outcomes.

### Terms of reference

The terms of reference for the evaluation asked for the NECT to be evaluated according to five focus areas: teaching, teacher development and curriculum; school leadership and management; partnerships, collaboration and stakeholder relations; capacity of the state; and governance and resources. To preserve the integrity of the eight NECT Programmes, however, the evaluation team opted to use the Programmes of the NECT as the organising principle for the evaluation, presenting findings by Programme but integrating the Programmes with the five focus areas in drafting conclusions and recommendations.

### Methodology

The evaluation used a mix-methods approach to gather evidence:

- *Quantitative data* derived from a national survey of education stakeholders (from district officials down to teachers, learners, and their parents / guardians) and data supplied by the DBE and NECT
- *Qualitative data* derived from interviews with School Governing Bodies (SGBs), principals and teachers in 12 schools in six provinces (the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West and the Northern Cape), from interviews with NECT managers,

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advisors and Board members, and from stakeholders representing teacher unions, private sector funders, and civil society – including education experts; and from secondary sources – NECT reports and PowerPoint presentations; and

- *Academic and grey literature* to inform the introduction and contextualise the evaluation.

These three sources of data were triangulated to allow for balance in the analysis, presentation and reporting of findings.

### **Findings**

The findings reveal a mixed picture of successes and shortcomings in the implementation of the NECT initiative over an eight-year period (2014-2021). By NECT Programme, the high-level findings of the evaluation are the following.

#### **Programme 1: District Improvement Programme**

This programme has made meaningful contribution in the education system, particularly in terms of capacity development. The training and support are welcomed by teachers and principals, and the building of networks and collaboration at district level has been evident. The effectiveness of the programme, however, needs careful consideration in the face of the very uneven, but generally continuing poor learner outcomes in quintile 1 and 2 schools and the very limited capacity of parents to support education. These data underline the ongoing need for the work NECT does in Programme 1, which is highly relevant. However, the coherence of the Programme could be enhanced by more strategic planning and use of synthesised evidence from the M&E unit and additional research.

#### **Programme 2: Systemic intervention**

Collaborations to enhance systemic change through Information and Communications Technology (ICT) have begun to impact on the operations of the DBE and the long-term sustainability of NECT interventions has been a key part of developing the work. But the effectiveness of NECT acting as the enabler for the DBE needs careful consideration. It appears that NECT taking on projects that are very large – for example, SA-SAMS – and involving itself with the regulatory frameworks around tendering risks blunting the USP of NECT and reduces its capacity to deliver on its core business as specified in the ECF.

#### **Programme 3: Innovation programme**

Leading innovation in education requires creating an environment that encourages creative thinking to solve education challenges and support continuous improvement. Over the past six years the NECT has clearly taken on this role and sought to evolve its approach in line with the education vision of the NDP. The work on EdHub is highly innovative, and the connection between research, policy engagement and practice provides an excellent example of how NECT, as a complex

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organisation, can work across institutional and non-institutional contexts to embed changes around education technology in practice.

Programme 3 was found to be highly effective and coherent.

### **Programme 4: Local projects**

Programme 4 was not included in the Terms of Reference for the evaluation and is therefore not substantively addressed in the report.

### **Programme 5: Education DialogueSA**

The programme has been effective in its attempt to address some of the key challenges of the education system while influencing key stakeholders, as per its mandate. There are divided views on whether the dialogues should or should not result in specific action, with NECT management – against the findings of a Board investigation of the issue – maintaining that the key purpose of the dialogues is to stimulate debate about topical education issues, and with various stakeholders calling for dialogue outcomes to inform the work of NECT. This programme is coherent with and without a focus on action, but there are certain key areas of work, for example on building links with NGOs, youth groups and religious organisations where some follow-up actions could support work on Programme 1.

### **Programme 6: Governance and finance**

NECT has an effective governance model with excellent working relationships between the Board and management and strong Board support for implementation of NECT interventions. But the sustainability of the organisation given the changing balance between core and special funding needs review. It is hard to track value for money because of a lack of baseline- and systematic routine data. Notwithstanding this, the Programme has been very effective in terms of the collaborations built with funders, private sector funding streams having grown over the period under review.

### **Programme 7: Strategic partnerships**

The growing portfolio of NECT programme interventions, linked to strategic partnerships, suggests that this work is both evolving and responsive to the changing needs and pressures within the education sector. NECT has been a key strategic partner to the DBE in addressing these challenges. Some of the Programme 7 initiatives appear not to be sustainable, however, given the current demands of other areas of NECT's work. Arguments have been made that too many special projects put the 'core business' of NECT under strain; the projects are relevant, but difficult to deliver – work on the SAFE programme being a case in point. This programme needs careful review in relation to

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NECT's middle- to longer-term trajectory, the emphasis of which should be on nesting the gains made to date on improving teaching and learning.

### **Programme 8: Monitoring and evaluation**

This programme has had discernible success in the provinces in which NECT work is concentrated through a range of actions monitoring participation and feedback; but much more is needed in terms of evaluation, synthesis, results review, and critical engagement. The focus to date has been largely on monitoring, to the neglect of rigorous evaluation. How NECT uses the results of its testing of teachers and learners in provinces to improve its interventions through a process of careful reflection on what works and does not work will be a critical part of the NECT's focus going forward.

### **NECT areas of work requiring attention**

Some areas noted in the review where organisational development needs attention are the following.

#### *Communication*

By 2021 it is very evident that the NECT has expanded its network of partnerships and collaborations. This places ever more pressure on the Trust to ensure that its information and knowledge sharing strategies remain up to this onerous task. More focus is needed on working with partners to cascade critical information both horizontally across strategic stakeholder groups as well as vertically to the provincial, district and local levels to avoid message distortion and misunderstanding.

#### *Agility*

As it institutionalises itself within the education sector the NECT may be running the risk of losing some of the focus on enhancing learning outcomes that characterised its early years. Management needs to ensure that it avoids, as far as possible, the bureaucratic inertias of government systems so that it continues to initiate swift and meaningful programmatic response to emerging developments.

#### *Trust*

There is clear evidence that from its inception the NECT has worked strategically to build relationships and partnerships with its stakeholders built on mutual trust and reciprocity. There is, however, more recent evidence to suggest that levels of trust in certain areas are being compromised by NECT taking on too many disparate projects. Delays in the finalisation of the SA-SAMS programme and the building of safe toilets in schools are examples of projects that distract from the core education improvement focus of NECT.

*Strategic responsiveness*

The NECT has positioned itself both as an intermediary collaboration vehicle as well as an accelerator of education transformation through strategic partnerships. Over time the NECT has been adding more and more initiatives to its programme portfolio and is becoming the 'quick fix' arm of the DBE. The danger for the NECT is that without the necessary financial and human resources it may spread itself too thinly across a range of education sector interventions and dilute its impact on teaching and learning.

*Gender inclusivity*

The impression created by the gender profile of the NECT management team (most managers are men), reinforced by the view of some senior managers interviewed that there is a level of gender blindness to the work they do, suggests a lack of attention to addressing gender imbalances. This extends to schools, where a tacit acceptance of boy-child superiority, a dearth of school facilities for girls menstruating, bullying of girls, and gender-based violence on and off school precincts shape girl-children's educational experiences. While these are manifestations of male attitudes to women in the broader society, NECT should be seeking, through its interventions, to shift negative perceptions of girls and women and to redress imbalances that impact them negatively.

**Recommendations**

Based on these high-level findings, three sets of recommendations are made.

**1. National strategic concerns for delivering on the NDP and enhancing institutional collaboration**

*Recommendation i: NECT should better realise its potential as a complex organisation more able than the DBE to embrace and learn from complexity in undertaking strategic planning for the South African education system to 2030*

Strategic planning is needed for change in the unequal education system of South Africa. The government planning cycles work on a five-year strategic plan, with detailed action plans for a three-year Medium Term Expenditure Framework and an Annual Performance Plan. Longer-term vision is needed to realise the goals of the NDP. NECT is ideally placed to co-ordinate work on this, as it is not limited to the government planning cycle, although its public funding has to consider that and integrate it into its (NECT's) longer-term planning.

Engaging with the complexity which characterises the South African education system entails moving beyond the existing structures, while acknowledging the importance of those structures. The NECT is uniquely well placed to do this because of its effective relationship both with the DBE and with a range of stakeholders at district and provincial levels. Complex social problems, like the

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inequalities in the South African education system, have a history which generates path dependencies and power asymmetries. The legacy of policies and practices the DBE and NECT have built up are important resources to address this, but more needs to be added, in developing strategic plans, to understand and assess the complexities and whether these are adequate to the task. Adaptive design, using existing information, interpreting the data collected by the M&E unit and triangulating this with many sources, and being open to the knowledge base of funders and other partners working at different levels of the education system will enhance the contribution NECT can make to realising the NDP. NECT should be supported to commission and review with all stakeholders a comprehensive position paper on how to best use the special features of the NECT as a complex organisation to support ten-year strategic planning for education change in South Africa.

*Recommendation ii: NECT and the DBE should devise a strategic plan to better co-ordinate their work at all organisational levels*

The effective working relationship with the DBE leadership is a considerable achievement of NECT. However, these effective relationships are not fully replicated at every level of the two organisations, and some of the partnerships between NECT and the DBE appear to emerge on quite ad hoc terms. We recommend both organisations produce a five-year strategic plan, possibly linked to MTSFs, to outline the range of collaboration that will be built at all levels, taking account of NECT's unique character as a complex organisation able to draw on adaptive design principles. This planned collaboration by both organisations needs linking to each organisation's planning cycle and arrangements for resource disbursement. As part of this work NECT should review its present range and scope of activities with DBE to ensure that collaboration, rather than competition, is built at all levels, and that the two organisations rely on each other's strengths, ensuring interactive collaboration at all levels.

*Recommendation iii: NECT should develop its capacity to act as a think tank for DBE and the education sector*

There are currently some crucial knowledge gaps confronting the DBE in planning how to deliver on the vision of the NDP. One aspect of this vision is the promise that by 2030, 90 percent of learners in grades 3, 6, and 9 must achieve 50 percent or more in the annual national assessment in Literacy, Numeracy / Mathematics and Science outcomes. But since 2014 there has been no systematic collection of data on learner outcomes at grade 3, 6, and 9 (which has also made evaluating the impact of NECT on learner performance through this evaluation difficult). These levels are crucial to ensuring students in the matric year have adequate preparation to pass at the required level. Considerable data is needed to plan for realising this goal. This, together with many features of education inequality in South Africa, needs rigorous study in order to evaluate what would make the education system improve. Building the NECT's capacity to act as a think tank and co-ordinate the best researchers in the country into a co-ordinated programme of work needs investment in talent, capacity building, and research review.

*Recommendation iv: NECT should appoint a gender and social inclusion specialist at senior management level*

The evaluation has shown that issues affecting girl-children in and outside of schools are not sufficiently addressed by the DBE. While this is a societal problem and schools are a microcosm of society, NECT should be using its position as an innovation leader to influence attitudes towards women and girls not only in the way it designs and delivers its interventions but in how it responds to the practical issues faced by girl learners in schools within a framework of holistic education. The appointment of a gender and social inclusion specialist at senior management level would assist NECT to ensure that gender is factored deliberately into all its work and enable it to model, for the DBE and the education sector as a whole, ways in which gender imbalances can be addressed within provincial departments of education and in the schools they oversee.

## **2. Technicalities to enhance the work of NECT**

*Recommendation v: Develop an overarching Theory of Change for Programme 1*

Programme 1 is the largest NECT programme, and currently has an outline Theory of Change (ToC) for teacher professionalisation and supplementary ToCs for each of the other areas of Programme 1. While this dispersed approach to thinking about change may have been helpful in the initial stages of developing the work of NECT, this, together with the limited scope of the ToC relating to teacher professionalisation, diminishes the effectiveness of NECT in responding to the situation on the ground and in planning its work. We therefore recommend a workshop to develop a single ToC for Programme 1, and the formulation of a clear set of objectives for each of the areas of this Programme, dovetailing the work and allowing for co-ordinated achievement of the overall goals. Once finalised, NECT should ensure that this ToC is institutionalised as *the* central mechanism to monitor progress across the Programme through data collection, regular review, and other components of the M&E cycle.

*Recommendation vi: Define criteria for scaling interventions*

Current criteria for scaling are associated with the level of inputs. These govern decisions on provincialisation and universalisation. While discussion of debates on scaling up draw on research in health, there is limited discussion of scaling down and of some of the themes noted in work on complex design, which can be termed 'scaling with'. A comprehensive review document is needed discussing different approaches to scaling in the education literature, what has been learned from other South African projects on embedding change and scaling, and what the implications are for NECT and its commitment to enhancing teaching and learning at school level. This review document should lead to a determination of the criteria for scaling that are applied consistently across NECT interventions and made available to the education sector and the public at large. Such criteria should include what steps need to be taken and milestones reached before a decision is made to

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scale an intervention and, once this decision is made, how the success of scaling is monitored and evaluated.

*Recommendation vii: Develop an approach to continuous professional development in the first instance for teachers in quintile 1 and 2 schools*

NECT training programmes, including those offered in conjunction with the DBE and provincial counterparts, are accredited by SACE, but the ways in which this accreditation does or does not meet teacher needs for continuous professional development (CPD) is not known. The NECT training model is not a continuous training e. A professional development framework is needed within which the professional development pathway of every teacher in every school can be plotted. This is especially important for teachers in quintile 1 and 2 schools, who are unlikely to be able to access certificate, diploma and degree programmes as would their counterparts in quintile 3, 4 and 5 schools. NECT should in the first instance review with SACE its (SACE's) professional development approach and then devise a framework and an accompanying plan that makes clear provision for teacher progression incorporating participation in accredited NECT training programmes. The framework and plan should then be shared with the DBE for accommodation within its teacher human resources strategy.

*Recommendation viii: Expand the range of senior management roles in NECT, taking gender representivity into account*

One of the implications of an expanding work agenda is the pressure the overall management of the NECT initiative places upon its CEO. While the NECT has a number of units, each responsible for a defined area of operation, it falls to the CEO to oversee a vast enterprise. A consequence of this is that the CEO must hold all the disparate parts together, ensuring that activities undertaken in one sphere complement those in another. Another consequence is that a good deal of tacit knowledge about the organisation and its operations resides in the CEO, which besides running a danger of being too much to contain, creates a key-person dependency risk that, should anything happen to the CEO, may issue in lost or foregone institutional memory. Allied to this should be the formalisation of a succession plan ratified by the Board.

We recommend the NECT management, in consultation with the Board, should review its management structure and consider appointing two deputy executive officers – or at least a Chief Operating Officer (COO) and deputy COO – to spread the management load more evenly. The bigger presence of senior management reporting to the Board (instead of the CEO being responsible for nearly all Board-level engagement) will create a wider knowledge base about the organisation. Gender representivity should be factored into this process.

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### *Recommendation ix: Expand the staff complement and range of activities of the MQA unit*

The MQA unit is crucial to building M&E capacity in schools and helping NECT realise its potential as a complex organisation capable of developing as an important education think tank in South Africa. To achieve this there must be a substantial investment in enhancing the capacity of the MQA unit to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of NECT interventions and teaching and learning outcomes. Such investment should take the form of ring-fenced funding for the MQA unit, up-skilling some of its current staff, and appointing additional staff with advanced skills in data collection and management to undertake M&E and strategic research, synthesise findings from existing M&E exercises, and support strategic thinking across all NECT Programmes. The MQA unit should become the lynchpin around which NECT operations revolve and must have input into all key decisions of the organisation.

### **3. Financial and collaborative issues to enhance the work of NECT**

#### *Recommendation x: Review stakeholder collaborations to realise the inclusivity imperatives of the ECF*

The NECT should review its stakeholder base to ensure inclusivity of all stakeholders, beginning with improving relationships with other education NPOs with a view to leveraging off their vast expertise and experience. This should include promoting the participation of civil society, youth, learners, and women's organisations in NECT's interventions, if not as implementing agents, then at least as thinking partners. The Reading Champions programme – now in Phase 2 – addresses youth to some extent. Further structured and planned engagement with education NPOs and with youth, student and women's organisations is needed at district level, in planning Dialogues, and in developing the scope of Programme 1. Transparency is needed in communicating decisions to exclude certain stakeholders from involvement in particular programmes.

#### *Recommendation xi: Increase the budget allocation to core funding to enable a greater focus on core NECT activities*

Funding allocated to the NECT from the National Treasury has been hugely important in expanding the work of the NECT and establishing its partnership with the DBE. The past three years have seen a change in the ratio of funding between core funding and special projects. The increase of resources for special projects, while falling within the general remit of NECT, poses a risk of 'mission creep' and of undermining some of the work that needs to be done using core funding. We recommend an expansion of the core funding component of NECT's financial resources, providing income streams for the work outlined in the above recommendations on strategic planning, capacitation of the MQA unit, development of the think tank function, and supporting plans to realise CPD for all teachers. Such an expansion will enable NECT to focus on its core business, prioritising activities that have the best chance of helping the DBE realise the central, NDP-aligned objective of improving education outcomes.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) conducted by a team commissioned by the funder FirstRand Empowerment Foundation (FREF) and managed by Tshikululu Social Investments. The team comprised three lead evaluators, Profs Molefe Ralenala, Mvuyo Tom, and Elaine Unterhalter, and research teams from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and a consortium of Outsourced Insight and Citofield led by Drs Michael Cosser and Wilfred Lunga (HSRC), Dr Stephen Rule (Outsourced Insight) and Philip Browne (Citofield). The evaluation was conducted over the period of January to October 2021.

### 1.1. Establishment and operations of the NECT

The NECT was established in 2013 by means of a Deed of Trust (DoT). NECT's origins are linked with the government's National Development Plan 2030 (NDP), which was developed in 2011-2012 through a consultative process led by the National Planning Commission and crystallised the aims of addressing poverty and reducing inequality. NECT was established "on the basis of the NDP [National Development Plan]", the education improvement framework being "specified in the NDP and elaborated more fully in the ECF [Education Collaboration Framework]" (FREF, 2020a: 4). The section on basic education in the chapter in the NDP on "Improving education, training and innovation" draws on the Department of Basic Education's (DBE's) *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the realisation of schooling 2025* (DBE, 2011).

The NDP identified the need for a "national initiative" to improve learning outcomes: "Drawing on the existing consensus on the need to work together [the "education pact" introduced in the preceding paragraphs], the Commission proposes a national initiative involving all stakeholders to drive efforts to improve learning outcomes in schools, starting with the worst performers (NPC, 2011: 314). This qualifying statement informed the NECT's initial targeting of schools in eight districts across the five worst-performing provinces (the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and North West). In planning this evaluation, these initial concerns have guided the approach.

NECT was initially housed in the non-governmental organisation (NGO) JET Education Services (JET), which had been appointed by the FirstRand Foundation at the end of 2013 to coordinate the activities that led to the founding of NECT (Theaker, 2015), before becoming an independent agency. Godwin Khosa, the current CEO of NECT, was at the time the CEO of JET. The consultative process that led to the drafting of the ECF was spearheaded by JET; as described in the ECF itself, "During the first quarter of 2013, JET Education Services, in its capacity as the Dialogue's secretariat, informed education stakeholders of the initiative and solicited the opinions of some on the proposal to develop a collaboration framework. A reference group was also established to assist in charting the collaboration framework" (NECT, 2013). After its registration and launch, NECT appointed JET as its Managing Agent (Theaker, 2015).

**1.1.1. Terms of Reference focus areas and the NECT Programmes**

The ToR (FREF, 2020a) required the evaluation to be conducted according to five focus areas:

Focus Area 1: Teaching, teacher development and curriculum

Focus Area 2: School leadership and management

Focus Area 3: Partnerships, collaboration and stakeholder relations

Focus Area 4: Capacity of the state; and

Focus Area 5: Governance and resources.

The HSRC was asked to focus its attention on Focus Areas 1 and 2. Simultaneously, the consortium was commissioned to evaluate the NECT in terms of Focus Areas 3, 4 and 5. While the HSRC and the consortium submitted individual proposals and budgets for the project, it was proposed by the Lead Evaluators at the Inception Workshop in January 2021 that the evaluation teams combine forces and undertake a single evaluation of the NECT. This approach was suggested by the interconnectedness of all the Focus Areas and the complexity of the interventions that NECT is undertaking to improve education outcomes in South Africa.

The need for streamlining the data collection and analysis processes to promote the efficiency and effectiveness of the evaluation itself which a single evaluation enabled was also a consideration in the light of the evaluation scope. This evaluation approach was deemed to facilitate the answering of the evaluation questions at a systemic level in relation to the NECT interventions. For this reason, it was agreed to convene one inception meeting for both teams and to produce one integrated inception report, and subsequently draft and final reports, resulting from that.

Although the ToR outlined five Focus Areas, there is an argument to be made for evaluating the NECT according to its own eight programmes and as a co-ordinated initiative which combines the work of eight programmes, which can be summarised as follows:

**Programme 1: District Improvement Programme (DIP)**

The DIP aims to improve the quality of teaching, learning and management of schools as well as the effectiveness of the support and monitoring services provided to schools by the districts, with a view to replicating successes in other districts and provinces. The DIP is being implemented in eight districts, two each in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, and one each in Mpumalanga and North West. The districts include 4,362 schools, 66,000 teachers and nearly 2 million learners. The targeted Fresh Start Schools (FSSs) serve as pilot sites prior to system-wide replication and institutionalisation of teacher professionalisation, school management & leadership, district development, parent & community involvement, learner welfare & support.

**Programme 2: Systemic intervention**

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The systemic intervention programme aims to address key systemic challenges in the education system at a national level, and to strengthen the capacity of the state to deliver public services. The focus is Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs): Ministerial Advisory Committee on ICTs, User Requirements for the SA-School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS).

### **Programme 3: Innovation programme**

The intention is to set up channels conducive to improving the quality of learning and teaching and the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system. The focus is to identify, test, replicate and institutionalise innovations that have been proven to be effective. The initiatives are: promoting learning initiatives (national examination system, District Steering Committees [DSCs], and the school referral system); and EdHub innovation (Sandbox project to trial new processes).

### **Programme 4: Local projects**

In striving to improve the coordination and effectiveness of social investments in education, the NECT aims to provide guidelines on how to increase the return on investment from social investment in education. Increased return on investments will require a change of approaches, methodologies and attitudes from both social investors and intended beneficiaries.

### **Programme 5: Education DialogueSA**

Towards the end of 2013, the NECT set up an Education Dialogue group comprising 43 members representing educationists, academics, business, unions and government. The purpose of the Dialogue is to create an avenue for open, honest engagement around key subjects which need resolution and action for educational reform to be successful in South Africa. From 2012 to 2019, 23 dialogues on a range of educational topics were convened, directly involving 9,703 people.

### **Programme 6: Governance and finance**

The focus is on the internal operations of NECT, entailing governance by the Board of Trustees, and the executive management of human and financial resources.

### **Programme 7: Strategic partnerships**

NECT aims to initiate and foster relationships in the government, business, unions, civil society, academia and the corporate social investment sectors, among organisations and individuals with interests in the enhancement of education in South Africa.

### **Programme 8: Monitoring and evaluation**

Continual monitoring of all projects and projects is essential to the promotion of effective functionality. Evaluations (implementation, developmental, systemic, impact, outcome and summative) are conducted internally and externally.

The argument for organising the evaluation in this way is partly for precision. The elements of the eight NECT programmes are variously incorporated within the five focus areas for the evaluation and focusing on the programmes, while bearing in mind the concerns of the focus areas, allows us to look at how NECT works organisationally as well as thematically. The District Improvement Programme (Programme 1) falls within Focus Area 1 (Teaching, teacher development and curriculum), Governance and finance (Programme 6) constitutes Focus Area 5 (Governance and resources), and Strategic partnerships (Programme 7) falls within Focus Area 3 (Partnerships, collaboration and stakeholder relations). Systemic intervention (Programme 2) straddles Focus Area 4 (Capacity of the state) and Focus Area 1 (District Improvement Programme) – since data collection, storage and management are critical to district improvement. One aspect of the Innovation programme – DSCs – is incorporated in Focus Area 1, while another aspect of this programme, the Edhub initiative (and with it the Sandbox project), falls within Focus Area 4 (capacity of the state). We combine a close granular look at the NECT programmes, reflecting on the relevant focus areas, with an assessment of how the organisation works as a whole in relation to the specific historical and contemporary context in South Africa.

The evaluation thus looks closely at the eight programmes of the NECT and the ways in which they combine, viewing these through the lens of the ToR focus areas.

### **1.2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation**

The evaluation outlined in the Request for Proposals (FREF, 2020a) is, in the first instance, “a comprehensive outcome evaluation of accomplishments and systemic contributions of the NECT in fulfilling its mandate [that seeks] to make recommendations for improvement in terms of structure, processes and strategic positioning in order to more adequately meet its mandate and respond to a changing education environment” (FREF, 2020a: 6). This evaluation aims to assess the extent to which the mandate that was established for the NECT to operationalise the ECF was able to address “the weaknesses in teaching, management, administrative support and accountability” (NECT, 2013: 3).

This is the first overarching evaluation of all the facets of work of the NECT; and it is taking place (2020-2021) at a time of an acute health (COVID-19) and economic crisis with profound implications for education, highlighting the need for intensified work in this sector. In responding to this context, the evaluation team has formulated a hybrid approach to the evaluation, attempting to connect and articulate elements from evaluation approaches that are very different.

To this end, the evaluation has sought to be partly summative *and* incorporates, where appropriate, elements from development evaluation.<sup>1</sup> The main orientation of the evaluation was intended to

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<sup>1</sup> Development evaluation as defined by OECD is the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed development intervention, its design, implementation and results (see

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be summative, considering the range, form and reach of the programmes delivered by NECT and their impact on learners and teachers in different settings and on the education system, taking account of vulnerabilities, intersecting inequalities, and different experiences of crises (including COVID-19). Through rigorous evaluation methods we aimed to understand why these outcomes emerged and assessed what combination of changes at the level of the system, the school, teachers, communities and forms of resource distribution contributed to what did and did not work for whom and with what consequences. Some of the recommendations build from this analysis.

Besides the summative aspect, a number of processes associated with developmental evaluation have been deployed. The evaluation seeks to understand the processes adopted and encountered by NECT in delivering on its mandate. The evaluation, where possible, interrogates this mandate itself by reflecting on whether the mandate was appropriate for addressing what was seen to be serious weaknesses in the education system. This aspect of the evaluation aims to appreciate how and why NECT worked as it did within a given policy-, socio-economic- and institutional context. It also considers what was achieved and overlooked (at different levels of the education system, and by different groups of actors in scaling up or reaching down), taking the approach as specified in the ECF.

This hybrid approach to the evaluation has been used as a means to assess the NECT approach to stabilising, improving and sustaining a complicated and complex system of education in South Africa in contexts where the effects of inequalities linked with the complexity of many factors in play, interacting often in non-linear ways, appear to defy control, prediction and change. In articulating these two orientations the study aims to provide an engaged discussion of the replicability and sustainability of the NECT approach.

Because the NECT became a major driver of change in the education sector, one should be able to evaluate the extent to which positive change is attributable to NECT. But attribution is a complex matter in education. Many factors can affect performance. The legacy of the apartheid provision of education, the unequal division of the resources of the country, including school facilities, different experiences with school leadership, and teacher training are just some of the processes which bear on outcomes. A range of different effects of these processes can be noted for different groups of children and their experiences of teaching and learning, and parental and community support for the school. In evaluating the NECT, we need to consider this very complex interconnection of relationships, which also speak to matters of “race” and “class”, often described as the dual characteristic of the South African schooling system. Education in South Africa is divided into a small elite set of schools and a low and persistently underperforming set – the majority of almost 90% of the schools. Quintile 1 and 2 schools make up the bulk of this 90% and are in the main the schools for children of the working class and Black families. NECT has focussed on this demographic and the schools that serve them.

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[https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/seco\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/seco_guidelines.pdf)). In the development context, evaluation refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of a development intervention.

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Attribution is also complicated by other initiatives and collaborations – by, for example, private sector and non-governmental organisation (NGO) contributions to a school in many different forms, whether financial or developmental. While it is tempting to want to isolate the specific contribution of the NECT to learner improvement through, for example, regression analyses, then, it is in practice extremely difficult to do this in as complex a system as basic education. In the discussions that follow, where it is possible, we draw out direct attribution to NECT programmes, but also reflect on other processes in play.

For the purposes of this evaluation the evaluators have considered the operations of the NECT since its inception in 2013 but have looked closely at the period 2015 to 2020, focusing on critical programme initiatives funded through the First Rand Empowerment Foundation, as well as those components of the programme supported by other contributors. (See Section 2.5 for an outline history of NECT). The evaluation assesses the relevance and coherence of the different programme interventions implemented over a six-year period (2015-2020), and looks the available programme indicators to consider the levels of improvement, impact associated with NECT, and sustainability within the education system.

The ToR (FREF, 2020a) for the evaluation of the NECT outline the primary objectives of the evaluation as follows:

1. To determine the extent to which the NECT in its organisation, operations, delivery and achievements, has met its mandate and objectives as set out in the imperatives of the NDP, and the principles and goals of the ECF
2. To assess the extent to which the NECT has made a contribution to long-term change in education through its initiatives relating to systemic improvement
3. To assess and report on the strengths and weaknesses of the NECT's programme and approach to educational improvement, and thereby provide recommendations for improvement where necessary
4. To assess and report on the structure, nature and success of NECT's collaboration in mobilising networks and stakeholders to improve educational outcomes as set out in its mandate
5. To assess structure, efficiency and effectiveness of resource utilisation in realising the outcomes attained
6. To determine what environmental / institutional factors hinder or promote the achievement of the NDP's goals in the education sector in the medium- to long-term and to note what action or interventions are required to position the NECT to be more responsive to its environment; and
7. To determine the extent and appropriateness of adoption and institutionalisation of NECT's innovations within the broader schooling system (FREF, 2020a: 8).

In trying to respond to these ToR, it is important to emphasise that the evaluation is not working with an abstracted and self-determining educational system. One is dealing with a system that is

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the product and outcome of complex social forces, and the contexts in which the NECT is working reflect the worst and most challenging features of that system.

The “strengths and weaknesses of the NECT’s programme and approach to educational improvement” (Objective 3 in the list above) have had to be assessed within the environment of the COVID-19 pandemic, through in situ evaluation of the NECT’s programmes – in the national DBE, in provincial departments, in districts, circuits and in schools. Objective 6 requires a contextual analysis of the extent to which the NECT’s programmes have been implemented across the schools, districts and provinces included in the NECT’s scope of activities and has been developed in reflecting on the full range of data collected. The question of which “environmental / institutional factors hinder or promote the achievement of the NDP’s goals” is addressed in the set of recommendations emerging from the evaluation. Objective 7 is about the scalability of the NECT’s “innovations” – the extent to which its interventions have been universalised, provincialised and institutionalised, which is addressed in the section on Programme 8.

### **1.3. Structure of the report**

The report is structured as follows. Besides the Introduction there are four sections:

1. *Context of the evaluation*, which provides a comprehensive background to the NECT and to the current evaluation, locating the establishment and operations of the NECT within the context of the National Development Plan (NDP) (which has a chapter on Education) and the Education Collaboration Framework (ECF) (the policy document arising from the NDP that led directly to the establishment of the NECT) and describes briefly the NECT Annual Reports and previous evaluations of the NECT
2. *Evaluation approach and methodology*, which discusses evaluation criteria as practised by the OECD (Development Assistance Committee [DAC] criteria), considers the primary and ToR Focus Area questions to be addressed through the evaluation, and outlines the methodological approach followed for the evaluation – including the sampling methodology and sample frames, a description of the data upon which the evaluation relied, and an account of the approach adopted in analysing the data
3. *Evaluation findings*, which presents the findings of the study according to seven of the eight Programmes which the NECT has pursued since inception and which are reflected in the five ToR Focus Areas for the evaluation: District Improvement Programme; Systemic intervention; Innovation programme; Education DialogueSA; Governance and finance; Strategic partnerships; and Monitoring and evaluation; and
4. *Conclusion and Recommendations*, which summarises the overall findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations incorporating the findings of the eight NECT Programmes and the five Focus Areas in the ToR (FREF, 2020a).

## 2. CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATION

### 2.1. Overview

The work of the NECT needs to be understood in the context of the many intersecting inequalities associated with the education system in South Africa, and the ways in which government has set out to address these. This section provides a general contextual analysis of some features of the South African education system and provides a detailed account of the origins of the NECT, linked to a number of key moves for reform initiated from around 2010. The section also reflects on the NECT as a particular form of complex organisation and the implications of its particular history and form for the evaluation. The first consideration is the evolutionary link of the NECT to the National Development Plan.

### 2.2. The National Development Plan

The National Development Plan (NDP) (NPC, 2011)

offers a long-term perspective. It defines a desired destination and identifies the role different sectors of society need to play in reaching that goal .... The NDP aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. According to the plan, South Africa can realise these goals by drawing on the energies of its people, growing an inclusive economy, building capabilities, enhancing the capacity of the state, and promoting leadership and partnerships throughout society.

“Improving education, training and innovation” is one of the fifteen chapters in the NDP. Amongst the “Key Points” that headline the chapter are that “The South African education system needs *urgent action*” (NPC, 2011: 295; emphasis added) and that “The priorities in basic education are human *capacity*, school *management*, *district support*, *infrastructure* and results-oriented mutual accountability between schools and communities” (NPC, 2011: 295; emphasis added). Statements in the “2030 Vision” for education include:

- By 2030, South Africans should have access to education and training of the highest *quality*
- The *performance* of South African learners in international standardised tests should be comparable to the performance of learners from countries at a similar level of development and with similar levels of access; and
- Building national capabilities requires *quality* early childhood development, *schooling*, college, university and adult education and training programmes (NPC, 2011: 297; emphasis added).

Quality and performance are two of the watchwords of the NPC underpinning the vision for schooling.

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The section of the chapter on basic education emphasises that, while there have been many gains since 1994, the major deficit is the quality of school education outcomes – the main contributory factors being:

- Human capacity weaknesses in teaching, management and school support (district offices)
- The language skills of learners; and
- The lack of cooperation between key stakeholders, particularly unions and the government (NPC, 2011: 302).

Long-term goals for basic education as outlined in the NDP are:

- Improving literacy, numeracy / mathematics and science outcomes
- Increasing the number of learners eligible to study maths and science-based degrees at university; and
- Improving performance in international comparative studies (NPC, 2011: 305).

In terms of improving literacy, numeracy / mathematics and science outcomes, the Commission proposes that “90 percent of learners in grades 3, 6 and 9 must achieve 50 percent or more in the annual national assessments in these subjects” by 2030. In terms of increasing the number of learners eligible to study maths and science-based degrees at university, the Commission proposes “a target for 2030 of 450 000 learners [passing Grade 12] being eligible for a bachelor’s programme with maths and science” by 2030. In terms of improving performance in international comparative studies, the Commission proposes that “grade 8 scores in the round of [Trends in Mathematics and Science Study] TIMSS closest to 2030 should reach 500 points.”

These aims were to be a key influence in the steps that led to the establishment of the NECT, as discussed below; but before presenting this history, we first give an overview of some key elements of the education context in which NECT has worked.

### **2.3. The education context in South Africa**

Post-apartheid governments have been faced with essentially rebuilding a racially fragmented, inequitable, and dysfunctional education system and transforming it into one that serves the educational needs of all South African learners. As articulated by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in its 2016-2020 Strategic Plan (DBE, n.d.a.: 3), “Through the NDP, our priorities have been set. We must improve the quality of teaching and learning through better teacher support, development, utilisation, and supply, as well as better materials provisioning and infrastructure development, preservation and maintenance. We are realigning the departmental structures, partnerships and assessment systems in our system so that they better support learning, feedback and support in our classrooms, and systemic accountability for the resources our country invests in our schools.”

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This section provides first a background overview of some key aspects of the South African education context, in which the NECT works, and then discusses the planning processes out of which the NECT emerged.

### **2.3.1. Education, poverty and inequality**

There is a link between educational level of attainment and household poverty. When learners are able to complete and receive a good quality basic education, they increase their chances of gaining access to tertiary education and this reduces their risk of poverty. Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2017) notes that households with lower education levels are more likely to be living in poverty. Individuals aged 18 years or older with a higher than matric qualification made up the smallest contribution of household poverty share between 2006 and 2015. Household members with a higher than matric qualification comprised between 1 and 1.6 percent of household poverty shares in comparison to household members who had some secondary schooling. This grouping comprised between 31 and 40 percent of household poverty shares for this period.

Economic data points to a picture of the financial inequalities across South African households. If households in the country are divided into five groups (quintiles), from the poorest 20 percent to the richest 20 percent, the country's deep inequalities become very evident. Research by the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies, drawing from the National Income Dynamics Study from 2017, finds that approximately 18 million South Africans live in the poorest 20 percent of households, and almost half of these poorest households are in rural areas (Valodia & Francis, 2020). On average, these poorest households have about five members and a total monthly household income of R2,600 (or about R567 per person in the household).

“Structural obstacles to the achievement of the right to education do exist. Research has consistently shown that the strongest determinant of educational outcomes in South Africa is socio-economic status. Given the history of South Africa, there is an overlap between poverty, race and access to quality education. Whilst primary school completion has increased from about 85% in 2002 to about 95% in 2017, the secondary school completion rate has increased from about 40% to just over 50%. These are significant improvements, yet there is clearly much work to be done in order to reach the NDP's vision for secondary school completion. For many learners from poorer homes the negative effect of home background factors cannot be completely eradicated. The pace of social and economic development in the country is therefore a long-term obstacle to full realization of the right to education (UN, n.d.).

According to the most recent Global Nutrition Report (2020) South Africa has made no progress towards achieving the low birth weight target – with 14.2% of infants having a low weight at birth – or the target for stunting, with 27.4% of children under 5 years of age affected (Global Nutrition Report, 2020). Many learners come into the school system already nutritionally deprived and are reliant on the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), which provides one nutritious meal per

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day to all learners in poorer primary and secondary schools. The DBE's Annual Report (2014) indicated that more than 9 million learners in 21,191 schools were benefiting from the NSNP.

Schools in the South African education system are classified into five quintiles, based on the socioeconomic status of a school as measured by average income, employment rate, and general level of literacy in the school's geographical area. Schools in the most economically disadvantaged geographical areas are categorised as Quintile 1 schools, those in the most economically advantaged geographical areas as Quintile 5 schools (Hall & Giese, 2008). Quintile 1 to 3 schools are non-fee-paying schools, receiving more funding per learner from the government than schools in Quintiles 4 and 5, which are fee-paying schools (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019).

It can be seen that the capacity of the school system is severely constrained to support education for children in households where income shares are in the bottom 40% of national distribution. The infrastructural and learner support needs highlighted by the school quintile system are matched by the socioeconomic and health needs associated with income distribution, in which race, class and gender inequalities intersect. It was these the inequalities the NDP was set up to address and for which NECT has been established as a key organisation.

### **2.3.2. Expenditure on education**

South African government expenditure on education in 2018 was 6.2 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This places South Africa at a ranking of 31 out of 197 countries (an undifferentiated ranking), which reflects the government's commitment to improving education (The World Bank, 2021). Despite numerous interventions and massive allocations from the national budget, the quality of education outcomes remains poor. The provision of adequate, quality basic education in South Africa still faces a wide range of challenges, which are primarily attributable to intransigent historical social inequities.

### **2.3.3. Quality of infrastructure**

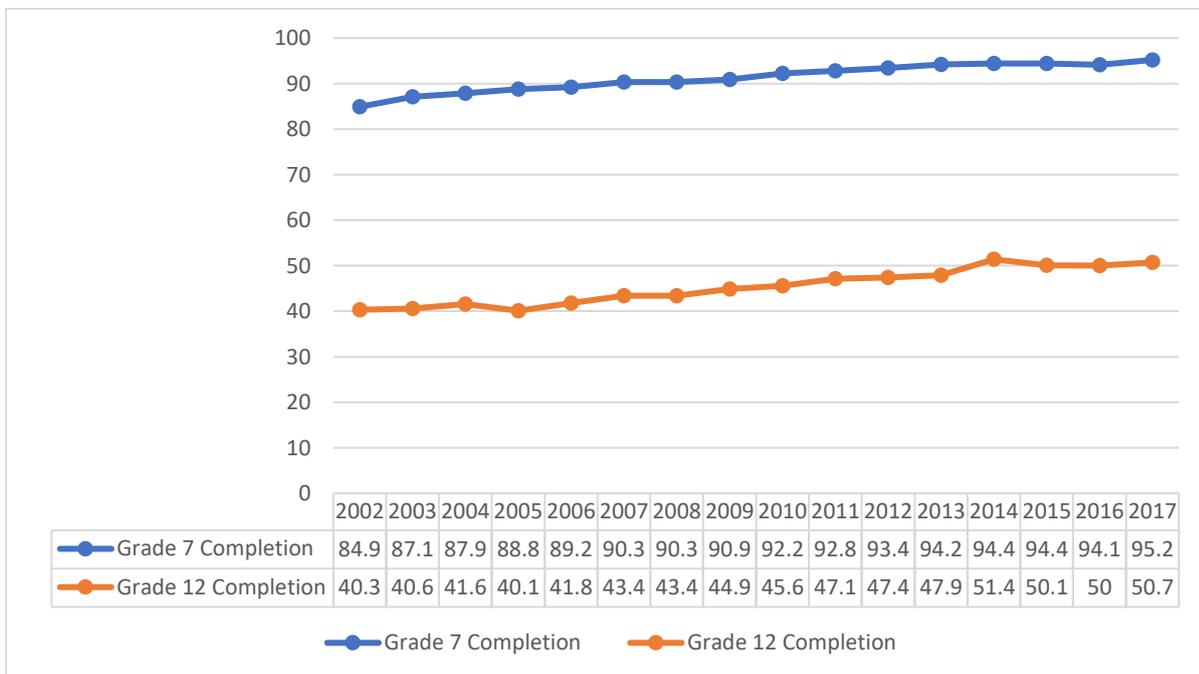
Large numbers of former Bantustan, rural and township schools are under-resourced in respect of classroom accommodation and teaching resources, reflecting the prevailing inequalities that still exist in the education system. Many schools have inadequate classroom structures, water supply and ablution facilities. In November 2013, the Minister of Basic Education published Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure with the objective of ensuring "that there is compliance with the minimum uniform norms and standards in the design and construction of new schools and additions, alterations and improvements to school which exist" (RSA, 2013). Despite the regulations a Section 27 report on education in South Africa states that "crumbling classrooms, horrendous bathrooms, cracked fences, and non-existent libraries and laboratories remain a reality for thousands of school-going children across South Africa" (Draga, 2017: 238). The education sector provides infrastructure through three programmes:

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Provincial Infrastructure Programme, Accelerated School infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI) and Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) initiative, but limited available budgets at provincial level mean that progress is slow. The concerning factor is that research suggests that the physical characteristics of learning spaces have a significant impact on educational progress and the impact has been estimated to explain on the order of 16 percent of the variation in pupils’ learning (Barrett et al., 2019).

### 2.3.4. Quality of learner performance

The primary goal of the basic education system is to ensure that all learners entering the system are provided with the opportunity to complete their schooling up to Grade 12 and to exit the system with a matric certificate. A major achievement of Government has been to reach almost universal access to and completion of primary schooling. Secondary school completion presents a less positive aspect in South Africa, however, with little more than half of the individuals aged 15 years and older successfully completing some upper secondary qualification (Stats SA, 2016). Whilst primary school completion increased from about 85% in 2002 to about 95% in 2017, the secondary school completion rate increased from about 40% to just over 50%.

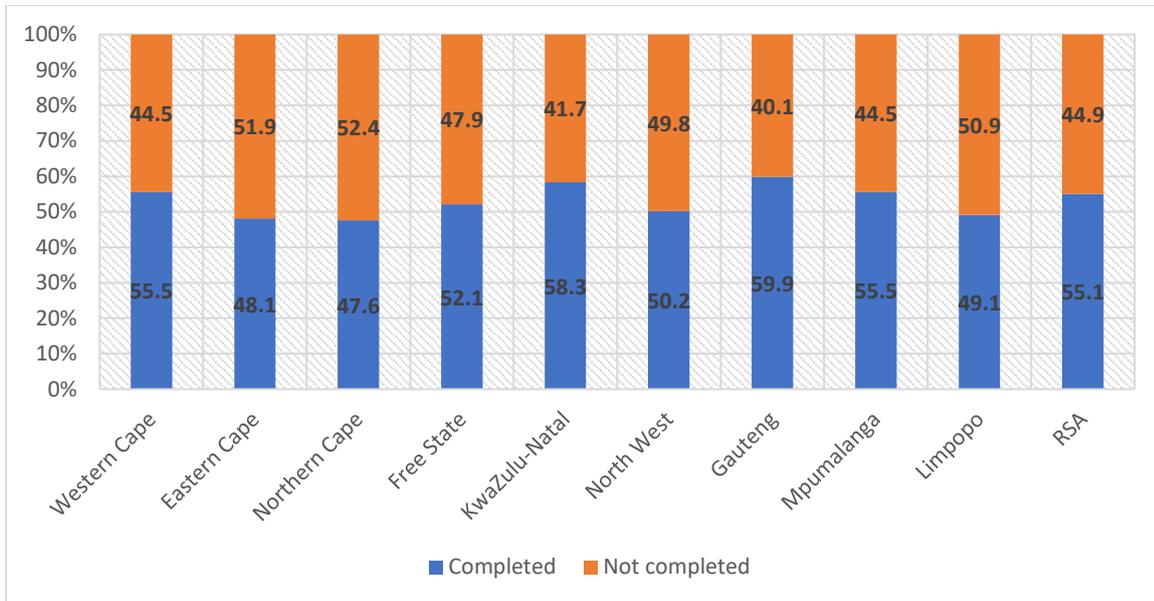


Source: DBE 25 Year Review

*Figure 1: National primary and secondary school completion rates*

These are significant improvements yet there is clearly much work to be done in order to reach the NDP’s vision for secondary school completion (DBE, 2019a).

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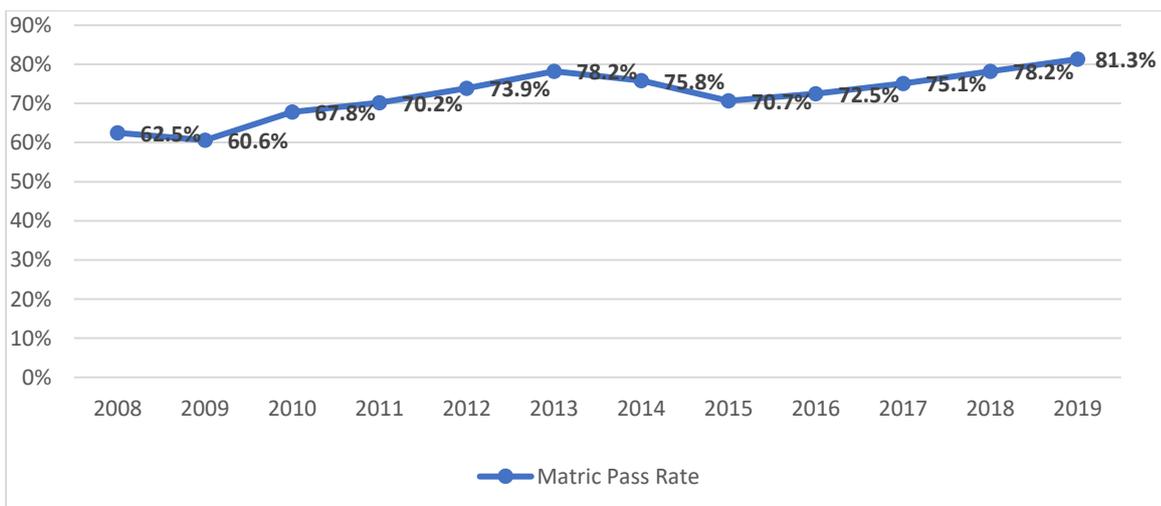


Source: Stats SA (2016b) (Community Survey 2016)

*Figure 2: Upper secondary completion rate by population aged 15 and older by province, 2016*

The upper secondary completion rate is the percentage of students completing the last year of high school (Grade 12). It is calculated by taking the total number of students in Grade 12, divided by the total number of children of the official Grade 12 age. Figure 2 shows that in South Africa, nearly six in ten individuals aged 15 years or more had completed at least some upper secondary qualification (55.1). (It should be noted, however, that 15-16-year-olds are exceptions in Grade 12 rather than the norm.) Moreover, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal had upper secondary completion rates slightly above the national average. However, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape had the highest percentage of those who have not completed an upper secondary qualification (close to 52%).

National Senior Certificate results have improved in recent years, as reflected in Figure 3:



Source: Department of Basic Education

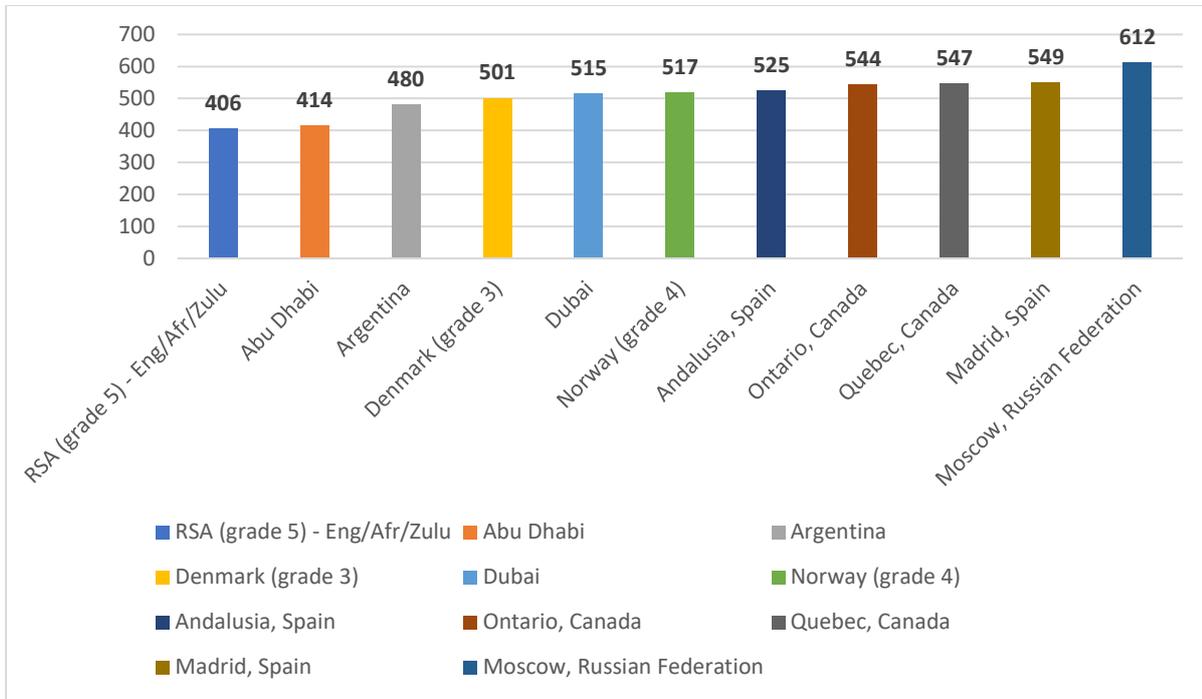
*Figure 3: South Africa Matric Pass Rates 2008-2019*

However, as Chairperson of UMALUSI (Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training) John Volmink pointed out, “Umalusi has observed a worrying trend in mathematics, where the subject does not seem to be progressing in tandem with other cognate subjects in terms of learner performance” (Pijoo, 2020).

In the 2019 NSC exams, boys continue to outperform girls and achieved a slightly higher pass rate of 82.8% compared to girls achieving at 80.1% - but the gender gap has closed significantly (DBE, 2019b). The National Development Plan (NDP) has set very firm improvement targets across all sectors, including education. According to the NDP, 450 000 learners should achieve university entry level passes that enable them to pursue mathematics and science careers. Five years after the adoption of the NDP the achievement in this regard was oscillating around 21.4% of the 2030 target, i.e., 96 509 learners were eligible to pursue maths and science careers from the 2017 National Senior Certification. The figure represents a growth of 10.1% between 2014 and 2017. Whilst the progress is good as this will increase the number of students eligible to pursue Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics studies, it is clearly highly unlikely for the country to achieve the 2030 target at this pace.

The regular Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) has demonstrated that South African learners perform poorly in international comparisons, including with some of South Africa’s neighbouring African countries. Nevertheless, mathematics achievement scores improved from a national average of ‘very low’ in 1995, 1999 and 2003 to ‘low’ in 2011 and 2015, as the NECT began its interventions. The highest gains in achievement occurred in the lowest performing segment of the system, possibly as an outcome of multiple interventions at school and home levels amongst the poorest learner groups (Reddy, 2018). The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2016 (PIRLS) provided empirical evidence on the status of reading literacy comprehension levels currently in South Africa. Figure 4 shows that of the 11 benchmarking participants in PIRLS 2016, South African Grade 5 learners achieved the lowest score. Multiple and complex factors contribute to South Africa’s underperformance in education. These factors are often related to the legacy of apartheid as reflected in differences in educational attainments among the various races.

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Source: PIRLS 2016 Report (Centre for Evaluation and Assessment at UP)

*Figure 4: South African Grade 5 Learner Achievement compared to other benchmarking countries participating in PIRLS 2016*

In 2011 the DBE introduced the Annual National Assessments (ANA) as an assessment instrument to enable a systemic evaluation of education performance and specifically to track learner performance each year in literacy and numeracy. As a result of resistance by education sector stakeholders (primarily teacher unions) the DBE has replaced the ANA with a National Integrated Assessment Framework (NIAF) consisting of three distinct yet complimentary assessment programmes that will be administered among learners in Grades 3, 6 and 9.

