

EDUCATION WHITE PAPER 5 ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA.

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PREFACE BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

When I announced the Implementation Plan for *Tirisano*, I indicated that our national and system-wide response to the challenge of Early Childhood Development (ECD) would be brought to the public as soon as we have completed and analysed the outcomes of our groundbreaking pilot project on the provision of the Reception Year. I am therefore particularly glad to announce our response in this White Paper.

I was especially excited to move more swiftly recently when I had the privilege to help UNICEF launch its report, *The State of the World's Children 2001*. The report ranks South Africa 66th, behind countries such as Botswana, Nicaragua, Mexico, Libya, Sri Lanka, Jamaica and Greece, in its under-five mortality rate, a critical indicator of the well-being of children. Let me share from this report a segment that I found helpful for us to reflect upon as we face the challenge of responding effectively to the ECD challenge.

"Although the particulars of their lives might differ, millions of mothers and fathers around the world, in both industrialised and developing countries, share the same story: finding and making time, investing energies, stretching resources to provide for their sons and daughters. Their days are consumed in helping their children grow strong and healthy, protecting, teaching, guiding, encouraging their talents and channelling their curiosity, delighting in their enthusiasm and their accomplishments. They search for advice and counsel from informal support networks and community agencies as they struggle, often against great odds, to do right by their children."

I hold out great hope that through the actions that we propose in this White Paper, all of us working in ECD may be able to respond more passionately and more effectively to the needs of these mothers and fathers as they seek advice and counsel and as they struggle to do right by their children, and to the needs of our nation's children. For it is in our response to the ECD challenge that we demonstrate our vision for the future for our children and how far we are willing to go to realise it.

The process and implementation plan initiated by this White Paper build on the enormous amount of work that is already being undertaken within and across Government, non-government and community-based organisations, local communities and families. While its main thrust is to close the gap in our programmes for five-year olds, thus giving effect to our Constitution and Education White Paper 1 on Education and Training, it also addresses itself to the ECD challenge facing us in respect of children younger than four years.

I therefore wish to take this opportunity to invite the active participation of members of the public and interested organisations as we take this momentous step for the children of our nation. I also wish to express, on behalf of Government, our sincerest appreciation to the many thousands of mothers across the length and breadth of our nation, who, despite being mainly professionally unqualified, are taking care of hundreds of thousands of our children in so many kinds of informal and at times formal ECD centres. Through your efforts, and in spite of the shortcomings that you struggle with, you are helping us build the nation.

Let us work together to nurture our children, to let them experience the excitement and the joy of learning, and to provide them, and our nation, with a solid foundation for lifelong learning and development.

Professor Kader Asmal, MP
Minister of Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approximately 40% of young children in South Africa grow up in conditions of abject poverty and neglect. Children raised in such poor families are most at risk of infant death, low birth-weight, stunted growth, poor adjustment to school, increased repetition and school dropout. This factor makes it even more imperative for the Department of Education to put in place an action plan to address the early learning opportunities of all learners but especially those living in poverty. Timely and appropriate interventions can reverse the effects of early deprivation and maximise the development of potential. The challenge for the Government is to help break the cycle of poverty by increasing access to Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes, particularly for poor children, and to improve the quality of these programmes.

Early childhood development refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age with the active participation of their parents and caregivers. Its purpose is to protect the child's rights to develop his or her full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential. Consistent with Education White Paper 1 on Education and Training (1995) and our Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (1996), we define early childhood development as an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially.

An analysis of the current nature, context and status of ECD provision in South Africa, reveals five key areas requiring attention,

- q The extent of ECD provision
- q Inequality in existing ECD provision
- q Inequality of access to ECD services
- q Variable quality of ECD services and
- q An incomplete, fragmented legislative and policy framework for ECD that results in unco-ordinated service delivery.

4. The Department of Education will address these matters through the proposals put forward in this White Paper. In particular, we will focus on expanding ECD provision, correcting the imbalances in provision, ensuring equitable access and improving the quality and delivery of ECD programmes.

5. The main ECD policy priority addressed in this White Paper is the establishment of a national system of provision of the Reception Year for children aged 5 years that combines a large public and smaller independent component. In this regard, our medium-term goal (2010) is for all children entering Grade 1 to have participated in an accredited Reception Year Programme.

6. In this White Paper we outline how we will achieve this through a phased, poverty-targeted approach that makes use of grants-in-aid to primary schools and subsidies to selected community-based ECD sites within conditional grants and provincial budgets.

7. In order to improve the quality of Reception Year programmes, we will require that all Reception Year programmes be registered with provincial departments of education, that accredited Reception Year educators be registered with the South African Council of Educators and educators, who do not have a specialised qualification to teach the Reception Year, undergo approved training programmes.

8. In response to the challenge of ECD for children younger than 4 years, the Department of Education will, within the ECD priority group of the Government's National Programme of Action for Children, prioritise the development of a strategic plan for inter-sectoral collaboration.

9. This strategic plan will focus on the delivery of appropriate, inclusive and integrated programmes, with a particular emphasis on the development of a national curriculum statement, practitioner development and career pathing, health, nutrition, physical development, clean water and sanitation, and a special programme targeting four year old children from poor families with special needs and those infected with HIV/AIDS.

10. In this manner we expect to increase access to ECD programmes, improve the quality of such programmes and provide South Africa's youngest citizens with a solid foundation for lifelong learning and development in the 21st century.

SECTION 1

The early childhood development challenge

1.1 A new era; a new opportunity for our children

1.1 South Africa's young children stand on the brink of a new era for early childhood development, occasioned by seven trends:

1.1.1 The unprecedented opportunity created by the ending of apartheid for all children to grow up in dignity and equality.

1.1.2 Growing evidence from child development research that the largest part of brain development happens before a child reaches three years old and that it is during this period that children develop their abilities to think and speak, learn and reason and lay the foundation for their values and social behaviour as adults.

1.1.3 A growing recognition that all reasonable plans for human development begin early with measures to protect the rights of the child rather than wait for 18 years later.

1.1.4 A consensus that given a healthy start and a solid foundation in the first months and years of their lives, that children are less likely to suffer from illnesses, repeat grades, drop out or need remedial services.

1.1.5 Growing appreciation that children's needs and indivisible rights span the areas of health, nutrition, a safe environment and psychosocial and cognitive development.

1.1.6 A consensus among professionals and increasingly among parents that the care of young children should provide them with suitable educational experiences; and

1.1.7 Growing evidence that young children are capable learners and that suitable educational experience during the pre-school years can have a positive impact on school learning.

Yet, while there is this growing consensus that what happens during these early months and years have dramatic consequences for the rest of childhood and adolescence, our children across the country and the world are most neglected in our policies, programmes and budgets. In our view, the time of early childhood development should merit higher priority attention. It is the time when responsible governments must make decisions about policies, laws, programmes and the provision of money. Yet, in our country, as in the rest of the world, for children and nations, these are the years that receive the least.

In this White Paper, we propose several actions and measures to rise to these challenges and to take forward much more concretely our programmes of early childhood development.

1.2 The case for investing in early childhood development

1.2.1 It is now widely acknowledged that the effects of what happen during the pre-natal period and during the earliest months and years of a child's life can last a lifetime. This is because the kind of early care a child receives from parents, pre-school teachers and caregivers determines how a child learns and relates in school and life in general. It is during early care that a child develops all the key elements of emotional

intelligence, namely confidence, curiosity, purposefulness, self-control, connectedness, capacity to communicate and co-operativeness.

1.2.2 The early years are also critical for the acquisition of the concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning. These include the acquisition of language, perception-motor skills required for learning to read and write, basic numeracy concepts and skills, problem-solving skills and a love of learning. With quality ECD provision in South Africa, educational efficiency would improve, as children would acquire the basic concepts, skills and attitudes required for successful learning and development prior to or shortly after entering the system, thus reducing their chances of failure. The system would also be freed of under-age and under-prepared learners, who have proven to be the most at risk in terms of school failure and drop-out. While it is never too late for children to improve in their health and development, to learn new skills, overcome fears or reflect on beliefs, more often it is the case that when they do not get the right start, they never catch up or reach their full potential. But, why invest in early childhood development?

1.2.3 There are compelling arguments that we put forward.

1.2.3.1 We committed our country to the advancement of the rights of children (see the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, and Section 28 of our Constitution of 1996) and the cause of human development, and these are irrefutable reasons for investing in early childhood development.

1.2.3.2 Through childhood development research, the influences of the first three years on the rest of a child's life are now well documented. Local and international research provides a wealth of evidence to show that the early years are critical for the development of the potential of human beings. This research has demonstrated that the period of gestation and the first seven years after birth are characterised by rapid physical, intellectual, emotional, social and moral development. For example, by the age of 2½ years, a child's brain has achieved 50% of its adult weight, and by the age of 5, the brain has grown to 90% of its adult weight. In addition, many of the brain's structures and biochemical routes are developed in the first two years of life. Unless the conditions under which poor children are raised and nurtured are addressed, the risk of irreversible brain damage and stunted physical development is inevitable for 40% of our children.

1.2.3.3 There are compelling economic arguments: increased productivity over a lifetime and a better standard of living when a child becomes an adult, later cost-savings in remedial education and health care and rehabilitation services, and higher earnings for parents, especially women, and caregivers who are freer to enter the labour market. In this regard, it is widely acknowledged that by freeing women, even somewhat, from the chores of early childhood development will result in raised incomes for women and families, especially for families living in poverty. These, in turn, can precipitate dramatic social and economic development in local communities, regions and the nation.

