

UNLOCKING NATIONAL LITERACY AT SCALE:

A Game-Changing Educational Partnership





ALIGNED WITH PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA'S BEEI VISION

The Mellon Educate model is directly aligned with President Cyril Ramaphosa's Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI), the largest youth employment programme in South African history. Like BEEI, Mellon Educate focuses on:

- Creating jobs for young people in the education sector
- Filling critical gaps in foundational learning
- Strengthening school functionality through practical, in-demand skills

Both initiatives share a vision of a more inclusive, resilient education system, one that empowers youth while improving outcomes for learners.





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AT MELLON EDUCATE WE BELIEVE THAT
EDUCATION IGNITES POSSIBILITIES AND
MULTIPLIES THE POTENTIAL TO THRIVE.
OUR MISSION IS TO

bring literacy to 1 million children

ACROSS SOUTH AFRICA WHILE AT THE
SAME TIME PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT TO
SCHOOL LEAVERS IN THE COMMUNITY.





Executive Summary

South Africa is facing a literacy emergency. 81% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning, rising to 89% in the poorest schools. This foundational failure not only blocks future academic success but also undermines youth employment and national development.

Mellon Educate offers a scalable, proven solution that can transform the national literacy landscape. Our model blends community-based tutor recruitment with a cutting-edge digital learning environment, designed for rapid deployment and deep impact.

Crucially, this approach aligns with President Ramaphosa's Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI), which has mobilised over 200,000 young South Africans to strengthen school functionality nationwide. Mellon Educate builds on this momentum, empowering a new generation with purpose, practical skills, and a clear literacy solution.

This proposal outlines a national partnership that enables the Education Minister to deliver lasting, measurable literacy gains, create thousands of jobs, and build the voter confidence that comes from real, visible progress in education.





The National Literacy Challenge

Despite significant investments, South Africa's education system continues to underperform, with early grade literacy standing out as the most urgent challenge. According to the 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), 81% of Grade 4 learners are unable to read for meaning, rising to 89% in the poorest schools. This foundational failure severely compromises all subsequent learning and development.

The core issue begins even before learners enter Grade R. Roughly 80% of the population lack access to quality early childhood development (ECD) programmes, leading to widespread school entry with developmental and learning backlogs. These learners then progress through low-performing primary schools, which amplify the gaps between them and their better-resourced peers.





KEY CHALLENGES

South Africa's education system is vast and complex, with deep-rooted challenges. Mellon Educate focuses on two critical areas where meaningful impact is possible:

1. Teaching and Learning Gaps

A major issue in basic education is the lack of subject knowledge and teaching skills among educators. For example, SACMEQ 2007 found that only 55% of Grade 6 teachers met the PIRLS Intermediate Benchmark in English, well below the 82% international average for Grade 4 learners. This gap is especially pronounced in low-income communities, where teachers often lack the tools to teach reading effectively.

2. Lost Learning Time

In North West Province, only 60% of scheduled lessons are taught annually. Nationally, less than half the curriculum is typically covered. Key barriers include:

- Limited access to quality learning materials
- Overcrowded classrooms and poor infrastructure
- One-size-fits-all teaching methods, especially in literacy

BROADER IMPACTS

Weak early education leads to high dropout rates and poor readiness for tertiary education or employment. Many school-leavers lack basic literacy and numeracy, perpetuating poverty and inequality. Even those who graduate often struggle in higher education, prompting some universities to lower standards. In the job market, employers report a mismatch between school-leaver skills and entry-level job requirements.



81% OF GRADE 4S CANNOT READ FOR MEANING (PIRLS 2021)

ONLY **55%** OF TEACHERS MEET THE MINIMUM LITERACY TEACHING BENCHMARKS

LESS THAN **50%** OF THE CURRICULUM IS TYPICALLY COVERED IN CLASSROOMS

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IS FUELED BY FOUNDATIONAL SKILL DEFICITS





A Game-Changing Approach

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES. TRANSFORMING FUTURES.

The Mellon Educate Literacy Programme is a nationally scalable, community-rooted initiative that addresses two of South Africa's most urgent challenges: the literacy crisis in early education and the high rate of youth unemployment.

At its core, the programme is built on a simple but powerful idea: that the best way to teach a child to read is through human connection and that the best way to build that connection is by empowering young people from the very communities we serve.