### 2.3.5. Quality of teaching

In a report on teacher quality in Southern Africa for the Commonwealth Education Trust, Metcalfe (2008) noted that South Africa, like many countries grappling with the quality imperatives of expansion of access to education to meet the Education for All (EFA) goals, struggles with teacher quality challenges. Robinson (2016) points to DBE data that shows that 10% of the country's teachers are absent from school each day, while research has found that 79% of South African Grade 6 mathematics teachers were classified as having content knowledge levels below the level at which they were teaching (Biznews, 2019). Approximately two-thirds of teachers currently working in public schools received their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) before the reforms in the early 2000s, and that an ageing workforce in conjunction with the rising unit costs of teacher salaries has placed immense pressure on provincial expenditure – leading to the inability of provinces to spend more on learning activities (JET Education Services, 2016). According to the DBE evidence also points to younger teachers being better equipped to teach than their older peers who received their initial

training in the previous system. Results from mathematics and language teacher tests in SACMEQ 2007 and 2013, point to younger teachers displaying a level of subject knowledge which was considerably higher than that of older teachers (DBE, 2019a).

### **2.3.6. Violence in schools**

There is no one cause of violence in schools but rather several intersecting factors that lead to school violence. In its 2019 publication *Behind the Numbers: ending school violence and bullying* UNESCO highlight the global nature of the problem, noting that almost one in three students (32%) has been bullied by their peers at school at least once in the last month (UNESCO, 2019). In all regions except Europe and North America, physical bullying is the most common and sexual bullying is the second most common type of bullying. In Europe and North America, psychological bullying is the most common type of bullying. Cyberbullying affects as many as one in ten children. More than one in three students (36%) has been involved in a physical fight with another student and almost one in three (32.4%) has been physically attacked at least once in the past year. Information about sexual violence perpetrated by peers is limited but evidence from sub-Saharan Africa suggests that a schoolmate is more likely to be the perpetrator than a teacher, especially for boys.

In recognising the challenge of school violence in South Africa the South African Council for Educators (SACE) has stated that “school-based violence does not take place in a vacuum but is rather influenced and shaped by contextual factors” (Section 27, 2017). In schools such violence can take the form of abuse, assault, bullying, illegal corporal punishment and gender base violence. Of particular concern is the safety of female learners at schools, and their vulnerability to gender-based violence. The 2013 *School Violence in South Africa* report found that “gender-based violence, acts of sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape are experienced at far higher levels by female learners, while males are usually found to experience higher levels of physical assaults” (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2013). The consequences of violence against and between learners can lead to increased rates of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation – and have devastating effects on the ability of learners to successfully progress through the school system.

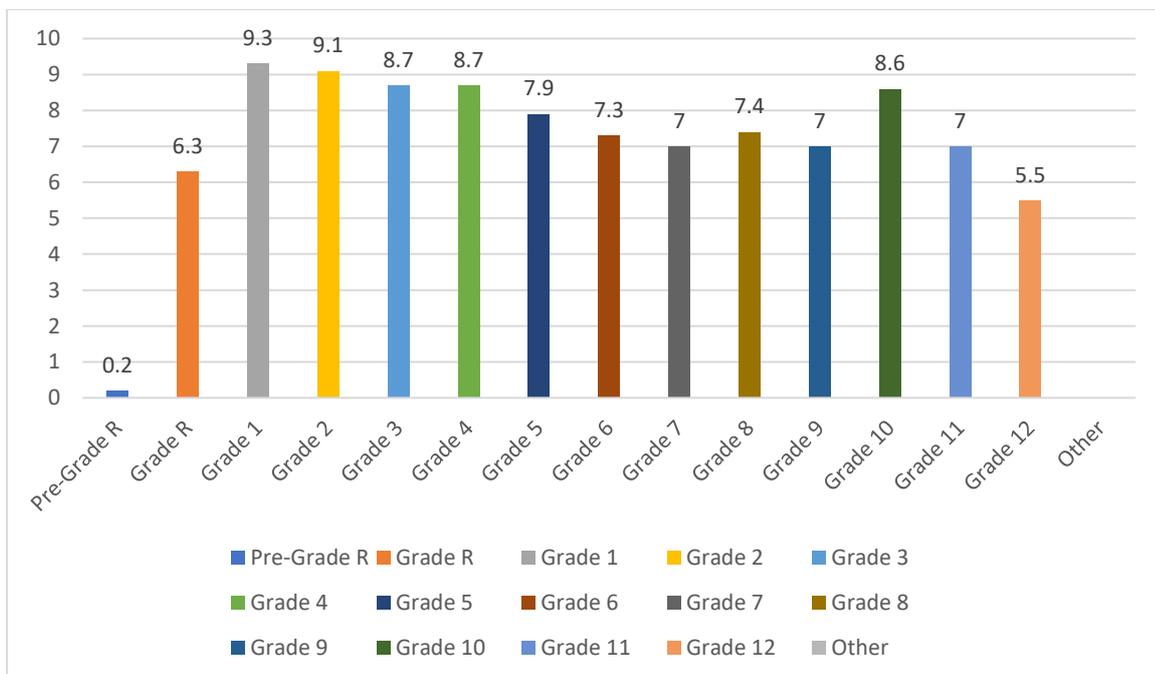
In October 2018, the National School Safety Summit was convened by DialogueSA on behalf of the Minister of Basic Education and the DBE. The aim of the Summit was to engage with education stakeholders to find common solutions to the various safety issues facing schools, as well as chart a way forward to allow for safer environments in South Africa’s schools (DBE, 2018a). Constituencies, including teacher unions, School Governing Bodies (SGBs), students and the DBE were invited to report on work done since then and to identify what still needs to be done. Significant interest was shown in the topic, and various government departments indicated their roles and responsibilities in this regard. The Summit adopted a declaration, and the NECT has been charged with serving as the Secretariat for the constituency-based National School Safety Steering Committee (NSSSC), which should implement the resolutions of the Summit.

**2.3.7. School governance**

In its report “Loss of principle”, Corruption Watch found that between January 2012 and July 2015 more than 1,000 reports had been received from the public regarding corruption in schools across South Africa. Of these reports, 54% implicated principals as the primary culprits in corrupt activities and reflects a pattern of collusion between, among others, members of school governing bodies (SGBs), teachers, family members and other outside parties involved in contractual arrangements with schools. Effectiveness is limited by three factors: a general unwillingness on the part of many of the school principals to fully incorporate parent governors into their legitimate roles; an overwhelming number of ex-principals in Institutional Management and Governance positions who favour interaction with the principal to the exclusion of the governing body; and the dominance of retired principals in the leadership structures of the organized associations of school governing bodies (Graaff, 2016).

**2.3.8. Learner attrition**

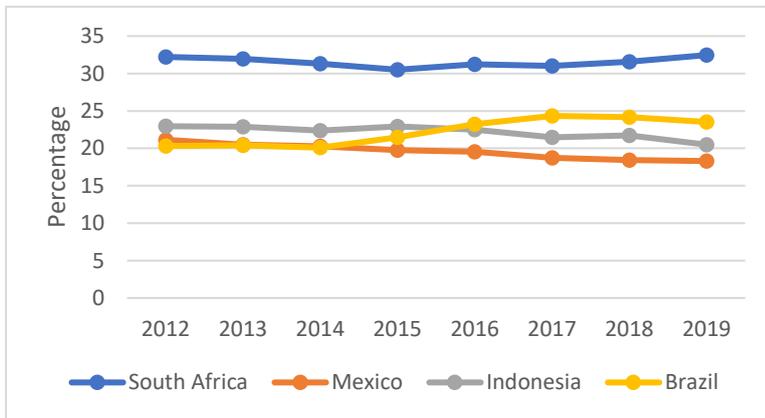
As far back as 2008 the growing concern over rising school drop-out rates led the Minister of Education to establish a Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in The South African Schooling System. A key finding of the Committee’s report was that school dropout was a multifaceted issue that involved academic and non-academic factors such as social, economic, familial and geographical aspects. These factors impacted each other in a continuous cycle that in turn, affected schools (Ministerial Committee, 2008). By 2020 the problem remains as challenging as ever, despite the best efforts of the Department of Basic Education to retain poorer learners via no-fees schooling, the school nutrition programme and the provision of learner transport.



Source: StatsSA

Figure 5: Percentage distribution of learners in ordinary schools, by grade, in 2016

The highest proportion of learners in ordinary schools was enrolled in Grade 1 (9.3%), while the lowest proportion was enrolled in Grade 12 (5.5%). The pattern of enrolment across grades reveals a steady decline in the proportion of learners from Grades 1 to 3, while the enrolment stayed almost the same between Grades 3 to 4. An anomaly occurs in Grade 10, where there is an unexpected increase in the proportion of learners. This could possibly be explained by higher levels of retention in Grade 10 than in other grades. The decline in the proportion of learners from Grade 11 to Grade 12 is significant, suggesting possible dropout or movement out of the schooling system to other education institutions (Stats SA, 2018). Many school dropouts add to the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training. As illustrated in Figure 6, the exceedingly high number of young people who are NEET is of grave concern as it implies a stagnation or decline in human capital, which is particularly worrying if it affects low-educated youth with little or no work experience (DHET), 2018).



Source: The World Bank

Figure 6: Share of South African youth 18-24 not in education, employment or training, total (% of youth population) compared to Brazil, Indonesia and Mexico

### 2.3.9. Contextual conclusion

It can be seen that the inequalities associated with the South African education system are both transversal, taking in many different forms of inequality, and intersectional, so that inequalities connect and deepen the injustice associated with inadequate provision for many children. The next section outlines how NECT came into being and how it has undertaken a range of actions to support change.

## 2.4. Early thinking on national education collaboration

Early thinking on national education collaboration is found in the NDP. The Education chapter of the NDP makes a range of recommendations, many of which coincide with proposals made by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in its “Action plan to 2014: Towards the realisation of

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schooling 2025” (DBE, 2011). The clearest signal in the NDP for the establishment of a national collaborative body to implement these proposals is the following:

... the Commission proposes a national initiative involving all stakeholders to drive efforts to improve learning outcomes in schools, starting with the worst performers.... [Elements of that initiative will include]:

- Ensure that *districts* have the capacity to support curriculum delivery
- Teacher development should include training on *curriculum pacing* and the subject content that teachers find difficult to teach
- Different stakeholders should collaborate under *a single national initiative* to pool resources

The national initiative should be under the auspices of the Department of Basic Education, but draw on expertise in institutions that are already working on school improvement as well as those that have the potential to make a contribution. The initiative should be *piloted in a sample of schools* and expanded over time (NPC, 2011: 314-315; emphasis added).

While the NECT in its current form may not have been in the minds of the National Planning Commissioners, most of the elements that appear under the rubric “A national initiative to improve learning outcomes” in the NDP foreshadow the establishment of the NECT as the body to drive the initiative, as well as anticipate the directions in which the NECT initiative has proceeded: for example, its replication model rests on initial interventions being piloted in initiatives like FSSs.<sup>2</sup>

In preparation for the drafting of the NDP, the National Planning Commission commissioned a Diagnostic Overview to identify South Africa’s key development challenges. In the context of the capacity of the state the Diagnostic Overview found that government at all levels was experiencing a skills deficit that had “an adverse impact not only on frontline service delivery, for instance in schools and hospitals and home affairs offices, but also on the ability of government to engage in long-term planning, coordination across institutions, run efficient operations, ensure adequate maintenance of infrastructure, establish organisational systems and routines, and manage personnel and industrial relations ... and information systems, human resource management and financial management are particularly weak areas” (NPC, 2012). The NDP itself stressed that “building state capacity is the most important step to achieve a developmental state.” Chapter Nine of the NDP makes it clear that “the priorities in basic education are human capacity, school management, district support, infrastructure and results-oriented mutual accountability between schools and communities”. These considerations were to provide NECT with a very clear roadmap for the kind of interventions that it could facilitate to strengthen the capacity of the state to deliver education and training of the highest quality, leading to significantly improved learning outcomes.

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<sup>2</sup> FSSs are the 409 schools identified at the outset of the NECT initiative as having “unique and serious challenges ... earmarked for comprehensive and high dosage interventions” (NECT, 2014a: 5).

The next substantive step towards the founding of the NECT as we know it was the development of the Education Collaboration Framework (ECF), which will be elaborated in the next section to show the genesis of the NECT.

## **2.5. The Education Collaboration Framework**

The drafting of the ECF arose out of discussions amongst various individuals in late 2012 about how they could “assist the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to realise its vision as encapsulated in the Action Plan Towards 2014 and implement the National Development Plan (NDP) for the education sector” (NECT, 2013: 1). The mounting of a Leadership Dialogue in December 2012 led to the solicitation by the Dialogue secretariat, JET Education Services, of opinions on the proposal to develop a collaboration framework, and ultimately to the drafting of this document.

The ECF, described as “a partnership initiative involving Government and social partners which is aimed at increasing cooperation among the stakeholders involved in education improvement with a view to improved educational outcomes in South Africa”, was to be managed and implemented by “the Trust established through this framework” (NECT, 2013: 3). The “collaboration model” (NECT, 2013: 4) comprised Government on the one hand and social partners – business, labour, civil society – on the other.

The ECF provides the foundation for the work of the social partners, which were to be coordinated by the NECT, through the positing of six themes linked to the NDP and the DBE’s *Action plan to 2014*:

1. Professionalisation of the teaching service
2. A call for courageous and effective leadership
3. Improving government capacity to deliver
4. Improving resourcing to create conducive and safe learning environments: teachers, books and infrastructure
5. Community and parent involvement; and
6. Learner support and wellbeing.

These themes are briefly outlined in the ECF. The NECT’s mandate regarding professionalising the teaching service is set out in the ECF:

The ECF will support Government to:

- Set up the frameworks and materials required to implement the ISPFTE [Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa]
- Train teachers and support them in their classrooms
- Build the necessary capacities at the school management and district levels to support and monitor teachers, starting with underperforming schools and their feeder schools.
- Improve the effectiveness of teachers and education officials (NECT, 2013: 6).

The Framework also spells out the five Programmes which the NECT was to spearhead:

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1. *District intervention programmes* comprising most of the focus areas discussed earlier in the framework aimed at providing a comprehensive and cohesive set of activities based on a common change theory.
2. *Systemic change intervention programmes* that would be implemented across the districts and provinces, for example, teacher development, youth leadership development, policy review, and strategic research programmes.
3. *Innovation projects* which would allow Government and social partners to design and test new ideas and innovations.
4. *Local intervention projects* involving support to schools or a cluster of schools provided by business, labour and civil society organisations.
5. *National education dialogues* aimed at promoting on-going discussions on the state of education and exploring joint actions.

The ECF articulates a theory of change – a “common theory [which] will serve as the basis on which the progress, successes and impacts of the interventions are assessed.” This theory, which has been used in shaping NECT’s work, is discussed in the next section, which will first trace in some detail the history and trajectory of the NECT from its formation. Formation of NECT and timeline of phases of work

The NECT was established in 2013 by means of a Deed of Trust (DoT) with seven Trustees. The DoT articulates the sole or principal object of the Trust as being “to support, develop and improve education in the Republic of South Africa” by means of public benefit activities pertaining inter alia to “Education and Development” (NECT Deed of Trust, 2013). The DoT had seven high profile signatories, four of whom were also “donors” to the Trust and were (and are) keen stakeholders in the country’s education system. The donor-trustees comprised the sitting Minister of Basic Education, Ms Angie Motshekga; Mr Sizwe Nxasana (National Student Financial Aid Scheme and CEO of FirstRand Bank Ltd and FirstRand Holdings); Mr Basil Manuel (National Professional Teachers’ Association of South Africa); and Mr Nkosana Dolopi (South African Democratic Teachers Union). The other three trustees were Ms Futhi Mtoba (Founder of TEACH South Africa, Association for the Advancement of Black Accountants of Southern Africa, Nelson Mandela Foundation); Mr Mark Lamberti (Massmart and Imperial Holdings); and Mr Bobby Soobrayan (Director-General of the Department of Basic Education).

The purpose of NECT was to operationalise the framework through three functional areas (NECT, 2013):

- Guide and oversee the *inclusive participation of civil society and business* in education improvement initiatives through the framework
- Provide a co-financing modality, designed specifically to provide an accountable *multi-stakeholder structure*, allowing for the rapid approval and swift disbursement of funds and offering Government and private sector funders the flexibility of specifying how their contributions to the Trust should be used; and

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- Sustain the Education Dialogue initiated in December 2012 (NECT, 2013; emphasis added).

The education sector in South Africa has a long history of fragmentation, inequity, and confrontation – including the ongoing effects of the balkanisation of education under the apartheid regime. From the outset the NECT has understood the importance of being seen as an ‘honest broker’ ideally positioned to address the trust-deficit that has often existed between different stakeholder groupings. The NECT model has provided an alternative to the disjuncture between state, NGOs and civil society that is seen in many other countries.

The NECT has close links with the DBE: many of the objectives outlined in DBE plans have been taken up by the NECT. Section 4.1 of this report considers how the NECT has embraced a number of these proposals. NECT’s work has had several different phases, as Table 1 shows.

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Table 1: Phases of the NECT's work, 2013-2020

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Establishment of the NECT by Deed of Trust with seven signatories	District Intervention Programme (DIP) initiated in EC, LP, KZN	DIP launched in NW, MP  Psychosocial referral started	Upscaling DIP from 8 to 40 districts across 5 provinces  Establishment of Education NGO network	DIP universalisation in EC, LP, KZN, NW, MP  Implementation of PSRIP  Initiation of SA-SAMS upgrade	DIP provincialisation in EC, LP, KZN  Initiation of SAFE programme  Inception of Sandbox project	DIP provincialisation in NW, MP	Surveys of school readiness to reopen and DBE COVID-19 response planning  Preparations for ECD migration from DSD to DBE  DBE talent management

Source: NECT Annual Reports

It can be seen from the timeline that NECT began with pilot work in three provinces, and has expanded to work in five provinces with a range of initiatives, both to scale up from the initial District Intervention Programme, but also to take a leading role in a number of high profile national initiatives, including PRISP, the SA-SAMS upgrade and the SAFE programme. In 2020 the NECT played a major role working with DBE on COVID response planning.

Concern with documenting and evaluating learner outcomes has been a central feature of NECT work at district level. A proposal in the NDP of 90 per cent of learners achieving 50 per cent or more in national examinations has a prominent place on the NECT website landing page: “Committed to ensuring a South Africa where 90% of learners pass mathematics, science and languages with at least 50% by 2030”. While the grades at which this should happen are not indicated, it is clear from the NDP that grades 3, 6 and 9 are envisaged. Such improvements cannot be confined to these grades, which the NPC presumably selected as a point of departure for improvements across the schooling system. The evaluation team has worked to interrogate this objective and the initiatives of NECT in supporting this work (see discussion in sections 4 and 5).

## **2.6. NECT Annual Reports**

Eight Annual Reports (2013/14 to 2021) document the progress of the NECT since its inception. Each report provides an account of the organisation against its planned targets and its financial performance. Taken collectively, the Reports give a picture of the NECT and its activities over the period of its operation.

The eight reports are:

1. Operations report and audited financial statements 2013/14 Financial Year
2. 2014 interim integrated report
3. 2015 financial year operations report
4. Annual report 2016: Education collaboration reaches a third of the national system
5. Annual report 2017: We are socially significant. Four years of collaborative, systemic education improvement at scale
6. Annual report 2018: Unlocking potential and creating opportunities. Five years of stable collaboration, increased learning and teaching in schools
7. Annual report 2019: Building social capital for South Africa. Six years of adding value through social change
8. Annual report 2020: Creative and agile response to disruptions. Seven years of social capital to pursue the NDP vision.

The titles and sub-titles of the reports convey the importance to the NECT of reach (2016, 2017), systemic change (2017), collaboration (2017, 2018), increases and improvements in teaching and

learning (2017, 2018), social change and social capital (2019, 2020), creativity (2020), and agility (2020).

## **2.7. Previous evaluations of the NECT**

There have been four main external evaluations of the NECT:

- Performance and capacity appraisal of the managing agency (Theaker, 2015)
- NECT output to purpose review (OPR) (Allsop & Hoosen, 2016; Schollar, 2017)
- NECT foundation phase learning programme evaluation (ZENEX Foundation, 2020)
- PSRIP evaluation (Africa Strategic Research Corporation, 2017)

The report by John Theaker presents the findings of an evaluation of the capacity of JET Education Services (the “Managing Agency”) to manage the NECT in the first year (2014) of its operations – in the period before the NECT took over this function. The report found that JET did not have the capacity and full set of competencies to manage a project of the nature and size of the NECT and recommended that a dedicated unit for project district interventions be established, led by the JET manager of district interventions and staffed by full-time personnel with the experience and competencies to implement the ECF. The Theaker report was no doubt influential in the subsequent decision to transfer the NECT management functions to the NECT itself.

The report by Eric Schollar & Associates (ESA) analyses data collected during the course of an “Output to Purpose” review undertaken by the NECT, which recognised, after three years of operation, the need to “‘take stock’ ... to conduct an independent assessment of the NECT’s achievements, programming and strategic outlook, and to make the necessary adaptations to delivery for moving forward” (NECT 2017a: 4). ESA did not, however, make recommendations for improvement – which led to the NECT drafting its own set of recommendations, separately to: the Board; to NECT programme managers; and to the DBE, provinces and districts (NECT, 2017a).<sup>1</sup>

The Zenex Foundation report presents the findings of an evaluation of the NECT’s Foundation Phase Learning Programme (FPLP) – the core of the District Improvement Programme (DIP – the NECT’s flagship programme) – conducted on behalf of Zenex by Social Surveys Africa and DNA Economics between 2016 and 2018. The evaluation considered the extent to which the FPLP had been implemented as planned and had achieved its intended outcomes and impacts. The results of the evaluation were to form the basis for recommendations on how the FPLP and the DIP could be improved, sustained and scaled up beyond the current interventions and provinces.

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<sup>1</sup> These sets of recommendations, while separate for different stakeholders, were all made by the NECT in June 2017.

There is no mention in any of the Annual Reports about how the recommendations arising from the Zenex-commissioned evaluation were taken up by NECT. A number of policy recommendations were made by the Zenex evaluation – that:

- Curriculum reform was needed in the wake of curriculum coverage having improved only moderately
- Foundation phase HODs did not have sufficient time, being teachers themselves, to monitor and provide support to teachers in the classroom, and that schools and the DBE had to rethink staffing and time / task allocation for HoDs
- Teacher time-on-task was still below acceptable levels, with non-core activities taking up too much time, and that the DBE and external interventions should be aware of the trade-offs between time required for their interventions (on training, etc.) and time on task for teaching
- There were too few subject advisors in NECT intervention provinces to provide sufficient support to teachers and that the DBE should urgently review the current post provisioning model
- There was a huge repeater rate in the foundation phase which called for a review of the policy of automatically progressing learners in this phase (a recommendation the DBE had already begun acting on); and
- Most schools evaluated had some form of catch-up programme or strategy in place which the DBE could look at institutionalising and resourcing.

But in a presentation to the DBE in 2020 (NECT, 2020f), NECT acknowledged that implementation and outcome level achievements “did not ... result in measurable, consistent and significant improvements in learner performance (impact level achievements).” In terms of the implementation of tools, it was found that “lesson plans were widely used and were regarded as the most beneficial component of the programme” but that trackers, while widely used, reflected “superficial compliance” with no evidence of having been used to monitor and resolve curriculum coverage issue (NECT, 2020f). This suggests that the NECT at least took note of the findings.

The fourth report, an evaluation of the Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP) by Africa Strategic Research Corporation, presents findings in relation to two overarching evaluation questions: Did the training and support provided to Foundation Phase teachers in the intervention contribute to improvements in their EFAL teaching skills? And did the training and support provided to foundation phase EFAL teachers improve the reading performance of their learners? The PSRIP was found to have improved both teaching skills and reading outcomes.

While the ESA and PSRIP evaluations made positive findings about the impact of the NECT, the findings raise questions:

1. What baseline data were available against which to benchmark the results?

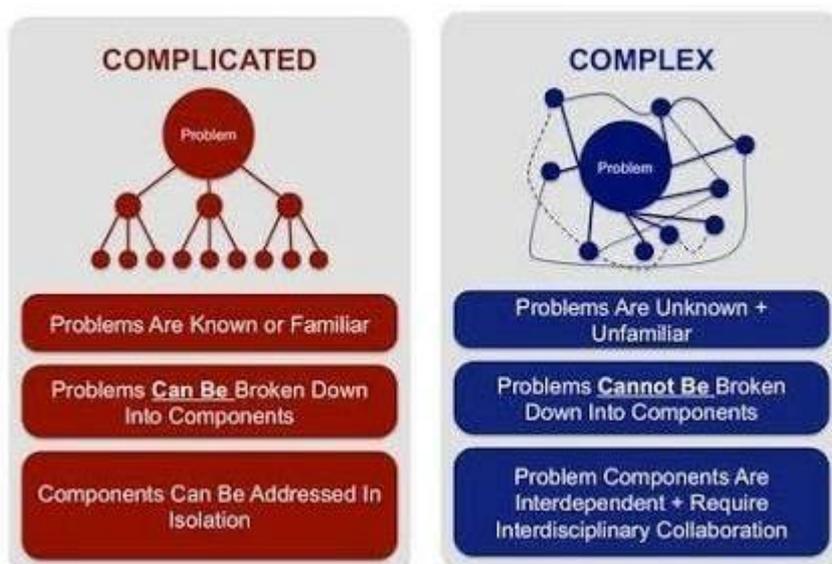
2. Were the results compared with those for teachers and learners in districts and schools in which no NECT interventions had been tested? and
3. Were differences in quantitative results (in pre- and post-testing and between districts and schools) statistically significant?

The current evaluation has built from the previous evaluations but is much more comprehensive in scope and reviews the full range of NECT programmes.

## 2.8. A complex organisation

From the outset the NECT has been committed to the concept of systemic interventions as a vehicle for transforming the quality of education in South Africa – noting that its work is centred within “a systematic and cost-effective way within a co-operative environment.”<sup>2</sup> The work of the NECT is framed within the complexity of the education system and the interdependencies within the overall system and subsystems. Systemic education interventions driven by the NECT are based on an interpretation of design principles that focus on the need for comprehensiveness and alignment across a series of components all aimed at improving schooling in a holistic way. The systemic nature of NECT programming has to some extent aimed at tailoring initiatives to contexts of schooling where the effects of the inequalities in South Africa are very evident. The NECT has over the years worked to tailor its initiatives as a complicated set of interlinked interventions being implemented within the unique complexities of the South African socioeconomic and political context. The NECT therefore needs to be understood as a particular kind of complex organisation working within contexts where many inequalities intersect and where the effects of the DBE, with its formal, complicated structures has uneven effect.

The essential differences between complicated and complex systems are illustrated in Figure 7.



<sup>2</sup> NECT (2014b). Interim integrated report.

*Figure 7: Complicated and complex systems*

An evaluation of the NECT is intertwined with aspects of the organisational performance of the DBE itself. The interventions made by the NECT in support of improving basic education in the country are intertwined with the work of the DBE. It is important for this evaluation to have an analysis of how to attribute results in such a complex collaborative relationship.

In reviewing the literature on complex organisations and complex challenges the evaluation team has distilled insights from the literature on global disaster risk management and frameworks to manage these, notably the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), adopted by 187 UN member states in 2015. This Framework considers ways in which to address institutional, non-institutional, individual and interpersonal fragilities relating to global disasters. We consider these to have considerable resonance with the intersecting inequalities at national level in South Africa, which NECT has been established to help address. The UNDP's report on how to draw on complex intelligence from a wide range of sources in order to address complex challenges is the form of process the team has associated with NECT (Peach et al., 2021). The challenge for NECT as an organisation is how to operate, acknowledging these complex conditions and interfacing, both with a complicated organisation in the form of the DBE and many looser other kinds of organisations associated with South African civil society. In framing our analysis we have drawn on Kreienkamp and Pegram (2020), whose work on addressing complex global catastrophic risks illustrates the importance of supplementing inherited "complicated" governance system design and practices with design principles explicitly oriented to working with complexity, rather than against it. We reflect in relation to each of the NECT programmes on the ways in which their approach to exploring the nature of the complexity, design and order, and the scope of the complexity through setting particularly agreed on boundaries, and stabilize and evaluate through identifying key leverage points, synthesizing information and correcting course may be a particularly fruitful direction for NECT.

### 3. EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Evaluation criteria

Drawing on the OECD DAC evaluation model the purpose of the evaluation criteria is linked to the purpose of evaluation. In the case of the NECT programme phase evaluation these criteria have been used to enable the evaluators to determine the merit, worth or significance of the intervention. Each criterion is a different lens or perspective through which the programme can be viewed. Together, the criteria provide a more comprehensive picture of the programme interventions, the process of implementation, and the results. They describe the desired attributes of interventions: all interventions should be relevant to the context, coherent with other interventions, achieve their objectives, deliver results in an efficient way, and have positive impacts that are sustainable. The evaluators have worked with these criteria to assess how the NECT could, based on the already achieved outcomes, be made more strategic and which technical areas of operation could be improved. These criteria facilitated the identification of evidence gaps and generated findings and recommendations that support a more effective implementation of the NDP and ECF, through the NECT in its work with the DBE. Applying the DAC evaluation criteria surfaces issues that help to indicate how the NECT can enhance learning about education change, and involve a range of stakeholders in participating in the evaluation.



Source: OECD

Figure 8: DAC evaluation criteria

The following principles have guided the use of the DAC criteria in the NECT evaluation. The evaluation team is aware that the definitions of the criteria should be understood within the broader context of South Africa's education context.

**Principle One:** The criteria are applied thoughtfully to support high quality, useful evaluation. They are contextualised – understood in the context of the evaluation, the intervention being evaluated, and the stakeholders involved. The evaluation questions and what we intended to do with the responses have informed how the criteria were specifically interpreted and analysed.

**Principle Two:** Use of the criteria have not been applied mechanistically. Instead, they were covered according to the needs of the relevant stakeholders, the context of the evaluation and the aim of ensuring a developmental approach. Data availability, resource constraints, timing, and methodological considerations have also influenced how (and whether) a particular criterion has been covered by the evaluation team.

### **3.1.1. Transversal evaluation criteria**

The education sector is a complex and evolving system that includes a diverse range of actors, including education officials, school governing bodies, learners, teachers, parents, community members, unions and regulatory bodies. It also includes stakeholder partners that provide financial, organisational and technical support in an effort to strengthen and improve education in all its different modalities. As evaluators the team recognised that South Africa remains a patriarchal and highly unequal society, despite a battery of constitutional guarantees and legislative protections and measures that aim to advance race, class and gender equality. Our evaluation approach, therefore, aims to be guided by context, be responsive to the intersecting inequalities of South African society, and seeks to assess the extent to which specific interventions promote race, class and gender equality, social inclusion and human rights. As evaluators we aim as far as possible to source and use sex, socioeconomic status (SES) and age disaggregated data so that we can refine our analysis and highlight any gender differentials or issues concerning race and class issues in programme processes and outcomes. The issue of achieving gender equality and addressing race and class inequalities in South Africa are major government priorities, so in the context of evaluating the NECT programme the evaluation team has looked at the ways in which the different programme components have achieved gender-equitable outcomes, supported the empowerment of adolescent girls and young women across the education system and engaged with the race and class inequalities of the society. The team has also looked at the ways in which intersecting inequalities associated with race, class and rurality have been approached in the work of the NECT.

There is also a need, through evaluations, to understand how persons with disabilities and other vulnerable populations have benefitted from the programme. While NECT beneficiaries are unlikely

to be selected linked to equity targets, the evaluation has kept in mind some of the diverse needs of children with disabilities in South African schools.<sup>3</sup>

Taking account of the salience of these inequalities, the evaluation team ensured collection of age, sex and SES disaggregated data (for learners), while data collected from teachers, education officials, NECT officials and any other stakeholders were also disaggregated by sex and SES so that we would be able to interpret some of the findings more precisely. To understand the levels of social inclusion and equity we ensured that we collected data that captures information about vulnerable groups, including learners with disabilities, learners from migrant families, LGBTIQ learners and HIV+ learners. The data collected came from asking respondents generalised, non-personal questions that could reflect perception. Acknowledging the sensitivities involved in understanding the incidence of gender-based violence in schools, we crafted evaluation questions about what features in the school environment were most strongly related to positive (egalitarian, inclusive, non-violent) attitudes about gender and negative (non-egalitarian, exclusive, pro-violent) attitudes and beliefs about gender and other social divisions among learners.

In short, our interest lay in collecting data on the following:

- Ensuring the consistent use of sex / age / disability / location data across the evaluation
- Gender equality – the extent to which NECT programme interventions have ensured that gender equality and empowerment principles have been applied
- Social inclusion – the ways in which NECT programme interventions have facilitated greater social inclusion for vulnerable groups in the predominantly rural provinces and poorly performing education districts in which it has worked
- Human rights – the extent to which NECT interventions have promoted South Africa’s constitutional commitments to human rights in and through education; and
- Innovation – the extent to which NECT programme interventions have facilitated education innovations that are replicable and sustainable.

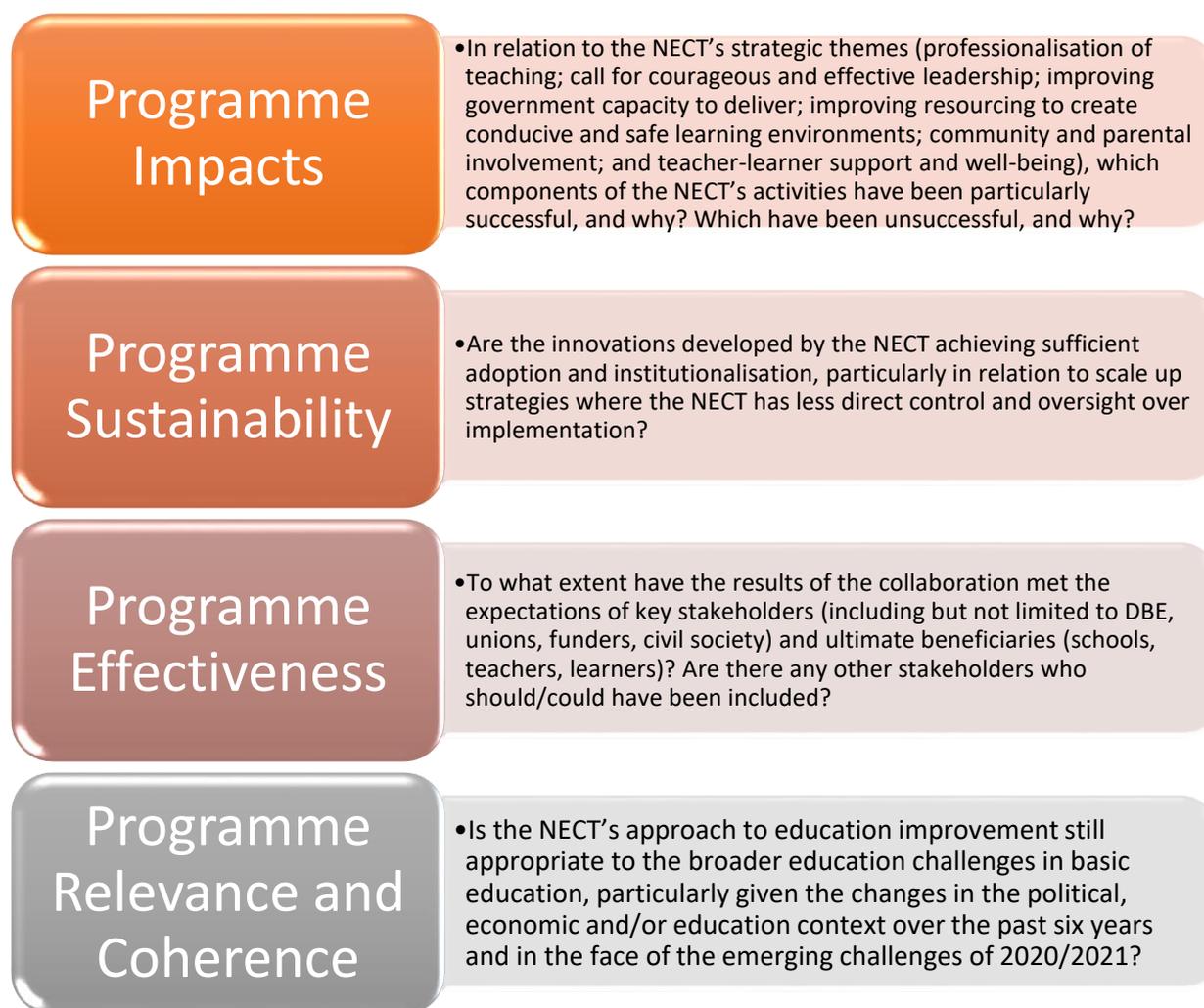
### **3.2. Primary evaluation questions**

The evaluation has been framed by a set of overarching evaluation questions designed to yield evidence that enables substantive recommendations to be made.

The overarching evaluation questions are as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> See PMG (2019) and Khumalo & Fish Hodgson (2019).



*Figure 9: Overarching evaluation questions*

In order to answer these overarching evaluation questions, the evaluation team worked with the Focus Area evaluation questions, augmenting these with the additional questions set out below, aiming to allow for greater granularity and nuance. The Evaluation Team has sought to understand the genesis of the NECT's programme conceptualisation, and approach, investigating through the literature reviewed and key informant interviews the following issues:

- Understanding the influence that the NDP played in informing programme conceptualisation
- Understanding gaps, challenges and assessment of context driving NECT programme conceptualisation
- Understanding some of the political dynamics that shaped programme thinking
- Understanding the nature and availability of a critical evidence base (key data sources) for programme conceptualisation and design
- Understanding the extent to which a programme evidence base was created (feasibility study / needs assessment / baseline study / gender analysis) and the form this took

- Understanding who the key role players were and what forms strategic relationships took in the programme conceptualisation
- Understanding the programme design process (Theory of Change? Logic Model? Risk and Mitigation assessments)
- Understanding the formulation of programme outcomes and metrics (Log Frame outputs, outcomes, targets and indicators, M&E Plan)
- Understanding those factors that may not have been strictly ‘measurable’ but have been significant in the ways in which the NECT programme has evolved over its implementation period
- Understanding the thinking around replicability / sustainability; and
- Understanding programme adaptations.

### **3.2.1. Evaluation questions per focus area**

The evaluation questions specified in the ToR for the evaluation (FREF, 2020a) are as follows.

#### *3.2.1.1. Focus Area 1: Teaching, teacher development and curriculum*

1. The suitability and effectiveness of the programme and approaches.
2. The level of outcomes achieved, and the degree to which the outcomes (local provincial and National) are sustainable.
3. The number of clients reached, and the extent to which the level of reach is likely to create a systemic difference in the education sector.
4. The level of sustained adoption and institutionalisation attained.

#### *3.2.1.2. Focus area 2: School leadership and management*

1. What was the level of reach and systemic impact of the school leadership and management interventions?
2. What level of sustainability was achieved in the adoption of ideas from training and support interventions?
3. Was the programming and approach for this focus area effective at all levels of Education Leadership and Management? What lessons can be learnt at all levels from the approach?
4. Was the level of resourcing for this focus area cost effective?
5. Were skills adequately transferred to education officials so that the process of development and school application can be sustained?

#### *3.2.1.3. Focus Area 3: Partnerships, collaboration and stakeholder management*

1. Has the ECF’s model of collaboration delivered its expected results and does it remain relevant to needs of the NECT and the education sector?

2. How effectively did the NECT meet the mandate of the NDP for educational improvement through mobilising stakeholders?
3. Are there any other stakeholders who could/should have been included or excluded?
4. To what extent did the NECT shape and contribute to lasting and sustainable partnerships for educational improvement?
5. To what extent did the NECT institutionalise the concept of partnerships and collaboration and educational improvement?

#### *3.2.1.4. Focus Area 4: Capacity of the state*

1. Identify and evaluate the areas of state capacity in which NECT has had an impact at national, provincial, district and school levels.
2. To what extent has the NECT had a long-term and sustainable impact on building the capacity of the state?
3. Has government's programme of education district development benefitted from engagement with the NECT?
4. What lessons can be learnt from the initiatives of the NECT to build the capacity of the state?

#### *3.2.1.5. Focus Area 5: Governance and resources*

1. To what extent have governance structures, procedures and processes contributed to the success and achievements of the NECT? To what extent did these hinder the NECT from attaining its mandate?
2. What lessons can be learnt from the experience of the NECT oversight and governance?
3. What is the level of cost effectiveness and cost benefit in the allocation and use of resources in NECT programming?
4. What lessons can be learnt from the processes and strategies of resource mobilisation and use by the NECT?

### **3.3. Methodological approach**

#### **3.3.1. Overview**

Multiple data collection techniques – document analysis, structured survey questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) – were used to help answer the evaluation questions linked to the evaluation objectives. Over the five years of its programmatic work the NECT has generated a substantial quantity of documentation, including annual reports, evaluation reports, M&E reports, programme-related reports and other governance-related materials. The evaluation team, in collaboration with Tshikululu and NECT, has identified and collated these

documents and analysed these programme and organisational documents, which have yielded both quantitative and qualitative information.<sup>4</sup>

Sub-section 2.3.1 below outlines the sampling procedures used. A key source of overview information has been the NECT Annual Reports, which, while key documents, have been read together with a wide range of other documentation.

The evaluation of the NECT, although it is the first of its kind, does not take place in a vacuum or on virgin ground: there has been monitoring of NECT activities since inception and there have been internal and external evaluations of aspects of the programme as well as reports to Parliament. A report of importance to the current evaluation is entitled “Grade 10-12 maths and science lead teacher training report: KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo” (NECT, 2016b). This evaluates an ETDP SETA short course programme for teachers in mathematics and science in the FET band in three provinces (KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Eastern Cape) and in two districts in each province. A report which provides detailed information on the District Improvement Programme, which has constituted a large proportion of the NECT’s focus, is the “Driving evidence-based education reform” publication (NECT, 2018a). This report presents selected M&E outputs from the NECT programme. Various case studies with a bearing on several of the Focus Areas (PSRIP, the national examination system and the DSC Model) have been undertaken and are available on the NECT’s website (see <https://nect.org.za/publications/case-studies>). The NECT has briefed the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education on progress made between 2016 and 2018 (NECT, n.d.b.).

No evaluation can be effective without reference to baseline data. Section 4.5 in the RfP (FREF, 2020a) indicates that “Baseline data was collected in all target districts so as to assess the extent and level of change in curriculum coverage over time.” We anticipated that this evaluation would draw to a large extent on baseline data and routine programme data to generate a quantitative assessment of progress against the baseline data based on programme indicators. The M&E activities outlined in section 4.5 of the RfP were premised on the collection of baseline data by the NECT’s Monitoring and Quality Assurance (MQA) team being available for the full evaluation of the NECT. In conducting this evaluation, which covers all areas of the NECT’s operations since inception (the eight Programmes outlined in its Annual Reports) and entails evaluating the effectiveness, reach, impact and sustainability of the NECT initiative as a whole, it has been difficult for the team to source comprehensive baseline data as a benchmark against which to assess NECT performance. Limited baseline data are available in *NECT monitoring and evaluation. Driving evidence-based education reform* (NECT, 2018a) and more extensive data are available in a number of PowerPoint presentations on baseline and midline data collection (NECT, 2017b; NECT, 2017c; NECT, 2018b; NECT, 2018c; NECT, 2019b; NECT, 2019c; NECT, 2019d; NECT, n.d.a). The nature and contents of these PowerPoint presentations are considered in section 3 of the report, under Programme 8. This

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<sup>4</sup> The qualitative (school visit) and quantitative (NECT Schooling Survey) data analysis frameworks (in Excel spreadsheet format) devised for the analysis of data collected are available on request.

information is useful, but partial. A complete set of baseline data for evaluation purposes is not available, which has posed limitations on the evaluation.

The methodology for the evaluation was guided by the documents “2019 FREF Targets” (FREF, 2019) and “2020 funders master report: Targets and achievements” (FREF 2020b), which provide the clearest picture of what the NECT has achieved in the most recent past. Both documents reflect objectives, activities, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and actual progress achieved in the eight NECT Programmes.

To ensure the validity of the results, a triangulation approach to the data has been employed. Triangulation includes the combination of different data sources and makes use of various techniques and methods applied in investigating the same phenomenon. The advantage of the triangulation method is that it provides for in-depth and richer data sets by integrating multiple data from various sources through collection, examination, comparison, and interpretation (UNAIDS, n.d.). As a result, triangulation assists in improving the validity of the results by reducing the risk of false interpretation of the collected information (UNAIDS, n.d.). The evaluation team has used quantitative data drawn from programme reports, DBE datasets and the NECT Schooling Survey conducted for this evaluation, information drawn from a literature review, and qualitative data derived from interviews and discussions with a range of different participants in NECT programmes or those with knowledge and experience of the education system.

Attempts were made to benchmark the data derived from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with district officials, SGBs, principals and teachers during site visits to NECT-intervention schools in April 2021 against data derived from visits to non-NECT-intervention schools in May 2021. The intention was to visit six schools in three provinces that had not been exposed to the NECT initiative, and to compare data gathered in these sites with those in the provinces where NECT had been active. Unfortunately, permission was received to visit only two schools in one province – the Northern Cape (NC). This did not provide sufficient data for a valid comparison of findings.

While NECT programmes themselves are not specifically concerned with gender differentials, our focus group discussion interview schedules all included questions about the treatment of girls in schools and our NECT Schooling Survey posed questions about sanitation for girls.

All these sources of information, combined with iterative reflections within the team, comprised the three points of the triangulation process.

#### *3.3.1.1. Ethical review*

Application for ethical approval for the evaluation was made to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the HSRC on 17 February 2021 (Evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) (REC 5/17/02/21)). The Committee advised against in-person Focus Group Discussions while

level 3 restrictions applied and asked for a detailed COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to be submitted to the REC. Copies of key informant interview and focus group discussion schedules were submitted to the REC along with the COVID-19 SOP. Full ethics approval for the study was granted on 14 April 2021.

By the time full approval had been granted, COVID-19 restrictions had been relaxed to the extent that the evaluation team could undertake site visits to schools. Fieldwork was duly conducted between 19 and 23 April 2021 in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West and between 15 and 19 May 2021 in the Northern Cape.

### 3.3.1.2. *Limitations of the methodology and data availability*

COVID-19 restrictions have played a major role in shaping the evaluation: Inception Workshop and Reference Group meetings had to be held entirely online; all interviews except those with NECT Management were conducted online (and it was only during the NECT Management meetings that the full evaluation team met face-to-face for the first time); and all interaction with NECT and DBE staff occurred online.

The evaluation team was fortunate enough to time its fieldwork visits to schools to coincide with a slight lull in national and provincial COVID-19 infection rates; without physical visits to schools the evaluation would have been severely impoverished.

While COVID-19 did not limit planned visits to control schools – schools in districts in the Free State and Western Cape that had not participated in the NECT interventions – provincial education department bureaucracy did. Unfortunately, these two provinces were not able to provide timeous permission for the team to visit schools in one district each in these two provinces, which disallowed a more meaningful comparison of NECT and non-NECT schools. The evaluation has thus only been able to reflect on two non-NECT intervention schools in the Northern Cape, thus allowing for only partial points of comparison with NECT-intervention schools.

While the evaluation team made the most of online communication to pursue the evaluation, it is possible that, had COVID-19 not been a factor (had, for example, the evaluation taken place pre-2020), evaluation processes and outcomes might have differed – in a context of freedom of movement and physical access to places and people. On-line communication is no substitute for physical communication, as various researchers (Long, Patterson & Maxwell, 2021; Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna, 2006; Zhou, Page-Gould, Aron *et al.*, 2019) have shown.

On top of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the evaluation, the paucity and interpretation of baseline data hampered the ability of the evaluation team to arrive at firm conclusions about the efficacy of the NECT initiative. In addition, while numbers of teachers participating in NECT training courses, 2014-2020 could be calculated from the Annual Reports, it was not possible to do more

detailed calculations regarding the unit cost of each teacher trained. The annual spend on Programme 1, under which the training programmes for teachers falls, is available, but there are many other strands to work in Programme 1, including training of principals and HoDs, and other work with district teams. Without more granular information on the different components of Programme 1 and numbers of all those trained under this programme, it has not been possible to investigate expenditure other than in aggregate terms.

The data collected for this evaluation also had some limitations. Responses to the schooling survey by teachers was rather low, although there was a good response rate amongst learners. There is a limited number of responses from district directors, circuit managers, subject advisors and SGB members. Responses to the NECT Schooling Survey on learning outcomes were self-reported. These limitations are discussed in the Evaluation findings section of the report.

### 3.3.2. Sampling methodology

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from a wide range of education stakeholders across the country, as summarised in Table 2, and more fully in the following text, and in Section 7.2 in the Appendices.

*Table 2: Sources for quantitative and qualitative data for the evaluation*

Key informant interviews	Focus group discussions	Online survey	Secondary data
NECT officials / Board 18 Funders 9 DBE officials 4 NECT school staff 25 Non-NECT school staff 4 Education experts 4	NECT schools 67 Non-NECT schools 13	District Directors 6 Circuit Managers 3 Subject Advisors 17 SGB members 42 Principals 194 SMT members 35 Teachers 104 + 254* Learners 1726 Parents 873	Annual reports 8 External reports 10 Technical reports 24 DBE reports 7 Databases 1

\* Two waves of survey

Sampling procedures were used to select schools for fieldwork visits and to determine the population to be targeted for the NECT Schooling Survey.

#### 3.3.2.1. Sample frame for qualitative component

The decision to undertake site visits to schools was initially informed by the proposal by one of the Lead Evaluators that the team centre the fieldwork around case studies, each school visited serving as a case study. It was decided to visit two schools (a primary school and a secondary school) in one district in each of the five provinces in which the NECT had initially focused its District Improvement Programme. The five provinces upon which the NECT had focused were the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West, while the eight districts the NECT had initially

targeted were Libode and Mount Frere (Eastern Cape), Pinetown and Uthungulu (KwaZulu-Natal), Vhembe and Waterberg (Limpopo), Bohlabela (Mpumalanga), and Bojanala (North West).

A re-demarcation exercise in the Eastern Cape after 2014 issued in a new set of education districts. This saw Mount Frere being incorporated into the Alfred Nzo West district and Libode being incorporated into the O R Tambo Coastal district. The schools selected for inclusion in the evaluation were located in the original Mount Frere district. Similarly, re-demarcation saw Uthungulu district in KwaZulu-Natal becoming King Cetshwayo district – the district singled out for KwaZulu-Natal case studies.

The evaluation team decided to visit schools in the following districts: Alfred Nzo West (Eastern Cape), King Cetshwayo (KwaZulu-Natal), Vhembe (Limpopo), Bohlabela (Mpumalanga), and Bojanala (North West). Visits took place in the week of 19 to 23 April 2021.

The population of schools from which the evaluation team selected schools for site visits was a DBE database shared with one of the evaluation team members on 19 June 2020 – a database that had been ‘cleaned’ to include only accurate information about schools. This database contained the names of 14,484 public and independent schools – far fewer than the 25,125 public and independent schools in South Africa contained in the “School masterlist data” for the fourth quarter of 2020 (DBE, 2021). Since the database was not used to draw a random sample of schools, however, but to allow the purposive sampling of schools for the qualitative component of the evaluation, the database suited the team’s purposes.

The sampling criteria used for the selection of schools that participated in the NECT initiative were province, district, learning phase (one primary school and one high school in each district), school quintile (only quintile 1 and 2 schools were included), geographical location (only rural schools were included in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, while urban schools had to be included in Mpumalanga and the North West), street address of the school (to enable the evaluation team to conduct case studies in schools not too far apart), and number of learners in the school (around 300 for primary schools and between 1,200 and 1,700 for secondary schools).

In order to compare NECT schools with non-NECT schools (schools in which no NECT interventions had been made), the team had planned to visit a primary and a secondary school in one district in each of three provinces that had not taken part in the NECT programme: Fezile Dabi (Free State); Pixley ka Seme (Northern Cape); and Cape Winelands (Western Cape). Because visits to these control schools had been arranged for May 2021, when the risk of COVID-19 infection was increasing, and because the provincial bureaucracy surrounding obtaining access to schools was cumbersome (responses were received too late from the Western Cape and the Free State), only the Northern Cape was visited – between 17 and 21 May 2021.

The sampling of NECT management and stakeholders for key informant interview purposes was partly random, partly purposive. The team ensured that all major stakeholder groups were included in the sample frame:

- NECT management, advisors and Board members: all NECT managers / advisors and three Board members were selected. The NECT management team was interviewed in the week of 15-19 March 2021 (ethics clearance for these interviews had been granted by the REC), advisors were interviewed between April and July 2021, and Board members were interviewed between 16 and 25 August 2021
- Four education experts, purposively selected, were interviewed between 11 June and 4 August 2021
- Nine NECT funders / partners / stakeholders were interviewed between 23 July and 13 August 2021: one union member, five funders, two education partners, and one social investment organisation; and
- Four senior officials from the DBE were interviewed between July and September 2021 – representing: the EMIS directorate; infrastructure; curriculum and teacher development; and continuing professional teacher development.

The list of these and other sources of information for the evaluation can be found in Appendix 2.

#### *3.3.2.2. Sample frame for quantitative component*

The main quantitative component of the evaluation involved a national survey of nine different categories of stakeholder in the education system:

- District Directors
- Circuit Managers
- Subject Advisors
- School Governing Body (SGB) members
- Principals
- School Management Team (SMT) members
- Teachers
- Learners; and
- Parents of learners.

The survey questionnaire,<sup>5</sup> formatted in Survey Monkey, was distributed in three ways: via the #Datafree Moya platform; via cell-phone (WhatsApp / SMS) and email messages to DBE officials and school principals visited during April and May; and via bulk SMS messages to school principals whose cell-phone numbers appeared in the March 2021 EMIS database of schools (publicly available on the national DBE website) and to teachers who had participated in any training programme offered

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<sup>5</sup> All data collection instruments can be found in section 7.4 of the Appendix.

either directly or indirectly by the NECT since the roll-out of training programmes. Since teachers were largely trained by Subject Advisors, who took attendance registers at the training sessions, and since the NECT did not itself collect teacher contact details, the evaluation team had itself to capture teachers' cell-phone numbers directly from (mostly hand-written) attendance registers. A total of 10,138 teacher phone numbers were captured by a team of eight HSRC researchers.<sup>6</sup> The second wave of the survey, in October 2021, saw links to the survey distributed via a bulk SMS service to all these teachers' numbers; but only 254 responses were received by the end of the month when the survey closed.

