

Scaling youth employment through schools: **THE STORY OF THE BEEI**



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BASA: Banking Association South Africa
BEEI: Basic Education Employment Initiative
CA: Curriculum Assistant
CEM: Council of Education Ministers
CWP: Community Work Programme
CYCW: Child and Youth Care Workers
DBE: Department of Basic Education
DBE-E³: Department of Basic Education Ecubed (for Entrepreneurship, Employability and Education)
DEL: Department of Employment and Labour
DTIC: Department of Trade, Industry and Competition
DG: Director General
EA: Education Assistant
EPWP: Expanded Public Works Programme
FET: Further Education and Training
GSA: General School Assistant
HEDCOM: Heads of Education Departments Committee
ICT: Information and Communication Technology
IT: Information Technology
IDC: Industrial Development Corporation
JASA: Junior Achievement South Africa
LCPM: Letters Correct Per Minute
LIS: Library and Information Services
LoLT: Language of Learning and Teaching
LSEN: Learners with Special Educational Needs
MICT: Media, Information and Communication Technologies

MOU: Memorandum of Understanding
MTEF: Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NDMS: National Data Management System
NECT: National Education Collaboration Trust
NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training
NEMISA: National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa
NMW: National Minimum Wage
NSSF: National School Safety Framework
NT: National Treasury
PED: Provincial Education Department
PEP: Public Employment Programme
PERSAL: Personnel and Salary System
PES: Presidential Employment Stimulus
PYEI: Presidential Youth Employment Initiative
QLTC: Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign
RC: Reading Champion
RCT: Randomised Controlled Trial
SACE: South African Council of Educators
SAPA: South African Principals Association
SEA: Sports and Enrichment Assistant
SEF: Social Employment Fund
SETA: Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB: School Governing Body
SMT: School Management Team
TA: Teaching Assistant
UIF: Unemployment Insurance Fund
WCED: Western Cape Education Department

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) is a South African public employment programme run by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) that places youth (ages 18-35) in schools on short-term contracts.

Launched in 2020 to mitigate the devastating economic impact of Covid-19, the BEEI evolved into a R31,275 billion multi-phase programme. To date, it has created nearly 1,3 million employment opportunities for young people at ~23,000 schools across South Africa, demonstrating how schools' reach can be leveraged to scale employment opportunities.

This report tells the story of the BEEI – its origins, design and evolution; what it has learned about working at scale; what it has achieved; and how it might improve in the future. It is based on interviews with 25 DBE officials, government stakeholders and representatives from non-government partners; and on a rapid review of public and internal programme documentation.

The BEEI began as part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES), which was launched in October 2020 at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic to alleviate unemployment and catalyse economic recovery. For the Presidency, working through schools was an opportunity to demonstrate that large-scale responses to unemployment are possible. For the DBE, it would bring much-needed capacity to an already-overburdened system that was further strained by the pandemic.

The programme's design evolved in each phase in response to lessons learned, the shifting context, and practical constraints. Design changes included placing more emphasis on hiring teacher graduates and part-time or distance education teaching students; introducing new Assistant roles; strengthening the focus on foundational literacy and numeracy skills; expanding training and strengthening work readiness and connection to future opportunities; reducing remuneration to below the National Minimum Wage; and adopting new payment systems.

Like any programme built quickly at scale, the BEEI has been complex and imperfect. Its successes and challenges both offer important lessons about how to rapidly build, roll out and iterate large-scale efforts to solve pressing social problems. Notably, the BEEI worked around a lack of dedicated staff through secondments and new collaboration models. It leaned on cascading management structures and mobilised school-based actors' support. It also worked with government and non-government partners, including the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), DBE-E³ and the Industrial Development Corporation, to implement recruitment, training and payment. This required striking a careful balance between what elements of the programme should be centrally controlled and what decisions should be owned by local actors (provinces, districts and schools); and navigating the "multiple logics" of different organisations, even when it was difficult. Deep "vertical" consultation at each level of the education system and broad consultation with sector stakeholders was also key.

While research and evaluation on the BEEI and its outcomes have been limited, interview participants and DBE and partner reports point to several positive shifts the BEEI has helped to drive. The programme created nearly 1.3 million jobs, many in rural areas and "job deserts"; developed workplace skills through practical, hands-on experience; and helped young people find other opportunities via the SA Youth recruitment platform. As of February 2026, more than 21,000 former Assistants were employed by the DBE, 80% as teachers.

At a school level, maintenance and infrastructure improved physical environments, and teachers felt more supported. Some smaller-scale evaluations of early literacy and numeracy programmes in Limpopo and the Eastern Cape have shown that placing young people in classrooms can improve learning outcomes.



To strengthen the BEEI in the future, multi-year funding allocations would enable improved planning, design and implementation and make it more possible to attract additional investment. Dedicated staff would help avoid burnout. Streamlined procurement would reduce training delays. Formalising the role of paraprofessionals in the education system would strengthen the teacher pipeline. Extending participant contracts and aligning them to school calendars would reduce administration and participant turnover, and enable more impact. An integrated data management system used by all partners, with unique identifiers for each BEEI Assistant and standardised indicators and indicator definitions, would improve planning, decision-making, delivery, monitoring and reporting. These lessons, while drawn from the BEEI, are relevant to other large-scale efforts to improve education and reduce unemployment.

The BEEI is fertile ground for future evaluation and research. Existing data from the DBE and its partners could be further analysed to understand expenditure trends and participants' employment trajectories. New research should more rigorously investigate training quality and outcomes, as well as the BEEI's impact on learning outcomes, classroom practice, teacher well-being, school environments, youth skills development, and the teacher recruitment pipeline. This research should be supported by philanthropy and academic partners.

In February 2026, the BEEI is at a crossroads: further funding is not confirmed. Yet it has made its mark on both education and employment: schools and young people love the programme and want it to continue. Promising developments point to shifts at schools, for programme participants and in the education system.

By sharing the BEEI's implementation journey and key lessons that have emerged, this report aims to inform discussion and debate about the BEEI's future and to support other large-scale efforts to improve education and create employment in South Africa.



FOREWORD

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION

It is my privilege, as the Minister of Basic Education, to introduce this report, which documents the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) across Phases I to V.

Launched in 2020 as part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus, the BEEI began as an urgent response to the social and economic shock of COVID-19. It quickly evolved into **the country’s largest school-linked youth employment programme**, creating nearly 1.3 million work opportunities for young people across approximately 23,000 public schools, with a total programme budget of R31.275 billion over five phases.

This report is important because **it shows, in practical terms, what becomes possible when we use the reach of the public schooling system to respond to two urgent national priorities at once: improving learning conditions in schools and expanding work opportunities for young people**. It describes how the programme’s design was strengthened phase by phase – through more refined roles, improved recruitment and payment systems, stronger training and support and growing collaboration between government and key partners.

A central theme running through this report is equity. **The BEEI deliberately channelled support to the schools and communities that need it most** – particularly no-fee schools, rural and township communities and areas described as “job deserts”, where young people face the greatest barriers to opportunity. By prioritising proximity-based recruitment and distributing posts through the school network in every province, the programme brought income, experience and pathways to future work to young people who are too often excluded from the labour market.

In the classroom and the school environment, the BEEI helped to strengthen day-to-day capacity: providing additional hands to support teaching and learning, easing administrative pressure, improving maintenance and the learning environment and expanding school-based support services. Importantly, **later phases sharpened the programme’s contribution to foundational learning, including a stronger focus on early literacy and numeracy support**, recognising that reading and numeracy are the gateway to success across every subject.

The report also shows how the BEEI contributed to longer-term human capital development. By creating structured work experience in schools, **the programme supported work readiness and opened pathways into further opportunities – including for teaching graduates and education students seeking meaningful work-integrated learning**. These are important lessons for building a stronger educator pipeline over time, especially for underserved communities where teacher shortages and learning backlogs remain most severe.

As this report makes clear, **implementing at national scale is never simple**. The BEEI required rapid delivery, careful coordination across levels of the system and continuous improvement in response to operational realities. The lessons captured here – on planning, procurement, training, data systems, accountability and partnerships – should inform how we strengthen future phases and how we approach other large-scale initiatives that seek to reach learners and communities at the margins.

Looking ahead, my hope is that this report serves both as a record of what has been achieved and as a practical guide to what must be strengthened to deepen impact – especially in the poorest communities. That includes clearer long-term resourcing and planning, stronger institutional capacity, streamlined processes that protect integrity while enabling timely delivery and better data for decision-making and accountability. Above all, **it requires a continued focus on what matters most: ensuring that every child – particularly those in historically underserved schools – has the support, time and conditions to learn**.

Honourable Siviwe Gwarube | Minister of Basic Education





MESSAGE FROM THE DEPUTY MINISTER
OF BASIC EDUCATION

I am pleased to contribute this message to the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) Phases I to V, reflecting on its progress, its alignment with national priorities, and the advancements achieved through sustained commitment and collaboration.

Guided by the transformative agenda of the Seventh Administration, the BEEI has pursued three core objectives: strengthening teaching and learning at all levels; expanding employment opportunities for youth and education professionals; and reinforcing the role of basic education as a catalyst for social and economic development.

Throughout these five phases, the initiative has made significant achievements. We have increased the educator pipeline in critical subject areas, supported learner-centred instructional practices, and expanded targeted interventions in underperforming districts.

A central achievement of the BEEI has been its contribution to addressing youth unemployment at scale. The initiative has created structured, meaningful employment pathways for thousands of young South Africans, enabling them to contribute directly to classroom support, community engagement programmes, and school-based administrative functions. In doing so, the BEEI exemplifies how education employment strategies can serve both pedagogical and socio-economic purposes.

Moreover, **by embedding the BEEI within large-scale national planning, we have ensured that its benefits are not isolated, but distributed across provinces, towns, and rural communities.** The results are tangible – communities experiencing increased economic participation, schools better resourced with human capital, and learners more supported and motivated.

As we look to future phases, the lessons captured in this report will inform how we expand, innovate, and sustain employment initiatives that advance both education and broader developmental outcomes.

Dr Reginah Mhaule | Deputy Minister of Basic Education



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND MESSAGE OF GRATITUDE

It is with deep appreciation and profound respect that I acknowledge the many individuals, teams, agencies and partners whose collective effort made the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) Phases I-V a success.

As the flagship programme of the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES), the BEEI represents a programme at scale – not only in scope, but in its ambition to advance educational excellence while massifying job opportunities across the education sector. It created ~318,000 jobs in 2020; ~273,000 in 2021; ~249,000 in 2022; ~240,000 in 2023, and ~199,000 in 2025 – a total of **nearly 1,3 million job opportunities over the five phases.** This programme came with **a budget of R31,275 billion** that was managed and reported on with integrity and full accountability.

The achievement in BEEI could only be realised through existing strong governance and accountability structures, robust planning processes, and a shared purpose among all stakeholders. From national and provincial leadership to district officials, school communities, labour partners, and implementing organisations, every contributor played a vital role in translating policy into practice.

Throughout implementation, we strengthened systems for risk management, planning, monitoring, and reporting to ensure that programme delivery remained effective, efficient, and responsive to evolving needs. Communication channels between implementing partners were prioritised, enabling fast feedback loops, adaptive refinements, and shared learning that enhanced impact on learning outcomes and community wellbeing.

We are especially grateful for the **collaborative partnerships forged with civil society, training institutions, private sector contributors, teacher unions and local government.** These partnerships were fundamental in expanding opportunities for young professionals, enhancing school support services, and embedding the initiative within communities that are closest to the learners we serve.

The impact of the BEEI extends beyond classroom walls. It has strengthened local economies by enabling employment, stimulated community engagement in education, and fostered a culture of shared accountability for learner success.

To all partners, stakeholders, and teams across the Basic Education landscape, thank you. Your unwavering commitment and collective effort have helped shape an initiative that models what is possible when vision, partnership, and action come together in service of our learners, our youth, and our nation.

Mr Hubert Mathanzima Mweli | Director-General, Department of Basic Education



MESSAGE FROM THE PROJECT SPONSOR

The Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) is part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES), initiated by the President of the Republic of South Africa in 2020. It is a flagship public employment programme in South Africa and worldwide. The programme addresses the triple challenges faced by South Africa – youth unemployment, inequality and poverty.

The BEEI represents one of the most complex operational undertakings implemented by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in a short period of time. From its inception, the programme required strong collaboration across government, funding partners, provinces, districts, schools, and communities to translate a national policy intervention into a school-based reality. Beyond support to schools, the BEEI had a broader economic impact. The payment of stipends to hundreds of thousands of young people injected much-needed income into households and local economies, stimulating economic activity at community level and supporting social stability during a period of economic recovery. The inclusion of young people in the economy, many for the first time, represents a critical step in building pathways to employment and employability. In addition, the six-month Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) contributions made on behalf of Assistants provided a tangible social security benefit, offering protection and future claims that extend beyond the duration of the programme itself.

This report affirms that **effective project management, clear programme ownership, strong partnerships, and continuous oversight are essential for delivering impact at scale.** The experiences documented here provide an important evidence base for strengthening future public employment initiatives within the education sector.

I wish to thank all officials who were involved for their commitment, diligence, and rigour, ensuring that the five phases of this programme were successful. Even when challenges arose, they rose up and conquered the challenge. It was an honour to be part of such a noble programme that uplifted communities and left an impact on the youth of South Africa.

Mr Shunmugam G Padayachee | Deputy Director-General: Business Intelligence,
Department of Basic Education BEEI Phases I-V Project Sponsor



FROM THE DESK OF THE BEEI PROJECT MANAGER

The Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) reflects the Seventh Administration's commitment to job creation, youth empowerment, skills development, and improved public service delivery, with education as a central driver of inclusive growth. Having been involved in the programme from its inception in 2020 through Phases I-V, I have witnessed its evolution from an emergency response into a structured, large-scale intervention with lasting social and economic value.

BEEI Phase I responded decisively to the COVID-19 crisis, addressing learning disruptions while providing income opportunities to unemployed youth. The placement of Education and General School Assistants in public schools strengthened teaching and learning and positioned young people at the centre of national recovery. This focus was deepened in Phases II-IV through classroom support, protecting teaching and learning time, building back better – learners were playing sports once again; school governance was supported; monitoring, payment, and training systems were refined; and partnerships across national, provincial, district, and school levels were strengthened. These improvements advanced work-integrated learning, skills development, and institutional capability, while enhancing support to schools.

Phase V marked a period of consolidation, with stronger compliance and oversight mechanisms safeguarding public resources and improving the quality of placements. Phase V also supported student teachers to improve their work-integrated learning. The continued payment of stipends stimulated local economies, particularly in underserved communities, contributing to poverty alleviation and broad-based economic participation. UIF contributions further extended social protection for participants beyond the placement period.

Across all five phases, BEEI has demonstrated how public employment programmes can simultaneously address youth unemployment, education system needs and social cohesion, while creating pathways to improved employability. As government advances the Seventh Administration's agenda of sustainable job creation, improved learning outcomes, and long-term human capital development, the lessons from BEEI provide a strong foundation for future policy and programme design.

I acknowledge the collective contribution of all stakeholders and, most importantly, the young people who served as Education and General School Assistants. Their commitment affirms that investing in youth through education-linked employment is an investment in South Africa's future.

Ms Lala Maje | BEEI Project Manager, Department of Basic Education



INTRODUCTION

The Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) is a South African public employment programme run by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). It 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. Its fifth phase ran from June to November 2025.

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 schools with learning, administrative and Information Technology (IT) support, while GSAs help maintain and improve schools’ physical environment and support sports and after-school activities.

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 created nearly 1,3 million employment opportunities for young people at ~23,000 schools across South Africa² – almost every public school in the country. It is the largest youth employment programme in South Africa.

Over its five phases, its objectives broadened: from emergency relief to strengthening learning and creating employment pathways for youth. Its design and implementation also evolved significantly.

However, while there has been some public and internal reporting on the programme, the story of the BEEI – its origins, design and evolution, and what it has learned about working at scale – has not cohesively been told. The journey required creativity, adaptability, and extraordinary commitment from government officials and civil society partners. Like anything implemented at scale and at speed, it has been complex and imperfect, but it has left a significant mark on schools and on the young people who took part in the programme.

As this report was produced, the BEEI’s future was uncertain. Yet independent of its future trajectory, unpacking the BEEI’s implementation provides valuable lessons on how to combat unemployment, bolster schools’ capacity, and rapidly build and troubleshoot new government programmes at scale.

This report draws on interviews with key actors and public and internal DBE documents to paint a more detailed picture of what the programme did, struggled with, learned and achieved over five years.

METHODOLOGY

This research was undertaken to tell the story of the BEEI from its inception (2020-21) through Phase V (2025). It is not an outcomes evaluation: it focuses on tracing the programme’s evolution over time, and on surfacing and sharing lessons about what it takes to design and implement cross-departmental government programmes at scale.

It draws on interviews with 25 participants who are DBE officials, government stakeholders, people from BEEI partner organisations (such as the National Education Collaboration Trust [NECT], Harambee, DBE-E³ and the Industrial Development Corporation [IDC]), and representatives from two education nonprofits. Interview participants were purposely selected in consultation with the BEEI Project Manager at the DBE (see Appendix 1 for more detail). Interview transcripts were subjected to a thematic analysis. The research team also conducted a rapid review of public and internal programme documentation, triangulating interview insights with available data where possible.

The report also includes four snapshots that highlight implementing partners’ and provinces’ contributions and perspectives. These were selected to feature practices, collaborations and innovations that enabled delivery at scale.

LIMITATIONS

This research was conducted and written up between September 2025 and February 2026. At the time of writing, the BEEI programme was still compiling final reports. Data for Phase V is provisional and has some minor inconsistencies in data on training, appointments and expenditure. Limited time frames and challenges or delays accessing programme documents and participant surveys from all five phases precluded an in-depth analysis of all documents. As the research focused on the BEEI’s design and implementation, it did not include direct research with principals, teachers or Assistants employed by the BEEI (although available survey responses from BEEI Assistants, school principals and school management team members were reviewed).





PROGRAMME ORIGINS AND CONTEXT

HOW THE BEEI BEGAN

Alleviating unemployment and testing delivery at scale

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

In the first few months of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Presidency proposed and secured approval for a mass employment strategy with a broad array of public employment programmes run by different departments, including a teacher assistant programme. After it was approved, the National Treasury invited government departments, including the DBE, to submit proposals that would employ large numbers of people, with a strong focus on youth.

