

# Situation analysis of the availability of teacher education addressing the educational needs of children with severe to profound disabilities

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# Background and research aim



- Despite strong policy commitment in South Africa to achieve quality education for learners with severe to profound disabilities (SPD), progress towards achieving this commitment has been slow.
- Key hindrance: Very few teacher education programmes focused specifically on impairment-specific support needs within education.
- Aim of situation analysis: Gain an overview of currently available teacher education resources relevant to the education of learners with SPD.

# Research methods



- Exploratory study
- Data collected from three sources:
  - Electronic surveys with six deans of education at higher education institutions, and eight directors of NGOs and DPOs (using Survey Monkey)
  - Telephonic interviews with members from centre of excellence specializing in neurodevelopmental disorders, and centre of excellence specialising in visual impairment
  - Review of 2017 faculty handbooks from 23 higher education institutions that offer teacher education programmes
- Data collated and analysed together

# Training at higher education institutions



- 70% (16 out of 23) of higher education institutions offer teacher education that has inclusive education or impairment-specific focus.
- But majority of training - particularly full qualifications (91% - 20 out of 22 trainings) - offered at CPAD level (Continuing Professional Academic Development).
- Implication: Teachers who only have Bachelor of Education or Postgraduate Certificate of Education not being properly equipped with skills to teach learners with severe to profound disabilities

*It was a grave mistake to stop the specialised training. Most universities lost precious knowledge, skills, resources, and programmes which will be very difficult to recover. It had a negative impact on the teachers teaching at special schools. Working with many school and principals - this is a question. Where do they send teachers for specialised training? (University Dean)*



# Training at higher education institutions



- Most available training, particularly modules within full qualifications, looks at inclusive education and might neglect impairment-specific education.

*‘This is such a large subject area that all the impairments can't be discussed... And the impairments that are part of the curriculum are just introductions, identifications and some support ideas - not in depth’  
(University Dean)*

- While there are full qualifications that have an impairment-specific focus (62% - 13 out of 21 trainings), majority of this training (85% - 11 out of 13 trainings) offered at CPAD level.
- Tend to focus on disabilities more generally; for example, looking at specialisations such as special needs education.

# Training at NGOs and DPOs



- Variety of training offered at NGOs and DPOs specific to particular disabilities. All offered as short courses in schools and/or to teachers For example:
  - Communication methods for visually impaired persons
  - Including learners with Down Syndrome
  - What is epilepsy
  - Augmentative and alternative communication
  - Inclusive education.

# Training at NGOs and DPOs



- Feeling among NGOs/DPOs was that teachers benefited from informal courses:

*‘Many participants have expressed that the training has informed them about many things that they were not aware of. Many had prior to the training felt that they were not equipped to teach children with Down syndrome but after the training were more positive on implementing the training’ (NGO director).*

- However, cash-strapped organisations not able to offer courses on a regular basis unless they are suitably compensated.
- Courses often not accredited or recognised as official teacher education courses. Therefore, teachers would have few incentives to do the course other than their own professionalism and desire to meet the learners’ needs.

*‘There needs to be internal motivation from individuals in order to acquire skills’ (NGO director).*

# Training at NGOs and DPOs



- NGOs and DPOs express the need for more partnerships to ensure that learners with specific impairments receive the specialised education that they need:

*‘Training on disability should not be the responsibility of the NGO and DPO sector only. All training offered at universities and colleges towards a qualification where persons will be working with the public should include training on disability in general, including intellectual disability’. (NGO director).*

# Concluding remarks



- While **all** teachers need knowledge of inclusive education, curriculum differentiation and meeting individual learner needs, **some** need in-depth knowledge about learning needs within specialised domains.
- Depth of engagement with this knowledge will vary according to placement of teachers in regular, full service or special schools
- Further need exists for **just-in-time** teacher education where regular school educators can access additional information on strategies for teaching SPD when the need arises.