



Lessons for scale: insights from the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI)

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Acronyms

BEEI: Basic Education Employment Initiative	NECT: National Education Collaboration Trust
CWP: Community Work Programme	NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training
DBE: Department of Basic Education	PEP: Public Employment Programme
EA: Education Assistant	PERSAL: Personnel and Salary System
GSA: General Support Assistant	PES: Presidential Employment Stimulus
IDC: Industrial Development Corporation	PYEI: Presidential Youth Employment Initiative
LCPM: Letters Correct Per Minute	SMT: School Management Team

The Binding Constraints Lab works with government, civil society and researchers to unlock improved learning outcomes at scale.

This report is based on research initiated and supported by the Department of Basic Education. The full report, *Scaling youth employment through schools: the story of the BEEI*, was written by Claire Biesman-Simons and Katie Huston, with additional research by Sibonelo Nongcula and Kristen Thompson.

Introduction

The Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) is a South African public employment programme that places youth (ages 18-35) in schools on short-term contracts. It is run by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and was launched in 2020 as part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES), to bolster support for schools and demonstrate how schools' reach can be leveraged to scale employment opportunities.

Originally, the BEEI was conceived as a once-off programme to mitigate the devastating economic impact of Covid-19. It evolved into **a R31,275 billion¹ multi-phase programme that has created nearly 1,3 million employment opportunities at approximately 23,000 schools across South Africa² – almost every public school in the country.** Over five phases, its objectives broadened: from emergency relief to strengthening learning outcomes and creating employment pathways for youth. Its design and implementation also evolved significantly.

As the largest youth employment programme in South Africa, the BEEI has reshaped expectations of what education-employment partnerships can achieve. Like anything implemented at scale and at speed, it has been complex and imperfect, but it has made a difference at schools, to participants and in the wider economy. Strong demand from schools and young people underscores its relevance and social value.

Moreover, the story of the BEEI's origin, design and implementation provides valuable lessons. The programme got off the ground rapidly in a challenging context, and over five phases has built and tested new ways to bolster schools' capacity; combat unemployment; and build, iterate and troubleshoot government programmes at scale.

This learning brief provides a brief overview of the BEEI's context, origins, rationale, design and scope, and highlights six lessons for scale that emerge from the experience of implementation: seize the opportunity; get more hands on deck; decide what to hold tightly versus lightly; build strong data systems; commit for the long-term; and focus on and document measurable impact.

It is based on research that was conducted for the DBE report *Scaling youth employment through schools: the story of the BEEI*, which details the project's evolution over time. The research comprised interviews with 25 people, including Department of Basic Education (DBE) officials, government stakeholders, people from BEEI partner organisations and nonprofit training providers, which were subjected to a thematic analysis; and on a rapid review of public and internal programme documentation, which was triangulated with interview insights where possible. As the research focused on the experience of the BEEI's design and implementation, it did not include direct research with district or school-level actors or participating youth.

By unpacking lessons from the BEEI's implementation journey, this report seeks to inform evidence-based dialogue on what it takes to achieve rapid and system-wide scale in the education ecosystem, and to unpack ways in which South Africa can strengthen its efforts to improve education and unlock youth employment.



Origins of the BEEI

The context

South Africa's education system is shaped by deep historical inequalities. Large class sizes, uneven distribution of qualified educators, overburdened teachers, limited resources, infrastructure backlogs and limited psychosocial support place considerable strain on children and educators³ and lead to poor learning outcomes and high dropout rates.⁴

Furthermore, South Africa has the second-highest **unemployment** rate in the world, after Eswatini.⁵ It is worst among youth: 58.5% of young people ages 15-24 are unemployed,⁶ and 1 in 3 are not in education, employment or training (NEET).⁷ Most government efforts to tackle unemployment are too small-scale to make a meaningful dent in the problem.⁸

The 2020 **Covid-19 pandemic** put even more strain on the education and unemployment crises: school closures and lost learning time exacerbated existing school challenges,⁹ and an estimated three million jobs were lost between February and April 2020, with less skilled and low-wage workers hit hardest.¹⁰

The opportunity

The BEEI began as part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES), which was initiated by the Presidency in October 2020 at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic to alleviate unemployment and catalyse economic recovery.

Once the PES was approved, the National Treasury invited government departments to submit proposals that would employ large numbers of people, with a strong focus on youth. Initially, the DBE submitted several proposals from different units; later, it consolidated these into one project with different types of Assistant roles.

For the Presidency, working through schools was an opportunity to demonstrate that large-scale responses to unemployment are possible. For the DBE, a nationwide youth employment programme could bring much-needed capacity to an already-overburdened system that was further strained by the pandemic.

The programme design built on past lessons from the DBE, where smaller-scale programmes had demonstrated the roles youth could play in schools; and from the Community Work Programme (CWP), another public employment programme, which found it was critical for schools to opt in to participate and to have the final say in interviews and appointments.