The DBE rose to the challenge. Initially, it submitted several proposals from different units. Based on National Treasury feedback, it consolidated these into one project with different types of Assistant roles and developed the implementation framework for the BEEI: a nationwide programme that in its first phase would create more than 300,000 short-term work opportunities in six distinct focus areas: teaching and learning support in classrooms, sports and recreation, psycho-social support, reading, administration, and maintenance and infrastructure.

“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 were 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.’”

Kate Philip | Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme Lead, The Presidency

Building on past lessons

It was possible to do this because the DBE had already tested these models, albeit on a smaller scale. Food handlers, learner support agents, and a European Union-funded education assistant programme that ran in rural areas from 2018-2021 provided proof of concept for the role young people could play in schools.³

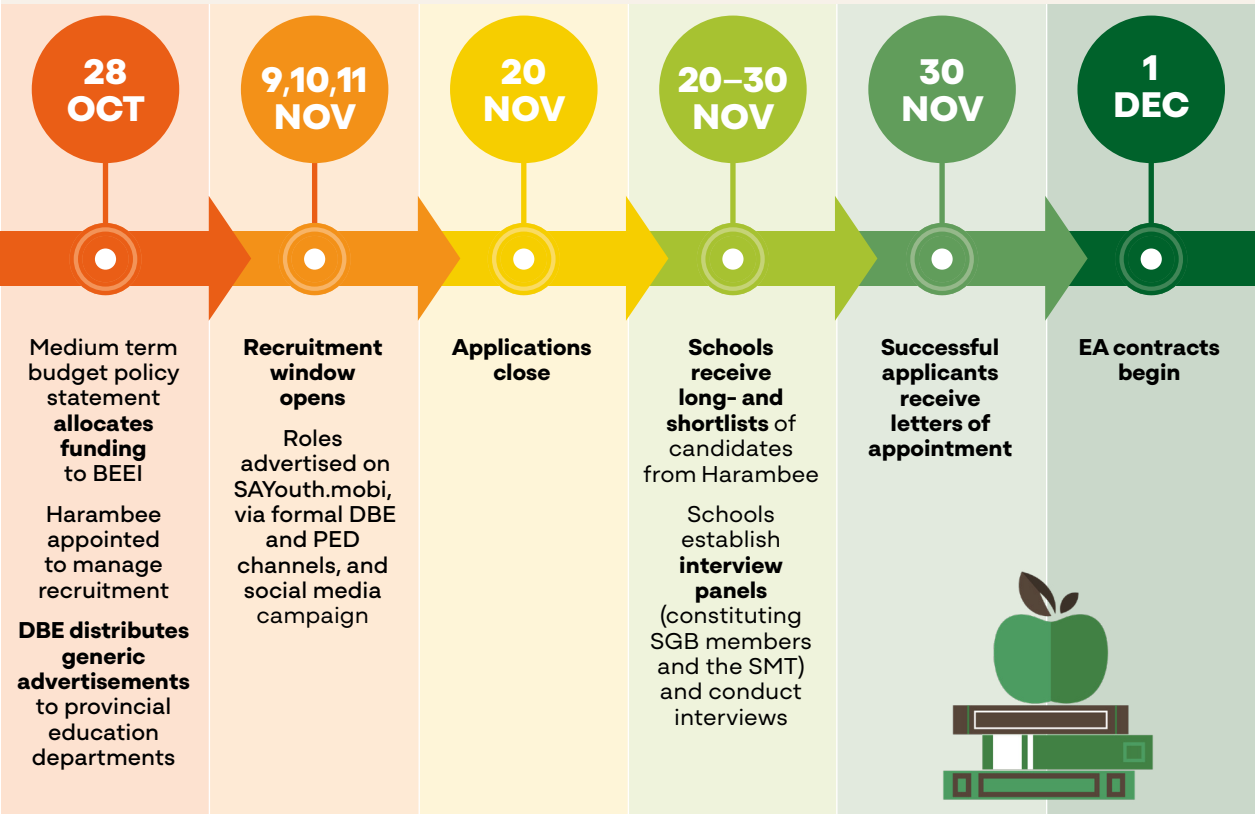
The BEEI also built on lessons from the Department of Cooperative Governance’s Community Work Programme (CWP), which had experimented with teacher assistants. While CWP participants in schools achieved some positive outcomes, they were usually selected by the CWP’s non-state implementing partners, which created a disconnect from school decision making and processes and task allocations. The BEEI was designed so that nothing would be imposed on schools: they had to opt in, and had the final say in participant selection. Other key design features, such as paying the National Minimum Wage (NMW)⁴ and working with Harambee’s SA Youth platform for recruitment, were introduced by the Presidency, again drawing on lessons from other public employment programmes (PEPs).

A RAPID START

Once the programme was announced on 28 October 2020, the DBE had **just five weeks to get it off the ground** – a feat that would require an enormous amount of hard work.

However, DBE Director-General Hubert Mathanzima Mveli recognised that the payoff was worth the risk. “I just decided that look, the benefit is bigger than what would happen if it doesn’t succeed,” he said.

FIGURE 1: Phase I startup timeline





THE BEEI IN CONTEXT

Education system challenges

South Africa’s education system is shaped by deep historical inequalities that continue to shape education access, quality and outcomes. While the post-apartheid government has made significant strides to expand enrolment and improve infrastructure, the system remains highly unequal, with stark differences between well-resourced schools and those serving poorer, predominantly rural and township communities. In many schools, learners fail to acquire foundational literacy and numeracy skills in early grades, which results in cumulative learning backlogs, high repetition and dropout rates, and low levels of mastery even among learners who pass their Grade 12 matric examinations.⁵

Challenges such as large class sizes, uneven distribution of qualified educators, overburdened educators, limited resources, infrastructure backlogs, and limited psychosocial support for learners place considerable strain on schools and educators.⁶ These structural constraints have been exacerbated by learning losses associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly among learners in the early grades.⁷ While the initial imperative for the BEEI was economic recovery, it has given schools an opportunity to alleviate some of these challenges.

South Africa’s largest public employment programme

South Africa has the second-highest unemployment rate in the world, after Eswatini.⁸ It is worst among youth: **58.5% of young people ages 15-24 are unemployed,⁹ and 1 in 3 are not in education, employment or training (NEET).¹⁰**

Alongside other strategies, public employment programmes (PEPs) have been a key part of the South African government’s response to high unemployment rates. While programmes such as the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), launched in 2004, and the Community Work Programme (CWP), established in 2009, have provided opportunities for millions of South Africans to access short-term employment, most efforts to combat unemployment have been smaller-scale.¹¹

The launch of the PES in 2020 expanded PEPs’ reach significantly. The PES provided funding for the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI), which established PEPs across multiple sectors. The BEEI was the largest of these programmes and served as its flagship.¹² the DBE had more capacity to run a large programme than most government departments, and played a key role in economic recovery and job creation.

The role of paraprofessionals in education

Globally, employing education assistants (also referred to as teacher assistants or paraprofessionals) is increasingly viewed as a key resource to strengthen school systems.¹³ While most are not qualified educators, and should not be assigned the same tasks as teachers, they can help improve classroom management, enable individualised and small group support, ease administrative burdens, strengthen day-to-day operations, and support infrastructure maintenance and improvement – tasks that help educators focus on their core priority of teaching and contribute to a more conducive, productive learning environment.

Local research conducted on a smaller scale demonstrates that, when well trained and supported to deliver specific learning support activities, education assistants in schools can positively impact learning outcomes.¹⁴

A NOTE ON DESIGN RATIONALE

For both the DBE and the Presidency, the BEEI was an opportunity to realise key objectives and test new ideas.

Bolstering school support

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the already-overburdened education system was further constrained by prolonged school closures and rotational learning. The BEEI was an opportunity for the DBE to bolster capacity at schools: young people could help manage Covid-19 protocols, help educators under huge pressure to close learning gaps and complete the curriculum, and support children traumatised by disruption and loss.

Building the institutional architecture for scale

The scale of the unemployment challenge is staggering – yet often initiatives to address it reach fewer than 10,000 people.¹⁵ For the Presidency, the ambitious PES employment targets offered an opportunity to counter this trend by demonstrating that mass employment is possible – and showing how it could be done.

In the initial PES design, the DBE offered 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. In the education system, each school has existing physical infrastructure and systems for management, decision-making and administration that could accommodate an additional 10 to 15 young people, enabling levels of scale.

For this reason, the DBE became the “backbone” of the PES in terms of scale. With more than 23,000 public schools across the country, it created more jobs than any other department through an established, localised and wide-reaching network – and demonstrated that it is possible to design and implement solutions to pressing social problems at scale.

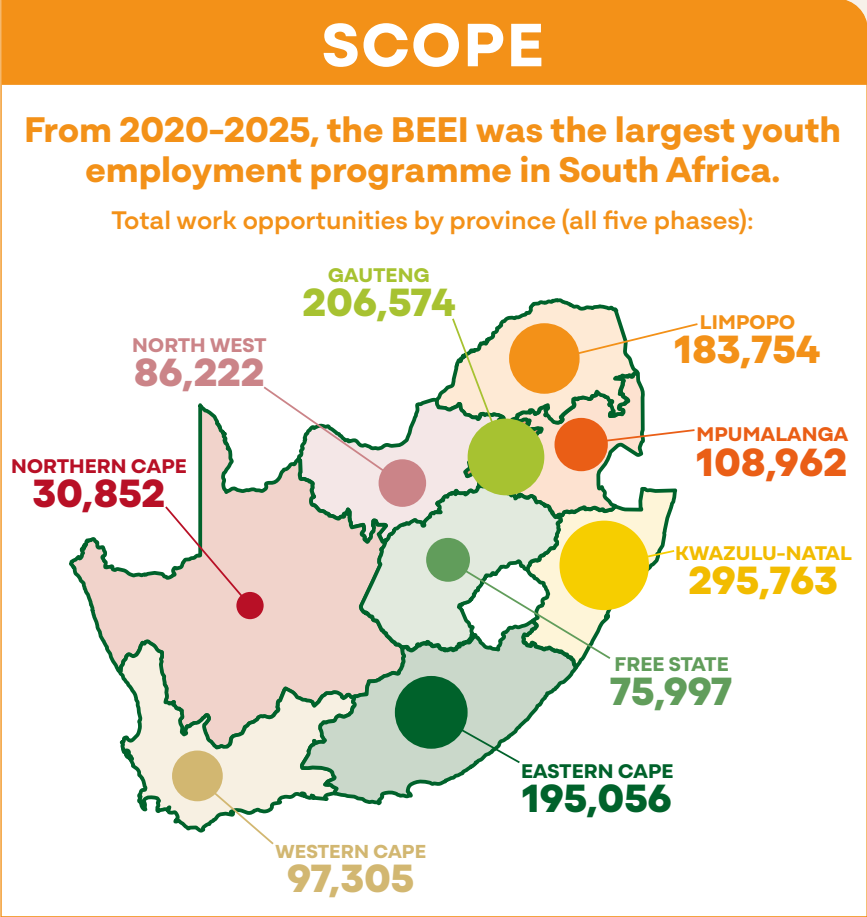


THE BEEI AT A GLANCE

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



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)

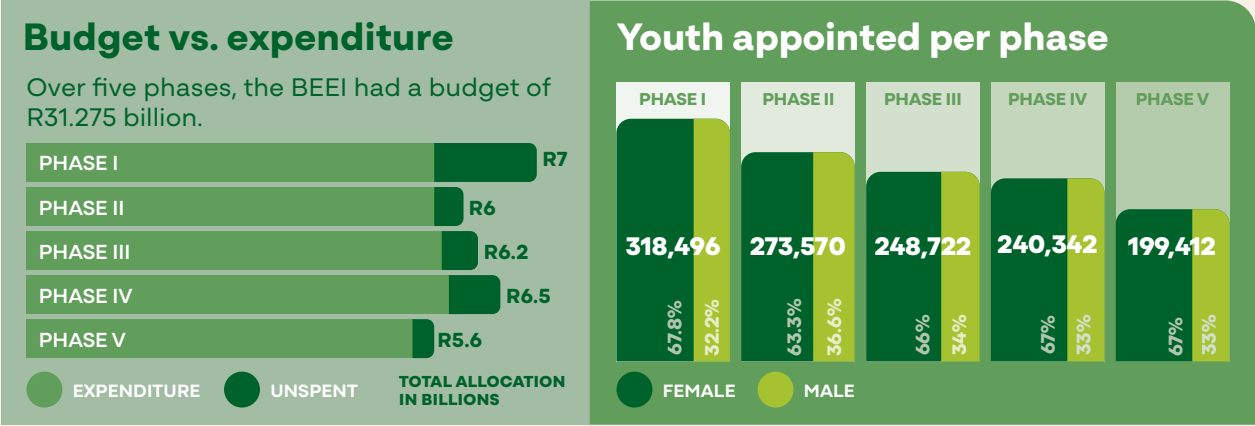
Learning, administrative and IT support

- 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 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.

Young people found work – including those usually excluded. The BEEI created **>1.28 million jobs**, many in “job deserts”.

More applicants and Assistants than usual^a were female and from rural and poor areas.

^a Compared to the profile of youth who are normally engaged in job-seeking or employment.

BEEI PROGRAMME DESIGN

The initial phase of the BEEI had economic recovery as its primary objective. The Phase I and Phase II timelines reflect this goal: young people were deployed rapidly even though it was the end of the school year. The DBE and its partners were building the structures and systems underpinning the programme almost simultaneously to implementation.

Over the programme’s five phases, lessons and design adjustments strengthened delivery. This section of the report covers the BEEI’s design and how it evolved over time. This includes funding and resource allocation; recruitment and eligibility; Assistant roles and allocations; training; payment systems; and the key role of partnerships.

FUNDING AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

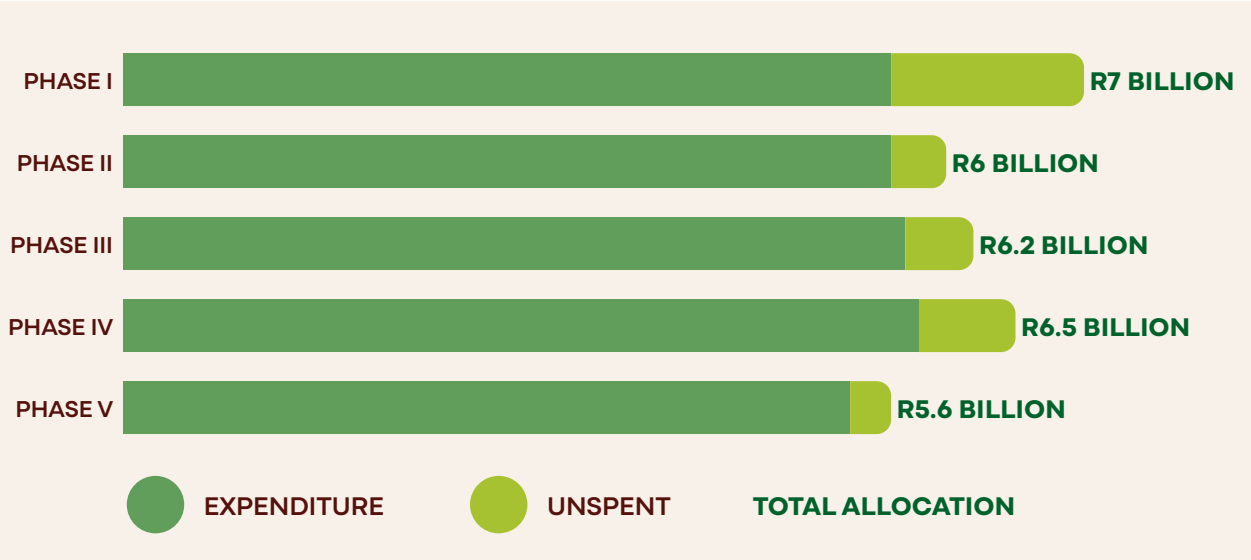
The first four phases of the BEEI were funded through the National Treasury. Funding for Phases I and II was allocated in the medium-term budget policy statement, and Phases III and IV were included in the medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF).

Phase V was largely funded by R4,013 billion from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF),^b with R1,6 billion from the National Treasury.¹⁶ Figure 2 provides a breakdown of budgets and expenditure over all five phases.

In the first three phases, Assistants’ stipends were set at the National Minimum Wage (NMW). In Phase IV, the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) accepted the DBE’s proposal to pay slightly below minimum wage, as this allowed for more employment opportunities.

The BEEI strove to create as many employment opportunities as possible and to provide training that supports exit pathways. Because the overwhelming proportion of funds went towards stipends, the budget for project management, oversight, monitoring and evaluation and support has been limited.

FIGURE 2: Budget versus expenditure, Phases I to V



^b The UIF is part of the Department of Employment and Labour. It generally provides short-term financial relief to qualifying workers who become unemployed or are unable to work due to circumstances like maternity, illness, adoption, or parental leave.

TABLE 1: Overview of BEEI budget and scope, Phases I to V¹⁷

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 ^c
Programme duration and dates	4+1 months ^d (Dec 2020 – Mar/Apr 2021)	5 months (Nov 2021 – Mar 2022)	5 months ¹⁸ (Apr – Aug 2022)	8 months ¹⁹ (Feb – Sept 2023)	6 months (Jun – Nov 2025)
No. of allocated job opportunities	319,060	287,424	274,000	255,100	204,676 ^e
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 ²⁰ (97.4%)
JOBS & STIPENDS					
Stipends ²¹	4,511,513	5,486,127	5,621,425	6,247,052	4,912,200 ²²
Saving of SGB posts ^f	2,431,818 ²³	–	–	–	–
1% UIF employer contribution	45,115	54,861	56,215	62,471	49,121 ²⁴
PROVINCIAL ALLOCATIONS					
Provincial project management	10,800	45,012	Part of provincial distribution ²⁵	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 ²⁶
Internet data	–	–	26,795 ²⁷	45,918	25,200
DBE oversight, monitoring & support	1,200	–	5,000	5,400	10,000
EXPENDITURE					
Actual expenditure ²⁸ (as % of allocation)	5,572,716 (79.6%) ²⁹	5,605,287 (93.4%)	5,688,371 (91.8%)	5,845,286 (90.4%)	5,292,000 (94.3%) ³⁰

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).