1.2.3.4 Intervening in the earliest years helps to reduce the social and economic disparities and race and gender inequalities that divide our society. For it is especially the children of our poor rural and poor urban communities who are most likely to benefit from and who most urgently need investment in early childhood development. It is in this manner that we can end inter-generational cycles of poverty, disease, violence and

discrimination. Note that poverty's cycle does not stop in one lifetime. A girl born to poverty is more likely to marry early and have a child while still an adolescent. A malnourished girl becomes a malnourished mother who gives birth to an underweight baby. And, like their parents, poor children are likely to transmit their poverty to the next generation.

1.2.3.5 Our position in the global economy depends on the competencies of our people and these competencies are developed and set early in life. Human development thus begins well before a child enters the primary school.

1.2.3.6 Although many of the cost benefits of ECD provision can be quantified, there are other benefits that are difficult to cost and quantify, for example, community mobilisation, an improvement in siblings' health status and in family relations. The early years have also been recognised as the ideal phase for the transmission of the values that are essential for a peaceful, prosperous and democratic society. These values include respect for human rights, appreciation of diversity, tolerance, and justice.

1.3 We believe that choosing not to act and to provide the earliest care for all children is a costly mistake. A longitudinal study of children from low-income families in the United States of America who participated in pre-school programmes has shown that for every R1 invested in the physical and cognitive development of babies and toddlers, there is a R7 return, mainly from cost savings in the future. Given a healthy start and a solid foundation in the first months and years of their lives, children are less likely to suffer from illnesses, repeat grades, drop out or need remedial services. A study of poor Brazilian children has also demonstrated the cost return of early childhood development. Poor girls who had attended pre-school were twice as likely to reach grade 5 and three times as likely to reach grade 8 as girls who did not. In the case of poor boys this cost return increased significantly. They were three times more likely to reach grade 5, while forty percent of poor boys who attended pre-schools finished primary school, compared to 2 per cent of boys who had not been involved in early educational programmes.

1.4 Defining early childhood development

1.3.1 Early childhood development (ECD) refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age with the active participation of their parents and caregivers. Its purpose is to protect the child's rights to develop his or her full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential.

1.3.2 Consistent with our *White Paper 1 on Education and Training (1995)* and our *Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (1996)*, we define early childhood development (ECD) as an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least 9 years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially.

1.3.3 This approach conveys the importance of an integrated approach to child development and signifies an appreciation of the importance of considering a child's health, nutrition, education, psycho-social and

additional environmental factors within the context of the family and the community. It is consistent with an understanding of the developmental process of children.

1.3.4 Community-based services that meet the needs of infants and young children are vital to ECD and they should include attention to health, nutrition, physical development, curriculum and water and environmental sanitation in homes and communities. This approach promotes and protects the rights of the young to survival, growth and development.

1.3.5 Since early childhood development services do not fall neatly into any one government department or level of government or sector, the needs and indivisible rights of the young child span the areas of health, nutrition, a safe environment and psychosocial and cognitive development. This will therefore require us to put in place an integrated, cross-sectoral approach and plan across government that involves civil society organisations, the corporate sector, religious organisations, non-governmental organisations, parents, children and adolescents.

1.3.6 In order to meet the challenges that we lay out in this White Paper, we shall make every effort to create, find and allocate the resources that are necessary to fund adequately early childhood development as the first essential step in ensuring the rights of the child. In taking further our policy goals we shall assign responsibility and accountability for ensuring that every child has the best possible start in life as the fundamental prerequisite for healthy growth and development during school age and adolescence.

1.4 The policy focus of this White Paper

1.4.1 While we acknowledge and recognise the vital importance of investment in early childhood development before the age of three years and the continuity of early childhood development until age nine, the policy priority of this White Paper is the implementation of the pre-school Reception Year (grade R) for five year olds.

1.4.2 In this regard, our medium term policy goal is progressively to realise our constitutional obligation to provide all learners with ten years of compulsory school education, including one year of early childhood development called the Reception Year.

1.4.3 Our policy target is that by 2010, all learners that enter grade 1 should have participated in an accredited Reception Year programme and that we shall have created a system of provision that is 75 per cent state subsidised rather than the current estimated 25 per cent state subsidisation. In this White Paper we provide details as to how we intend to achieve this policy goal.

1.4.4 In respect of early childhood development of children in the age range six years to nine years, our policy goals and programmes are outlined in our five year plan, Tirisano: 1999-2004, and its annual supplementary work programmes. These policies and programmes focus on improving the quality and

effectiveness of teaching and learning and the functioning of our schools as they serve these children in Grades 1, 2, 3 and 4. They also focus on improving learners' language, mathematical and life skills, knowledge, values and attitudes.

1.4.5 With regard to children four years old and younger, this White Paper prioritises the development of a strategic plan for inter-sectoral collaboration, focusing our efforts on improving the quality of early learning programmes.

1.4.6 In this regard, our strategic plan will prioritise the development of curricula, and practitioner career pathing and development. In the period leading up to 2010, the Department of Education will also prioritise the subsidisation of early learning programmes for four year olds from poor rural and poor urban families, HIV/AIDS positive/infected children and children with special learning needs.

1.4.7 The White Paper outlines how we intend to achieve these goals. But first, let us turn to a description of the current status of ECD in our country.

SECTION 2

The Current status of ECD provision

Based on the revised 1996 census statistics, it is estimated that approximately 10 million children fall within the age range of birth to 9 years. It is this group of children that are the focus of the policies that we outline here. This estimate of the focus group must also be read against the background that 40% of our families live in abject poverty, with rural African families being hardest hit. Children raised in these poor families are most at risk of infant death, low birth weight, stunted growth, poor adjustment to school, increased repetition and school dropout. This makes it even more imperative for the Department of Education to put in place an action plan to address the early learning opportunities of all learners but especially those living in poverty.

2.1 A picture of inequity of provision and opportunity

2.1.1 At present just over 1 million of an estimated 6 million children in the 0 - 6 years age range are already enrolled in some type of ECD provision (*The Nationwide Audit of ECD Provisioning in South Africa*, Department of Education, 2001). As was noted earlier, children in the 6 - 9 years age range are guaranteed by our *Constitution, 1996* access to grades 1-4 in primary schools. Accordingly, for purposes of this White Paper, our attention is focused on those children in the age range birth to 5.

2.1.2 Based on our audit of early childhood development sites, we can conclude that the problem of ECD provision in South Africa is one of access and of equity. However, there is an existing base of sites from which to plan and develop quality improvements and improved access. Our audit has also shown that since approximately 75 per cent of ECD provision is fee-based, unlike the case with primary schooling where fees play a relatively small role compared to public funding, the financial burden for ECD falls disproportionately on the poor.

2.1.3 Our audit has also confirmed the longer lasting effects of the apartheid government's policy of racial discrimination in ECD provision for birth - 5 years olds.

2.1.4 White children have access to ECD services of considerably higher quality than Coloured, Indian or African children, while in poverty-stricken rural and informal areas ECD provision for African children from birth - 5 year old is far lower than in formal urban areas, both in terms of quality and quantity.

2.1.5 Children from urban and higher-income groups generally have more access, and access to services of much higher quality, than poor or rural children. Only 40 per cent of sites are located in rural settings.

Children on farms are also shown to be the worst off while rural children generally are the most likely to suffer exclusion from early childhood development, stunted physical growth and lags in emotional and cognitive development.

2.1.6 Further traces of apartheid's legacy can be seen in the limited access of children with special needs to ECD services. Children with disabilities constitute only about 5,9 per cent the target population, and 9,4 per cent of the ages of 1 and 5. They are, for the most part, not provided for either in the mainstream or within specialised services. This is despite the fact that early identification and early intervention are imperative for the optimal development of many of these children.

2.1.7 Below we provide information on the status of ECD provision at national and provincial levels. These statistics are based upon our analysis of our audit of ECD provision.

2.1.8 Significantly, as demonstrated also by the distribution of sites, provinces with large rural communities have the least number of children enrolled in any kind of ECD programme.

From our audit of 23,482 ECD sites, the following is a distribution of these across the nine provincial departments:

- q Eastern Cape 3,231 (14%)
- q Free State 1,665 (7%)
- q Gauteng 5,308 (23%)
- q Kwazulu-Natal 5,684 (24%)
- q Mpumalanga 1,367 (6%)
- q Northern Cape 422 (2%)
- q Northern Province 1,987 (8%)
- q North West 1,174 (5%)
- q Western Cape 2,644 (11%)

From information collected from 21,892 of these sites, the following table provides the distribution across types of ECD provision.

- q School-based 3,623 (17%)
- q Community based 10,816 (49%)
- q Home based 7,453 (34%)

From information collected from 21,892 sites, learner enrolment across provincial departments of education are as follows.

- q Eastern Cape 152,451
- q Free State 75,493
- q Gauteng 236,523
- q Kwazulu-Natal 213,950

- q Mpumalanga 52,626
- q Northern Cape 20,278
- q Northern Province 82,582
- q North West 53,554
- q Western Cape 143,016
- q National 1,030,473

The following table provides information on the numbers of practitioners and child minders and the learner: educator ratios across all the ECD sites.