DUAL IMPACT MODE: LITERACY AND LIVELIHOODS

Blending Human Touch with AI Precision

The programme's hybrid model combines tutor-led instruction with a cutting-edge digital platform powered by Amira AI, an award-winning* literacy software developed by Carnegie Mellon University. This dual approach ensures that each child receives both the emotional support of a mentor and the adaptive, data-driven precision of AI.

- Tutor-led Literacy Hubs: Face-to-face reading support in mother tongue and English, delivered by 8 trained tutors per hub.
- Digital AI Literacy Hubs: Scalable, tech-enabled learning environments with 4 tutors per hub, using Amira AI to personalise instruction and accelerate progress.

Each hub is equipped with high-quality learning materials, graded readers, visual aids, mobile libraries, and storytelling resources, creating a rich, engaging environment that makes reading joyful and effective.

Community Tutors: From Unemployed Youth to Literacy Leaders

Mellon Educate recruits high-potential, unemployed school-leavers, young people who have matriculated with strong results, and trains them to become Community Literacy Tutors. These tutors undergo rigorous, skills-based training aligned with BPO-grade methodologies, equipping them with the pedagogical tools and confidence to deliver high-quality, one-on-one literacy support to children in Grades R to 3.

By embedding tutors within the communities they serve, the programme fosters trust, relatability, and continuity. Children benefit from consistent, personalised attention, while tutors gain meaningful employment, professional development, and a pathway into the education sector. Many go on to pursue careers as full-time teachers, creating a virtuous cycle of upliftment and educational excellence.





Accelerating reading growth through blended AI and tutor support.





PROVEN IMPACT AND SCALABLE VISION

Currently active in 15 schools across Cape Town, the programme supports over 3,500 learners and is independently monitored for impact. Results show significant improvements in reading fluency and comprehension, particularly among Grade 3 learners transitioning to English as the language of learning.

The model is both cost-effective and scalable. Mellon Educate aims to expand to 600 with a long-term vision of reaching 1 million children nationwide and providing employment to 10,000 unemployed youth through the tutor programme.

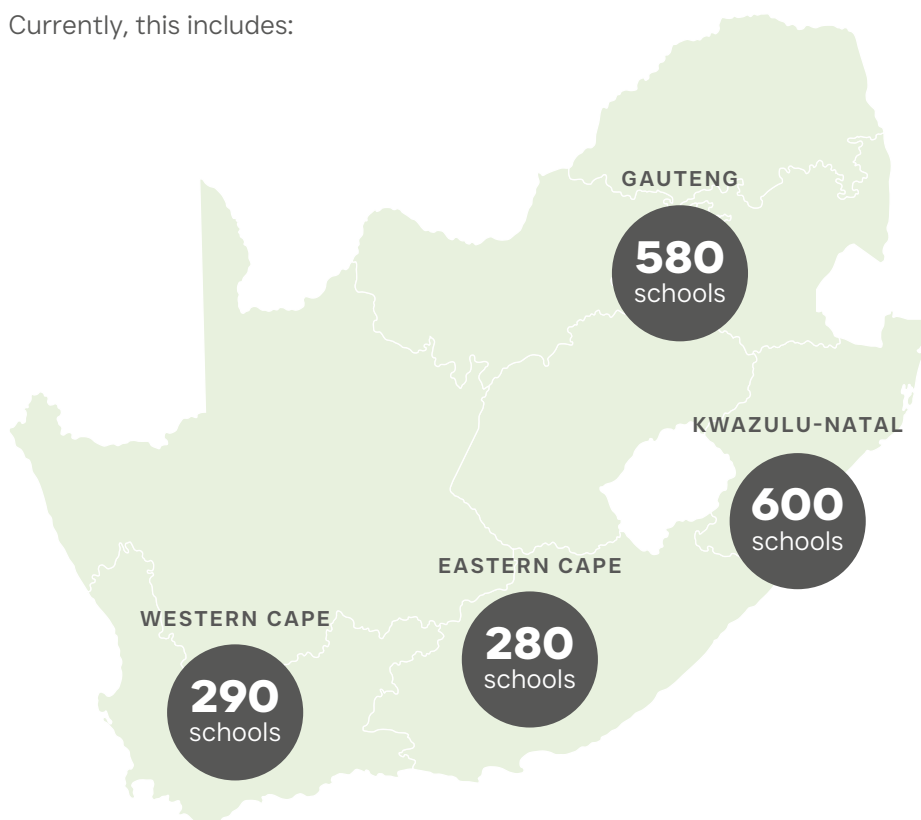
600 literacy hubs

10,000 community literacy tutors

1,000,000 literate children

The programme will be rolled out across all 9 provinces, while also prioritising provinces where Mellon Educate already has a footprint through infrastructure support or direct literacy interventions.