The #Datafree Moya platform, which was used between 16 and 19 July 2021, yielded a response of 2,852, distributed as follows: 57.2% of respondents were learners, 28.9% parents of learners, 7.0% principals, 3.5% teachers, 1.4% SGB members, with negligible percentages (less than 1% each) of District Directors, Circuit Managers, Subject Advisors and SMT members making up the balance. Because of the low proportion of teacher responses in this initial survey, the second wave of the survey was distributed in October 2021.

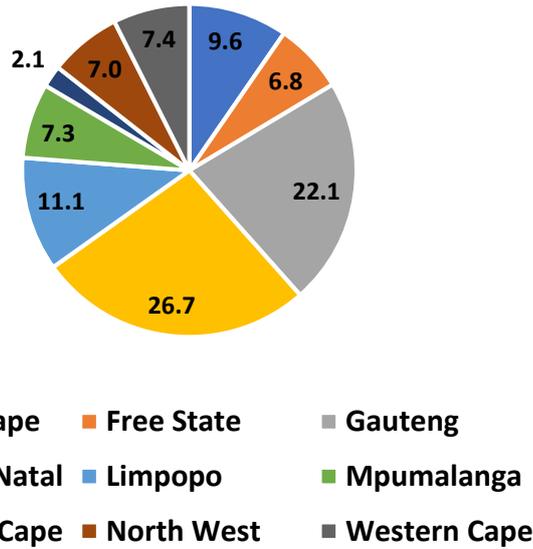
The following figures illustrate the combined first and second wave survey profiles of respondents – their province, their gender, and their socioeconomic status (as measured by the proxies' household receipt of a government grant and position on a wealth distribution scale). (For the full set of quantitative results for the first wave of the survey, see the PowerPoint presentation "Schooling Survey Friday 30 July 2021" in Appendix 3.)

The provincial distribution of respondents is illustrated in Figure 10.

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<sup>6</sup> Capturing from hand-written attendance registers the telephone numbers of only 10,138 of the teachers who had participated in a NECT training programme took a team of eight HSRC researchers three weeks. Many more researchers and weeks would have been needed to capture the telephone numbers of the entire population of NECT teacher training attendees.

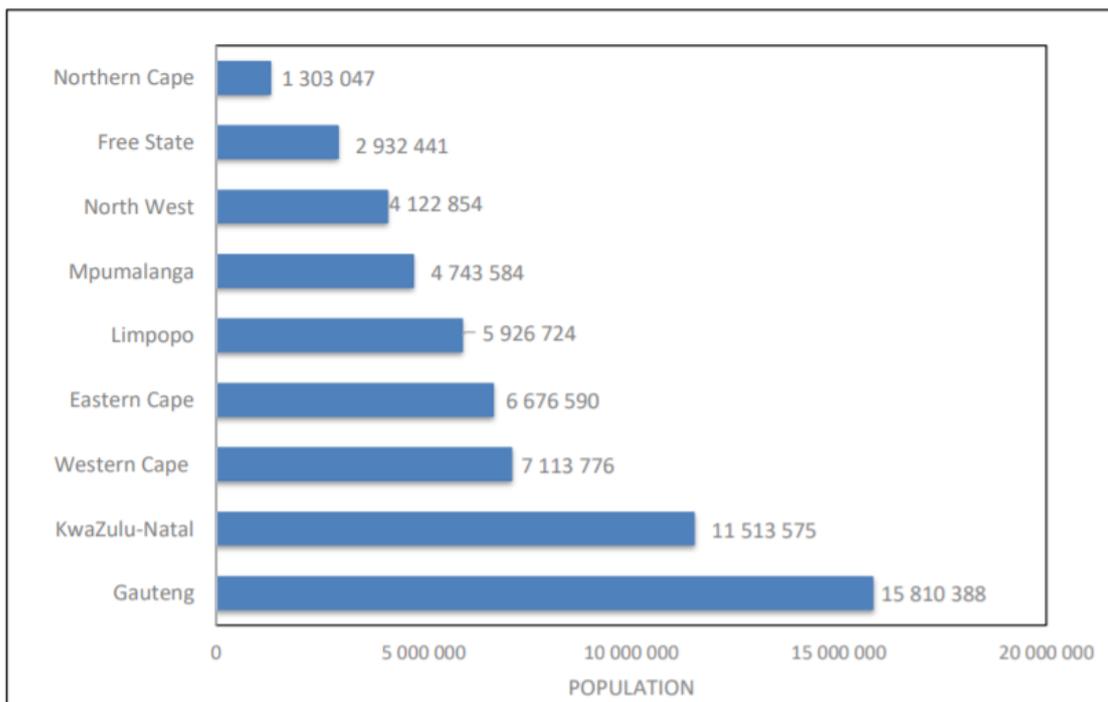
**Distribution of all respondents to NECT Schooling Survey, by province (%)**



Source: NECT Schooling Survey

Figure 10: Distribution of all respondents to the NECT Schooling Survey, by province

But for the reversal of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, this distribution is fairly representative of the provincial population distribution for South Africa in mid-2021, illustrated in Figure 11.

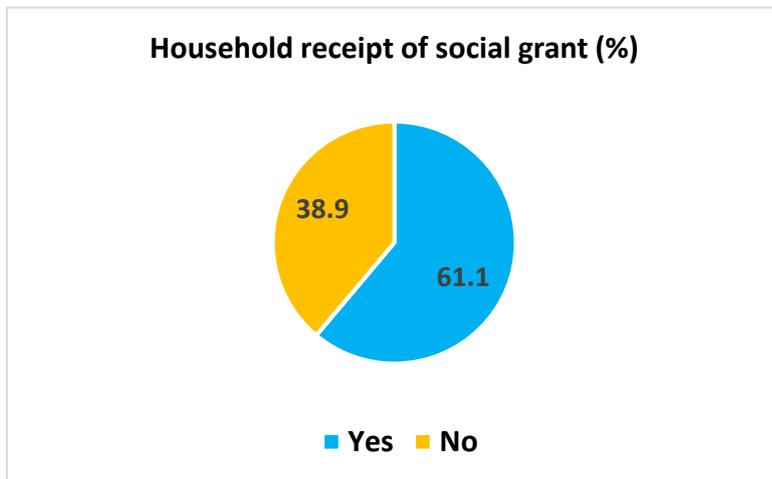


Source: Stats SA (2021)

Figure 11: Mid-year population estimates for South Africa by province, 2021

The two largest response rates were of teachers from KwaZulu-Natal (26.7%) and Gauteng (22.1%) – the larger response rate from KwaZulu-Natal possibly being attributable to the NECT intervention status of the province (Gauteng was not initially included in the NECT initiative). Underrepresentation in the survey of respondents from the Western Cape disrupts the order of responses from the next three largest provinces. Nevertheless, the survey distribution suggests that a good provincial cross-section of respondents was achieved.

One of two indicators of respondents' socioeconomic status (SES) – household receipt of a social grant – is depicted in Figure 12.



Source: NECT Schooling Survey

Figure 12: Household receipt of a social grant by anyone in respondent's household

That three out of five respondents said someone in their household received a social grant suggests that most respondents were in the low- to middle-SES bracket – a finding confirmed by a second proxy for SES: location on a wealth distribution scale. Asked to locate themselves on a wealth distribution scale from 1 to 100, the average location was 32.6, which is consistent with the finding about receipt of a social grant. While teachers who responded to the survey may not have been fully representative of the population of teachers in the schools where NECT works, the second wave of the survey was directed to teachers who had attended NECT training.

### **3.3.3. Data audit**

A large amount of NECT data (in the form of reports, Excel spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations) was assembled in the course of the evaluation. In addition, the evaluation team collected data from the DBE, from district officials and teachers through fieldwork conducted in six provinces, from nine stakeholder groups through a national survey (NECT Schooling Survey), and through interviews conducted with key informants within the NECT itself (management, staff, and Board members) and outside the NECT: education experts; and stakeholders in teacher unions, business, and civil society. Appendix 2 contains the full list of data sources consulted for the evaluation.

### **3.3.4. Approach to analysis**

Section 3.3.1 indicated that triangulation would be deployed to enable the evaluation team to arrive at a valid set of conclusions from the findings. The key sources of data for the analysis were:

- Primary data
  - The NECT Schooling Survey – largely quantitative data, but including some qualitative responses
  - The fieldwork conducted in twelve schools across six provinces – qualitative data
  - Interviews conducted with key informants inside and outside of the NECT (the full range is outlined in Appendix 2) – qualitative data
- Secondary data
  - NECT reports and PowerPoint presentations on its Programmes – qualitative and quantitative data
  - Data on learning outcomes provided by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) – quantitative data; and
  - Literature that informs the evaluation: policy documents; books, journal articles and reports.

The evaluation team triangulated not only primary and secondary data but qualitative and quantitative data, as follows. The NECT Schooling Survey findings provide – particularly but not exclusively for NECT Programme 1 (District Improvement Programme) – the foundation for the analysis, triangulation with findings from the school visits confirming or disavowing the survey results. Interwoven with this analysis are perspectives by key informants, reference to data provided by the NECT and DBE, and presentation of findings from the literature that either lend weight to or contradict the survey findings.

The key themes identified for the analysis of quantitative data derive from the NECT Schooling Survey, which sought to ascertain:

- From all respondents: their province of residence, their SES, their gender, and their main role in the education sector
- From district directors, circuit managers, subject advisors, SGB members, principals, SMT members and teachers: their participation in NECT training programmes
- From district directors and circuit managers: the effectiveness of SA-SAMS for capturing district- / school-level data, the success of the NECT in improving the quality of schooling in the district, and the effectiveness and sustainability of partnerships with the NECT
- From subject advisors: the effectiveness of skills transfer to teachers in the district
- From SGB members, principals and SMT members: the nature of and response to a difficult decision they had to make
- From SGB members and principals: whether their school had benefited from a SAFE (Sanitation Appropriate for Education) intervention
- From SGB members, principals, teachers and learners: whether the school's ablution facilities catered for the menstrual hygiene needs of adolescent girls
- From principals: participation of their teachers in NECT training programmes, improvement of learning outcomes due to NECT interventions, partnerships with the community / businesses / government departments, and implementation of Department of Education guidelines on school infrastructure
- From teachers: participation in NECT training programmes, improvement of learning outcomes due to NECT interventions, partnerships with the community / businesses / government departments, and implementation of Department of Education guidelines on school infrastructure
- From principals, teachers and learners: the condition of toilets in their school, whether the school property was a safe and secure environment for teaching and learning
- From principals, learners and parents: disability status of learners
- From teachers, learners and parents: use of NECT materials in the classroom
- From learners and parents: subject learner found easiest and most difficult, marks obtained in 2020 in selected subjects, homework assistance received from parents / guardians / given to learners
- From learners: living circumstances, and proximity to school; and
- From parents: involvement in children's school.

As this list suggests, there are many topics which overlap amongst different stakeholder groupings, allowing for the triangulation of responses on the themes of:

- NECT training programmes
- NECT skills transfer
- Use of NECT materials
- Data management
- Partnerships
- Leadership
- Sanitation and hygiene

- School safety and security
- Learner disability status
- Learner data management; partnerships; leadership attitudes to school subjects
- Learner academic performance
- Parental / guardian involvement in child's life and school
- Sanitation and hygiene
- Safety and security
- Learner disability status; and
- Socio-economic status.

In addition to the NECT Schooling Survey, quantitative data were provided by the DBE in the form of statistics on average grade performance of learners in the 12 schools visited in April and May 2021 and on the performance of Grade 3, 6 and 9 learners nationally in selected subjects between 2016 and 2018. These data are woven into the analysis of learner performance, a component of the District Improvement Programme constituting Programme 1 of the NECT.

The key themes identified for the analysis of qualitative data derive from:

- Interviews with district officials (district directors, circuit managers, and subject advisors), principals and teachers conducted during the visits to 12 schools in April and May 2021
- Interviews with stakeholders in the DBE, business, labour, and civil society (including prominent education experts); and
- Interviews with the NECT Board and management.

The themes arising from these key informant interviews are:

- The role of the NECT
- NECT governance and finances
- Stakeholder management (relations, collaboration and partnerships)
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Scale-up and sustainability
- Marketing and communications
- Dialogue
- District and school leadership and management
- District and school improvement
- NECT programme design
- NECT special projects
- Innovation
- Psychosocial support to learners
- Equality and inclusiveness
- ICT
- Water and sanitation

- Curriculum coverage
- Reading improvement.

The overlap between the quantitative and qualitative dimensions is deliberate, allowing for the triangulation of data primarily from the three major sources – survey, statistical, and interview – but also with information from secondary sources (reports, PowerPoint presentations, and academic literature).

Where there are insufficient or potentially unreliable data upon which to base conclusions, this is indicated in the text. Recommendations are based on the available evidence with caveats about data quality where appropriate.

### **3.3.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined how the methodological and evaluation approaches were connected, and has summarised the methods used, the data collected and some of the key issues addressed in the analysis process. In the next chapter the findings of the review, organised in relation to the main NECT programmes, are presented.

## 4. EVALUATION FINDINGS

### 4.1. Overview: NECT programme, themes and approach

As discussed in the Introduction to this report, while the requirement in the ToR (FREF, 2020) was for the evaluation team to evaluate the NECT according to the five Focus Areas, it seemed to the team to make practical sense to use the eight Programmes of the NECT as the basis for evaluation and to marry them with the evaluation questions posed in the ToR under the five Focus Areas to draw conclusions from the findings. The presentation and analysis of the findings of the evaluation are therefore undertaken according to the eight Programmes:

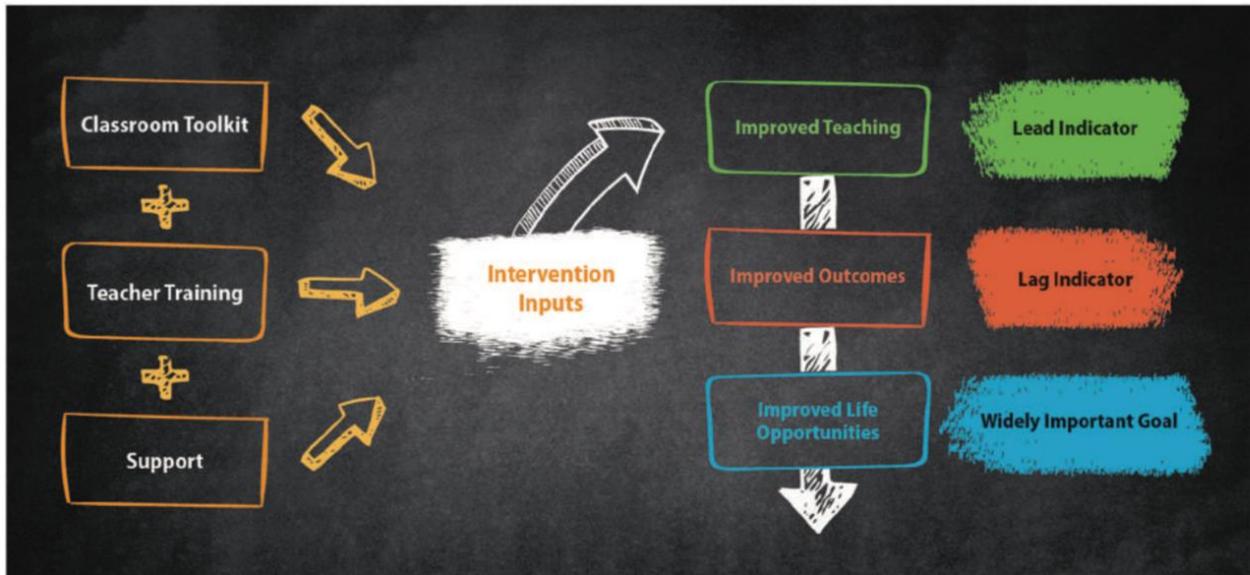
1. Programme 1: District Improvement Programme
2. Programme 2: Systemic intervention
3. Programme 3: Innovation programme
4. Programme 4: Local projects
5. Programme 5: Education DialogueSA
6. Programme 6: Governance and finance
7. Programme 7: Strategic partnerships
8. Programme 8: Monitoring and evaluation

Programme 1, the District Improvement Programme, is the largest programme by some way, embracing the six themes articulated in the ECF:

1. Professionalisation of the teaching service
2. A call for courageous and effective leadership
3. Improving government capacity to deliver
4. Improving resourcing to create conducive and safe learning environments: teachers, books and infrastructure
5. Community and parent involvement; and
6. Learner support and wellbeing.

A discussion of the suitability of the NECT initiative for professionalising the teaching service must begin with a consideration of the theory of change underpinning teacher professionalisation. The following image, taken from “NECT monitoring and evaluation. Driving evidence-based education reform” (NECT, 2018a), outlines this change theory:

## Change Theory for Teacher Professionalisation



Source: NECT (2018a)

Figure 13: NECT change theory for teacher professionalisation

The theory presents teacher professionalisation as comprising three facets – training, toolkits for classroom use, and support – and having a range of outcomes. But the relationships are portrayed as a simple inputs-outputs model: interventions in the form of the provision of classroom toolkits, teacher training, and support will result in improved teaching, improved outcomes (a “Lag Indicator”) and improved life opportunities (a “Widely Important Goal” and the ultimate lag indicator). In theory this model looks to be cogent: train teachers in the “fundamentals of performance” while at the same time providing them with classroom materials (lesson plans, resource packs, trackers, content booklets, posters). A second step in the process of change entails following this up with support in the days / weeks / months following the training intervention using school visits, classroom observation, etc.

This theory is about teacher professionalisation, but it does not present the whole picture in which this process is located. NECT notes that each sub-programme of the DIP has its own theory of change, and that a generic one does not work. We consider this approach and its strengths and weaknesses as a key aspect of the evaluation and the work of NECT as a complex organisation.

The original theory of change – which “serve[s] as the basis on which the progress, successes and impacts of the interventions are assessed” (NECT, 2013: 12) – is presented in the Education Collaboration Framework:

Table 3: Change theory

Level	Key change drivers	Priority areas
District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using evidence to drive improvement</li> <li>• Building contents knowledge and teaching skills</li> <li>• Improving accountability systems and practices</li> <li>• Increasing resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved utilisation of the ANA and SC results for monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>• Development of systems and minimum norms and standards in order to improve the institutional and logistical capacity of districts</li> <li>• Improved communication</li> </ul>
School		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing the infrastructure backlog</li> <li>• Improved utilisation of the ANA and SC results</li> <li>• Improved management of staff</li> </ul>
Classroom		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAPS rollout</li> <li>• Improving content and teaching skills in languages, mathematics and science focusing first and foremost on materials and resources such as workbooks</li> <li>• Improved utilisation of the ANA and SC results</li> <li>• LTSM including technological solutions</li> <li>• Improved quality of Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Grade R</li> </ul>
Household/community		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved parent involvement and better support of learning and teaching</li> <li>• Improved utilisation of the ANA and SC results</li> </ul>
<b>Anticipated outcomes: Observable and sustainable improvement in learning outcomes</b>		

Source: NECT (2013)

Figure 14: NECT change theory in the ECF

While the model suggests, through its bi-directional arrow, that interventions are made simultaneously at the district, school, classroom, and household / community levels, this is ambiguously presented in the diagram, where the Key change drivers appear in the same row as does the level. As the cells have not been merged it appears that the change drivers apply at the District level only. At best, the table is confusing.

From discussions with the NECT management during the Inception Workshop for the current evaluation, some remarks were made indicating that the theory of change was predominantly a cascade one: empower districts (district directors), who will then empower circuit managers and subject advisors, who will empower schools (principals and teachers). However, other reflections from NECT articulated in the course of preparing this review bring out an appreciation of multiple

collaborations with various power dynamics. Some have commented a cascade dynamic was not the original intention. This had focussed on an aim to work directly with teachers, which continues to be a major part of the programme. Some adherence to a cascade model was made by a member of the NECT management team (interview with NECT management) that “A sharp top 50 [education officials responsible for the planning and rollout of programmes] should be able to cascade to the next 500, then to 40,000 teachers. Our initial approach was to attack the bottom. But five years down the line we know we need to capacitate the top level.” These comments suggest there are a range of views about how teacher professionalisation links with other elements of the District Improvement Programme. NECT management have emphasised that all interventions, such as the work on teacher professionalisation, are subject to monitoring and evaluation (M&E), the findings of which provide a feedback loop. The precise detail of what form of M&E is linked with this theory of change and the nature of adaptations made has not yet been documented.

It is evident that the NECT initiative requires a more sophisticated theory of change for its interventions taken together that takes account of the complexities inherent in teaching and learning, the changing context in which the programme is being implemented, and the ways in which the organisation itself has changed through different phases of its work.

## **4.2. Programme 1: District Improvement Programme**

The initial conception of NECT identified the district as the primary unit for the focus of action. As is evident from the NDP, the district is the preferred unit of analysis in various sectors – prefiguring, arguably, the recent promulgation of the District Development Model (COGTA, 2020). In the education sector, “district support” is one of the key priorities within basic education (NPC, 2011: 295), since “Many of the weaknesses in schools are a reflection of weaknesses at the district level” (NPC, 2011: 310). “[G]overnment capacity to deliver” is pre-eminently a district competency.

The first NECT operational report, for 2013/14 (NECT, 2014a), demonstrates that a firm foundation was laid from July 2013 as illustrated in the following points:

- Laying the foundation for the district improvement programme (July-December 2013) by profiling a sample of the schools and circuits from 20 target districts in order to obtain information on planning, overall district capacities, interventions in the respective target districts, and school needs in terms of infrastructure, learner and teacher support materials, school management, curriculum delivery, and learner welfare
- Appointing Lead Agencies to work with districts to establish the necessary structures for driving the district improvement programme, to initiate the programme in 409 FSSs, and to developing three-year plans for district improvement (January- July 2014)
- Implementing the three-year plans (August-December 2014), focusing on five themes:
  - District development: establishment of District Management Committees (DMCs) in all eight districts; training of district officials in change management, school readiness, and curriculum management

- Management development: building the capacity of SMTs (principals, deputy principals, and HODs) to enhance school functionality and improve learner performance – at the levels of development of management training materials, training of trainers (including district officials), training of school-level managers, and in-school coaching
- Professionalisation of teaching: building the capacity of teachers to manage the curriculum and to facilitate the process of learning in order to improve learner performance – though the provision of structured training in maths and science, the establishment of Professional Learning Communities, in-school coaching in maths and science, and curriculum support including trackers, lesson plans, training programmes, and in-school support
- Learner welfare: improving learner well-being through providing psycho-social services, improving school nutrition, and contributing to resourcing of sporting and cultural activities; and
- Parent and community development: establishing DSCs comprising representatives from business, unions, academic institutions, school governing body chairpersons, youth leaders, and traditional and religious leaders within the communities that the district offices serve.

As this account suggests, the NECT made commendable advances in 2013/14 in supporting government through operationalising all four of the teaching service professionalisation activities mandated for it in the ECF: setting up frameworks and materials for implementing the ISPFTE; training teachers and supporting them in their classrooms; building capacity at school management and district levels to support and monitor teachers; and improving the effectiveness of teachers and education officials.

The 2014 Annual Report (NECT, 2014b) fleshes out the description of the District Improvement Programme (known then as the District Intervention Programme) in the 2013/14 report, outlining, and populating with data showing progress made in, the four focus areas of the Programme:

- Focus area 1: Strengthening districts
- Focus area 2: FSSs programme
- Focus area 3: Community interest in education
- Focus area 4: Implementing learning programmes in provinces

The NECT identified in its 2014 Annual Report eight areas of focus within the “strengthening districts” focus area:

- Area 1: Enhancing teacher performance [30% weighting]
- Area 2: Effective school management [30% weighting]
- Area 3: Learner welfare and development
- Area 4: Promotion of effective curriculum management

- Area 5: Learner/teaching support materials
- Area 6: Equipment, infrastructure and facilities
- Area 7: Parent and community involvement
- Area 8: District capacity improvement

The year 2015 saw a refinement of NECT's conception of its support to districts in which the District Improvement Programme (DIP) was more closely aligned with the DBE's programmes and was rendered more coherent and streamlined through the development of clear targets and outputs for each of the focus areas (NECT, 2015). This reorganisation points to the agility of NECT in being able to focus its district-directed energies as a result of self-reflection. In the following year (2016) this refinement process was extended to the development of district improvement plans (NECT, 2016a). The focus for 2017 was to be on

... strengthening the capacity of principals to manage curriculum delivery in schools. Because the thrust of the NECT's District Improvement Programme is the improvement of learner outcomes; and because the effective delivery of the curriculum is a critical factor in improving learning outcomes, all efforts are now being made to ensure that curriculum delivery is effectively managed in schools (NECT, 2016a).

The 2017 Annual Report (NECT, 2017d) demonstrated a further shift in NECT's approach: the use of coaches comprising retired education officials, young people (for Mathematics and Science in particular), and a small number of foreign teachers from neighbouring African countries to provide support to principals and teachers particularly in the area of curriculum (107 of the 156 coaches worked in this area). In 2018, NECT focused on building the capacity of districts by strengthening planning, increasing the capacity of subject advisors and circuit managers to serve and support schools, and assisting provincial departments to support districts in improving their functionality (NECT, 2018d). There was a further shift in NECT's approach in 2019, which saw provinces appropriating for themselves the teacher professionalisation interventions of NECT – provinces assuming responsibility for resourcing and hosting teacher workshops. On the basis of this shift, NECT could claim that its Structured Learning Programmes had reached 76% of schools and 23% of teachers in the system – a claim considered in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2.

We discuss these thematic areas constituted by Programme 1 drawing on the range of data assembled for the evaluation and with a comment on what has been achieved at district level.

#### **4.2.1. Professionalisation of the teaching service and enhancing teacher performance**

Professionalisation of the teaching service, as illustrated in the theory of change, is a key sub-programme under the District Improvement Programme.

The NECT's mandate regarding professionalising the teaching service is set out in the ECF. As the above account of the development of the DIP captured in the Annual Reports has shown, a great

deal of time and effort has gone into developing frameworks and materials for improving teaching. There is a focus on capacitating teachers across many of the NECT Annual Reports; the phrase “support to teachers” or variations thereof can be found in all the Annual Reports except the latest (2020) Report (NECT, 2020d). In the 2020 Report there is, appropriately within the NECT evolution, a shift to “support to learners” and “support to parents”.

A major source of support to teachers has come in the form of workshops or training programmes. Table 3 shows the number of teachers who participated in training programmes delivered by the NECT or its service providers since inception as reported in the NECT Annual Reports.

*Table 3: NECT-facilitated training programmes in which teachers participated, 2014-2020*

Subject / Programme / Teacher type	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
Mathematics	8,281				2,794			<b>11,075</b>
Science	900							<b>900</b>
Languages	8,673							<b>8,673</b>
Curriculum support (HODs)	1,016							<b>1,016</b>
Mathematics, Science & languages		19,398						<b>19,398</b>
In-school subject coaching	128							<b>128</b>
Resources management, curriculum tracking & support (SMT members)		6,817						<b>6,817</b>
SMT members			3,500	5,290	12,300		2,616	<b>23,706</b>
Teachers			26,000	76,034	92,047			<b>194,081</b>
PSRIP				11,721	8,828	9,121	8,549	<b>38,219</b>
Teaching methodology					83,219			<b>83,219</b>
Support					577			<b>577</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27,547</b>	<b>26,215</b>	<b>29,500</b>	<b>93,045</b>	<b>199,188</b>	<b>9,121</b>	<b>11,165</b>	<b>395,781</b>

Source: NECT Annual Reports, 2013/14-2020

Key observations from Table 3 are the following:

- There is inconsistency from one year to another in reporting on training received by teachers
- Reporting of training is piecemeal: in some years total number of teachers trained is reported, while in other years “highlights” are reported
- In some years teacher training is reported by subject (2014), in one (2015) by group of subjects, and in other years simply by “teacher”
- Reporting of training varies from year to year by subject, by modality, and by teacher type; and

- It is not clear whether the categories in the table are discrete – for example, whether in 2018 the 8,828 PSRIP teachers trained formed part of the 92,047 teachers trained.

The cumulative effect of these variations in reporting on teacher training is that one cannot track from one year to the next which teachers have been trained in which subjects.

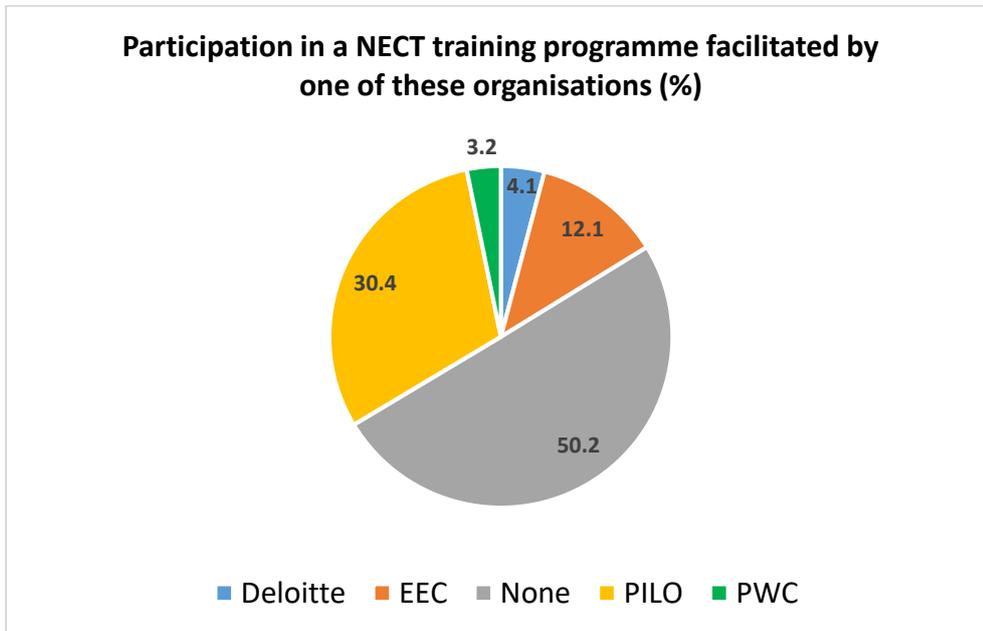
Notwithstanding this difficulty, it is clear from the Annual Reports that nearly two-thirds of the emphasis of the focus on the professionalisation of teachers was on enhancing teacher performance and effective school management – both of them topics that were explored in the NECT Schooling Survey conducted for this evaluation.

The NECT Schooling Survey posed questions to teachers about:

- Their participation in NECT training programmes
- The importance of their participation in the workshop / training programme for enhancing their teaching skills
- To what extent they had been able to put into practice what they had learned in the workshop / training programme
- Whether they currently used NECT materials in the classroom – and if so, which NECT materials they used; and,
- If they did not use NECT materials in the classroom, why not.

*It is important to note ahead of the presentation of findings below that the teachers to whom the survey link was sent were not representative of the total population of teachers in South Africa or of the total population of teachers trained by the NECT. As indicated in section 3.3.2, the survey link was sent via SMS to as many of the teachers whose telephone numbers could be captured by the evaluation team as possible.*

The findings are outlined in Figures 15 to 20.



Source: NECT Schooling Survey

Figure 15: NECT-organised training programmes in which teachers have participated

Of the 443 teachers who participated in the NECT Schooling Survey and who indicated whether they were male or female, 63.4% were female, 36.6% male, which correlates with the 73% female to 27% male gender distribution of teachers in South Africa.

Table 3: Gender distribution of teachers and principals in South Africa, 2018

	Teachers		Principals	
Female	265,179	72.5%	8,070	37.3%
Male	100,528	27.5%	13,551	62.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>365,707</b>		<b>21,621</b>	

Source: Obtained from the Chief Director of Media Liaison and Communications, Department of Basic Education by Africa Check, <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/reports/women-teach-and-men-lead-gender-inequality-south-african-schools-examined>

In response to the question about which organisation had facilitated a NECT workshop / training programme in which they had participated, half (50.2%) said they had not participated in any NECT programme facilitated by one of the service providers, nearly a third (30.4%) had participated in a PILO / Jika iMfundo Campaign programme, 12.1% in an Education Excellence Consortium (EEC) programme, 4.1% in a Deloitte programme, and 3.2% in a PWC programme. Of the 150 teachers who had participated in a NECT training programme and who indicated whether they were male or female, nearly two-thirds (64.4%) were female – slightly more than the percentage of female respondents to the survey (63.4%). This distribution is close to, but underrepresents, the percentage of female teachers in ordinary public schools (excluding those paid by SGBs) in South Africa, which in 2018 was 72.5% (Africa Check, 2018; statistics provided by the spokesperson for the DBE, Elijah

Mhlanga). Of the 365,707 teachers in the country in that year, then, nearly three-quarters were women.

As outlined in Section 2, training teachers was a key concern of the ECF, and a key focus of the first phase of the NECT's work. Addressing teacher needs is a key theme in all NECT Annual Reports. Ninety percent of teacher respondents to the survey indicated the year of their participation in a training programme; the remainder could not remember. Of those who did remember, the largest percentage (27.0%) participated in 2018, followed by 14.4% in 2017 and in 2019 and 10.8% in 2021. The lower percentages of teachers who participated in a training programme in 2014-2016 (less than 10% in each year) is perhaps a function of failing memory.

Teachers surveyed identified 30 different topics covered in these training programmes. The largest percentages of teachers reported they had participated in a programme on curriculum management (17%), leadership and management (15%), Mathematics teaching (12%), teaching of reading (9%), use of NECT materials (8%), and teaching of English (6%).

Of principals surveyed (N = 194), 62.1% said teachers at their schools had participated in a NECT training programme, 22.4% that they had not participated, and 15.5% that they did not know. The vast majority of principals – 90.9% – indicated that their teachers had participated in Foundation and Intermediate Phase training programmes: 26.8% of principals said their teachers had participated in Foundation Phase Mathematics, 23.6% Grade 1-7 English as a First Additional Language (EFAL), 22.8% Foundation Phase Home Language, and 17.7% Natural Sciences and Technology. Negligible percentages of principals said their teachers had participated in training programmes for Grade 8-12 EFAL (2.8%), for FET Mathematics and Grade 8-9 Natural Science (both 2.4%), and FET Physical Science (1.2). Less than 1% said their teachers had not participated in any of the training programmes mentioned.

A limitation of this comparison, however, is that there is not necessarily an association between teachers' and principals' responses to the question of teacher participation in NECT training programmes since the teacher respondents were not necessarily teachers at the same schools as the principals who responded to the survey.

From the focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with principals and teachers during the site visits in April and May 2021, it emerged that the inception of the NECT programme in different schools occurred at various times between 2014 and 2016. Some primary and secondary schools were not exposed to the NECT intervention. Those not so exposed indicated that they had received DBE management training as well as training from NGOs working in the education sector. The schools exposed to the NECT intervention pointed out that the NECT intervention was the only programme offered at curriculum and management level and was rolled out in three phases. The first stage was the FSSs, focusing on building up underperforming schools; it had a three-year timeframe. But because the chosen schools had limited staff capacity, the programme, in the view

of FGD respondents, had not achieved its desired outcomes. This observation, from the perspective of particular schools, needs to be reviewed together with a NECT management observation that the FSSs had been primarily selected to test planned interventions.

In discussions during the school visits teachers reported different experiences regarding how they had been able to take forward their training. In a FGD in King Cetshwayo district, it emerged that one teacher had attended a NECT management training session in 2014/15 during the PILO pilot phase. One teacher (NW-P) had attended a NECT training session while employed in a different province which she had found useful, but she admitted that she had not shared her learnings with current colleagues.

Teachers reported on different experiences regarding how the schools they worked in were connected with NECT initiatives. FET Mathematics teachers (LP-S) had attended a NECT workshop but their school had been removed from participation in NECT training soon thereafter when learner performance improved. They did not attribute this to the NECT intervention, however.

Responses to NECT training in another Mathematics teachers' FGD (EC-S) was mixed, with comments such as:

- The first workshop was “important or beneficial but after that one, it is just repetition”.
- “NECT does not really help in Math, they do the work that is supposed to be done by the HOD, like going through books and assess.”
- “Workshops usually take place during the week, when you supposed to be working, however it does not take more than three days. The teachers come back motivated and with new strategies and approaches, and there is morale to teach, which learners benefit from.”

A FGD of mother tongue educators (NW-P) had either no knowledge of NECT, or had been told about it a few years ago but never heard about it again. Mother tongue teachers at this school pleaded for input from NECT on materials for communication and reading; audio recorders for reading comprehension tests; electronic chalkboards; and greater focus on Grade 8 learners rather than just Grade 12s. NECT has explained that it does not provide these these resources.

A number of teachers reported very positive experiences. Mother tongue isiZulu teachers (KZN-P) had attended NECT (PILO) workshops on assessment, and skills in listening, writing, talking and communicating. They enthused about the benefits, indicating that they had gained tools to help learners who were behind and struggling. Likewise, they had appreciated inputs on problem solving and critical thinking skills, and on methods of assessing the extent of learner understanding of a subject.

Mother tongue isiXhosa teachers (EC-P) had attended NECT workshops prior to the pandemic and had subsequently been visited once per month by NECT officials who monitored their teaching. The

comments of one participant noted how these visits evoked both excitement and trepidation, followed by considerable appreciation:

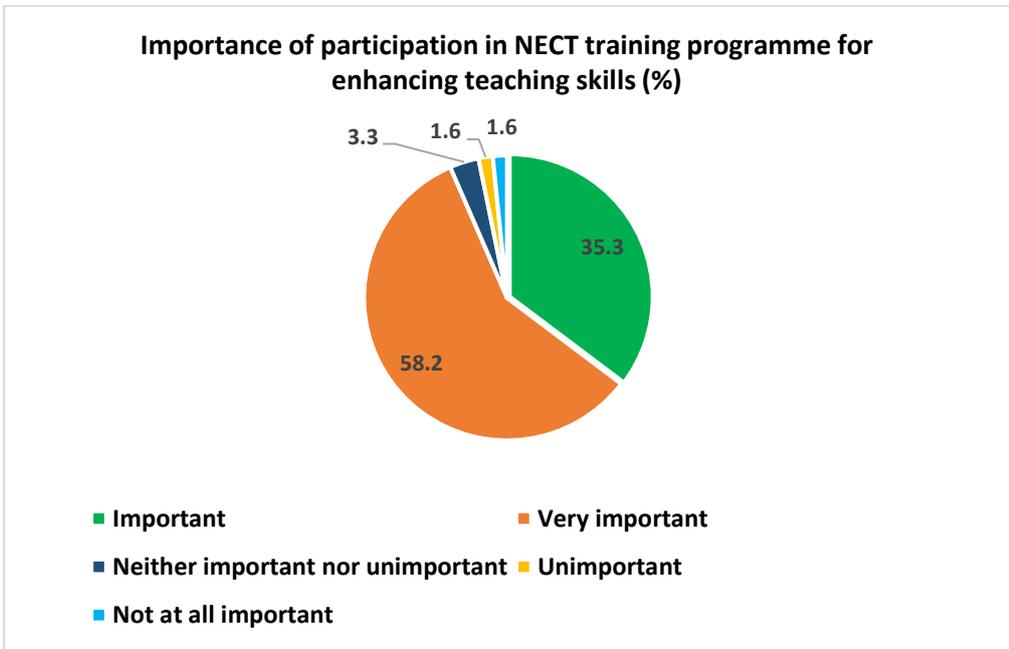
We were just dreading to see that van – because they were going to come into our class: teach this; how do you do this? You are given 30 minutes; you are going to start with phonic; take the group to the corner and read; this group must write; and you sometimes forget: you start with this, you end with that; so that van we were dreading..... ... we were given so many posters; we were given everything.... It was helpful... it was fun, it was good. And after that we all laugh with them. They were not cruel; they were not harsh; they just assist you when you don't understand....

This contrasted with the visits by inspectors before 1995. As the same teacher said:

We were afraid of them. They were not helpful; they were cruel. It was only criticism. There was such a difference between the inspectors and the NECT; because in NECT we would teach ... you must show your work; you must have so many spelling tests, so much written work, so many ... workbook – you have signed the workbook. You have corrected the children; you have signed and put the date; you know all those things. They make you to step on your toes because you know all this is going to be wanted. So, after that you go ... you were corrected, advised: do this like this... those children who are like this, try this ... you know, it was helpful. .... It's NECT who will come to school and say "show me the way I have shown you how to do this thing. Teach in front of me. Even if they come to check work, they sometimes come with NECT – they just come".

Another mother tongue isiXhosa teacher at the same school (EC-P) concurred:

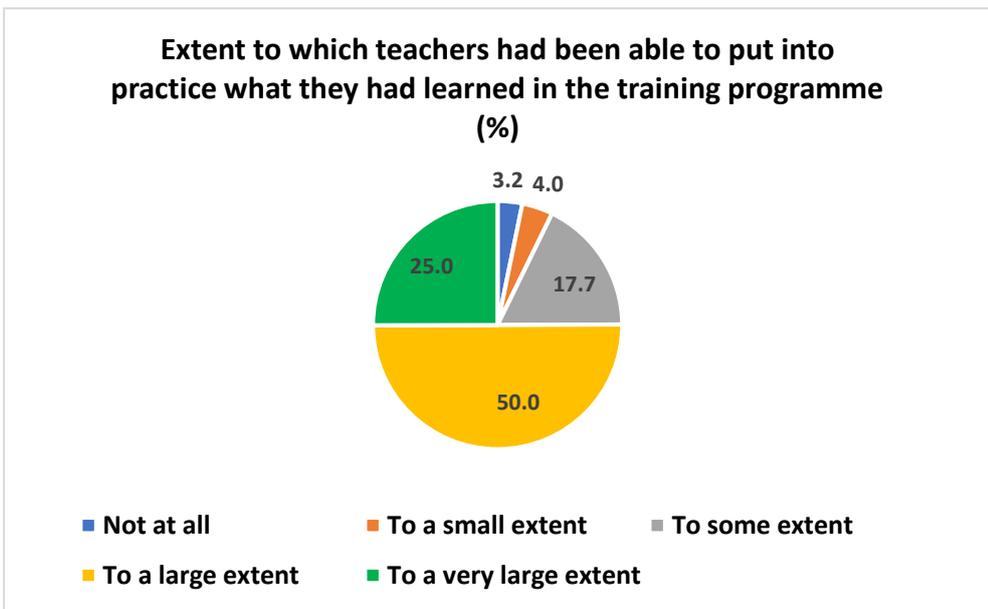
... I was so comfortable with them because we just sit. Look at my work and suggest what are the things I must do. We talked, just friendly; there was no fright. I just talked to her like I'm talking to the other teachers. But knowing that this one is more experienced than I am. It was just fun. Yes, it was so good, because you have to come with learners' books; you sit down with them and they have to correct you.



Source: NECT Schooling Survey

Figure 16: Importance of teachers’ participation in the NECT workshop / training programme for enhancing their teaching skills.

Asked how important their participation a workshop / training programme was for enhancing their teaching skills, the vast majority (93.5%) said their participation was important or very important, the remainder (6.5%) indicating that the programme was of little or no importance. This is a strong endorsement of the value of teachers’ participation in a NECT-organised or -facilitated training programme.



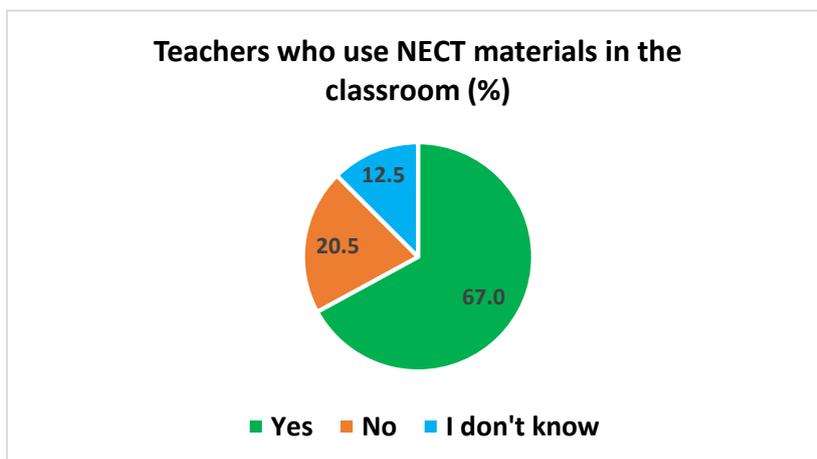
Source: NECT Schooling Survey

Figure 17: Extent to which teachers had been able to put into practice what they learned in the workshop / training programme

Asked to what extent they had been able to put into practice what they had learned in the training programme, three-quarters of the teachers (75.0%) said they had been able to apply what they had learned to a large or very large extent, 17.7% to some extent, and 7.2% to a small extent or not at all. Eighty percent of female teachers and 79.5% of male teachers had been able to apply in the classroom what they had learned in the training programme. Of those who could remember their trainer (only five teachers could not remember), 90.8% rated the trainer effective or very effective, 9.2% ineffective or very ineffective – another ringing endorsement of the training intervention. Nor was there any difference between the views of male and female teachers: 94.0% of male teachers and 91.1% of female teachers who had participated in a training programme thought the trainer effective.

Thus, with regard to the provision of training programmes to teachers in schools, as outlined in part of the theory of change, there is evidence of this having been rolled out.

Area 5 outlined in the 2014 plan for the DIP was concerned with learning and teaching support materials. A key signal of the success of the NECT initiative is the extent to which teachers use NECT materials in the classroom. Teachers were asked a series of questions about their use of NECT materials. Figure 18 shows whether they used such materials in the classroom.

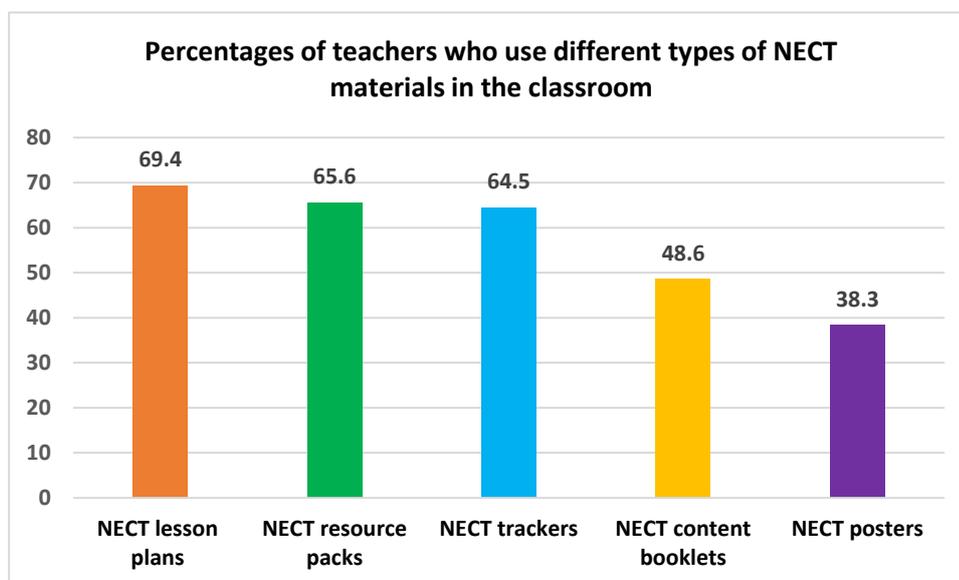


Source: NECT Schooling Survey

Figure 18: Whether teachers currently used NECT materials in the classroom

Two-thirds of teacher respondents (67.0%) said they used NECT materials in the classroom, 20.5% that they did not, and the balance (12.5%) that they did not know. Here there is a marked difference between teachers who identified as female versus male: while nearly three-quarters (73.2%) of female teachers said they used NECT materials in the classroom, only 55.7% of male teachers made use of such materials.

Figure 19 shows which types of NECT material teachers used in the classroom (teachers could indicate more than one type of material used).

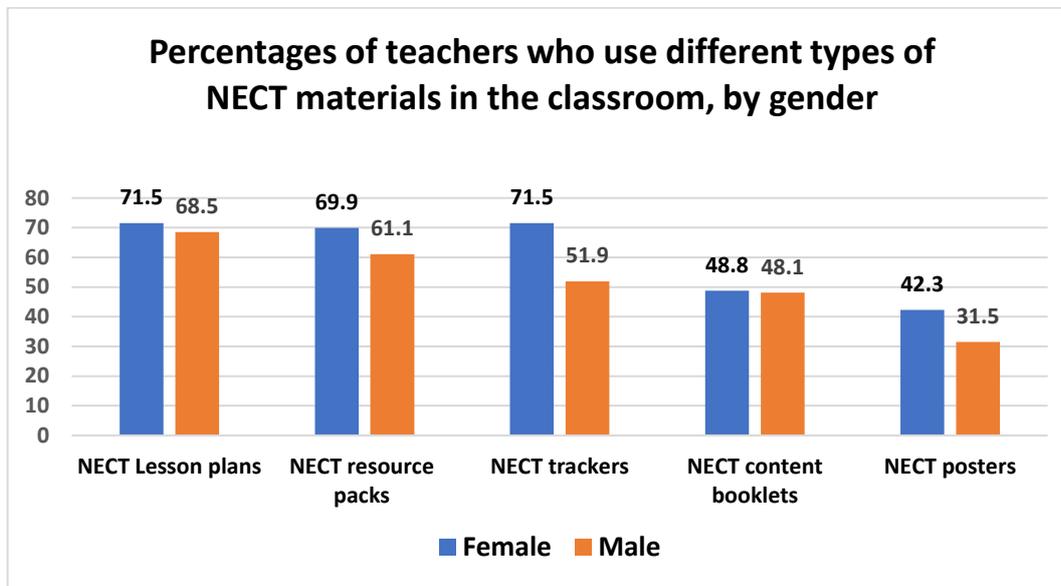


Source: NECT Schooling Survey

Figure 19: Types of NECT materials used by teachers in the classroom.

Of those who said they used NECT materials (N = 183), 69.4% of teachers said they used NECT lesson plans, 65.6% NECT resource packs, 64.5% NECT trackers, 48.6% NECT content booklets, and 38.3% NECT posters. Two-thirds of teachers, then, use at least one type of NECT material for teaching purposes.

There are some very slight gender differences with regard to male versus female teachers' use of different types of materials (Figure 20). The most marked difference is the large proportion of female teachers using NECT trackers. Of the 119 teachers who used NECT trackers in the classroom, the vast majority (103, or 86.6%) were primary school teachers; and only 18 (17.5%) of the primary school teachers who used trackers were male. More detailed work with teachers to understand how the NECT trackers are or are not useful to teachers in particular areas would help highlight what is to be gleaned from these data.



Source: NECT Schooling Survey

Figure 20: Teacher use of NECT materials, by gender

Some insight regarding teachers' perspectives on the material emerges from the qualitative component of the study. A teacher in the King Cetshwayo District FGD said that the trackers "made management at the school easier in terms of monitoring the curriculum". Mother tongue isiZulu teachers (KZN-P) had received lesson plans on what to teach and what not to teach, guidelines on how to deal with their learners, and notes on how to teach. Mother tongue isiXhosa teachers (EC-P) indicated that NECT provided "more than a tracker and a lesson plan and resources and books for sentence tips and flashcards. There was a big manuscript for that from NECT; flashcards and sentence tips; so, when we started NECT we have got all these resources." The teacher continued discussing other useful material, although there are divided recollections from NECT management on whether these were all distributed by NECT:

We were given Vulu Bula books yearly from NECT. The child must go home with the book and read the book at home. It will come down to the kind of parents we were telling you about – that the parents of these children who are girls who are going up and down – going to get grants and don't care about these young ones. So, this young one is not going to be healthy at home. What we are to get is a torn book, not read at all. It will be different with a child coming from a private school, who will come with books that are neatly covered, neatly returned. "Come, Mama, help me with homework"; and you will help with homework because she understands what is to be done.

Thirty-seven (37) teachers reported they did not use NECT materials in the classroom. Their responses regarding the reasons are shown in Table 4.

*Table 4: Why teachers did not use NECT materials in the classroom*

Reason	N	%
I am not familiar with the NECT teaching and assessment materials	16	43.2
I am not sure of the origin of the materials I am using	11	29.7
I prefer using other teaching and assessment materials	4	10.8
Although I received NECT training, I have not been given support in using NECT teaching and assessment materials	4	10.8
My school principal / grade head / subject head is not in favour of my using NECT teaching and assessment materials	2	5.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: NECT Schooling Survey

Nearly half of the teachers who do not use NECT materials are unfamiliar with the Structured Learning Programmes (SLPs), and nearly a third use materials, but are not aware of who produced them. Only two teachers reported that their principal or subject or grade head was opposed to them using NECT materials, and only four teachers actively chose other materials rather than those produced by NECT.

These results from the survey and observations from the school visits indicate a good level of ‘embeddedness’ of NECT materials and training for a significant proportion of teachers surveyed and interviewed.

A total of 221 teachers responded to a question about whether the schools in which they were currently teaching were FSSs. Thirty-nine percent of teachers said their school was a FSS, 30.3% that it was not, and the balance (30.7%) indicated that they did not know. The results of a cross-tabulation of use of NECT materials with FSS status (N = 193) is shown in Table 5.

*Table 5: Teacher use of NECT materials in the classroom in relation to FSS status*

FSS status	Use of NECT materials	N	%
FSS	Use NECT materials	69	35.8
	Do not use NECT materials	2	1.0
	Do not know if I use NECT materials	0	-
Not a FSS	Use NECT materials	32	16.6
	Do not use NECT materials	26	13.5
	Do not know if I use NECT materials	3	1.6
School status unknown	Use NECT materials	34	17.6
	Do not use NECT materials	13	6.7
	Do not know if I use NECT materials	14	7.3
<b>Total</b>		<b>193</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: NECT Schooling Survey

Of teachers who used NECT materials in the classroom, the distribution of responses with regard to whether they were or were not in a FSS is as follows, although NECT management clarified that the

concept of the FSS was only known to those in FSSs. The responses suggest that a large proportion of teachers who used NECT materials were either currently teaching in a FSS or had done so:

- 35.8% knew they were teaching in a FSS
- 16.6% knew they were teaching in a non-FSS; and
- 17.6% did not know whether the school they were teaching in was a FSS.

Of those who did *not* use NECT materials:

- 1.0% knew they were teaching in a FSS
- 13.5% knew they were teaching in a non-FSS; and
- 6.7% did not know whether they were teaching in a FSS.

Finally, of teachers who did not know whether they were using NECT materials:

- 1.6% knew they were teaching in a non-FSS; and
- 7.3% did not know the status of the school in which they were teaching.