- q Eastern Cape 6,354 24:1
- q Free State 3,964 19:1
- q Gauteng 15,052 16:1
- q Kwazulu-Natal 10,603 20:1
- q Mpumalanga 2,658 20:1
- q Northern Cape 844 23:1
- q Northern Province 3,615 23:1
- q North West 2,910 18:1
- q Western Cape 8,503 17:1
- q National 54,503 19:1

2.2 Types of ECD provision in South Africa

2.2.1 In this section we focus our attention once more on the provision of ECD service and programmes to children aged birth - 5 years, since children in the age group 6-9 years are provided for in primary school education. Of the ECD programmes that exist for birth - 5 year olds, almost 82 per cent of ECD services provide such services to children between 3 and 5 years of age. There is therefore a general neglect of provision of ECD services and programmes to children from birth to 2 years, the most critical stage in terms of children's growth and development.

2.2.2 Many different types of ECD services are available. These services remain largely fragmented and are characterised by much duplication. We distinguish two main categories of ECD institution-based provision: public and independent. Public ECD institutions are funded by provincial departments of education and consist of pre-primary schools that provide for ECD services and programmes for children aged 3 - 5 years.

2.2.3 A much greater variety of ECD services exists in the category of independent ECD institutions. These institutions are funded through parents' fees, community fundraising and/or donations of material, with some or no financial support from government. Independent ECD provision currently includes:

- q The Reception Year (Grade R) at independent schools.

- q The Reception Year (Grade R) attached to public schools, but managed by the school governing body and operated by a private individual or the community.
- q Independent pre-primary schools that provide for children from 3 - 5 years of age.
- q Privately operated or community run crèches or nursery schools that provide for children from birth to 5 years.
- q Home-based provision for children from birth to 5 years.

2.2.4 Of these independent ECD services and programmes, community-operated institutions, commonly referred to as community-based sites, and independent pre-primary schools constitute the two largest groups of providers.

2.2.5 Whilst the existing ECD services and programmes for children from birth to 5 years vary greatly in terms of type, they also vary greatly in terms of quality. We illustrate this through two examples that are drawn from the *Final Report of the National ECD Pilot Project, 2001*. They illustrate just how vast the range of quality of ECD services are and how no single factor can be identified as the reason for quality or its lack. Example 1: The practitioner's highest educational qualification is Grade 10 and she is responsible for 40 registered learners. The ECD site is in a relatively poor, rural area but is not on a farm. The practitioner is well prepared with a range of equipment and provides developmentally appropriate learning activities...covering all aspects of learning and development...She also makes use of a range of techniques for working with individuals, small groups and large groups (p. 25-27).

Example 2: The practitioner has a tertiary qualification - a one-year diploma - and she is responsible for 32 registered learners. The ECD site is located in a township...The following observation sums up the situation... "There is no lesson to be observed...the learners [are] sleeping. We asked for the principal. A worker said that the principal went to the shop. We asked for their daily programme because at that time [of day] they are supposed to do something, but we find them asleep." This remains the situation for several hours of the morning (p. 32).

2.2.6 Based on our analysis of these sites, we can attribute differences in the quality of ECD services and programmes to, amongst other things:

- q The absence of minimum standards and guidelines for the registration of ECD service providers.
- q The absence of an effective system that monitors and evaluates the quality of services.
- q Inequitable funding and resourcing of ECD services.
- q The absence of a mechanism for the professional registration of ECD practitioners/educators and of the requirement that they be registered with the South African Council of Educators.
- q Inequities in the qualifications of ECD practitioners/educators.
- q The absence of an accreditation system for trainers of ECD practitioners/educators.
- q Inadequate support with the implementation of Curriculum 2005 given to Reception Year (Grade R) educators.
- q The absence of a national curriculum framework for children under 5 years of age.

q Inadequate support services such as nutrition programmes and accessible immunisation programmes.

2.2.7 Having described the state of early childhood development services and programmes in South Africa, we turn next to a description of the actions taken until now by Government in response to this challenge, before turning in section 4 to an outline description of how we propose to implement our policy proposals on the Reception Year (Grade R).

SECTION THREE

Government's Response to the ECD Challenge.

Until now there has been a wide-ranging response by Government to the ECD challenge that we have described in earlier sections of this White Paper. This response demonstrates its concern and commitment to address the ECD needs of our children.

3.1 Wide-ranging and Government-wide policies and programmes

The 1998 Department of Education audit of national policies and programmes that relate to the provision of ECD showed that several inter-sectoral policies, legislation and programmes have been adopted by the national, provincial and local levels of government. Some of these policies and programmes are listed below to illustrate the extent of Government's participation and leadership in policy development since 1994.

3.1.1 Our *Constitution, 1996*, in Section 28 of the Bill of Rights provides among others, that:

(1) Every child has the right-

(a) to a name and a nationality from birth;

(b) to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment;

(c) to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care and social services;

(d) to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation;

(e) to be protected from exploitative labour practices;

(f) not to be required or permitted to perform work or provide services that (i) are inappropriate for a person of that child's age; or (ii) place at risk the child's well-being, education, physical or mental health or spiritual, moral or social development;...

(2) A child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.

3.1.2 Our *Constitution, 1996* also provides in *Section 29* of the *Bill of Rights* among others that:

(1) Everyone has the right-

(a) to a basic education...

3.1.3 The *White Paper for Social Welfare* adopted in 1996 prioritises the provision of social development services to children under 5 years, but especially to children younger than 3 years. It commits Government to subsidising a range of programme options to help meet the varied ECD needs of families. It also targets the intersecting needs of women and children and includes social developmental programmes for unemployed women with children younger than 5 years.

3.1.4 *Education White Paper 1 on Education and Training* adopted in 1995 defines the Department of Education's role in developing policy for children 0 - 9 with an initial focus on 5 year olds and the phasing in of the Reception Year. It also commits the Department of Education to inter-departmental collaboration and partnerships with non-governmental organisations, ECD practitioner groups and the private sector.

3.1.5 In 1996 Government adopted the *National Programme of Action for Children* which focuses on the integrated delivery of the following services to children: nutrition, child and maternal health, water and sanitation, ECD and basic education, social welfare development, leisure and cultural activities and child protection measures.

3.1.6 The *Interim ECD Policy* of the Department of Education was adopted in 1996. It provides for the implementation of a National Reception Year Pilot Project to test a lower cost model and curriculum for implementation of the Reception Year in partnership with non-governmental organisations and community based ECD service providers. As a consequence of this policy, National ECD Pilot Project Interim Unit Standards for ECD practitioner training were developed.

3.1.7 In 1996, the Department of Education, provincial education departments and the European Union allocated R125 million to implement the *National ECD Reception Year Pilot Project*. The project achieved the participation of 2,730 ECD sites and Reception Year practitioners, and approximately 66 000 Reception Year learners countrywide over a three year period. Two of the pilot project's main objectives were to make and test innovations in the ECD field related to accreditation of practitioners, policy and subsidy systems, and to research the most effective means of delivering Reception Year education. Since the outcomes of this project form the basis of our policy proposals on the implementation of the Reception Year, we describe below in detail its goals, lessons learnt and their implications for policy.

3.1.8 The 1997 Report, *Quality Education for All: Overcoming Barriers to Learning and Development*, of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and the National Committee on Education Support Services recommended a focus on the early identification, assessment and intervention for learners with special education needs. It places a particular emphasis on pre-school learning and advocates inter-sectoral collaboration of the Department of Education with the Departments of Health and Welfare.

3.1.9 The *Free Health Care Policy* of 1994 provides for free health care for children younger than 6 years, while the *White Paper on Health* adopted in 1997 provides for free maternal and child health, an integrated nutrition strategy, environmental health, including safe water and sanitation, and communicable disease control.

3.1.10 The *Integrated Nutrition Strategy* (Draft, January 1998) provides another inter-sectoral focus with the creation of development committees to facilitate the administration of the strategy, and involves among others the Departments of Education, Welfare, Labour and Sport and Recreation.

3.1.11 The *Technical Guidelines on Immunisation in South Africa* (1995) provides that children younger than 5 years be prioritised for nutritional intervention. The programme includes education, food supplementation, micronutrient supplementation and education.

3.1.12 In terms of the *Welfare Laws Amendment Act* of 1997, a child support grant is payable for needy children younger than 7 years.

3.1.13 The *White Paper on Disability* adopted in 1997 focuses on the provision of services to very young children with disabilities.

3.1.14 Policy recommendations of the *Inter-Ministerial Committee on Young People at Risk* together with the *Minimum Standards of the South African Child and Youth Care System* adopted in 1998 provide among others for an integrated framework for the child and youth care system and places emphasis on prevention to promote resilience and early intervention. Key principles advocated in the policy are those of family preservation and exposure to activities and opportunities that promote normal development. While this is an inter-sectoral initiative, the Department of Social Development is the lead department.

3.1.15 The *Draft Issue Paper on the Transformation of the ECD System in South Africa* (1998) of the Department of Social Development advocates strategies for implementing the White Paper for Social Welfare in relation to ECD. It advocates a strong inter-sectoral focus.

3.1.16 The *White Paper on Local Government* adopted in 1998 provides that local government can promote social development through the provision of recreational and community facilities, and can deliver aspects of social welfare services. Municipalities have the constitutional power and do provide childcare facilities and grants to associations for this in terms of the *Child Care Act, 1983*.

3.1.17 The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry through its *Working for Water Project* has subsidised the care of workers' pre-school age children either through subsidisation of their attendance in a community facility or in some cases the creation of a crèche.