^c This included R4,013 billion from UIF and R1,6 billion from National Treasury.
^d The programme ran for 4 months, with a 1-month extension to April in some provinces. Provinces used unspent funds to extend the programme.
^e 158,402 jobs were funded by the UIF and 46,274 jobs were funded by the National Treasury.
^f 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.

RECRUITMENT AND ELIGIBILITY

Prospective Assistants apply through a zero-rated digital application portal, [SAYouth.mobi](#), run by the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator (see page 26). Young people apply for specific positions at specific schools, and can apply to multiple schools and for multiple roles.

As they apply, young people answer custom questions prescribed by DBE that align to employment criteria. Responses are used to auto-matically rank young people from most to least qualified. For all roles, eligibility criteria included (as of Phase V):

- Aged 18-35 years^g
- Not in employment, education or training (NEET)^h
- Live within five kilometres of the schoolⁱ
- No criminal record

In Phase IV, the BEEI excluded participants in previous phases. In Phase V, past participants were allowed to re-apply.

Specific roles have additional criteria (summarised in Figure 4 on page 29). The programme also aimed to appoint people living with disabilities to 2% of the roles.³¹

Harambee identifies all qualified candidates, ranks them in order of how well they meet the prescribed criteria, and provides shortlists to schools. Schools interview and select Assistants.



“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. Because of that, I think that a lot of people are excited and willing to get on board and help the programme.”

Crysty Swift | Tools and Insights Lead, DBE-E³

PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION OF TEACHERS

In early phases, project staff realised that the programme was attracting teacher graduates who were unable to find work. **Many teacher education programmes have limited hands-on classroom experience, and participating in the BEEI was a practical learning opportunity that increased qualified teachers’ employability.** It also provided schools with Assistants who had relevant experience, knowledge and skills.

In response to this, from Phase IV onwards, **teacher graduates were prioritised** for appointment as EAs. From Phase V, this was expanded to include **education students in part-time and distance learning programmes.**

In Phase V, 27,802 Assistants (14%) were qualified educators: 4.5% were qualified to teach in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase (Grade 10-12), 2.5% in senior phase (Grade 7-9), 3.5% in intermediate phase (Grade 4-6) and 3.4% in foundation phase (Grade R-3).³² Another 15% of Assistants were enrolled in a distance learning programme.^j

As many teachers retire, the BEEI is helping prepare the next generation of educators.

^f This is 18-39 years for applicants living with a disability who are applying to schools that serve learners with special educational needs (LSEN schools).
^g In Phase V, youth studying part-time or via distance learning towards an education degree were eligible to apply.
^h This is 30km for rural and farm schools. Because the programme is designed to minimise Assistants’ transport costs, geo-matching is used to ensure candidates living near schools receive preference.

^j Assistants are only allowed to pursue distance studies *in education*; they should not otherwise be studying or working, and attest to this when signing contracts and letters of acceptance.

HARAMBEE AND SA YOUTH:

HOW COLLABORATION ENABLED RAPID SCALE AND INCLUSION

When the BEEI was announced in October 2020, the DBE faced a daunting task: recruiting nearly **320,000 young people to work in ~23,000 schools in just five weeks**. Traditional recruitment methods for school-based posts varied, were not always transparent or equitable, and were challenging to accelerate, standardise and document.

To support this task, the PYEI introduced the DBE to the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, a social enterprise that connects young people to jobs and skilling opportunities. The Jobs Fund had contracted Harambee to support PYEI projects.

Harambee had already developed a zero-rated platform called Tshepo 1Million, a “learning and earning” platform to connect young work-seekers in Gauteng with opportunities. To meet the BEEI recruitment challenge, Harambee leveraged its existing digital systems, contact centre and communications infrastructure to launch SA Youth, a national, data-free platform where young people could find and apply for jobs.

Harambee supported the DBE to advertise the opportunities, ensuring wide reach, and scaled up its contact centre, WhatsApp and social media support during the application window. It also processed applications and generated a ranked list of candidates for each school, based on the DBE’s criteria and using geo-matching to ensure proximity to schools. Schools retained control over interviews, final selection and role assignments.³³ This division of labour drew on what each partner did best: it broadened reach, centralised data, efficiently evaluated and ranked candidates and ensured transparency, while preserving local decision-making and ownership.

In Phase I, SA Youth supported recruitment in seven of nine provinces.³⁴ The BEEI received 868,540 applications for 319,060 jobs; of these, 501,087 (58%) came via the platform.³⁵ **By Phase V, all nine provinces were using the platform, and SA Youth received more than 12 million applications from 1,651,006 unique individuals.**³⁶ “It’s extraordinary,” says Nomahlubi Mosethedi, who leads national government relations at Harambee. “It tells you that young people are willing to work. They aren’t just sitting by the wayside waiting.”

Inclusion is key to the BEEI’s recruitment strategy. “Our ability to reach people even in the most remote areas is probably our biggest value proposition,” says Mosethedi. Zero-rated access removes barriers, and partnerships with the National Youth Development Agency and the Department of Employment and Labour ensure that even rural youth without internet access can apply through physical centres. The SA Youth platform also creates a digital CV for job seekers, reducing travel and printing costs.

Beyond rapid recruitment, the DBE’s partnership with Harambee has offered ongoing value. The BEEI brought huge numbers of young people onto the SA Youth platform, where they can find and apply for other jobs and access training. “We get the majority of our new joiners when we are running the Basic Education Employment Initiative,” says Mosethedi. SA Youth also enables longitudinal tracking of BEEI alumni, with the potential to strengthen research and policy insights.

The image shows two pages of a digital CV for Ntombi Dlamini, created by the SA Youth platform. The CV is presented in a clean, professional layout with a white background and green accents. The top page (Page 1 of 2) includes personal information, contact details, and a section for SA Youth's Assessments and Screeners. The bottom page (Page 2 of 2) lists qualifications and experience. The SA Youth logo is visible in the top right corner of the first page.

Ntombi Dlamini

Primary number: 0750279524
Email: ntombi@gmail.com
Passport number: 098765
Citizenship: Antarctica
☒ Eligible to work in South Africa
Location: Salt River, Cape Town, Western Cape, 7925

Driver's licence: Car driver's licence, Truck driver's licence

SA Youth's Assessments and Screeners

Problem-solving capability
Completed Jun 2025

about
Measures fluid intelligence, the ability to reason, adapt, and solve new problems independent of verbal skills, without relying on prior knowledge. Developed with a clinic psychologist, benchmarked against industry standards, and linked to real-world success.

Result
Scored in the top 1%
Solves complex problems by evaluating impacts, finding connections, recognizing dependencies and choosing effective methods. Demonstrates strong learning ability and the adaptability to uncover hidden patterns or principles.

Behavioural profile
Completed Jun 2025

about
Measures essential soft skills including grit, motivation, and a growth mindset. Developed with Oxford University and J-PAL. Results are validated against real hiring decisions, and indicate potential success in various roles.

Result
Scored highest on growth mindset. People with a growth mindset believe their skills and intelligence can be improved over time with effort and persistence.

Experience

Teacher Assistant
Pheleni Secondary College
Jun 2025 - Current

Fundraiser
Volunteer For Nonprofit In Youth Space
Mar 2025 - Current

Packer
Supermarket
Feb 2025 - Current

Ntombi Dlamini, Primary number: 0750279524, Email address: ntombi@gmail.com
This CV reflects information provided by the applicant on [sapyouth.mobi](#)

Page 1 of 2

Youth coordinator
Volunteer For Church Of Holy Cross
Aug 2024 - Current

Qualifications

High School / Secondary School
Holy Cro Senior Secondary Senior Secondary School
Grade 12/NQF Level 4
Still busy full-time, Jan 2024 - Feb 2026

Ntombi Dlamini, Primary number: 0750279524, Email address: ntombi@gmail.com
This CV reflects information provided by the applicant on [sapyouth.mobi](#)

Page 2 of 2

An example of a digital CV created by the SA Youth platform.

Pulling off five massive recruitment drives required more than tech platforms and systems. External funding allowed Harambee to scale up support during the intense recruitment period: in Phase V it hired an extra 150 people to handle the 2,8 million inquiries that came in via social media, WhatsApp and its call centre during the application window.

Coordination, trust-building and relationships were also critical. “While DBE is the owner of this project from an implementation perspective, we had to embed ourselves in the entire collaboration,” says Mosethedi. “That engagement and that collaboration across the board was one of the most important elements in the success of this project.” Harambee provided training manuals, videos and personnel; ran webinars and meetings; was visibly available to help government grasp the new approach; and deployed skilled personnel to help manage stakeholder relationships.

Meeting face-to-face with stakeholders across the country in roadshows and provincial workshops helped to allay concerns. “With a programme like this, you can’t just work with the coalition of the willing. You have to get buy-in from each and every stakeholder,” says Mosethedi. “Some workshops went exceedingly well. Some were very volatile. But with each workshop, when we walked away, we had imparted a bit more confidence in people and in the programme.”

Still, it took five phases for the SA Youth platform to become fully accepted as the platform for applications. “It becomes easier over time, because the programme is now very well known,” says Mosethedi. “Young people know exactly what to do when applying. We even found that a lot of young people who are engaging with our social media platforms were helping other young people with information.”

The collaboration between Harambee and the DBE demonstrates that **embedding new digital systems into government programmes takes effort, patience, responsiveness and trust – but the payoff is transformative scale, improved transparency in hiring, and more inclusion.**

ASSISTANT ROLES

The BEEI began as an aggregation of proposals from different DBE units and includes a range of roles that respond to different needs. Young people are employed either as Education Assistants (EAs) or General School Assistants (GSAs). EAs provide learning, administrative and IT support, while GSAs help maintain and improve schools’ physical environment and support sports and after-school activities. Both work up to 8 hours a day or 40 hours per week.³⁷ Specific roles have been refined across phases, but qualifying criteria have largely remained consistent.



FIGURE 3: EA versus GSA breakdown per phase

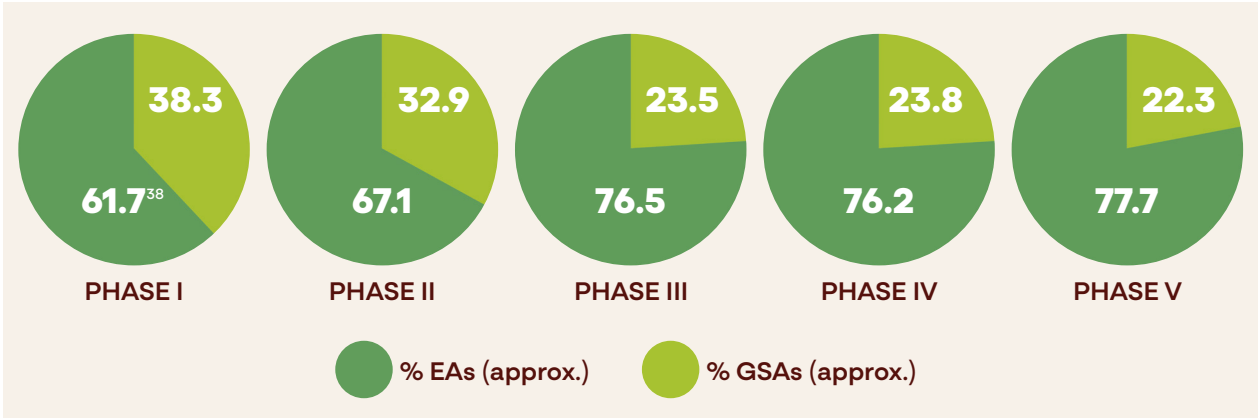


FIGURE 4: Assistant roles, responsibilities and eligibility criteria (as of Phase V)³⁹

EDUCATION ASSISTANTS (EAS): MATRIC PASS REQUIRED			
CURRICULUM ASSISTANT		READING CHAMPION	
Support teaching and learning in the classroom ^k (focus on high school) ^l	MATRIC with 40% pass in subjects for which they are providing support	Support teachers with reading and numeracy	MATRIC with pass in Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) of the school
	* Teaching qualification an advantage		Demonstrate a passion for reading
eCADRE		CARE AND SUPPORT ASSISTANT ⁴¹	
Provide ICT technical support to teachers and learners	MATRIC with pass in IT subjects or	Provide psychosocial support for learners	MATRIC
	Matric and IT qualification or certificate or		* Child and Youth Care Worker Certificate or qualification in Social Science an advantage
Workshop Assistant ⁴²		LABORATORY ASSISTANT	
Prepare materials, tools, and equipment	MATRIC with pass in engineering subjects	Help educators maintain laboratories	MATRIC with pass in Physical Sciences and Life Sciences
	* Artisan qualification or bachelor's degree/diploma with engineering subjects an advantage		* Bachelor's degree or diploma with science subject an advantage
Administrative support			
Matric plus IT knowledge			
Support and monitor learners in workshops			
Clean up after lesson			

GENERAL SCHOOL ASSISTANTS (GSAS): NO QUALIFICATION REQUIRED			
SPORT AND ENRICHMENT ASSISTANT		HANDYPERSON	
Help teachers during physical education (PE) lessons	No qualification required	Assess school infrastructure and compile maintenance plan	No qualification required
	* Sport/music/art certificate an advantage		* Trade certificate an advantage
Assist with after-school programmes: sport, arts, culture, clubs		Conduct maintenance and minor repairs	
		Maintain gardens	
		Clean classrooms, corridors, ablutions and outdoor spaces	

^k This includes tasks such as registration, distributing and collecting resources, monitoring learners and assisting with group activities.
^l In Phases I to IV, Curriculum Assistants were placed in both primary and high schools. In Phase V, Reading Champions focused on primary schools and Curriculum Assistants focused on high schools – though schools may have enacted this differently in practice.

SCHOOL AND ROLE ALLOCATIONS

Allocation of Assistants to schools and roles is designed to balance reach, equity and education system priorities. Once the budget for a phase is finalised, the DBE allocates posts to provinces on an equitable share basis, in line with post-provisioning norms and taking the number of learners per province into account.⁴³ Provinces allocate the number of posts per district and school, but should:

- meet a prescribed minimum number of posts per school
- allocate a higher proportion of EAs to no-fee schools and schools that serve learners with special education needs (LSEN)
- allocate GSAs to no-fee and LSEN schools only.

EAs are allocated to the different roles – Curriculum Assistants, Reading Champions, eCadres, Care and Support Assistants, Workshop Assistants and Laboratory Assistants – with an emphasis on supporting educators to strengthen learning outcomes. Priorities include:

- **Prioritising foundational skills.** In line with the education sector need of supporting early and foundational learning, in Phase V primary school Curriculum Assistants were merged with the role of Reading Champions, with Reading Champions responsible for supporting both literacy and numeracy;^m and directed to focus on Grades R to 4.⁴⁴ The number of Reading Champions in Phase V more than doubled as compared to Phase IV,ⁿ to 58,691.⁴⁵ This means more than a quarter of all Assistants were deployed to support foundational skills in Phase V – more than any other role.
- **Supporting high-enrolment subjects.** In Grades 10 to 12, EAs should support subjects with more learners, including languages, science, technology, engineering and mathematics.⁴⁶ These include “gateway” subjects that open up further study and career options.



TRAINING

The BEEI’s approach to training is two-pronged, with both centralised and province-specific offerings.

DBE national training managers develop a manual for each Assistant role. DBE-E³ – a directorate in the office of the Director General that provides support on education, entrepreneurship and employment – then uses these manuals to design and deliver online training and wraparound support. This includes general orientation training for all participants as well as role-specific, self-paced modularised content.

Control over training largely resides with provinces, who manage training budget allocations and organise training, which includes additional face-to-face and online opportunities.⁴⁷ While provinces must align with national guidelines on role-specific training, they can decide whether to host in-person or online training and have control over how they allocate training budgets. This gives provincial project teams the flexibility to allocate budgets and plans for training that will most benefit Assistants in their provinces.

Training offerings evolved over time.⁴⁸ In Phase I, there was little time to plan or design training, which mainly orientated Assistants into their roles. Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) could use 1% of their stipend budgets for training, and schools were responsible for on-the-job training. In Phase II, the training budget was increased more than ninefold.⁴⁹ This was to strengthen on-the-job training with a view to improving learning outcomes and to provide Assistants with pathways to employment.

^m Some Reading Champions were also trained to provide curriculum and mathematics support (see Department of Basic Education 2025g, 2025h).
ⁿ There were ~25,000 Reading Champions in Phase IV.

Orientation training

All Assistants are required to complete generic orientation training and orientation training related to their roles. This was offered via printed manuals and the TeacherConnect^o WhatsApp platform in Phase I and moved online from Phase II. It is delivered by DBE-E³ and Assistants can complete it via TeacherConnect’s WhatsApp or an online platform (see page 34). From Phase II, Assistants were also requested to complete self-paced online safety training through Digify Africa and a two-hour online training covering the National School Safety Framework (NSSF)⁵⁰ and the Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools.⁵¹

To complete training, participants need internet connectivity and access to a smartphone or a computer. This makes it difficult to enforce completion, especially in rural areas with poor internet connectivity. In Phase IV, 76.4% of Assistants completed the generic orientation training hosted on TeacherConnect. In Phase V, 53.2% of Assistants partially or fully completed this orientation training.⁵²

National training managers also developed orientation training for principals and teacher mentors on how to support Assistants, which they could access via TeacherConnect. However, because schools do not report directly to the BEEI, it was difficult to get principals and teacher mentors to enrol in this training.⁵³ This meant they did not always understand Assistants’ roles or how they could support them to fulfil these roles.

“It’s not only about imparting skills. We also offer training that can help propel young people forward and sustain themselves after this programme.”

Lala Maje | BEEI Project Manager, Department of Basic Education



^o TeacherConnect is a DBE digital learning and support platform for teachers.

