

Press Release:

NECT receives kudos from sector stakeholders

The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) underwent its first overarching evaluation of all facets and aspects of its work from the date of its establishment in 2013, receiving kudos from sector stakeholders. The evaluation revealed the NECT as an expert, agile and efficient organisation that not only recognises the changing needs and pressures in South Africa's education sector, but also has the ability to respond effectively as matters arise.

The NECT evaluation report, commissioned by the FirstRand Empowerment Foundation and overseen by the following Professors: Elaine Unterhalter, Molefe Ralenala and Mvuyo Tom in collaboration with the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), Citofield and Outsourced Insight, was conducted from January to October last year at the height of acute health (Covid-19) and economic crisis with profound implications for education, highlighting the need for intensified collaboration and work in this sector.

The NECT's programme design and interventions are guided by the six themes presented in the Education Collaboration Framework (ECF), namely professionalisation of the teaching service, courageous and effective leadership, improving government capacity to deliver, improving resourcing to create conducive and safe learning environments, community and parent involvement, and learner support and wellbeing.

Presenting the report at the conference, Prof Molefe Ralenala said evaluating any organisation was like asking a doctor for a health check. "The NECT, which is dedicated to strengthening partnerships amongst business, civil society, government and labour to achieve the education goals of the National Development Plan, has proven itself healthy and efficient, agile and knowledgeable to such an extent that the research team referred to it as the 'quick-fix arm' of the Department of Basic Education (DBE)," he said.

The NECT has positioned itself both as an intermediary collaboration vehicle as well as an accelerator of education transformation through strategic partnerships and over time added more initiatives to its programme portfolio. The evaluation report cautioned the danger of the NECT spreading itself too thin across a range of education sector interventions and potentially diluting its impact on teaching and learning without the necessary financial and human resources.

At a recent NECT District Conference for Education Reform, Prof Ralenala said the research team found the decision to approach the NECT a wise one. “We view their turnaround time in giving advice and sorting out problems of great benefit to the DBE.”

Over the past eight years, the NECT expanded its network of partnerships and collaboration to such an extent the evaluation report recommends the organisation step up its information and knowledge sharing. The report also recommended the NECT develop its capacity to act as a ‘think-tank’ for the DBE and the education sector. “They are already doing so, but we recommend that it be formalised. The NECT should be given the funds and opportunity to expand its operations.”

The NECT instils a trust that attracts potential partners to approach them for collaboration, as was done by government and the DBE, said Prof Ralenala.

He referred to the NECT’s partnership with the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (*SAFE*) Initiative to eliminate pit latrines at schools and the South African School Administration and Management System (*SA-SAMS*) to manage the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic to education as examples. “Government has given the DBE three years to eliminate the dangerous pit latrines in schools. To decrease the number of pit latrines in time, the DBE called in the NECT. When Covid 19 struck and the way forward for education looked uncertain, the DBE in collaboration with the NECT, stepped forward to take the lead. In both cases the NECT’s involvement was prominent and their problem solution skills get full marks,” said Prof Ralenala.

He commended the NECT for its handling of private and public funds. The private sector is hesitant to give money unless they know exactly what it will be used for, he said, making reference to the NECT’s Government and Finance Programme which over the past 8 years has been highly effective in terms of the collaborations built with funders, with private sector funding streams having grown over the period under review.

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