



---

## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

### **REVIEW OF UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC 2017 ANNUAL REPORT**



**Parliamentary Paper No. 14 of 2019**

*May 2019*

*Published and Printed by the Department of Legislature, Parliament House, SUVA*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAIRPERSON’S FOREWORD .....	4
LIST OF ACRONYMS .....	5
RECOMMENDATION .....	6
INTRODUCTION .....	6
Committee Members .....	6
FUNCTIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC .....	7
ISSUES RAISED .....	7
Limited Financial Resources.....	7
Recommendations.....	7-8
Need for More Academic Staff.....	8
Recommendations.....	8
Lack of Adequate Teaching and Learning Facilities and Support Services.....	8
Recommendations.....	8-9
Shortage of Student Accommodation at Laucala Campus.....	9
Recommendation.....	9
USP Trust Fund.....	9-10
Recommendation.....	10
COMMITTEE SITE VISIT TO THE USP LABASA CAMPUS.....	11
Background.....	11
Key Findings.....	11-12
Committee Recommendation.....	12
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS .....	13
GENDER ANALYSIS .....	13-14

Recommendation.....	14
CONCLUSION.....	15
COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE.....	16
APPENDICES	
Witnesses .....	17
Published Written Evidence .....	18

## CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the University of the South Pacific for the year ended 31 December 2017.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies, in order to investigate, inquire into, and make recommendations relating to the agencies' administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information.

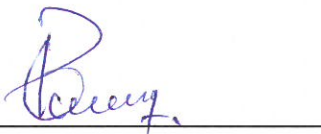
The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review.

This review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from January to December 2017, conducted into: The University's administration; structure; budgetary allocation; programmes offered; policies; challenges; highlights; priorities for the coming years; and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

At this juncture, I also wish to thank the Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of the South Pacific, Professor Pal Ahluwalia, and his staff for their assistance in this inquiry. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues and Committee staff for their contributions and support.

I, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, commend this report to Parliament.



**Hon. Viam Pillay**  
**Chairperson**

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CROP	-	Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific
DEIC	-	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee
FPR	-	Framework for Pacific Regionalism
KPIs	-	Key Performance Indicators
MQR	-	Minimum Qualification Requirement
Pacific TAFE	-	Pacific Technical and Further Education
QOT	-	Quality of Teaching
QOR	-	Quality of Research
SRT	-	Strategic Research Themes
SDG	-	Sustainable Development Goal
SP	-	Strategic Plan
SDC	-	Staff Development Committee
SRC	-	Staff Review Committee
TVET	-	Technical Vocational Education and Training
USP	-	University of the South Pacific
UGC	-	University Grants Committee

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has conducted a review of the Annual Report of the University of the South Pacific for 2017 and recommends that Parliament takes note of its report.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs of the last term of Parliament was referred the 2017 Annual Report of the University of the South Pacific. The Annual Report has since been reintroduced in this new Parliament term and referred to the current Standing Committee on Social Affairs during the February 2019 meeting. The committee has been mandated to review the Annual Report and report back to Parliament on its findings.

Standing Orders 109(2)(b) allows the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to examine matters related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

Standing Orders 110(1)(c) authorises the Standing Committee to *scrutinise the government departments with responsibility within the committee's subject area, including by investigating, inquiring into, and making recommendations relating to any aspect of such a department's administration, legislation or proposed legislative program, budget, rationalisation, restructuring, functioning, organisation, structure and policy formulation.*

## **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The substantive members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs are:

- Hon. Viam Pillay (Chairperson)
- Hon. George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson)
- Hon. Alipate Nagata (Member)
- Hon. Salote Radrodro (Member)
- Hon. Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu (Member)

During the Standing Committee's meetings, the following alternate membership arose pursuant to Standing Order 115(5):

- Hon. Simione Rasova
- Hon. Mikaele Leawere



## **FUNCTIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC**

The University of the South Pacific is a non-profit educational institution which was established under the Royal Charter in 1970.

The core function of USP is to deliver quality education that enables its graduates to inherit knowledge, skills and abilities to effectively and sustainably address the social and economic needs of the Pacific region. The University also has a mandate to undertake research that is relevant to the region and supports policy level dialogue and decision making that affect lives of the Pacific People. Innovation is also an inherent function of the University.