3.1.18 The Department of Sport and Recreation through its *SANGALA Movers in Action Pilot Project* targets the participation of 3 - 6 year olds in sport and recreation.

3.1.19 The National Sports Council has developed its *Superkidz Programme* for children 0 - 7 years in collaboration with the provincial departments of education and ECD non-government organisations.

3.1.20 The Department of Correctional Services through its *Females and Youth Unit* has developed a draft policy on pregnant women in prison and children under five years in prison with their mothers.

3.1.21 *The Human Resources Development Strategy for South Africa*, published jointly by the Ministries of Education and Labour during April 2001 recognises that developing our people begins at birth and places emphasis on the registration of sites, the professional development of ECD practitioners and quality assurance of education and training programmes at ECD sites.

3.1.2 This list of more than thirty policies, laws and programmes demonstrate the Government's commitment to making policies and allocating available resources to those children and their mothers who are the most disadvantaged.

3.1.3 However, the challenge facing Government is to convert its wide ranging and critically important post-1994 response into an integrated and targeted, government-wide national programme of action on ECD as intended by the *National Programme of Action for Children*. In this regard, a key challenge facing Government is to increase access to ECD programmes, correct existing imbalances in ECD provision, improve the quality of ECD programmes and plan and deliver ECD services in a co-ordinated way. We believe that all our policy development must be driven by these goals.

3.1.4 The Department of Education's departure point for all ECD policy development is that the primary responsibility for the care and upbringing of young children belongs to parents and families. However, because of the inequality in income distribution, and because ECD is a public good whose benefits spill over from individual parents to society as a whole, the Department sees it as the state's responsibility to subsidise and assure the quality of ECD services. In order to achieve this, the Department of Education:

3.1.4.1 Will strive to ensure that all children aged 5 have access to Reception Year (Grade R) programmes in which they are given adequate opportunities to develop to their fullest potential.

3.1.4.2 Is committed to developing collaborative strategies and programmes with all our social partners in ECD as a means to ensuring the co-ordinated and integrated development of young children from birth to age 9.

3.1.4.3 Will ensure that the educational component of ECD is planned in a continuous developmental sequence from birth to age 9 in collaboration with all our social partners.

3.1.4.4 Will ensure that parents, communities and other stakeholders are represented in democratic governance structures.

3.1.4.5 Will ensure that the funding of ECD services is focused on the achievement of equity and redress.

3.1.4.6 Is committed to the optimal utilisation of available resources, and the strengthening and expanding of existing services.

3.1.5 We turn next to a description and summary of the implementation of the National ECD Pilot Programme. In this exercise we place emphasis on the lessons learnt and the possible implications for the nation-wide implementation of a publicly funded Reception Year.

3.2 The National ECD Pilot Programme

3.2.1 Informed by the constitutional provisions on the provision of basic education to all South Africa's children, *Education White Paper 1 on Education and Training* (1995) on the public provision of one year of ECD (the Reception Year), and the *Interim Policy on ECD* that provided a framework for ECD from age 0 to 9 years, the Department of Education in 1997 launched the National ECD Pilot Project.

3.2.2 While this project was launched to implement more broadly the *Interim ECD Policy*, it placed special emphasis on the development of a public system of lower cost but high quality Reception Year for 5 year olds. It would be on the basis of our experience with this three year long project that the Department of Education would put forward policy proposals on the creation of a public system of ECD in the Reception Year. The project's objectives included among others the following:

3.2.2.1 Making and testing innovations in the ECD field related to the accreditation of ECD providers, curriculum policy and funding subsidy systems.

3.2.2.2 Promoting outcomes-based education and assessment in ECD in line with the provisions of the National Qualifications Framework.

3.2.2.3 Building leadership, management, implementation capacity and ECD expertise, particularly at provincial department of education level in conjunction with resource and training organisations.

3.2.2.4 Assuring quality community-based ECD programmes through the provision of funding subsidies and training.

3.2.2.5 Ensuring that children in the pilot project receive quality Reception Year education.

3.2.2.6 Researching the most effective means of delivering a public system of Reception Year provision.

3.2.3 Through the National ECD Pilot Project the Department of Education provided provincial departments of education with conditional grants totaling R40 million to provide start-up subsidies for the provision of the Reception Year by community-based ECD sites, contract resource and training organisations to provide training towards the achievement of the accreditation of practitioners and provincial monitoring costs.

3.2.4 In turn, provincial departments of education committed themselves to utilising the funds in accordance with the National ECD Pilot Project Design and to provide provincial funds for subsequent years of the project.

3.2.5 Altogether 2,730 ECD sites and practitioners who served approximately 66,000 learners were selected by the provincial departments of education to participate in the project.

3.2.6 Other components of the project were:

3.2.6.1 An Interim Accreditation Committee appointed by the Minister of Education to provide, in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework, the norms and standards for the training of ECD practitioners and to set up systems for accrediting both resource and training organisations and practitioners.

3.2.6.2 An information campaign that lasted for the first six months of the project, and which was aimed at informing practitioners and ECD social partners about the project.

3.2.6.3 A research and monitoring agency contracted by the Department of Education to provide research and monitoring services.

3.2.7 As part of the research effort, the research and monitoring agency was requested to compare the quality, equity and cost-effectiveness of community-based sites with those of school-based Reception Year classes and with Grade 1 classes that, prior to the introduction in 1999 of the new age of admission policy and age-grade norms, had a substantial number of under-age learners.

3.2.8 In addition, the research brief included examining the appropriateness and realization of the norms and standards developed for practitioner training and development, assessing the adequacy of the funding subsidies, considering the strengths and weaknesses of the provincial delivery models, and examining the effectiveness of the accreditation system set up by the Interim Accreditation Committee.

3.2.9 Finally, the research team was asked to review relevant ECD documentation and to outline the policy implications. Below we provide a summary of the lessons learnt from the project and their policy implications.

Quality, Equity and Cost-effectiveness

3.2.10 The quality of education at community-based sites was shown to have improved over the three-year project which can be attributed to the pilot project training, Curriculum 2005 training, and the internalisation of outcomes-based education methods. At the end of the project, the variation in quality appeared to be more apparent across provinces rather than among different site types. When considering both practitioner performance and the learner assessment results in early literacy and numeracy we found that about a quarter of community-based sites were offering high quality education.

3.2.11 There was also a distinct improvement in equity over the duration of the project. Using the criteria of attitudes, practices and facilities in respect of disability, gender, racial diversity and HIV/AIDS, we have, through the pilot project, demonstrated how we can close the equity gap in the quality of education provided by community-based and primary school Reception Year classes.

3.2.12 The project also demonstrated that a higher percentage of community-based sites were accommodating learners with disabilities, working against gender stereotypes, and reflecting racial diversity than primary school Reception Year classes.

3.2.13 Turning to the cost-effectiveness of ECD provision by site, the project report observed that from the perspective of Government, the provision of the Reception Year at community-based sites was substantially cheaper than providing similar education at schools. The average practitioner's salary was only R688 per

month for subsidised community-based sites but an average full-time teacher earns approximately R6700 per month. Parent and community members bear the cost of food, building/rent and educational equipment at the community-based sites.

3.2.14 In contrast, in the case of school-based provision, Government covers food, through the Primary School Nutrition Programme, classroom infrastructure and educational equipment. Moreover, the monthly parents' fees at community-based sites are R38/month, nearly three times that of the average R12.90/month paid at primary school-based Reception Year sites. Therefore, it is much more cost-effective for parents to send their children to primary schools that are funded by Government.

3.2.15 However, notwithstanding these positive features of community-based sites, we found that parents believe that their children were more secure attending primary school.

3.2.16 Interestingly, we also found that some parents believe that their children could avoid social problems affecting adolescents if they begin and complete their schooling early.

Norms and Standards for ECD Practitioners

3.2.17 The project report provides some evidence that the current set of norms and standards are appropriate for ECD practitioners, a term encompassing different roles and responsibilities, levels of expertise and qualifications, and including caregivers, teaching assistants and pre-school teachers.

3.2.18 However, the report found that for them to contribute to improved teaching practice, they should be refined to eliminate vagueness and ambiguities.

3.2.19 The report also observed that although practitioners experienced problems with outcomes-based methodologies and discipline, with corporal punishment still evident, they demonstrated that they were capable of meeting almost all the specific outcomes and the respective assessment criteria at NQF Level 1 for Facilitating Active Learning, Managing the Learning Programme and Facilitating Healthy Development.

Funding Subsidies

3.2.20 The project demonstrated that the R2 per five- and six-year old learner over 200 days subsidy scheme was neither adequate nor appropriate and that the level of the funding subsidy was insufficient to satisfy quality ECD provision.

3.2.21 It also demonstrated though that the presence of the funding subsidy had a positive impact on improving access to resources such as rent, food, equipment and capital purchases, and that it made a contribution to poverty alleviation.

3.2.22 Through the sustainable provision of the Reception Year, the burden of providing the Reception Year can be shifted from poverty-stricken families to Government and through it Government can support long-term poverty alleviation and social development.

Provincial ECD Delivery Models

3.2.23 The project demonstrated that each of the provincial departments of education had their strengths and weaknesses in implementing the project.

3.2.24 The Northern Cape and Western Cape adhered most closely to the project implementation plan, while KwaZulu-Natal administered the subsidies in an innovative manner by subsidising practitioner salaries and educational equipment rather than individual learners.