The first important observation here is that the highest percentage of teachers (35.8%) both taught in a FSS and used NECT materials in the classroom – not an unexpected observation but one which confirms the salience of NECT materials in NECT FSSs some years after the initiative was first rolled out. This is a higher correlation than that between teachers who were teaching in a non-FSS and did not use NECT materials in the classroom.

Second, it is noteworthy that the second highest percentage of teachers (16.6%) were teaching in a non-FSS but nevertheless used NECT materials in the classroom – suggesting some level of universalisation or wider knowledge beyond the FSS of NECT interventions.

#### *4.2.1.1. Provincialisation, universalisation and assessments of NECT interventions*

NECT work in schools with teachers to enhance professionalisation and improve teaching and learning was scaled up in two forms. In schools where NECT interventions were described by officials as “low dose”, follow-up work was vested with the provincial administration. This was termed provincialisation. A second form of scale-up took place with what were termed “high dose” schools. Here NECT enhanced its inputs. This was termed universalisation.

From FGDs with teachers during the fieldwork phase it appeared that teachers at different levels were found to be aware of general school management roles and functions, but it appears that this awareness was not simply attributable to NECT interventions. Often mention would be made of DoE programmes, initiatives and workshops, and more detail was provided about these than about NECT programmes.

From an education official perspective there were mixed views about the usefulness of NECT interventions. One KwaZulu-Natal education official maintained that

There is an improvement. I think circuit managers by and large have contributed through the onsite coaching, even through *Jika iMfundo* [meaning to “turn around education” in isiZulu]. You see this in terms of results, submissions and conflict resolutions between subject advisors and principals. We have trained them and the results are showing.

On the other hand, interviews revealed that the level of reach and systemic impact of the school leadership and management interventions was not optimal as education officials in the provinces identified severe limitations in the NECT’s universalisation of its programmes.

#### **4.2.2. Effective school management**

A second key area outlined for work in Programme 1 was enhancing school management. Courageous leadership was conceptualised as an intervention to provide principals and school management teams, primarily HODs, with the tools to make courageous decisions in the best interests of their learners, teachers and schools.

In order to evaluate how these tools had been put into practice, principals were asked in the NECT Schooling Survey to describe a courageous / difficult decision currently facing them, indicating what made it a courageous / difficult decision. A total of 160 principals (63% male and 37% female) took the opportunity largely to voice grievances, a minority outlining difficult decisions facing them, and an even smaller minority indicating what made these decisions difficult.

The responses cluster around seventeen issues. The number of responses on each of these issues is indicated in parentheses:

1. The impact of COVID-19 on schooling (50)
2. Poor or inadequate school infrastructure (18)
3. The impact of socio-economic status (SES)-related issues (8)
4. Teacher motivation (7)
5. Poor learner discipline (7)
6. Teacher shortages (6)
7. On-line learning challenges (6)
8. SGB-related issues (6)
9. Lack of parental involvement in the school (5)
10. Multigrade schooling issues (5)
11. Teacher absenteeism (4)
12. Learner performance (4)
13. Learner absenteeism (3)
14. Learner motivation (3)

15. Technology-related issues (3)
16. Learner substance abuse (2)
17. Lack of community involvement in the school (2)

Given the salience of COVID-19 as a major schooling disruptor in 2020 and into 2021, it is not unexpected that the majority of responses (52) concerned the challenges posed by the pandemic. It is, however, surprising that principals who had participated in NECT training sessions, completed before the onset of the COVID lockdowns in March 2020, could not distinguish the issue – the effects of the pandemic – from the management process of dealing with it.

Learner rotation – having learners attend school every other day on rotation – was cited by a number of principals as a major management challenge (“Dealing with rotation of learners when you have to teach and manage the school”). A very practical problem was posed by one principal:

Rotational system by learners makes it so difficult for me to track work done because p[h]asing is impossible and teachers tend to teach to the test so that learners could be able to have their assessment towards the end of each and every term.

A telling consequence of rotational learning was its impact on curriculum coverage, to which many principals drew attention – “How to keep the school operating under COVID 19 pandemic, especially to ensure maximum curriculum coverage with the rotational time-tabling”. Curriculum coverage was a major issue even before COVID, constituting a key focus of the NECT at the outset of its District Improvement Programme.

Most immediately, principals were exercised by having to deal with learners returning to school in early August 2021: “A courageous message is that schooling must go on and learners must be vaccinated”. Allowing all learners to return to school en masse was cited by many principals as a difficult decision they had to make – albeit that the “decision” may have been imposed on them by the authorities.

A sample of responses of principals who made reference to difficult and / or courageous decisions confronting them follows:

To convince teachers who are negative about vaccination because if I don't win them it will be disastrous to themselves and the school community

and the flip side:

To take vaccine. I want to continue working for the department but I don't trust any of these companies producing vaccine. I don't even want to sign for vaccination of school children because after 10yrs I don't know complications that will be caused by those vaccines.

Difficult decision is disciplinary action against learners who have many rights.

Minimize late coming and absenteeism in both learners and teachers by making serious interventions.

I am facing a courageous decision of making a directive regarding the accountability for the absence of staff members in my school.

Having to reduce the SGB paid staff at school while there is so much to be done in curriculum delivery. This is due to the decrease in norms and standards grant to our school.

Having to shift an underperforming Math qualified teacher who was chronically failing learners even when given workshops for several times.

I took Maths from an underperforming Math teacher who was given workshops but couldn't help him up the game. I am underqualified but since I started teaching the subject, our school and learners performance has improved a lot.

Undocumented learners. After 3 months it is said that they should be chased away from school. What about their right to education...if you don't chase them away. The DOE does not subsidise them.

And finally, a decision that strikes at the heart of on-line education but which in a pre-COVID context might have appeared bizarre: "To give my learners the password to access our WiFi."

Asked to what extent the skills acquired from their participation in any leadership training programme (whether NECT or not) assisted them in resolving the difficult decision they had to make, three-fifths of principals (60.7%) said the training programme had assisted to a large or very large extent, 26.4% to some extent, and 12.8% either very little or not at all. These data suggest that the training had provided useful tools to enhance school management.

Other data also provided evidence that management was being enhanced at the school level. From the FGDs conducted during the site visits in April 2021 there was consensus within schools and across the districts that principals and SGBs worked well together. An important aspect highlighted was that there was inclusiveness in the approach of running the schools by the different management groups identified.

There was general satisfaction with the level of capacitation that school principals received through the NECT programmes. According to two participants:

It was when Deloitte and other stakeholders were supporting NECT, and it was here when the NECT intervention was at its peak, assisting and supporting teachers and learners at

schools and also supporting management with the courageous leadership workshops. This is when people benefitted most from the NECT.

The interventions were in the areas of curriculum support and improvement of quality and the use of data to inform decision making. The NECT organized workshops for principals, which focused on innovative leadership, e-learning, and courageous leadership. They also encouraged proper data management systems and analysis of the data, to inform decision making.

According to another principal, the best outcome of NECT in their school was the innovative leadership aspect which the programme introduced to principals, and school leadership, where the leaders were encouraged to be “instructional leaders, leaders who focus on quality of teaching and learning”. As a result of these new perspectives, the school was reported to have introduced structured extra classes during the week, on Saturdays and on public holidays.

Participants in SMT training programmes were of the view that SMT training was effective. The training offered by the NECT helped SMT members focus on their responsibilities in terms of curriculum management. Teachers, however, were divided in their opinions about support received from SMT members. Some teachers indicated that they were getting more support and were finding the support, supervision, and advice from SMTs very helpful. Others, however, were critical of the SMT and stated that they were not receiving any help at all.

From the NECT Schooling Survey we ascertained that, of the 202 principals who answered the question about which organisation had facilitated a NECT workshop / training programme in which they had participated, more than half (113, or 56.0% – 61.1% male and 38.9% female) had not participated in any NECT programme facilitated by one of the service providers, one-fifth (39, or 19.2% – 56.4% male and 45.6% female) had participated in a PILO / Jika iMfundo Campaign programme, 24 (or 11.9% – 56.0% male and 44.0% female) in a Deloitte programme, 14 (or 6.9% – 73.3% male and 26.7% female) in an Education Excellence Consortium (EEC) programme, and 12 (5.9% – 38.5% male and 61.5% female) in a PWC programme.

The topics of these programmes ranged from NECT and its application in schools (10 respondents) to curriculum leadership and coverage (8), school management (7), management and leadership (7), financial management (4), the teaching of reading (5), improving teaching and learning (5), the teaching of English (4), Professional Learning Committees (PLCs) (3), the teaching of Mathematics (2), school surveys (2), and various single-item responses (coaching, dashboards, assessment, e-learning, marketing, parental involvement, self-evaluation and achievable targets, teamwork, and the use of NECT materials in the classroom).

Asked how important their participation in this workshop / training programme was for enhancing their leadership skills, 60.3% said their participation was very important (63.0% of female principals,

63.6% of male principals), 35.6% that it was important (37.0% of female principals, 31.8% of male principals), 2.7% that it was neither important nor unimportant, and only 1.4% that it was not at all important. And asked to what extent they had been able to put into practice what they had learned in the training programme, more than half of the principals (53.4%) said they had been able to apply what they had learned to a large extent (51.9% of female principals, 59.1% of male principals), 23.3% to a very large extent (29.6% of female principals, 20.5% of male principals), 13.7% to some extent (11.1% of female principals, 13.6% of male principals), and 9.6% to a small extent. Of those who could remember their trainer, just over half (51.4%) rated the trainer very effective (59.3% of female principals, 45.5% of male principals), 37.1% effective (29.6% of female principals, 38.6% of male principals), 1.5% neither effective nor ineffective, and 10% either very ineffective or ineffective (11.1% of female principals, 9.1% of male principals).

We can draw three conclusions from these responses:

1. Although the response profile is very far from being representative of the total population of principals, the fact that more than half of those principals who participated in the survey had not undergone any NECT-related training in management and leadership suggest that the reach of the programme amongst principals has not been as extensive as anticipated. This programme focussed on a broader cadre of school leaders, including both principals and HODs, but data was not gathered from the latter group. More detailed follow-up is needed with principals and HODs who have participated in NECT training.
2. Those principals, surveyed for this evaluation, who did participate in a NECT-related training programme for the most part derived considerable benefit from it, in terms of both the importance of the programme for enhancing their leadership skills and of being able to put into practice what they had learned in the training programme.
3. From a gender perspective, there are no striking differences between the proportions of female and male principals in terms of the importance they attach to NECT training programmes, the extent to which they were able to put into practice what they had learned in the training programme (almost identical proportions of female and male principals having been able to put into practice what they had learned to a large or very large extent), and the effectiveness of the trainer (slightly more male than female principals thought the trainer effective or highly effective).

The overriding impression is that, of those principals who had participated in NECT training programmes, the vast majority found the programmes important for skills development, had been able to apply what they had learned, and were highly complimentary about the trainer. This suggests that those principals who participated in NECT training programmes derived great benefit from them – a signal to the NECT that its leadership interventions have had impact on this layer of school leadership.

### 4.2.3. Improving government capacity to deliver

As outlined in Section 2.4, the NDP provided the NECT with a very clear roadmap for the kind of interventions it could facilitate to strengthen the capacity of the state to deliver education and training of the highest quality, leading to significantly improved learning outcomes.

As discussed in Section 2.9, the NECT, as an example of a complex organisation aiming to deliver sustainable school improvement needed to focus both on school interventions with teachers and principals and work to enhance the effectiveness of the subsystem of a district administration in which schools operate. It is from the district that schools receive key support inputs of curriculum, institutional development, and resourcing.

The NECT's work in Programme 1 has been to operationalise the NDP priority of strengthening the capacity of the state to deliver public services. Focussing on the district level, since 2013 the NECT has been working with officials from districts, provinces and at national level to design and implement specific education improvement programmes. Experts drawn from the private sector by the NECT have assisted in strengthening critical skills of the education officials at the various levels. The NECT brought in experts to support Information and Communications Technology (ICT) planning in the Department. The same experts also supported the Operation Phakisa ICT in education initiative. The NECT has been working with the DBE to undertake research into the modernisation of the school administration system (SA-SAMS). Towards the end of 2015, the NECT collaborated with the DBE and local and international organisations to research how other countries promote innovation in education. The research recommended the establishment of a South African education innovation hub (Eduhub), whose primary focus would be to improve the co-ordination of innovation initiatives nationally, with the aim of supporting systemic education improvement in South Africa. This initiative is discussed under Programme 3.

### 4.2.4. Improving resourcing to create conducive and safe learning environments

Conducive and safe learning environments for learners are a function in the first instance of school infrastructure, which should not pose any threat to children's safety and should not detract from their ability to learn in the classroom. Principals, learners and teachers were asked in the NECT Schooling Survey whether they considered the school property to be a safe and secure environment for teaching and learning. Their responses are indicated in Table 6.

*Table 6: Do you consider the school property to be a safe and secure environment for teaching and learning?*

Response	Principals		Teachers		Learners	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	80	54.0	140	90.9	1,240	91.0
No	68	46.0	14	9.1	122	9.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,362</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: NECT Schooling Survey

While these findings are not in response to a random administered survey, it is striking that while teachers and learners are overwhelmingly positive about the safety and security of the school environment (90.9% and 91% respectively), principals are mixed in their response, only 54% believing their school environments are safe and secure for teaching and learning.

From a gender perspective, 54.8% of male principals thought the school safe and secure, compared to 50% of female principals, 38.7% of male teachers and 61.3% of female teachers thought the school safe and secure, and identical percentages of male and female learners (91.1%) thought the school safe and secure. The female teachers' views are counterintuitive (one would have expected them to feel far less safe and secure than their male counterparts) and out of alignment with those of principals and learners – though again, learner and teacher respondents are not necessarily in the same schools as each other or in the same schools as the principals.

#### **4.2.5. Community and parent involvement**

An aspect of NECT working as a complex organisation across districts with very different socioeconomic relationships is linked with the range of different perspectives by community organisations and parents regarding the quality of education and how to support this. The NECT Schooling Survey posed questions to learners and their parents / guardians about parental / guardian involvement in their children's education. Parents / guardians were asked about their involvement in their children's school. Almost two-fifths (37.4%) said they were not involved at all. Involvement extended largely to meeting with their child's teacher to discuss progress (55.7%), with 8.0% working on projects at the school (fixing or painting classrooms, for example) and 5.0% helping to prepare or serve meals to teachers and / or learners.

Data from interviews with members of DSCs during site visits to schools in April 2021 revealed considerable engagement. The Chair of a DSC (NW) saw the DSC's role as being to "agitate the community and the nation" as a means to "change, advise, educate, and create awareness". It was incumbent on them to "take the lead" by reaching out to the community to "explain the role of education in all spheres of life". An example of this was their decision that psychosocial support should not just be a response to the pandemic, but "for all challenges, at all schools". In their view, teachers "have inadequate time to teach proper reading". This is being remedied by commitment from DSC members who are union members or "morutis" (pastors) to promote reading in their individual capacities and in their church congregations. Particular efforts were made amongst learners at the Grade 4 point of transition from home language to English. The DSC Chair had initially met the NECT provincial official during teacher training sessions and both had been actively engaged in "convincing" the North West Department of Education that the DSC "is here to support, not to police the system".

The NECT provincial official indicated that the NECT provided support on the basis of “identified and expressed need.” This DSC was clearly cognisant of the limitations of NECT, admitting that NECT “cannot do everything”, and provided examples of its own initiatives. These included the ‘Reading for Meaning’ programme in Bafokeng schools nearby, the training of 20 morutis (local religious leaders) to train SGBs on effective school governance, interactions with local health and social services and police to facilitate both planned and impromptu searches for drugs, and their ‘adopt-a-pastor’ project to expand psychosocial support for schools. The DSC Chair pointed out that they had not yet intervened in respect of maths and science, but that it was on their agenda.

The DSC Chair said that the initial reservations about the DSC amongst circuit officials (who asked questions such as “why are you so inquisitive?”) had been replaced by regular reporting interactions and requests for support. He indicated that NECT projects were all registered with the District Director.

Requests made to this DSC by the District Director for input on several practical issues suggest recognition of the capacity of the DSC. These requests have been for advice on how to deal with learner absenteeism, the theft of computers, and the lack of punctuality of taxis that have been hired to transport learners.

A DSC member in Mount Frere (EC) indicated that the DSC’s role was broad. He said that it served as an “entry point” for NECT and facilitated and assisted with the implementation of NECT programmes by participating and providing ideas, and promoting stakeholder collaboration and coordination. Activities mentioned were a reading and writing dialogue (Mount Ayliff), NECT meetings with stakeholders about bridging gaps and meeting targets, and quarterly meetings focused on the improvement of learner and especially matriculant learner results. He further pointed out that NECT visited schools frequently and involved the DSC in their plans to capacitate learners and teachers.

Members of the DSC in Vhembe (LP) saw their role as being to ensure that teaching and learning proceeded well in schools. Although they were not expected to make physical visits to schools, they played a strategic role in the oversight and support of schools, by means of monitoring and evaluation, and in the event of particular challenges, deployment to resolve the issues. This DSC averred that they had the capacity to mobilise large numbers of people when required, and that they facilitated the procurement of bursaries for high performing learners. DSC members recognised the value of NECT support in respect of curriculum and content and had advocated “for the NECT programme to cover more schools in the district”, to which NECT responded by providing its learning materials to all schools. One member said, “Teachers are in dire need of in-service training they need to be refreshed and improved especially with technology becoming such an important factor in education”. Additionally, this DSC had been sufficiently motivated to attempt to recruit teacher assistants, who could be paid a stipend to enable the teachers to focus on students who especially needed extra attention and learning support.

The Vhembe DSC had additionally engaged with the Department of Social Development to advocate for social workers to be available at schools in response to recent incidences of bullying, which led to a learner's suicide. The DSC itself had visited affected schools and families. Although the DSD MEC had committed to deploying social workers in schools, there was a shortage. This DSC enjoyed a good relationship with teacher unions, which improved school functionality. The district improvement plan was in operation. District Directors were given a chance to present their plans to the DSC, after which the operationalisation and rollout was monitored by the DSC, thus creating an accountability mechanism that was both effective and also efficient.

Many schools received support from the private sector and businesses in their localities; notably in North West, mining companies were a major donor to schools. Faith-based organisations also played a key role in supporting learners and teachers and in some cases psychosocial support was provided through these non-state entities in partnership with the Department of Social Development and the Department of Health.

This wide range of views and relationships indicates the many networks at district level the NECT has connected with, enacting some features of a complex organisation.

#### **4.2.6. Learner support and wellbeing**

The support learners receive from their parents / guardians is a key aspect of learner wellbeing and, particularly for learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds, contributes to improved learning outcomes (Li & Hanmin, 2019). The NECT initially identified, in its first Annual Report (NECT, 2014a), three areas of learner wellbeing: providing psycho-social services to learners; improving nutrition in schools; and contributing to the resourcing required for sports and cultural activities in schools. There is no further mention of learner support until the 2020 Annual report, where parents, in the context of managing the COVID-19 pandemic, are slated to be "actively involved in school projects targeted at improving learner support" (NECT, 2020d: 50).

Comments from the NECT management indicate, however, that while the DBE leads on the issue of psychosocial support, the NECT has developed certain support materials, including on the response to COVID-19. Consulting with the person in charge of the Investment Portfolio on Psychosocial Support and reviewing the ward committee-based psychosocial support initiative were not undertaken as part of this evaluation but are likely to provide further evidence of NECT proactiveness in the area of psychosocial support to teachers and learners.

Psychosocial support, because of the range of interconnected issues raised, is an area where a complex organisation may be particularly well suited to connect with and respond to many-faceted problems. This strand of engagement was explored in the school visits. None of the schools visited was found to have sufficient numbers of staff dealing with psychosocial issues. In a few cases, social workers are linked to schools and can be called upon to deal with serious issues when deemed

necessary. However, many providers of psychosocial support are unqualified. The varied scope of the demand for psychosocial intervention and inadequacy of service providers was captured by a Limpopo-based teacher. She said, “one of the biggest problems in the school and community is pregnancy. The school has people who monitor the girls in school so that they do not miss school. Another community issue ... [is] poverty and they have managed to do their bit by getting donors for sanitary towels and food parcels in collaboration with the school nutrition committee.... Foreign learners are sometimes affected by the language barrier but the school tries by all means to help these learners by having basic Tshivenda lessons for new students.... One [learner] had a problem with sight and the school did all they could to get her question paper to be printed in a different font from the department. She said, “The presence of the social worker in the school premises used to help with issues of inclusion as the learners found it easier to communicate with her. The school has been without a social worker since 2019 (LP-S). Another highlighted the gaps in effective intervention, pointing out that, “Since 2019 the main problems are the orphans and children whose parents are misusing the grants. We need to introduce parental skills programmes” (LP-P). Referring to psychosocial support providers, a teacher in North West said that “If they are available, they are not active. I have not seen them before” (NW-S). Similarly, “For psychosocial support, there was someone helping in that aspect but their contract ended and was never renewed” (EC-S). In Limpopo, a secondary school teacher said “The withdrawal of the social workers in schools has been really problematic, and this needs to be addressed urgently. Psychosocial support is needed for both the learners as well as teachers, especially in the light of COVID and the related challenges” (LP-S).

Even where psychosocial support is being provided, a sense of being overwhelmed with the demand for services across large districts emerged. Some respondents indicated that they were not able to engage with all of the schools in their districts in any given year. One even said, “There are some schools that I have never visited” (NW-DD). Others said that they had to self-fund their trips to distant schools owing to a lack of official vehicles, or even a lack of budget for fuel for using their own vehicles to travel to the schools. One said, “Sometimes I use my own car to take learners to social welfare facilities and I fund that from my own pocket”. (KZN-S). A District Director lamented that she had “one assistant and one on comorbidity leave” in spite of the workload comprising coordination of “inclusive education, day care centre stimulation of children OT, ST, PT”. To add to this, the NECT had “introduced psychosocial support in 2020 with a COVID focus” (NW-DD). Elucidation of resource constraints at district level emerged similarly in the Eastern Cape, “There was a case of a learner that was slow because of eye problems and we sent a letter to the district and their response was not positive” (EC-S). Limited resources were even further stretched since 2020. Another comment pertained to bricks and mortar, “I do not have an office of my own and since there is COVID, I am unable to share office space, so it makes it difficult to have private sessions with learners. I used to utilise the principal’s office before, but due to COVID and social distancing, that is no longer an option” (KZN-S). Onward referrals were problematic to a primary school teacher, who said, “The Isibindi Centre provides support to learners in terms of equipment and psychological support [but] teachers have no time to go to this centre to request psychological support” (KZN-P). A similar trend emerged in the Northern Cape control district, where an official said, “We have one

social worker for the whole district, but Pixley (ka Seme) has the highest FAS [foetal alcohol syndrome] incidence. ...People who have left have not been replaced. ... I cannot personally provide psychosocial support” (NC).

One teacher emphasised the need for referrals to appropriate professionals. She pointed out the need to “Communicate as the team with the SBST coordinator on learners with challenges ... [because] SBST is a government initiative”. She added that some learners “write slow” and that “the class teacher observes the learners (invigilators and subject teachers), identifies such learners and refers to the SBST” (NW-S). Another said “It would help if the department employed social workers who specialised on school related issues. Both the LDOE and LDSO could talk to each other regarding deploying social workers to schools since there are huge numbers of unemployed social workers” (LP-P). Another teacher said she “strongly recommended the need for a school counsellor” (EC-P).

In the districts where the site visits took place, the staff allocation to the psychosocial function is inadequate for the district size and the numbers of schools to be serviced. Interestingly, in a control school, a teacher indicated that

Many teachers have one-on-one sessions with girls and boys. Each matriculant has a teacher as a ‘foster parent’ – in the school’s adopt-a-child programme. Two to three learners are allocated to each teacher. The teacher discusses issues such as results, home problems, abuse, etc. The teachers then identify parents in the residential area to assist where necessary – the child can then contact the parent. After five to 10 days, the principal then sees what the problem is or to what extent it has been addressed (NC-S).

These data highlight the complexity of needs within and around schools and the wide range of support provision needed.

Needs for psychosocial support are not confined to learners; and an additional feature of the complexity of the context is the changing needs of teachers. Those working in the psychosocial support space are exposed to high levels of pressure owing to workload, and stress as a consequence of the nature of some of the work. The teachers involved in providing psychosocial support, interviewed during the school visits, were not forthcoming with any major ideas on coping with the stress and pressure, besides pacing themselves and resting well during their off-duty times.

Overall, however, it seems that the levels of psychosocial support that the NECT is attempting to achieve are beyond the current capacity of most schools. A key informant education expert suggested that the expectation to provide psychosocial support in addition to their teaching load was not a reasonable expectation of any teacher:

I mean where do you start? Nutrition? Social work? Personal counselling? No man! Get onto the teaching and learning stuff. Don't be distracted by all the other things. Again, I have taught in schools where everything was broken, in the homes, in the communities. But I knew that I could do one thing that could break through, and that is make sure that those kids get the best possible teaching and learning support that you could give them. ... I'm not denying the need. I'm just saying, do what you can, with the skills that you have, in the places where you work. And give that child their civil rights. For me to teach you well and to teach you with compassion and to teach you competently, was already solving half of those problems. .... So, my point is, in a crisis, with a lot of money, and you want to spread it out thinly to do everything, you'll lose. Focus on the one thing that gets a kind out of poverty, the best possible teaching and learning strategy..... How do you teach a subject that captures some of these other concerns? Just showing up on time is already half of the problem solved when it comes to some of these issues. Being dependable, being regular, being reliable for the kids, being an example as a person and as a teacher" (education expert).

It can be seen that there are two perspectives on providing for psychosocial support needs for learners: a perspective which requires more input from teachers and schools; and a perspective that stresses trying to attend to these very wide needs spreads the intervention too thin, and that what is needed is a clear focus on excellent teaching.

#### 4.2.7. Learning support and outcomes

Building community and parental involvement with the education of children, coupled with learner support and wellbeing, were key themes in the ECF and a concern of NECT engagement at district level. While these are not areas where a direct causal link can be made between NECT activity and the relationships that emerge, the data gathered on the levels of parental support for children's learning and learners' views of their own learning needs and achievements are illuminating with regard to the challenges confronting NECT and DBE.

Asked in the NECT Schooling Survey what kind of homework assistance they received from their parents / guardians, learners responded as outlined in Table 7. Multiple responses were possible.

Table 7: Types of homework assistance received from parents / guardians

Type of homework assistance received	N	%
None	430	33.5
She / he helps me with Mathematics problems	380	29.6
She / he listens to me read	311	25.0
She / he tests me on facts to be learned for a test	311	25.0
She / he tests me on spelling	208	16.2
She / he helps me with Science problems	164	12.8
She / he reads to me	123	9.6
Other	72	5.6

Type of homework assistance received	N	%
Total	1,283	100.0

Source: NECT Schooling Survey

One-third of learners (33.5%) said they received no homework assistance from parents / guardians. This is a very high proportion and gives an indication of the national need to support education comprehensively. The largest proportion of learners reported assistance came in the form of help with Mathematics problems (29.6%), followed by parents / guardians listening to their children read and learners being tested on facts for a test (both 311, or 25.0%). The quality of homework assistance is in part a function of parents' / guardians' education levels. Learners surveyed reported the majority of parents / guardians (26.6%) having attained Grade 12, followed by those who had attained some secondary schooling (18.9%), a higher education certificate or diploma (11.0%) and some primary schooling (10.5%). These high proportions of parents with relatively low levels of education give an indication of the context in which NECT works.

The survey does indicate the engagement of those parents who participated with their children's education, despite relatively low levels of schooling. Of the 713 parents / guardians who answered a question about whether they assisted their children with homework, 95.9% responded in the affirmative. These were not necessarily related to the learners who responded to the survey. Parents' / guardians' self-reported highest education levels were 46.6% having achieved Grade 12, followed by 20.8% some secondary schooling and 15.7% a higher education certificate or diploma. The fact that no parents / guardians had achieved an undergraduate or postgraduate degree may mean that children with graduate parents / guardians attend schools characterised as quintile 3, 4 and 5.

From parents / guardians surveyed the highest proportion reported assistance was afforded to learners through listening to their children read (62.5%), testing them on spelling (56.2%), helping them with Mathematics problems (55.6%), and testing them on facts (42.5%). The smallest proportion reported giving children support through reading to them (36.8%).

Lower percentages of parents' / guardians read to their children than have their children read to them – as reported by both learners (9.6% versus 25.0%) and parents / guardians (36.8% versus 62.5%). These discrepancies are almost certainly a function of parents' / guardians' highest education levels, combined possibly with a lack of reading material (besides, possibly, school readers) in the home, though this would need to be tested through further studies.

That one-third of learners said their parents / guardians did not help them with homework is largely supported by the findings from FGDs with teachers, SMTs, school principals and SGBs, who revealed that parents were generally not supportive of school teaching and learning processes. Parents / guardians are much more likely than learners to indicate that they do offer homework assistance to

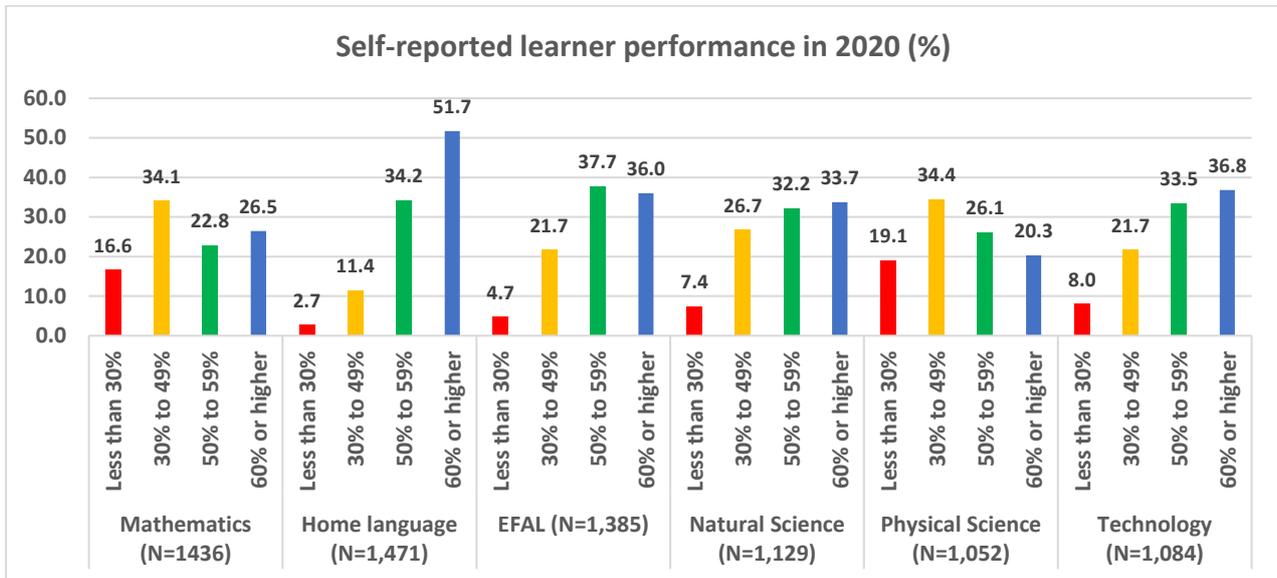
their children – a bias that may explain the discrepancy between parents’ / guardians’ and learners’ response to the question of homework support.

Work on building parental and community support for learning and connecting this with support for teachers is a complex issue which requires intervention at many levels. To some extent the complex organisation of the NECT responds to this, and other NECT programmes, as discussed below, have been developed to engage with some features of this. However, the very many complex issues in play require very careful planning and assessment of actions to be taken. One starting point may be provided by better understanding of the problem of improvement or lack of improvement in learning outcomes.

Looking at learning outcomes linked with NECT’s work is useful both in appreciating the many facets of the problem and in deepening the focus of the evaluation. There is no specific mention of improvement in *learning* outcomes in the outline of the eight NECT Programmes on the NECT website – though the ToR for this evaluation (FREF, 2020a) do refer in the key evaluation questions for Focus Area 1 to “The level of outcomes achieved, and the degree to which the *outcomes* (local provincial and National) are sustainable” (emphasis added). Since the ultimate purpose of the NECT is to assist the DBE in improving the learning outcomes of learners – a mandate derived directly from the NDP (“significantly improved learning outcomes” is part of Vision 2030 – NPC, 2011: 296) and from the ECF (where “improvements in learning outcomes” are mentioned under District intervention programmes – NECT, 2013: 12), no evaluation of the NECT at whatever stage of its operations can afford to neglect this critical area. A range of sources have been used for this discussion – learning outcomes self reported by learners participating in the NECT schooling survey, DBE EMIS data on the schools visited during the site visits, data on learning outcomes collected by the NECT M&E, and national data on average grade performance of learners in selected subjects in Grades 3, 6 and 9 in South African schools, 2014-2020.

#### 4.2.7.1. *Self-reported learning outcomes, NECT Schooling Survey*

The findings from the NECT Schooling Survey regarding self-reported performance by learners in selected subjects in 2020 are shown in Figure 21.



Source: NECT Schooling Survey

Figure 21: Self-reported learner performance in selected subjects in 2021

Bearing in mind that these are self-reported learning outcomes, a high proportion of learners were not achieving well. More than half the learners achieved less than 50% for Mathematics (50.7%) and for Physical Science (53.5%), while self-reported performance in languages (Home Language and EFAL) shows a very different curve – 85.9% of learners achieving more than 50% in Home Language (with 51.7% achieving 60% or higher) and 73.7% achieving more than 50% in EFAL. A third of Natural Science learners (34.1%) achieved less than 50%, while 29.7% of learners achieved less than 50% for Technology.

A disaggregation by grade shows that the higher the grade, the higher the percentages of learners who achieved less than 50% for Mathematics: 62.3% in Grade 11, 57% in Grade 10, 55.1% in Grade 9, 43.3% in Grade 8, and 32.6% in Grade 7.<sup>7</sup> The same pattern does not hold for Physical Science, however: while the lowest percentage of learners achieved less than 50% in Grade 7, followed by a slightly higher percentage in Grade 8, the highest percentage of learners achieving less than 50% was in Grade 9, with slightly lower percentages achieving less than 50% in Grade 10 and then Grade 11.

How this performance profile compares with learners’ perspectives about which subjects they found easiest is an issue the team sought to understand. Table 5 shows which subjects learners found easiest.

<sup>7</sup> Learners were asked what grade they were in in 2021, but what marks they achieved in 2020.

*Table 8: Which subject learners found easiest*

Subject	N	%
English as a First Additional Language (EFAL)	431	34.0
Home Language	363	28.6
Mathematics	281	22.1
Natural Science	82	6.5
Technology	59	4.6
Physical Science	53	4.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,269</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: NECT Schooling Survey

While Mathematics emerges as the third-easiest subject for learners after EFAL and Home Language, this is not consistent with their self-reported performance in 2020, where achievement in Mathematics was considerably below that of the other subjects. That a higher percentage of learners (22.1%) found Mathematics to be the easiest subject and only 6.5% of learners found Natural Science easiest, 4.2% found Physical Science easiest, and 4.6% found Technology easiest does not square with their performance in these subjects in 2020.

Asked which subject they found most difficult, however, there is a greater match, as Table 9 shows.

*Table 9: Which subject learners found most difficult*

Subject	N	%
Mathematics	821	61.0
Physical Science	263	19.6
Technology	79	5.9
Home language	65	4.8
Natural Science	61	4.5
EFAL	56	4.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,345</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: NECT Schooling Survey

While this profile is perfectly consistent with self-reported learner performance, it is anomalous that the profile of easiest subject with marks achieved in 2020 is not. There does not seem to be an obvious explanation for this.

A disaggregation of most difficult subject by province is shown in Table 10.

*Table 10: Most difficult subject for learners (as reported by learners), by province (%)*

Subject	Eastern Cape	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga	Northern Cape	North West	Western Cape
Mathematics	55.2	61.1	60.1	63.2	60.4	63.9	56.0	64.8	60.2
Home Language	6.9	2.8	6.5	3.5	5.4	4.6	0.0	1.1	2.0
EFAL	3.4	6.5	2.3	5.2	5.4	3.7	0.0	2.2	6.1
Natural Science	6.9	1.9	4.1	5.6	0.0	2.8	8.0	3.3	10.2

Subject	Eastern Cape	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga	Northern Cape	North West	Western Cape
Physical Science	20.7	21.3	20.5	18.6	21.6	20.4	36.0	23.1	13.3
Technology	6.9	6.5	6.5	3.9	7.2	4.6	0.0	5.5	8.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: NECT Schooling Survey

From Table 10 we see that substantial percentages of learners – between half and almost two-thirds – in all provinces consider Mathematics the most difficult subject, but lower percentages of learners in the Eastern Cape and Northern Cape (less than 60%) consider it the most difficult subject. Physical Science is deemed the most difficult subject by around a fifth of learners in all provinces except the Western Cape, where only 13% of learners think it the most difficult subject, and in the Northern Cape, where more than a third of learners (36%) consider it the most difficult subject. The only other anomaly is the relative high percentage of learners in the Western Cape – 10% – who consider Natural Science the most difficult subject. These data provide some background relating to learner perspectives on their school work and the significant challenge associated with providing support to learning in mathematics and physical sciences in all provinces.

#### 4.2.7.2. Average grade performance of learners in selected subjects in site visit schools, 2014-2020

A second data source for understanding some of the challenges around improving learning outcomes and how this might connect with the NECT interventions was provided by the field visit schools. This involved a comparison of the average grade performance of learners in the 12 schools visited in April and May 2021 as part of the fieldwork, with the average grade performance of learners across the entire education system. Data showing performance across the schooling system has been difficult to obtain. The evaluation team made repeated requests to the national EMIS directorate and the examinations section but were not able to obtain comprehensive data.

From Tables 21 to 28 in section 7.5 it is evident that COVID had a major impact on grade averages between 2019 and 2020 in primary schools, and particularly in the Foundation Phase (FP). Home Language and Mathematics at the FP show sharp declines in outcomes across the board, save for Gr 1 at P1N5 (NW). A similar trend can be seen for Gr 1-7 EFAL, where only P1N1 (a NECT intervention school) shows a mixed picture, and for Gr 4-6 Natural Science and Technology, where only two average grade percentages (both Grade 1) were in positive territory.

The picture is more mixed in secondary schools. In Gr 8-12 EFAL, just under half of the grade averages declined between 2019 and 2020; in FET Mathematics, only three of the grade averages showed a decline from 2019 to 2020, with some of the increases in grade performance being exponential: 55% for Gr 10 at S1N4 (MP), 48% for Grade 11 at S1N5 (NW), and 30% for Grade 11 at S1N2 (KZN). The profile was less dramatic in FET Physical Science, where about half of the shifts

from 2019 to 2020 were declines; but there was a jump (of 60%) for Gr 11 at S1N4 (MP) and a less dramatic increase (of 24%) for Gr 11 at S1N5 (NW). At the lower grades (8-9) the shifts were almost exclusively downwards, average grades for Natural Science showing an increase from 2019 to 2020 in only two schools (S1N3 [LP], where there was an increase of 18%, and S1N4 (MP), where there was a moderate increase of 5%).

For the period up to 2019, the baseline percentages (i.e., the grade averages for each subject in the first year for which we have data) are much higher in primary than in secondary schools – though baseline percentages in primary schools are not uniform (there are outliers across the board). Grade averages are often in the 60% to 70% range. Baseline percentages for Mathematics and Physical Science at the FET level are appalling low in secondary schools: the average across the schools for which we have data is, for Mathematics, 29% in Grade 10, 26% in Grade 11, and 31% in Grade 12, and for Physical Science, 36% in Grade 10, 35% in Grade 11, and 40% in Grade 12. The baseline percentages for Natural Science across all schools for which we have data in Grades 8 and 9 are similarly poor: 40% and 39% respectively.

There are no clear patterns in terms of percentage change in primary schools, with a narrow increase versus decrease in percentage shifts across the schools for which we have data (on average, three schools showing increases and three schools decreases). P1N4 shows impressive increases in Grades 2 and 3 in Home Languages, P1N1 and P1N4 in FP Mathematics, and P1N4 in primary school EFAL.

Performance in secondary schools also differs markedly across subjects and schools, with some schools showing impressive increases in FET Mathematics (especially in Grade 12, where five of six schools showed improved performance), more modest increases in FET Physical Science, and a much flatter percentage shift (up or down) in Grade 8 and 9 Natural Science. S1C1, a non-NECT school, saw percentage increases of 24% and 17% in Grade 10 and Grade 11 Mathematics respectively.

Overall, we cannot discern any marked improvement across the board as a result of NECT interventions except in Grade 12 Mathematics; and there are too few non-NECT schools for us to make any definitive observations comparing NECT and non-NECT schools in terms of percentage shifts.

#### *4.2.7.3. NECT M&E data on learning outcomes in reading*

Data assembled by the NECT M&E unit also provide insight into some learning outcomes. A 2018 baseline study in the Eastern Cape described in a 35-slide PowerPoint presentation to ToT sessions sought “To collect data to inform the support of the Provincialisation process of Learning Programmes across all schools in the Eastern Cape”, the overall goal being to support district officials (curriculum managers and subject advisors) in monitoring and evaluation of teaching and

learning. A sample of 263 schools (primary and secondary) was surveyed in Term 3 of 2018 by teams of subject advisors and monitoring specialists, with a focus on:

- Learning outcomes (G3-4 assessment)
- Time on task
- Curriculum coverage
- Quantity of work completed
- Content analysis; and
- Quality of work produced by learners.

The methodology involved teachers providing fieldworkers with a range of data sources – learner exercise / classwork books, DBE workbooks, completed assessment tasks – “from their two best learners” – a sample that would seem to bias the results towards best performance rather than assessing the average performance of learners in the class.

The overall results were very low bearing in mind a standard pass mark beyond further education is 50%:<sup>8</sup>

- The provincialisation baseline for Grade 3 EFAL showed that 39% of learners achieved less than 50%, 31% between 50% and 69%, and 30% between 70% and 100%.
- An analysis of the Grade 4 EFAL pass rate showed that 60% of learners achieved less than 50%, 25% achieved between 50% and 69%, and 14% achieved between 70% and 100%.
- An analysis of the Grade 4 Mathematics pass rate showed that 94% of learners achieved less than 50%, 6% of learners between 50% and 69%, and no learners 70% or more.
- The average percentage scores were 56% for Grade 3 EFAL, 46% for Grade 4 EFAL, and 28% for Grade 4 Mathematics.
- The universalisation test scores for Libode and Mount Frere were 56% for Grade 3 EFAL, 34% for Grade 4 EFAL, and 27% for Grade 4 Mathematics. The EFAL Grade 4 score is considerably lower for these two districts (34%) than for the province (46%).

#### *4.2.7.4. Average grade performance of learners in selected subjects in Grades 3, 6 and 9 in South African schools, 2014-2020*

Juxtaposed with the profile of learner self-reported data from the NECT Schooling Survey and the profile of average grade performance of learners in the 12 schools visited in April and May 2021 is the national picture of average grade performance for selected subjects for the period 2016-2018,

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<sup>8</sup> There is clearly a bigger debate to be had here which this report cannot digress into about why the DBE – presumably with the support of Umalusi, the basic and further education quality council – pegs a pass mark at 30% or 40% depending on the subject and the number and combination of subjects for which a learner may achieve such percentages.

which builds the information base for understanding the contextual challenges facing NECT in different provinces. NECT management acknowledges there has been a major gap in the data since the end of ANA and that large national surveys like TIMMS and PIRLS to assess learning outcomes and needs have been initiated.

Assessing the 2016-2018 data for Grade 3, 6 and 9 provides too short a period from which to draw reliable conclusions; at best the data provide a snapshot of learner performance and point to possible trends. There are large differentials in performance across provinces. Thus, for example, for Grade 3, Home Language percentages range from 63% (FS) to 83% (KZN) – the average over the three years; EFAL percentages range from 60% (FS) to 86% (GP); and Mathematics percentages range from 58% (FS) to 91% (GP). This suggests that there is little standardisation of assessment across provinces. Performance drops the higher the grade. Improvements in 2016-2017 in the provinces in which NECT worked are evident, but it is difficult to establish causation.

Table 11: Average grade performance in selected subjects for Grade 3 South African schools, 2016-2018

Province	Home Language				EFAL				Mathematics			
	2016	2017	2018	Ave.	2016	2017	2018	Ave.	2016	2017	2018	Ave.
EC	61,3	74,0	74,9	70.1	58,4	69,8	71,3	66.5	59,3	70,6	72,2	67.4
FS	55,6	70,4	67,7	62.6	57,9	61,8	59,7	59.8	53,3	53,8	66,3	57.8
GP	79,8	82,0	82,6	81.5	85,2	86,4	87,5	86.4	90,1	90,9	91,9	91.0
KZN	64,7	82,6	83,0	82.6	73,7	81,0	84,5	82.7	81,8	89,6	91,5	90.5
LP	66,6	80,7	81,7	76.4	83,8	85,0	87,6	85.5	79,4	78,4	90,0	85.5
MP	73,5	81,9	83,1	79.5	82,7	83,7	86,2	84.2	79,0	89,9	89,9	86.3
NW	66,5	82,3	81,3	76.7	79,2	81,2	81,6	80.7	78,2	89,2	88,2	85.2
NC	74,0	77,7	75,3	75.7	83,4	84,3	81,5	83.1	83,5	85,1	84,4	84.4
WC	71,0	74,0	73,7	72.9	84,2	86,4	82,2	84.2	82,0	84,6	84,6	83.7
SA	68,1	78,4	78,1	75.3	76,5	80,0	80,2	79.2	76,3	81,3	84,3	81.3

Source: Data provided by the DBE

Table 12: Average grade performance in selected subjects for Grade 6 South African schools, 2016-2018

Province	Home Language				EFAL				Mathematics				Natural Sciences & Technology			
	2016	2017	2018	Ave.	2016	2017	2018	Ave.	2016	2017	2018	Ave.	2016	2017	2018	Ave.
EC	52,8	68,0	66,4	62.4	51,0	63,6	63,7	59.4	51,8	64,2	64,8	60.3	50,8	64,2	64,7	59.9
FS	40,7	47,8	52,2	46.9	28,6	49,0	47,3	41.6	33,4	39,4	43,7	38.8	24,9	41,0	40,7	35.5
GP	84,7	87,1	95,4	89.1	88,9	92,5	92,3	91.2	81,8	87,1	88,7	85.8	89,0	91,4	92,2	90.9
KZN	58,8	80,3	87,0	82.8	74,6	n.d.	84,5	84.4	58,4	n.d.	79,2	78.6	69,6	n.d.	75,6	75.7
LP	82,0	80,6	80,1	80.8	80,0	80,3	82,7	81.0	66,4	69,0	77,7	71.0	72,2	70,4	68,6	70.4
MP	79,6	85,2	86,4	83.8	78,5	86,0	85,5	83.4	59,4	73,8	83,4	72.2	68,4	74,7	73,2	72.1
NW	78,0	86,9	84,2	83.1	88,0	84,2	89,0	87.1	69,0	73,4	79,4	73.9	69,2	70,2	70,5	70.0
NC	71,1	72,7	74,5	72.8	81,0	81,5	81,7	81.4	67,3	69,9	73,9	70.4	90,3	89,3	90,9	90.1
WC	74,5	77,2	76,4	76.0	82,9	84,3	83,9	83.7	71,2	73,3	72,9	72.5	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
SA	69,1	76,2	78,1	68.4	72,6	77,7	79,0	70.4	62,1	61,1	68,8	62.6	66,8	71,6	72,1	63.1

Source: Data provided by the DBE

Table 13: Average grade performance in selected subjects for Grade 9 South African schools, 2016-2018

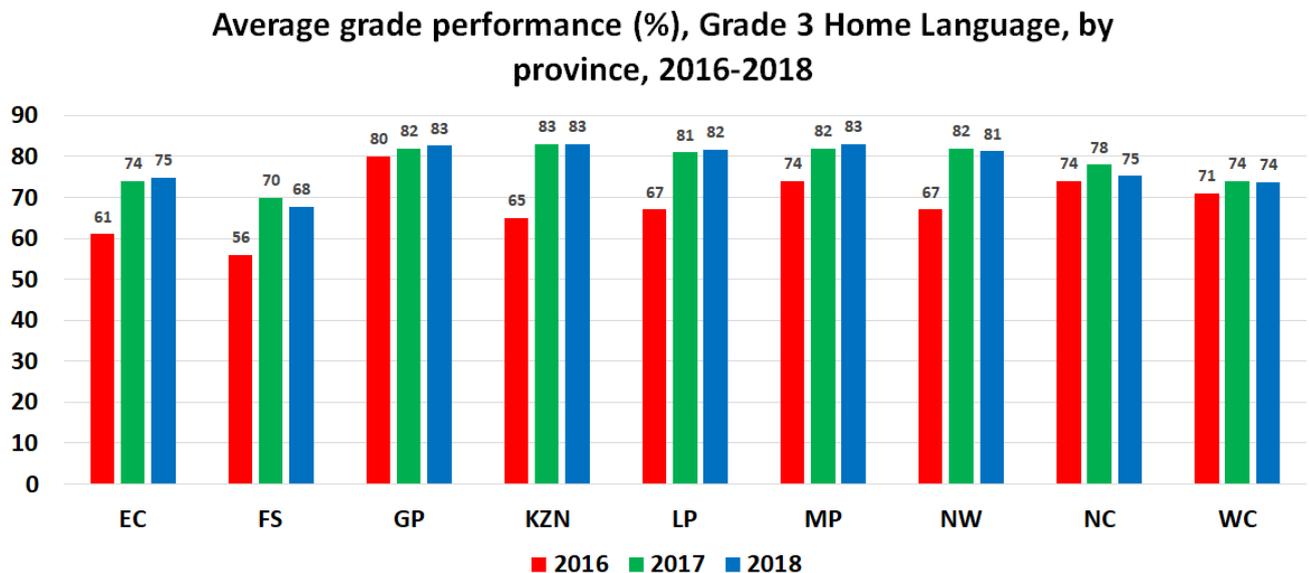
Province	Home Language				EFAL				Mathematics				Natural Sciences			
	2016	2017	2018	Ave.	2016	2017	2018	Ave.	2016	2017	2018	Ave.	2016	2017	2018	Ave.
EC	39,8	41,3	44,4	41.8	30,5	34,5	36,3	33.8	32,6	36,1	37,8	35.5	32,6	37,4	39,0	36.3
FS	18,6	29,2	33,9	27.2	11,7	28,8	38,3	26.2	15,2	27,9	37,3	26.8	11,9	21,0	20,5	17.8
GP	67,4	73,9	87,7	77.4	75,8	81,7	81,5	80.3	45,8	52,1	48,3	49.2	60,2	64,1	63,8	63.1
KZN	64,4	59,4	62,3	61.4	45,9	53,3	60,6	56.8	21,3	29,4	31,5	30.4	39,1	38,6	60,8	49.7
LP	54,7	53,7	61,1	56.5	45,2	43,5	49,9	46.2	22,0	28,2	28,0	26.0	31,1	39,0	65,5	45.2
MP	66,4	68,0	66,4	66.9	65,4	62,5	61,1	63.0	23,0	29,6	29,5	27.4	34,9	42,7	68,4	48.6
NW	52,2	54,9	59,1	55.4	52,3	53,3	53,4	53.0	24,6	31,7	33,8	30.0	35,5	36,0	63,1	44.9
NC	58,9	65,5	65,6	63.3	74,1	76,2	76,0	75.4	44,8	37,2	35,0	39.0	79,1	79,0	78,1	78.7
WC	71,1	75,1	75,1	73.8	78,8	80,9	81,1	80.2	47,5	49,1	46,6	47.7	55,4	55,1	52,9	54.5
SA	54,8	57,9	61,7	58.2	53,3	57,2	59,8	57.2	30,8	35,7	36,4	34.7	42,2	45,9	56,9	48.8

Source: Data provided by the DBE

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Attainment levels are lower in higher grades. Thus, for Grade 3 the average percentages across the three years are 75.3%, 79.2% and 81.3% for Home Language, EFAL and Mathematics respectively, average percentages for the same subjects for Grade 6 are 68.4%, 70.4% and 62.0%, and for Grade 9, 58.2%, 57.2% and 34.7%. The decline in Mathematics performance is particularly large: from 81.3% in Grade 3 to 62% in Grade 6 to 35% in Grade 9. The psychological impact of so large a decline in learner performance over a seven-year period must be devastating for many learners.

The trend for Grade 3 and to some extent for Grade 6 is that there was a large improvement from 2016 to 2017 particularly in the five provinces (EC, KZN, LP, MP and NW) in which the NECT initially rolled out its interventions, with percentages either increasing marginally or plateauing from 2017 to 2018. Whether the improvements from 2016 to 2017 are attributable to the interventions of the NECT or to some other factor(s), however, is purely speculative in the absence of hard evidence – in the form of demonstrable associations between school performance and NECT training of teachers in a particular school. The chart below shows the dramatic increases between 2016 and 2017 (from red to green bars) in Grade 3 Home Language in most provinces.



Source: Authors' calculations from DBE data

Figure 22: Average grade performance (%), Grade 3 Home Language, by province, 2016-2018

The increases between 2016 and 2017 are possibly due to the interventions of the NECT.

#### 4.2.7.5. Learner performance: Self-reported versus DBE-reported

While it is not strictly valid to compare self-reported learner performance with DBE-reported learner performance because the NECT Schooling Survey data presented above are not representative, a comparison of the Grade 12 self-reported data with National Senior Certificate (NSC) data as found in the DBE's *National Senior Certificate 2020 Diagnostic Report Part 1: Content Subjects* (DBE, 2021a)

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and *National Senior Certificate 2020 Diagnostic Report Part 2: Languages* (DBE, 2021b) is instructive. Table 14 shows the comparison.