Role-specific training

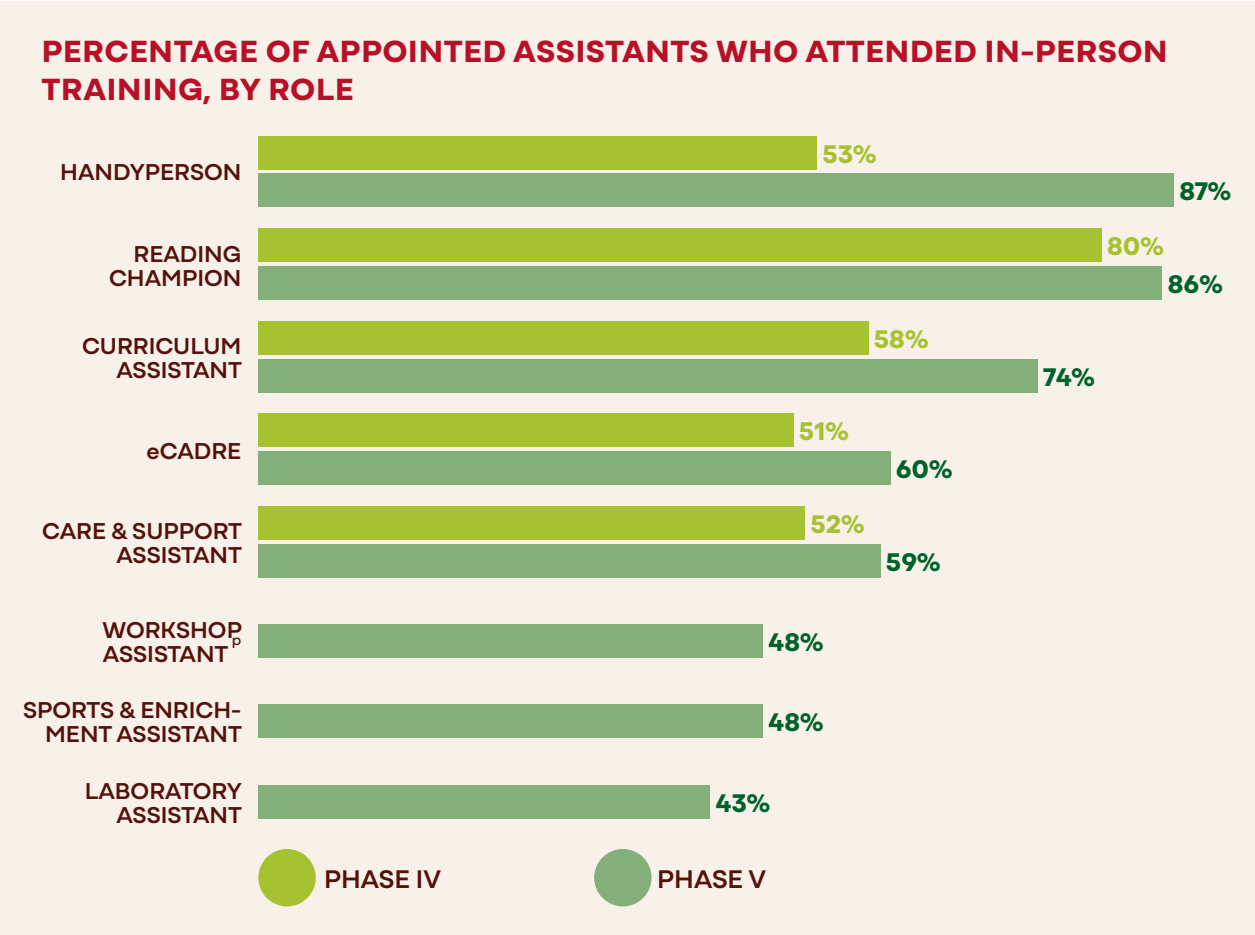
Role-specific training was based on centrally developed manuals and delivered through a cascading train-the-trainer model: provincial training managers train district-level subject advisors, who then train teachers and Assistants. It was offered both online and in person, with content and delivery varying by role, province and implementation phase.

During Covid-19, training was mainly online; in later phases in-person training increased. Each modality has advantages and limitations:

- **In-person training** supports focus and practical skills development and does not require connectivity, but is costly and logistically complex – particularly in large or rural provinces. It also takes longer to organise due to government procurement protocols and sometimes took place near the end of the programme.⁵⁴ It was more successful in urban areas and where BEEI partners could help problem-solve around procurement.
- **Online training** is more scalable and can reach a wider audience, especially in remote areas, but engagement levels are lower and poor internet access can exclude some Assistants.⁵⁵

Figure 5 shows the percentage of Assistants who received in-person training in Phases IV and V. The short planning and implementation period in Phase V made it challenging to reach the majority of youth in some roles. This was particularly challenging for training that required specific equipment or purpose-built facilities. Still, in-person training increased overall between Phases IV and V. In Phase V, 75% of Assistants received in-person training.

FIGURE 5: % of Assistants who attended in-person training, by role (Phases IV and V)⁵⁶



^P Laboratory Assistants and Workshop Assistants were added in Phase V. SEA data for Phase IV was not provided.



PREPARING FOR FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The BEEI is committed to building skills, linking Assistants to opportunities and enabling entrepreneurship.⁵⁷ Examples of training provided include:

- **Handypersons:** Handypersons were consistently prioritised for in-person training because their roles require practical, hands-on skills. Some handypersons also attended Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA)-accredited construction training, which covered skills like painting, plumbing, carpentry, glazing, tiling and basic electrical work.⁵⁸
- **Coaching and refereeing:** Some Sports and Enrichment Assistants had accredited training.⁵⁹
- **Entrepreneurship:** In Phase IV 5,000 Assistants received three days of entrepreneurship training through a partnership with Junior Achievement South Africa (JASA) and the Banking Association South Africa (BASA).⁶⁰
- **Digital literacy:** Through a partnership with the National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa (NEMISA), all BEEI Assistants from Phases II-V were eligible for a self-paced digital literacy course. Assistants who completed all modules and submitted a portfolio of evidence received a certificate from the Media, Information and Communication Technologies (MICT) SETA..⁶¹
- **Webinars:** DBE-E³ offers webinars with topics such as “Your roadmap to success” and “Problem-solving for opportunities” to help Assistants plan for their future, learn about entrepreneurship and find opportunities.

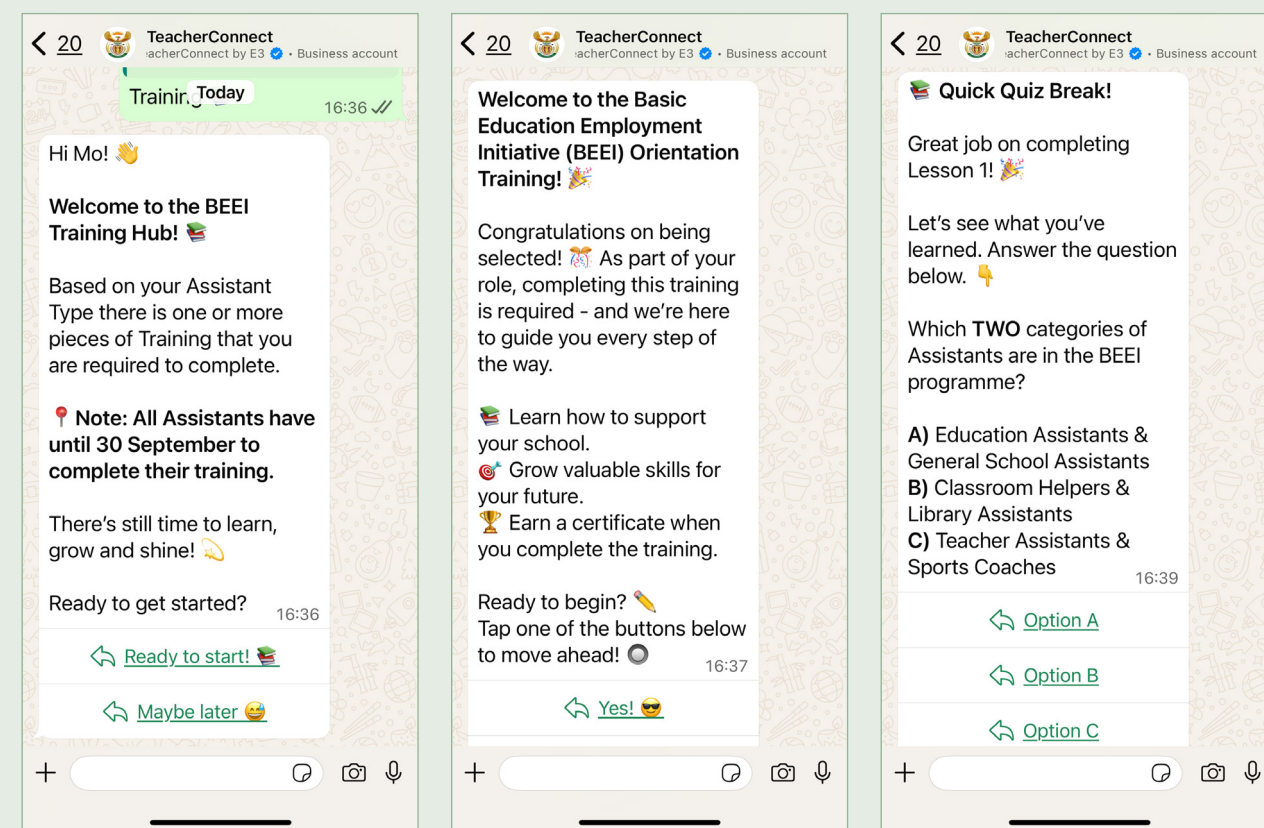
BUILDING FOR SCALE:

HOW DELIBERATE DESIGN CHOICES ENABLED TRAINING AND SUPPORT

While EAs were contractually obligated to complete orientation training, it was difficult to enforce: every design decision needed to increase the odds that a young person would access and complete the training.

DBE-E³, a directorate in the office of the DG that supports the DBE's TeacherConnect programme, designed and hosted the online orientation and role-specific online training for Assistants. It also ran a help desk and a one-stop portal where Assistants could access and download key information; ran surveys; issued certificates of completion; and curated a list of exit opportunities.

Designing training and support that could reach more than 200,000 young people across the country – and encourage them to complete it – required contextual understanding, intentional design, and a careful balance between depth and breadth. With each design decision, the team had to ask, *can we replicate this for everyone?* Individual users' diverse locations, languages, household circumstances and levels of internet access had to be taken into account. Many BEEI youth struggled to access data; some shared a family handset or shared one device with other Assistants.



Key strategies DBE-E³ and the DBE used to build training and support systems that worked at scale and in diverse contexts included:

- **Meet users where they already are.**

Training and communication were designed around the realities of the people the system was built to serve – their access, confidence, time and context. Widely adopted, low-tech platforms including WhatsApp and SMS were used as the primary entry point, lowering access barriers and enabling participation across diverse-resource settings.

- **Design for emotional safety and digital confidence.**

"The science of learning talks about emotional safety being the number one thing that needs to be in place for people to learn," says Crysty Swift, Tools and Insights Lead at DBE-E³. Content was intentionally designed to be supportive and "as delightful as possible" to reduce digital hesitation, Swift says. Language, colour, tone and emojis were selected (and iterated) with the intention of making the learning journey feel friendly rather than intimidating.

- **Combine asynchronous learning with high-touch human support.**

Short learning modules were paired with human support for Assistants, principals, districts and provinces, including live webinars, real-time Q&A and multiple help channels.

- **Plan for disruption and expect the unexpected.**

The system was designed with the assumption that things would go wrong. Planning explicitly for errors – with strong partner collaboration and relationships – was helpful when challenges arose.

- **Build resilient infrastructure through templatisation, automation and adaptability.**

Operating at national scale with a small team required ruthless standardisation, but also flexibility. Widely adopted platforms like WhatsApp were chosen not only because they could scale quickly, but because they allowed continuous updates in response to user behaviour. Templates, automated responses, clear decision trees and minimal manual intervention enabled consistent support at scale, while usage data and patterns informed ongoing adjustments.

- **Use data to learn, adapt, and support – not just to report.**

The system was designed so that reporting served decision-making and support, not just compliance. Real-time data on registration, engagement, and completion enabled the DBE-E³ and BEEI teams, provinces and districts to identify where users were struggling and respond accordingly.

- **Treat training as part of a broader pathway, not a standalone event.**

Training was embedded within a wider journey that included soft skills and work-readiness content, certificates and participation letters, and clear exit opportunities (further study, entrepreneurship, bursaries and partner programmes).

These design choices, iterated over five BEEI phases, offer valuable lessons for other efforts to train and support young people remotely and at scale.



PAYMENT SYSTEMS

Systems to pay Assistants' stipends evolved over time to strengthen accuracy and accountability. Three main channels were used in the course of the programme:

- In Phase I, Assistants were **paid directly by schools**.⁶² This required careful management and was more successful in some provinces than others.⁶³ It brought a risk of financial mismanagement, and placed administrative pressure on schools that were already struggling to manage operational responsibilities.
- From Phase II, provinces could continue direct payment by schools or **pay Assistants directly via the Personnel and Salary System (PERSAL)**, a government system to pay public servants.⁶⁴ PERSAL keeps formal records and reduces the risk of financial mismanagement, but requires overburdened district officials to keep up with new hires and contract terminations; data capturing delays can lead to late payments or overpayment, which is difficult to recoup.⁶⁵
- In Phase V, UIF funding meant new payment structures were required: as a government entity, the UIF cannot transfer its money directly to other government departments. To manage this, the **Industrial Development Corporation (IDC)**⁹ was appointed as a payment intermediary to manage all UIF-funded stipends.⁶⁶ The IDC introduced Kwantu, a digital payment system that was developed for the Social Employment Fund (another public employment programme). **Kwantu** promised to be an end-to-end payment system and includes biometric facial recognition checks, enhancing accountability. However, it required time, trust, patience, effort, and resources for training and support to implement a new system, and some districts and schools struggled to adopt it.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

The DBE and provincial education departments operate under tight budgets and cannot fund activities that are not related to teaching and learning. Working with implementing partners with expertise and resources to support key project functions has strengthened implementation. For example, Harambee is funded by the National Treasury to manage the recruitment process. In the fifth phase, the IDC introduced Kwantu to oversee payment of UIF-funded stipends. The BEEI has also worked closely with partners in the education sector who advised on programme structure, and institutions from a range of sectors have supported training. "Collaboration" on page 42 provides more detail on partnerships.

⁹ The IDC is a state-owned development finance institution overseen by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC).



WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO WORK AT SCALE?

In 2020, in a period of high uncertainty, the DBE rolled out an ambitious programme with minimal lead time. Over five phases, the DBE and its collaborating partners have grappled with many complexities and shifting goalposts. "Making it happen" under high pressure and challenging time frames has demanded cooperation, adaptability, resilience and sacrifice.

Like any programme built quickly at scale, it has been complex and imperfect, but it has made its mark: to date the BEEI has managed to create nearly 1,3 million jobs in schools, with indications of positive developments and systemic spinoffs. It is the largest youth employment programme that has ever been run in South Africa.

This section explores what the BEEI can teach us about scale: What does it take to run massive programmes – to get them off the ground quickly and to strengthen them over time? And how might these insights strengthen the BEEI in the future and inform other efforts to tackle pressing social problems at scale? These insights are based on what worked well in the BEEI, and what was challenging or could be strengthened.



POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND URGENCY

The BEEI’s rapid start was enabled by political commitment, urgency of purpose and pragmatic design choices. It had a clear and compelling problem statement – youth unemployment and Covid-19-related learning losses – that 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.

HUMAN CAPACITY

More than 90% of the BEEI budget was allocated to Assistants’ stipends. This meant limited resources for project management and administration – including the human capacity needed to run a large, ambitious and complex programme.

Because the BEEI was introduced as a short-term project and has not been institutionalised, it did not have dedicated structures or permanent staff: **national and provincial staff are seconded to the BEEI in addition to their existing full-time jobs.**⁶⁷ The project had to find innovative ways of mobilising capacity and strengthening collaboration to deliver. These included:

• Breaking down silos and increasing collaboration within the DBE

Delivering the programme within extremely tight timeframes required new ways of working. The national project team includes people from different directorates, including training, HR and finance, who could respond quickly to issues. For example, when reports surfaced in Phase I that a principal paid Assistants half of their stipends and pocketed the balance, a Labour Relations Manager was quickly deployed to address the issue. This also bolstered training capacity: in some districts the Library and Information Services (LIS) unit partnered with subject advisors for languages to improve Reading Champions training delivery. This increased coordination shows the potential to transform longstanding divisions in ways that enable responsiveness and improve delivery.

• Using existing delivery platforms

The BEEI’s cascading management structure allows it to draw on knowledge, experience and capacity throughout the system: it can lean on existing systems at provincial, district, circuit and school levels rather than creating new systems; and can mobilise project leads and administrative support at all levels to support implementation (see Figure 6).