Programme design

The programme places youth (ages 18-35) in schools on short-term contracts, where they work as Education Assistants (EAs) or General School Assistants (GSAs). EAs provide learning, administrative and Information Technology (IT) support, while GSAs help maintain and improve schools' physical environment and support enrichment activities. Key elements of design are summarised in the infographic on pages 6-7, and design shifts over the BEEI's five phases are summarised in Appendix 2 on page 21.

THE BEEI AT A GLANCE

Summarised from Department of Basic Education 2026. Design is as of Phase V. Phase V figures are provisional.

GOALS

- Reduce youth unemployment
- * Address Covid-19 backlogs and improve learning outcomes
- * Improve school infrastructure
- * Strengthen pathways to work and study
- * Demonstrate how to create employment at scale

SCOPE

From 2020-2025, the BEEI was the largest youth employment programme in South Africa.

Total work opportunities by province (all five phases):

Province	Work Opportunities
Gauteng	206,574
North West	86,222
Northern Cape	30,852
Western Cape	97,305
Free State	75,997
Eastern Cape	195,056
Kwazulu-Natal	295,763
MPumalanga	108,962
Limpopo	183,754

DESIGN

RECRUITMENT

- SA Youth: Applications and shortlisting
- Schools: Interviews and selection

ELIGIBILITY

- Age 18-35
- Not working or studying
- ≤5km from school
- No criminal record

PAY AND WORKING HOURS

- R4,000 per month
- Up to 40 hours/week

ROLES

Education Assistants (EAs)

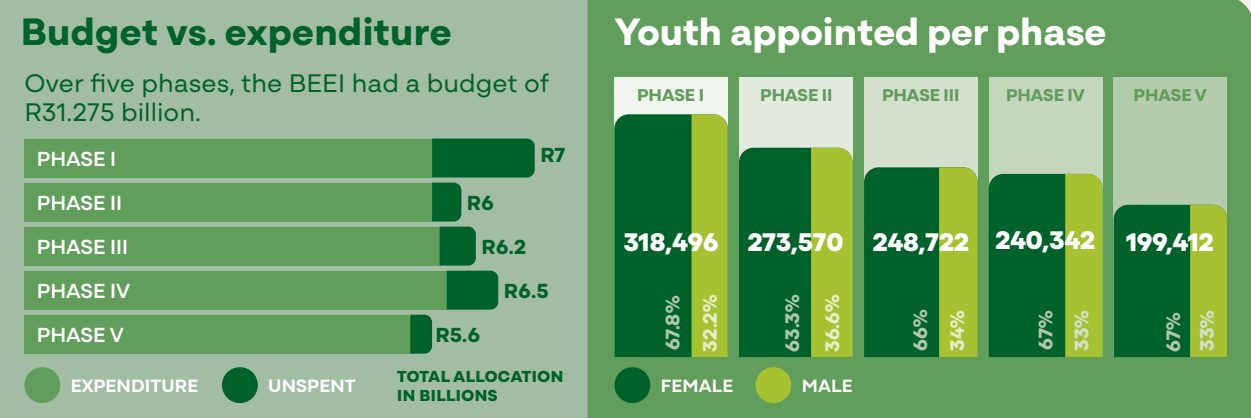
Learning, administrative and IT support

- Curriculum Assistants
- eCadres
- Workshop Assistants
- Reading Champions
- Care & Support Assistants
- Laboratory Assistants

General Support Assistants (GSAs)

Maintain and improve physical environments; support sports and after-school activities

- Handypersons
- Sport & Enrichment Assistants



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The BEEI responds to a clear need.

In 2025, there were **1.65 million** applicants for 200,000 jobs.

This represents more than 1 in 4 unemployed young people nationwide.

Teachers were more supported.

96% of school management team (SMT) members agreed that EAs help reduce teacher workloads.

Young people accessed training.

75% of Assistants had in-person training in Phase V. Participants report **improved** administration, interpersonal, communication, teaching, time management, patience and computer skills.

Teaching students and graduates gained practical experience.

During Phase V, **14%** of youth were qualified educators and **15%** were studying to become teachers.

Graduates found work in the education system.

In February 2026, **21,013** former Assistants were employed by the Department of Basic Education, **80%** as teachers.