*Table 14: Comparison of self-reported and DBE-reported learner performance data for Grade 12, selected subjects, 2020*

% range	DBE data			Self-reported data		
	Mathematics	Physical Science	EFAL	Mathematics	Physical Science	EFAL
<30%	46.2	34.2	0.7	20.2	15.1	1.3
30%-49%	31.4	39.5	32.5	42.2	40.9	21.3
50%-59%	9.2	11.0	32.8	22.7	28.3	41.9
≥60%	13.2	15.3	33.9	14.9	15.7	35.5

Source: NECT Schooling Survey and DBE (2021a; 2021b)

As might be expected, the self-reported performance data are higher for each of the three subjects than are the DBE data. Nearly four in five learners achieved under 50% for Mathematics in the DBE data, while only three-fifths achieved under 50% in the self-reported data. The corollary is that while only 22.4% of learners in the DBE data achieved over 50% for Mathematics, 37.6% in the self-reported data did so. Similar differences obtain in a comparison of the other two subjects. But whichever data one looks at, the results for Mathematics and Physical Science are extremely poor, suggesting that more dramatic interventions will be needed if the NECT commitment “to ensuring a South Africa where 90% of learners pass mathematics, science and languages with at least 50% by 2030” is to be achieved.

While the data on learning outcomes presented in this section paint a mixed picture of learner performance, they provide certain pointers to understanding aspects of the complexity of the context in which NECT has delivered Programme 1: From the NECT Schooling Survey we saw, despite the non-random nature of the survey, that half the learner respondents indicated that they had achieved less than 50% for Mathematics and Physical Science in 2020 – the percentage achieving less than 50% for Mathematics increasing the higher the grade. These rates, though self-reported, were consistent with the DBE performance data. This is a worrying finding, but its links to the range of NECT support to the teaching of Mathematics cannot be established. Intensive assistance has been provided to Mathematics teachers and learners over the years of the NECT initiative, but the depth of need, indicated by learners, underlines how much more support is needed.

Some further indication of the extent of need for support to the teaching of mathematics emerges from the survey. This provides contradictory evidence on easiest versus most difficult subject. Mathematics emerges as the third-easiest subject (22% of learners indicated this) after EFAL (34%) and Home Language (29%) but as the most difficult subject by 39 percentage points (61%), followed by Physical Science (20%).

4.2.7.6. *Conclusions*

These data suggest that individual teachers should be provided with the basic training required to understand and manage the many psychosocial issues that prevail in particular forms in quintile 1 and 2 schools, including: household poverty; how to refer special needs learners; bullying or marginalisation of learners; learner transfers to other schools; school-related gender-based violence; and teenage pregnancies. While teachers cannot be expected to offer the services of a professional counsellor or social worker, they should have professional training and support to identify issues, and to provide empathetic initial support. Serious cases require referral to the relevant professionals at district level or outside of the DBE.

Learner support and wellbeing was a key theme in the ECF, and has been a focus in specific phases of NECT work. The format of a complex organisation means NECT may be particularly well placed in times of crisis, such as COVID-19, to respond to these needs. But these needs are long-term and the ‘core business’ of NECT building the professional skills of teachers and support for their work in these areas needs careful and considered planning.

**4.2.8. Systemic intervention at district level**

In rolling out the DIP the NECT intervention has included coordination, participation, and partnership across structures at the district level and building on and investing in capacity at all levels. Where policies are decentralised, subnational systems with locally articulated governance structures and coordinated strategies are seen as playing a central role, together with their alignment with national efforts.

The NDP itself stresses the links between education, opportunities and employment, with particular emphasis on the notion of building capabilities across the system.

Data collected from field visits to quintile one and two schools in six provinces illustrated how other systemic challenges such as poverty, inequality, migrancy and violence intersect with education. These also emerged in the DBE’s project to determine readiness of schools to re-open after the initial Level 5 lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic. Managed by NECT, the project highlighted the stark differences in capacity and resources of Quintile 1 and 2 schools in comparison with those in Quintile 3, 4 or 5. NECT computed a “Readiness Index” in respect of a range of criteria (including structural factors such as the availability of running water, and the level of health and sanitation) that determined the readiness of schools to open (Figure 23). On average, the project’s surveys rated Q1 and Q2 schools at levels (scoring 0,5 to 0,7 out of 1,0) substantially below schools in the Q3, Q4 and Q5 categories (0,6 to 0,9).

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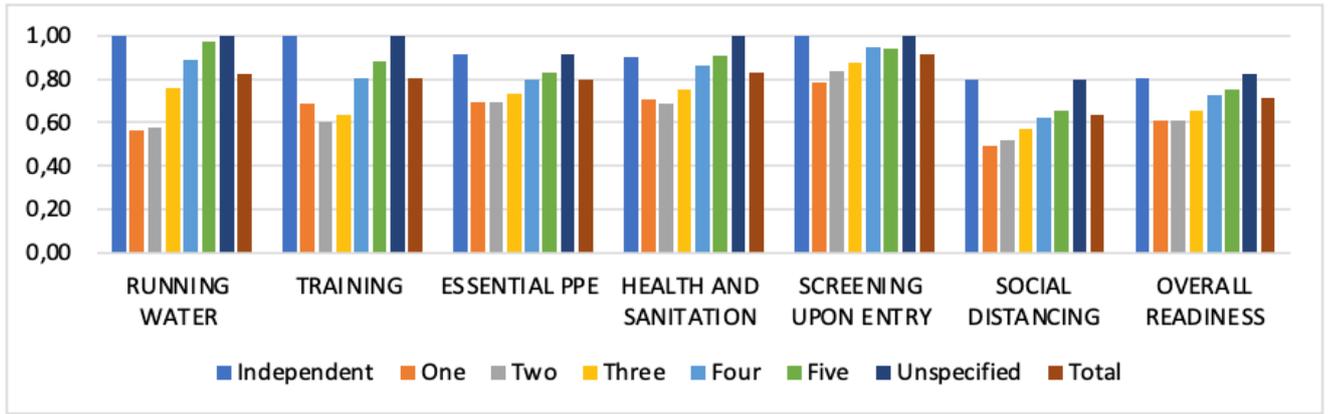
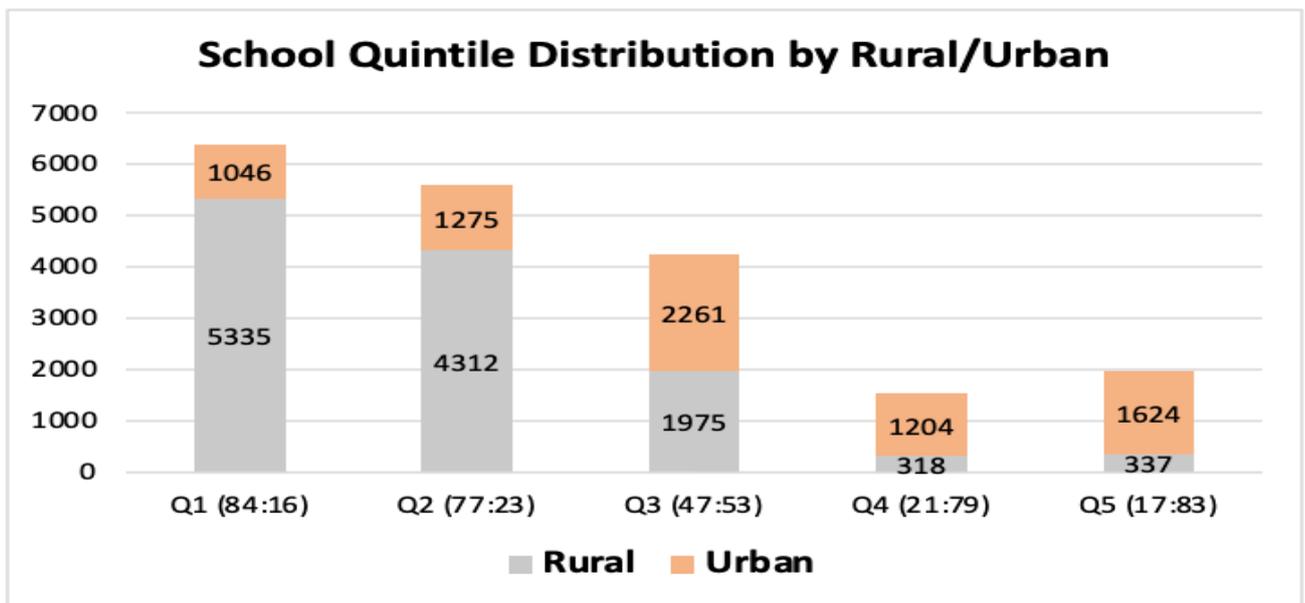


Figure 23: Readiness of schools to open amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

Nationwide data on the distribution of schools show that most rural schools (79%) are either Q1 or Q2, and vice-versa, most Q1 and Q2 schools (81%) are situated in rural localities (see Figure 24). This clearly reinforces the rationality of NECT’s programme foci on poorly resourced, rural schools. Qualitatively illustrative of the urban-rural divide, a science and technology teacher at a school in NW told the evaluation team, “in NW we have to use our own equipment. Other provinces have better textbooks. Gauteng is much better equipped and resourced. Teachers are better paid in other provinces (FGD, NW-SS). Similarly, an HSRC researcher noted that only one classroom block had been added to a primary school in Limpopo since its construction in the 1960s. He wrote, “that the majority of the physical structures are in dire need of repair, and they suffer from challenges such as leaking roofs during the rainy season, and extreme heat or cold conditions during the summer and winter respectively. Ablution facilities are far away from the classrooms; but quite clean and impressive (Eco Toilets)”.



Note: Data includes the 19,687 schools for which the relevant information could be obtained.

Figure 24: School quintile distribution by geographical location (rural / urban)

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During the data collection process many respondents stressed the need for major transformational initiatives such as the DIP to be positioned more strategically within the complex systemic realities of South Africa – not just to address education challenges but the epiphenomena that impact for example on interventions such as courageous leadership, teacher professionalisation, and learner improvement – issues such as chronic poverty, dysfunctional families, gender-based violence, substance abuse, lack of documentation, and corruption.

In response to some of these conditions the DSCs were established. These serve as education enablers through the creation of partnership forums with vested interests in the contextualised nature of individual education districts. It was notable from the evaluation field visits to six provinces just how important the DSC structures are in informing the focus of school improvement programmes. In establishing the DSCs and other initiatives at district level over the past six years the NECT has mobilised education specialists and coaches / mentors to work closely with their official counterparts to identify challenges and facilitate the improvement of district, circuit and school level planning, systems, skills and the work-culture of all DBE staff at the district level. The NECT has conceptualised and facilitated multi-stakeholder structures to encourage joint cross-sectoral efforts to establish enabling and sustainable conditions for education improvement.

The evaluation has set out to assess the relevance and effectiveness of relationships and partnerships between stakeholders at the district implementation level. The field visits to six provinces enabled the evaluators to view a range of relationships and partnerships and their effect on the quality of leadership, management and teaching and learning at schools. The key relationships and interactions that were observed were the nexus of interactions between NECT provincial coordinators, district and circuit managers, subject advisors, school principals, school management teams (SMTs), school governing bodies (SGBs) school principals and other stakeholders. The NECT Schooling Survey showed that districts and schools have been involved in an impressive range of partnerships with community structures, other government departments, businesses, NGOs and FBOs aimed at improving education outcomes.

Noteworthy, however, was the fact that NECT was rarely mentioned in responses from participants. This may suggest that the NECT profile needs to be elevated in provinces and they may also need to be seen as part of the DBE implementation structures.

The evaluators observed several relationships and partnerships that appeared to work well. There was evidence of some collaboration with other stakeholders in districts, including partnerships between mines, universities, and schools to improve the quality of teaching (NW and NC). In addition, efforts have been made to bring partners together through meetings with unions (EC). There were also events such as stakeholder meetings, coordinated by the District Director, to bring representatives from different constituencies together to discuss strategies for overcoming local challenges (EC).

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There was evidence of constructive partnerships with unions to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Unions played a positive role in improving the quality of teaching and learning through working together with state and non-state actors to provide equipment such as laptops and tablets (EC) as well as training (NC), which included classroom management and leadership. There were also other events organised by Unions such as workshops to facilitate the professional development of teachers (KZN). It was noted that while the NECT plays a role in the professional development of teachers through their presence at workshops, Union interventions have also promoted good relations with teachers and circuit officials (LP). Union members highlighted their important role in facilitating good communications between district officials and members. (NC). Another respondent felt that the role of unions is an essential one in terms of providing key information about the school, so that informed decisions can be made by district officials (NW). Unions also assist teachers who face difficulties when they are faced with a suspension. In addition, a respondent felt that communications between the school and DBE officials are more effective if communications are initially channelled through the unions (EC). The Circuit Managers work closely with the unions to ensure any issues which affect educators are openly discussed and speedy resolutions are found. It is apparent that the unions have become allies of both the school administration as well as government, playing a very positive and supportive role in the learning environment. A clear demarcation of roles between the unions (shop stewards) and many SGBs has also helped strengthen the relationship between teacher unions, educators and SGBs, and this has created a very beneficial working relationship.

The NECT envisaged that DSCs would be the facilitators of local-level collaboration between education stakeholders. Each DSC is expected to monitor the implementation of the district improvement plan (DIP) and bring local communities and relevant structures into education and education decisions. At the same time, they are to help the district education office solve community-based challenges that it may be facing. DSC members who were interviewed indicated that the DSCs have been functioning well within the districts (KZN & LP) and that they were working collaboratively with district education offices. Some respondents from DSCs indicated that they did have some form of relationship and interaction with District Directors and circuit officials. Another respondent felt that having the circuit managers participating in the DSC facilitated communication and improved coordination between officials and the DSC (LP).

School governing body members felt that relationships with district and circuit officials were generally good. Some respondents qualified their answers by noting that education officials visit schools and are willing to assist with addressing challenges at schools (KZN). There is a very positive relationships between school principals and the SGBs, with the latter playing a very key support role towards the administration and smooth running of both primary and secondary schools. In most schools, the role of the SGB has been clearly defined and not left to interpretation and this has given members clarity of vision, aims and set objectives as SGBs. SGBs perform very critical functions, ranging from disciplinary enforcement bodies to audit and accountability of school resources. Other respondents felt that the relationship could be improved through a more

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professional approach to interactions with officials and by ensuring regular interactions (EC), while another respondent noted that not all services were available in the closest town to their school (KZN). For example, teachers are required to travel to the district office for issues relating to curriculum consultations.

Mixed views were expressed on relationships with district and circuit officials. It appeared that there was some frustration with role limitations as subject advisors. For example, subject advisors are not able to exercise any kind of control over absent teachers, as this is the role of the circuit manager. It was felt, however, that circuit managers often do not exercise discipline when required to deal with teacher absenteeism. (NW). Respondents in general felt that their relations district and circuit officials were good. A subject advisor from the Eastern Cape highlighted the good communication with DBE officials, who ensured that he was connected with the relevant person from NECT for support. A subject advisor from the Eastern Cape reported that there were good interactions with provincial and district officials when workshops were called to discuss curriculum delivery, analyse exam papers and the setting of papers. Inviting officials to these events promoted good relations with them.

Respondents felt that the relationship between district officials and principals was good. There were good lines of communication, and the approach is learner centred, which aligns well with the district approach. District Directors felt that the relationship that they have with principals is generally good. They described open cordial relationships and good channels of communication. However, the Northern Cape respondent remarked that the relationship was poor but was being worked on.

The evaluation field work identified a number of key challenges. Perhaps the key challenge mentioned most frequently in terms of facilitating collaboration between key partners to improve the quality of teaching and learning was a chronic shortage of resources. This includes time allocated for training (NC) as well as a shortage of teachers resulting in more subjects than teachers available to teach (KZN, union representative). Another issue that has affected collaboration and the development of partnerships has been restrictions in place on public gatherings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has limited stakeholder engagements. This issue was highlighted by a subject advisor from the North West and a union representative from Limpopo. Another issue raised was poor coordination between the national department and the provincial department of education. This resulted in the supply of textbooks to the provincial office without arrangements being made for the delivery of the books to schools and then subject advisors having to deliver books to schools using their own resources (NW). Poor coordination has also resulted in poor timing of training for teachers, which occurred during term time (NW). It was reported that there are some restrictions placed on DSC members, including the need for authorisation from the circuit manager to visit schools and moves to develop identity cards to enable DSC members to visit schools (NW). Most principals appear to have a healthy working relationship with their staff members. However, various factors including power relations, group dynamics and sometimes a general lack

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of motivation at individual level present a real challenge to building a coherent and cohesive team of teachers.

A lack of awareness of the role and functions of NECT was also highlighted by a subject advisor in the Eastern Cape which resulted in tensions between NECT and local provincial officials. A DSC member felt that there was some conflict between the DSC and district officials because of NECT's role in addressing problems at schools. There was a perception that many of the NECT interventions were supposed to be the role or function of the department and not the NECT (EC SGB). The interference of politics was another aspect raised by an SGB, which felt that political appointments made within the DBE were not conducive to relationship-building. Lengthy delays in responding to school challenges and problems as a result of department red tape was cited as a problem for constructive relationship between schools and district officials (KZN SGB). There is no evidence to suggest that these difficulties are generalisable to all NECT-district relationships.

The model of collaboration envisaged by the ECF and operationalised by the NECT has been geared to replication, scale up and embeddedness within the education system as a vehicle for transformation. In interviews with the NECT management and with other partners the emphasis on a "universalisation" approach has been aimed at ensuring that programming results in systemic change that is both viable in the demanding conditions of education in South Africa as well as sustainable. The NECT's longer term goal is to support the DBE in the process of replicating and institutionalising these transformational innovations nationally.

The education sector has been characterised both pre- and post-1994 by the often-antagonistic relationship between government and the teacher unions. Much of this confrontational relationship has been driven by narrow political and socio-cultural agendas. From the outset the NECT committed itself to bringing all South Africa's teachers unions (SADTU, NAPTOSA, SAOU, NATU, and PEU) into its collaboration model – recognising the diversity of voice while aiming to build consensus and joint action. A key area of NECT partnership emphasis has been around encouraging union involvement in their teacher professionalisation programming by ensuring that unions have been consulted and their interests and concerns are reflected in implementation approaches. Over the past six years there is clear evidence that the NECT has consistently engaged with teachers' union leadership at national, provincial and district levels as well as with the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) and with the professional development institutes of the different unions. There was some evidence in the field, however, that local union leadership had not been on board with certain NECT interventions and had actively intervened to prevent schools from implementing initiatives such as the curriculum tracker.

A conclusion from these examples points to the way the transformation of education in South Africa requires not only strong collaboration within the education sector but also strong horizontal collaboration with other key sectors and role-players as initiated through the DSCs. The complex organisational form of the NECT working in relation to institutional and non-institutional factors may give a particular purchase on these relationships. But engagements need to be strategically

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thought through, and a range of monitoring and evaluation data at district level needs to be kept under review in order to plan well and sustain change.

The evaluation has found that improvement is required in the coordination and integration of systems that deliver education with other services provided for school population. The DBE, unions and private sector partners have been natural partners in addressing key education performance challenges; services delivered by other sectors including health, social protection, sanitation, home affairs and safety and security are equally critical elements of holistic education improvement. . Collaboration across sectors is important not only to align support and facilitate implementation of one programme, but also to facilitate coordination across different policies, programmes and actions that the different sectors may be undertaking. The more integrated services are, the stronger the intersectoral collaboration will be required.

In terms of its collaboration model the NECT may in future look to broaden its scope in order to advocate for more coherent district-wide inter-sectoral goals and policies that facilitate the kinds of collaborative working relationships that can more effectively address the systemic threats posed to the work that the NECT is doing. D. Such an approach could be premised on some of the following considerations:

- The socio-cultural and geographic connectedness of schools or teachers making up a subsystem
- Recognising and addressing the intersecting challenges and divisions of gender inequality, social exclusion and vulnerability
- Leveraging an ecological systemic change thinking approach that views systemic change as an outcome of change at the individual, community, and organisational levels
- Emphasising the roles that national-level and district-level agencies play in supporting local schools and their teaching and learning environments
- Recognising that multi-layered and integrated systems are made up of supra-systems and networks of relationships and responsibilities that may impact on the ability of districts and schools to sustain change management processes
- Taking a function-structure lens, which highlights the connectedness of inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes
- Emphasising the importance of system goals (strategic functions) and how the key mechanisms of the system are used to attain those goals, and the specific subsystems (or components) that are used to carry out those functions; and
- Recognising that while schools, and their teaching and learning processes, are embedded in their local micro-milieu, they are equally situated within broader economic, social and political dynamics.

**4.2.9. Scaling up or scaling with**

*4.2.9.1. Technical and political considerations in the scaling up of interventions*

Excerpts from the CEO’s report to the NECT Board of Trustees in April 2017 elucidate the approach taken to the scaling up of NECT interventions:

Scale ups are a practical demonstration of an exit strategy – taking what works and leaving it to the provincial and national systems to implement albeit with some form of support to address the force of inertia. However, note must be made of the fact that there are tests and trials that are still in the pipeline. These will be continued with until such time that such trials are graduated or discontinued following the necessary monitoring and evaluation (CEO report to Board, April 2017, p.4).

At that juncture, it was also reported that

The footprint of the NECT has further extended from the 40 districts reported at the November Board meeting to over 50 (62,5%) of the 86 districts. The greatest proportion of these districts are benefitting from the reading programme. While the NECT champions interventions that are sufficiently deep and thus have high impact and sustainability potential, the expansion of the learning programmes to all the schools in the target districts and the reading programme to all the provinces has contributed a great deal to improving national awareness of the work of the NECT and developing a national discourse about learning improvement (CEO report to Board, April 2017, p.5).

Although NECT interventions were at an earlier stage in Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal at the time, in the case of the Eastern Cape, the DoE was keen to expand the programme to all schools. As from Term 2 in 2017, the NECT and the ECDoE thus proceeded to roll out the programme in 60 schools per term in each of the 20 districts that were not yet involved in the NECT programme. This was envisaged as the first phase of an incremental process, as detailed in Table 15.

*Table 15: Proposed introduction of learning programme: 2017-18*

	<b>Term 2 (2017)</b>	<b>Term 3 (2017)</b>	<b>Term 4 (2017)</b>	<b>Term 1 (2018)</b>
First district cohort (Libode, Mount Frere, Butterworth)	All schools	All schools	All schools	All schools
2017 provincialisation trials	60 schools / district			
2018 full scale provincialisation	None	None	None	All schools

*Source: CEO report to Board, April 2017*

Ultimately the scaling-up that has taken place, in the words of NECT management, “has not been a technical process”. Their view is that it continues to constitute a dynamic “political” process –

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“political with a small ‘p’” – which involves cajoling, negotiation, and the pedalling of ideas in order to enhance or kick-start improvements in specific provinces or particular districts where specific needs have been identified. An example is the PSRIP, which was up-scaled on the basis of the practical consideration that English as Second Additional Language attracted the largest level of interest and funding. Conversely, Mathematics teaching is being scaled up at a much slower pace owing to less funding interest and leadership in that area – but also, as the analysis of learner performance in Mathematics in section 4.2.7 on learner outcomes has shown, because even ‘political’ considerations could not warrant the scaling up of Mathematics in the face of extremely poor learner results in this subject.

A range of views have been expressed on scaling up and these entail different perspectives on supporting government capacity to deliver. On the one hand there is a view about embedding reform successfully in a few sites in order to learn how processes work well, and then scaling up on the basis of what is known from those initiatives, taking account of the complexities of local and national contexts and appropriately building the capacity of government capacity to deliver. This is the view articulated, for example, in the Brookings Institution publication “Millions learning” (Robinson, Winthrop & McGivney, 2016). The NECT management view has been that past experience in programme work (DDSP, QLP, IEP, Khanyisa) shows that it is difficult to say with certainty that embedding has been achieved. In NECT work, scaling up was justified on demand and impact on quantity of learning (curriculum coverage). This approach shaped the movement from initial FSSs to universalisation and provincialisation. Universalisation was undertaken in schools where there was high demand for interventions and where there was a need to work on multiple levels with districts and circuit administration. Provincialisation was undertaken where interventions from NECT were deemed as ‘low dose’ and where the major work was to be done by the province. This is a differentiated approach to scaling up. The data present a mixed picture regarding how this approach has played out.

The evaluation has uncovered how the complex relationships concerning educational improvement at every scale pose challenges for the NECT as an organisation in how to operate in key processes such as scaling up, building relationships at district level with a raft of stakeholders, and enhancing the capacity of the state to deliver. The differentiated approach to scaling up developed by NECT may well be appropriate to the wide range of needs at district and system level. What is required does seem a matter of supplementing the inherited “complicated” governance system, which works at district and provincial level, with design principles explicitly oriented to working with complexity, possibly terming this ‘scaling with’. Such a process would entail a reworking of the theory of change for the DIP, and some expansion of how M&E information is used. Formulating some particularly agreed-on boundaries, for example on what level of psychosocial support for learners lies within the purview of teachers and NECT’s work with teachers, would be useful. Reviewing leverage points, for example where and how provincialisation and universalisation are not only introduced but reviewed and recalibrated and the how the information to achieve this is synthesised, appears key in developing an approach to ‘scaling with’ that accommodates the complexity of the education system.

#### 4.2.10 Conclusion

The District Improvement Programme was initially implemented in eight school districts in five provinces with some level of success. These pilots were subsequently rolled out and the data point to success in work with teachers with regard to training, which is highly valued by those who participated, and wide use made of materials, which have been widely distributed. The work with principals on leaderships is also commended by those who participated. Partnerships in districts with a range of stakeholders to support these initiatives have also played a useful part. A longer-term objective is to see these district level interventions institutionalised across all nine provinces. This process is ongoing. The gains, we have noted, suggest that Programme 1 has the potential to systemically strengthen the capacity of school districts to streamline and improve school performance across the education system in South Africa.

A key evaluation question was “Has government’s programme of education district development benefitted from engagement with the NECT?” The DIP needs to be seen in the broader context of the state’s efforts since 1994 to strengthen the capacity of government to manage and deliver basic services, including education. While education is a provincial competence, it is districts (and through them circuits) that are responsible for teaching and learning in schools. At the same time, schools are located within municipalities – and where these are dysfunctional, this has an impact on the functioning of the schools within their geographical area as a range of issues that are municipal competences – water services, sanitation, spatial planning, electricity supply, approval of plans, environmental health, and others – will affect the socio-economic conditions of learners and their families. In this regard, the government’s latest District Development Model may offer some hope of improvement. The data show how the complex form of NECT as an organisation interacts with both institutional and non institutional processes at district level, highlighting a range of processes to be kept under review in planning future initiatives.

The efforts of the NECT to improve the quality of the provision of education in districts, which has been one of the most problematic areas for the national DBE and its provincial counterparts, appears to be achieving some success in strengthening local-level education delivery. The inclusion in the NECT Schooling Survey of nine stakeholder categories, ranging from district directors and circuit managers to subject advisors, SGBs, principals, SMTs, teachers, learners and parents of learners, all of whom have been exposed in one way or another and to some degree or other to the NECT initiative, is testimony to the reach of NECT interventions at various levels (district, circuit, school, and community) and on a broad array of stakeholders. NECT has undeniably breathed new life into the education sector; whether its approaches and interventions are embedded in all schools and whether they are sustainable in the long run remains to be seen.

The NECT initiative is premised on a collaboration model, recognising that with so many stakeholders in the sector – only nine of whom were canvassed in the NECT Schooling Survey – there can be no progress without partnerships. One of the key lessons to be learned from the initiatives

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of the NECT to build the capacity of the state (another key evaluation question), therefore, is precisely the NECT's modelling, for the DBE, of its approach to collaborations and partnerships. Much of the NECT's success has been achieved through deliberative partnership building and a strategy of building partnerships that is intended to remain beyond the catalytic role that the NECT plays in building these collaborative efforts.

Nowhere are partnerships more important, arguably, than at the coalface – in schools and classrooms, between the governors (the SGB) and the managers (the principal and the SMT), between the managers and the teaching and support staff, and between teachers and learners. A partnership model that stops at the gates of the school defeats the very object of education – to give learners the best possible start in life by maximising their learning.

Much of the data for the evaluation of Programme 1 has focused on schools, and in particular on principals, teachers and learners. From the responses of teachers to the NECT Schooling Survey it is clear that those teachers who participated in such programmes were highly complimentary about them, seeing them as important for improving their teaching skills and confirming their ability to use in the classroom the skills they acquired in these programmes.

The extent of teacher participation in NECT training programmes may, however, be a concern were the findings of the NECT Schooling Survey be found to apply beyond those surveyed: only 50% of teacher respondents to the survey indicated that they had attended such programmes. This may be a function of when the teacher joined the school, as the training programme may have been offered some time before. However, the fact that the largest percentage (27.0%) of teacher respondents to the survey remembered having participated in a NECT-organised training programme in 2018, followed by 14.4% in 2017 and in 2019 and 10.8% in 2021, suggests that there may be other reasons for non-participation. The survey is not representative of all teachers in the country, and the level of responses may be due to the convenience nature of the survey, which meant some key respondents did not complete the survey because of its timing / period of administration, and the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another possibility is that teachers were trained by subject advisors in their districts and so had no direct contact with any of the service providers mentioned in the survey (Deloitte, PWC, PILO / Jika iMfundo, or EEC). Indeed, this is the model outlined by the Monitoring and Quality Assurance (MQA) unit of the NECT by way of explaining why the NECT did not have a database containing the contact details of teachers trained through its programmes.

In order to fully appreciate the reach of NECT training among teachers a repeat survey could be conducted, but this appears less urgent than continuing the highly valued work at district level with teachers and school communities.

The other key ingredient in school success and ultimately in successful learning outcomes is leadership – and in the context of a school, the principal. The timing of the NECT Schooling Survey – in the midst of a pandemic – unfortunately influenced principals' views about leadership – specifically, about a difficult decision facing them. The vast majority of decisions revolved around

the pandemic; and for the most part principals seemed unable to separate the COVID-19 phenomenon from their management of it. This response is on one level not unexpected, given that the arrival of the pandemic changed worldviews, inculcating a sense of a ‘new normal’ that somehow created a barrier with what preceded it. It would, however, have been useful to analyse a set of responses uncoloured by COVID.

The data from the survey and the school visits indicate principals valued the training. More followup with others who received training, such as HoDs, would be useful. NECT has a large resource of attendance data and contact details, and more detailed evaluation work and in-depth followup around leadership and its challenges would also be useful.

### **4.3. Programme 2: Systemic intervention**

The aim of Programme 2 on systemic intervention is to address key systemic challenges in the education system at a national level, and to strengthen the capacity of the state to deliver public services. As the NECT website expresses it, the Programme “aims to address key systemic challenges that are holding back the improvement of the education system or that risk reversing the gains already made ... [seeking to] further the NDP intent of strengthening the capacity of the state to deliver public services” (<https://nect.org.za/what-we-do>).

For the NECT the quality of its systemic intervention programmes depends on the extent to which the capacity built through pilot and local initiatives can be replicated in other locations and how much national (or subnational) support is needed for this to occur. Programme 2 reflects the importance of “quality at the systems levels” – systems being defined as the organisational and institutional structures responsible for specific areas of education services. For the NECT this “quality to implement” has been dependent on how much new interventions leverage existing services, to what extent these programmes were scalable to start off with, how clearly roles and responsibilities across levels and sectors are delineated, and whether capacity is being strengthened nationally as well as at district, community, and school levels.

#### **4.3.1 ICTs in education**

A major focus of Programme 2 has been on ICTs in education. The logic for the NECT’s Technology in Education initiatives is described in the following figure (NECT, 2019e):

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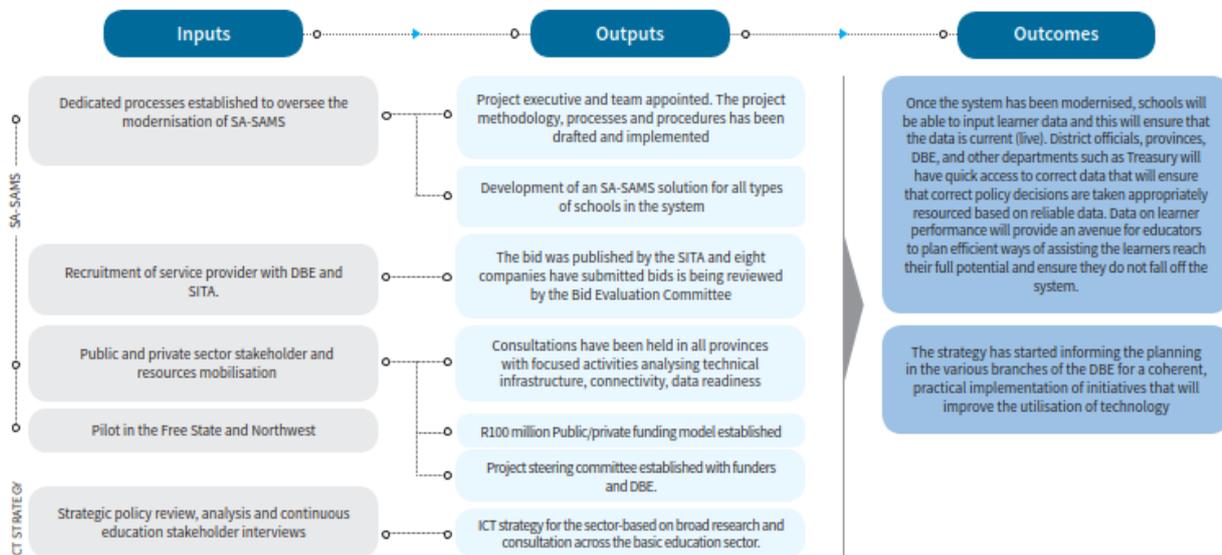


Figure 25: Technology in education

The interventions facilitated by the NECT are categorised into two core initiatives:

- Initiative 1: Ministerial Advisory Committee on ICTs
- Initiative 2: Modernisation of SA-School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS)

Initiative 1 has seen the NECT facilitate the formation of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on ICTs, which is constituted by private sector role-players and senior public sector officials. The purpose of the committee has been to support the development of an ICT strategy at the Department of Basic Education (DBE), provide technical oversight support to the DBE and to other education initiatives such as Operation Phakisa Education Lab, which is located in the Presidency. It is unclear the extent to which NECT's work on ICT in Education aligned with the initiatives implemented by Operation Phakisa.

Initiative 2 is aimed at providing technical support to e-administration at the DBE with a focus on SA-SAMS and the examinations system. The South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS), known internationally as the Student Information System, is designed for the South African Education Sector and is maintained by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), ensuring that it is aligned to education policies. It is freely provided to all schools, aiming to assist them with their own school administration and reporting. SA-SAMS provides the only electronic platform to ensure efficient and standardised policy implementation and reporting across all provinces. The system is able to save on resources for the sector by eliminating data duplication, since it is the source system to collect the National Senior Certificate (NSC) registration information.

Inequalities in education are starkly illustrated by the extent to which learners have access to ICT – the so-called “digital divide”. In the 2020 COVID-19 environment learners without or with limited access to laptops, Wi-Fi and mobile data were disadvantaged in relation to the current on-line

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learning environment. To improve access to and the use of ICT in basic education, the DBE has provided training to the following role players: provincial officials, subject advisors, teacher centre managers and e-learning specialists on ICT integration. This has been further complemented by ICT professional development for principals and teachers on how to integrate a Learning Management System into education. A total of R11 million has been allocated to the procurement and provision of the following:

- Offline e-Library solutions to 100 schools which will also serve as content access sites for Second Chance Centres, distribution of TV Broadcast Reception
- ICT equipment to 200 schools in Limpopo, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces
- The provision of e-Libraries to 500 schools; and
- The upgrading of the Thutong Education Portal.

For the NECT the use of technology in teaching and learning has a role that is removed from improving learner marks, and that has a broader impact in terms of preparing learners for participation in the knowledge economy. According to the NECT a strategic focus on systemic capacity is critical as it has implications throughout the education system. The NECT notes that “it affects strategy, policy, design and implementation of interventions, as well as the way in which success is defined and measured. It calls for a differentiated approach to ICT interventions in schools tailored to the readiness of individual schools for the uptake of ICTs” (NECT, 2016c).

The NECT and its partners recognised early on that an education system designed for the 4IR posed a complex, dialectical, and exciting opportunity for South Africa that could potentially transform society for the better – or leave it lagging in relation to other developing countries. The NDP had already noted that the education sector needed to be transformed completely to offer solutions to new challenges including the fact that “high speed broadband should be readily available and incorporated into the design of schools. This will enable greater use of technology in education and enhance the classroom experience for both teachers and students”. There was also recognition that digitally driven data and cloud-based solutions were no longer an option but a necessity for the education sector if it was to maintain and fine tune its information (e-administration) and learning (e-learning) systems. On entering the ICT in Education terrain, the NECT stated that it had no illusions about a quick fix and that they accepted that this was not a project with a finish date, but rather a journey looking at each element of the value chain and seeking to advance each of those elements on an ongoing basis (NECT, n.d.e.).

### *4.3.1.1. ICT initiatives for data collection and management*

The government’s Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) 2019-2024 (DPME, 2020) identifies the need to develop data capturing systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in Early Childhood Development (ECD) and indeed throughout the education system:

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Innovation is needed to develop underlying operational systems and data capturing systems, which can provide appropriate information for monitoring, planning and improvement. Such information is essential to identify quality problems in Grade RR, R and other parts of the system (DPME, 2020: 72).

Against this tacit admission that there are no proper operational and data capturing systems in place, it is claimed that “Higher education institutions generally have strong operational systems, which produce data that can be used to monitor and guide the sector” (DPME, 2020: 73). These statements underscore the need for interventions across the ECD, Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase of schooling to improve the collection, management and storage of data. The NECT’s support to the DBE in implementing the SA-SAMS programme is poised to make a major contribution to the achievement of this objective.

The support from the NECT has primarily focused on planning the modernisation and revamp of the school administration system, specifically around defining the SA-SAMS User Requirement Specification (URS) and upgrading the SA-SAMS technical architecture. Significant levels of private sector funding were channelled through the NECT to support this initiative. The expectation is that this will help improve the efficiency of the DBE’s core management information system and consequently the resource allocation to schools and districts. EMIS is the system for the collection, integration, processing, maintenance and dissemination of education sector data and information to support decision-making, policy-analysis and formulation, planning, monitoring and management at all levels of an education system. EMIS is a function and unit within the DBE with the responsibility for developing and maintaining an integrated education information system for management of education in South Africa through the acquisition, processing, dissemination, and reporting of quality aggregated education data.

The need for ICT modernisation within the education sector led to the NECT collaborating with the DBE to develop an ICT strategy. As part of this process the NECT, from 2017, facilitated the development of a Concept of Operations and User Requirement Specification for the modernisation of South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS), including the strengthening of functional school management and data warehousing<sup>1</sup>. SA-SAMS is a robust computer application specifically designed to meet the management, administrative and governance needs of public schools in Southern Africa. The programme has a strong EMIS focus to assist schools in the completion of the Annual School Survey. Many schools were using different management applications for different school functions; for example, schools were using a financial package to control the school finances, a separate timetabling package to do timetables and class

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<sup>1</sup> During the second and the third quarters of 2017, funding worth R100m (DBE confirmed R40m and the private sector – Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, FirstRand Empowerment Foundation and the ELMA Foundation – was committed for the development of a school administration and management system including rollout of the pilot in the North West and Free State provincial educational departments and a packaged solution delivered to the DBE for national rollout.

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lists were manually generated. This resulted in the same data input into three or more separate systems and all these systems needed to be updated every time a change occurred.

The purpose of the SA-SAMS modernisation has been to provide a free to use application for all schools to assist them with their own school administration and reporting and for the collection of unit level data. SA-SAMS now provides the only electronic platform for schools to ensure efficient and standardised policy implementation and reporting across all provinces. In 2018 a vendor was supposed to be appointed, but procurement issues created a lengthy delay. In 2019 the solution design and piloting protocols were completed in readiness for initial rollout in the pilot provinces of Free State and North West in 2020 and EMIS workshops were held with DBE, Free State and North West to review the functional and process mapping. In December 2019, a workshop was held with all nine provinces hosted by the DBE EMIS Sub-HEDCOM. In mid-2021 the SA-SAMS version 21.1.1 was released and included the 2021 Curriculum settings, differing from previous years as it was developed in complete collaboration with relevant Policy Owners which include Curriculum, and Examination Assessment. The change of methodology in releasing SA-SAMS version 21.1.1 originated from the demand of correct and up-to-date data that could be sourced using the SA-SAMS.

In support of assisting the DBE to realise the efforts of implementing leading practices in ICT for the effective delivery and enabling of education and learning, the SA-SAMS Project Management Office (PMO) led the NECT initiated process resulting in the establishment of the Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) at DBE. The CIO commenced duties in September 2019 with the responsibility for establishing a national PMO to support provinces in IT Services Management, Data Warehousing and Analytic functions, and to optimally support project management and ICT operations. The value of the SA-SAMS modernisation process is to provide schools with a cost effective, easy to use and fully integrated computer solution containing all aspects of school management requirements. It also incorporates a Timetabling Assistant to assist the schools with the complicated task of allocating educators to subjects to classes. The user interface is specifically adapted to cater for non-computer literate users. A button interface and user prompting mechanism is used as opposed to more complicated menu structures. The Learner Unit Record Information and Tracking System (LURITS) collects record data for each learner in South Africa, from Grade R through to Grade 12. LURITS is required by all South African schools, apart from those on the Western Cape, every quarter. SA-SAMS has been made available to all schools free of charge so that every school can submit the data in the correct format to the departments that then submit quarterly to LURITS.

The disruption to schooling in 2020 emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated amendments to Section 4 of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) resulted in the revision of the Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) and Programmes of Assessment (POAs) across all grades and all subjects for both 2020 and 2021. One of the most significant additions to the Programme of Assessment (PoA), in 2021, is the inclusion of fixed weightings for all assessment

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tasks that are administered, and this will ensure consistency in the computation of SBA marks across the various schools. This led to the need for major amendments to the South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS) programme for 2021. These amendments have a direct impact on the capturing of marks and the calculation of the School Based Assessment (SBA) marks for all learners, as well as the quarterly reporting of the learner assessment results.

A significant amount of work has been done by the NECT in collaboration with the DBE, but the modernized SA-SAMS has yet to be delivered. The DBE has expressed disappointment at the delays and by the fact that the delivery deadline has been moved to 2023. The DBE is anxious for the updated SA-SAMS to be operationalised as they can't get data quickly enough and currently schools are not able to visualize their own data. The DBE also has concerns about the capacity of schools to use the application once it is up and running and feel that a whole change management process will need to be put in place to ensure that the system works as it is intended to. As yet the use of SA-SAMS is not mandatory so the capturing and onward transmission of data from schools remains a challenge. In this case it appears that the NECT has not been able to circumvent government tendering and procurement processes, and this has in part been the reason for the lengthy delays.

Additional points made by NECT in response to this account of SA-SAMS are the following:

1. The modernisation of SA-SAMS is a strategic initiative with national importance due to its reach and the critical value of a reliable and fit-for-purpose system in the short term and the long run. The 'upgrade of SA-SAMS' was first initiated in 2008 and the DBE's first version of the business case for modernisation was only completed in 2010. It was not until 2015 that the modernisation reached its next milestone, with the support of external donors. After these lengthy delays, the DBE then approached NECT to assist in 2017.
2. Through the involvement of government and NECT, the project leveraged external support from major donors, which reflected a willingness to strengthen the data-driven functions of the system. Despite the level of support and the urgency to get the project implemented, the NECT was required to observe all the requirements of working through the State Information Technology Agency (SITA) and the stringent controls of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA). In terms of governance, these must be complied with.
3. When the second attempt at finding service providers indicated major risks, NECT's Trustees took the decision to cancel the supply chain management process as a risk avoidance strategy. By contrast, various government departments have ended up in protracted litigation with service providers. To reach that point required two years of continual effort by the PMO. In 2020, an agreement was struck with UNESCO to find an alternative solution; in 2021 the first version of the solution was trialled, and implementation is now scheduled for 2023. This is the reality of working within the public sector.

#### **4.3.2 Conclusion: Systemic intervention**

The work on Programme 2 illuminates the complex organisational form of NECT interfacing with the complicated organisational structure of the South African education system in two different ways. At district level NECT has helped bring together a range of stakeholders to support school improvement and the workings of the institutionalised education system. These are important initiatives that need strengthening and sustaining. At national level the NECT has worked on policy development with regard to ICT in education and has been a major player in helping to leverage delivery on the SA-SAMS programme. The latter is a key systemic intervention, and the NECT has been an important player in helping to bring this project to completion.

#### **4.4. Programme 3: Innovation programme**

The aims of Programme 3, according to the NECT website, are “to initiate programmes and set up channels that will promote new thinking, approaches and programmes aimed at improving the quality of learning and teaching and the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system” (<https://nect.org.za/what-we-do>). Once innovations have been identified and tested – shown to be effective with the potential to enhance the overall performance of the system – they are replicated and institutionalised.

The key innovation discussed in the sub-section that follows is the Edhub initiative.

A number of other learning initiatives are mentioned on the NECT website, but were not included in the ToR for this evaluation. We describe these briefly to give the full range of NECT concerns with innovation.

The national examination system and the school referral system and policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) are listed on the NECT website as two of the three components constituting learning initiatives. The school referral system appears to be synonymous with the provision of psychosocial support to learners – which given its importance as an issue of growing concern in schools, was addressed under the rubric “Learner support and wellbeing” in the account of Programme 1 above.

A review of the examination system is mentioned in the 2013/14 Annual Report (NECT, 2014 ) – “Initiative 1: Case study on the improvement of examination system – the NECT initiated a review of the improvements made in the operation of examinations function of the education system.” The project was completed in 2015 and reported on in the 2015 Annual Report:

The technical report produced is being used by the DBE’s examination and assessment division to improve planning. Treasury’s technical advisory centre (G-TAC) is repackaging the report into an easily accessible public document for much wider dissemination. The report

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reveals useful insights into public service improvement and contributes towards building a culture of learning in the DBE (NECT, 2015 : 16-17).

The third learning initiative is DSCs, which was also discussed under Programme 1 – District Improvement Programme.

### **4.4.1. EdHub innovation**

The Media in Education Trust's (MIET's) Technical Report on Innovation in Education (2016) was commissioned by the NECT, the Global Education Leaders' Partnership, and the FirstRand Empowerment Foundation to look at innovative and sustainable ways in which South African learners could be better equipped to compete and succeed in a rapidly changing world through gearing the entire education system towards "21st century learning" (Van der Elst, 2016). Based on their understanding of how innovation could best be integrated into the basic education system, the NECT looked to develop cross-sectoral partnerships that would provide platforms for facilitating both collaboration between key stakeholders in education as well as promoting innovation across the education sector.

One of the primary interventions of the NECT has been the establishment of the EdHub as a dedicated innovation unit with the mandate as an education incubator to promote, design and drive innovation for 21st century education. The Ed-Innovation Portfolio provides support to a portfolio of selected innovative education solutions that challenge the boundaries of current educational provision, whether in technology, teaching methods or learning practices. The NECT has consistently articulated a perspective on the future of teaching and learning which involves nurturing a set of competencies, pedagogies, environments, assessments, and mindsets that should be part of lifelong learning, supported by evolving technologies.

The flagship project of the NECT's EdHub has been the Sandbox Schools Project. The focus of this project has been to explore and drive the transformation agenda in education and to assist the sector in responding to the ever-changing demands of a rapidly changing, technology driven global context. Through the implementation of this project, a body of evidence will be gathered to assist in proving the case for the integration of 21st Century teaching and learning practices into the South African public schooling system. A notable aspect of this work has been the NECT's efforts to undertake research on global and local trends in innovation in education, and then to contextualise it through experimental interventions tailored to the socio-economic realities of South Africa's schools.

The Sandbox project is being supported through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) by three global partners: the Centre for Curriculum Redesign (USA); Global Education Leaders' Partnership Education Futures (Russia), and the University of Johannesburg. The Sandbox Project constitutes a multi-year initiative that has involved the establishment of "laboratories" for piloting approaches to

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21st century education in South African public schools. As the pilot has progressed, the evidence collected will be made available to the Department of Basic Education and sector stakeholders.

The following objectives guide the work of the project and contribute towards achieving this vision:

- Test models for competency-based teaching and learning in South African public schools
- Provide evidence of what works and what does not for the DBE and other stakeholders
- Document processes and develop models for the scale-up and rollout of similar interventions; and
- Contribute towards stimulating innovative thinking and developing a growth mindset among stakeholders in the public-school ecosystem.

The issue of social inclusion is, according to the NECT, at the heart of the work being done through the Edhub. Central to the Edhub thesis is that all humans need a range of skills and competencies to be economically active in a fast-changing workforce and to thrive in life beyond school. These skills and competencies are crucial to enable and improve on social cohesion and to reduce inequality, but the NECT believes that these requirements are lacking in the delivery of education in low quintile schools. The Edhub therefore focuses much of its research on innovative approaches that deliberately and systematically develop these skills and competencies in quintile 1-3 public schools, to close the gap with learners emerging from quintile 4-5 schools. This approach is outlined in some detail in a recent book, *Embedding social justice in teacher education and development in Africa*, where the work of the Sandbox is outlined in chapter 10 (McNaught and Gravett, 2021). The argument that the NECT builds on is that the social justice imperative underlies the importance of deliberately developing these skills in all children, not just those in higher quintile schools, to enable a more just and equitable society.

After a period of initial research and design, the Sandbox project officially kicked off engagements with the pilot schools in 2019, with the purpose of creating strategic relationships with the schools, preparing them for the intervention and soliciting support from the district, circuits, school leaders and educators. The EdHub “Sandbox” team used 2019 to develop a detailed research plan in partnership with the University of Johannesburg (UJ), which revolved around the broad research question focusing on what could be learned from the design and implementation of a teaching and learning intervention (Sandbox) in the foundation phase of schooling, about how to enable teaching and learning for the demands of the changing world. This research culminated in the Sandbox Research Compendium 2020 (NECT, 2020e). Some of the learnings identified by the researchers in the beginning stages of the project included the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for school stakeholders to work collaboratively in support of education during challenging times, that varying degrees of learning takes place within the home depending on socio-economic, cultural and linguistic factors and that daily mindfulness activities with learners is one of the interventions that can be beneficial for the support of learners’ emotional wellbeing (EELC, 2021).

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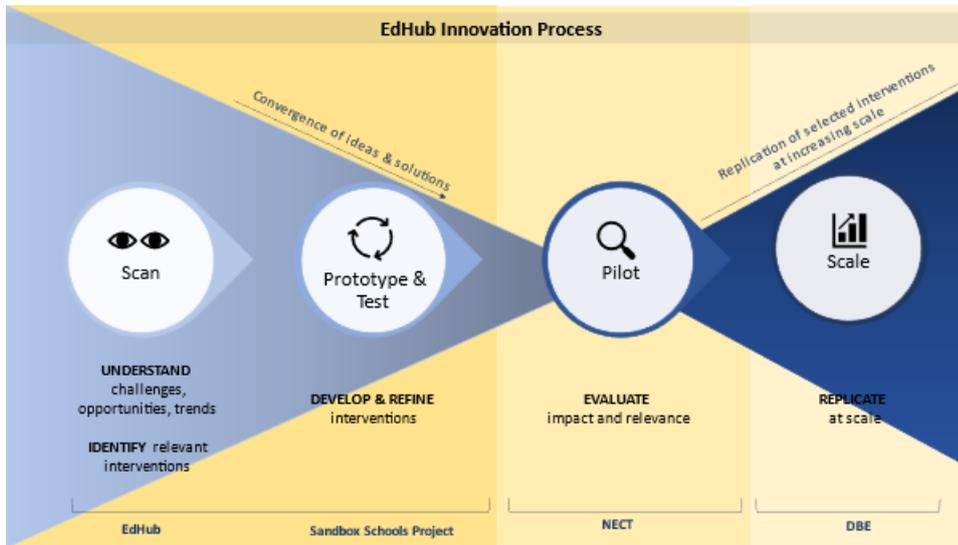
A framework for 21st-century learning has been selected by the EdHub and ten public primary schools (Sandbox schools) were selected in the Waterberg district of Limpopo, where the prototyping studies have been initiated. The Funda UJabule School on the Soweto Campus of the University of Johannesburg is also participating in the Sandbox Schools Project. Although implementation and research were disrupted in 2020, feedback from teachers suggests that the materials and initial training were helpful in developing awareness of both the literacy and competency-infusion components of the programme.

A policy analysis of this Competency-based Learning Programme intervention has been conducted by the Edhub and published in a recent book, *An educational calamity. Learning and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic* (Reimers et al., 2021), where chapter 9 – “South African curriculum: Infusing competencies for a changing world” – explores approaches to leveraging the opportunities arising from the pandemic to improve the relevance and resilience of the CAPS curriculum.

In this context, the Sandbox Schools Project introduced a mini-intervention to explore organised learning in the home environment over a three-month period. The intention of this initial exploration was to contribute to the growing body of research on the topic of remote learning in the foundation phase of schooling, especially in resource-constrained environments.

The NECT’s strategic approach has taken into account the fact that education in South Africa badly needs effective innovations of scale that can help produce the needed high-quality learning outcomes across the system. In line with global thinking the NECT has understood that the primary focus of educational innovations should be on teaching and learning theory and practice, as well as on the learner, parents, community, society, and its culture. It also recognises that technology applications need a solid theoretical foundation based on purposeful, systemic research and a sound pedagogy.

In terms of replication, the Sandbox Schools Project focuses on prototyping innovative approaches to teaching and learning. This is embedded within a longer-term NECT strategy that looks to iterate on and ascertain the potential value of an innovation in context, before moving from a pre-pilot (prototyping) to a pilot phase. Once in the pilot phase, the NECT anticipates that the intervention would be incrementally scaled up based on pilot effectiveness and learnings. In discussion with NECT management, interviewees emphasised that they were following an adaptive / cyclical approach to innovation. Once an innovation moves to pilot, it might transition into another programme within the NECT (with the resources to roll out a larger-scale pilot) and be coupled with the M&E function to ascertain impact. Once impact has been established, it may transition to further scale via the NECT or directly within the DBE. The NECT has modelled this approach as depicted in Figure 27.



