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A DECADE OF STRUGGLE FOR QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION AND JOB SECURITY

SADTU DRAFT INPUT on WHITE PAPER No. 5 on EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, submitted to the Department of Education, 31 July 2001

Introduction:

SADTU welcomes the release of White Paper No. 5 on Early Childhood Development. We thank the Ministry and Department of Education for affording us this opportunity to make an input. We are however concerned that the process during its development excluded stakeholder participation.

Section One:

The background to the ECD sub-sector is theoretically sound, yet this is not followed through with adequate funding.

1.1 We concur with the Department of Education that "policies, budgets and programmes" in ECD "should merit higher priority" yet there is no clear implementation plan of how this will be achieved.

1.2 The South African Democratic Teachers' Union concurs with the definition of ECD but feels that the policy focus should indicate clearly how targets set for 2010 would be achieved.

1.2.3 Inter-sectoral collaboration strategies need to be developed to reflect the commitment noted here.

1.2.4 & 1.4 The White Paper No. 5 notes the "vital importance of investment in ECD before the age of three years..." and the long term cost savings, yet there is a continued neglect of learners under the age of five years.

1.4.7 We suggest that there should be ongoing stakeholder participation in the development and monitoring of the implementation plan. Far more attention needs to be given to the detail of how the Department of Education plans to achieve the goals set in this White Paper No. 5 on ECD.

Section Two:

When reviewing the types of ECD provisioning, we need to acknowledge the impact of the HIV/Aids pandemic (as noted in 1.4.6). This is a tremendous challenge that needs to be addressed in the ECD phase.

The challenge of HIV/Aids orphans will necessitate the accommodation of support and counseling services for ECD learners infected or affected by the pandemic as well as redefining the role of ECD institutions. This should also be addressed through pre-service education and training programmes.

There should be consistency between the White Paper No. 5 on ECD and the White Paper No. 6 on Building an Inclusive Education and Training System. In the latter it is noted that learners infected or affected by HIV/Aids is a type of barrier to learning and development.

SADTU believes that ECD is the phase during which early assessment and intervention regarding barriers to learning and development should occur. The emphasis should therefore be placed on identifying, preventing and addressing barriers to learning and development.

2.1.1 Increased attention should be paid to learners in the birth to age five cohort. A clear strategy must be developed aimed at learners who are infected/affected by HIV/Aids. Unless this is addressed, ECD institutions will be overwhelmed by the impact of the pandemic.

2.1.2 When addressing practical solutions to the challenges of "access, equity, quality", provision needs to be made to limit the chance of increasing the gap between the historically disadvantaged and the historically advantaged ECD institutions. Since fees will still have to be paid by parents, there will be no incentive to retain Grade R classes at community-based ECD centres.

SADTU however wishes to stress that this is precisely why we have consistently expressed a preference for Grade R posts to be located at the more than 23 000 primary school sites.

This will ensure the following:

- ❖ That all learners who enter Grade 1 (at least by 2010) would have had access to quality, accredited Grade R programmes.
- ❖ That there is continuity and consistency between Grade R and the rest of the Foundation Phase. Fortunately, this is reflected in the National Curriculum Statement, aimed at streamlining and strengthening Curriculum 2005.
- ❖ That the educators will have access to adequate professional development programmes (registration with SACE, 80 hours of inset, etc)
- ❖ That there should be equitable access to resources, both human and material resources.

2.1.6 We agree that learners with barriers to learning and development should have increased access to quality ECD services. We also note that the Department of Education has included ECD centres in the pilot project of the

Danida funded Educator Resource and Development Project on Inclusive Education and Training. This project needs to be sped up and broadened to all provinces.

2.1.8 Stakeholders should participate in the development of strategies aimed at provinces with large rural populations. These same provinces struggled with the implementation of the National ECD Pilot Project. We strongly recommend training for Provincial and District officials to implement and monitor the Conditional Grant funding and programmes.

2.2.2 A well-co-ordinated inter-ministerial strategy is required to ensure that "fragmented services" and "duplication" is prevented in future. SADTU believes that since funding is very limited, all available funding should be pooled and utilised in the best possible manner.

2.2.5 SADTU concurs that "the ECD services and programmes for children from birth to 5 years varies greatly in terms of type and quality", yet we are disturbed by the two examples given in support of this statement. Surely the Department of Education is not suggesting that under-qualified ECD practitioners are better able to provide a quality ECD service than trained practitioners are?

SADTU wishes to stress that most educators, currently in the system have been the products of an unequal and discriminatory education and training system and therefore all educators require adequate and effective upgrading and professional development programmes.

In particular, SADTU believes that all teachers must:

- ❖ Be registered with the South African Council for Educators, as noted in 2.2.6
- ❖ Have access to professional development programmes.
- ❖ Be included in the Educators Employment Act (1998) by definition and conditions of service.
- ❖ Comply with the requirements of the Norms and Standards for Educators (1998).
- ❖ Have access to fair and equitable remuneration. In the long term, this must also apply to all ECD practitioners.

This will address the concern noted in 2.2.6 regarding "inequalities in the qualifications of ECD practitioners/educators".

2.2.6 Also notes that there is an absence "of an accreditation system for trainers of ECD practitioners/educators". This is no longer the case as the ETDQA located in the ETDP SETA was registered as an ETQA for ECD on 18 April 2001.