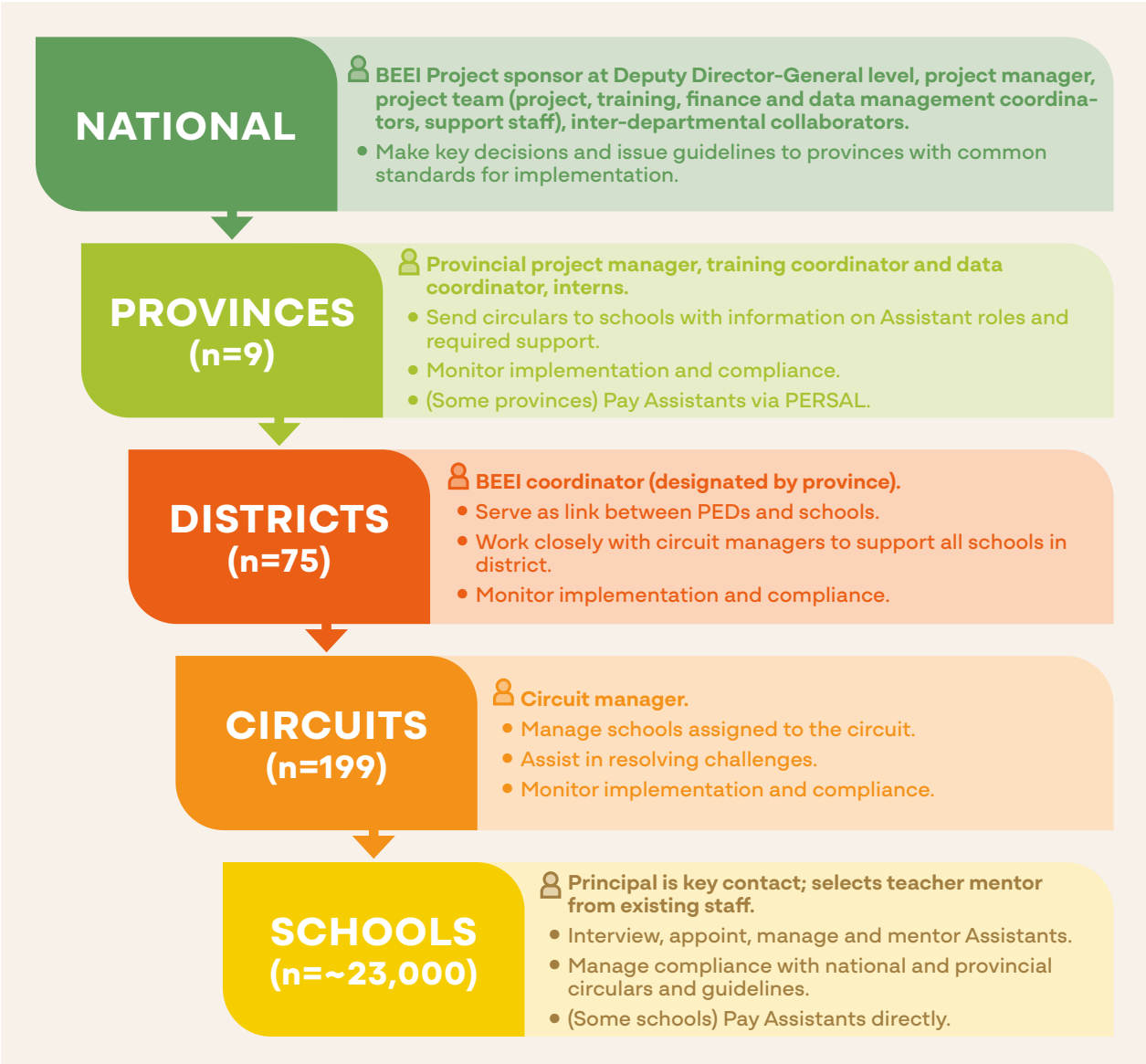
• Mobilising school-based actors to support the programme

Ultimately, school principals are responsible for implementing and following programme guidelines. Since it is not possible for DBE staff, provinces or districts to monitor implementation at every school, strategies to build local buy-in are key. Two examples of such strategies – focus schools and support for teacher mentors – are profiled on page 40.

These strategies are promising when there is strong capacity and sufficient funding at province, district, circuit and school levels. However, where capacity and resources are limited, this threatens implementation. At all levels, officials have had to take on BEEI coordination in addition to existing duties. Graduate interns on short-term contracts have helped alleviate administrative pressures at national, provincial and district levels,⁶⁸ but they have limited knowledge and experience of government processes and systems and can only take on limited responsibility. The level of pressure on programme staff and partners has proven unsustainable, especially in Phase V with the introduction of a new payments system. It came at a cost to their ability to deliver on their other professional responsibilities and, at times, to their own well-being.

In addition to cross-cutting and cascading part-time secondments, large-scale programmes like the BEEI would benefit from dedicated programme management capacity to improve programme implementation and sustainability.

FIGURE 6: Cascading management structure: from national to school level



“This role is an addition to everything that is still expected of you, it’s extra responsibility. At 1am you see that someone was working, there’s an e-mail coming. It’s just amazing how officials take this programme and want to see it succeed and run with it, and at the speed and dedication that they do.”

Inati Bindiza | National Training Coordinator, Department of Basic Education

MOBILISING CAPACITY AND SUPPORT AT SCHOOL LEVEL

Active involvement at a school level is key to the BEEI: for Assistants to make an impact and gain on-the-job skills, they must be effectively managed and mentored. Two strategies the BEEI used to drive school-level engagement and ownership – focus schools and teacher mentor engagement – are profiled below.

FOCUS SCHOOLS: using peer networks to bolster capacity

The Western Cape identified schools in each area that successfully took up the programme and designated them as “focus schools” that can support principals at other schools nearby.

As Western Cape project manager Alison February explains: “I know the schools we can lean on for assistance. If you don’t know what to do, you don’t have to come to me, you can go to the focus school – [they] will be able to help.” Focus schools received extra training on new programme elements.

February notes that the “focus school” designation has motivated principals. “They want to be a focus school, so I get schools working harder to get that accolade.” It is also building informal communities of practice: “Like one principal said, it gives them a chance to collaborate not just on the project – getting together, they speak about other things.”

This additional layer of support alleviates pressure on provincial and district officials, and motivates principals to improve their BEEI programmes to achieve “focus school” status.

TEACHER MENTORS: building school-level engagement

Each school is expected to designate a “teacher mentor” to support Assistants and help them adapt to a professional environment. In practice, this is an extra responsibility for over-burdened teachers.

“Teacher mentor participation has been the hardest thing to build over the phases,” says Thulile Seleka, Technical Assistant at the NECT, which partnered with the DBE on the Reading Champion (RC) programme.

In Phase V, largely through the RC programme, the BEEI deployed several strategies to improve teacher mentor engagement. District officials began offering a two-hour orientation session, which covered the goals of the RC programme, how teachers can support Assistants to deliver the programme, and advice for working with youth and harnessing their energy. Teacher mentors were also invited to attend RC training and use the Reading Champions chatbot (see page 43).

These strategies began to pay off: in Phase V, 8,000 teacher mentors registered on the chatbot and joined district-based teacher mentor WhatsApp groups, where they submitted monthly reports and an online assessment. “Phase V is the first time we had this number of teacher mentors,” says Seleka. “But it’s also because every year [there’s] some level of reinforcement – every year the energy just grows and grows.” This also reflects the fact that building widespread buy-in for new systems takes time.

CONSULTATION, CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

To ensure all levels of the education system work well together, consultation with all key stakeholders and at all levels – national, provincial, district, circuit and school – is key. By and large, the BEEI leaned on existing committees and management structures (see Figure 7) to share information, listen and mobilise support for the programme.

Vertical consultation

When new ideas or changes in policy are on the table:

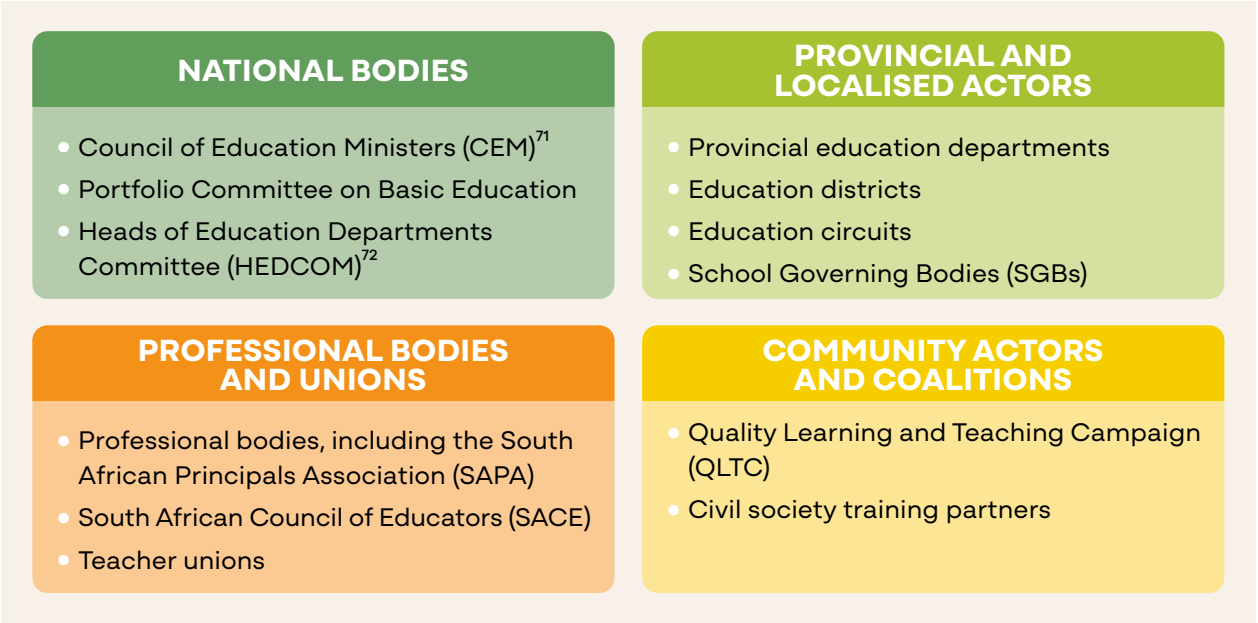
- Through the Minister, the Project Team presents to the Council of Education Ministers (CEM) and District Directors.
- Through the Director-General, the national project team meets with provincial Heads of Department for consultation, as well as with teachers’ unions, School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and professional bodies like the South African Principals Association (SAPA).
- The project team also consults each province one-on-one, where meetings are open to officials at all levels, including schools; and uses other established committees for consultation.⁶⁹

This multi-layered consultation aims to ensure that policy experts with a bird’s-eye view of the programme also understand how the programme is landing at schools – and that both shape decisions. It requires significant coordination and planning, and respect for each stakeholder’s expertise, perspective and experience.

Broad consultation (with key education stakeholders)

The education system in South Africa is complex, with multiple actors whose support is necessary to roll out a programme like the BEEI. Figure 7 outlines stakeholders operating within the education sector who were consulted throughout planning and implementation.

FIGURE 7: Key education sector stakeholders⁷⁰



Consultation strategies were varied, and included monthly performance reports submitted to key stakeholders,⁷³ quarterly presentations to the five major unions to provide updates and address questions, and a provincial roadshow with key partners at the start of Phase V.

Aligning with the DBE’s Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) was also helpful. The campaign works with all stakeholders that interact with schools – business leaders, politicians, political parties, churches, tribal offices, unions and the South African Local Government Association – to mobilise individuals, organisations and communities to work together to improve education in South Africa.⁷⁴ The BEEI used existing campaign subcommittees in each province to advocate for the programme, understand actual implementation practices and assist when communities had disputes.

These relationships and engagements helped cascade the programme rapidly from national to local level. Because leaders from teacher unions, communities, and member bodies like SAPA supported and advocated for the BEEI, their members largely responded positively and supported implementation.

Feedback loops

From Phase I, the programme conducted on-site monitoring, monthly email surveys (to Assistants and principals) and telephonic surveys to detect risks and resolve bottlenecks. It also ran webinars to offer support, and hosted a close-out meeting for each province to invite input on what went wrong, what could be improved and what was done well.

COLLABORATION

The DBE has implemented the BEEI in a constrained environment: no dedicated staff, limited budget for programme management, insufficient planning time, and red tape associated with procurement and formalising partnerships through Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). Partnerships enabled the DBE to expand capacity; improve quality; navigate supply chain delays; and integrate digital systems to increase efficiency, accuracy and reach. Major partners and the contributions they have made to the BEEI are summarised in Table 2 and some are further detailed in the snapshots throughout this report. Many smaller-scale partnerships supported training across various Assistant roles, including the Mvula Trust, NEMISA, Microsoft, Intel, merSETA,[†] Digify Africa, MTN, Anglo American, the University of Johannesburg, JASA and BASA.

TABLE 2: BEEI major partners and roles

Partner	Description	Role
Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator	Social enterprise; funded by Jobs Fund to support PYEI	Run recruitment via SA Youth platform
National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT)	Public-private partnership; supports national & provincial governments to implement education priorities	Supports Reading Champion programme: design, implementation, contracting civil society training partners
Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) (Phase V only)	Part of DEL; provides short-term relief to qualifying workers who are unemployed or unable to work	Funds majority of project
Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) (Phase V only)	State-owned development finance institution overseen by DTIC	Provides and maintains Kwantu payment system; Administers payment to UIF-funded Assistants

[†] Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority



THE NECT AND NGO PARTNERS:
HOW COLLABORATION SUPPORTED THE
READING CHAMPION PROGRAMME

When the BEEI was launched, the DBE turned to the NECT for help training Reading Champions (RCs). As an established DBE partner with an existing MOU and a mandate to coordinate education sector collaboration, the NECT could quickly contract literacy nonprofits to provide training, design, implementation and coordination support, avoiding delays associated with government procurement.

Lindiwe Madumo, the DBE’s RC training manager, says the NECT’s ability to bring partners on board quickly secured the capacity and expertise needed to train RCs: “Other literacy partners bring their specialties. As the department, we don’t have that strength. We need partners to be able to assist us.”

RCs attend a three-day in-person or online training workshop that covers role orientation, implementing key reading strategies, supporting school libraries, resource management, how to establish reading clubs and corners, and how to use WhatsApp and the RC chatbot for support. **Literacy nonprofits and the DBE’s Library and Information Services (LIS) unit worked together to develop the initial training curriculum, which has been refined each phase; and to conduct training at provincial and district levels, which is led by LIS with nonprofit support. In Phase V, 86% of RCs received in-person training.**⁷⁵

After training, a coordinated effort from the DBE, the NECT and eight nonprofit partners⁷⁶ ensured that RCs had access to sector experts who can answer questions.⁷⁷ In every school district, a nonprofit partner was assigned to manage WhatsApp groups for RCs and teacher mentors, which share centrally-planned instructions and activities and offer personalised support. “If they don’t understand anything, then they can come back to the groups, and we can discuss things,” says Gabogaisane Sikhipa, Programmes Operations Manager at Room to Read, one of the nonprofit partners.

With sign-up rates of 70-80% in earlier phases, and 97% of trained participants by Phase V,⁷⁸ the WhatsApp groups enabled ongoing engagement and communication of relevant information without significant cost implications. “When you’re working with over 50,000 Reading Champions across the country and you want them to be doing what they need to do in the short period that we’ve got, platforms that drive engagement are critical,” says Thulile Seleka, Technical Assistant at the NECT.

RCs also have access to the RC chatbot. Developed through a collaboration between the NECT and Funda Wandé, another one of the nonprofit partners, it offers access to the manual and other resources. RCs complete a baseline report and endline assessment on the chatbot and submit weekly reports. Seleka says that this data informs programme planning: “We receive chatbot back-end data twice a week, and that helps inform next steps for the following week. Some of the [WhatsApp] messages are drawn from the issues that are highlighted by the data.”

Reading Champions appreciated for the training and support. Of 13,630 RCs surveyed in Phase V, 97% said they enjoyed their role and 92% said their experience as an RC met their expectations.⁷⁹ Seleka attributes these achievements to the united efforts of the DBE, NECT, nonprofit partners and schools. “It’s hard to pull something like this together and to get it off the ground. I’m really proud to have watched people overcome a system for a common goal. It’s the combined energy that makes it work.”

Partnerships to navigate procurement constraints

Like all government-funded programmes, the BEEI requires strict compliance with auditor-general requirements. These regulations have made it difficult to procure training: entering into an MOU or going through a tender process can take months. BEEI programme staff have tried to navigate this in four main ways:

- **Working with another partner who has an existing MOU with the DBE.** Existing MOUs allowed the DBE to leverage various partnerships to support training. For example, an existing Microsoft partnership was tapped to support eCadres training; Junior Achievement South Africa (JASA) offered their entrepreneurship training through DBE-E³; and the NECT contracted and managed literacy nonprofits to train and support Reading Champions.
- **Building a list of pre-approved service providers.** At the end of Phase IV, some provinces asked prospective service providers to go through the procurement process before Phase V launched so they could be contracted to train quickly at its outset. However, in Phase V the training budget was held by the DBE and not PEDs (as in previous phases). Procurement had to adhere to national requirements, and these provincial lists could not be used.
- **Securing third party funding for a training service provider.** Appointing a training service provider is more complex and lengthy than securing a venue, catering or transport for training. In some instances, philanthropy and the private sector funded trainers while provinces covered venue, catering and transport, which sped up the process.⁸⁰
- **Using internal service providers.** Using service providers who were already approved by the DBE for internal training helped avoid lengthy tendering or quotation processes.⁸¹

While these approaches enabled training to some degree, some Assistants only received role-specific training late in the phase, and were not able to realise their potential impact in their roles.⁸² Some did not receive training at all.⁸³ More planning and lead time would allow a more effective training rollout.

The challenge of “multiple logics”

The BEEI has shown how powerful strong partnerships can be – but managing these relationships requires deliberate coordination, trust, cooperation, shared purpose, and clear delineation of roles and responsibilities. Every department or organisation has its own institutional systems, policies and processes, and ways of doing things. When institutions that have not previously worked together have to collaborate, these organisational “logics” can clash, especially if roles and responsibilities are not clear. While this is true across sectors, it is heightened in public partnerships given government institutions’ strict operating terms and stringent protocols.

This friction can affect programme delivery. For example, the DBE and the UIF had never partnered before the UIF was appointed to fund Phase V. There were no precedents, templates or protocols to turn to, and expectations and compliance requirements were not always aligned. It took more than a year to negotiate and finalise the funding agreement, which led to a one-year gap between Phases IV and V. Challenges in the partnership also led to delays paying Assistants, which were disruptive to schools and negatively affected Assistants’ experience of the BEEI.



SIMPLICITY AND AUTOMATION

Scale inevitably presents deep complexity, and requires as much clarity and simplification as possible: standardisation, clarity of roles, and replicable systems that can function across provinces and institutions are needed. As illustrated in the snapshots throughout the report, simple, scalable systems for recruitment, training and support that can handle high volumes without manual workarounds have aided the BEEI.

BALANCING CENTRAL CONTROL AND LOCAL AUTONOMY

Scale always entails a trade-off between implementation fidelity and reach. Provinces, districts and individual schools are diverse. Centralising all decisions and maintaining tight controls would miss an opportunity for local actors to own the programme and adapt it to their respective contexts.

Working at scale also ultimately means accepting a degree of imperfection: the goal is not to make sure all schools implement the programme perfectly, but to help more schools to implement the programme better. While the DBE provides an implementation framework, provinces are allowed to deviate with Head of Department approval and DBE concurrence, allowing the programme to adapt to local terrains and contexts.

At the same time, certain programme criteria need to be held centrally and standardised. The BEEI must comply with government policies on fair and transparent recruitment, financial management, monitoring and reporting. Stipend payment must adhere to National Treasury regulations around accuracy, reconciliation and reporting, and UIF contracting requirements introduced further rigidity in Phase V.