The BEEI: Six lessons for scale

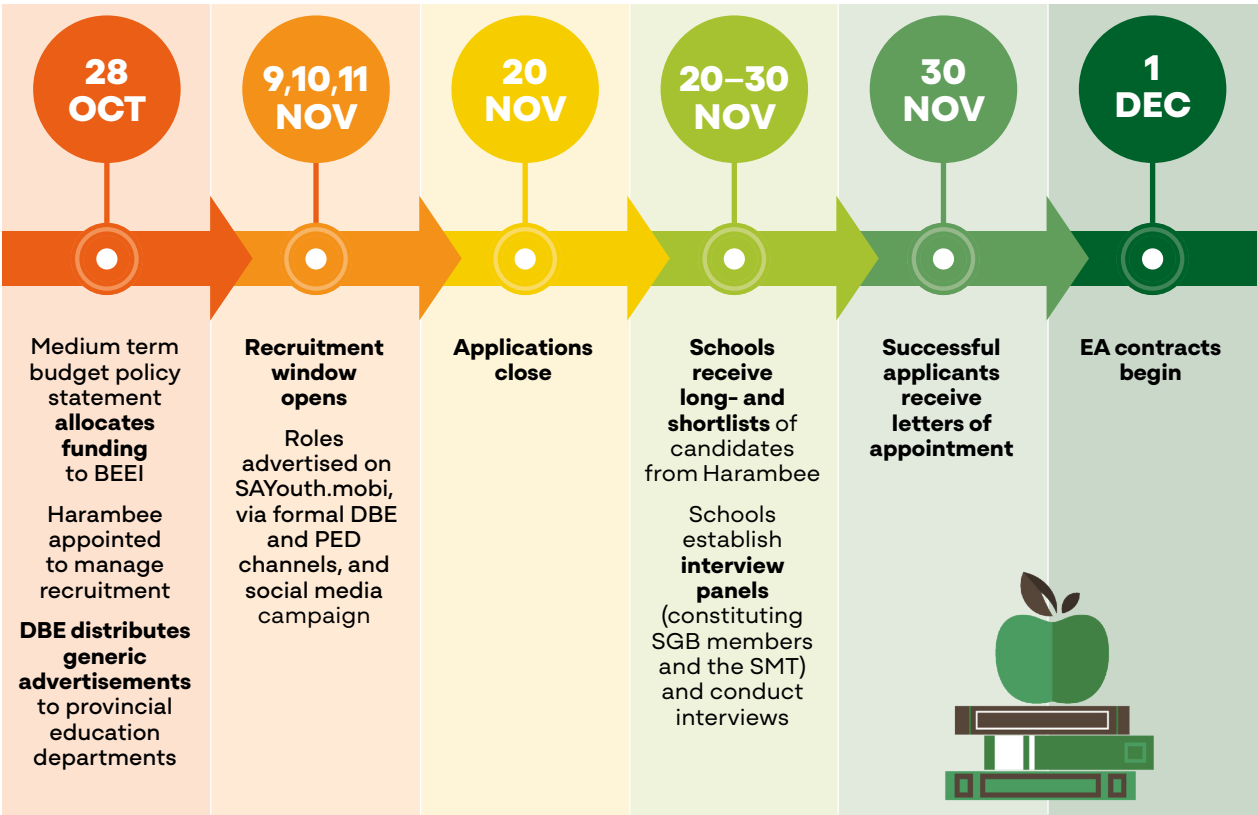
1. Seize the opportunity – then iterate

The scale of South Africa’s unemployment challenge is staggering. Yet most initiatives to address it reach fewer than 10,000 people.¹² The Presidential Employment Stimulus was an unprecedented opportunity to create jobs on a massive scale – and to prove that it could be done effectively.

While some other government departments declined to put forward such ambitious programmes, the DBE rose to the challenge. Although it was uncharted territory, the potential for large-scale change made it worth stepping off the map, despite the many unknowns and inherent risks. In the words of DBE Director-General Hubert Mathanzima Mweli, who has championed the programme, “I just decided that the benefit is bigger than what would happen if it doesn’t succeed.”

This opportunity meant kicking off at scale, rather than building and scaling up. The time-frames to get the programme off the ground were punishing: once the PES was announced on 28 October 2020, the DBE had just under five weeks to advertise, recruit, vet and contract more than 300,000 young people in every corner of the country (see Figure 1). The systems to do this did not exist, and the people working on it were all seconded from other jobs.

Figure 1: Phase I start up timeline (2020)



In Phase I, the programme had to compromise. Timing was not ideal: a December start for a four- to five-month post was poorly-aligned to the school year. Training was planned quickly and largely online. Record-keeping was inconsistent across provinces, and there was some leakage in school-based payment systems. The Covid-19 pandemic imposed restrictions on gatherings and travel that further compounded these challenges.

But instead of waiting until the timing was better or the systems were built, the DBE built the plane while it was flying. **The window of opportunity to place hundreds of thousands of young people in schools was unlikely to come again. It was better to embrace the chaos and build than to wait for a better time.**

This was enabled by a few key factors. A **clear and compelling problem statement** – youth unemployment and Covid-19-related learning losses – mobilised stakeholders quickly. **High-level political and executive support** from the Presidency, the Minister of Basic Education and the DBE Director-General enabled fast decisions, quick resolution of bottlenecks and flexibility. This **decisive leadership and tolerance for managed risk** gave the BEEI permission to launch quickly, “learn while doing” and iterate improvements instead of waiting for the programme to be perfect.

“Making it happen” under high pressure and challenging time frames demanded cooperation, pragmatic design choices, adaptability, resilience and sacrifice.