3.2.25 Gauteng's adaptive model offered the most inter-sectoral collaboration (e.g. with the Departments of Health, Welfare and Local Government) but did not follow the project's training model.

3.2.26 On the other hand, Mpumalanga, Free State, Eastern Cape and the North West experienced serious problems in project implementation.

3.2.27 Many lessons were learnt from the implementation of the project:

3.1.2.27.1 Strong political will in provincial departments of education is crucial for Government intervention projects such as the National ECD Pilot Project.

3.1.2.27.2 Funding for national projects should be ring-fenced as some provinces used the funding for other education-related expenditure.

3.1.2.27.3 Setting up a separate subsidy system for this project was extremely labour intensive and too difficult for some provinces to administer.

3.1.2.27.4 Using the number of five- and six-year old learners as the determining factor for the issuing of subsidies was very difficult due to poor documentation of learners' ages.

3.1.2.27.5 Some provinces mastered the tendering process, whereas others found this very difficult and will require in future, additional capacity building.

3.1.2.27.6 The working relationship between ECD and schooling sector provincial personnel, essential for the implementation of the Reception Year policy proposals, was effective in only half of the provinces while in the remaining half considerable work needs to be undertaken to improve these working relations.

3.1.2.27.7 Resource and training organisations' performance in the provinces was also varied with few able to accurately implement recognition of prior learning (RPL), some assessing practitioners through follow-up visits and few informing their participants of how their training fitted into the National Qualifications Framework.

3.1.2.27.8 Provincial human, financial and infrastructural resources to support ECD provincial work was varied and, in most cases, inadequate for the provinces to carry out the appropriate monitoring of ECD sites. Reasons for this include: not enough personnel; personnel with many other duties besides ECD; lack of funding for transport and materials; and lack of transport and communications facilities.

Accreditation of ECD providers

3.2.28 The accreditation of ECD providers was implemented during the last six months of the life of the project that made a true assessment of the effectiveness complicated.

3.2.29 Nonetheless, the resource and training organisations and practitioner accreditation processes were found to already have had an impact and therefore found to be an effective spur for transformation. The project demonstrated that accreditation of ECD providers has the potential to be effective and that it should be developed into a permanent feature of the national ECD policy and programmes, provided that the following recommendations were considered:

3.2.29.1 The processes require more transparency as practitioners should be informed of the accreditation elements. Feedback should be provided so that all parties receive the results and comments of the inspection visits.

3.2.29.2 A structure to accredit elective unit standards and to deal with referrals for fundamental unit standards should be established.

3.2.29.3 Resource and training organizations require more training so that they can integrate the accreditation requirements and processes into their operations.

3.2.29.4 The processes in general need to be strengthened and made more rigorous, e.g. there should be more than one inspection visit and at least two moderators working independently, more time should be spent on each visit and emphasis should be placed on training practice and practitioner performance in a real setting.

3.2.29.5 There should be consistent and substantive moderation by the relevant Education and Training Quality Assurance Body of the practitioner accreditation process. This should remain in place for several years before provinces in co-operation with accredited resource and training organisations take over the responsibility.

Policy Recommendations arising from the Project

We turn next to some of the specific policy recommendations made in the *Final Report of the National ECD Pilot Project*.

3.2.30 The Reception Year should be made compulsory for admission into Grade 1, and its provision should be phased in over a five-year period.

3.2.31 A combination of Reception Year classes should be offered at primary schools and community-based sites within a new public system of Reception Year provision.

3.2.32 The Government should be requested to fund the implementation of a public system of Reception Year provision, and the following matters will require attention:

q Provincial ECD budgets should be ring-fenced and ECD should become one of the key programmes of the national and the provincial departments of education.

q Should Government opt to subsidise ECD salaries then the issue of who is the employer of ECD practitioners should be clarified. Should it be decided that the provincial departments of education would become the employers, it would be important to comply with the *Basic Conditions of Employment Act*, which requires that employers provide their staff with contracts and comply with the minimum wage which presently is R1,000 per month.

q Furthermore, should the provincial departments of education become the employers of these ECD practitioners, practitioners should be required to register with the South African Council of Educators and be represented at the Education Labour Relations Council.

q The mechanism created to accredit practitioners should be developed further, particularly the area of elective credits, and should be incorporated into a career path for non-formally trained practitioners.

3.2.33 The quality of the Reception Year should be improved. While primary schools and community based sites are now offering a similar quality of education, this overall quality is still too low. Improved and higher quality Reception Year programmes will require the following support services:

q Training in teaching methods that are quality controlled and accredited.

q Regular and systematic monitoring of practitioners through observation and feedback by education officials.

q Adequate support to practitioners so that they can demonstrate an understanding of the expected outcomes or expected levels of learner performance.

q More reading books should be provided since the presence of accessible books is highly correlated with improved early literacy assessment results and educational equipment.

q Registration requirements should be used to ensure that sites provide safe accommodation and an educationally enriching environment for learners.

q In order to improve the professional status of ECD practitioners, they should be required to register with the South African Council for Educators.

3.2.34 Having described in this section Government's response until now to the ECD challenge, including the Department of Education's National ECD Pilot Project and lessons learnt from these, including policy implications for the future, we turn in the next two sections to our key policy proposals for the establishment of a national system of Reception Year provision for children aged 5 years (Section 4) and for an inter-governmental plan of action on ECD for children from birth to 4 years (Section 5).

SECTION 4

SYSTEMATISING RECEPTION YEAR AND EARLIER PROVISION

Arising from the lessons learnt on the provision of the Reception Year in the National ECD Pilot Project, the Government proposes to establish a national system for the provision of Reception Year programmes to children aged five, including independent provision outside of the public sector. This radical leap cannot be achieved in one year. The Department of Education believes that this proposal, including its financing, adequately and responsibly meets our commitment to progressively realise our policy goals to provide access to all children aged five to a national system of Reception Year programmes. We believe that this proposal is within our country's fiscal means.

The Department has noted that provision of ECD is an activity with significant social returns. Using largely private means, South Africa currently provides coverage for about one learner-year out of five of pre-Grade 1 education. Because of its social returns, we propose expanding this coverage. A reasonable goal would be to expand this coverage to 1.7 learner-years by 2010. The setting of this target is based on research showing that this is the level of coverage that we expect will be achieved by South Africa's 10 next-highest neighbours in GDP per capita within the next 10 years. It is to be noted that current coverage is currently spread out over several years. Thus, for example, starting at ages one or two, some twenty per cent of each age group might receive coverage, adding up to about one learner-year after 5 years.

Our proposal can be summarised by saying that our target is essentially to universalise coverage of the Reception Year, whilst maintaining a significant coverage in earlier years. Our proposal accomplishes this transition over approximately ten years. However, our proposal also entails using public funds in such a way that the pre-Reception Year can be more targeted towards the poor and those most affected by HIV/AIDS.

4.1 Three models of provision of the Reception Year and earlier

The Department of Education proposes the establishment of a national system of Reception Year provision that shall comprise of three types, namely,

- q Reception Year programmes within the public primary school system.
- q Reception Year programmes within community-based sites, and
- q Independent provision of Reception Year programmes.

4.1.1 Reception Year and earlier programmes within the public primary school system

4.1.1.1 Our first priority is that all our public primary schools should become the sites for the provision of accredited Reception Year programmes. With some additional investment in building rehabilitation to accommodate the learning, extra-curricular and safety requirements of the Reception Year, we believe that our 23,000 strong primary school system provides wide access and coverage of our country.

4.1.1.2 This will mean that the current state of provision of the Reception Year will undergo dramatic change, from a system that is approximately 75 per cent privately funded to one that is approximately 75 per cent publicly funded.

4.1.1.3 In putting forward this proposal, the Department of Education is confident that parents, families and communities will not simply reduce by an equivalent amount the levels of private investment they currently make in ECD, but will instead refocus at least part of their funds on ECD services for children 4 years of age and younger.

4.1.1.4 Thus, our proposal is that the Reception Year will be mostly provided in public schools. Schools will be encouraged to do so through the proposed subsidy mechanism described below. However, the fact that the Reception Year will be more subsidised than is currently the case will encourage school governing bodies to provide coverage for earlier grades, but on a private-fee basis except in the case of children orphaned by AIDS, where the proposed subsidy mechanism would be extended as far down the age scale as possible.

4.1.1.5 School governing bodies of primary schools that respond effectively to the ECD challenge outlined in this White Paper will be provided with grants-in-aid by provincial departments of education to establish accredited Reception Year programmes. These grants will be fully poverty targeted and our aim is that the children of the poorest 40 per cent of families will receive the highest per capita level of grants-in-aid.

4.1.1.6 Based on our ECD audit approximately 200,000 children are currently accommodated within primary school-based Reception Year programmes. Our medium-term goal (2010) is that approximately 90 per cent of all five year olds, some 810,000, would be accommodated within primary school-based Reception Year programmes.

4.1.2 Reception Year and earlier programmes within community-based sites

4.1.2.1 Informed by the many lessons learnt from our National ECD Pilot Project we propose that some community-based sites become, over the short-term (2004), part of the public system of the provision of the Reception Year but only in cases where the public primary school option is not available or not available within a reasonable distance for the learner.

4.1.2.2 These sites would otherwise generally emphasise years prior to the Reception Year. In this regard, we propose that as part of the public system, these sites be provided with an adequate Government subsidy

up to the level of 135,000 children. Currently the Government's Medium-Term Expenditure Framework fully accommodates this proposal.