The BEEI Implementation Framework, which was revised for each phase, provides clear policy and governance frameworks that define mandates, roles and responsibilities, and decision rights at each level of government and for implementing partners. Table 3 (see page 46) shows how the BEEI has worked to maintain consistency and compliance while allowing for flexibility and local adaptation.

TABLE 3: 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.⁸⁴	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,⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶
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;⁸⁷ 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.

INTEGRATED DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

A well-managed integrated data management system provides a centralised location for all programme data and informs implementation, oversight and planning. For the BEEI, accurate, consolidated data on recruitment, appointments, attendance, performance, training and payment would enable national, provincial, and district staff to monitor school data in (almost) real time and respond swiftly to concerns. It would help streamline reporting and data sharing and simplify auditing at the end of a phase.

Within the BEEI, a variety of data management systems have been developed and used. Some systems developed for a particular function demonstrate the potential benefits of strong data systems. For example, the SA Youth recruitment platform could reach youth in all corners of the country quickly, standardised eligibility criteria, and enabled automated candidate ranking and shortlisting at scale.

Although the Kwantu payment system’s rollout was challenging, it enabled unprecedented transparency: 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. These platforms were beginning to speak to each other: Harambee shared the list of eligible candidates with Kwantu to ensure that only youth who were appointed through appropriate channels were paid. Integration with the Department of Home Affairs to verify ID numbers still needs to improve.

However, the BEEI has not been able to implement a comprehensive data management system that is integrated across functions and used by all stakeholders for the programme’s duration. In Phase II, an external service provider (Bhelela Technologies) developed a national data management system (NDMS), which was used by eight provinces in Phase II⁸⁸ and all nine provinces in Phase III. In provinces that committed to learning and using the system, data quality and reliability improved. However, the service provider could not carry the costs into a further phase, and the DBE did not have sufficient budget to maintain the system. As a result, in Phase IV individual provinces were responsible for managing data capturing and reporting and were not provided with any system, which led to inconsistencies in data quality and availability.

The North West and Western Cape provinces developed their own data management systems and made them available to other provinces.⁸⁹ While there was some uptake, adoption was limited.⁹⁰

Ideally, an integrated data management system (which may include multiple interoperable platforms that speak to one another) should serve as the “single source of truth” for key figures, such as youth appointed (with verified ID numbers); attendance; training participation; payment and termination; and should be used by all key actors for planning, decision-making, delivery, monitoring and reporting.

“Kwantu has helped provinces that did not have systems for the past four years make the project transparent in terms of who is in that school. It has really also [helped] bring that transparency of information. I don’t have to phone the province and ask them to provide information, with a click of the button, the President can access the data.”

Lala Maje | BEEI Project Manager, Department of Basic Education

NEW DATA SYSTEMS:

HOW ONE PROVINCE BUILT “A SYSTEM THAT TELLS THE STORY”

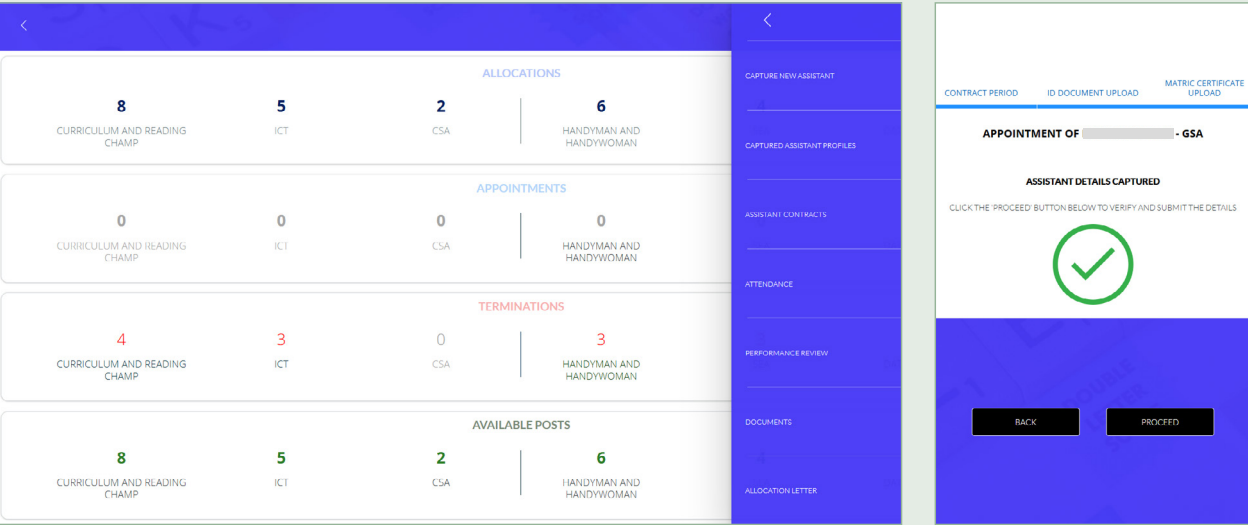
As project manager for the BEEI in the Western Cape, Allison February initially struggled to manage disparate data systems. She wanted “a system that tells the story of each school: if I go to an assistant’s name, it must tell me the training that she has done, her days absent. It must give me the whole picture – I mustn’t still [have to] phone the school.”

The provincial BEEI team developed an Excel-based online system, also available in an offline app, to make this possible. Each school has a unique user ID linked to its data. The system enables the Western Cape provincial team, district coordinators and schools to manage recruitment, attendance, payroll,⁹¹ performance reviews and financial reconciliations through a single portal.

Centralising all information has streamlined reporting and improved responsiveness to audit queries. “If an auditor wants to see an ID, I don’t have to run to the school like we did in the past – I can share it via the system,” says February.

It has also enabled direct communication and information-sharing with all schools. February can message principals directly, and a library stores key documents, emails, instructional videos and PowerPoints. “If a school gets a new secretary and the secretary doesn’t know how to upload a new applicant onto the system, there’s a PowerPoint or video for that,” says February.

Unlike other provinces, the Western Cape has a dedicated BEEI team,⁹² and internet connectivity is better in the Western Cape than many other provinces. Other provinces may need more capacity and support to adopt an integrated data management system. Still, the Western Cape case demonstrates the benefits that such a system can bring.



SHIFTS AT SCALE: PROMISING DEVELOPMENTS

Research and evaluation on the BEEI and its outcomes have been limited. The BEEI, like most public employment programmes, allocated the majority of its budget to stipends: it sought to maximise the flow of funds to unemployed young people and their households. **Minimal funding was allocated to research and evaluation, and time frames made it hard to plan for evaluation or commission research.**

Nevertheless, interview participants and DBE and partner reports point to a number of positive shifts the BEEI has helped to drive. These include changes in schools, for young people, and in the employment landscape. This section touches briefly on these encouraging developments. Recommendations for further research are included in the recommendations section.

“It definitely helps the teacher to plan a school week better. It helps in terms of learner discipline. It provides the teacher with more time to focus on learners who are struggling to catch up. Basically, [having EAs and Reading Champions] helps with the workload that the teacher has on a day-to-day basis.”

Natasha van Schalkwyk | BEEI Provincial Project Manager, Gauteng Department of Education (Phase V)

CHANGES IN SCHOOLS

More support for teachers

Positive educator well-being and time spent teaching are both associated with improved learner outcomes.⁹³ Conversely, heavy administrative loads and time spent on non-teaching tasks (such as classroom set-up, attendance, and distributing and collecting learning resources) can detract from teaching and learning and negatively impact educator well-being.

Survey⁹⁴ data shows that EAs have brought much-needed support to teachers: in a survey of 9,788 school management team (SMT) members at the end of Phase I, 96% of respondents agreed that EAs have helped reduce educators' workloads.⁹⁵

Alleviated administrative pressure

As highlighted by interview participants, placing EAs in schools that did not have designated administrative staff eased pressure on principals and educators to manage day-to-day administrative matters. This opened up time for principals and SMT members to focus on leadership and educator development – important activities that are often backgrounded due to administrative pressures.⁹⁶

Improved school environment

A safe, well-maintained physical environment helps facilitate more productive learning⁹⁷ – but many schools do not have caretakers or maintenance staff. Handypersons have helped schools improve maintenance and infrastructure and create more welcoming, safer environments.⁹⁸



“I fell in love with teaching. I would love to further my studies in education.”

Education Assistant | Phase III

A NOTE ON LEARNING OUTCOMES

Improving learning outcomes is a major goal of the BEEI. Research from other contexts shows that practices and shifts the BEEI enabled – like more time on task in the classroom, improved educator well-being and lower child-to-adult ratios – can improve learning outcomes.⁹⁹

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 Phase I, 95.5% of SMT members surveyed agreed that learners have benefitted from EAs' presence.¹⁰⁰ However, the survey focused on SMT members' subjective experiences, and the question was about benefit overall (not limited to learning outcomes).

Some smaller-scale studies have shown that placing South African youth in classrooms can improve learning outcomes. For example, in Limpopo, nonprofit Funda Wandé ran a randomised controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate the impact of a foundation-phase literacy and numeracy programme. All treatment schools received learning and teaching support materials (LTSM), and some also trained YES-funded Teacher Assistants (TAs) to help deliver the programme.

In schools with TAs, children made significantly greater progress in both literacy and numeracy, equivalent to approximately a year and a quarter of additional learning¹⁰¹ – and in literacy, children made greater improvements than in any other rigorously evaluated intervention in the last decade.¹⁰² While this intervention included materials and intensive (and expensive) training and mentorship for both teachers and TAs, it demonstrates the impact youth can make on learning outcomes when well-supported.

A project to address letter sound knowledge has also shown promising results. Poor letter sound knowledge is a major challenge in early literacy development: 50% of Grade 1s complete the year without being able to identify letter sounds in their home language, which limits their ability to master other literacy skills as they progress through the grades.¹⁰³ **An exploratory study was conducted in 2023 that involved BEEI youth trained to implement a small-group, play-based, mother-tongue basic literacy intervention called Zazi iZandi for learners in grades R and 1 in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo.¹⁰⁴ Researchers found that the short six-week intervention significantly increased the proportion of learners that met the DBE benchmark letter knowledge of 40 letters per minute at the end of Grade 1, from 29 % to 42%.**

In 2025, the intervention was scaled across the Nelson Mandela Bay district in the Eastern Cape, where the district partnered with local nonprofit Masinyusane to train and mentor BEEI EAs working in Grade R, 1 and 2 classrooms at 126 schools. 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. The intervention was relatively low-cost, with training, materials and mentoring costing about R1,570 per EA or R37 per learner.

Further research on whether, how and under what conditions EAs contribute to improved learning outcomes is needed and should be supported by philanthropy and academic partners (see recommendations).

INCREASING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND WORK READINESS

Job creation

By the end of Phase V, the BEEI had created more than 1,28 million work opportunities for unemployed South African youth. Figure 8 shows the distribution of opportunities across provinces and phases.

“The BEEI has created the ability to provide job opportunities and upskill young people. It’s being able to participate in the economy, giving them that opportunity in a workplace setup on how to prepare for big things, a worldview or of what is available for them as young people and how to carve their way forward.”

Natasha van Schalkwyk | BEEI Provincial Project Manager, Gauteng Department of Education (Phase V)



FIGURE 8: Employment opportunities created per province, Phases I to V

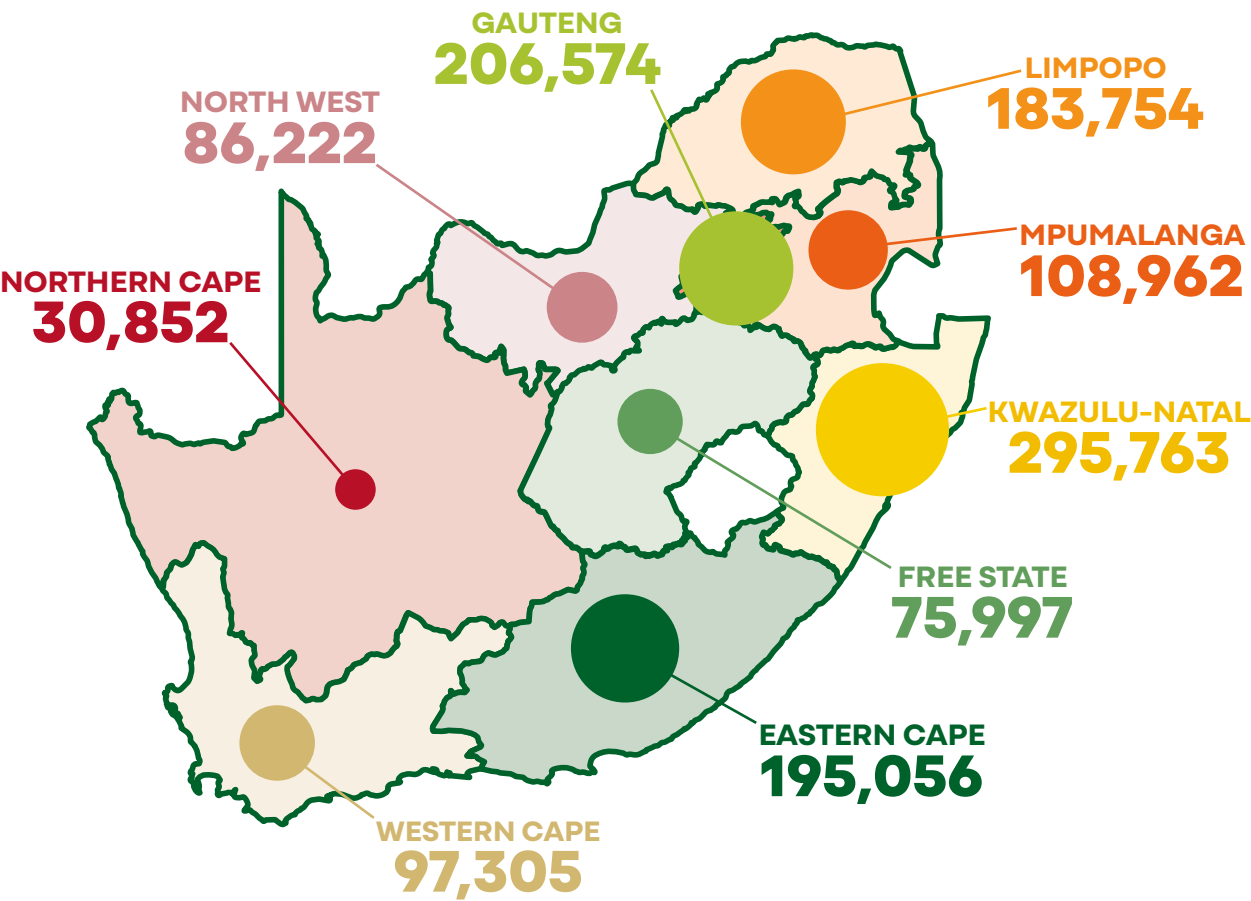


TABLE 4: BEEI employment opportunities created by phase and province¹⁰⁵

PROVINCE	Phase I	Phase II	Phase III	Phase IV	Phase V	TOTAL
EC	57,253	39,286	36,023	34,741	27,753	195,056
FS	19,226	15,309	14,839	15,230	11,393	75,997
GP	45,633	48,988	39,964	36,600	35,389	206,574
KZN	73,953	62,229	57,205	57,687	44,689	295,763
LP	49,362	38,128	37,051	32,574	26,639	183,754
MP	26,108	24,087	21,577	19,953	17,237	108,962
NC	6,894	6,487	6,200	6,494	4,777	30,852
NW	21,836	19,196	16,732	14,905	13,553	86,222
WC	18,231	19,860	19,131	22,158	17,925	97,305
TOTAL	318,496	273,570	248,722	240,342	199,412 ¹⁰⁶	1,280,599