“Any South African will know that if you accept a big daunting challenge in October for delivery by March, you can kiss your summer holiday goodbye. The public officials who put up their hands to run with it were all really committed people willing to serve their country, willing to sacrifice and willing to take audit risk. Quite a few departments said no. ... [but] the DBE had the courage and the level of public service to say, “The country really needs us right now. We can do it, and we’re going to do it.”

Kate Philip | Presidential Employment Stimulus programme lead, The Presidency

2. Get more hands on deck

From day one, the BEEI was implemented without dedicated staff. Everyone driving the programme, from the National Project Manager down to provincial, district and school-level officials, was also wearing another hat with other responsibilities. This was rewarding but took a toll: many interview participants worked long hours to keep up with the programme’s fast pace and vast reach.

The programme would benefit from dedicated staff. But realistically, **given fiscal austerity and South Africa’s many competing and pressing needs, system-wide efforts to improve education and tackle unemployment will largely need to be implemented with existing resources.**

The BEEI used creative strategies to get more hands on deck, including:

- **Redeploying internal capacity:** Existing DBE staff were seconded to support the programme part-time at national, provincial, district and school levels. The programme also drew on DBE-E³, a directorate in the Director-General’s office that supports education, entrepreneurship and employment, to adapt its existing TeacherConnect platform to design and deliver virtual training and support.
- **Breaking down silos and increasing collaboration:** The national project team included people from different DBE directorates, including training, HR and finance, who could respond quickly to issues. This approach created a blueprint for new ways of working.
- **Mobilising school-based actors:** For example, to build school-level ownership, the Reading Champions programme offered orientation sessions and a chatbot to engage teacher mentors. The Western Cape nominated “focus schools” that were running the project well to support nearby schools. This designation motivated principals and helped build informal communities of practice.
- **Building external partnerships:** From Phase I, the Harambee Youth Accelerator¹³ used its SA Youth mobile platform to centralise recruitment. In Phase V, the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC)¹⁴ managed payment for UIF-funded Assistants.¹⁵ The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT)¹⁶ helped mobilise and contract nonprofit partners to train and support Reading Champions, and various civil society organisations provided training for other roles.

“8 to 5 or 9 to 5 doesn’t work with BEEI. You work until the early hours of the morning, you give more than what you would give to any other project. You thank yourself later.”

Lydia Phehla | BEEI Provincial Coordinator (Phases I-IV), Gauteng Department of Education

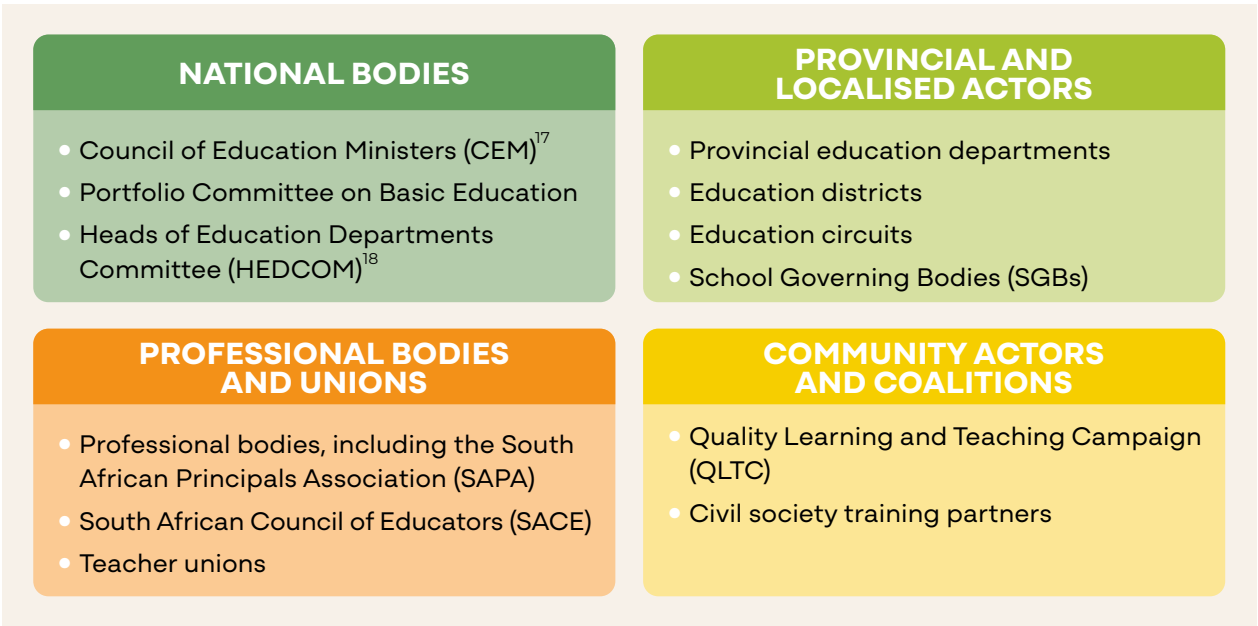
“It has brought that thing of not working in silos but breaking the silos. Working that way is much more beneficial for the sector.”