Currently, this includes:



By focusing on these key areas, Mellon Educate seeks to reach the learners who need support the most and to scale its impact efficiently across South Africa.





Creating meaningful employment for unemployed youth.

Improving early literacy outcomes — a key education priority.

Strengthening public trust through visible results in schools.





Conclusion: A National Legacy Opportunity

This is more than a literacy programme, it's a nation-building strategy.

This programme provides a historic opportunity: to turn South Africa's literacy crisis into a national success story. It creates jobs, improves learning, and generates hope, in a format communities can see and feel.

By aligning with national priorities and delivering real, visible progress, the Mellon Educate Literacy Programme offers a credible, scalable solution to South Africa's most pressing educational and economic challenges.

Let us work together to make literacy the foundation of a stronger South Africa.





About us

Our journey began in 2002 as the Niall Mellon Township Trust, with a mission to build homes in the townships and provide a brighter future for South Africa's most vulnerable communities.

In 2013 the charity redoubled its commitment to championing change by focusing its efforts on building new schools, renovating and modernising existing school campuses and providing educational support programmes through Mellon Educate, pledging a 10-year education development programme to provide better education to more than 100,000 African children.

In 2018, Mellon Educate launched its "Mellon Educate Literacy Programme," which focuses on addressing the high number of children who are unable to read for meaning. The programme employs literacy tutors that provide a dedicated literacy curriculum that is further supported by an award-winning digital environment that uses AI-powered reading tutoring.

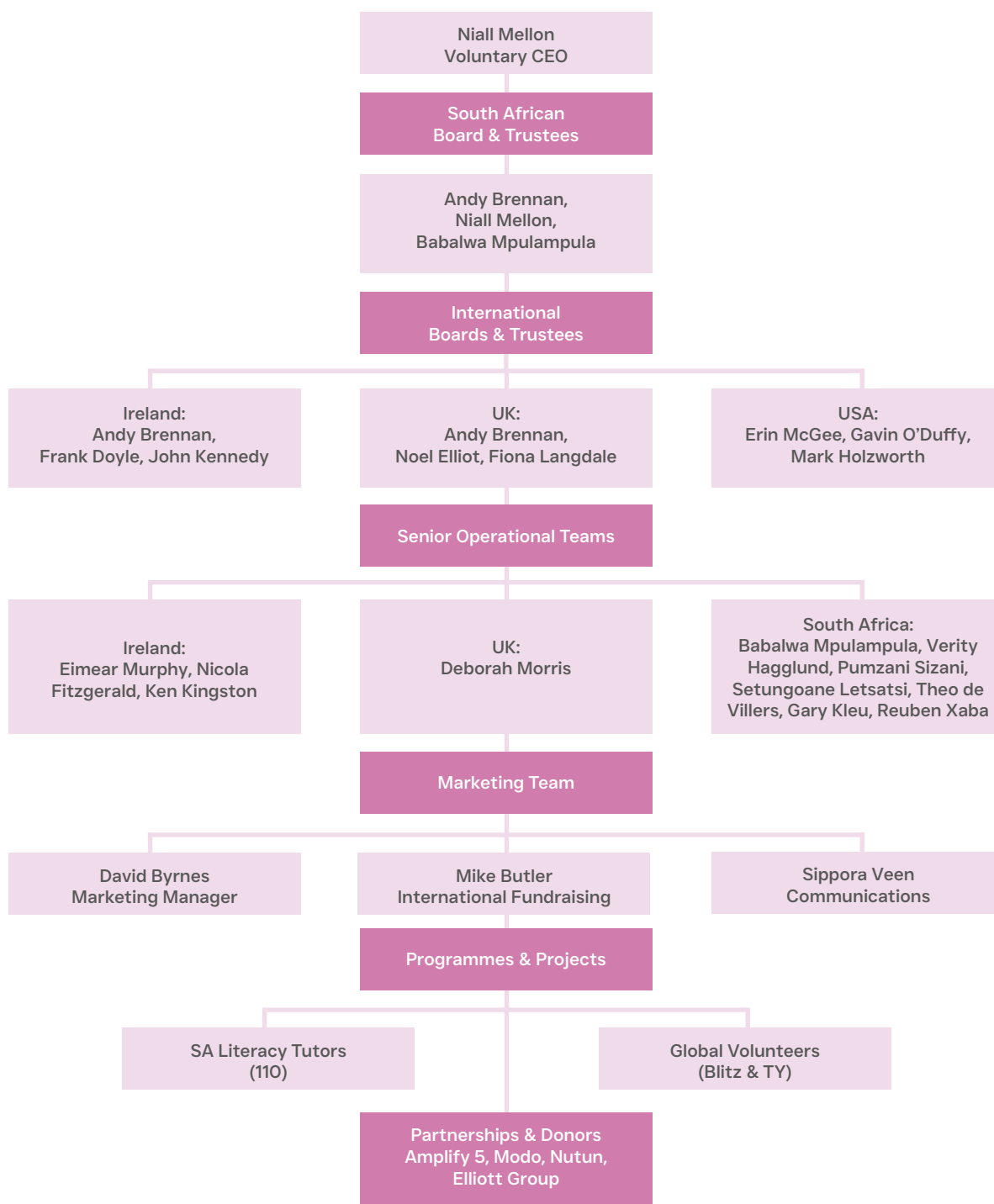
Education ignites
possibilities and
multiplies the
potential to thrive.