FIGURE 9: Number of applicants, appointments and gender breakdown, Phases I-V¹⁰⁸

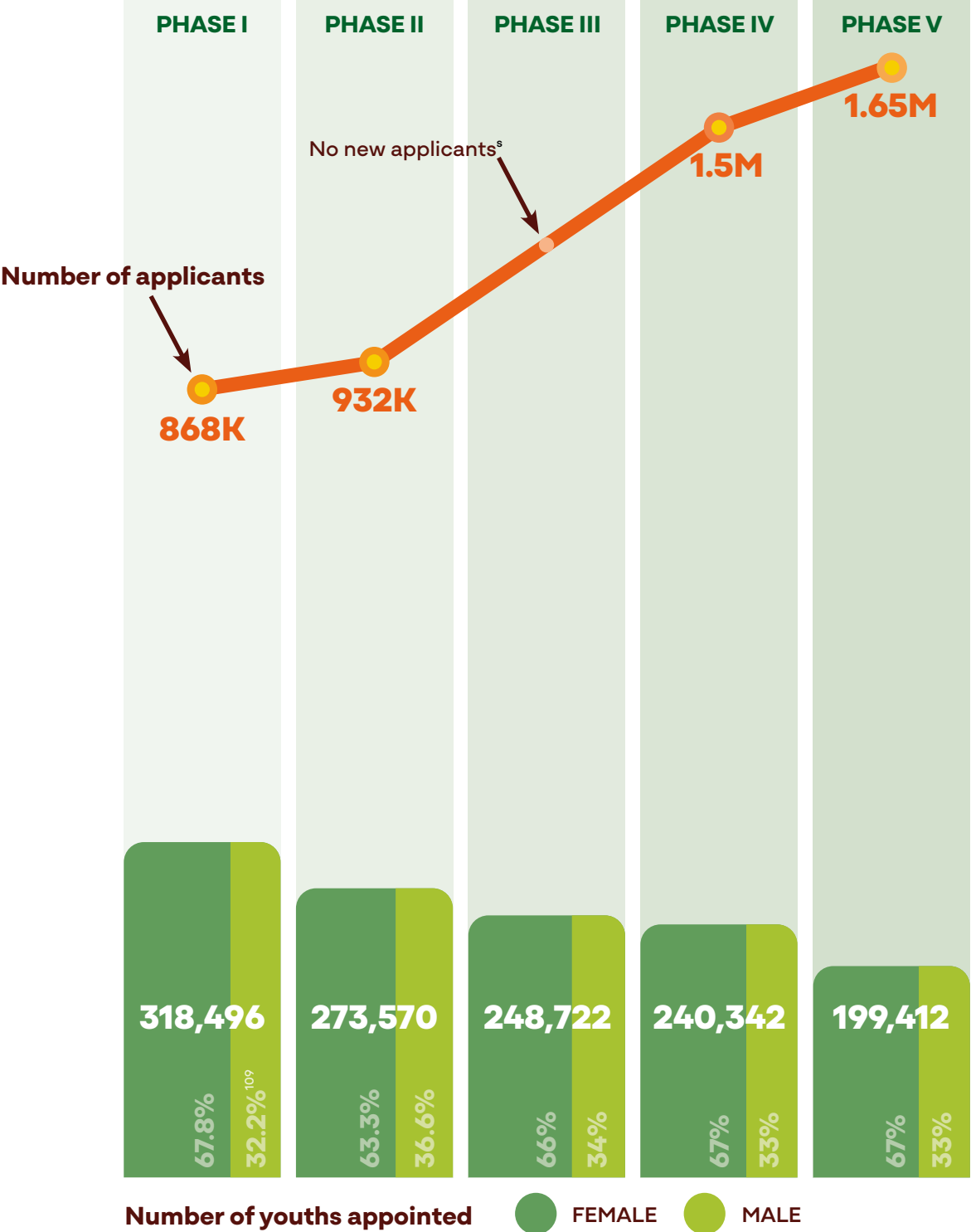


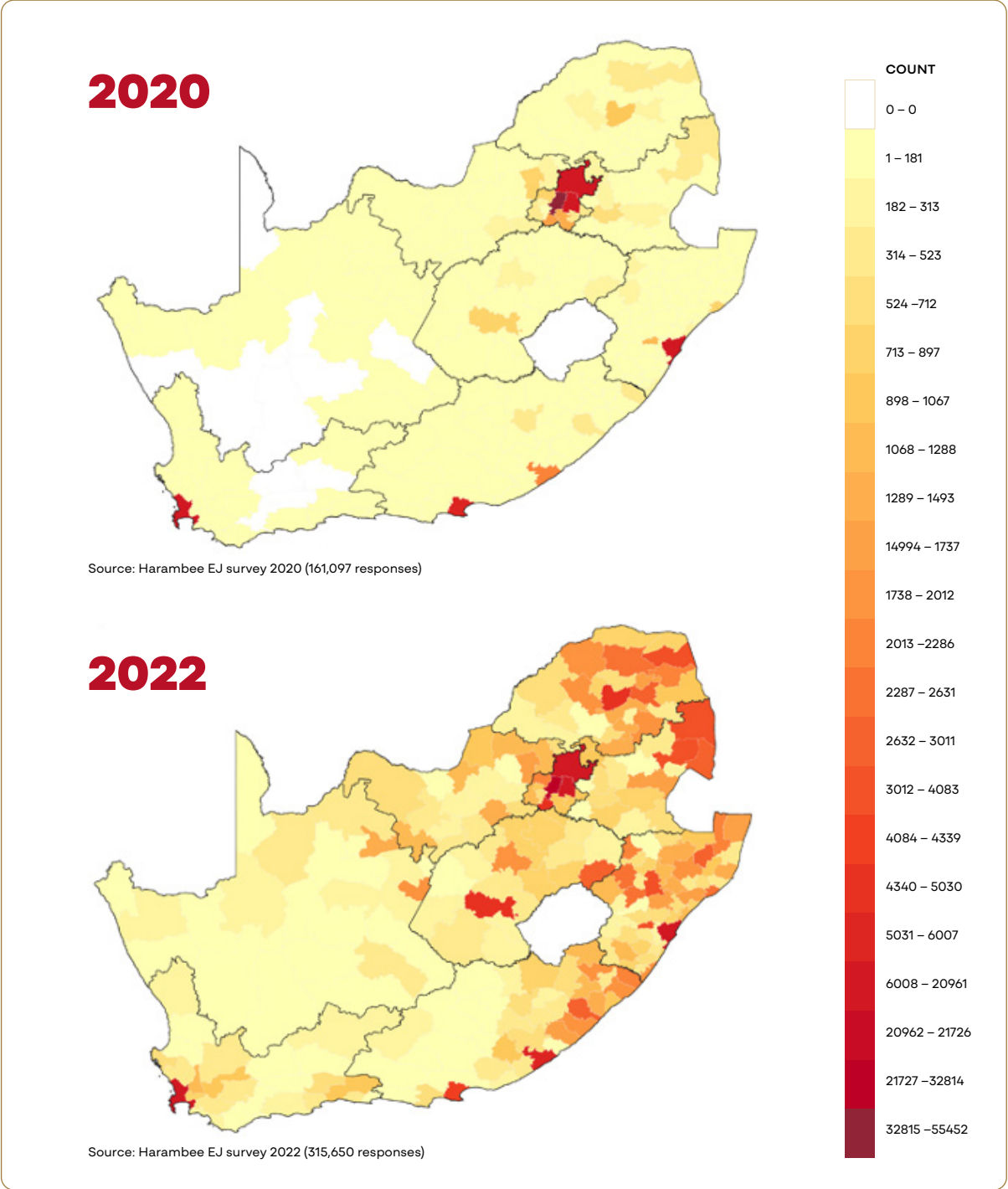
Figure 9 provides further details on Assistant applications and appointments over the five phases. The high number of applications highlights the country’s youth unemployment crisis, and young people’s appetite to participate. The increased number of applications with each phase also demonstrates growing awareness of the BEEI and the success of recruitment campaigns. **In Phase V, more than one in four unemployed young people in South Africa applied for the programme.**¹⁰⁷

^s Assistants who were employed in the second phase were reappointed for Phase III.

More equitable distribution of opportunities

Because schools are in every community in South Africa, the BEEI received more applications from rural and poor areas,¹¹⁰ and from women, than usually seen in job-seeking.¹¹¹ **It also brought more jobs to these demographic groups, and to “job deserts” where opportunities for young people are otherwise scarce,** as shown in Figure 10, which shows youth employment density per municipality before (above) and after (below) the BEEI was launched.

FIGURE 10: Youth employment density before and after the BEEI¹¹²



The BEEI also achieved its goal of appointing female applicants to 65% of posts in four phases. This is significant in a country where female youth (15-34 years) are underrepresented in employment.¹¹³



Workplace skills

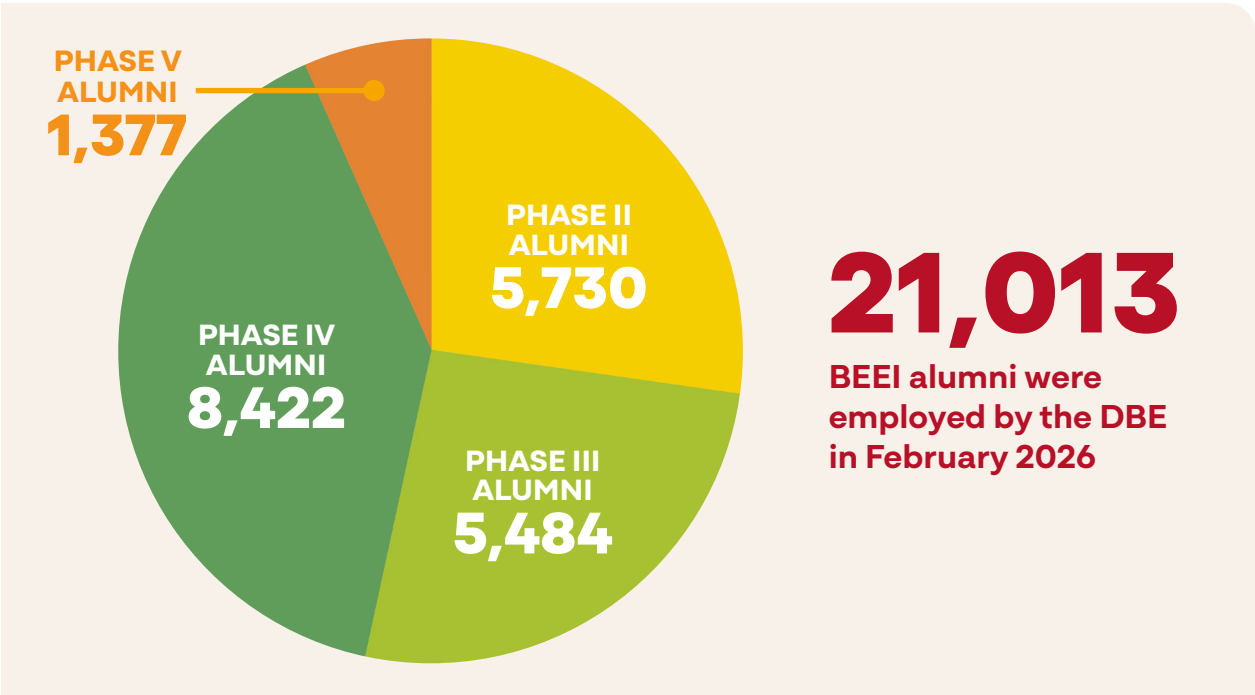
For most participants, the BEEI was their first exposure to a professional environment. The programme has given hundreds of thousands of youth a chance to grow their worldview and develop workplace skills that they can carry with them into future opportunities.

Youth report that they have benefited: for example, in a follow-up survey of 5,000 Phase I Assistants, respondents reported gaining key workplace skills including administration, communication, teaching, interpersonal skills, computer skills and teamwork that will support them in future employment.¹¹⁴

“Through this programme I got to experience the feeling of being in a working environment. Because I am a shy person, working with different people of different ages helped me boost my confidence. It also gave me the chance to prove to myself that I can work well in a group.”

Education Assistant | Phase III

FIGURE 11: BEEI alumni (Phases II to V) employed by DBE as of February 2026



Post-programme employment in the education sector

Although the BEEI does not track alumni, an August 2022 analysis of PERSAL data showed that at least 8,422 former BEEI Assistants¹¹⁵ were employed by the Department of Basic Education.[†] Seventy percent worked as teachers. By February 2026 this had grown: **a total of 21,013 former Assistants worked for the Department, 80% of whom worked as teachers** (see Figure 11).¹¹⁶

More research is needed on BEEI Assistants’ trajectories after the programme, which could be commissioned in partnership with Harambee and the SA Youth platform.

Growing the teacher pipeline

While developing a pipeline of teachers was not initially an explicit programme goal, many EAs have discovered a love for teaching and decided to pursue a teaching qualification.¹¹⁷ South Africa has a shortage of teachers who can teach African languages in the Foundation Phase, struggles to appoint and retain teachers in rural areas, and faces a looming wave of teacher retirements.¹¹⁸ Attracting Assistants to the profession who were not planning to become teachers is strengthening the teacher pipeline in South Africa.

Digital inclusion and access to opportunities

The DBE’s partnership with Harambee broadened digital inclusion and access to work and learning opportunities for both successful and unsuccessful applicants. To apply, young people had to join the SA Youth platform, where they could search for other jobs with the 3,000+ employers on the platform, build a digital CV and access training opportunities.

Candidates who were not successful in their BEEI applications continue to use the platform to access other opportunities. For example, in the ~15-month period after recruitment for Phase II closed, unsuccessful BEEI applicants viewed 27,8 million opportunities and had 44,342 WhatsApp and 19,609 call-centre interactions.¹¹⁹

[†] This excludes SGB-funded posts.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The BEEI has demonstrated that it is possible to harness the power of distributed networks to bring jobs to every corner of the country. Its implementation and evolution have also surfaced where and why this is challenging, and identified and tested strategies to mitigate these challenges.

Still, more can be done to improve design and planning, support an overburdened implementation team, strengthen data management and use, gather evidence of impact, and make the most of the BEEI as a learning opportunity. This section briefly outlines key recommendations that were shared by interview participants or identified by the research team.”

These recommendations are specific to the BEEI but have broader relevance for any large-scale education or public employment programme in South Africa – and beyond.

INSTITUTIONALISE THE BEEI AND ALLOCATE MULTI-YEAR FUNDING

Short time frames for planning and implementation and uncertainty about the programme’s future were the most cited challenges among interview participants. Shifting the BEEI from a time-bound, emergency intervention to a standing national programme with a predictable budget allocation would provide more planning time and capacity. This additional capacity is essential for realising the potential of the initiative to make measurable and marked improvements in children’s learning.

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;¹²⁰ 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.

This in turn would allow more time for consultation and for building, testing and training on new systems, which would improve data quality and reduce payment delays. It would strengthen programme design: decisions could be more deliberate and less driven by time constraints. It would allow the BEEI to take on longer-term projects – like building an integrated data management system or commissioning external research – that are difficult to deliver within tight time frames. And it would make it more possible to attract additional investment from the private sector and philanthropy.

¹²⁰ The Binding Constraints Lab has hosted three workshops exploring opportunities for working with youth to deliver foundation phase learning outcomes at scale. The outputs from these workshops provide useful insights and recommendations for any future programme planning. They can be accessed [here](#).

STREAMLINE PROCUREMENT PROCESSES

Paired with more planning time, more streamlined, efficient procurement processes would allow the BEEI to train young people before or soon after they start work and deliver role-specific training to a higher proportion of participants. This may include working with fewer external service providers who can subcontract instead of assuming the administrative burden and delays of contracting providers individually.

This can increase the impact of training: if more young people have more time to practise and apply new skills, it is likely to have a knock-on effect on both children’s academic outcomes and participants’ future employability.

EXTEND PARTICIPANT CONTRACTS AND ALIGN THEM TO SCHOOL CALENDARS

Public employment programmes, by design, must reach as many people as possible with limited budgets. While multi-year contracts would reduce administration and participant turnover and likely benefit learning outcomes, they are at odds with the BEEI’s founding logic.

However, extending contracts to a “middle ground” 8 to 10 months (instead of 5 or 6) would have a positive impact on youth, schools and learners: it gives Assistants time to practise and master skills gained through training and workplace experience, reduces administrative churn for school staff, and enables more impact on learning and psycho-social outcomes.

Aligning to school calendars would also be beneficial. Employing Assistants in January or February, when schools face significant administrative pressure, would provide much-needed support, and is preferable to appointing Assistants at high-pressure times, such as during June exams. Contract end dates should align with the end of a school term to minimise disruption.



GROW THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration with both state and non-state actors has already bolstered capacity, introduced effective systems and played a major role in delivery. Partners can also help by testing new ideas, funding evaluation and research, and shouldering risk.

However, this must be done carefully. Partnerships can introduce risk if partners are not aligned on common purpose, ways of working, role definitions and how to deal with conflict. It is important to distinguish between partners and service providers: in a partnership, all partners should engage willingly and derive benefit from the collaboration.

Building partnerships takes time and trust. Organisations that partner with the DBE have to navigate the sector's complex context and terrain. Education is politicised, and change requires buy-in from many stakeholders, including from provinces, which are used to a degree of autonomy, down to school-level actors including School Management Teams (SMTs) and School Governing Bodies (SGBs). Within this context, it is difficult to establish new high-impact partnerships with short planning and implementation time frames.¹²¹

FORMALISE THE ROLE OF PARAPROFESSIONALS IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

In other sectors, like social work or health, accredited and regulated entry-level or paraprofessional roles – like Child and Youth Care Workers (CYCWs) or Community Health Workers (CHWs) – provide critical services to the public at lower cost, while providing practical experience and training to people who often lack tertiary qualifications but have much to contribute.

Establishing a defined, accredited and regulated paraprofessional role in the education sector would provide clarity between Assistants' and teachers' responsibilities (which is important to SACE and to unions); establish standards of training and competence for Assistants; and strengthen the pipeline of young people choosing and upskilling to work in the education sector.

As a first step, the programme could appoint BEEI alumni as mentors for new Assistants. In addition to building a career pathway for EAs, this would strengthen on-site support for Assistants; alleviate pressure on teacher mentors; retain top talent in the programme; and ensure skills and institutional knowledge gained in one phase are passed onto the next.

IMPROVE DATA MANAGEMENT

An integrated data management system – where recruitment, appointment, attendance, performance, training and payment data is linked and up to date – would significantly strengthen planning, decision-making, delivery, monitoring and reporting. This requires widespread adoption of key platforms; interoperability between key platforms; and sufficient training and support for users. Integration and interoperability is key: when datasets speak to each other, it reduces manual work, delays, inaccuracies and conflicting data. Standardised indicators and indicator definitions would also improve the quality and accuracy of monitoring and reporting.

BUILD ON EARLY GRADE LITERACY-NUMERACY FOCUS

Given the national priorities to improve early grade literacy and numeracy, the additional allocation of EAs focusing on Foundation Phase in Phase V was an encouraging development. Future phases can build on this work, by introducing a programmatic focus on measuring and improving learning outcomes and specifically working with struggling learners to support them to reach the grade level literacy benchmarks in their home languages.

LEVERAGE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD THE NEXT GENERATION OF TEACHERS

The prioritisation of youth in education distance learning programmes needs to continue, and the BEEI model is an approach education learning providers in general, as well as Funza Lushaka, should consider for their students. The opportunity for BEd students to gain in-classroom experience is highly valuable for their career development. Serving as an EA allows youth to explore their passion for teaching firsthand while providing a practical framework that brings their academic coursework to life.

Approximately 48% of the current teaching workforce is over the age of 50, signaling a massive “retirement wave” by 2030.¹²² The research underscores that rural regions and foundation phase instruction in African languages will suffer most from these shortages. Therefore, BEd students who reside in these at-risk regions and are proficient in the identified languages should be prioritised in future phases of the BEEI.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The BEEI is fertile ground for evaluation and research. Research should more rigorously evaluate the quality and outcomes of EA training, as well as the programme's impact on learning outcomes, classroom practice, teacher well-being, school environments, youth skills development, and youth access to work and training opportunities after leaving the programme. It should also explore unintended impacts of the programme, including its impact on the teacher pipeline and ripple effects in local economies where people were employed to offer catering, venues, transport and accommodation for training. For example, it may be interesting to explore the role of the BEEI in identifying potential teachers in communities facing teacher shortages, particularly those who can teach in the requisite home languages.

