

Response to the Draft Terms of Reference for an Inter-sectoral Forum for Early Childhood Development

Wordworks welcomes the establishment of an Inter-sectoral Forum for Early Childhood Development and the opportunity to comment on the terms of reference for the new forum.

1. The success of the forum will turn on the knowledge and expertise of the members. The main issue we wish to raise in respect of this is the importance of ensuring that different specialisations within the field of early childhood development are represented. This is not currently addressed in the terms of reference. This could give rise to a forum from which key areas of ECD expertise are absent.

To this end, we suggest that before paragraph 3.2, a new paragraph is inserted to provide for expert representation from the key ECD fields, among members in categories a), d) and e) in 3.1, including:

- child health
- child nutrition
- child psychology/wellbeing
- early years learning and pedagogy
- early language development

2. ECD service providers in South Africa operate in very diverse environments. A range of factors shape the particular challenges they face, including i) location (urban/ rural), ii) cultural/ linguistic context, iii) socio-economic context, and iv) setting (home-based, centre-based or community-based). Providing for at least one representative in category 3.1a) from each province may help to address this – but it may not. For instance, it could be that all representatives work in centre-based, urban contexts in their province.

We recommend therefore that point 3.2 makes reference to the goal of ensuring that every province is represented, and that the above factors i)-iv) will be considered when determining provincial representation. DSD will wish to consider the most appropriate process for selecting provincial representation where there is not a democratic, representative ECD umbrella body in place in a province.

3. While the ISF may from time to time wish to set up working groups, we recommend that there are no tiers of membership or different levels of participation. All members should be meaningfully involved in all discussions. To ensure that the ISF does not become unwieldy, we recommend that DSD considers a membership of no more than thirty.
4. Finally, but crucially, section 2 should strengthen the ISF's **advisory** role to government. The forum should not only exist to be consulted by government but also to proactively raise issues with government and to give advice on priorities, approaches and resources.