Source: NECT PowerPoint presentation

Figure 26: The EdHub model of innovation, replication and scale up

At this stage it appears that the NECT has not prioritised materials development, given the laboratory approach that it takes in bringing in modern themes and addressing topics of social inclusion. When Edhub interventions are considered for scale going forward, it is likely that there will be increased opportunity to continue to enhance these aspects of the work. Originality is built into the systemic approach to education, and educational innovations require an exploration of the hurdles to innovation, in new arguments about effectiveness of technology applications and of likely replicability and sustainability. Through the EdHub initiative the NECT is adding value to the innovation in education thrust by identifying through research the factors that interfere with creating and, especially, implementing transformative, life-changing, and much-needed innovations across schools and how these can be practically addressed. Given the NECT’s already wide-ranging footprint across the education sector it is well-positioned to intervene robustly in the ongoing conversation around 4IR education by looking beyond the emphasis on STEM to the ways in which music, arts and physical culture are equally part of young people’s personal, social, emotional, and moral development.

#### 4.4.2. Conclusion

Leading innovation in education requires creating an environment that encourages creative thinking to solve education challenges and support continuous improvement. Over the past six years the NECT has clearly taken on this role and sought to evolve its approach in line with the education vision of the NDP. The work on EdHub is highly innovative and the quality of the connection between research, policy engagement and practice provides an excellent example of how NECT, as a complex organisation, can work across institutional non institutional contexts to embed changes around education technology in practice.

#### **4.5. Programme 4: Local projects**

The two local projects within Programme 4 are “Return on investment of social investments in education” and “Corporate social investment handbook”, neither of which forms part of the expected scope of activities to be included in this evaluation. Comments relating to these initiatives are discussed in Section 4.8 on Strategic Partnerships.

#### **4.6. Programme 5: Education DialogueSA**

One of the aims outlined in the ECF was a programme of national education dialogues aimed at promoting on-going discussions on the state of education and exploring joint actions.

The NECT conceptualised the Education DialogueSA as a vehicle for creating discursive spaces for open, honest engagement around key subjects which need resolution and action for educational reform to be successful in South Africa. NECT felt that education outcomes in South Africa could be improved with a focus on policy change and intervention, and this might shape better planning and execution of interventions at a systems level. Key stakeholders targeted for engagement in dialogues have included teacher unions, student organisations, civil society organisations, the private sector, academics, and government. The dialogues were intended to be non-partisan, inclusive and open opportunities for individuals and organisations to engage and explore various options for joint societal actions in the education sphere. The Dialogues have had a very close nexus with the broader NECT communications efforts and have been a major part of the way that the NECT has communicated with the public.

The NECT conceptualised what it terms “Action-Oriented Dialogue” as a modality for providing sustained leadership on educational improvement and the kinds of behavioural changes required to achieve these improvements. Since its inception in 2013 the DialogueSA programme has drawn dialogue participants into discussions characterised by diversity of perspectives and rigour of thought. These dialogues have aimed to stimulate conversations on often contentious aspects of education in ways that have been open and courageous, and focused on actionable solutions. In addition, the dialogues have opened discursive spaces where participants from a range of different sectors have been able to gain fresh perspectives on the costs of conflict and formulate new possibilities for interaction and common actions (NECT, 2017e). The Dialogues are by design a responsive programme, responding to emerging issues as they arise in the education sector. Some have dealt with very practical issues (such as the Dialogue on School Uniforms) while others have been more theoretical (such as the Language in Education Dialogues). In each case the issues have arisen in the public space, and the NECT role has been to bring together relevant players to discuss and strategise around these. In some cases, research papers have been prepared to lead the discussions. NECT management view the DialogueSA programme as a recognised “convening authority” on behalf of the education sector, and the NECT has actively used its “convening power” to consult on a range of education-related issues. A focus on “civil society” has emerged as a priority

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– including academics, communities and others who are not part of the formal consultative structures of the Department. Their voice and involvement have been facilitated through the programme, particularly during the recent COVID-19 crisis.

Over the past seven years the DialogueSA programme has achieved some significant outcomes, including:

- Creating spaces for substantive engagement around key subjects which need resolution and action for educational reform to be successful in SA – for example “practical conversations about the future of learning” (2018).
- Involving a broad and diverse range of education stakeholders, including teacher unions, student organisations, civil society organisations, business, academics, and government agencies – for example the “NGO leadership summit” (2016).
- Bringing together a wide range of education sector role players and providing individuals and organisations with the space and opportunity to explore policy options for education transformation – for example “decolonisation of South African schooling” (2017).
- Bringing together education theory and practice in an effort to create viable policy options – for example “what is teacher professionalisation?” (2014).

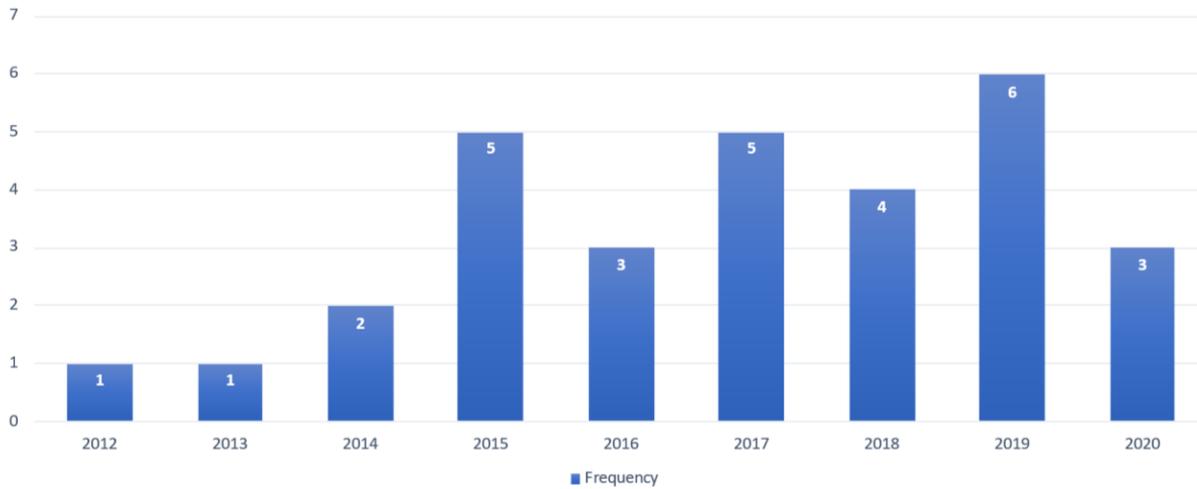
Since 2012 the NECT has convened a wide-ranging set of dialogue themes focusing on some of the critical education challenges facing South Africa broadly, and the education sector more specifically. The programme has engaged more than 7,000 participants over seven years.

The following are a sample of some of the dialogue themes:

- Making schools and teachers effective (2014)
- Learner safety (2015)
- Education NGO leadership (2016)
- 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (2017)
- SA-SAMS modernisation (2018)
- ECD function shift (2019)
- Ethics in education (2020)

From 2015 the frequency and reach of the dialogues increased, reflecting the value that the NECT, the DBE and other stakeholders placed on the value-add that these structured conversations provided to the overall education discourse in the country (see Figure 28):

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**Total number of participants 2013 -2020: 7,283**

*Figure 27: Frequency of NECT DialogueSA events, 2013-2020*

Interviews with key informants including NECT board members, officials from the DBE, representatives of civil society, and the private sector emphasised the value and significance of the dialogues, and pointed to the following salient features of the programme:

- The NECT has played its independent “honest broker” role in promoting constructive debate among key stakeholders. A number of these dialogue topics have been motivated by the Minister of Basic Education on issues including learner discipline, school violence and dropout rates.
- The dialogues have created an avenue for structured conversations among stakeholders from divergent sector and ideological backgrounds
- The dialogues have contributed to minimising gaps in perception among different stakeholders, around more controversial issues
- Through the vehicle of the dialogues the NECT has been able to keep an ever-growing number of stakeholders on their database informed about the teacher-professionalisation programme; and
- The dialogues have contributed to nurturing a common education improvement agenda by, amongst other strategies, systematically and objectively challenging widespread misinformation and negative propaganda in the education sector.

DialogueSA was not initially designed as an action-oriented programme and did not necessarily inform or result in action plans. The dialogues appear to have been more geared towards providing a platform for stakeholders to engage in robust discussion aimed at informing ideas and changing education practice for the better (especially between government and civil society). The view of several respondents (DBE, civil society, private sector, teacher unions) is that they would like to more measurable outcomes from the dialogues – one respondent noting that “a lot of time,

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planning and resources are put into these dialogues, but we are not sure what the tangible longer terms results are.” This is an issue on which there are divided views.

Although the NECT has been the dialogues convening authority, it has also participated in dialogues initiated by its partner stakeholders including the DBE. The NECT Board of Trustees is actively involved in the DialogueSA programme and fully supports the initiative but would also like to see more tangible evidence of its impact. As early as 2014 the Board recognised the value of the dialogues and advised that national media should be used to ensure that the entire country knows about the dialogues (NECT Board Minutes, 27 June 2014). This was viewed as an important step forward for the NECT as to date there is limited evidence pointing to specific outcomes having been achieved. A review of the DialogueSA programme was undertaken in 2016 based on the Board’s request that the NECT undertake an assessment of the programme to assess the extent to which resolutions and proposals emanating from the dialogues were having traction within the sector. This concern was reflected in the Board Minutes of 1 July 2016 where members noted that a review of the intent and operation of the education dialogues should be commissioned by management in consultation with the dialogue chairpersons. One of the key findings of the Review was that the NECT needed to focus much more of its attention on post-dialogue follow-up actions and where necessary strengthen implementation if the DialogueSA programme was to achieve its stated purpose and assure participants of the value of the dialogues (Botha, 2016). Key recommendations that were made around this issue were the importance of:

- Assigning responsibility for specific follow-up actions to working groups made up of participants who represent relevant stakeholders’ groups and who have the necessary interest, expertise, and commitment
- Selecting a relevant stakeholder as convener of the working group and assign overall accountability for delivery and feedback to the convener
- Giving clear briefs with deliverables and timeframes to the working group; and
- As the NECT, tracking progress and holding working groups accountable for delivery and timeous feedback to participants.

While NECT staff and board members asserted that they had been guided by the findings of the Review regarding both the programming and facilitation of dialogues, there has not been any formal process of measuring progress against the review recommendations and there are a range of views on what kind of action should follow from Dialogues or whether their primary value lies in convening the discussion.

A major aspect of the review concerned the identification of dialogue topics, and the need for constituencies to lead on identifying critical issues to dialogue around. NECT management feel that this has been difficult to achieve, except in the case of the Minister and Department, who have consistently identified topics and requested dialogues on these specific issues. Labour and business have been less pro-active, although BLSA has led on a recent Ethics Dialogue. The NECT’s M&E unit is taking the lead on undertaking an in-house evaluation process, which will happen in early 2022.

Interviews with several NECT senior managers suggested that there has been ongoing discussion on how the DialogueSA initiative can become more action-oriented and develop specific interventions and how monitoring and evaluation can be used to measure the impact that these engagements have been having. However, there are other views that reflect on policy, such as ECD migration. They are useful, and do not need to result in a specific outcome action. There is a strong feeling from interviews held with the DBE, teacher unions and education experts that the national dialogues could be enhanced by enabling more broad-based consultations, specifically by devolving the dialogues to provincial and local spheres with a special focus on the districts. Whereas the initial focus of the dialogues was on leadership and decision-making, NECT senior managers noted that there has been a gradual shift to focus the platform on engaging with the wider system and processes involved in supporting education outcomes.

This evaluation takes note of the strategic value of the DialogueSA programme and the value it has as a platform to bring together diverse voices within the education sector to engage with some of the most pressing challenges faced by the South African education system. The range of views on the relationship of dialogue and action needs reflection. Our concern is that since 2016 there has been no clear process in place to track the effect or impact of each of the dialogues on critical policy development areas. While we note that not all dialogues may link to follow-up actions, some reflective process regarding which should, which should not and why would be useful.

### **4.7. Programme 6: Governance and finance**

In reviewing Programme 6 on Governance and finance the evaluation draws on interviews with key informants, Annual Reports, Board minutes and a range of reports prepared for the Board as well as financial reports. The aims of Programme 6 on Governance and finance are effective and efficient governance by the Board of Trustees, and internal executive management of the NECT's human and financial resources.

This section is organised to address the evaluation questions concerned with the role and effectiveness of the Board, and the internal executive management of the NECT as a whole. It is organised firstly with a discussion of governance arrangements, and then a review of the funding modalities and the role of funders.

#### **4.7.1. Governance**

Governance issues have been reviewed looking at the role of the NECT Board of Trustees; the representativity of the Board in relation to all stakeholders; the funding modalities and the role of funders; and the extent to which the Board engages with specific NECT projects.

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### 4.7.1.1 Role of the Board of Trustees

A Deed of Trust established the NECT on 1 July 2013 was signed by seven trustees, three of whom were also identified as donors (D). The Deed specified that the number of trustees should never be less than seven, and that two of the trustees should represent the Department of Basic Education. Trustees serve a term of five years, renewable for one additional term of five years if the trustee is re-elected. The Board of Trustees is required to meet at least twice per year. The Minister of Basic Education is permitted to nominate a proxy in the event of her / his not being able to attend a meeting. The Board has been characterised by strong continuity, with seven of the nine Trustees having served the full seven-year period being evaluated. This suggests commitment and comprehensive institutional memory that is conducive to well informed deliberations and evidence-based decisions.

*Table 16: Trustees of NECT, 2013-2020*

Trustee name	2013 signatory of Trust Deed	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Ms Matsie Angelina Motshekga (D)								
Mr Sizwe Errol Nxasana (D)								
Mr Nkosana Dolopi (D)								
Mr Basil Lawrence Manuel								
Mr Parmosivea Bobby Soobrayan								
Mr Mark Lamberti								
Ms Ntombifuthi Temperance Mtoba								
Mr Godwin Khosa								
Mr Paddy Padayachee								
Mr Brian Figaji								
Mr Mathanzima Mweli								
Ms Tebele Luthuli-Makhetha								

The evaluators' perusal of Board reports and selected summaries of proceedings suggest that meetings of the Board and its committees have been regular since inception. The interviewed NECT managers perceive that they enjoy a good working relationship with the NECT Board, because it is "highly supportive" of their activities. One manager said, "Everything we do is sanctioned by the Board", including strategy, planning, and reporting. Management holds the view that the Board is characterised by maturity, and the capacity to guide the organisation, but without interfering in operational issues. The Chair of the Board is seen as a person who enables continuity, with some reliance on "personal social capital" between individuals. The Board appreciates the clear and concise reporting by NECT and the need for follow-up queries is minimal. One manager pointed out that the attendance at meetings "could be better", but there is an understanding of the multiple obligations of Board members. The Minister is sometimes required elsewhere, and she exercises her right to send a proxy. Effort is made, however, to ensure that a Board member with expertise or interest in an agenda item attends the relevant meeting. Meetings do sometimes proceed without a quorum, which results in post-meeting 'round robin' communications to ensure that all

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views are factored into a discussion prior to any decision-making. One Board member expressed concern that Board packs for meetings are received too close to the time of the meetings, which restricts the amount of attention they can give to scrutiny of the documents prior to the meetings.

The independent-mindedness of the Board is a critical success factor in the view of one NECT manager, who said that the Board does not always agree with the government or the private sector. This results in “a protected space” to influence the education sector. This view is contested by other managers, who sense that the close relationship between NECT and the DBE might undermine such independence. One external partner said, “I have tried to make a positive contribution [to the Board], but this has been selectively received ... I have not really felt valued.” An advisor to the Board has suggested to this partner that they should be patient and work within existing “constraints”.

### *4.7.1.2 Representativity of the Board*

The NECT management indicated that the Board Chair is elected collegially by the Trustees. The deputy chair is always ex officio the sitting Minister of Basic Education. The chair of the Audit / Risk committee must also be elected. Since inception, neither this position nor the Board Chair have been changed. This reflects the continuity that was alluded to earlier. NECT was seen as a ten-year special purpose organisation, which is different from other multiple stakeholder organisations. Members each represent a particular stakeholder / sector group. Sectors are only permitted to nominate senior members. The CEO, the Minister and the Board Chair have been the same three individuals since inception, again signalling strength of commitment and intent. None of them has gone beyond the ten-year period of board membership allowed by the Deed of Trust. The continuity is positive for a new organisation that never existed before, especially because of its complex nature.

The internal perception of NECT is that a range of appropriate skills and sectors are represented within the Board and that each Board member brings “cultural capital” to the deliberations. One manager said that the range of backgrounds, talents and experience of Board members facilitate “very solid intervention insights” because the configuration of the Board is a stakeholder engagement process, representative of business, labour, government and CSOs. Conversely, several Board members lamented the lack of representation of CSOs, with one wondering if this was not prioritised because they were not seen by NECT management as sources of funding. This issue has not formally been considered by the Board. The Board has sufficiently empowered the CEO to make decisions at a programme level in an “agile and responsive manner”. Participation by teacher unions was initially limited but latterly “they have engaged the culture” and appreciate their own inclusion at this level. There is acknowledgement, however, that Board members from the development sector tend to ‘chop and change’ and that greater continuity in the representation of the sector would strengthen the Board. One Board member expressed the view that the Board lacked gender representivity, especially because the Minister herself was often “not available for Board meetings”, although the Minister is one of three female members of the Board, and attendance records suggest

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good attendance by all, particularly the Minister. An “internal analysis” of the Board (dated 25 June 2020) determined that amongst the Trustees, historic consciousness and experience of collaboration were “excellent”, and that representivity from the education sector and of educational expertise were also “excellent”, as was financial expertise. Conversely, the proportions of Trustees who represented the female gender or academia were “not good”. Representivity of civil society and networking capacity in the corporate social investment sector were both deemed to “require attention”. Representivity of unions and business were “good”, as were expertise in development and change management, legal issues and technical issues, and networking capacity in civil society.

It was ascertained that succession planning for the CEO and several senior colleagues was being undertaken, recognising the need to “pass on institutional memory”. One of the NECT managers said that NECT had suggested to the DBE the need for a talent management programme to acquire senior managers. One external comment from a funder was that as NECT explored options for future managers, it should factor in some specific requirements addressing organisational fit.

### *4.7.1.3 Funding modalities, governance and strategic orientation*

From within NECT, the managers generally perceived that relationships with their funders were good. The funders tended to consult NECT on the prospects of venturing into new interventions prior to doing so. NECT was encouraged by the enquiries from funders about existing work in areas that they might be interested in funding.

NECT derives considerable security from the reliability of the government funding. The DBE is the largest funding source, at around 50%. For this reason, NECT holds quarterly meetings with the Treasury, and sends updates to the Presidency in addition to its quarterly reports to the DBE. Several NECT managers acknowledged that NECT had an “extraordinary relationship” with the DBE at national level. They were aware of growing perceptions that NECT was the favoured and dominant player in the sector. To many stakeholders in the education sector interviewed for this study, it appeared as if the boundary between the DBE and NECT was blurred. One manager suggested that the relationship needed to be devolved and enhanced at lower levels. However, there were divided views on this. One NECT specialist indicated that a clear and deliberate link between NECT and each of the relevant DBE units was the critical success factor. NECT should be identifying and nurturing counterparts in DBE to work with its programmes. Examples given of where this should operate smoothly were in the DBE Sector Reading Plan in DBE; Research Agenda in DBE Monitoring and Evaluation; and the postgraduate interns allocated to the DBE priorities. Additionally, NECT was gratified that there had been some growth in private funding. NECT management asserted that it made consistent and deliberate attempts to partner with a range of stakeholders at various levels but that some funders had withdrawn, owing to COVID-19. However, one Board member expressed disquiet regarding dwindling levels of funding from the private sector. This member was of the view that the NECT did not engage sufficiently or strategically enough with the private sector to mobilise funding owing to an excessive focus on the DBE and the teacher unions.

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NECT planned to improve communications with current and potential funders, using “the right tools ... to get the message across. An intranet is being developed together with a repository that people will be able to access to see things like CSI, templates, NECT value proposition, research papers.” One NECT manager said, “We need to find spaces where we can weave ourselves into the tapestries of communities.” Another said that although there had been budget cuts from funders, there had also been savings on activities that could not proceed. Since the advent of COVID-19, more funders had come forward to support digital and remote learning interventions. NECT was therefore in the process of establishing ‘portfolios’ for groups of funders with distinctive interests such as digital learning, reading, care, and support.

NECT acknowledged that some NGOs had been reluctant to support the NECT’s reading campaign because of the pre-existing ‘Read-to-Lead’ campaign. A NECT specialist said, “They [the NGOs] were under the impression that NECT wanted to replace the work they do and take over.” There was also reluctance to accept projects that were not fully understood. “Then it takes a bit of time for them to understand and get on board”. NECT was similarly aware of the perception of many NGOs that NECT was on a “mission to put them out of business with government departments”. A NECT manager expressed the view that the long-term involvement of many NGOs in education had had minimal broad impact. NECT preferred to work with NGOs that could work at scale to implement change across the system.

The external perspective from funders confirmed some of the suspicions and perceptions of NECT insiders. One funder indicated that they had never been able to engage with the Board or CEO directly one-on-one. This had only been possible within the context of a larger gathering. This funder did meet with representatives of specific NECT programmes and was of the view that the CEO “carries too much load”. This funder expressed the perception that NECT was “not very accountable to the broader education sector”. It would be the preference of this particular funder that finance reports should be customised to show the expenditure of specific grants or donations. “We have always grappled with whether we can influence NECT in any way. We almost felt we don’t want to tread on any toes.” The funder felt that this was why “most donors now make targeted or ring-fenced grants”, but that this side-tracked the CEO because he had to focus on core fundraising. “It is important that the Board should recognise this tension, so that donor relationships can be better managed.”

Another funder expressed regret that the Partners’ Forum which existed at the inception of NECT had been disbanded. “This is a missed opportunity as an additional accountability mechanism and also for the donors to have a full view and comprehension on the array of activities NECT will be embarking on as to what is working well and not working well and where need is really needed.” This correlates with the view of another funder, who said, “As a funder, we are more interested in learning and engaging, being part of the process, than being a sideline observer.” Nonetheless, NECT

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management maintained that it endeavoured to include funders and partners on board as much as was feasible, given the rapid decisions and responses that NECT sometimes had to make.

The scope of NECT operations was viewed critically by some external and internal stakeholders. One funder said, “NECT acts like an implementing agent for DBE, whereas they were supposed to play a leading role for connecting the government, donors, and the civil society. NECT has lost its initial vision of being a bridge between government and other partners. They expend too much time and resources in implementing programmes beyond their capacity, without creating partnerships.” A Board member expressed the view that NECT had been exceeding its mandate, even operating as “a parallel DBE”. This created some level of duplication, along with some confusion (particularly for teachers) about NECT materials that were provided over and above those provided by the DBE. This Board member was adamant that NECT should “have an endpoint” rather than an indeterminate and unsustainable mandate.

Another funder suggested that NECT should increase its independence to avoid the widely held perception that it was “too close to government”. They felt that “It is inconceivable that a Minister should go to NECT rather than to people in the DBE”. Similarly, they were of the view that rather than doing the work themselves, NECT should be convening researchers and specialists in the different sectors of education, and then facilitating delegation of work to appropriate experts. A suggestion to the NECT Board was that it should be “less schizophrenic” and should be profiling the broad and critical educational sector goals for South Africa “rather than NECT as an organisation”.

It can be seen that in the range of views on whether the close relationship with DBE is or is not a ‘good thing’ some of the friction of the relationship between a complex and a complicated organisation appear to play out. It has to be recognised that if NECT has to influence policy it has to engage the DBE. However, this engagement should be informed and influenced by inputs from other stakeholders. The NECT has to network with all stakeholders. A perception that there is no sufficient inclusivity has to be dealt with. The ECF is very particular about the necessary involvement of “all stakeholders”.

### *4.7.1.4 Board engagement with NECT projects*

NECT managers appeared to express consensus that the Board was intrinsically involved in the various programmes of NECT and was in support of its operations and activities. One Board member was of the view that it would assist members of the Board if they were to receive programme updates directly from the programme managers and specialists “rather than always from the CEO”. However, the risk of such practice might be to lengthen Board meetings and distract from executive priorities.

### **4.7.2. Finance**

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Efficiency is linked to the ability of the NECT to spend its funds according to the agreed budget and work plans, and to ensure that its reporting includes accurate forecasting to ensure that financial shortfalls are not experienced. In terms of efficiency, the NECT internal view is that there is a satisfactory distribution of human and financial resources across programmes, and that staffing is adequate and competent. Financial soundness is evidenced by the financial results presented in the integrated annual reports of the evaluation period. The NECT financial statements from the inception of the programme in 2014 to date paint a picture of the leading role that good governance structures play within the organisation. The financial position of the NECT and its financial performance and cash flows for the years under review are in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards. Commendably, all financial statements are free from material misstatements (in other words, a financially unqualified audit opinion has been received) and there are no material findings on reporting on performance objectives or non-compliance with the legislation.

The NECT raised total funding of R1,580 billion from 2014 to 2020. The DBE has contributed 65% thereof, whilst a total of 35% was raised from the private sector. The reason DBE is the main funder is that it regularly tables additional project scope to the NECT such as special projects like the readiness of schools to reopen in the second half of 2020, following the initial COVID-19 lockdown. Such projects necessitate increased funding. NECT financial management said that the DBE disbursed its funds in tranches after the NECT submitted reports and plans to it. NECT reports that it has not experienced any challenges in the meeting of expected requirements, or any scenario that has warranted the denial of fund disbursements. One NECT manager was of the view that future funding had become the biggest challenge since the start of the COVID-19 era because the priorities of funders were changing. Nevertheless, their view was that the “success of NECT speaks for itself” and that this in itself “attracts important core funders”. They indicated that NECT was now the beneficiary of direct Votes by the National Treasury. Nonetheless, the Board was conscious of the risk of high dependence on one source.

*Table 17: NECT income (000,000)*

Source of income	Year						
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Government MTEF (core)	77,62	122,10	72,10	99,96	155,41	115,74	121,58
Government & SETAs (ring-fenced)	0,36	2,33	13,44	96,58	29,40	53,89	63,53
<b>Total government</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>185</b>
Non-government (core)	36,55	42,92	64,08	65,58	71,55	56,93	59,51
Non-government (ring-fenced)	2,29	19,19	35,15	11,68	2,84	32,78	53,60
<b>Total non-government</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>113</b>

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Source of income	Year						
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Total funding</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>298</b>

*Note: Ring-fenced funding refers to funding for short term or special programmes. Core funding refers to the funding of traditional programmes and activities since the conceptualisation of NECT.*

Of the R1,580 billion received, 94% has been invested directly in education-related programmes, and the remaining 6% was spent on administration costs. There has been a recognisable increase in government and private sector funding and participation in the implementation of the NECT initiatives. Table 17 shows funding sources by government and non-government sources, and the allocations towards core and special projects.

### 4.7.2.1 Cost effectiveness and -benefit in resource allocation and use

NECT financial management indicated that the NECT has “policies in place that safeguard and ensure that resources are spent efficiently and efficaciously”, and that “it is easy to identify wastages [which] are reported to the CFO and assessed for negligence and the need for disciplinary action.” Table 18 shows the annual expenditure for each of NECT’s eight programmes. The expenditure of core funding, comprising almost 80% of the total, is shown in normal font. The expenditure of Special Projects funding, the remaining 20%, is shown in bold font. Total annual expenditure is shown in the shaded bottom row, in italicised font.

*Table 18: NECT expenditure, 2014-2020: Core and special project funding*

Programme	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Programme 1: District Development	98 708 777	177 580 145	138 710 362 <b>19 831 227</b>	177 581 183 <b>56 888 831</b>	198 632 623 <b>24 605 649</b>	121 648 131 <b>78 102 665</b>	94 394 221 <b>96 618 004</b>	1 007 255 442 <b>276 046 376</b>
Programme 2: Systemic Intervention	175 053	2 617 923	2 039 653	2 289 863	2 161 981 <b>7 640 531</b>	1 606 039 <b>8 561 242</b>	6 068 248 <b>5 506 766</b>	16 958 760 <b>21 708 599</b>
Programme 3: Innovation	71 213	1 854 069	819 417	2 055 888	7 677 634	7 508 745	3 987 113	23 974 079
Programme 4: Local Projects	5 248	-	100 371	-	-	-	-	105 619
Programme 5: Education Dialogues	532 112	2 185 487	1 420 138	3 557 889	2 264 456	3 605 664	3 607 157	17 172 902
Programme 6: Internal Operations	9 483 933	9 231 002	10 572 801	15 057 132	18 474 609	15 723 736	16 519 119	95 062 332
Programme 7: Strategic Partnerships	329 886	16 244	31 614	7 733 615	-	-	-	8 111 359
Programme 8: Programme Management, M&E	2 281 603	2 780 025	3 483 711	-	7 940 644	8 757 083	7 296 035 <b>11 337 558</b>	32 539 100 <b>11 337 558</b>
Total: Core	111 587 824	196 264 894	157 178 067	208 275 570	237 151 947	158 849 398	131 871 892	1 201 179 592
Total: Special Projects			<b>19 831 227</b>	<b>56 888 831</b>	<b>32 246 180</b>	<b>86 663 907</b>	<b>113 462 328</b>	<b>309 092 473</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>111 587 824</b>	<b>196 264 894</b>	<b>177 009 294</b>	<b>265 164 401</b>	<b>269 398 127</b>	<b>245 513 305</b>	<b>245 334 220</b>	<b>1 510 272 065</b>

Note: Core funding amounts are shown in normal font; Special Projects in bold font; and total expenditure in italics.

The following graphics highlight the high proportion spent, firstly from a programmatic perspective, on the NECT’s key Programme 1 (District Development) and secondly, from a Core / non-Core perspective, on the organisation’s Core activities versus Special Projects.

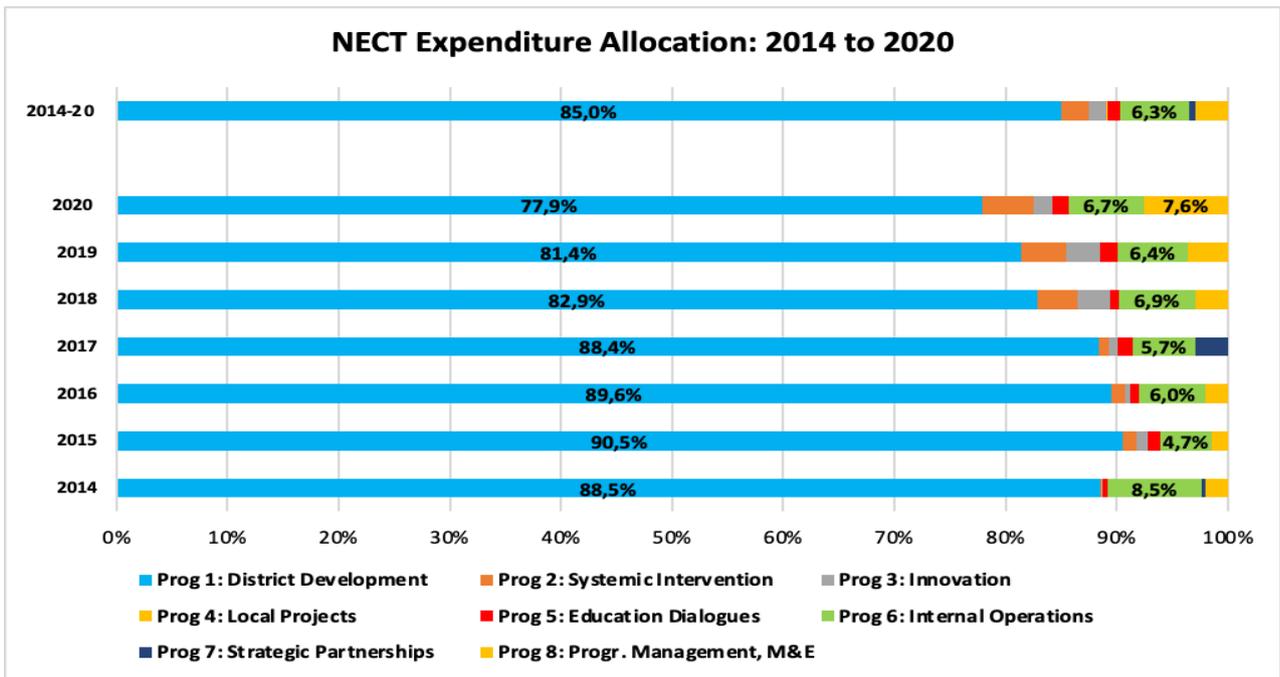


Figure 28: NECT expenditure allocation, 2014-2020

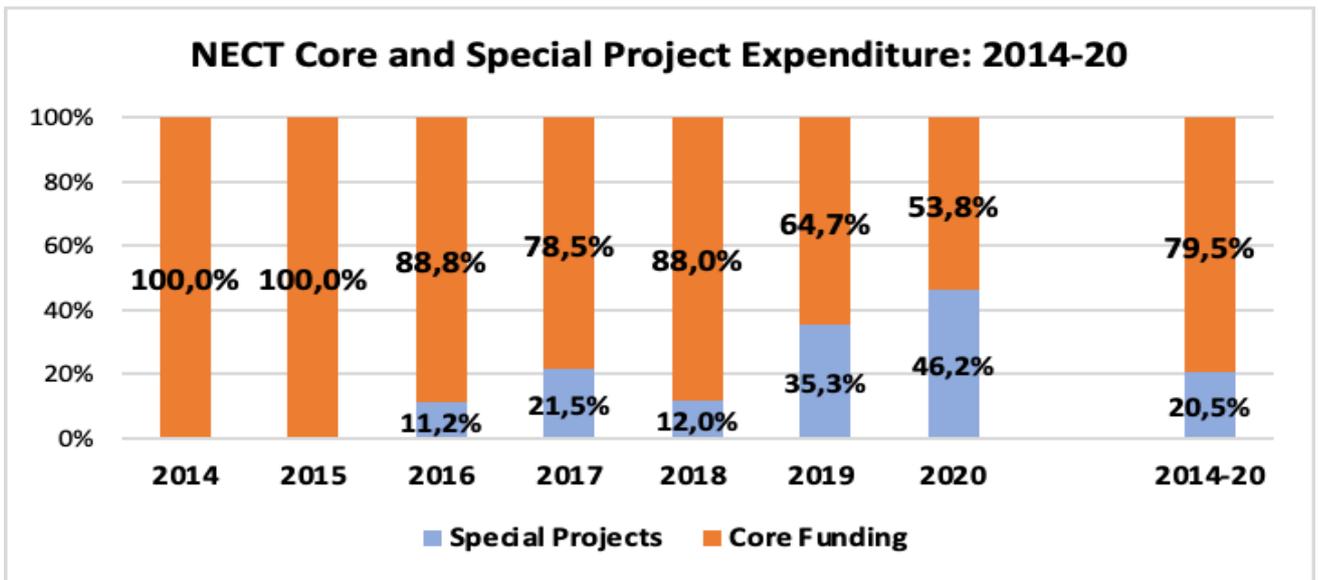


Figure 29: NECT core and special project expenditure, 2014-2020

The highest cost driver from 2014 to 2020 was thus the District and Schools development programme, which accounted for 85% of the NECT’s expenditure. The proportion hovered at around 90% during the initial years (2014-2017) and then declined to around 80% in the latter period (2018-2020). There is insufficient data to look closely at the efficiency of expenditure and the outcomes of programmes. The evaluators’ impression is that the allocation of expenditure and the accomplishments of this programme are commensurate with the broad reach, complex logistics and levels of effort involved therein. Nonetheless, the ultimate impact on learner performance in critical STEM subjects has not been substantial. The data collected (see tables in report Appendix) suggest

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that the NDP targets which are set for 2030 for learner achievement in Mathematics and Science will be elusive.

The distribution of funds in NECT has thus mainly been oriented to supporting Programme 1. Smaller proportions were spent on the other programmes, mainly systemic interventions (3%), monitoring and evaluation (3%), the innovation programme (2%), education dialogues, marketing and communication (1%), and strategic partnerships (1%). The most discernible change was the increased allocation to systemic interventions, from around 1% in 2014-2017, to around 4% in 2018-2020, which correlates with increased levels of up-scaling in the latter period. The remaining 6% was allocated to internal operations, although commencing at over 8% in 2014, during the set-up and establishment of the organisation. Budgeting is mainly done per programme and not per school. Whereas the revenue and expenditure on NECT traditional programmes has declined owing to the provincialisation process, the decline has been offset by the increase in the ring-fenced strategic partnerships programmes.

It was noted that the number of individual funders of the NECT programme has been increasing gradually. For example, there was an increase from 28 in 2017 to 37 in 2018. This increase represent a total growth of 32%. The increase can be attributed to the increasing collaboration efforts of the NECT and its partners. A financial manager said, "I am of the view that the majority of the schools (involved in our programmes) benefited either directly or indirectly."

Notably, the thrust of many of the Special Projects pertains to aspects not directly related to teaching and learning. The following table indicates that the special project with the largest budget is SAFE (59% of the value of all special projects) (see details in section describing Programme 7) and the largest single spend allocation (33% of special project expenditure). The obvious intention of this is to facilitate an environment that is conducive to effective teaching and learning, but it is essentially beyond the remit of education sector focus and might arguably be better placed under the management of the Department of Public Works.

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Table 19: NECT special projects expenditure, 2014-2021

SPECIAL PROJECTS 2014 - 2021								
Project	Value of the project R	2021 R	2020 R	2019 R	2018 R	2017 R	2016 R	Spend of total R
DBE - Life Orientation project	37,350,420	1,649,445	11,348,014	11,156,238	11,120,919	324,114	76,625	35,675,357
DBE - LTSM	16,700,000	3,059,932	960,124	-	-	-	-	4,020,055
DBE - ECD funding	6,950,000	1,049,040	2,730,970	-	-	-	-	3,780,010
DBE - Shool Readiness Verification	17,879,000	2,864,349	15,000,000	-	-	-	-	17,864,349
SA-SAMS	68,158,000	11,482,225	5,506,766	8,561,242	5,589,405	201,338	-	31,340,975
SAFE	673,707,871	142,830,944	18,430,606	10,859,333	-	-	-	172,120,883
ETDPSETA - PSRIP	179,024,621	20,407,162	35,420,104	50,230,970	1,457,309	47,502,438	8,413,800	163,431,783
Remote & Digital Learning programme	44,000,000	11,044,760	19,836	-	-	-	-	15,093,565
ETDPSETA - ICT EC	6,500,000	-	-	-	8,593,565	6,500,000	-	15,093,565
ETDPSETA - CATC	5,040,750	313,941	1,891,534	-	-	-	-	2,205,475
ETDPSETA - NGO Training	300,000	86,444	-	-	-	-	649,528	735,972
ETDP - SETA - Teacher testing	1,490,930	-	-	-	-	1,490,930	-	1,490,930
Tshikululu Investment - ALA support	2,000,000	950,000	950,000	-	-	-	-	1,900,000
EU/UNICEF-REALS	29,099,267	447,429	-	-	-	-	-	447,429
MSDF - Data Landscape	1,558,717	-	-	897,584	661,133	-	-	1,558,717
COVID-19 intervention	33,350,602	7,787,658	24,654,237	908,708	-	-	-	33,350,602
Save the Children South Africa	3,175,485	-	-	2,569,998	605,486	-	-	3,175,485
Vuwani schools project	10,691,274	-	-	-	-	-	10,691,274	10,691,274
Arts and Culture - Spelling BEE	1,555,352	-	82,144	399,833	1,017,820	55,555	-	1,555,352
DBE - Maths Task Team	5,080,000	-	-	1,080,000	3,185,544	814,456	-	5,080,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,143,612,289</b>	<b>203,973,329</b>	<b>116,994,335</b>	<b>86,663,907</b>	<b>32,231,180</b>	<b>56,888,831</b>	<b>19,831,227</b>	<b>520,611,778</b>

4.7.2.2 Lessons from NECT resource mobilisation and use processes and strategies

NECT management was of the view that the “coordination of corporate social investment has failed”. They cited the example of Programme 4 never having taken off as intended, pointing out that although the NECT had special projects funded by specific investors, it “doesn’t do what we had envisaged” because corporates are competitive, coordination is difficult, and the CSI units “are full of communications people and don’t know about social development.” Although coordinating corporate investment might not have taken off, the NECT is itself a forum in which different corporations can-ordinate work with the government.

From a technical perspective, the NECT financial management pointed out that the NECT monitored its performance with regard to Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE). In the years under review, NECT B-BBEE audit had been a challenge, as they had struggled to achieve Level 1 owing to the structure of NECT, in terms of which much of the work was done by consultants, most of whom were male, and most of the firms were not 100% black owned. Low expenditure on skills development also affected the B-BBEE rating. The majority of NECT’s employees were on contract, hence there was no skills expenditure on them.

Most of the initiatives planned for 2020 were affected by the COVID-19 lockdown, some were delayed, while training interventions that were usually conducted face to face were conducted virtually. New demands came about as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the NECT was sufficiently agile to be able to change plans in order to respond to newly emerging needs.

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NECT is based on the principle that collaboration and focused effort by important role-players increases the power of the nation to secure the changes that are urgently required to deliver good education to all children. It was noted that during the first five years (2013-2018) much focus was on building foundations for collaboration. In 2019-2020, the emphasis was directed to strengthening the collaboration with the intention of mobilising state capacity to achieve distinctive, substantial, and sustainable improvements in the education sector.

The current collaboration strategy is commendable. However, it is marred by limited engagement with the private sector and civil society. NECT needs to extend its research initiatives to identify organisations that are involved in corporate social investment programmes and engage with them to get more funding and support.

From a future sustainability perspective, the partnerships, particularly with government, have enabled the integration of sundry elements of the NECT programme in provincial departments. This has laid foundations for the institutionalisation of NECT initiatives across the national education system.

Furthermore, the organisation has made a deliberate attempt in empowering additional emerging professionals that it calls activators (trainees and interns). For example, some interns from different professional backgrounds have been brought in through FirstRand's FirstJob initiative. The trainees are recent graduates and postgraduates. This has alleviated pressure on NECT in implementing some of its programmes.

### *4.7.2.3 NECT budgeting processes*

A NECT financial manager indicated that funding always came with conditions, and the NECT had not experienced any complications in satisfying these conditions. However, the tendency amongst funders to opt for ring-fencing around their own priorities posed a serious challenge to NECT management's decision-making and longer-term preferences borne out of experience and evidence gathered from schools. The quite dramatic shift towards Special Projects during 2019 and especially 2020, as the pandemic began to bite, will have severely constrained Core pursuits and contributed to a shift from the primary objectives of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. One funder indicated that the NECT had not been very accountable to the broader education sector and the funder had not received regular and timeous finance reports pertaining to the use of their funding.

The processes entailed in budgeting for the NECT commence in August with a planning meeting with the management. Plans and budget are submitted to the Board for approval in November. NECT reflects on the approved budget in June the following year and makes any appropriate revisions. Unanticipated "Special Projects" sometimes result in budget changes, such as the "readiness of schools to open" that was commissioned and funded by the DBE during the 2020 lockdown. During the planning session, income and expenses are projected on the basis of previous funding patterns.

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Budgeting is per Programme, and 80% of budget is allocated to Programme 1 and engagement with districts and schools. There is not a specific budget per district or school.

The NECT has two bank accounts for differential handling of its cash flow. These comprise a 7-day notice account and a 32-day notice account, both of which attract interest on all banked funds.

### *4.7.2.4 Donors as involved participants*

The NECT maintains that it has been actively involved in advocacy work to encourage other NGOs to work with it and has funded other NGOs as a way of signalling that there is “no competition” (for example, funding was given to Funda, based in the Eastern Cape). This means if there is buy-in from these NGOs, there might be increased collaboration in enhancing the education sector in South Africa. It should be noted that this view is not shared by several partners and funders, as reported elsewhere in this document. A widely held perception is in fact that the NECT dominates the sector at the expense of other experts and NGOs.

The NECT management indicated that Zenex, FREF and Old Mutual were fully involved with the NECT’s mission to transform the education system in South Africa. They regularly requested updates and progress reports. There were specific individual contact persons within each funding organisation, which facilitated continuity in communications between the NECT and Zenex, FREF (via Tshikululu), and Old Mutual. Additionally, Standard Bank, Momentum, and Eskom were also keen to see the full transformation of the education sector even though their involvement with NECT activities was partial. Usually, funders of Special Projects are fully involved whilst funders of Core Funding are partially involved. Examples of the former are providers of ring-fenced funding for the NECT’s M&E unit (50% of the last grant); and for other specific research initiatives (subject advisors, pre-reading coalition, bulk lesson plan and lesson planning trackers, literacy and numeracy in different languages, piloting). The funder prefers to fund special projects rather than to provide core funding because they like to be involved at the design and implementation stages of a project. One funder expressed concern at the NECT’s capacity to manage donor relationships and made inputs regarding capacitation. This is at variance with the internal view that the NECT’s relationships with its funders are good. Another funder expressed the view that although the NECT has had some success, they hope that this evaluation “will allow more opportunity for frank discussions about how NECT can be more successful.”

### **4.7.3. Interactions and relationships of NECT with core stakeholders**

The NECT is an organisation dedicated to strengthening partnerships within civil society and between civil society and government in order to achieve national goals for basic education. It strives both to support and to influence the agenda for reform of education. A creation of the NDP (chapter 9) and the subsequent ECF, the NECT takes its strategic cue from the education priorities set out in these frameworks. In essence the NECT is a partnership initiative aimed at strengthening

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cooperation among stakeholders – business, labour and other civil society formations – in order to improve education outcomes.

### *4.7.3.1 NECT-DBE relations*

A core function of the NECT has been to create a coordinated interface with government and since its inception it has worked both to influence and to support the agenda for reform in education. Its relationship with government is based on mutual recognition of the distinct roles and responsibilities of the state and civil society. It is, however, an entity that is required to report to the DBE and to parliament as a large proportion of its funding comes from government.

The evaluation set out to understand how this collaboration model works at the strategic level, but also how it manifests at the implementation level and how NECT-driven partnerships and relationships are perceived. Most respondents interviewed in the NECT national office felt that the relationship between the NECT and the DBE was critical to the success of the collaboration model, and that to date it had been constructive and mutually beneficial. During the interviews respondents highlighted different aspects of this relationship:

- Support for the NECT programme is good at the national level and it has been useful for the programme to have had a National Minister of Basic Education in office from the outset of the programme, when it was first implemented.
- The NECT has a solid and effective relationship with the DBE through the National Minister, the DG and the CEO of NECT.
- Programmes implemented jointly by the NECT and the DBE generally work well because there are significant levels of information exchange and efforts are made to align the NECT programmes / interventions with DBE policies and initiatives.
- The NECT has a strong and well-integrated relationship with the DBE. An Educational Technical Assistance Office has ensured that NECT staff are placed within the DBE and work with DBE managers, but these officials are coordinated by NECT. This arrangement has accelerated key areas of development, for example the modernisation of SA-SAMS and the conceptualisation of the three-stream model.
- The DBE is the largest funder of NECT, with the department contributing 65% of the NECT budget between 2014 and 2020.

As with all relationships there are areas for improvement and reformulation. It was felt that the DBE should improve the capacity of its staff at provincial level and ensure that permanent capable HODs were appointed to work effectively with NECT officials to implement programmes at the district level. It was also suggested that there need to be open lines of communication between DBE and NECT at the inception phase of projects to ensure alignment of design and implementation. This would further strengthen relationships. Respondents within the DBE who are responsible for the

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technical management of key branches expressed concern that they were not always sufficiently consulted on major initiatives as decisions are made at the ministerial and DG level.

### *4.7.3.2 NECT-union relations*

Most respondents from the NECT national office felt that the relationship with unions was good, whilst some felt that it was a challenging area to work in. Some of these varying opinions are captured in the quotations from respondents below. Where relationships experience difficulties, it appears that a lack of proper communication and a spirit of collaboration are the influencing factors which negatively affect the quality of the relationship.

For some respondents, the relationship with unions was seen as good – as viewed through the lens of NECT Board interactions with stakeholders, including union representatives. Unions see the NECT as having a very important co-ordinating function in bringing together disparate groupings of stakeholders who have previously invested funds and effort into education initiatives that have effectively created an uncoordinated “silo” effect. Some union respondents expressed reservations about the role of the NECT, noting that the major challenges facing the education sector – such as school infrastructure, security, classroom overcrowding and poor learning outcomes in critical subject areas such as maths and science – remain the responsibility of the state to solve, although all these areas were outlined as core concerns of the NECT and fall within its mandate to collaborate with DBE on change. These respondents were not keen to see the NECT assume those roles but felt that it should rather operate as a facilitator and a catalyst, working alongside government to ensure that it delivers on its clearly stated intentions regarding its role in education transformation. There was, however, strong union support for the work that the NECT was doing in collaboration with the unions and the DBE to strengthen and embed the professionalisation of teaching in the country.

### *4.7.3.3 NECT-private sector relations*

As part of the evaluation key respondent interviews were undertaken with some of the major private sector funders who have channelled money into the education sector through the NECT. For many corporates in South Africa there is a clear recognition that the legacy of the apartheid era education system still holds educational transformation back and that there is a need for the private sector to support the education sector to build up its capacity to increase the availability of skilled labour through a well-functioning school system. This reality provides a strong “business case” for the private sector to partner with government and provide all kinds of support, interventions and development programmes to improve the quality of education in South Africa.

Historically much of the private sector engagement in South Africa’s education sector has been through parallel provision of funding but with the advent of the NECT many companies started to realise the long-term benefits for growing businesses to invest in education. Key private sector respondents felt that the modality of the NECT has provided companies with an ideal public-private

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partnership (PPP) vehicle for investing in national efforts to overcome shortcomings in the delivery of public services by the state.

The corporate sector sees the NECT as a “safe pair of hands” in terms of its status, and the systems it has put in place for good governance, accountability, and transparency. Companies that invest resources in the NECT are attracted by the government’s commitment to a 50-50 partnership with business through its pledge to match funds raised by the private sector. For corporate donors the NECT enables a consolidation of funding power, which in turn allows for the investment of significant levels of resources into flagship programmes. Through the collaboration model espoused by the NECT, corporates indicated that the governance skills, management skills and the energy of the private sector were vital in terms of holding government and the unions accountable for implementing NECT programmes, and for convincing citizens to stand up and take responsibility through their governing bodies for their schools.

A major plus for the big NECT corporate funders has been the concept of national pooled funding as an essential tool that enables corporates to avoid building a parallel system to government. Corporates that fund the work of the NECT recognise that parallel systems, instead of strengthening government, effectively weaken government by creating dependency on an unsustainably funded system. They feel that the NECT model allows companies to work together on social development initiatives with a planned transition to government, to ensure the sustainability of the initiative. This is being done by undertaking pilot projects, learning lessons along the way, and then handing over the effective projects to government for them to deliver at scale. The key informants representing corporates raised several concerns that may, however, influence the level of support that they provide to the NECT in the future:

- There is a perception that the NECT is becoming an arm of the DBE and is therefore blurring its mandate, which creates concerns about this kind of PPP model.
- The NECT is taking on too many initiatives and is thereby losing its strategic focus.
- Political uncertainty in South Africa and the ongoing effects of state capture and corruption increase the hesitancy of corporates to commit to long-term funding of the NECT.
- There is a concern that the “jury is still out” in terms of the impact that the work of the NECT is having, and that there needs to be more outcome and impact level data on the medium- and longer-term effects of NECT-led programming – essentially a concern about the value for money of investments.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education has yet to be fully assessed, and corporates feel that the impact of this on teaching and learning is a major “unknown” that creates high levels of risk aversion within the corporate sector.

#### 4.7.4. Conclusion

Governance and funding are both a special programme of NECT and could be said to comprise the DNA of the complex organisation it epitomises. The NECT as a structure was established to serve as a prototype vehicle for driving the NDP's education priorities through public-private collaboration. In this format government, business, labour and civil society organisations have worked collectively to support the governance, resourcing and operations of the NECT. Amongst these groupings there has also been consensus around how best to create and sustain the requisite conditions for the success of the collaboration. Through serving on the NECT board of trustees, through engagement on the DSCs, by providing funding for NECT programming and via the provision of technical expertise these four stakeholder groups have been actively involved in the governance and the implementation of the NECT programmes. Evidence from key informant interviews and work in the field suggest that the NECT Board (at the strategic level) and DSCs at the district level have played significant roles in the transformation of critical education processes.

One of the notable achievements of the collaboration model associated with NECT has been that NECT has successfully raised significant levels of programme funding from the both the government (primarily the DBE) and the private sector. There are some concerns, however, that the corporate funding stream is narrowing (partly as a result of COVID-19) and that there is an increasing reliance on state funding – something that could impact on its efforts to remain as an independent entity. This is stated without losing sight of the fact that the NECT was established to assist the education transformation project and, therefore, that the state has a responsibility to fund it. It is, however, important for the state to involve all stakeholders mentioned in the ECF in resourcing the NECT. A collaborationist relationship needs every partner to be involved and feel they have a stake in the project.

The arrangements of governance and collaboration perform crucial work to respond to both the institutional and non-institutional processes that bear on the delivery of education, and which have become, organisationally, part of the unique marker of the NECT. Very different views were voiced to the evaluation team regarding the relationship of NECT with the DBE, funders, and civil society organisations. In some ways this diversity of views is a strength, indicating the ways in which NECT has succeeded in holding together very different constituencies. Another strength is the increasing number of funders, the rising level of annual income, and the range of project expenditure. But these overall positive trends need to be read carefully. The changing balance of expenditure between core and special projects needs careful consideration. This trend was not a COVID-19 special moment, but had begun in 2017, was evident in 2019, and was a major feature of expenditure in 2020. This appears to signal that in addition to the 'core business' of improving teaching, learning, and community engagement with schooling at the district level, the NECT is taking on a range of additional projects to support DBE needs. NECT does have some very distinctive contributions to make in terms of convening powers at national and district levels. But its specialist work has been in improving teaching and learning. Moving into areas where NECT is not specialist, while financially useful to the organisation, runs the risk of spreading its expertise too thinly. We

examine this further in relation to Programme 7 on Strategic Partnerships, but careful attention needs to be given to the governance arrangements to oversee this balancing between specialist and generalist support to the DBE.

#### **4.8. Programme 7: Strategic partnerships**

The original conception of Programme 7 was that strategic partnerships were needed in three areas: the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) initiative; Life orientation; and the Education technical assistance office. Strategic partnerships, however, are at the centre of the NECT's activities, and so it was inevitable that Programme 7 would come to include other aspects – as hinted by the FREF ToR (FREF, 2020a: section 4.2.7). The evaluation of Programme 7 begins with an account of progress achieved in the implementation of the initial three areas of partnership before broadening the scope to include other initiatives under this Programme.