The DBE BEEI national project team, DBE-E³, Harambee, the NECT, Funda Wandu and the Kwantu payment system have generated substantial data since 2020 that has informed programme reporting but has been largely underutilised for research. This data could be made available to interested researchers to better understand concepts like expenditure trends, training outcomes, or employment and learning trajectories of programme applicants and participants (including a focus on participants with education qualifications and who are studying towards a teaching degree). The programme also uses established platforms, like Harambee's SA Youth and DBE-E³'s TeacherConnect, that can be easily harnessed for further research with participants, teachers and schools, and alumni.

This research can be supported by philanthropy and academic partners, who can bring additional funding, methodological rigour and independence.

“The elements that make for good [public employment] outcomes are not a mystery: the conditions of work, the duration of work, the quality of the work experience, the work undertaken, the fairness of the selection process, the efficiency of the systems. We were able to demonstrate at various points that all of that can come together, but we need proper planning timelines.”

Kate Philip | Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme Lead, The Presidency



CONCLUSION

Over five phases, the BEEI has demonstrated what is possible when urgency, scale and public purpose are aligned. As the largest youth employment programme in South Africa, the programme delivered nearly 1,3 million work opportunities across approximately 23,000 schools, reaching deep into communities with the highest levels of youth unemployment. This achievement was driven by the commitment of DBE officials and partners who consistently went beyond formal roles to design, adapt and problem-solve under intense pressure.

While not without weaknesses, the BEEI matured significantly across phases, strengthening systems, clarifying roles and embedding learning into implementation. In doing so, it generated valuable insights for the future of the BEEI itself and for large-scale employment and education programmes more broadly. Early signals of change are evident at school level, for participants and the education system.

At the time of writing, future funding had not been announced. Yet the programme has already reshaped expectations of what education-employment partnerships can achieve at scale. Strong demand from schools and young people underscores its relevance and social value.¹²³

By documenting the BEEI’s implementation journey, surfacing enablers and constraints, and distilling practical recommendations, this report seeks to inform evidence-based dialogue on whether and how the BEEI should be sustained, strengthened and positioned as a cornerstone of South Africa’s efforts to strengthen education and youth employment.



ENDNOTES

¹ Department of Basic Education 2025a.

² Department of Basic Education, no date (a).

³ Department of Basic Education 2022a.

⁴ In Phases I-III.

⁵ Biesman-Simons 2023, Christie 2022, Soudien et al. 2022.

⁶ Christie 2022, Hofmeyr et al. 2024.

⁷ Hoadley 2023, van der Berg et al. 2022.

⁸ World Bank 2025.

⁹ Statistics South Africa 2025. “Unemployed” is defined as the population of young people who are willing and able to work but not working.

¹⁰ Mudiriza & de Lannoy 2023.

¹¹ Philip 2025; Presidency of the Republic of South Africa 2023.

¹² Presidency of the Republic of South Africa 2023.

¹³ Andersen et al. 2020; Bingham et al. 2010; Hemelt et al. 2021.

¹⁴ Axiom Education 2023, 2024; Borole et al. 2024; Fleisch & Schöer 2023; Ardington 2023; YearBeyond 2018.

¹⁵ Presidency 2023.

¹⁶ Department of Basic Education 2025a.

¹⁷ Data from Department of Basic Education 2021b, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2023a, 2023c, 2025a, 2025l.

¹⁸ In the Northern Cape and Western Cape, Phase III was extended by an additional month using unspent funds from Phases I and II. Department of Basic Education 2022c.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ As provided by the BEEI project manager, 31 January 2026. This figure includes the appointment of 57 Kwantu district administrators who were appointed by the BEEI to support districts and schools in adopting Kwantu. Their stipends were paid using UIF funding allocated for Assistant stipends, as reported in Department of Basic Education 2025e.

²¹ Monthly stipends were R3 500 (Phase I), R3,817.44 (Phase II), R4,018.44 (Phases III and IV), and R4,000 (Phase V). Department of Basic Education 2025a.

²² R3,801,648,000 from UIF and R1,110,552,000 from National Treasury.

²³ Department of Basic Education 2021b.

²⁴ R38,016 million from UIF and R11,105 million from National Treasury.

²⁵ In Phases III and IV, R54 million of the provincial distribution was designated for project management.

²⁶ This included R100 million from UIF and R400,000 from National Treasury. However, according to Department of Basic Education 2025l, the R100 million allocated from the UIF towards training was not disbursed.

²⁷ Assistants received R30 each month to purchase cellphone data to allow them to complete training.

²⁸ Across phases, there has been a significant underspend on training. This is in part due to stringent procurement requirements and supply chain delays which made it difficult to plan and implement training within project timeframes. See Department of Basic Education 2023a.

²⁹ The majority of the Phase I underspend was on saving of posts, to which R2.43 billion was allocated.

³⁰ This represents predicted expenditure as provided by the BEEI project manager, 31 January 2026. Final expenditure was not available at time of writing.

³¹ Department of Basic Education 2021b, 2022b, 2022c, 2023a, 2025e. This 2% target mirrors the target in other large-scale PEPs such as the EPWP and CWP. The BEEI achieved 0.14% in Phase I, 0.78% in Phase IV, and 0.52% in Phase V. In Phase II, this was reported by province; some provinces used percentages while others used total numbers. It was not included in the Phase III closeout report.

³² Own calculations, based on Department of Basic Education 2025e (# of qualified educators appointed, based on Kwantu data) and appointment data received from the BEEI project manager, 31 January 2026 (total # of Assistants placed). Final placement numbers in Phase V were not available at time of writing.

³³ Department of Basic Education 2021b.

³⁴ Free State used a paper-based system, and Gauteng used its own digital system.

³⁵ Department of Basic Education 2021b.

³⁶ Department of Basic Education 2025c.

³⁷ Department of Basic Education 2025a.

³⁸ Department of Basic Education 2025a.

³⁹ Figures for Phases I and III-V are approximate. Phase I was calculated using district placement data, which reported on 310,858 placed Assistants, retrieved from Department of Basic Education 2021b. Phase III uses Department of Basic Education 2022c data on the number of appointed handypersons and SEAs (64,274); the number of EAs was estimated by subtracting 64,274 from 248,722. Phase IV and V were calculated using training data: Phase IV training data in Department of Basic Education 2023a provides data for 223,050 placed Assistants and Department of Basic Education 2025g reports on 200,201 Assistants placed in Phase V.

⁴⁰ Department of Basic Education 2025a.

⁴¹ This role was introduced in Phase IV. Previous phases included Child and Youth Care Workers (CYCWs), whose role was similar. CYCWs were responsible for helping schools adhere to Covid-19 safety protocol; this was no longer required in Phase IV.

⁴² Workshop Assistants and Laboratory Assistants were placed in schools with laboratory and workshop facilities and provided support for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects.

⁴³ The DBE post provisioning norms are the formula-driven process used annually to calculate and allocate teaching posts to schools. They are based on educator-to-learner ratios, availability of educators, equity considerations, the number of learners with special needs, and subjects offered.

⁴⁴ Department of Basic Education 2025b.

⁴⁵ Department of Basic Education 2023a, 2025g.

⁴⁶ Department of Basic Education 2025b.

⁴⁷ In Phases I-IV provinces received training budgets and were responsible for procurement. In Phase V, when the UIF became the main funder, provinces were allocated a training budget but the money was held at national level; provinces had to follow national procurement processes to organise training.

⁴⁸ Training data is presented in the closeout report produced by the DBE at the end of each phase. This reporting does not give in-depth detail on training, and it is not always clear if data reports on registration for or completion of training. Using the available documentation, it was not possible to comment on training quality or outcomes.

⁴⁹ Department of Basic Education 2021a. In Phase I, R44,7 million was allocated to training. This increased to R414 million in Phase II.

⁵⁰ In Phase IV, more than 168,000 users (91% of those who registered) completed and passed the NSSF training. Department of Basic Education no date (c).

⁵¹ Reporting on the completion rate of these two trainings is inconsistent across closeout reports. It is also not possible to deduce if participants who took part in multiple phases completed the training more than once.

⁵² Department of Basic Education 2023a, 2025g. It is not possible to present data on the number of Assistants who completed orientation training specific to their role. Available data provides statistics on the number of modules that Assistants have partially or fully completed. Assistants can complete multiple modules, including modules related to other Assistant roles.

⁵³ Enrolment data for this training was not available.

⁵⁴ Department of Basic Education 2025g and interview with BEEI Project Manager, 25 November 2025.

⁵⁵ Department of Basic Education 2025g.

⁵⁶ Department of Basic Education 2023a, Department of Basic Education 2025g. Phase V numbers are provisional.

⁵⁷ Department of Basic Education 2025a.

⁵⁸ Department of Basic Education 2025g.

⁵⁹ Department of Basic Education 2025g.

⁶⁰ Department of Basic Education 2023b.

⁶¹ Department of Basic Education 2021b, 2022b, 2023a.

⁶² Department of Basic Education 2021b. This excludes the Eastern Cape, which used PERSAL to pay Assistants in Phase I.

⁶³ In Gauteng, for example, schools had to provide proof of every BEEI-related payment to the provincial project team to receive the next round of payments.

⁶⁴ Department of Basic Education 2022b, c, 2023a, 2025e. PERSAL was used by the Eastern Cape (Phases I and III-V); the Northern Cape (Phases II-V); and KwaZulu-Natal (Phases II-V). In Phase V these three provinces only used PERSAL for National Treasury-funded posts.

⁶⁵ Department of Basic Education 2021b, 2023a.

⁶⁶ In Phase V, 158,402 roles were funded by the UIF and 46,274 were funded by NT. All schools, whether funded by the UIF or National Treasury, must onboard Assistants on the Kwantu system, but Kwantu is only used to pay UIF-funded Assistants. NT-funded Assistants are still paid via PERSAL or by schools.

⁶⁷ This excludes the Western Cape, where the provincial education department hired a dedicated project team.

⁶⁸ Each province is limited to four interns, a district to three interns and a circuit to two interns, as stipulated in Department of Basic Education 2025d.

⁶⁹ This included Heads of Education Departments Committee (HEDCOM) subcommittees on finance, teacher development and curriculum management, and human relations.

⁷⁰ Department of Basic Education 2025a.

⁷¹ The CEM includes the Ministers of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training; and the nine provincial members of the executive councils for education.

⁷² The HEDCOM includes the Director-General (DG) of the DBE, the deputy DGs of the department, and the heads of provincial education departments.

⁷³ Recipients included the UIF, Presidency, National Treasury, Portfolio Committee, Senior Management of Basic Education, HEDCOM, CEM, the DBE's monthly Broad Management Meeting, SGB Association, South African Principals' Association and Teacher Unions. Department of Basic Education 2025.

⁷⁴ Department of Basic Education, no date (b).

⁷⁵ Department of Basic Education 2025g.

⁷⁶ Eight nonprofits supported RCs in Phase V: Room to Read, The Learn Project, Funda Wandé, READ Educational Trust, Nal'ibali, Penreach, Activate Leadership and A Better Africa Foundation (see Department of Basic Education 2025i).

⁷⁷ Department of Basic Education 2025i.

⁷⁸ Department of Basic Education 2025j.

⁷⁹ Department of Basic Education 2025k.

⁸⁰ Interview with BEEI project manager, 12 January 2026.

⁸¹ Interview with BEEI project manager, 12 January 2026.

⁸² Department of Basic Education 2025g.

⁸³ Department of Basic Education 2025g.

⁸⁴ In Phase I, Free State and Gauteng did not use the Harambee platform. From Phase II onwards, all provinces have used Harambee.

⁸⁵ Based on an equitable share basis.

⁸⁶ In some cases, Assistants may be assigned more than one role to meet needs and provide learning opportunities.

⁸⁷ 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.

⁸⁸ Free State did not use the NDMS in Phase II.

⁸⁹ The Western Cape used its data management system from Phases II to V. The North West used its system from Phases II to IV.

⁹⁰ Department of Basic Education 2023a.

⁹¹ The Western Cape uses its own system to prepare its UIF payroll for Kwantu, which integrates the Western Cape payroll onto its payment system.

⁹² The Western Cape's BEEI team is funded from the BEEI operational budget. The provincial organogram is approved by the Minister of the Executive Council of the WCED.

⁹³ See e.g. Dreer 2023; Evans & Mendez Acosta 2023, Schonert-Reichl et al. 2023.

⁹⁴ Department of Basic Education 2021c, 2021e, 2022e.

⁹⁵ Department of Basic Education 2021c.

⁹⁶ Queensland Department of Education 2022.

⁹⁷ Barrett et al. 2018.

⁹⁸ Five interview participants highlighted the impact of handypersons on school climate.

⁹⁹ Dreer 2023, Evans & Mendez Acosta 2023, Fourie & de Klerk 2024, Schonert-Reichl et al. 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Department of Basic Education 2021c.

¹⁰¹ Ardington 2023.

¹⁰² Lucwabe 2025.

¹⁰³ Mohohlwane et al. 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Fleisch & Schöer 2023.

¹⁰⁵ Department of Basic Education 2022c, 2023a. Phase V data received from BEEI project manager, 28 January 2026.

¹⁰⁶ The total number of appointments for Phase V includes 57 Kwantu district administrators who were appointed by the BEEI to support districts and schools in adopting Kwantu. Their stipends were paid using UIF funding allocated for Assistant stipends, as reported in Department of Basic Education 2025e.

¹⁰⁷ Department of Basic Education 2025e, Statistics South Africa 2025.

¹⁰⁸ Department of Basic Education 2021b, 2022b, 2022c, 2023a, 2025a, 2025e, 2025l.

¹⁰⁹ Phase I data on the percentage of males and females appointed excludes Mpumalanga as not all data was disaggregated by gender.

¹¹⁰ As proxied by school quintile. Harambee 2023c.

¹¹¹ Harambee 2023c.

¹¹² Harambee Employment Accelerator 2023b. Data is derived from Harambee's Employment Journey (EJ), which is an online survey mechanism embedded within SAYouth.mobi.

¹¹³ Statistics South Africa 2025. In Quarter 1 of 2025, 48,1% of females were NEET, compared to 42,2% of males.

¹¹⁴ Internal survey of 5,000 former Assistants, presented in Harambee Employment Accelerator 2023b.

¹¹⁵ As per data provided by the BEEI project manager, 12 December 2025.

¹¹⁶ Department of Basic Education 2026.

¹¹⁷ Department of Basic Education 2021d, 2022f, 2022g; DBE-E³ 2025. This was also mentioned by six interview participants.

¹¹⁸ van der Berg et al. 2020, 2025.

¹¹⁹ Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator 2023b.

¹²⁰ This would include per-beneficiary costing, administration versus stipend ratios, and inflation and wage adjustments.

¹²¹ To mitigate this, the DBE can work with organisations with which it has existing MOUs. For example, the education nonprofit Funda Wandé had an existing MOU with the DBE that allows them to partner across all provinces. Other nonprofits have supported the BEEI by partnering with Funda Wandé, which allowed them to bypass government red tape. The DBE can also establish MOUs with key government departments/units and non-governmental organisations before a Phase begins.

¹²² van der Berg et al. 2020, 2025.

¹²³ Department of Basic Education 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2022e, 2022f, 2022g, DBE-E³ 2025.

¹²⁴ Data from Department of Basic Education 2021b, 2022b, 2022c, 2023a, 2025c.

¹²⁵ The programme ran for 4 months, with a 1-month extension to April in some provinces. Provinces used unspent funds to extend the programme.

¹²⁶ In the Northern Cape and Western Cape, Phase III was extended by an additional month using unspent funds from Phases I and II, as documented in Department of Basic Education 2022c.

¹²⁷ This phase had two youth cohorts. Cohort 1 was employed for 8 months from February, using unspent funds from previous phases to fund stipends from February to April. Cohort 2 was employed for 5 months, from May.

¹²⁸ Phase I spent just over a third of its budget on SGB-funded posts, which were challenging for schools to retain when parents struggled to pay fees during Covid-19.

¹²⁹ Department of Basic Education 2021b.

¹³⁰ For farm schools and schools in rural areas, this distance is 30 kilometres.

¹³¹ Department of Basic Education 2025a.

¹³² Curriculum Assistants were trained to support educators within a specific learning phase.

¹³³ With the exception of the Eastern Cape, which paid Assistants via PERSAL.

¹³⁴ All schools upload details to Kwantu. UIF-funded roles are paid via the IDC. National Treasury-funded roles are paid as in previous phases.

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APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

The research team consulted with the BEEI project manager, Ms Lala Maje, to request a list of recommended interview participants. These included current and past DBE and partner organisation staff members who could help trace the programme’s evolution and provide information and insight on:

- history, origins and context of BEEI
- programme design, implementation and evolution
- recruitment, training and support, and payment
- key partnerships between government and civil society

Based on the list compiled by Ms Maje and the availability of potential interview participants, the following individuals were interviewed:

- Department of Basic Education: 4 national project team members, 4 national training coordinators
- Provincial Education Departments: 6 members of provincial project teams
- DBE-E³: 1 representative
- Harambee: 1 representative
- Industrial Development Corporation: 2 representatives
- Kwantu: 2 representatives
- National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT): 1 representative
- The Presidency: 1 representative

In addition to these interviews, the research team contacted and interviewed representatives from Masinyusane and Room to Read.

In total, 25 people were interviewed. In three interviews, the research team interviewed two participants together. These were an interview with two Western Cape project team members, an interview with an NECT representative and the training manager for Reading Champions, and an interview with two programme staff from Masinyusane. All other interviews were individual interviews.

Interviews were hosted online and lasted 45 minutes to 2.5 hours. All interviews were semi-structured.

APPENDIX 2: PROGRAMME EVOLUTION, PHASE BY PHASE

Table 5 provides an overview of how the BEEI evolved over the five phases.

TABLE 5: Key BEEI design elements and shifts per phase¹²⁴

	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 ¹²⁵ (Dec 2020 – Mar/Apr 2021)	5 months (Nov 2021 – Mar 2022)	5 months ¹²⁶ (Apr – Aug 2022)	8 months ¹²⁷ (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 ¹²⁸	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 ¹²⁹	As in Phase I; Eligibility extended to age 39 for youth living with a disability; Live within 5km of school ¹³⁰	Renewed Phase II Assistants ^v	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 ¹³¹
ROLES AND PLACEMENT	4 categories of EAs (Curriculum Assistant, ¹³² 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 ¹³³	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 ¹³⁴

^v 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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