4.1.2.3 As will be the case with public primary school-based Reception Year provision, these community-based sites will be required to fulfil national policy and norms and standards on the provision of Reception Year programmes. The many recommendations that have been compiled from our pilot project and that are outlined in Section 3 will also have to be fully complied with for community-based sites to be included in the public system of Reception Year provision.

4.1.3 Independent provision of Reception Year programmes

4.1.3.1 We believe that independent pre-primary schools and Reception Year programmes that are attached to independent schools provide an important service and should continue to do so.

4.1.3.2 These programmes will however not receive a Government subsidy.

4.1.3.3 They will also be required to fulfil national policy and norms and standards on the provision of Reception Year programmes.

4.2 Financing our proposals for the expanded provision of the Reception Year

In this section we cover three important topics: a) the mechanisms of finance, b) the actual costs of the proposals, and c) the effect of the proposed funding mechanisms and funding amounts on the ECD environment.

4.2.1 Mechanisms of Finance

Two principal mechanisms of finance are anticipated.

4.2.1.1 Firstly, conditional grants from the national government, through the provinces, would fund grants to community-based ECD centres on a per-learner basis.

4.2.1.2 These grants are expected to fulfill two missions, namely, to provide ECD care only in areas where other options are not available and, importantly, to encourage ongoing experimentation. We have noted in Section 3.2 above that the community-based ECD provision cannot yet be assumed to provide ECD care of satisfactory quality, thus requiring further experimentation.

4.2.1.3 Notwithstanding this observation, we believe that we should use community-based ECD centres to reach children who otherwise have no practical option.

4.2.1.4 Thus, the expectation is that provision financed by this mechanism would reach a peak of approximately 135,000 children by 2003 or 2004, and then would grow no further.

4.2.1.5 Whether we continue to provide this coverage within a national conditional grant will be re-assessed by the mid-point of the current Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (2003). The logic of public finance suggests that only the proportion of the enrolment of 135,000 representing experimentation of national interest should be based on a national conditional grant on an ongoing basis after approximately fiscal year 2003/04.

4.2.1.6 These community-based ECD centres are able to operate at a cost considerably lower than primary school-based provision since the latter uses standard, provincially-employed educators, whereas the ECD practitioners at these community-based ECD centres are not employed by Government.

4.2.1.7 Secondly, this White Paper proposes that the provision of the Reception Year in public primary schools take place via direct grants-in-aid from provincial departments of education to school governing bodies.

4.2.1.8 These grants would flow on a per-learner basis. This would encourage a focus on efficiency of provision.

4.2.1.9 The grants would cover only children in the Reception Year, and would be poverty targeted with the same degree of progressivity as in the targeting table of the Norms and Standards for School Funding that currently allocates non-personnel funding to schools.

4.2.1.10 The grants would flow directly to the school governing bodies under the coverage of Section 21 of the South African Schools Act and will be specified through an amendment of the Norms and Standards for School Funding.

4.2.1.11 Under this finance mechanism, ECD care providers in the Reception Year of public schools would be employees of the school governing body. However, for purposes of quality enhancement and assurance, they would be required to enter certain training and registration requirements as discussed above.

4.2.1.12 The justification for this mechanism is to enable a combination of the lower cost of the community-based centres, but holding the possibility of greater quality control and accountability, as well as putting ECD provision under easier administrative reach of provincial departments of education.

4.2.1.13 Thus, our call for subsidising the Reception Year in public schools attempts to get the best of two worlds. The National ECD Pilot Project on community-based sites demonstrates that costs can be reduced using community energies and relative informality.

4.2.1.14 Our proposal to use school governing bodies, and to finance costs directly through these bodies, aims at capturing this aspect. However, taking community-based provision to a very large scale - where the close supervision possible in a pilot project would tend to get lost - would raise issues of accountability, particularly in quality control and to some degree finances.

4.2.1.15 Routing service provision through public schools where the principal is a provincial employee and where the networks of accountability are already improving, would add accountability to the mix. The policy goal is to keep costs low, while maintaining or improving the accountability and information networks that improve quality, thus increasing value-for-money.

4.2.1.16 A further justification is that by putting the entire funding under the highly progressive targeting approach used in the Norms and Standards for School Funding, a greater share of total educational resources would flow towards the poor.

4.2.1.17 The policy would be that free-standing public ECD enters as traditionally operated in certain provincial departments of education would continue, but they would have to operate within the framework of the South African Schools Act, would have to be managed by a school governing body and funding would have to flow through these bodies. Care providers would be employees of these bodies. In order to enhance accountability and keep these enters under the administrative reach of the provincial departments of education, we propose that principals or directors of these enters remain employees of the provincial departments of education.

4.2.1.18 Provincial departments of education would begin to use this model gradually. Each department would select the poorest schools that are well-managed, and have Section 21 status, and begin to subsidise Reception Year places at those schools at the appropriate percentage of the cost of a primary per learner cost in the province (approximately 70%).

4.2.1.19 Poverty would be judged in terms of the rankings in the funding norms. The targeting of the subsidy would be based on the poverty ranking of each school as already determined for the funding of primary and secondary schools. Thus schools at the top of the poverty ranks would receive more than schools in the middle. Each province would start with the poorest and work its way gradually down the list over the years with a view to achieving a target of eighty-five per cent coverage in the Reception Year through this mechanism by 2010.

4.2.1.20 A plan to move coverage up by a certain number of percentage points each year would be put in place by each provincial department of education. Each provincial plan will be co-developed between the Department of Education and each provincial department of education and each provincial Treasury, and will then become policy.

4.2.1.21 Though one of the policy recommendations arising from previous studies would call for ring-fencing financial allocations to ECD, in this White Paper we take a more cautious approach. We propose to study more closely the ring-fencing of allocations since discussions with public finance experts suggest that ring-fencing is becoming a source of real or perceived allocative inefficiency in the use of public resources within provinces. In addition to deciding on the further study of ring fencing of allocations, we are calling for actual service delivery targets in terms of coverage.

4.2.1.22 Lastly, given the centrality of nutrition to ECD, we propose to review, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other Government departments, the Norms of Standards of School Funding with the objective of expanding the reach of the Primary School Nutrition Programme to five-year olds in the Reception Year.

4.2.2 The Cost of the Proposals

Reasons for the Fiscal Affordability of the Proposal

4.2.2.1 Expanding the provision of the Reception Year in the manner that we propose in this White Paper will cost much less than was initially thought, if compared to past growth in the cost of the education system.

4.2.2.2 Reception Year programmes can be expanded as a result of two "dividends:" first, the decline in fertility rates, and, second, improvements in the flow-through efficiency of the system.

4.2.2.3 Several aspects need to be noted. First, as much of our own work and various analysts have shown, South Africa already provides her youth with far more than 9, or even 10, years of schooling. The average school-life participation of South African youth is already at least 13 years. However, this does not mean that children complete, on average, 13 grades of study. Many children repeat early grades, taking up more than

their “share” of learner-years, and then drop out, thus not completing the cycle after having taken up resources. This results in learner-years of study being inefficiently inflated relative to actual achievement in grade-completion. This inefficiency has been reduced in recent years, e.g. by tightening the control over school-entry age and introducing age-grade norms, and we expect further increases in efficiency as repetition and dropping out are further reduced.

4.2.2.4 Secondly, South Africa’s school-age cohorts, namely 6-7 year olds, are not only increasing more slowly than in the past, but are actually declining. We also expect that this decline will continue for a few years until it stops declining in about two decades time.

4.2.2.5 The trend in primary school enrolment reflects both the impact of declining population as well as tighter control of inappropriate age grouping. It is clear that enrolment has been declining and, because the underlying trends are strong and will continue, we can expect that enrolment would continue to decline. It is this already existing trend that provides the fiscal space needed to expand ECD care. The actual costing of the proposals, below, elaborates on the cost forecasts based on these trends. But it was important to establish some of the fundamental reasons why fiscal space for ECD expansion already exists and is expected to increase.

Cost impact analysis

4.2.2.6 There is one distinct matter that requires attention namely, the actual cost of expanding coverage of the Reception Year. Expanding ECD provision will naturally have long-term costs. The Department has studied these costs and find them to be reasonable. In what follows we have made various assumptions:

4.2.2.6.1 We have used values indexed to 1 wherever possible in order to draw attention to the relative amounts in question, but we also provide the key Rand values as an approximate order of magnitude.

4.2.2.6.2 We have taken long-term trends into account because: a) education is inherently a long-term issue, b) the underlying demographic pressures are also long-term trends and are visible only if one takes a long period into account, c) for purposes of policy we do not require the sorts of short-term detail required for actual implementation planning.

4.2.2.6.3 Costs are anchored as follows. Public primary school education has a cost index of 1, public secondary school education has a cost index value of 1.3, Reception Year provision in schools has an index of 0.7, and Reception Year provision in community-based centres has an index of 0.4. The cost of public primary school education in absolute terms is assumed to be 2.800 in 2001 Rand. Projections are made in real 2001 Rand. Note that this assumes that cost drivers such as real educator salaries, learner-educator ratios, etc., in public primary and secondary schooling do not change.

4.2.2.6.4 The school-entry age cohort is assumed to be at 1 million at present and to decline gradually by approximately 3 per cent per year until stabilising at approximately 900,000.