— Mellon Educate Mission





Our team





Our team

A PASSION FOR EDUCATION

Mellon Educate's strength lies in the calibre of its people. Educators, leaders, and change makers who bring decades of experience in teaching, curriculum development, and community empowerment.

Setungoane Letsatsi, Head of Literacy, holds a Master's in Education Policy and leads programme design and delivery aligned with national priorities. Her work with School Management Teams and education officials ensures Mellon Educate's interventions are evidence-based and locally responsive.

Verity Hagglund, a Fulbright Scholar and former Curriculum Advisor, brings over 30 years of experience in teaching and assessment. Her leadership in English language education and systemic literacy support has shaped curriculum delivery across the Western Cape.

Babalwa Mpulampula, Director of Mellon Educate South Africa, transitioned from construction management to lead education-focused community development. She has overseen the recruitment and training of hundreds of literacy tutors, many previously unemployed, creating pathways to purpose and progress.

Emerging leaders like **Tonique Andrews** and **Unathi Mgedezi-Lembeni** reflect Mellon Educate's commitment to growing talent from within. Tonique is pursuing a Bachelor of Education while leading a tutor team at Marine Primary. Unathi, with six years of experience and ongoing studies in Early Childhood Development, now leads the team at Injongo Primary and aspires to become a facilitator.

Together, this team blends academic excellence, lived experience, and grassroots leadership—driving literacy transformation across South Africa.