Lala Maja | BEEI Project Manager, Department of Basic Education

To bring so many actors into the fold, the BEEI needed not only their buy-in, but support from the broader and complex education ecosystem, including government committees, teacher unions, professional bodies and civil society actors (see Figure 2). Extensive and multi-layered consultation, change management and feedback loops were key. By and large, **the BEEI leaned on existing committees and management structures to share information, gather feedback and mobilise support for the programme.**

External partners played a key role: in government programmes, non-state actors are often well-placed to innovate, test new ideas, and drive research to understand how and to what extent the BEEI can improve learning outcomes, and often bring additional resources to the table. This work needs to be done with a focus on “what is scalable”: expensive, intensive models can offer insights but are less useful than pragmatic, low-cost interventions.

Figure 2: Key education stakeholders



3.

Decide what to hold tightly, and what to hold lightly

All government departments and programmes are bound by Auditor-General requirements: they must adhere to protocols and achieve clean audits. This requires stringent accountability and quality control measures.

Government is also by its nature decentralised. The DBE, in particular, operates as a distributed network of capacity: a system in which resources, skills, decision-making authority, and responsibility for implementation are shared across multiple institutions, levels and actors.

The BEEI was deliberate about what would be centrally managed and standardised, versus where provinces, districts, schools and partners had discretion to implement the programme in ways that best suited their context. Its approach to balancing central control and local autonomy for each key programme function is summarised in the table opposite.

Why does this delineation matter? It provides clarity: in a system as large as the DBE, understanding protocol, roles and responsibilities is critical. **It allows local actors to adapt to their context and realities, which creates ownership and buy-in, rewards initiative and encourages innovation.**

For example:

- Gauteng developed its own best-practice system for payments, with stringent monthly controls at school level.
- The North West and the Western Cape built their own integrated data systems to manage key project metrics.
- In the Eastern Cape, Nelson Mandela Bay district rolled out a foundation phase literacy catch-up intervention to 126 schools, focused on substantially improving letter-sound knowledge for grade Rs, 1s and 2s.

Some of these interventions have been adopted more broadly, or could be. The Western Cape and North West data systems have been used in Mpumalanga and Limpopo, respectively. The literacy intervention in the Eastern Cape was relatively inexpensive: excluding stipends, it cost about R1,570 per EA or R37 per learner for training, materials and mentoring.

Table 1: Programme design and delivery: standardisation versus local autonomy

Programme element	Standardised approach	Distributed control
Recruitment	Harambee creates adverts and infographics. National DBE promotes adverts on key social media pages with large youth followings. All candidates apply via SA Youth digital platform.¹⁹	Provinces and local actors (e.g., circuit managers, SGBs, nonprofits) re-post and circulate adverts. Schools receive lists of qualifying candidates from Harambee, interview candidates and finalise selection.
Post allocation	National DBE specifies the number of GSAs and EAs per province,²⁰ and a minimum number of posts per school.	Provinces and districts allocate the number of posts per school and designate roles. Schools can motivate for additional posts and role allocation shifts.
Role definition	National DBE determines Assistant roles and eligibility criteria.	Schools determine what specific tasks Assistants carry out based on school-specific needs.²¹
Training for school-based roles	National DBE drafts and costs a national training plan. National DBE training managers create training manuals and PowerPoints for each role and distribute to PEDs. DBE-E³ digitises manuals into compulsory online/WhatsApp orientation training and self-paced modular training for each role.	Provinces draft and submit training plans; allocate training budgets in line with plans;²² select delivery mechanisms (online/in-person); work with district officials to deliver training using standardised materials; and can commission external trainers and NGOs to run training. Schools are encouraged to provide supplementary training.
Training for future opportunities	National DBE offers training on financial management, digital literacy and CV building. DBE-E³ hosts webinars and information on future opportunities.	Provinces allocate training budgets; choose training offerings; select candidates for additional training; and can bring in external trainers.
Payment	The IDC pays UIF-funded Assistants through Kwantu.	Provinces select PERSAL or school-based payment for Treasury-funded Assistants.
Role description	National DBE's BEEI implementation framework and placement guidelines define Assistant roles.	Schools assign day-to-day duties and appoint a teacher mentor to oversee management and conduct performance reviews.

4. Build strong data systems

To run programmes effectively at scale, accurate, up-to-date information is key – not only to meet Auditor-General requirements, but to enable effective planning, implementation and oversight. In the BEEI's case, this includes data on recruitment (with bank-verified ID numbers), appointments, attendance, performance, training, payment and termination.

Over the years, the BEEI made some progress towards this goal. The SA Youth recruitment platform had wide reach and enabled automated candidate ranking and shortlisting at scale. In Phase II, an external service provider developed a national data management system that was used by eight provinces in Phase II and all nine provinces in Phase III. In provinces that committed to learning and using the system, data quality and reliability improved, but when funding ran out the platform was not maintained. While some provinces, including the North West and Western Cape, developed their own effective solutions, this province-led approach led to inconsistencies in data quality and availability.