4.2.2.6.5 Coverage of the Reception Year cohort in school-based provision is assumed to increase to approximately 90% of the cohort. In absolute numbers, school-based care is assumed to increase from approximately 200,000 at present to approximately 800,000 by 2010.

4.2.2.6.6 Care in subsidised community-based centres is expected to increase to 135,000 learners by 2003 and to stay fixed at that level. Implicitly, this mode of provision is assumed to be equivalent to about 15% of a cohort.

4.2.2.6.7 Care in unsubsidised independent, community and home-based centres is expected to decrease from approximately 800,000 children to approximately 600,000 children.

4.2.2.6.8 The cost scenarios, as driven by these enrolment and the cost assumptions made, are as shown in the graphic below.

4.2.2.6.9 The "base trend" scenario is simply the cost projection without demographic changes such as declining fertility and with no enhancement in school efficiency. An alternative, much lower scenario shows the "dividend" from the demographic transition and the improvements in efficiency. Since the demographic transition is in fact taking place and flow efficiency is actually improving, one might wonder why costs are not actually coming down as the graph depicts. The reason is that this "dividend" is being taken up by other factors, such as higher labour costs, lowered learner:educator ratios in primary and secondary schooling, etc. A third, intermediate scenario shows the effect of re-investing some of this "dividend" in improved ECD provision.

4.2.2.6.10 There are, therefore, two implications. First, in some sense it is up to the education sector itself, in discussion with labour organisations, government departments concerned with mandates and salaries, to make sure that this "dividend" does not simply get used up by expenditure in the traditional schooling sectors. Second, it is to be noted that the claim ECD would like to make on the "dividend" is relatively modest compared to the total, yet very meaningful in terms of enhanced quality in the system. Given the cost of dealing with other looming social problems, the "dividend" should neither be squandered away nor should ECD be the only claimant on it. Actual costs are forecast as follows.

4.2.2.6.11 The tradeoffs of ECD expansion against other educational goals have been assessed. Even if we were to assume that the education budget would grow at a conservative rate of one per cent per year, and with the assumptions about demographic change and efficiency gains listed above, then the proposed ECD actions consume at most fifteen per cent or so of the budgetary leeway that emerges. Given the high priority of ECD as a social investment, we believe that a claim of about fifteen per cent of the budgetary space created by economic growth, demographic transition, and efficiency gains, is reasonable. This leaves room for quality increases in the ordinary schooling sub-sector, and for other sub-sectoral investments within education.

The Effects of Subsidies on the ECD Environment

4.2.2.7 ECD is to a large degree a market-driven or community-driven activity in our society. As noted, approximately eighty per cent of provision, as distinct from subsidisation of ECD is not in public schools. The proposals in this White Paper are for most of the funding to take place through grants to Reception Year

programmes in public primary schools, as long as such grants can proceed through the governing bodies of such schools.

4.2.2.8 The effect of injecting a subsidy of this nature into this market is difficult to predict. For example, would subsidising the Reception Year in public primary schools simply crowd out community- and home-based care? We expect not, as discussed below. However, because these uncertainties are real, as well as because of fiscal prudence, it is suggested that expansion be gradual. The effects of the subsidy, and the mechanisms under which it would be implemented, are expected to be as follows.

4.2.2.9 The subsidy for places in public schools would only be for the Reception Year and would be poverty-targeted. Furthermore, it would not cover the full cost of care, even in public schools, except for the poor as described earlier. The desired effect of this approach is that there would be a substitution of care in public schools for community or home-based care, favoring the poor and the Reception Year. The wealthier, and/or those desiring care prior to the Reception Year would still have recourse to independent ECD providers, community or home-based. In terms of numbers, our expectation is that, as coverage by the Reception Year in public schools would grow from approximately 200,000 to 800,000, and coverage in community- and home-based sites would stay constant in absolute terms, but be displaced towards the slightly better off, and towards those desiring pre-Reception Year care. In short, it is not expected that the subsidy to the Reception Year in public schools would crowd out community and home-based provision.

4.2.2.10 Furthermore, while having an equity impact, and creating a poverty-relief effort is clearly part of our policy goal, it would be undesirable if the effect of a subsidy were to simply substitute public for private funding. The Department of Education has evidence that provision of subsidies does not create a simple substitution. Instead, typical reaction to subsidies is to lower fees (or, rather, to create sliding scales, though in effect lowering the average fee), while still charging some fees. In the research and monitoring of the National ECD Pilot Project, it was found that in the subsidised pilot project vs. unsubsidised community sites effective fees (i.e., taking sliding scales and exemptions into account) paid were about thirty-two per cent lower and yet expenditure per child was approximately twenty-two per cent higher.

4.2.2.11 In short, we believe that the combination of poverty-targeted subsidies to places in the Reception Year in public schools, managed by school governing bodies, hence the "community" aspect of the public school; the continued subsidisation of community-based sites; improvements of standards in provider training; and improvements in supervision of all providers, in public primary schools or in communities and homes would all contribute to creating a vibrant and varied ECD sector. We believe that our proposals would not result in an undesirable crowding out of community initiative, but would result in an optimal mix - from the point of view of maximizing efficiency and equity - of public and private energies.

4.3 Implementing our proposals on the Reception Year

4.3.1 As has been noted in Section 3, there are many challenges that face our country as we take the next steps to establish a high quality national system of provision of the Reception Year. As we move forward, the following areas will receive further attention and will be incorporated within national policy, national norms and standards and national programmes for the provision of the Reception Year:

4.3.1.1 Measures to improve the quality, equity and cost-effectiveness of Reception Year programmes.

4.3.1.2 The further development of the norms and standards, the qualifications framework and career paths for ECD practitioners.

4.3.1.3 The ongoing development of the curriculum for the Reception Year, and the provision of more effective support to ECD practitioners to improve their teaching practices.

4.3.1.4 The development of an adequate poverty targeted grants-in-aid system for primary schools and an adequate subsidy system for community-based sites.

4.3.1.5 The further development of provincial leadership, management and implementation capacity, and ECD expertise.

4.3.1.6 The strengthening and improving of the system of accreditation of ECD providers.

4.3.1.7 The development of registration criteria for ECD practitioners with the South African Council of Educators. The Council is currently reviewing its registration requirements in order to provide for the registration of educators with a variety of qualifications. Given the lack of evidence that formalisation of certification and qualifications of ECD practitioners leads to improvements in quality of provision and given that such formalisation tends to raise costs, policy development in this area will pay attention to this trade-off. In any case such policy will have to take into account the funds available for ECD, given that the per learner funding will be lower than for primary and secondary schooling.

4.3.1.8 The representation of ECD practitioners within the Education Labour Relations Council.

4.3.1.9 The development of conditions of service for ECD practitioners who are employed by school governing bodies and publicly subsidised community-based ECD sites.

4.3.1.10 The development of a governance model for the incorporation of publicly subsidised community-based ECD sites within the public system of Reception Year provision.

4.3.1.11 The establishment of a strengthened policy advisory forum with key social partners.

4.3.1.12 The development of targets and performance indicators for inter-governmental and inter-sectoral co-ordination on ECD, with particular reference to the health, nutritional, safety, physical development and water and sanitation requirements of children aged 5 years.

4.3.1.13 The review and amendment of all relevant policies, norms and standards, legislation and regulations to give effect to our policy proposals contained in this White Paper.

SECTION 5

Expanding Provision and Building Coherent and Targeted Inter-Sectoral Programmes for Children from Birth to 4 Years

The Department of Education accepts that providing ECD for children younger than five years require a combination and a variety of programmes that draw in several departments and levels of government, non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, families, parents and children. In this regard, we find helpful and useful the list of possible programmes in the UNICEF report, *The State of the World's Children 2001* that could be provided for children younger than 4 years. The Department of Education, shall, at inter-departmental and inter-governmental levels further study all of the programmes listed below for possible inter-sectoral implementation.

ECD: No single formula

- q Educate and empower parents and caregivers.
- q Deliver services directly to children using home visits, home day care, integrated child development centres and formal and informal learning activities.
- q Strengthen national resources and capabilities.
- q Increase demand for ECD programmes and raise awareness of policy makers, planners and the general public.
- q Develop national child and family policies that allow parents increased time to meet their child-rearing and childcare responsibilities and that encourage increased possibilities for childcare by grandparents and other adult family members.
- q Develop legal and regulatory frameworks that increase awareness of rights and the availability of legal resources among both women and children and that promote more effective use of legislation and improved compliance.

The State of the World's Children 2001. UNICEF.

5.1 Inter-sectoral efforts are essential

5.1.1 The need for inter-sectoral collaboration is especially highlighted when we consider the indivisible rights of young children. The same UNICEF report provides a useful list in this regard that is provided below. This list is consistent with our Government's post-1994 policies, legislation and programmes as outlined earlier in Section 3, but also draws attention once more to the weaknesses in our response. Clearly, the challenge of providing ECD for children younger than 4 years will require more effective and inter-sectoral planning, programmes and implementation.

The rights of young children

Very young children (0-3 years)

- Protection from physical danger.
- Adequate nutrition and health care.
- Appropriate immunisations.
- An adult with whom to form attachment.
- An adult who can understand and respond to their signals.
- Things to look at, touch, hear, smell, taste.
- Opportunities to explore their world.
- Appropriate language stimulation.
- Support in acquiring new motor, language and thinking skills.
- A chance to develop some independence.
- Help in learning how to control their own behaviour.
- Opportunities to begin to learn to care for themselves.
- Daily opportunities to play with a variety of objects.