There is, however, some confusion about nomenclature: while in the 2019 Annual Report the CEO in his "Reflections" refers to "strategic partnerships programmes" (*sic*), the three initiatives alluded to above – SAFE, Life orientation, and the Education technical assistance office – are located later in the report under a section entitled "Strategic initiatives".

Additionally, the NECT has taken initiative in respect of talent management with a view to its own medium-term sustainability as well as the broader skills needs of the DBE.

##### **4.8.1. Sanitation appropriate for education (SAFE)**

A key aspect of safety and dignity at schools is proper toilet infrastructure rather than pit latrines, into which children have fallen and drowned. Notably Michael Komape (age 5) (2014), in Chebeng village, Limpopo and Lumka Mkethwa in the Eastern Cape (March 2018), fell into pits of human waste and died (Presidency, 2018; Tomlinson, 2021). To mitigate the recurrence of such tragedies, President Cyril Ramaphosa launched the SAFE initiative in August 2018 (The Presidency, 2018), in the form of a partnership between government, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the NECT, to which the private sector was invited to contribute. The goal was to provide innovative, safe ablution facilities at nearly 4,000 mostly rural and township schools where such facilities did not exist. The President said, "This is an initiative that will save lives and restore the dignity of tens of thousands of our nation's children, as our Constitution demands." Private companies were invited to adopt groups of schools as model schools for joint sanitation-water-energy off-grid solutions. Amongst NECT's Special Projects, SAFE is by far the largest, with a budget of R673 million, or 59% of the value of all special projects combined. To date, R172 million has been expended on the project, comprising one-third (33%) of special project expenditure since the inception of the NECT.

The responses of principals, teachers and learners to the question in the NECT Schooling Survey that

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reads “How would you rate the standard of toilets for teachers / learners in your school?” are outlined in Table 20.

*Table 20: How would you rate the standard of toilets for teachers / learners in your school?*

Response	Principals		Teachers		Learners	
	N	Average	N	Average	N	Average
Score (out of 5 stars)	151	2.5	145	3.1	1,384	2.9

Source: NECT Schooling Survey

As in the case of the safety and security afforded by the school property, principals are less sanguine about the state of their schools’ toilets (2.5 stars) than are learners and teachers (2.9 and 3.1 stars respectively). But no group rates the standard of toilets as at a “good” or “very good” level.

School provision of hygienic ablution facilities for girls when they are menstruating is another key aspect of sanitation. This is about health and dignity. The profile here is illustrated in Table 21.

*Table 21: Do the ablution facilities cater for the menstrual hygiene needs of adolescent girls?*

Response	Principals		Teachers		Learners	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	40	27.0	90	60.8	549	72.6
No	108	73.0	58	39.2	207	27.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>756<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: NECT Schooling Survey

While these figures are not strictly comparable because they do not pertain to principals, teachers and learners from the same school, principals are yet again far more critical of the state of ablution facilities in their schools (73% said such facilities did not cater for the hygiene needs of menstruating girls) than are teachers (39.2% critical) and learners (27.4% critical) – though almost half the learner respondents did not know, either because they were at primary school or because they did not feel themselves in a position to make a judgement. (Gender is not a factor here, a cross-tabulation shows; but a higher percentage of those in primary school – 47.2% – and of those in Grade 8 – 51% – than of those in Grades 9-12 do not know about whether their schools cater for girls when they are menstruating.

Observations by the fieldworkers who visited schools in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West in April 2021 were that ablution facilities at almost all of the 12 schools visited showed signs of neglect. Toilets in the Eastern Cape primary school in particular were in a bad state of repair: pit latrines had no toilet seats, which were a major hazard to learners of small stature in danger of falling into them.

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<sup>2</sup> Those who did not know – 628, or 45.3% of learners – have been factored out of this calculation to enable comparison with principals and teachers, who were not given the option to say “I don’t know”.

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The fieldnotes show that the ongoing maintenance of ablution facilities at schools remains a significant challenge. These conditions highlight that the SAFE programme needs to look beyond construction to the longer-term viability and sustainability of these facilities.

After the launch of SAFE, a project management office was established to mobilise resources and implement the sanitation related programmes. The primary objective is to replace unsafe pit toilets with appropriate sanitation in accordance with the Department of Education's (DBE) Norms and Standards for school infrastructure (DBE, n.d.b.). The number of toilet seats to be provided has been determined by the learner enrolment. Such number of seats must include age-appropriate facilities in primary schools, as well as facilities for the disabled in all schools. The scope of work includes the following:

- Assessment of existing sanitation infrastructure
- Determination of scope for required sanitation infrastructure (i.e. required number of seats in terms of the DBE Norms and Standards given the learner numbers)
- De-sludging of the existing pit toilets
- Demolition of the unsafe existing pit toilets
- Construction of appropriate toilets
- Provision of rainwater harvesting tanks
- Construction of walkways to link toilets to the nearest classroom block

Of the 3,898 schools on the project list, 969 schools were assessed and found to have adequate sanitation, while a further 126 schools were found to have been closed. The remaining schools on the list were allocated to a range of different Implementing Agents that include the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), Mvula Trust and the NECT. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) appointed the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) in August 2018 for the implementation of school sanitation programmes in selected schools in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces. In July 2019, the DBE allocated 121 schools to the NECT for implementation under the SAFE programme, with 55 Schools in the Eastern Cape and 66 Schools in Limpopo Province, but this was later reduced to 111 as a result of the closure or merger of a number of these schools. By 2021 the number of schools allocated to NECT under the SAFE programme was 658, with procurement finalised for 576 schools (by June 2021).

The SAFE programme was driven by the understanding that schools need to provide their staff and learners with safe drinking water, improved access to and maintenance of clean, gender-friendly and inclusive sanitation facilities and to promote hygienic behaviours and lifelong good health. The DBE has recognised the shortfall in adequate water and sanitation infrastructure at many township and rural schools across the country, and aim to ensure that schools should be provided with adequate sanitation facilities, which promote health and hygiene standards, and comply with all relevant laws (DBE, 2012). For the NECT as a management agent for SAFE the measurable objective has been to eradicate inappropriate sanitation facilities characterised by schools without

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appropriate sanitation, inappropriate Grade R sanitation and insufficient sanitation facilities, to meet the DBE Norms and Standards (NECT, n.d.f.). The choice of appropriate sanitation technology can only be based on an assessment conducted on the most suitable sanitation technology. The role of the NECT has been to select and appoint contractors to undertake the work and to be allocated to school sites according to their CIDB Grading and threshold and to oversee site development plans. Given the location of many of the identified schools the NECT has opted to install dry sanitation using a urine divergent system alongside alternative building technologies. The most successful partnership has been through the work with Assupol, which has succeeded in rolling out around 60 Amalooloo – a dry sanitation system that includes the collection, storage, safe management, treatment, and disposal of human excreta which can be safely returned to the soil as compost or fertiliser. The NECT has noted that working with the private sector is easier than working with government as it circumvents many of the challenges and delays associated with PFMA procurement processes.

From key informant interviews with NECT management one of the biggest challenges to emerge was the limited capacity of some of the service providers, who had not proved to be as efficient as expected. This has placed an added burden on the NECT in terms of managing contracts and deliverables. Another challenge is that the procurement and delivery processes are not placing sufficient emphasis on the menstrual hygiene needs of adolescent girls and this issue has not been included in the NECT planning. In general, the site development plans of the SAFE programme appear to place insufficient focus on the specific water and sanitation needs of girl learners despite a directive in the Department of Women’s Sanitary Dignity Policy that calls for “the availability and accessibility of a safe, hygienic and private sanitation facilities which is sex-segregated, has a door with a lock and is functional when needed” (DWYPD, 2019).

Table 22 assembles data on the numbers of schools by province allocated to NECT under the SAFE initiative and the level of completion of the school toilet projects.

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Table 22: Status report on NECT’s contribution to the SAFE initiative (2021)+

Province	IA	No. in original allocation	No. of Schools cancelled	No. of Schools proceeding	DBE SAFE Overall Progress											
					PLANNING			CONSTRUCTION								
					Site Ass & Scoping	Survey Drawings	SDPs	Site Handovers	1-25% Completed	26-50% Completed	51-75% Completed	76-99% Completed	Practical Completion	Works Completion	Final Completion	
EC-B1	NECT	55	6	49	42	42	42	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
EC-B2	NECT	101	0	101	81	85	94	52	5	2	3	6	5	0	0	0
LP-B1	NECT	66	4	62	61	54	54	36	6	2	1	3	7	0	0	0
LP-B3	NECT	47	0	47	47	47	47	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
EC-B3	NECT	233	0	233	195	202	210	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KZN-B3	NECT	80	5	75	77	75	75	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
EC-B4A	NECT	60	15	45	45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
EC-B4	NECT	52	6	46	46	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	NECT	694	36	658	594	510	524	88	11	4	4	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL %	NECT			100%	90%	88,54%	90,97%	13,4%	11	4	4	9	12	0	0	0

Findings on the issue of ablution facilities in schools and the NECT’s participation in the SAFE initiative are as follows:

- The primary objective of the SAFE initiative is to replace basic pit toilets with appropriate sanitation in accordance with the DBE’s Norms and Standards for school infrastructure.
- Schools assessed to have poor WASH facilities were allocated to a range of different Implementing Agents that include the DBSA, Mvula Trust and the NECT.
- From August 2018 NECT was responsible for the implementation of school sanitation programmes in selected schools in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, and Limpopo.
- By 2021 the number of schools allocated to NECT under the SAFE programme was 658, with procurement finalised for 576 schools (by June 2021). For the NECT as a management agent for SAFE, the measurable objective has been to eradicate inappropriate sanitation facilities characterised by schools without appropriate sanitation, inappropriate Grade R sanitation and insufficient sanitation facilities, to meet the DBE Norms and Standards. The NECT has established a dedicated unit for the SAFE programme, which has demonstrated capacity to manage a complex procurement process that produces sustainable, cost-effective facilities.

The NECT involvement in the SAFE initiative is seen by a number of those in NECT management to be an important strategic collaborative initiative signalling both the education sector’s drive to improve sanitation infrastructure at schools and the commitment of NECT to support this work. The NECT, along with other agencies like Mvula Trust, are managing the process of tendering for and appointing professional service providers and contractors to construct the sanitation facilities at

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schools. The NECT is also serving a quality assurance role in ensuring that the newly constructed facilities meet the requirements of DBE school infrastructure standards. While the complexities of the engineering work and tendering associated with this project are acknowledged, the slow pace is a matter of concern. The balance of what is gained for the NECT through its involvement with SAFE needs to be strategically assessed against what may be lost in terms of deepening engagement with the 'core business' of the DIP. Careful consideration needs to be given to whether the NECT's social and political resources as a particular kind of complex organisation are better utilised overseeing sanitation works or rather deployed building community and teaching support in schools to 'wrap around' the provision of sanitation facilities, a task which could be delegated to organisations with specialist experience in this area. Utilising NECT's convening powers at district level could, for example, support teaching, learning and school cultures which are accepting and supportive of menstrual hygiene management for learners and teachers. It is, of course, recognised that improvement in school infrastructure improves the performance of learners. Nonetheless, the function could be allocated to other service providers to coordinate and implement.

In response to the presentation of these findings, NECT has made four additional points that serve to contextualise the SAFE initiative within the scope of its work:

1. It is common knowledge that South Africa has a massive backlog before, and since 1994, in the provision of safe water supply and sanitation at schools. The Minister of Basic Education has a constitutional responsibility to implement Norms and Standards on infrastructure. Public pressure to eradicate 'pit toilets' has mounted over the years and came to head in the tragic death of a learner using unsafe facilities. The need for urgent change in the funding and management of water / sanitation delivery at schools is beyond dispute.
2. Against this backdrop, the worst affected provincial departments of education and public works *cannot* meet the demand for infrastructure, either financially, or at the pace which is required.
3. SAFE was an initiative of the Presidency, which the NECT was requested to support. The NECT's Trustees took the decision to support the initiative. As in the case of SA-SAMS, NECT's role enabled a collaboration between the public and private sectors and significant resource mobilisation. By the end of 2021, new toilet facilities at 80 schools have been delivered with support from private funders (including Assupol). These successes contrast with the slower pace at which facilities are delivered at schools supported by public monies. The reasons are clear: regulatory approvals governing the use of public funds are more onerous and time consuming. These are systemic and structural constraints within which any agency must operate.
4. The lessons from the private sector implementation were used to model the large scale of implementation of Alternative Building Technology in 600 earmarked schools. It is quicker, more cost effective and spreads innovation amongst small contractors.

#### **4.8.2. Life Orientation**

A second strategic partnership for NECT has been its work with the DBE on the development of Life Orientation textbooks. This project too, important as it is, has been marked by delays in completion.

The NECT, as part of its mandate from the DBE, provides fundholding and coordinating support. The 2019 Annual Report noted that “The project has made considerable progress since April 2017 and is currently in the Grade Book Edit and Design of phase” (*sic*) (NECT, 2019a: 67). The development of all nine textbooks was scheduled to be completed by 30 November 2020. However, there has been a delay of 20 months from the initial scheduled completion date – indicated in the 2017 Annual Report (NECT, 2017d) as March 2019.

The delays in completing this project are perplexing. The Chief Director Social Inclusion and Partnerships in Education, DBE underlined in 2017, when launching the project, that speedy completion was needed:

The Life Orientation project required quick turnaround times and the involvement of over 30 stakeholders made up of development and social investment Funders and technical experts. The NECT was the most relevant platform to quickly bring these players together. It was easy to set up the financial management and recruitment systems as well as conducive working arrangements for the team. In this way, *we are confident of meeting the tight deadlines involved in the project*. We aim to produce a set of nine textbooks by March 2019. The governance and management systems set up in the NECT enabled us to create the confidence from funding partners thus securing their commitment to crowd-fund over R30 million (NECT, 2017d: 48; emphasis added).

#### **4.8.3. Education Technical Assistance Office**

A third strategic partnership has centred on the work of the Education Technical Assistance Office. The Education Technical Assistance Office (ETAO) is profiled in the Chairman’s report in the 2019 NECT Annual Report: “On ECD and skills development, the NECT continues to provide support through the Education Technical Assistance Office which flexibly mobilises the required technical assistance for critical policy and programming processes within the DBE” (NECT, 2019a: 4). In the same report, the CEO attributes an 8.9% decline in expenditure to “delays experienced in implementation of some of the planned activities on Education Technical Assistance Office (ETAO) and National Reading Coalition (NRC) programmes” (NECT, 2019a: 8).

Section 6 of the 2019 Annual Report – “Strategic initiatives” – lists the ETAO’s and its three focus areas as:

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1. Migration of Early Childhood Development from the Department of Social Development to the Department to the Basic Education
2. Rollout of the Three Stream model in order to diversify educational options for learners; and
3. Establishment of the National Institute of Curriculum and Professional Development (NICPD) as an institutional body for attaining more coherence and effective teacher development and curriculum implementation (NECT, 2019a: 62).

NECT is responsible for the first of these. The CEO's report to the Board (24 April 2020) highlights a new funding line item of R6.95 million, comprising "DBE ECD complementary funding" for "the audit of ECD centres and other ECD migration related activities". An initial 1 April 2020 deadline for the migration was extended to 1 April 2021 in order to accommodate the technicalities entailed. The feasibility of the latter deadline was queried at the Parliamentary Education Committee (16 March 2021) in view of emerging complexities pertaining to "legislation, contracts, proclamations, new DBE functions, human resources and labour relations, ECD financing and budgets, and moveable and immoveable assets" (PMG, 2021).

Limited information was gathered on this strategic initiative, and it is thus not possible to comment on this work.

### **4.8.4. Talent management**

A fourth strategic partnership has focussed on talent management.

The CEO's report to the Board in November 2020 provided an update on "ongoing engagement" with the DBE officials with respect to "talent management". The NECT had undertaken a documentary review to assess the competency gaps which existed among DBE officials. Several documents were interrogated in order to determine the gaps. These were the Education Labour Relations Council collective agreement; Guidelines on strengthening circuit management; Occupational Specific Dispensation; Circuit manager job descriptions; Chief Education Specialist and Deputy Education Specialist job descriptions. The analysis and subsequent discussions with the DBE identified the need to develop several education specific competencies:

- Strategy and managerial leadership
- Education formulation and analysis
- Data analysis, interpretation and reporting
- Assessment and quality assurance
- Planning curriculum delivery approaches
- Education research design and execution; and
- Programme / policy monitoring and evaluation.

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Natural attrition of senior executives in the DBE renders this need as urgent and an amount of R1,2 million has been allocated to executive support for likely successors to executives who are close to retirement. The envisaged support comprises:

1. Development of coherent education competency framework
2. Workshop the competency framework with the system and attend to modifications
3. Training material development and customization
4. Development of a monitoring and evaluation framework
5. Enrolment of officials with service providers/universities; and
6. Rolling out of the Post training executive support programme (i.e., mentorship)

The partnership with the DBE in this area does allow for NECT and the DBE to learn together on what has been achieved in work on policy, planning and evaluation.

### **4.8.5. Conclusion**

It is clear from the growing portfolio of NECT programme interventions, linked to strategic partnerships, that their work is both evolving and responsive to the changing needs and pressures within the education sector. NECT has been a key strategic partner to the DBE in all the four initiatives outlined in the Strategic Partnerships programme. However, it is evident that delivery on some – notably SAFE and the Life Orientation textbooks – has been slow. To what extent some of these initiatives make best use of the NECT specialist skills needs careful consideration.

## **4.9. Programme 8: Monitoring and evaluation**

Programme 8 covers a wide range of activities linked to monitoring and evaluation. Activities include inputs into internal programme design and framework development, quality assurance of training (virtual and face to face) and materials development, and pre- and post-assessments of training (design, implementation and analysis). The programme is also concerned with the design of monitoring surveys, data collection tools, and testing. Work is carried out under this programme in capacity building for district and provincial officials, supporting their work in data collection, processing and analysis. Under this programme reporting is carried out to programme managers (through internal processes) and to NECT stakeholders (through external communication channels).

In the first two years of its existence the NECT outsourced most of its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) work, with the original M&E function coming through JET because the thinking was that NECT would operate as a small secretariat rather than an implementing body.<sup>3</sup> After 2015 there was a major reorganisation of the NECT initiative with the range of programme areas rapidly expanding and the volume of data rapidly increasing. From 2015 the NECT became much more concerned with

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all evidence for this section comes from interviews with the MQA (Monitoring and Quality Assurance) unit of the NECT.

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scale-up, which meant that the budget grew rapidly and the scale of operations increased exponentially. Different consortia were working on NECT programmes, different approaches were being trialled and data was being collected in a fragmented way. At this stage the need to streamline and consolidate the NECT's M&E function became quite pressing. Once NECT made the shift to having its own in-house M&E capacity in 2015 a more considered and consistent effort was made to create better alignment between programmes and create a more standardised M&E approach.

The NECT M&E function works with district officials and at school level to surface information and sits on a considerable amount of data on issues of curriculum coverage and teaching skills developed. By 2017 the NECT had large data sets from many schools showing curriculum coverage. The DBE responded by saying that they do this tracking through school-based assessments and data is captured on SA-SAMS, but this tends to be more about compliance as opposed to an analysis of actual capacity gained. NECT invested in collecting school level outcome data because of the unreliability of data captured through SA-SAMS. Typically, the system uses school-based assessment data (SBA) to gauge learning outcomes in the lower grades.

The theory of change (discussed under Programme 1) places considerable emphasis on feedback loops and evaluation in relation to the programmes for teacher professional development. The NECT is concerned about performance in reading and maths and introduced a fine-grained analysis of quality of work in maths and languages. As part of this set of interventions, the NECT has:

- Drawn out quality issues, such as measuring the number of words that a learner should know in every grade
- Measured time on task – and accumulated a large quantity of data on this issue; and
- Produced large volumes of data on reading performance and translated this into implementation modalities.

However, these data, have not been condensed into report form.

The M&E unit conducts internal monitoring of the PSRIP, DIP, Teaching Mathematics for Understanding (TMU), PSRIP Home Languages and Second Additional Languages. Monitoring conducted for the PSRIP is connected to collecting data on registration, attendance, competition and pre- and post-course assessments. A portfolio of evidence is compiled by participants, with the guidance designed and the portfolio marked and analysed by members of NECT staff working on Programme 8. Once these stages have been completed, a participant in PRISP can achieve professional development credits (SETA and SACE requirements).

The M&E unit has also been used to conduct evaluations of aspects of NECT's work. It was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Education DialogueSA programme and the impact of innovations in, and the effectiveness of, remote digital learning. The very broad range of work linked to the M&E programme calls for a broad range of expertise.

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In addition to generating and organising data the M&E team has been working with education managers to get them to engage with data more strategically as a way of improving systems.

There is a recognition amongst that a broad range of skill sets and expanded capacity are required by the teams working on Programme 8 in order to monitor the full range of work being rolled out by NECT.

The NECT has been trying to align its M&E system with that of the DBE. Data sources, however, are different and have different reporting cycles, which makes alignment more difficult. The NECT relies heavily on EMIS data, which is often badly outdated and unsatisfactory. The SA-SAMS system is a closed system and only accessible to people who work in schools. The Curriculum Branch of the DBE has a poorly developed system, and the data is often unreliable.

There is clearly much to be gained by taking forward a two-way alignment between DBE and NECT M&E systems, accompanied by a process of synthesizing information and reflecting on implications in a range of fora.

### **4.9.1. M&E and the scaling up of NECT interventions**

M&E has formed the basis for modification of interventions and for assessing the quality of activities being conducted. The NECT M&E function has enabled the organisation to identify the most valuable and efficient use of its resources. It has been critical for developing objective conclusions regarding the extent to which programmes are judged as successful. Monitoring and evaluation data has provided the necessary evidence base to guide strategic planning, to design and implement programmes and projects, and to allocate, and re-allocate resources in a more efficient way. Thus information compiled by the M&E programme and unit has been used to develop two strands of work on scaling up and systemic change. NECT developed an evidence base from two sources which were shared with provinces / the DBE . On the basis of this monitoring system, schools which had a *low dosage* of inputs were selected for a form of scaling up termed provincialisation – which relies on the province to provide the necessary ongoing support. Schools which had a *high dosage* of inputs were selected for what was termed universalisation – which relied on NECT coaches supporting schools. In the Eastern Cape, it was clear from year-on-year data reviews that the high dosage schools in the universalisation strand produced better learner outcomes than schools in the provincialisation programme.

Two NECT infographics, one on universalisation and one on provincialisation, explain the range of evidence used to assess these processes. The two-page infographic on universalisation (NECT, n.d.c.) addresses the topics “What is universalisation?”, “What are the aims of universalisation?”, “What are the learning programmes?”, “What is curriculum management?”, “What have we achieved?”, and “What lessons have we learnt?” A similar range of topics is covered in the infographic on provincialisation. Universalisation, taking place in all eight of the original districts

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identified by the NECT for interventions – Bohlabela (Mpumalanga), Bojanala (North West), Libode and Mount Frere (Eastern Cape), Waterberg and Vhembe (Limpopo), and Pinetown and King Cetshwayo (KwaZulu-Natal) – is described as “the process of taking successful FSS innovations to all schools in the targeted districts”. The publications on universalisation and provincialisation note that the “Committee of Education Ministers (CEM) and Heads of Education Committee (HEDCOM) support the replication of Learning Programmes in all schools” and that “District Directors have given their full support for the replication programme” (NECT, n.d.c.). However, the criteria for replication are not specified in the infographic.

Provincialisation, taking place in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, is described as “the scale-up of the NECT District Improvement Programme (DIP) from FSSs, and from all schools in the respective districts to all schools and districts in the province” – aimed, like universalisation, at supporting school managers, circuit managers, teachers, and subject advisors.

The NECT has worked to develop baselines and indicators as foundations to measure the impact of NECT innovations and has tried to ensure that these have been efficient in generating valid evidence for demonstrating change. Since 2017 a number of PowerPoint presentations have been developed – according to information provided in interviews with the CEO and the MQA unit, for internal use and for the benefit of DoE officials in the provinces in which the NECT has focused its efforts – presenting preliminary analyses of baseline assessment data and midline assessment data in support of universalisation and provincialisation (see NECT, 2017b; 2017c; 2018b; 2018c; 2019b; 2019c; 2019d; 2020a; 2020c; n.d.a). These presentations (discussed in depth in relation to Programme 2 above) are preliminary, in that they are not accompanied by narrative reports interpreting the data for an audience outside of the NECT / DoE. NECT staff clarified that the reports in the PowerPoint format were intended to provide high quality monitoring evidence to inform NECT programme managers and decision making by provincial managers. The findings from these presentations are discussed below and some of the implications considered.

A 2018 baseline study in the Eastern Cape described data gathered on learning outcomes (see discussion of Programme 2 above) in a sample of 263 schools (primary and secondary). These results reveal that poor performance was associated with decisions on provincialisation – suggesting that the low dose intervention that had resulted in a decision to support provincialisation requires some critical reflection. The assessment of that data used to support a decision on provincialisation can be read in parallel with data used to support a decision on universalisation.

A PowerPoint presentation entitled “Baseline Survey based on Draft Learner Workbook Analysis (Grade 3 and 4: Mathematics; Grade 8 and 9: Maths and NS) 2018” provides a detailed account of use of the learner workbook in selected subjects (Mathematics, Natural Science, and EFAL) in selected grades (3, 4, 8 and 9) to establish a baseline “to **inform the support of the universalisation process of the NECT Learning Programme across all schools in the 8 districts**”. Which schools were selected for the baseline analysis is not specified, however; and while the file name indicates that schools in the Bohlabela district were involved in the analysis, this is not specified in the title of the

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presentation – evidence again of the “internal” (NECT / DBE) nature of this output. Very small numbers of workbooks (between 11 and 26) are included in the analysis.

The presentation devotes a few slides at the end to “Key observations”, which enables the reader to make some sense of the foregoing slides, and one page to “Recommendations”. However, the presentation needs to be explicated in narrative format – in the form of a *report* on the baseline analysis. Without this it is very difficult to understand the large number of slides in the PowerPoint presentation. Nor is it clear, from the presentation, what criteria were used to decide upon universalisation from selected schools to the eight districts.

The most comprehensive of the PowerPoint presentations (containing 91 slides) presents detailed analyses of EFAL and Mathematics assessment results at the Grade 3 and 4 levels for the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. This is an overview of progress achieved towards universalisation and provincialisation in these provinces. The presentation also includes data on the Teaching Mathematics for Understanding (TMU) project and on progress achieved to date in the PSRIP.

The extent of assessment and analysis of data showcases the work of the MQA unit. What is particularly useful are graphs showing distribution curves for the various assessments conducted – providing a clear indication of patterns in the distribution of learner marks. The conclusions are summarised in a shorthand format:

### **Provincialisation –**

- Grade 3 EFAL – improving
- Grade 4 EFAL – problems, especially the large number of learners at Level 1
- Grade 4 Maths – low threshold, improving and changes within the levels

### **Universalization (Mt Frere and Libode)**

- All improved but similar obstacles in Grade 4 EFAL

### **Overall**

- Universalization data (Libode and Mt Frere) is better (high dosage of support, one-on-one, 2 years and 3 months of exposure)
- Provincialisation – only 1 year of exposure, smaller improvements

Without accompanying narrative reports that take stock of the larger context in which these assessments have taken place and provide a framework for monitoring improvements in learner performance with clear annual targets – a framework that can be interrogated by external parties (education researchers outside the NECT) – this information remains opaque to all but NECT / DBE insiders.

### **4.9.2. Conclusion**

Programme 8 ensures an important place for M&E in the work of NECT monitoring teacher professionalisation initiatives, learner outcomes, building local capacity to use and interpret data,

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and to review NECT programmes. The scale and volume of work is impressive, but further attention needs to be given to reports that synthesise and interpret findings, and to critical review with internal and external stakeholders regarding findings. Alignment with DBE information systems to support systemic change is highly recommended. The NECT is generating a lot of knowledge which needs to be handled through a well-designed knowledge management system. The M&E could benefit immensely from such a system. The scaling up process is explained more coherently in this section but without a functional M&E system based on a well-designed knowledge management system decision-making on scaling up will be flawed.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation report set out to look at the eight programmes of the NECT bearing in mind the key evaluation focus areas concerned with:

- Teaching, teacher development and curriculum
- School leadership and management
- Partnerships, collaboration and stakeholder relations
- Capacity of the state; and
- Governance and resources.

The evaluation questions examined NECT programme impacts, sustainability, effectiveness, relevance and coherence.

The specific objectives for the evaluation were:

1. To determine the extent to which the NECT in its organisation, operations, delivery and achievements, has met its mandate and objectives as set out in the imperatives of the NDP, and the principles and goals of the ECF
2. To assess the extent to which the NECT has made a contribution to long-term change in education through its initiatives relating to systemic improvement
3. To assess and report on the strengths and weaknesses of the NECT's programme and approach to educational improvement, and thereby provide recommendations for improvement where necessary
4. To assess and report on the structure, nature and success of NECT's collaboration in mobilising networks and stakeholders to improve educational outcomes as set out in its mandate
5. To assess structure, efficiency and effectiveness of resource utilisation in realising the outcomes attained
6. To determine what environmental / institutional factors hinder or promote the achievement of the NDP's goals in the education sector in the medium- to long-term and to note what Commented action or interventions are required to position the NECT to be more responsive to its environment; and
7. To determine the extent and appropriateness of adoption and institutionalisation of NECT's innovations within the broader schooling system (FREF, 2020a: 8).

### 5.1. Conclusions

Underlying the analysis made in this evaluation is the recognition of the deep intersecting inequalities of race, class, gender and location associated with the South African education system, and the complexities of the processes entailed in trying to change this. NECT, with its focus on the

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needs of learners and teachers in quintile 1 and 2 schools, and building collaboration across a range of different stakeholders with concerns for education for the poorest children, is an important and innovative organisation with an enormous amount to offer in assisting with the transformation of the South African education system. NECT's experience of working at multiple levels from school through district, circuit, province and national networks, and with its close collaboration with the DBE has laid some important groundwork for a further deepening of strategic and operational work to help improve learning and strengthen the education system. NECT draws on a wide range of interventions and programmes, with a focus on teachers, enhancing learning, growing leadership, building district level collaboration to support education, using M&E data, exploring the potential of new technologies, and partnering to support the capacity of the state to deliver.

Over the last four years within NECT a number of important lessons have become apparent. The significance of collaboration and good communication from national down to local levels, and from local practice in schools through to district, provincial and national structures have been underlined. The significance of the lesson, foreshadowed in the ECF, and played out in the practice of NECT programmes, of holding together very diverse constituencies, has been confirmed. The need for collaboration, given the depth of inequality in the South African education system, was further confirmed by the COVID-19 pandemic. NECT has played a key role in holding together and co-ordinating the work of constituencies, such as the DBE, teacher unions, and the private sector, which may have different institutional orientations, but which all share a commitment to improving education quality, with special concern for the poorest children and their schools and interest in addressing the intersecting inequalities which shape the South African education system. But this success of NECT in supporting wide collaborations in many different areas has come at a cost to the organisation. In diversifying too widely, taking on a very wide range of projects, what has been diminished has been a clear sense of the ways in which different parts fit into a whole. Opportunities have not been sufficiently utilised to engage in strategic thinking, to develop the well informed and reflective forms of knowledge that can support both NECT as an organisation and the long term improvement of the South African education system. In taking on and advancing a range of special projects, often at the request of the DBE, NECT has not engaged enough with the development of strategic thinking about education in South Africa. The organisation has potential to convene and contribute key ideas, research, and experience of practice to planning for what needs to be done to meet Goals set for delivery in 2030 – notably the SDGs, global policy frameworks like *Education 2030*, and the African Union *Continental Education Strategy for Africa*. The government's three-year operational planning cycle should not constrain NECT in supporting thinking about goals with five- and ten-year timespans to deliver on strategic goals.

NECT is a complex organisation which acknowledges the need to draw on complex intelligence from a wide range of sources in order to address complex challenges. But NECT needs to realise the potential of the M&E data and other research information it assembles, and assess what gaps there are in knowledge, both about its own work and the changes needed in education in South Africa. There are gaps in the capacity of NECT to synthesise and evaluate data, and build knowledge about education system change. While managers within NECT understand the approach the organisation

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has taken to scaling up, building and sustaining relationships with the DBE, the thinking which underlies this, for example where boundaries are drawn, where, how and why provincialisation and universalisation are understood in particular ways, these ideas have not been thrown open to wider discussion, scrutiny and critique. There is a need to illuminate and explain how the DBE and NECT collaborate at all levels, and to keep this process under review through critical processes of scholarship and review.

NECT has a unique and effective relationship with the DBE, which is an enormous asset. NECT also has an asset in that is not part of the DBE, but is a complex organisation, and has multiple sources of funding and networks with a wide range of partners. The overall assessment of the evaluation is that the eight years of the NECT's efforts to drive ECF implementation have been relatively successful and have in many ways reinforced the value of the ECF as an effective model of collaboration and as a driver of NDP education priorities. The most significant observation in this regard is that there is extensive collaboration potential in communities across the South African landscape which remains untapped. The evaluation has found that many of the lessons from the ECF implementation confirm that such multi-stakeholder collaborations can succeed, but that there is room for continual improvement in certain critical areas to sustain the dynamism of the model. The findings of the evaluation have shown that the NECT has achieved an enormous amount in a relatively short space of time (effectively eight years) in attempting to meet the objectives of the NDP and the imperatives of the ECF for improving learning outcomes in the South African education system. As the CEO of NECT has pointed out in interviews with the evaluation team, the approach has been, following first-hand observation in schools, in the first instance to address the quality of teaching, "starting with the worst performers" (NPC, 2012: 314). Over an eight-year period (2014-2021) the NECT has established itself as an agent of change, helping to build a national project by seeking to embed new approaches to teaching and learning in the DBE and in provincial DoEs, districts, circuits and schools across the country – beginning, as per the NDP's proposal, in eight districts across five provinces and scaling up interventions that have worked from schools to the district ("universalisation"), from districts to the province ("provincialisation"), and from schools, districts and provinces to the whole country ("institutionalisation"). That these terms for scaling up – of the NECT's own devising – have gained traction across the country is testimony to the extent of the NECT's reach. The NECT model of collaboration underpins all its efforts. Taking its cue from the NDP and the ECF, the NECT has sought to gather into one fold all the groupings with a stake in education – the DBE and provincial DoEs, business, labour, civil society organisations, the South African Council of Educators (SACE) and the ETDP SETA – which share a common vision for improving learning outcomes. Consensus has built at various levels of engagement – at the national level (the NECT's partnership with the DBE is strong and has the full support of the Minister of Basic Education, who is a member of the NECT Board), at the provincial level (the NECT has developed good working relationships with all provincial Heads of Department and with district directors and other officials, especially subject advisors), and at the school level – providing customised leadership training for SGBs, principals and SMTs and curriculum and subject-oriented training for teachers. The view of the evaluation team, derived from a number of interviews with a range of stakeholders, is that collaboration and partnerships have been successful at the political level: the NECT has succeeded

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in promoting the initiative, in recruiting stakeholders of different kinds (business, labour, civil society) and of different persuasions, and in retaining a collaboration between stakeholders over an extended period. Private corporations have funded the initiative to the tune of many millions of Rands; and since the funding stream has continued and grown, there has seemingly been value for money in the NECT partnering with the DBE in trying to improve education. The fact that National Treasury has a separate vote for funding the NECT is evidence that the collaboration is working.

Against these positive achievements the evaluation has identified a number of gaps. NECT has not fully realised the potential of its organisational form and its openness to the scope of the complexity of the education system in South Africa. Its contribution to identifying and reviewing boundaries needs to be enhanced. Examples of boundaries to be set are between the unbounded psychosocial needs of learners and the form of professional support teachers can offer; between the upgrading of teachers' skills during a short training exercise (accredited with SACE) and the need for continuous professional development. A further gap is associated with the work NECT could do to stabilise and evaluate the education system through identifying key leverage points in different provinces or at different levels, identifying the key steps needed along the way to ensuring, for example, "90% of learners know[ing] more than 50% of the curriculum by 2030" (NECT Annual Report, 2016). Other gaps relate to synthesizing information produced by the M&E exercises, commissioning further research, and correcting course as needed. Some ways to do this might involve calculating the relationship between the amount spent on training teachers and improvements in learning outcomes. While collaboration involving business and labour – often through representation by prominent persons in executive positions – has been successful, other sections of civil society, most notably youth and women's organisations, do not seem to have had a commensurate place at the table. While NECT has viewed the Programme on National Dialogues as primarily concerned with the intrinsic value of dialogue, there is a case to be made to review how the networks built through the conversations on "Education NGO leadership" (the dialogue of 2016) and "Ethics in education" (the dialogue of 2020) can be used to enhance stakeholder reach.

We therefore conclude the NECT has met its mandate and objectives with regard to the ECF, but that more can be done to enhance its contribution to long-term change in education better connecting, planning and synthesising its initiatives relating to systemic improvement. The strengths of the NECT are its unique mix of collaborations and effective relationship with the DBE. Its weakness is the lack of clear articulation regarding how the different activities of the complex organisation work together to help mitigate and stabilise some of the harmful effects of the unequal socioeconomic relationships in South Africa that play out in schools. NECT has been enormously successful in establishing a structure, and developing and mobilising collaborative networks and stakeholder engagement. But it has been less successful in driving improvements in learner outcomes, particularly for those in Grade 3, 6, and 9. For learners in quintile 1 and 2 schools, there are huge challenges in enhancing learning and enormous legacies of past inadequacies to be overcome. The depth of these complexities requires more, not less, consideration of data, context, and the effective steps to be taken to bring about change. There are no silver bullets for this process, only a depth of engagement and support for teaching and learning over many years. The structure

and efficiency of resource allocation has helped NECT realise its achievements. But more needs to be done in expanding the capacity of the M&E unit, building up NECT as a research-intensive organisation that draws on synthesised knowledge production to plan and review all areas of practice. This requires a review of the balance between core funding and special projects in NECT's financial planning.

With regard to the individual NECT programmes and their impact, sustainability, effectiveness, relevance and coherence we conclude the following.

### **5.1.1. Programme 1: District Improvement Programme**

This programme has made meaningful contribution in the education system, particularly in terms of capacity development. The training and support are welcomed by teachers and principals, and the building of networks and collaboration at district level has been evident. The effectiveness of the programme, however, needs careful consideration in the face of the very uneven, but generally continuing poor learner outcomes in quintile 1 and 2 schools and the very limited capacity of parents to support education. These data underline the ongoing need for the work NECT does in Programme 1, which is highly relevant. However, the coherence of the Programme could be enhanced by more strategic planning and use of synthesised evidence from the M&E unit and additional research.

### **5.1.2. Programme 2: Systemic intervention**

Collaborations to enhance systemic change through Information and Communications Technology (ICT) have begun to impact on the operations of the DBE and the long-term sustainability of NECT interventions has been a key part of developing the work. But the effectiveness of NECT acting as the enabler for the DBE needs careful consideration. It appears that NECT taking on projects that are very large – for example, SA-SAMS – and involving itself with the regulatory frameworks around tendering risks blunting the USP of NECT and reduces its capacity to deliver on its core business as specified in the ECF.

### **5.1.3. Programme 3: Innovation programme**

Leading innovation in education requires creating an environment that encourages creative thinking to solve education challenges and support continuous improvement. Over the past six years the NECT has clearly taken on this role and sought to evolve its approach in line with the education vision of the NDP. The work on EdHub is highly innovative, and the connection between research, policy engagement and practice provides an excellent example of how NECT, as a complex organisation, can work across institutional and non-institutional contexts to embed changes around education technology in practice.

Programme 3 was found to be highly effective and coherent.

**5.1.4. Programme 4: Local projects**

Programme 4 was not included in the Terms of Reference for the evaluation and is therefore not substantively addressed in the report.

**5.1.5. Programme 5: Education DialogueSA**

The programme has been effective in its attempt to address some of the key challenges of the education system while influencing key stakeholders, as per its mandate. There are divided views on whether the dialogues should or should not result in specific action, with NECT management – against the findings of a Board investigation of the issue – maintaining that the key purpose of the dialogues is to stimulate debate about topical education issues, and with various stakeholders calling for dialogue outcomes to inform the work of NECT. This programme is coherent with and without a focus on action, but there are certain key areas of work, for example on building links with NGOs, youth groups and religious organisations where some follow-up actions could support work on Programme 1.

**5.1.6. Programme 6: Governance and finance**

NECT has an effective governance model with excellent working relationships between the Board and management and strong Board support for implementation of NECT interventions. But the sustainability of the organisation given the changing balance between core and special funding needs review. It is hard to track value for money because of a lack of baseline- and systematic routine data. Notwithstanding this, the Programme has been very effective in terms of the collaborations built with funders, private sector funding streams having grown over the period under review.

**5.1.7. Programme 7: Strategic partnerships**

The growing portfolio of NECT programme interventions, linked to strategic partnerships, suggests that this work is both evolving and responsive to the changing needs and pressures within the education sector. NECT has been a key strategic partner to the DBE in addressing these challenges. Some of the Programme 7 initiatives appear not to be sustainable, however, given the current demands of other areas of NECT's work. Arguments have been made that too many special projects put the 'core business' of NECT under strain; the projects are relevant, but difficult to deliver – work on the SAFE programme being a case in point. This programme needs careful review in relation to NECT's middle- to longer-term trajectory, the emphasis of which should be on nesting the gains made to date on improving teaching and learning.

### **5.1.8. Programme 8: Monitoring and evaluation**

This programme has had discernible success in the provinces in which NECT work is concentrated through a range of actions monitoring participation and feedback; but much more is needed in terms of evaluation, synthesis, results review, and critical engagement. The focus to date has been largely on monitoring, to the neglect of rigorous evaluation. How NECT uses the results of its testing of teachers and learners in provinces to improve its interventions through a process of careful reflection on what works and does not work will be a critical part of the NECT's focus going forward.

### **5.1.9. NECT areas of work requiring attention**

Some areas noted in the review where organisational development needs attention are the following.

#### *5.1.9.1. Communication*

By 2021 it is very evident that the NECT has expanded its network of partnerships and collaborations. This places ever more pressure on the Trust to ensure that its information and knowledge sharing strategies remain up to this onerous task. More focus is needed on working with partners to cascade critical information both horizontally across strategic stakeholder groups as well as vertically to the provincial, district and local levels to avoid message distortion and misunderstanding.

#### *5.1.9.2. Agility*

As it institutionalises itself within the education sector the NECT may be running the risk of losing some of the focus on enhancing learning outcomes that characterised its early years. Management needs to ensure that it avoids, as far as possible, the bureaucratic inertias of government systems so that it continues to initiate swift and meaningful programmatic response to emerging developments.

#### *5.1.9.3. Trust*

There is clear evidence that from its inception the NECT has worked strategically to build relationships and partnerships with its stakeholders built on mutual trust and reciprocity. There is, however, more recent evidence to suggest that levels of trust in certain areas are being compromised by NECT taking on too many disparate projects. Delays in the finalisation of the SA-SAMS programme and the building of safe toilets in schools are examples of projects that distract from the core education improvement focus of NECT.

#### *5.1.9.4. Strategic responsiveness*

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The NECT has positioned itself both as an intermediary collaboration vehicle as well as an accelerator of education transformation through strategic partnerships. Over time the NECT has been adding more and more initiatives to its programme portfolio and is becoming the 'quick fix' arm of the DBE. The danger for the NECT is that without the necessary financial and human resources it may spread itself too thinly across a range of education sector interventions and dilute its impact on teaching and learning.

### *5.1.9.5. Gender inclusivity*

The impression created by the gender profile of the NECT management team (most managers are men), reinforced by the view of some senior managers interviewed that there is a level of gender blindness to the work they do, suggests a lack of attention to addressing gender imbalances. This extends to schools, where a tacit acceptance of boy-child superiority, a dearth of school facilities for girls menstruating, bullying of girls, and gender-based violence on and off school precincts shape girl-children's educational experiences. While these are manifestations of male attitudes to women in the broader society, NECT should be seeking, through its interventions, to shift negative perceptions of girls and women and to redress imbalances that impact them negatively.

## **5.2. Recommendations**

Arising from the findings of the evaluation and from these conclusions, three sets of recommendations are made – in the areas of: national strategic concerns; technical issues; and financial and collaborative issues.

### **5.2.1. National strategic concerns for delivering on the NDP and enhancing institutional collaboration**

#### *5.2.1.1. Recommendation 1: NECT should better realise its potential as a complex organisation more able than the DBE to embrace and learn from complexity in undertaking strategic planning for the South African education system to 2030*

Strategic planning is needed for change in the unequal education system of South Africa. The government planning cycles work on a five-year strategic plan, with detailed action plans for a three-year Medium Term Expenditure Framework and an Annual Performance Plan. Longer-term vision is needed to realise the goals of the NDP. NECT is ideally placed to co-ordinate work on this, as it is not limited to the government planning cycle, although its public funding has to consider that and integrate it into its (NECT's) longer-term planning.

Engaging with the complexity which characterises the South African education system entails moving beyond the existing structures, while acknowledging the importance of those structures. The NECT is uniquely well placed to do this because of its effective relationship both with the DBE and with a range of stakeholders at district and provincial levels. Complex social problems, like the

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inequalities in the South African education system, have a history which generates path dependencies and power asymmetries. The legacy of policies and practices the DBE and NECT have built up are important resources to address this, but more needs to be added, in developing strategic plans, to understand and assess the complexities and whether these are adequate to the task. Adaptive design, using existing information, interpreting the data collected by the M&E unit and triangulating this with many sources, and being open to the knowledge base of funders and other partners working at different levels of the education system will enhance the contribution NECT can make to realising the NDP. NECT should be supported to commission and review with all stakeholders a comprehensive position paper on how to best use the special features of the NECT as a complex organisation to support ten-year strategic planning for education change in South Africa.

*5.2.1.2. Recommendation 2: NECT and the DBE should devise a strategic plan to better co-ordinate their work at all organisational levels*

The effective working relationship with the DBE leadership is a considerable achievement of NECT. However, these effective relationships are not fully replicated at every level of the two organisations, and some of the partnerships between NECT and the DBE appear to emerge on quite ad hoc terms. We recommend both organisations produce a five-year strategic plan, possibly linked to MTSFs, to outline the range of collaboration that will be built at all levels, taking account of NECT's unique character as a complex organisation able to draw on adaptive design principles. This planned collaboration by both organisations needs linking to each organisation's planning cycle and arrangements for resource disbursement. As part of this work NECT should review its present range and scope of activities with DBE to ensure that collaboration, rather than competition, is built at all levels, and that the two organisations rely on each other's strengths, ensuring interactive collaboration at all levels.

*5.2.1.3. Recommendation 3: NECT should develop its capacity to act as a think tank for DBE and the education sector*

There are currently some crucial knowledge gaps confronting the DBE in planning how to deliver on the vision of the NDP. One aspect of this vision is the promise that by 2030, 90 percent of learners in grades 3, 6, and 9 must achieve 50 percent or more in the annual national assessment in Literacy, Numeracy/Mathematics and Science outcomes. But since 2014 there has been no systematic collection of data on learner outcomes at grade 3, 6, and 9 (which has also made evaluating the impact of NECT on learner performance through this evaluation difficult). These levels are crucial to ensuring students in the matric year have adequate preparation to pass at the required level. Considerable data is needed to plan for realising this goal. This, together with many features of education inequality in South Africa, needs rigorous study in order to evaluate what would make the education system improve. Building the NECT's capacity to act as a think tank and co-ordinate the best researchers in the country into a co-ordinated programme of work needs investment in talent, capacity building, and research review.

*5.2.1.4. Recommendation 4: NECT should appoint a gender and social inclusion specialist at senior management level*

The evaluation has shown that issues affecting girl-children in and outside of schools are not sufficiently addressed by the DBE. While this is a societal problem and schools are a microcosm of society, NECT should be using its position as an innovation leader to influence attitudes towards women and girls not only in the way it designs and delivers its interventions but in how it responds to the practical issues faced by girl learners in schools within a framework of holistic education. The appointment of a gender and social inclusion specialist at senior management level would assist NECT to ensure that gender is factored deliberately into all its work and enable it to model, for the DBE and the education sector as a whole, ways in which gender imbalances can be addressed within provincial departments of education and in the schools they oversee.

**5.2.2. Technicalities to enhance the work of NECT**

*5.2.2.1. Recommendation 5: NECT should develop an overarching Theory of Change for Programme 1*

Programme 1 is the largest NECT programme, and currently has an outline Theory of Change (ToC) for teacher professionalisation and supplementary ToCs for each of the other areas of Programme 1. While this dispersed approach to thinking about change may have been helpful in the initial stages of developing the work of NECT, this, together with the limited scope of the ToC relating to teacher professionalisation, diminishes the effectiveness of NECT in responding to the situation on the ground and in planning its work. We therefore recommend a workshop to develop a single ToC for Programme 1, and the formulation of a clear set of objectives for each of the areas of this Programme, dovetailing the work and allowing for co-ordinated achievement of the overall goals. Once finalised, NECT should ensure that this ToC is institutionalised as *the* central mechanism to monitor progress across the Programme through data collection, regular review, and other components of the M&E cycle.

*5.2.2.2. Recommendation 6: NECT should define criteria for scaling interventions*

Current criteria for scaling are associated with the level of inputs. These govern decisions on provincialisation and universalisation. While discussion of debates on scaling up draw on research in health, there is limited discussion of scaling down and of some of the themes noted in work on complex design, which can be termed 'scaling with'. A comprehensive review document is needed discussing different approaches to scaling in the education literature, what has been learned from other South African projects on embedding change and scaling, and what the implications are for NECT and its commitment to enhancing teaching and learning at school level. This review document should lead to a determination of the criteria for scaling that are applied consistently across NECT

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interventions and made available to the education sector and the public at large. Such criteria should include what steps need to be taken and milestones reached before a decision is made to scale an intervention and, once this decision is made, how the success of scaling is monitored and evaluated.

### *5.2.2.3. Recommendation 7: NECT should develop an approach to continuous professional development for teachers in quintile 1 and 2 schools*

NECT training programmes, including those offered in conjunction with the DBE and provincial counterparts, are accredited by SACE, but the ways in which this accreditation does or does not meet teacher needs for continuous professional development (CPD) is not known. The NECT training model is not a continuous training one. A professional development framework is needed within which the professional development pathway of every teacher in every school can be plotted. This is especially important for teachers in quintile 1 and 2 schools, who are unlikely to be able to access certificate, diploma and degree programmes as would their counterparts in quintile 3, 4 and 5 schools. NECT should in the first instance review with SACE its (SACE's) professional development approach and then devise a framework and an accompanying plan that makes clear provision for teacher progression incorporating participation in accredited NECT training programmes. The framework and plan should then be shared with the DBE for accommodation within its teacher human resources strategy.

### *5.2.2.4. Recommendation 8: NECT should expand the range of senior management roles in NECT, taking gender representivity into account*

One of the implications of an expanding work agenda is the pressure the overall management of the NECT initiative places upon its CEO. While the NECT has a number of units, each responsible for a defined area of operation, it falls to the CEO to oversee a vast enterprise. A consequence of this is that the CEO must hold all the disparate parts together, ensuring that activities undertaken in one sphere complement those in another. Another consequence is that a good deal of tacit knowledge about the organisation and its operations resides in the CEO, which besides running a danger of being too much to contain, creates a key-person dependency risk that, should anything happen to the CEO, may issue in lost or foregone institutional memory. Allied to this should be the formalisation of a succession plan ratified by the Board.

We recommend the NECT management, in consultation with the Board, should review its management structure and consider appointing two deputy executive officers – or at least a Chief Operating Officer (COO) and deputy COO – to spread the management load more evenly. The bigger presence of senior management reporting to the Board (instead of the CEO being responsible for nearly all Board-level engagement) will create a wider knowledge base about the organisation. Gender representivity should be factored into this process.

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### *5.2.2.5. Recommendation 9: NECT should expand the staff complement and range of activities of the MQA unit*

The MQA unit is crucial to building M&E capacity in schools and helping NECT realise its potential as a complex organisation capable of developing as an important education think tank in South Africa. To achieve this there must be a substantial investment in enhancing the capacity of the MQA unit to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of NECT interventions and teaching and learning outcomes. Such investment should take the form of ring-fenced funding for the MQA unit, up-skilling some of its current staff, and appointing additional staff with advanced skills in data collection and management to undertake M&E and strategic research, synthesise findings from existing M&E exercises, and support strategic thinking across all NECT Programmes. The MQA unit should become the lynchpin around which NECT operations revolve and must have input into all key decisions of the organisation.

### **5.2.3. Financial and collaborative issues to enhance the work of NECT**

#### *5.2.3.1. Recommendation 10: NECT should review stakeholder collaborations to realise the inclusivity imperatives of the ECF*

The NECT should review its stakeholder base to ensure inclusivity of all stakeholders, beginning with improving relationships with other education NPOs with a view to leveraging off their vast expertise and experience. This should include promoting the participation of civil society, youth, learners, and women's organisations in NECT's interventions, if not as implementing agents, then at least as thinking partners. The Reading Champions programme – now in Phase 2 – addresses youth to some extent. Further structured and planned engagement with education NPOs and with youth, student and women's organisations is needed at district level, in planning Dialogues, and in developing the scope of Programme 1. Transparency is needed in communicating decisions to exclude certain stakeholders from involvement in particular programmes.

#### *5.2.3.2. Recommendation 11: NECT should increase the budget allocation to core funding to enable a greater focus on core NECT activities*

Funding allocated to the NECT from the National Treasury has been hugely important in expanding the work of the NECT and establishing its partnership with the DBE. The past three years have seen a change in the ratio of funding between core funding and special projects. The increase of resources for special projects, while falling within the general remit of NECT, poses a risk of 'mission creep' and of undermining some of the work that needs to be done using core funding. We recommend an expansion of the core funding component of NECT's financial resources, providing income streams for the work outlined in the above recommendations on strategic planning, capacitation of the MQA unit, development of the think tank function, and supporting plans to realise CPD for all teachers. Such an expansion will enable NECT to focus on its core business, prioritising activities that have the

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best chance of helping the DBE realise the central, NDP-aligned objective of improving education outcomes.