In Phase V, the IDC introduced Kwantu, a digital payment system with biometric facial recognition checks, to oversee payment of UIF-funded stipends and enhance accountability.²³ Rollout was challenging, especially given the short timeline from decision to implementation, which impacted awareness and buy-in. Resources for training and support to implement a new system were limited, and some districts and schools struggled to adopt it. However, despite these challenges it enabled unprecedented transparency: when used effectively, it could account for exactly who was appointed in each school, which days they came to work and how much they were paid – providing a solid audit trail and reducing previous challenges of ghost workers and payment leakages.

Building integrated data management systems came about while the BEEI was running at scale, which led to a patchwork of approaches that shifted phase to phase and, even when strong, did not always speak to one another. This makes it difficult to compare data across regions or across years and to access “real-time” information for decision-making.

Ideally, **an integrated data management system** (which may include multiple platforms that speak to one another) **should serve as the “single source of truth”** for key figures. It should be used by all key actors for planning, decision-making, delivery, monitoring and reporting. This requires widespread adoption of key platforms; standardised indicator definitions; and sufficient training and support for users. Integration and interoperability between platforms are key: linked datasets reduce manual work, delays, inaccuracies and conflicting data.

While such a system is unlikely to be in place at the outset, initial systems and processes for large-scale programmes should be developed with this critical goal in mind.

5. Commit for the long term

The BEEI is a remarkable achievement. **Yet its design, delivery and impact were constrained by late confirmation of starting dates, short planning and startup time frames, and limited programme duration.** Phase V was delayed by a full year due to contracting complexities when the UIF came on board as a new funder, which significantly reduced public employment programmes' overall footprint in the year the programme did not run.²⁴

These short-term commitments and limited time frames had wide-ranging knock-on effects:

- There was insufficient time for consultation or establishing new partnerships.
- Building, testing and training on new systems was rushed – a major challenge when the new Kwantu payment system was introduced in Phase V.
- It was hard to plan, procure and deliver training timeously, so that some Assistants were only trained near the end of their contracts – and some were not trained at all.
- It disincentivised investing in longer-term projects that would significantly improve the programme, like developing an integrated data management system or commissioning a formal evaluation of the programme's impact.
- It limited the extent to which affected stakeholders could adopt new tools, embrace new ways of working and collaborating, and learn to trust partners.
- With little to no time to design, plan and evaluate, along with the short implementation timeframe, the opportunity to deliver improved learning outcomes was missed.

In interviews with stakeholders, **the most common recommendation was to institutionalise the programme: to shift the BEEI from a time-bound, emergency intervention to a standing national programme with a predictable budget allocation.**

This would mean **securing Cabinet approval** for the BEEI as a standing national programme; including the BEEI in the **DBE policy framework** and aligning it with the **Medium-Term Strategic Framework** and the **Seventh Administration's priorities**; securing three-year funding in the **Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF)**; developing a robust, **Public Finance Management Act (PFMA)-compliant financial model**; articulating **roles and responsibilities** for ecosystem actors; and allocating **dedicated staff** to manage the programme at national, provincial and district level, to reduce negative impacts on other responsibilities.

Institutionalising the programme would address many of the challenges listed above. It would improve data quality and reduce payment delays; allow decisions to be more deliberate and less driven by time constraints; enable impact evaluation; and help attract additional private sector and philanthropic funding. **Ultimately, it would deepen the BEEI's impact on the people it aims to uplift: young people, children, educators and their communities.**



6. Focus on and document measurable impact

Employment outcomes are important, and the BEEI has created nearly 1,3 million work opportunities; attracted a more diverse and equitable pool of applicants and Assistants than usually engage in job-seeking and employment; and given qualified teachers and education students practical, real-world experience. Further research should draw on existing datasets from SA Youth (which can track applicants' outcomes over time) and TeacherConnect (which has extensive survey and training data) to better understand the BEEI's impact on skills development and post-programme employment and learning trajectories.

The BEEI also has real potential for delivering learning outcomes: research from other contexts shows that practices and shifts the BEEI has enabled – like more time on task in the classroom, improved educator well-being and lower child-to-adult ratios – can improve learning outcomes.²⁵ However, **thus far the programme's impact on learning outcomes at scale has not been rigorously investigated**: the BEEI had limited funding for monitoring, evaluation and research, and limited planning time to design or commission an evaluation.

In recent phases the BEEI has prioritised foundational literacy and numeracy, which have an outsize impact on later academic performance and life outcomes. The number of Reading Champions, who are responsible for supporting both literacy and numeracy in primary schools with a focus on Grades R to 4, more than doubled in Phase V to 58,691. This means more than a quarter of all Assistants were deployed to support foundational skills in Phase V – more than any other role.