Pre-school aged children, all of the above, plus:

- Opportunities to develop fine motor skills.
- Encouragement of language through talking, being read to, singing.
- Activities that will develop a sense of mastery.
- Experimentation with pre-writing and pre-reading skills.
- Hands-on exploration for learning through action.
- Opportunities for taking responsibility and making choices.
- Encouragement to develop self-control, cooperation and persistence in completing projects.
- Support for their sense of self-worth.
- Opportunities for self-expression.
- Encouragement of creativity.

The State of the World's Children 2001. UNICEF.

5.1.2 Presently the main governmental role players involved in the service delivery of Pre-Reception Year ECD services are the Departments of Social Development, Health and Local Government, and the Office of the Presidency.

5.1.3 In this regard, the Department of Social Development supports many needy children and families while the Department of Health provides free primary health care for children under six as well as nutrition programmes for needy children. Local government provides childcare facilities and provides grants for these purposes to non-governmental organisations. The Office of the Presidency has responsibility for co-ordinating Government-wide programmes and for monitoring the achievement of national objectives as outlined in the National Programme of Action for Children.

5.1.4 Accordingly, and within the context of the ECD priority group of the National Programme of Action for Children, and with resource and training organisations in ECD, the Department of Education will co-ordinate

and support activities to develop national, provincial and local level strategies and services that are planned in an integrated and comprehensive manner. These strategies and service programmes will be delivered through the effective use of existing resources, institutions and organisations and are focused on our poor and HIV/AIDS infected and affected communities and children with special learning needs.

5.2 Integrated Pre-Grade R programmes for special groups of 4 year olds

5.2.1 Although there are vast inequities with regard to the nurturing that children younger than 4 years receive, there are no national guidelines for Pre-Reception Year programme development.

5.2.2 As we noted earlier, the early years are characterised by rapid growth and development and whilst some of this occurs spontaneously, most developmental aspects require active nurturing. The delivery of inclusive and integrated Pre-Reception Year programmes can ensure that all children have significantly improved opportunities for growth and development.

5.2.3 In order to impact on the lives of our children in this way, the Department of Education will over the medium-term spearhead the development and implementation of Pre-Reception Year programmes for four-year old children from poor rural and HIV/AIDS infected and affected families and those with special learning needs.

5.2.4 This the Department will undertake in collaboration with other government departments, non-governmental and community-based organisations and the private sector.

5.3 Curriculum and practitioner development for pre-Reception Year

5.3.1 As we noted above, Pre-Grade R programmes that are both inclusive and integrated should provide opportunities to foster children's emotional, social, intellectual, physical, spiritual and moral development and to use play as the primary vehicle for achieving this.

5.3.2 In order for programmes to be truly integrated, a focus on children's nutritional and other health requirements, safety, physical development and water and sanitation needs would also be included.

5.3.3 Particular care will be taken to ensure that when addressing children's intellectual developmental needs, practitioners make use of developmentally appropriate practice. In other words, the kinds of opportunities that children are offered for language and literacy development, the development of numeracy and other mathematical concepts, and the development of critical thinking skills, for example, must meet children's needs at their particular stage of development.

5.3.4 In this regard, the Department of Education undertakes to develop, within the ECD priority group of the National Programme of Action on Children, appropriate curricula for Pre-Reception Year programmes

with a special emphasis on mathematical literacy, language and life skills. It also undertakes to expand, over the medium term, its work on practitioner development and career pathing for Reception Year practitioners and pre-Reception Year practitioners. It undertakes to develop best practice models for the management and quality development of pre-Reception Year programmes.

SECTION 6

A SUMMARY OF ALL THE POLICY PROPOSALS CONTAINED IN THIS WHITE PAPER

6.1 Establishing a national system of Reception Year provision for five year olds

A three-part system

6.1.1 The Department of Education proposes the establishment of a national system of Reception Year provision that shall comprise of three types, viz., Reception Year programmes within the public primary school system, Reception Year programmes within community-based sites and independent provision of Reception Year programmes.

6.1.2 School governing bodies of public primary schools that respond effectively to the ECD challenge outlined in this White Paper will, on a progressive basis be provided with grants-in-aid by provincial departments of education to establish accredited Reception Year programmes. These grants will be fully poverty targeted and our aim is that the children of the poorest 40 per cent of families will receive the highest per capita level of grants-in-aid.

6.1.3 Our medium-term goal (2010) is that approximately 85 per cent of all 5 year olds, some 810,000, would be accommodated within primary school-based Reception Year programmes.

6.1.4 We propose that some community-based sites become part of the public system and that these sites be provided with an adequate Government subsidy up to the level of 135,000 children. Currently Government's Medium-Term Expenditure Framework fully accommodates this proposal. As will be the case with public primary school-based Reception Year provision, these community-based sites will be required to fulfil national policy and norms and standards on the provision of Reception Year programmes.

6.1.5 Independent pre-primary schools and Reception Year programmes that are attached to independent schools provide an important service and should continue to do so. While these programmes will not receive a Government subsidy, they will be required to adopt and carry out national policy and norms and standards on the provision of Reception Year programmes that are applicable to public providers.

Funding the proposals

6.1.6 Two principal mechanisms of finance are approved. Firstly, conditional grants from the national government, through the provinces, would fund grants to community-based ECD centres on a per-learner basis. These grants are expected to fulfill two missions, viz., to provide ECD care only in areas where other

options are not available and, importantly, to encourage ongoing experimentation. Provision financed by this mechanism would reach a peak of approximately 135,000 children by 2003 or 2004, and then would grow no further. This provision is fully accommodated within Government's Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (2001/2-2003/4).

6.1.7 Secondly, the Department accepts that the provision of the Reception Year in public primary schools take place via direct grants-in-aid from provincial departments of education to school governing bodies. These grants would flow on a per-learner basis, would cover only children in the Reception Year and would be fully poverty targeted with the same high degree of redress as in the targeting table of the *Norms and Standards for School Funding*. The grants would flow directly to the school governing bodies under the coverage of Section 21 of the South African Schools Act to be specified under an amendment of the National Norms and Standards for School Funding. Free-standing ECD centres as traditionally operated in certain provincial departments of education would continue, but they would be required to operate within the framework of the South African Schools Act, would be required to be managed by a school governing body and funding would flow through these bodies. Care providers would be employees of these bodies. In order to enhance accountability and keep these centres under the administrative reach of the provincial departments of education, we propose that principals or directors of these public sites remain employees of the provincial departments of education.

6.1.8 The combination of poverty-targeted subsidies to places in the Reception Year in public schools, managed by school governing bodies, the continued subsidisation of some community-based sites, improvements of standards in provider training, and improvements in supervision of all providers, in public primary schools or in communities and homes, would all contribute to creating a vibrant and varied ECD sector.

National policy and norms and standards for the Reception Year

6.1.9 As we take the next steps to establish a reasonably and we hope high quality national system of provision of the Reception Year several areas will receive further attention and will be incorporated within national policy, national norms and standards and national programmes for the provision of the Reception Year. These include the curriculum for the Reception Year, the development of an adequate poverty targeted grants-in-aid system for primary schools and an adequate subsidy system for community-based sites, provincial management and implementation capacity, and ECD expertise, the system of accreditation of ECD providers, norms and standards, a qualifications framework and career paths for ECD practitioners, registration criteria for ECD practitioners with the South African Council of Educators, the representation of ECD practitioners within the Education Labour Relations Council, conditions of service for ECD practitioners who are employed by school governing bodies and publicly subsidised community-based ECD sites, a governance model for the incorporation of publicly subsidised community-based ECD sites within the public system of Reception Year provision, a strengthened policy advisory forum with key social partners and inter-

governmental and inter-sectoral coherence and focus on ECD, with particular reference to the health and nutritional requirements of children aged 5 years.

6.2 Expanding provision and building coherent and targeted inter-sectoral programmes for children from birth to four years

6.2.1 Since the main governmental role players involved in the service delivery of Pre-Reception Year ECD services are the Departments of Social Development, Health, Local government, and the Office of the Presidency, the Department of Education shall, within the context of the ECD priority group of the National Programme of Action for Children, co-ordinate and support activities to develop national, provincial and local level strategies and services that are planned in an integrated and comprehensive manner, delivered through the effective use of existing resources, institutions and organisations and are focused on our poor rural, poor urban and HIV/AIDS infected and affected communities.

6.2.2 Over the medium-term, the Department of Education will, in collaboration with other government departments, non-governmental and community-based organisations and the private sector spearhead the development and implementation of Pre-Reception Year programmes for four year old children from poor rural and poor urban families with an emphasis on those that are infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

6.2.3 The Department of Education shall, within the ECD priority group of the National Programme of Action on Children, develop appropriate curricula for Pre-Reception Year programmes with a special emphasis on mathematical literacy, language and life skills. The Department of Education shall ensure that Pre-Grade R programmes are both inclusive and integrated focusing on the provision of opportunities to foster children's emotional, social, intellectual, physical, spiritual and moral development and the use of play as the primary vehicle for achieving this. In order for programmes to be truly integrated, we shall focus on children's nutritional and other health requirements. The Department of Education also undertakes to expand, over the medium term, its work on practitioner development and career pathing from Reception Year practitioners to pre-Reception Year practitioners. It undertakes to develop best practice models for the management and quality development of pre-Reception Year programmes.