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## 7. APPENDICES

### 7.1. Terms of reference

Appendix 1 contains the ToR for the Evaluation (FREF, 2020a).

### 7.2. Sources of data for the evaluation

The sources of data for the evaluation are contained in Appendix 2:

#### APPENDIX 2: DATA SOURCES FOR NECT EVALUATION, MARCH TO OCTOBER 2021

Data type	Date	Respondent / Source
<b>NECT MANAGERS, ADVISORS AND BOARD (x18)</b>		
Key informant interviews (KIIs)	15-19 March 2021	1. CEO
		2. Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant
		3. National Programme Manager
		4. Programmes Director
		5. PA to the CEO / Office Manager
		6. Marketing and Communications Manager
		7. CFO
		8. Technical Advisor
	April-July 2021	9. Programme Design and Quality Assurance Consultant)
		10. Systemic Intervention Programmes
		11. Dialogues & Communication
		12. Dialogues & Communication
		13. Innovation
		14. Special Projects
		15. Education specialist
	16-25 August 2021	16. Board member: SADTU
		17. Board member: Chair
		18. Board member: BLSA
<b>NECT ANNUAL REPORTS</b>		
Report	2013/14	NECT Operation Report 2013/14
	2014	NECT 2014 Interim Integrated Report
	2015	2015 Financial Year Operations Report
	2016	NECT annual report 2016: Education collaboration reaches a third of the national system
	2017	NECT Annual Report 2017: We are socially significant
	2018	NECT Annual Report 2018: Unlocking potential and creating opportunities
	2019	NECT Annual Report 2019: Building social capital for South Africa
	2020	NECT Annual Report 2020: Creative and agile response to disruptions
<b>EXTERNAL REVIEWS OF THE NECT</b>		
Report	2015	Report for National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT): Performance and Capacity Appraisal of the Managing Agency (John Theaker)

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<b>Data type</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Respondent / Source</b>
Table	n.d.	NECT response to John Theaker recommendations
Report	2016	National Education Collaboration Trust: Output – to – Purpose Review [Mid-Term Review]. October/November 2016 (Terry Allsop & Fazeela Hoosen)
Report	2017	The National Education Collaboration Trust: Analysis of the survey data collected for the output to purpose review (Eric Schollar)
Report	2017	NECT Output to Purpose Review Analysis and Recommendations, June 2017
Report	2017	External Evaluation, Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP) 2017 Evaluation Report Vol. 1: Findings, 22 November 2017
Report	2020	An Evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust’s Foundation Phase Learning Programme. Summary Report, January 2020 (Zenex Foundation)
PowerPoint presentation	n.d.	Evaluation of NECT Learning Programme (Foundation Phase) (for DBE)
PowerPoint presentation	2020	Evaluation of NECT Learning Programme (Foundation Phase): Presentation to the DBE, 24 July 2020
Report	2020	External Evaluation: Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP II) 2019 Summary of Findings Phase II Evaluation Study 2019 Version 02, 23 Feb 2020
<b>NECT TECHNICAL REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS</b>		
Report	2016	The Status of ICT in Education in South Africa and the Way Forward. Available at: <a href="https://nect.org.za/publications/technical-reports/the-state-of-ict-in-education-in-south-africa">https://nect.org.za/publications/technical-reports/the-state-of-ict-in-education-in-south-africa</a>
Report	2016	Grade 10-12 Maths and Science lead teacher training report: KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo. Final Draft.
Report	2018	NECT monitoring and evaluation. Driving evidence-based education reform.
PowerPoint presentation	n.d.	Universalisation baseline survey: PowerPoint summary (Vhembe, LP)
PowerPoint presentation	2018	Preliminary results of the Eastern Cape provincialisation baseline report, January 2018
PowerPoint presentation	2018	Universalisation baseline survey Draft Learner Workbook analysis – Gr 3 & 4 Maths, Gr 8 & 9 Maths and Natural Sciences, Feb 2018
PowerPoint presentation	2017	Midline survey: Draft Learner Workbook Analysis, Gr 4 & 6 EFAL and Maths, Gr 8 & 9 EFAL, Maths and Natural Sciences, Dec 2017
PowerPoint presentation	2017	Universalisation baseline survey: Draft Learner Workbook Analysis – Gr 3 & 4 Maths, Gr 8 & 9 Maths and Natural Sciences, Dec 2017
PowerPoint presentation	n.d.	Baseline and midline comparison survey draft learner workbook analysis Gr 4 & 9 EFAL, Maths and NS
Report	2021	Programme 2: Modernisation of SA-SAMS Exco progress report Aug 2021
PowerPoint presentation	2019	Data Presentation: Subject Adviser Assessments – EC; Gr 3 & 4 EFAL Assessments – EC & KZN; Gr 4 Mathematics Assessments – EC & KZN; Gr 3 & 4 Learner Books – EC; TMU
PowerPoint presentation	2018	KwaZulu-Natal provincialisation 2018 (Umgungundlovu)
PowerPoint presentation	2018	KwaZulu-Natal provincialisation 2018 (Ilembe)
PowerPoint presentation	2019/20	TMU Mathematics teaching and learning framework for South Africa: Pilot Implementation 2019/2020 Feb 2020

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<b>Data type</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Respondent / Source</b>
PowerPoint presentation	2018	Limpopo 2018 Survey Assessment Analysis: Grade 3: EFAL; Grade 4: EFAL, Mathematics & NSTECH; Draft Learner Workbook Analysis: Grade 3 EFAL, Mathematics; Grade 4 EFAL, Mathematics & NSTECH
PowerPoint presentation	2020	North West presentation March 2020
Report	2016	A platform that is too powerful to waste: Review of Education DialogueSA 2016
Report	2021	EXCO progress report Modernisation of SA-SAMS Aug 2021
Report	n.d.	Sandbox research compendium 2020: Emerging insights from the Sandbox schools project
Report	2021	Infusing competencies into Foundation Phase literacy: The competency-based learning programme
Report	n.d.	Promoting active citizenship in education: A reflection on the DSC model
Implementation plan	2021	Infrastructure programme implementation plan (IPEP) for DBE - 121 schools, Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces
PowerPoint presentation	2021	SAFE initiative presentation
Report	2021	Amalooloo: Report on sub-structure volume and use after 18 months
<b>NECT-RELATED DOCUMENTS</b>		
Policy document	2011	NPC (National Planning Commission). National Development Plan 2030: Our future – make it work. The Presidency, Republic of South Africa.
Policy document	2013	Education Collaboration Framework: Business, labour and civil society initiative to support the National Development Plan and the Education Sector Plan
Terms of Reference	2020	FREF (FirstRand Empowerment Foundation). Evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust: Request for proposal. Johannesburg: Tshikululu Social Investments
<b>SCHOOL VISITS, NECT SCHOOLS: EASTERN CAPE, KWAZULU-NATAL, LIMPOPO, MPUMALANGA, NORTH WEST</b>		
KiIs (NECT schools)	19-23 April 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. District Director (x4) (EC, KZN, LP, NW)</li> <li>2. Circuit Manager (x3) (EC, KZN, LP)</li> <li>3. Principal (x10) (EC, KZN, LP, MP, NW)</li> <li>4. Psychosocial (x8) (EC [1], KZN [2], LP [2], NW [3])</li> </ol>
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) (NECT schools)	19-23 April 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. DSC (x3) (EC, NW, LP)</li> <li>2. Subject Advisors (x3) (EC, NW [2])</li> <li>3. FET Maths Teachers (x5) (EC, KZN, LP, MP, NW)</li> <li>4. FET Science (x3) (LP, MP, NW)</li> <li>5. FP Maths Teachers (x4) (KZN, LP, MP, NW)</li> <li>6. FP Mother Tongue (x4) (EC, KZN, LP, NW)</li> <li>7. Gr1-7 EFAL (x5) (EC, KZN, LP, MP, NW)</li> <li>8. Gr4-7 NS (x5) (EC, KZN, LP, MP, NW)</li> <li>9. Gr8-9 Science (x4) (EC, KZN, NW)</li> <li>10. Unions (x10) (EC, KZN, LP, MP, NW)</li> <li>11. SMT (x9) (EC [2], KZN [1], LP [2], MP [2], NW [2])</li> <li>12. SGB (x9) (EC, KZN, LP, MP [1], NW)</li> <li>13. PSRIP (x3) (EC, LP, MP)</li> </ol>
<b>SCHOOL VISITS, NON-NECT SCHOOLS: NORTHERN CAPE</b>		

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<b>Data type</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Respondent / Source</b>
KIIs (Non-NECT schools)	17-21 May 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Principal (x1) [Primary]</li> <li>2. District Director (x1)</li> <li>3. Circuit Manager (x1)</li> <li>4. Psychosocial (x1)</li> </ol>
FGDs (Non-NECT schools)	17-21 May 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Subject Advisors (x1)</li> <li>2. FET Maths (x1)</li> <li>3. FET Science (x1)</li> <li>4. FP Maths (x1)</li> <li>5. FP Mother Tongue (x1)</li> <li>6. Gr1-7 EFAL (x1)</li> <li>7. Gr4-7 NS&amp;T (x1)</li> <li>8. Unions (x2)</li> <li>9. SMT (x1) [Primary]</li> <li>10. SGB (x2)</li> <li>11. PSRIP (x1)</li> </ol>
<b>EDUCATION EXPERTS</b>		
KIIs	11 June-4 August 2021	1. University
		2. Private sector
		3. NGO
		4. Award-winning teacher
<b>NECT SCHOOLING SURVEY</b>		
Survey	16-28 July, September 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. District Directors</li> <li>2. Circuit Managers</li> <li>3. Subject Advisors</li> <li>4. SGB members</li> <li>5. Principals</li> <li>6. SMT members</li> <li>7. Teachers</li> <li>8. Learners</li> <li>9. Parents</li> </ol>
<b>NECT FUNDERS / PARTNERS / STAKEHOLDERS</b>		
KIIs	23 July 2021	SAOU
	26 July-13 August 2021	1. Woolworths
		2. Zenex
		3. Nedbank
		4. Momentum
		5. LEAP
		6. Old Mutual
		7. Tshikululu
8. Telkom		
<b>DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION (DBE)</b>		
KIIs	July-September 2021	1. EMIS Directorate
		2. Infrastructure
		3. Curriculum & Teacher Development Research
		4. Continuing Professional Teacher Development
Dataset	July 2021	Average learner performance across 12 schools (NECT and Non-NECT) visited for fieldwork (EMIS Directorate, DBE)

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<b>Data type</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Respondent / Source</b>
PowerPoint presentation	2018	Improving learning outcomes Grade 3, 6 & 9 average learner performance (all subjects of interest to NECT, and all provinces), 2016-2018 (DBE, 2018b)
Strategic plan	n.d.	Revised five-year strategic plan 2015/16-2019/20
Strategic plan	n.d.	Action plan to 2014: Towards the realisation of schooling 2025
Strategic plan	2015	Action plan to 2019: Towards the realisation of schooling 2030
Report	2016	DBE (2018c). Education Statistics in South Africa 2016. Available at: <a href="https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Publications/Education%20Statistic%20SA%202016.pdf?ver=2018-11-01-095102-947">https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Publications/Education%20Statistic%20SA%202016.pdf?ver=2018-11-01-095102-947</a>
Media statement	2018	DBE (2018a). Basic Education Minister convenes School Safety Summit. In <i>Thuto</i> , Vol. 207. Available at: <a href="https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Publications/Thuto%20Volume%20207%20Final%20(2).pdf?ver=2018-10-19-180502-843">https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Publications/Thuto%20Volume%20207%20Final%20(2).pdf?ver=2018-10-19-180502-843</a>
Report	2019	DBE (2019). A 25 Year Review of progress in the basic education sector. Available at: <a href="https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/DBE%2025%20Year%20Review%20Report%202019.pdf?ver=2019-12-13-133315-127">https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/DBE%2025%20Year%20Review%20Report%202019.pdf?ver=2019-12-13-133315-127</a>
		<b>OTHER SOURCES (ACADEMIC AND GREY LITERATURE)</b>
Various		Included in References in the report

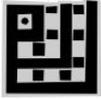
### 7.3. Findings from NECT Schooling Survey (Wave 1)

See PowerPoint attachment.

### 7.4. Data collection instruments

#### 7.4.1. Key informant interview schedules

7.4.1.1. *Key respondent interviews for school site visits, April and May 2021*



Outsourced Insight cc.



## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW WITH DISTRICT DIRECTOR

Respondent name (omit surname)	
District	
Province	

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As someone who has participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Michael Cosser**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 900 9288

**Philip Browne**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

1. Please tell me briefly about your professional background and how long you have been in this position.

2. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?

3. What are your key roles and responsibilities within the district?

4. Over the last 5 years, what have been the major successes the district has achieved?

5. Over the last 5 years, what have been the major challenges the district has faced?

6. Has the quality of education improved in the schools in your district, stayed the same, or declined in recent years?

[Moderator: Probe especially regarding school management, teaching quality, learners' reading abilities (primary school), mathematics and science performance (secondary school)]

7. Are you aware of specific programmes to improve the management of schools in your district? Please elaborate

8. Are you aware of specific programmes to improve the quality of teaching in the schools in your district? Please elaborate

9. Are there specific programmes aimed at improving the use of technology in the schools in your district? Please elaborate.

10. Are there specific programmes aimed at improving water and sanitation facilities in the schools in your district? Please elaborate.

11. What local civic or religious or other community organisations contribute to the running of the schools in your district? Please explain how they do this.

**12. Have you seen any measurable improvement in the skills of teachers in your district? If so, what has contributed to this improvement? Where do you think that gaps in teacher competence still exist?**

**13. Have you seen any measurable improvements in the capacity of principals and subject advisers in your district? If so, what has contributed to this improvement? Where do you think that gaps still exist?**

**14. How have the NECT programmes helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience.**

**15. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?**

**16. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

**17. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?**

**18. What would you say have been your main achievements as a District Director, and what gaps or challenges would you still like to address in the district?**

**19. What has been the impact of the District Steering Committee in your district?**

**20. Are you aware specifically of NECT projects that have been implemented in the schools in your district? If so, could you explain the purpose and duration of these projects. How was their success measured (evaluation indicators), and what were the outcomes of each?**  
**[If not specifically mentioned, probe for interventions pertaining to Teacher Development, Curriculum Development, Curriculum Coverage Tracking, Reading & Writing, Subject Advisors, School Leadership, School Management]**

Project Name, Purpose, and Date/Duration	Evaluation indicators	Implementation/Outcome

**20. Are you aware specifically of NECT projects that have been implemented in the schools in your district? If so, could you explain the purpose and duration of these projects. How was their success measured (evaluation indicators), and what were the outcomes of each?**  
**[If not specifically mentioned, probe for interventions pertaining to Teacher Development, Curriculum Development, Curriculum Coverage Tracking, Reading & Writing, Subject Advisors, School Leadership, School Management]**


**21. How would you characterize your relationship as District Director with the principals of the schools in your district?**

--

**22. How would you characterise the relationship of the district with teacher unions? How could this be improved?**

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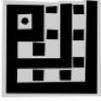
**23. Has a District Improvement Plan been implemented? And if so, what has been your role in this implementation?**

--

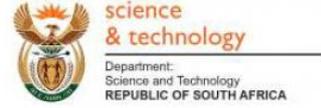
**24. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?**

--

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS INTERVIEW**



Outsourced Insight cc.



## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDER

Respondent name (omit surname)	
School	
District	
Province	

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As someone who may have participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

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Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

1. Please tell me briefly about yourself. How and when did you get involved with the school or circuit or district, and in what role(s)? **[Interviewer: probe for nature of post/s, and whether full-time or part-time]**

2. Have you received specific training and / or ongoing support / supervision for providing psycho-social support? Please elaborate.

3. Has the training equipped you for the needs in the school / circuit / district? Please elaborate.

4. Please tell me about your caseload in the last 12 months and compare it with the caseload during the pre-COVID-19 period (2019 and before).

5. Has the focus of presenting problems or issues changed since the advent of COVID-19? Please explain and give examples.

**[Interviewer: probe specifically for issues such as domestic abuse, home circumstances, undernourishment, emergent learning difficulties, attention deficit, stress, burnout]**

6. Do you feel that you have sufficient skills and resources to cope with your role in providing psycho-social support? If not, what additional support do you need?

7. What is your own coping mechanism?

8. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?

9. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?

10. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical disabilities and those with learning disabilities?

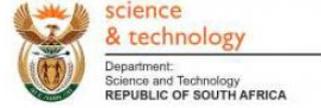
FINAL

**11. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?**

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS INTERVIEW**



Outsourced Insight cc.



## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW WITH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Respondent name (omit surname)		
School		
District		
Province		

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As someone who has participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this interview.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Michael Cosser**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 900 9288

**Philip Browne**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

1. Please tell me briefly about yourself. How and when did you get involved with the School, and in what role (s)?

2. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?

3. What is the administrative structure of the school and to what extent are the various structures fulfilling their purpose?

4. Over the last 5 years, what have been the major achievements of the school?

[Moderator: Probe especially regarding teaching quality, learners' reading abilities (primary school), mathematics and science performance (secondary school), inclusion, SAFE initiatives, administration and management]

5. Over the last 5 years, what have been the major challenges the school has faced?

[Moderator: Probe especially regarding teaching quality, learners' reading abilities (primary school), mathematics and science performance (secondary school), inclusion, SAFE initiatives, administration, communication and management]

6. Are there specific programmes targeted at improving the education outcomes of the school?

- 6.1. Are their specific programmes targeting learners?
- 6.2. Are their specific programmes targeting educators?

7. Are there specific programmes targeted at improving the quality of teaching in the school? Please elaborate.

8. Are there specific programmes aimed at improving the use of technology in the school? Please elaborate

9. Are there specific programmes aimed at improving water and sanitation facilities in the school? Please elaborate.

**10. What local civic or religious or other community organisations contribute to the running of the school? Please explain how they do this.**

--

**11. Which NECT projects have been implemented in the school? Please explain the purpose and duration of these projects.**

**11.1. How was their success measured (evaluation indicators), and what were the outcomes of each?**

**[If not specifically mentioned, probe for interventions pertaining to Teacher Development, Curriculum Development, Curriculum Coverage Tracking, Reading & Writing, Subject Advisors, School Leadership, School Management]**

Project Name, Purpose, and Date/Duration	Evaluation indicators	Implementation/Outcome

**12. How would you characterise the interactions and relationships of the school with the District and Circuit officials of the Department of Basic Education?**

**12.1. How could these be improved?**

**12.2. Has a District Improvement Plan been implemented?**

--

**13. How would you describe the relationship between yourself and the SGB?**

**13.1. How would you describe the relationship between yourself and the rest of the teaching staff?**

--

**14. How would you characterise the participation and relationships of the school with teacher unions? How could these be improved?**

--

**15. How have the NECT programmes helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience.**

**16. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?**

**17. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

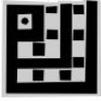
**18. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?**

**19. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?**

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS INTERVIEW**

**7.4.2. Focus group discussion (FGD) interview schedules**

*7.4.2.1. FGD interviews for school site visits, April and May 2021*



Outsourced Insight cc.



## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH FET MATHEMATICS TEACHERS

Respondent names (omit surnames)		
School Name		
District		
Province		

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As teachers who have participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Michael Cosser**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 900 9288

**Philip Browne**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

1. Please tell me briefly about yourselves. How long have you been an FET mathematics teacher?

[Moderator: Probe the following: What are the minimum qualifications for one to be appointed as a FET Phase Mathematics Grade 10-12 teacher? How did you become/were you appointed as such a teacher?]

2. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?

3. Has the quality of FET Mathematics in this school improved, stayed the same, or declined in recent years?

[Probe especially regarding teaching quality, learners' mathematics performance]

4. Mathematics is a challenging subject that many learners struggle with. What are the main challenges at the FET Phase level, and how do you address these challenges?

5. Are FET Phase mathematics teachers provided with adequate and proper in-service support from the school/provincial department of education? Why do you think this is the case?

[Moderator: Probe why they think this might be the case? Could anything be done better and how?]

6. Did you attend professional development activities organized by the district or province? Did you attend the NECT intervention, and when?

7. Which mathematics elements did the NECT training focus on? *Please elaborate.*

8. Has the NECT training been beneficial to you? Why do you say this?

**[Moderator: focus on the subject content knowledge; instruction; curriculum; improving learners' critical thinking or problem-solving skills; and usefulness of assessment guides]**

**9. How have the NECT programmes [in which you and your school have participated] helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience?**

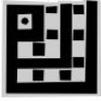
**10. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?**

**11. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

**12. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?**

**13. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?**

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISCUSSION**



Outsourced Insight cc.



## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH DISTRICT STEERING COMMITTEE (DSC)

Respondent names (omit surnames)		
District		
Province		

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As officials / teachers who have participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Michael Cosser**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 900 9288

**Philip Browne**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

**1. Please tell me briefly about yourselves – how and when you became members of the DSC.**  
**[Moderator: Probe the following: What are the minimum qualifications for one to be appointed members of the DSC?]**

**2. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?**

**3. What is the role of the DSC? [Probe: To what extent is it fulfilling this purpose?]**

**4. Who serves in the DSC in this district?**

**[Probe: the roles of its members, how many members there are and what stakeholder groups they represent, and how members are selected to serve in the committee]**

**5. Are you aware of specific programmes to improve district development?**

**[Probe: this includes building the capacity of subject advisers and circuit managers in your district to support school principals and teachers so that learner results in subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and Languages are improved]**

**6. Are you aware of specific programmes to improve learner welfare and support in this district?**

**[Probe: what kinds of programmes have been established to improve this type of support and how successful have they been?]**

**7. How would you characterise the interactions and relationships of the DSC with the Circuit officials and with the schools in your district? How could these be improved?**

**8. Has a District Improvement Plan been implemented in this district? Please elaborate.**

**9. How would you characterise the relationship of the DSC with teacher unions? How important is this relationship for the district and for schools in it?**

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**10. How have the NECT programmes helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience.**

--

**11. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?**

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**12. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

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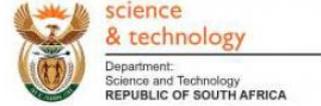
**13. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?**

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**14. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?**

--

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISCUSSION**



## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH FET PHYSICAL SCIENCE TEACHERS

Respondent names (omit surnames)		
School Name		
District		
Province		

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As teachers who have participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Cosser".

**Dr Michael Cosser**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 900 9288

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Browne".

**Philip Browne**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

1. Please tell me briefly about yourselves. How long have you been an FET Physical Science teacher?

[Moderator: Probe the following: What are the minimum qualifications for one to be appointed as a FET Phase Physical Science Grade 10-12 teacher? How did you become/were you appointed as such a teacher?]

2. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?

3. Has the quality of FET Physical Science in this school improved, stayed the same, or declined in recent years?

[Probe especially regarding teaching quality, learners' Physical Science performance]

4. Physical Science is a challenging subject that many learners struggle with. What are the main challenges at the FET Phase level, and how do you address these challenges?

5. Are FET Phase Physical Science teachers provided with adequate and proper in-service support from the school/provincial department of education? Why do you think this is the case?

[Moderator: Probe why they think this might be the case? Could anything be done better and how?]

6. Did you attend professional development activities organized by the district or province? Did you attend the NECT intervention, and when?

7. Which Physical Science elements did the NECT training focus on? *Please elaborate.*

8. Has the NECT training been beneficial to you? Why do you say this?

**[Moderator: focus on the subject content knowledge; instruction; curriculum; improving learners' critical thinking or problem-solving skills; and usefulness of assessment guides]**

**9. How have the NECT programmes [in which you and your school have participated] helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience?**

**10. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?**

**11. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

**12. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?**

**13. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?**

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISCUSSION**



Outsourced Insight cc.



## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH FOUNDATION PHASE MATHEMATICS TEACHERS

Respondent names (omit surnames)		
School Name		
District		
Province		

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As teachers who have participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

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Yours sincerely

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Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 900 9288

**Philip Browne**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

**1. Please tell me briefly about yourselves. How long have you been Foundation Phase Mathematics teachers?**

**[Moderator: Probe the following: What are the minimum qualifications for one to be appointed as a Foundation Phase Mathematics teacher? How did you become/were you appointed as such a teacher?]**

**2. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?**

**3. Has the quality of Foundation Phase Mathematics in this school improved, stayed the same, or declined in recent years?**

**[Probe especially regarding teaching quality, learners' Mathematics performance]**

**4. Mathematics is a challenging subject that many learners struggle with. What are the main challenges at the Foundation Phase level, and how do you address these challenges?**

**5. Are Foundation Phase Mathematics teachers provided with adequate training and support from the school / provincial department of education?**

**[Moderator: Probe why they think this might be the case? Could anything be done better and how?]**

**6. Did you attend professional development activities organized by the district or province? Did you attend the NECT intervention, and when?**

**7. Which Mathematics elements did the NECT training focus on? Please elaborate.**

**8. Has the NECT training been beneficial to you and to your learners? Why do you say this?**

**[Moderator: focus on the subject content knowledge; instruction; curriculum; improving learners' critical thinking or problem-solving skills; and usefulness of assessment guides]**

**9. How have the NECT programmes [in which you and your school have participated] helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience.**

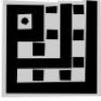
**10. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?**

**11. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

**12. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?**

**13. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?**

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISCUSSION**



Outsourced Insight cc.



## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH FOUNDATION PHASE MOTHER TONGUE LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Respondent names (omit surnames)		
School Name		
District		
Province		

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As teachers who have participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Michael Cosser**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 900 9288

**Philip Browne**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

**1. Please tell me briefly about yourselves. How long have you been Foundation Phase Mother Tongue Language teachers?**

**[Moderator: Probe the following: What are the minimum qualifications for one to be appointed as a Foundation Phase Mother Tongue Language teacher? How did you become/were you appointed as such a teacher?]**

**2. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?**

**3. Has the quality of Foundation Phase Mother Tongue Language in this school improved, stayed the same, or declined in recent years?**

**[Probe especially regarding teaching quality, learners' Mathematics performance]**

**4. What are the main challenges at the Foundation Phase level, and how do you address these challenges?**

**[Moderator: Probe how they address or work around these challenges]**

**5. Are Foundation Phase Mother Tongue Language teachers provided with adequate and proper in-service support from the school/provincial department of education? Why do you think this is the case?**

**[Moderator: Probe why they think this might be the case? Could anything be done better and how?]**

**6. Have you attended professional development activities organized by the DBE in the district or province, specifically related to Mother Tongue language improvement? Please elaborate on the type of skills attained.**

**[Moderator: Focus on where and when these were held]**

**7. Did you attend the NECT intervention related to Foundation Phase Mother Tongue Grade 1-3? Where and when? Please elaborate, especially on the perceived value and benefits of this training.**

8. Which Mother Tongue Language elements did the NECT training focus on? *Please elaborate.*

9. Has the NECT training been beneficial to you? Why do you say this?

**[Moderator: focus on the subject content knowledge; instruction; curriculum; improving learners' critical thinking or problem-solving skills; and usefulness of assessment guides]**

10. How have the NECT programmes [in which you and your school have participated] helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience.

11. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?

12. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?

13. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?

14. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISCUSSION**



Outsourced Insight cc.



## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH GRADE 1-7 EFAL TEACHERS

Respondent names (omit surnames)		
School Name		
District		
Province		

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As teachers who have participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Michael Cosser**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 900 9288

**Philip Browne**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

**1. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?**

**2. Please tell us briefly about the time before NECT programme was introduced in your school. [Probe: comment on your teaching methodologies in English First Additional Language (EFAL). How did you assess learners? How did you use the CAPS document to guide you in teaching and learning? Were you able to cover the curriculum for each term and If not why]**

**3. When was NECT introduced in your school AND how was it introduced? What do you think has changed or has NOT changed since the NECT programmes were introduced? [Probe: Comment on NECT training and school-based support; methodologies; lesson plans and resources]**

**4. Curriculum coverage**

**4.1 Please tell us how you deal with curriculum pacing and tracking at your school. [Probe: Curriculum pacing and tracking has been identified as a major challenge facing teachers. Is this still a challenge? If No, how has this issue been resolved?]**

**4.2 Please tell us about how you use Trackers to ensure curriculum coverage [Probe: Do you find Trackers useful in helping you cover the curriculum? Please explain]**

**4.3 Please tell us briefly about how your grade head and subject head support you on curriculum matters. [Probe: How often do you meet as Foundation Phase/Intermediate Phase/Senior Phase teachers to reflect on progress in curriculum coverage and learning?]**

**1. Assessment for learning practices**

**5.1 Would you say that your assessment practices have improved as a result of the NECT intervention? [Please give examples]**

**5.2 How have NECT programmes helped you develop higher order thinking skills in learners [Probe: How often do you use higher order questioning during teaching and learning / during formal and informal assessment?]**

**5.3 What challenges do learners experience with higher order questioning? How do you assist them to develop these thinking skills? [Provide examples]**

**6 Learning outcomes**

**6.1 Describe the performance of your learners in EFAL before the NECT intervention. How has learner performance changed since the intervention? [Please elaborate]**

**7. Teacher Support**

**7.1 What role does the principal play in terms of developing Instructional Leadership at your school?**

**7.2 Have you formed WhatsApp groups to support each other within your school and across NECT programme schools? If Yes, how useful are these groups?**

**8. How have the NECT programmes [in which you and your school have participated] helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience.**

**9. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?**

**10. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

Revised 12 April 2021

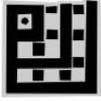
**11. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?**

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**12. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?**

--

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISCUSSION**



Outsourced Insight cc.



## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH GRADE 4-7 SCIENCE / TECHNOLOGY TEACHERS

Respondent names (omit surnames)		
School Name		
District		
Province		

### Introduction

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Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

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Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 900 9288

**Philip Browne**  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

**1. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?**

**2. Please tell us briefly about the time before the NECT programme was introduced in your school. [Probe: comment on your teaching methodologies in Science / Technology. How did you assess learners? How did you use the CAPS document to guide you in teaching and learning? Were you able to cover the curriculum for each term and if not, why]**

**3. When was NECT introduced at your school AND how was it introduced? What do you think has changed or has NOT changed since the NECT programmes were introduced? [Probe: Comment on NECT training and school-based support; methodologies; use of trackers; lesson plans and resources]**

**4. Curriculum coverage**

**4.1 The assessment content of the Intermediate Phase must include both Natural Science and Technology. How do you order these components and their assessments?**

**4.2 Please tell us how you deal with curriculum pacing and tracking at your school. [Probe: Curriculum pacing and tracking has been identified as a major challenge facing teachers. Is this still a challenge? If No, how was this issue been resolved?]**

**4.3 Please tell us about how you use Trackers to ensure curriculum coverage [Probe: Do you find Trackers useful in helping you cover the curriculum. Please explain]**

**4.4 Please tell us briefly about how the HoD supports you on curriculum matters. [Probe: How often do you meet as Foundation Phase/Intermediate Phase/Senior Phase teachers to reflect on progress in curriculum coverage and learning?]**

**2. Assessment for learning practices**

**2.1. Would you say that your assessment practices have improved as a result of the NECT intervention? [ Please give examples]**

**2.2. How have NECT programmes helped you develop higher order thinking skills in learners [Probe: How often do you use higher order questioning during teaching and learning / during formal and informal assessment?]**

**2.3. What challenges do learners experience with higher order questioning? How do you assist them to develop these thinking skills [Provide examples]?**

--

**3. Learning outcomes**

**3.1. Describe the performance of your learners in Science / Technology before the NECT intervention. How has learner performance changed since the intervention? [Please elaborate]**

--

**13. Teacher Support**

**13.1 What role does the principal play in terms of developing Instructional Leadership at your school?**

**13.2 Have you formed WhatsApp groups to support each other within your school and across NECT programme schools? If Yes, how useful are these groups?**

--

**14. How have the NECT programmes [in which you and your school have participated] helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience.**

--

**15. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?**

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**16. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

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Revised 12 April 2021

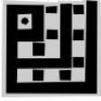
**17. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?**

--

**18. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?**

--

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISCUSSION**



Outsourced Insight cc.



## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH TEACHERS TRAINED ON THE PRIMARY SCHOOL READING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (PSRIP)

Respondent names (omit surnames)	
School Name	
District	
Province	

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As teachers who have participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

Dr Michael Cosser  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 900 9288

Philip Browne  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

1. Please tell me briefly about yourselves. How long have you been teachers in this school?

2. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?

3. As a teacher, what do you understand to be your role in improving the quality of reading in foundation or intermediate phase in your school?

[Moderator: Probe participants' general understanding of their role in improving the quantity and quality of reading by the learners in their class/es]

4. Has the quantity and quality of reading in your class and in the school improved, stayed the same, or declined in recent years?

[Moderator: Probe especially regarding teaching time, number of books read in class, methods of teaching reading, and learners' reading abilities]

5. Support for the teaching of reading

5.1. What support have you received from the Principal and the School Management Team in the teaching of reading?

5.2. What support have you received from a subject advisor to help you improve the quality of reading outcomes in your class?

[Moderator: Ask participants to elaborate, especially on the nature and extent (i.e., materials, training, type/s of training, or coaching) of support received from the Principal, SMT, and subject advisor]

6. Improvements in reading due to the PSRIP

6.1. Has the NECT PSRIP resulted in any measurable improvement in the reading ability of learners in your class/es?

[Moderator: Ask participants to elaborate on why they believe the NECT intervention has contributed to improved learning outcomes. If there has been no or limited improvement

**in learning outcomes despite the intervention, ask what it is about the intervention that needs to be improved, or what additional interventions are needed]**

**6.2. If the intervention has led to measurable improvement/s, please indicate what those improvements are.**

**[Moderator: Ask participants which of the following learning outcomes have shown the most and the least improvement: (a) letter sounds; (b) familiar words; (c) oral reading of connected texts; (d) reading comprehension]**

**7. Has the PSRIP changed the way you teach reading? If so, how?**

**8. How have the NECT programmes [in which you and your school have participated] helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience.**

**9. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?**

**10. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

**11. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?**

**12. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?**

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISCUSSION**



Outsourced Insight cc.



## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

Respondent names (omit surnames)		
District		
Province		

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As teachers who have participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

Dr Michael Cosser  
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Evaluation of the National Education  
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Tel. 082 900 9288

Philip Browne  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

**1. Please tell me briefly about yourselves. How long have you been members of the SMT?**  
**[Moderator: Probe the following: What are the minimum qualifications for one to be appointed members of the SMT? How did you become/were you appointed a member of the SMT?]**

**2. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?**

**3. Managing a functional school**

**3.1. What are the key ingredients of a functional school?**

**3.2. How do you create and manage a functional school?**

**4. Curriculum management**

**4.1. What does it mean to exercise leadership in curriculum management?**

**4.2. How have you addressed the issue of curriculum coverage in the school?**

**5. School planning**

**5.1. What does it mean to exercise leadership in school planning?**

**5.2. How important is the collection and use of data in planning?**

**6. School culture**

**6.1. How do you build and nurture a positive school culture?**

**7. School and classroom management**

**7.1. What is the relationship between school management processes and activities in the classroom?**

**8. Courageous leadership**

**8.1. Courageous leadership is what the NECT thinks all school leaders and managers should be exercising. How do you understand courageous leadership? Can you give some examples?**

**9. Learner performance**

**9.1. What does it mean to exercise leadership in relation to improving learner performance?**

**10. Have you participated in any NECT programmes, either on Courageous Leadership or on other management topics? If so, how beneficial were those programmes in improving your school management skills?**

**11. How have the NECT programmes [in which you and your school have participated] helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience.**

**12. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?**

**13. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

**14. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?**

**15. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?**

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISCUSSION**



Outsourced Insight cc.



## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY MEMBERS

Respondent names (omit surnames)		
School Name		
District		
Province		

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As persons who have participated in NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

Dr Michael Cosser  
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Tel. 082 900 9288

Philip Browne  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

1. Please tell me briefly about yourselves.

1.1. How and when did you get involved in the School Governing Body, and in what capacity?

1.2. When you were elected, did you receive any training on the role and functions of the SGB?

2. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?

3. How do you understand the purpose and functions of the SGB in the school? To what extent is the SGB fulfilling its mandate?

4. What are your major concerns about the operations and functionality of the school?

5. Has the quality of education in this school improved, stayed the same, or declined in recent years?

[Moderator: Probe especially regarding teaching quality, learners' reading abilities (primary school), mathematics and science performance (secondary school)]

6. Are you aware of specific programmes aimed at improving the management of the school? Please elaborate.

7. Are you aware of specific programmes aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school? Please elaborate.

8. How have the NECT programmes [in which you and your school have participated] helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience.

9. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?

**10. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

--

**11. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?**

--

**12. Are you aware of specific programmes aimed at increasing and improving the use of technology in the school? Please elaborate.**

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**13. Are you aware of specific programmes to improve the supply of water and sanitation facilities in the school? Please elaborate.**

--

**14. What local civic or religious or other community organisations contribute to the running of the school? Please explain how they do this.**

--

**15. Are you aware of NECT interventions that have been implemented in the school? If so, could you explain the purpose and duration of these projects. How was their success measured (evaluation indicators), and what were the outcomes of each?**

**[If not specifically mentioned, probe for interventions pertaining to Teacher Development, Curriculum Development, Curriculum Coverage Tracking, Reading & Writing, Subject Advisors, School Leadership, School Management]**

Project Name, Purpose, and Date/Duration	Evaluation indicators	Implementation/Outcome

**16. How would you characterise the interactions and relationships of the school with the District and Circuit officials of the Department of Basic Education? How could these be improved? Has a District Improvement Plan been implemented?**

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FINAL

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**17. How would you characterise the participation and relationships of the school and the SGB with teacher unions? How could these be improved?**

--

**18. What key interventions should be prioritised to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this school?**

--

**19. Is there anything you would like to share with me which I have not asked but which you feel is important for me to know?**

--

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISCUSSION**



Outsourced Insight cc.



## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH SUBJECT ADVISORS

Respondent names (omit surnames)		
District		
Province		

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As subject advisors who have participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

Dr Michael Cosser  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
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Tel. 082 900 9288

Philip Browne  
Principal Investigator  
Evaluation of the National Education  
Collaboration Trust (NECT)  
Tel. 082 574 5739

**1. Please tell me briefly about yourselves. How long have you been Subject Advisors?**  
**[Moderator: Probe the following: What are the minimum qualifications for one to be appointed as a Subject Advisor? How did you become/were you appointed as a Subject Advisor?]**

**2. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?**

**3. As a subject advisor, what do you understand to be your role in supporting teaching and learning in your Districts? [Moderator: Probe the practices SAs use in supporting teaching and learning in schools]**

**4. What are the main challenges you experience in carrying out your job requirements? [Moderator: Probe how SAs address or work around these challenges]**

**5. Has the performance in the subjects you are responsible for improved, stayed the same, or declined in recent years? [Moderator: Probe especially regarding teaching quality, learners' reading abilities (primary school), mathematics and science performance (secondary school)]**

**6. How do you involve / collaborate with other stakeholders as you support and manage teaching in your District? [Moderator: Mention the names of the stakeholders. Also, indicate if you are aware of specific programmes to improve the support you provide to schools?]**

**7. Are you aware of specific programmes aimed at improving management of schools in the district you support? Please elaborate.**

**8. Are you aware of any specific NECT projects that have been implemented in the schools in the district you support? If so, could you explain the purpose and duration of these projects. How was their success measured (evaluation indicators), and what were the outcomes of each?**

**[If not specifically mentioned, probe for interventions pertaining to Teacher Development, Curriculum Development, Curriculum Coverage Tracking, Reading & Writing, School Leadership, School Management**

Project Name, Purpose, and Date/Duration	Evaluation indicators	Implementation/Outcome

**9. Please briefly discuss your interactions with NECT and how you would describe the relationships that exist between your office and NECT officials or the programme.**

--

**10. How would you characterise the interactions and relationships of the schools you support with yourselves and other District and Circuit officials of the Department of Basic Education? How could these be improved?**

--

**11. What key interventions should be prioritised to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the schools in the Districts you support?**

--

**12. How have the NECT programmes [in which you and your school have participated] helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience.**

--

**13. How have NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?**

--

**14. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

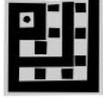
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<b>15. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?</b>

<b>16. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?</b>

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISCUSSION**



Outsourced Insight cc.



## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Respondent names (omit surnames)	
School	
District	
Province	

### Introduction

A research team comprising the Human Sciences Research Council, Citofield and Outsourced Insight is conducting an evaluation of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). It is critical for us to gauge the views, perspectives and experiences at schools where NECT has implemented programmes, and schools where this has not been done, in order to assess any impact that has occurred. **As union representatives who have participated in the NECT training programmes, you have been chosen to participate in the evaluation.** We would be most grateful if you could participate in this discussion.

Please respond to the questions as openly and fully as you can, and to the comments made by your colleagues. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential within the research team. We will not show your answers to anyone who is not part of our research team.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Michael Cossar**  
**Principal Investigator**  
**Evaluation of the National Education**  
**Collaboration Trust (NECT)**  
**Tel. 082 900 9288**

**Philip Browne**  
**Principal Investigator**  
**Evaluation of the National Education**  
**Collaboration Trust (NECT)**  
**Tel. 082 574 5739**

1. Please tell me briefly about yourselves. How and when did you get involved in the respective union(s) you are with, and in what capacity? **[Probe educational trajectories]**

2. What would it take to make education in this district excellent?

3. What is the role of teacher unions? To what extent is this role being fulfilled?

4. What contributions have teacher unions made to education in this school and in this district? Have they been successful or unsuccessful? Please elaborate.

5. What kind of relationship have your unions had with the NECT? **[Moderator: Probe for understanding about the purpose of partnerships]**

6. Are you aware of any specific programmes aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school and in the district? If so, could you explain the purpose and duration of these projects? How was their success measured (evaluation indicators), and what were the outcomes of each?  
**[If not specifically mentioned, probe for interventions pertaining to Teacher Development, Curriculum Development, Curriculum Coverage Tracking, Reading & Writing, Subject Advisors, School Leadership, School Management]**

Project Name, Purpose, and Date/Duration	Evaluation indicators	Implementation/Outcome

7. Are there other partnerships and / or avenues the union(s) is / are exploring to improve the quality of teaching and learning? Please elaborate.

8. Are you aware of specific programmes to improve the management of the school? Please elaborate.

**9. How have the NECT programmes [in which you and your school may have participated] helped to give girl learners the same opportunities as boy learners? Please give examples from your experience.**

**10. How have the NECT programmes helped schools to make learners who are different in any way feel more accepted – learners from other countries, learners who speak different languages, learners who have different sexual identities?**

**11. How have NECT programmes helped officials and teachers to be inclusive through their decision-making, management and governance responsibilities?**

**12. How have the NECT programmes helped learners with physical and psychosocial disabilities and those with learning disabilities?**

**13. The NECT assumes the role of mediator between various stakeholders in the education sector. How would you rate NECT's role in this regard – at school, district, provincial or national level?**

**14. Is there a role for teacher unions in improving the interactions and relationships of the school with the District and Circuit officials of the Department of Basic Education? What specific actions in this regard are possible?**

**15. How would you characterise the relationship of the District Steering Committee with teacher unions? How important is this relationship for the district and for the schools in it?**

**16. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with us which we have not asked you, but you feel it is important to share with us?**

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS DISCUSSION**

### **7.4.3. NECT Schooling Survey questionnaire**

See appended questionnaire in PDF format.

## 7.5. Average grade performance of learners in selected subjects at selected levels in 12 schools visited in April and May 2021

Table 23: Average grade performance in Foundation Phase Home Language, site visit schools, 2014-2020

School type	Province	School	Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3	
			Average % change to 2019						Average % change, 2019-2020					
			Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift
NECT	Eastern Cape	P1N1	61,7	1,9	60,1	1,7	55,5	2,0	67,0	-9,6	64,8	-12,0	61,1	-5,1
NECT	KwaZulu-Natal	P1N2	66,2	-2,1	68,5	1,8	79,5	-1,0	61,3	-15,4	74,7	-15,2	75,0	-11,0
NECT	Limpopo	P1N3	59,2	2,7	64,6	0,3	60,7	1,6	65,6	0,7	65,4	-12,0	64,8	-8,5
NECT	Mpumalanga	P1N4	66,2	3,7	61,7	5,4	53,9	10,2	75,9	-9,6	79,2	-1,9	85,8	3,2
NECT	North West	P1N5	82,1	-3,3	62,9	0,7	60,7	1,7	67,6	8,6	63,3	-6,0	65,7	-3,1
Non-NECT	Northern Cape	P1C1	55,4	-1,7	66,6	-0,5	61,9	-1,9	50,6	-3,4	64,7	-8,7	55,4	-2,9

Key: P = Primary school, N = NECT intervention school, C = Control (non-NECT intervention) school

Source: Data supplied by DBE

Table 24: Average grade performance in Foundation Phase Mathematics, site visit schools, 2014-2020

School type	Province	School	Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3	
			Average % change to 2019						Average % change, 2019-2020					
			Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift
NECT	Eastern Cape	P1N1	43,1	8,6	49,6	7,1	49,4	4,0	62,2	-10,8	66,0	-7,1	58,9	-4,8
NECT	KwaZulu-Natal	P1N2	75,8	-2,0	72,0	1,4	74,4	0,4	70,6	-15,6	75,1	-10,6	72,7	-10,2
NECT	Limpopo	P1N3	60,4	5,0	65,7	-0,8	59,9	-0,5	73,8	-6,9	61,0	-12,0	57,5	-7,3
NECT	Mpumalanga	P1N4	67,3	2,1	68,4	2,8	62,0	6,8	74,1	-11,4	76,7	-3,1	84,4	4,3
NECT	North West	P1N5	76,2	-0,4	74,4	-3,3	68,6	1,4	74,0	6,2	61,8	-5,9	73,0	-9,4
Non-NECT	Northern Cape	P1C1	61,4	-3,3	66,8	0,9	57,7	1,3	51,3	-3,3	69,7	-2,4	61,5	-5,5

Source: Data supplied by DBE

Table 25: Average grade performance in primary school English as a First Additional Language (EFAL), site visit schools, 2014-2020

School	Gr 1		Gr 2		Gr 3		Gr 4		Gr 5		Gr 6		Gr 7		Gr 1		Gr 2		Gr 3		Gr 4		Gr 5		Gr 6		Gr 7	
	Average % change to 2019														Average % change, 2019-2020													
	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift
P1N1	56,6	2,5	55,4	1,3	45,2	4,7	47,7	2,0	48,7	2,0	56,2	-1,4	51,7	4,2	62,3	-10,7	58,1	10,4	55,7	0,2	52,6	5,6	50,5	7,7	51,7	1,3	60,6	7,3
P1N2	54,7	0,7	62,3	3,5	60,7	1,4	53,3	8,7	60,4	6,1	62,3	4,1	48,1	0,8	55,2	15,3	66,9	-6,7	63,2	10,4	67,8	18,7	69,9	17,2	70,4	15,8	48,4	15,8
P1N3	54,9	3,0	63,2	-0,7	50,7	4,1	53,1	1,8	42,1	4,6	52,2	2,3	55,1	-0,4	60,8	-1,6	59,6	16,5	60,8	-7,2	57,5	19,8	51,1	10,2	56,4	17,5	52,6	14,6
P1N4	68,6	1,8	67,8	3,0	55,9	9,3	61,7	-0,5	59,1	2,2	46,1	5,9	62,5	-1,7	74,5	14,0	75,9	3,6	85,7	-1,0	58,5	0,7	61,8	-4,0	59,0	-4,3	54,4	-8,3
P1N5	78,3	-4,5	72,7	-3,5	60,1	1,9	51,7	6,4	56,1	3,8	60,8	3,0	65,9	-0,5	61,2	0,4	60,2	-7,0	65,5	-4,9	69,0	-3,4	65,2	-3,3	70,1	-3,6	62,5	-5,1
P1C1	66,2	-4,4	75,9	-1,8	63,3	-4,7	49,5	6,1	47,7	2,0	50,2	1,9	51,4	0,1	52,1	-6,1	69,0	-4,2	49,0	-0,2	63,8	2,1	52,4	-2,1	53,2	-4,7	51,5	15,5

Source: Data supplied by DBE

Table 26: Average grade performance in grades 4 to 6 Natural Sciences & Technology, site visit schools, 2014-2020

School type	Province	School	Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6	
			Average % change to 2019						Average % change, 2019-2020					
			Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift
NECT	Eastern Cape	P1N1	37,1	5,3	44,0	4,1	45,9	5,8	46,0	0,6	52,2	-0,9	60,2	-3,7
NECT	KwaZulu-Natal	P1N2	60,4	5,9	51,9	8,1	57,7	3,5	71,3	-14,5	64,6	-18,8	63,1	-13,8
NECT	Limpopo	P1N3	52,3	4,0	63,1	-4,1	60,7	-2,4	62,0	-3,2	50,8	-12,7	53,5	-7,0
NECT	Mpumalanga	P1N4	68,5	-2,0	65,4	0,7	71,2	0,5	60,9	1,3	65,4	-5,8	72,1	-2,6
NECT	North West	P1N5	77,4	-3,8	64,2	-3,5	64,3	-1,8	57,8	10,6	49,4	-8,2	58,0	-5,5
Non-NECT	Northern Cape	P1C1	58,1	3,1	58,5	0,5	39,1	8,1	64,2	-11,5	57,1	-18,4	49,0	-12,2

Source: Data supplied by DBE

Table 27: Average grade performance in grade 8 to 12 EFAL, site visit schools, 2014-2020

School	Gr 8		Gr 9		Gr 10		Gr 11		Gr 12		Gr 8		Gr 9		Gr 10		Gr 11		Gr 12	
	Average % change to 2019										Average % change, 2019-2020									
	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift
S1N1		3,2		-0,6	39,6	2,1	40,7	0,2			47,2	-7,7	47,4	-3,8	42,9	-0,4	39,7	8,3		
S1N2	52,1	-3,4	49,6	2,3	41,7	1,4	41,5	-0,8	42,6	8,2	46,8	-3,7	52,9	-14,7	43,4	0,2	39,9	5,3	53,9	-8,9
S1N3	47,0	3,0	57,7	-2,0		2,1		0,1		-1,4	53,9	9,5	50,4	8,5	48,9	-1,8	51,9	4,1	48,2	3,5
S1N4	48,4	-4,1	38,0	7,0	41,3	-0,4	46,2	-0,1	41,5	1,2	39,1	-13,7	52,2	-10,7	39,3	-2,4	45,1	1,1	43,3	-13,7
S1N5	48,7	2,0	48,2	4,7	52,4	1,2	51,3	4,4	64,6	1,9	53,4	-5,0	57,9	-8,9	55,1	-14,1	63,1	-8,1	67,0	14,6
S1C1	40,9	0,8	45,0	0,7	43,6	-0,3	43,3	1,0	50,9	-2,1	41,5	3,2	46,0	0,9	42,0	0,7	44,1	7,9	46,0	1,2

Key: S = Secondary school

Source: Data supplied by DBE

Table 28: Average grade performance in FET Mathematics, site visit schools, 2014-2021

School type	Province	School	Gr 10		Gr 11		Gr 12		Gr 10		Gr 11		Gr 12	
			Average % change to 2019						Average % change, 2019-2020					
			Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift
NECT	EC	S1N1		11,6	30,2	-2,2	18,6	12,9	38,7	-15,8	24,0	-5,2	30,5	4,0
NECT	KZN	S1N2	26,1	-4,3	26,7	0,6	20,7	12,0	22,8	24,4	25,0	30,3	28,1	-16,4
NECT	LP	S1N3	23,0	15,6	28,0	6,2	46,5	-5,7	38,4	6,1	35,2	23,9	36,0	13,5
NECT	MP	S1N4	48,5	6,0	20,1	10,4	29,7	4,1	31,7	55,3	29,3	25,4	33,5	26,2
NECT	NW	S1N5	27,3	8,7	29,5	-0,1	36,5	7,2	37,8	14,9	28,2	48,0	43,0	33,1
Non-NECT	NC	S1C1	21,9	23,5	22,9	17,4	32,3	7,8	50,0	18,2	41,1	0,3	39,7	18,9

Source: Data supplied by DBE

Table 29: Average grade performance in FET Physical Science, site visit schools, 2014-2020

School type	Province	School	Gr 10		Gr 11		Gr 12		Gr 10		Gr 11		Gr 12	
			Average % change to 2019						Average % change, 2019-2020					
			Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift
NECT	EC	S1N1	38,1	-1,3	31,0	1,5			30,5	-1,5	30,1	1,9		
NECT	KZN	S1N2	36,6	-3,0	33,3	-1,5	35,0	8,1	33,1	8,2	31,0	14,4	42,9	-14,3
NECT	LP	S1N3	43,0	-2,8	38,4	3,5	55,7	-10,2	37,6	1,6	42,5	16,1	34,9	-14,8
NECT	MP	S1N4	28,9	7,7	34,3	-0,2	29,8	5,7	36,0	-5,0	31,7	59,8	38,0	-10,8
NECT	NW	S1N5	37,2	7,4	35,0	5,5	43,7	1,4	51,7	-16,5	41,9	23,7	45,1	-5,3
Non-NECT	NC	S1C1	29,3	4,3	35,3	3,4	36,5	6,1	34,3	-6,2	37,6	-24,0	41,2	15,9

Source: Data supplied by DBE

Table 30: Average grade performance in Grade 8 to 9 Natural Science, site visit schools, 2014-2020

School type	Province	School	Gr 8		Gr 9		Gr 8		Gr 9	
			Average % change to 2019				Average % change, 2019-2020			
			Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift	Base %	% shift
NECT	EC	S1N1	37,2	-0,6			36,3	-22,3		
NECT	KZN	S1N2	58,9	-4,4	44,9	-1,1	51,4	-12,8	42,4	-10,2
NECT	LP	S1N3	47,6	-3,5	43,4	-4,0	39,6	0,1	34,5	18,2
NECT	MP	S1N4	30,9	7,1	35,7	1,6	42,0	3,6	35,2	4,5
NECT	NW	S1N5	45,3	-0,6	45,4	2,8	42,6	-13,6	51,4	-16,1
Non-NECT	NC	S1C1	34,2	1,5	29,9	3,1	35,6	-19,3	33,1	-12,5

Source: Data supplied by DBE