Small-scale, local innovations are also showing that BEEI Assistants can measurably improve learning outcomes. For example, in Phase V Zazi iZandi, a play-based, mother-tongue basic literacy intervention, was run at 126 schools in Nelson Mandela Bay district in the Eastern Cape. The BEEI partnered with local nonprofit Masinyusane, which trained and mentored BEEI Education Assistants working in Grade R, 1 and 2 classrooms. Internally collected data shows that on average, in both Grade R and Grade 1, the median number of letters correct per minute (LCPM) increased and the proportion of learners who did not recognise a single letter was more than halved. With materials and training coming in at a relatively low cost, this intervention could be scaled through the BEEI.

In a constrained fiscal climate, a large budget line for stipends would be a more compelling sell if it comes with proven improvements for both youth employment and learning outcomes. When it equips youth with the skills (training) and resources (materials) to deliver measurable improvements in key skills, the BEEI has far-reaching potential to directly address learning poverty.²⁶

Future research and evaluation should more rigorously investigate the BEEI's impact on learning outcomes. This research can be supported by philanthropy and academic partners, who can bring additional funding, methodological rigour and independence.

Conclusion

As this report was produced, the BEEI's future was uncertain. While budget for BEEI project management had been allocated to national and provincial departments in 2026/27, clarity around stipends for phase VI and beyond was still outstanding.

Yet independent of its future trajectory, reflecting on the BEEI's implementation provides valuable lessons about how to combat unemployment, bolster schools' capacity, and rapidly build and troubleshoot new government programmes at scale.

It showed us that it is critical to seize moments of political opportunity; and that “building the plane while flying” requires creative mobilisation, partnerships, and clear roles and responsibilities. Strong, integrated data systems and strategies to prioritise and document measurable outcomes are key. All of this requires institutionalisation: longer-term funding commitments and inclusion in key frameworks would improve planning and delivery, help build partnerships and mobilise resources, and enable stronger data systems and impact measurement.

Government often responds to pressing social issues with relatively small projects – in education, in employment and in other arenas. Yet South Africa's unemployment and education crises are too large and too urgent to resolve in this way. The scale of the problems requires a proportionately sized response: we need to be ambitious and intentional, to bravely seize opportunities, to build partnerships that can tackle these problems at scale, and to rigorously design for and evaluate impact.



“They are the best of South African youth. They are ambitious, they want to do something good. They are open to any kind of direction, mentorship, guidance, and opportunities. It’s incredibly heartwarming to be able to support people like that.”

Crysty Swift | Tools and Insights Lead, DBE-E³

Appendix 1: Overview of BEEI budget and scope

Table 2: Overview of BEEI budget and scope, Phases I to V

Budget Component	Phase I Allocation	Phase II Allocation	Phase III Allocation	Phase IV Allocation	Phase V Allocation
OVERVIEW					
Allocated budget in R '000	7,000,000	6,000,000	6,199,000	6,463,000	5,613,000
Programme duration and dates	4+1 months ²⁷ (Dec 2020 – Mar/Apr 2021)	5 months (Nov 2021 – Mar 2022)	5 months (Apr – Aug 2022)	8 months ²⁸ (Feb–Sept 2023)	6 months (Jun – Nov 2025)
No. of allocated job opportunities	319,060	287,424	274,000	255,100	204,676
No. of youth appointed (as % of allocation)	318,496 (99.8%)	273,570 (95.2%)	248,722 (90.8%)	240,342 (94.2%)	199,412 (97.4%)
JOBS AND STIPENDS					
Stipends	4,511,513	5,486,127	5,621,425	6,247,052	4,912,200
Saving of SGB posts ²⁹	2,431,818	–	–	–	–
1% UIF employer contribution	45,115	54,861	56,215	62,471	49,121
PROVINCIAL ALLOCATIONS					
Provincial project management	10,800	45,012	Part of provincial distribution	Part of provincial distribution	60,000
Provincial distribution (training & operations)	–	–	755,955	102,160	–
OTHER COSTS					
Training	44,668	414,000	Part of provincial distribution	Part of provincial distribution	500,000
Internet data	–	–	26,795	45,918	25,200
DBE oversight, monitoring & support	1,200	–	5,000	5,400	10,000
EXPENDITURE					
Actual expenditure (as % of allocation)	5,572,716 (79.6%) ³⁰	5,605,287 (93.4%)	5,688,371 (91.8%)	5,845,286 (90.4%)	5,292,000 (94.3%)

Notes:
• All figures, except for actual expenditure, refer to funding as allocated in the implementation framework.
• All amounts in R '000 excluding non-financial data (no. of allocated job opportunities; contract period).