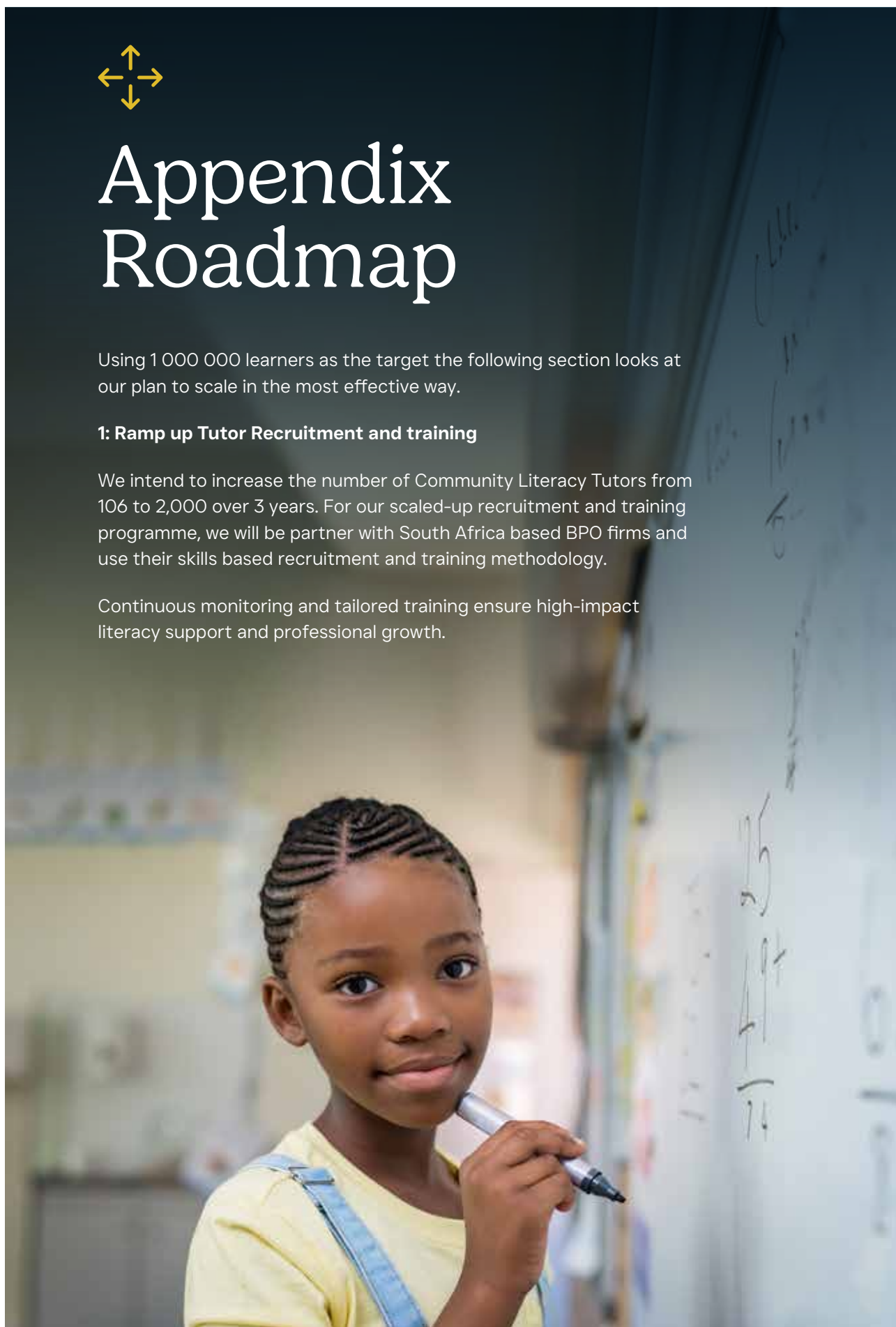
Appendix Roadmap

Using 1 000 000 learners as the target the following section looks at our plan to scale in the most effective way.

1: Ramp up Tutor Recruitment and training

We intend to increase the number of Community Literacy Tutors from 106 to 2,000 over 3 years. For our scaled-up recruitment and training programme, we will be partner with South Africa based BPO firms and use their skills based recruitment and training methodology.

Continuous monitoring and tailored training ensure high-impact literacy support and professional growth.