2.2.6 Furthermore noted that there has been "inadequate support with the implementation of Curriculum 2005 given to Grade R educators". Here it

should be noted that Grade R educators were excluded from OBE training due directly to the implementation of the National ECD Pilot Project. In addition, there are Grade R educators who already meet the requirements of SACE who should be further developed and who should be allowed to be appointed in promotion posts, in particular to be HOD's. This however is an extremely rare occurrence.

2.2.6 SADTU strongly agrees that a national curriculum framework should be developed for children under five years of age.

Section Three:

3.1 SADTU notes the wide range of government policies and proposes that the Department of Education should be the co-ordinating structure since this will ensure that the objectives in 3.1.24.6 are achieved.

3.2.5 What forms of ongoing support and training are available to the 2730 practitioners who were trained in the pilot project? Will the 4 500 conditional grant sites include these sites?

3.2.17 SADTU wishes to stress that ECD practitioners, in the long term should be developed to meet the requirements of the Norms and Standards for Educators. Ultimately this should be linked to ensuring that ECD practitioners receive equitable remuneration as compared to their counterparts in other, more formal education and training sub-sectors.

In the short to medium term, practitioners should be registered with SACE and included in the EEA. We propose that a minimum registration requirement, for example level 4 will facilitate access to professional development programmes.

3.2.20 We concur that the "R2 per five- and six year-old learner over 200 days subsidy scheme was neither adequate nor appropriate..." SADTU believes that adequate funding is essential to quality ECD provisioning.

3.2.27.7 SADTU recommends that urgent attention should be given to the development of an RPL tool. This is an essential mechanism required for all training programmes as many ECD practitioners have tremendous expertise and experience in the sub-sector.

3.2.27.8 In addition to 3.2.27.7, we believe that provincial and district capacity should be developed to support and monitor ECD services.

3.2.28 SADTU believes that the accreditation process should have been in place before the implementation of the National Pilot Project. The absence thereof led to practitioners not having a full qualification by the end of their training. In addition, it should be noted that the practitioners who were trained and the training providers received conditional interim accreditation. The ETDQA located in the ETDP SETA should be encouraged to support and

capacitate ECD providers who are unable to meet the requirements for accreditation.

3.2.29.4 Training programmes are changing to meet the requirements of learnerships and skills development programmes. SADTU believes that mentors and assessors as vital components of these training programmes will go a long way in the developing ECD as a sub-sector. Therefore, as ECD stakeholders, we should strive to ensure that ECD practitioners and trainers have access to skills development programmes and learnerships. SADTU believes that the principles of equity, access and redress should guide the development of these programmes.

3.2.32 SADTU strongly disagrees with the recommended minimum of R1, 000 since we believe that ECD practitioners should receive equitable remuneration as compared to their counterparts in the foundation phase. This is presently approximately R6,500 per month (total cost to State).

3.2.33 We furthermore disagree that "primary schools and community-based sites are now offering a similar quality education..." It should also be noted that all educators in the foundation phase will receive training on the National Curriculum Statement and have access to 80 hours of Inset. This should be extended to community-based practitioners so that the gap between formerly "formally and non-formally or informally" trained ECD practitioners is not increased.

Section Four:

4.1 SADTU recommends that all reception year provisioning should be within primary schools, for reasons already stated (see 2.1.2).

4.1.1.6 All stakeholders should participate in the development of an implementation plan to ensure that the stated targets are reached by 2010.

4.2.2.8 SADTU recommends training programmes for schools governing bodies on how to effectively manage these ECD funds and programmes.

4.2.2.11 SADTU urges all stakeholders to acknowledge the historical contribution of ECD NGOs, community-based organisations and religious organisations.

Section Five:

SADTU agrees that the complex range of considerations in the ECD sub-sector cannot be effectively addressed through a "single formula".

5.1.1 International processes such as the UNICEF Report should guide inter-sectoral collaboration. In addition, SADTU believes that stakeholder participation is essential.

5.2.1 SADTU agrees that national guidelines should be developed for pre-reception year programme.

5.2.3 We agree that specific focus should be placed on " poor rural, HIV/Aids infected/affected learners and special needs".

5.3.4 SADTU strongly agrees that curriculum development is required for the Pre-reception year phase. In addition, we believe that all ECD educators should have access to professional development programmes.

Section Six:

6.1 The "three-part system" proposed is realistic in the short to medium term. We however suggest that ECD provision beyond 2010 should be structured in the following way:

- (a) Reception year – Grade 3 (Foundation Phase) in primary schools
- (b) Pre-reception year (Birth to 5 years of age) through inter-sectoral collaboration, co-ordinated by the Department of Education, in community-based ECD programmes and services for children and families, subsidised by the State.

In conclusion:

When the New Age of Admission Policy was introduced, the Department of Education advised that it was saving R1 billion annually in learning support materials alone. At that time, the National ECD Pilot Project was already underway. We are disappointed that more resources have not been invested, especially between 2003 and 2010. We also suggest that all ECD stakeholders should be invited to participate in policy developments post 2010.

SADTU is concerned that the status of White Paper No. 5 on ECD is unclear. We strongly believe that the Department of Education should be accountable for achieving the goals and objectives outlined in the White Paper. We hope that the Department will consider the need to further develop the White Paper No. 5 on ECD into an ECD Act.

Once again, we thank the Ministry and Department of Education for allowing us to comment on White Paper No. 5 on ECD. SADTU is committed to contributing towards the development of an implementation plan for the next ten years and beyond.

31 July 2001

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