Appendix 2: Key design elements and shifts per phase

Table 3: Key BEEI design elements and shifts per phase

	Phase I (2020–2021)	Phase II (2021–2022)	Phase III (2022) *Extension of Phase II	Phase IV (2023)	Phase V (2025)
DURATION AND DATES	4+1 months (Dec 2020 – Mar/Apr 2021)	5 months (Nov 2021 – Mar 2022)	5 months (Apr – Aug 2022)	8 months (Feb–Sept 2023)	6 months (Jun – Nov 2025)
FOCUS	Offer emergency employment, help schools manage the impact of Covid-19 (including health and safety protocols), support learning recovery, save SGB posts	Strengthen employment pathways	As in Phase II	Focus on education recovery post Covid-19	Prioritise foundational skills, reading and learning support
FUNDING AND WAGES	Funding from National Treasury (NT); stipends at NMW	As in Phase I	As in Phases I-II	Stipends slightly below NMW	Stipends below minimum wage; Funding from UIF and NT
ELIGIBILITY	18–35 years; NEET; No criminal record; Preference for youth living near school	As in Phase I; Eligibility extended to age 39 for youth living with a disability; Live within 5km of school	Renewed Phase II Assistants ³¹	As in Phases II-III; Prioritised qualified educators; Did not previously participate in BEEI	Allowed previous participants to re-enrol; Prioritised qualified educators and youth in education distance learning programmes
ROLES AND PLACEMENT	4 categories of EAs (Curriculum Assistant, Reading Champion, eCadre, Child and Youth Care Worker); 2 categories of GSAs (Handyperson; Sport and Enrichment Assistant)	As in Phase I	As in Phases I-II	As in Phases I-III; Child and Youth Care Workers changed to Care & Support Assistants	As in Phase IV; Added 2 new EA roles (Workshop Assistants and Laboratory Assistants); RCs focussed on primary schools and CAs focussed on high schools
TRAINING	Generic orientation and role-specific training; Orientation training via printed manuals	Budget increased ninefold; Orientation training moved online; Online safety, sexual abuse and harassment training; More face-to-face training	More face-to-face training (continued)	More face-to-face training (continued)	More face-to-face training (continued); Training budget managed by national DBE instead of provinces
PAYMENT SYSTEM	Schools pay Assistants directly	Schools pay Assistants directly or via PERSAL	As in Phases I-II	As in Phases I-III	UIF-funded posts paid by IDC based on Kwantu records

Endnotes

- ¹ Department of Basic Education 2025
- ² Department of Basic Education, no date
- ³ Christie 2022, Hofmeyr et al. 2024
- ⁴ Biesman-Simons 2023, Christie 2022, Soudien et al. 2022
- ⁵ World Bank 2025
- ⁶ Statistics South Africa 2025. “Unemployed” is defined as the population of young people who are willing and able to work but not working.
- ⁷ Mudiriza & de Lannoy 2023
- ⁸ Presidency 2023
- ⁹ Hoadley 2023, van der Berg. et al. 2022
- ¹⁰ Harambee 2020
- ¹¹ Compared to the profile of youth who are normally engaged in job-seeking or employment.
- ¹² Presidency 2023
- ¹³ A social enterprise that connects young people to jobs and skilling opportunities.
- ¹⁴ A state-owned development finance institution overseen by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC).
- ¹⁵ In Phase V, 158,402 Assistants were funded by R4,013 billion from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), which is part of the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) and generally provides short-term relief to qualifying workers who are unemployed or unable to work. An additional 46,274 Assistants were funded by R1,6 billion from the National Treasury.
- ¹⁶ A public-private partnership that works with national and provincial governments to strengthen implementation of education priorities.
- ¹⁷ The CEM includes the Ministers of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training; and the nine provincial members of the executive councils for education.
- ¹⁸ The HEDCOM includes the Director-General (DG) of the DBE, the deputy DGs of the department, and the heads of provincial education departments.
- ¹⁹ In Phase I, Free State and Gauteng did not use Harambee's SA Youth digital platform. From Phase II onwards, all provinces have used Harambee.
- ²⁰ Based on an equitable share basis.
- ²¹ In some cases, Assistants may be assigned more than one role to meet needs and provide learning opportunities.
- ²² In Phase V, provinces were allocated their training budget, but the budget was held by the DBE. Provinces had to adhere to national supply chain management systems when organising training.
- ²³ Kwantu was initially developed for the Social Employment Fund, another public employment programme. In the BEEI, all Assistants were captured on the system, whether funded by National Treasury or UIF.
- ²⁴ Huston 2025
- ²⁵ See e.g. Dreer 2023, Evans & Mendez Acosta 2023, Fourie & de Klerk 2024, Schonert-Reichl. et al. 2023
- ²⁶ See Ardington 2024
- ²⁷ The programme ran for 4 months, with a 1-month extension to April in some provinces. Provinces used unspent funds to extend the programme.
- ²⁸ This phase had two youth cohorts. Cohort 1 was employed for 8 months from February. Unspent funds from previous phases funded Cohort 1 stipends from February to April. Cohort 2 was employed for 5 months, from May.
- ²⁹ Phase I spent just over a third of its budget on saving school governing body (SGB)-funded posts, which were challenging for schools to retain when parents struggled to pay fees during Covid-19.
- ³⁰ The majority of the Phase I underspend was on saving of posts, to which R2.43 billion was allocated.
- ³¹ Between Phases II and III, the same cohort of Assistants was retained: there was no time between phases to recruit new Assistants. Schools benefited from Assistants with more confidence and skills, but other unemployed youth did not have an opportunity to gain much-needed experience.

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