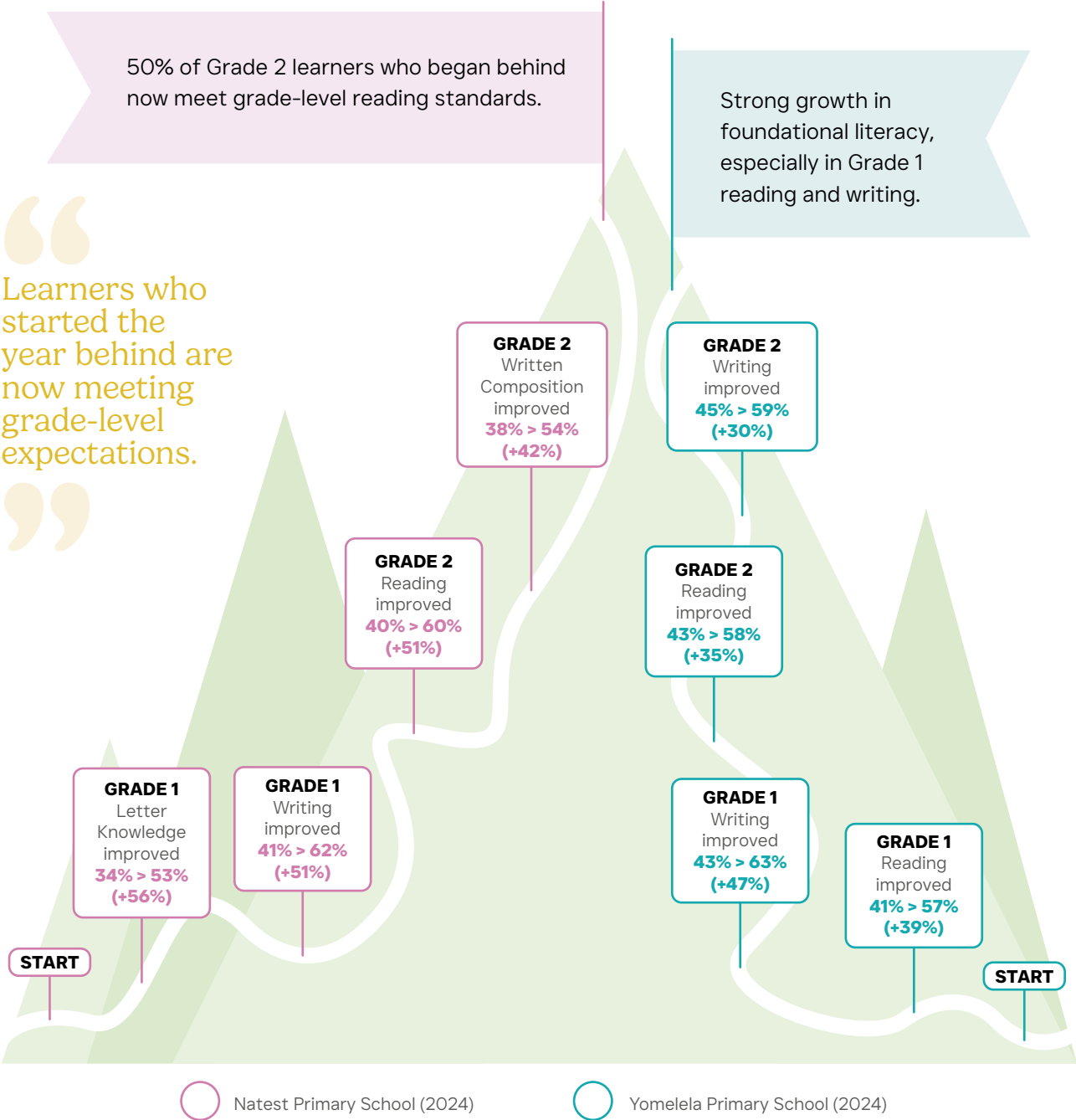
STAGE	TRAINING FOCUS	DURATION
Onboarding	Foundational literacy skills and programme orientation using accredited content	2 Weeks
Ongoing training	Targeted, school-based sessions addressing identified needs	Monthly
Winter refresher	Skills training based on monitoring and feedback	1 Week (winter break)
Performance review	Career development and progress conversations	Monthly/termly
Advanced development	Leadership, facilitation and management skills	Ongoing as identified
Accreditation	Access to accredited modules through fet colleges	As available

2: Introducing a Mobile Hub model

Eliminating the dependency on building a large bricks and mortar infrastructure reduces time-to market and cost. We intend to introduce mobile hubs into our existing approach, allowing for rapid national deployment.



Appendix A - Independent Monitoring & Evaluation Results



Digital Hub Contribution

The integration of Amira AI supports

2x

faster reading growth when combined with tutor support.



Appendix B - Mellon Educate Achievements - Building a Legacy of Change



36,000
HOMES BUILT

38+

SCHOOL & LITERACY
INTERVENTIONS



100,000
PEOPLE



18

LITERACY HUBS



100,000
LEARNERS



110
TUTORS

37,000+

INTERNATIONAL &
NATIONAL VOLUNTEERS
MOBILISED



90%

OF TUTORS RECRUITED
FROM PREVIOUSLY
UNEMPLOYED YOUTH



Awards & Partnerships

NELSON MANDELA ENDORSEMENT, CAPE TOWN
MAYOR'S MEDAL, IRISH GOVERNMENT SUPPORT