USP proactively engages and takes a leading role in engaging with its member countries and finding solutions on major development challenges such as education, climate change, oceans, marine, renewable energy, public administration, digitalization, gender, and health. Besides being a tertiary institution promoting quality education and research and innovation, USP is also focused on fostering regional cooperation and integration in collaboration with the respective CROP agencies and development partners.

USP also has Pacific Technical and Further Education (Pacific TAFE), which provides alternative pathways to higher education as well as TVET programmes.

## **ISSUES RAISED**

### **LIMITED FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

One of the key impediments faced by the University is limited financial resources that inhibits its ability to fully deliver its strategic objectives. The committee observed that inadequate financial resources has led to the University not being able to fully implement the key deliverables in its Strategic Plan 2013-2018.

Furthermore, inadequate funds has also affected the University's capital works and substantially deferred maintenance programmes.

The committee notes that the University is striving to address this issue by ensuring that the available resources are used efficiently and additional efforts vested in raising revenue through sources such as development partners and commercial activities.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the University must ensure prudent financial management in its operations for example, in the recruitment, appointment, and employment of its staff, and the compliance of its operational activities to the financial and administration management policies that uphold best practices.
2. That the University must invest in new income streams through:



- commercial revenue,
- sustainable commercial income generating projects, and
- additional assistance from new development partners.

3. That the University engage in aggressive marketing strategies and pursue incentives to attract more international students.

## **NEED FOR MORE ACADEMIC STAFF**

The University also faces the problem of having a large number of academic staff positions vacant which affects its overall mandate. While the University is resorting to blended modes of learning, the presence of high calibre academic staff is a prerequisite to ensuing effective teaching and learning and equitable sharing of workloads. It was observed that the University is prioritising the recruitment of academic staff to reduce this gap.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the University strengthen its Human Resource recruitment process and offer attractive remuneration packages to address the shortage of academic staff.
2. That the University better coordinate with the Department of Immigration for visa extensions to facilitate retention of expatriate academic staff.
3. That the University undertake succession planning to avoid shortage of academic staff.

## **LACK OF ADEQUATE TEACHING AND LEARNING FACILITIES AND SUPPORT SERVICES**

Lack of adequate teaching and learning facilities and support services at the University's regional campuses and centres is a major concern that serves as hindrance in furthering its strategic aspirations. The committee notes that discussions and work are being pursued bilaterally with member countries and assistance is being sought from development partners to address this critical issue.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the University, whilst continuing to invest in new income streams through commercial revenue and additional assistance from new development partners, also vigorously pursue sustainable commercial income generating projects to address the



lack of teaching and learning facilities and support services.

2. That the University be bolder in seeking corporate sponsorship and alumni contributions to help finance its capital development.

## **SHORTAGE OF STUDENT ACCOMMODATION AT LAUCALA CAMPUS**

Lack of adequate funding has meant that USP was not able to build enough accommodation at the Laucala campus to provide accommodation to its students at the campus and also attract more foreign students. The University Grants Committee (UGC) has requested the University to increase the intake of foreign students.

The building boom in Fiji has driven up the cost of construction, and the scarcity of development funding are challenges which have slowed down the construction of new accommodation. Despite all these issues, the committee notes that USP opened new student accommodation blocks at the Laucala Campus in 2017. A total of 48 beds were added as part of the 11th Hall thus increasing the number of beds at Laucala to 1,061. Plans are also being developed for the construction of the 12<sup>th</sup> hall project at the Laucala Campus.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. That the University provide adequate student accommodation to meet student demand.

## **USP TRUST FUND**

The University Trust Fund was set up to promote the establishment of a Trust Fund. It will be guided by a Board of Trustees with the Vice-Chancellor and President as Chair, 1 member of Council and 3 independent members from outside the University with expertise in the area of investment, trust law and knowledge/experience of managing significant endowment funds.

The committee notes that the Trust Fund is yet to be established. The University anticipated to raise more Endowment Funds as part of its 50th Anniversary however, it was unable to meet the target. Currently, with only FJD 5.8 m and limited predefined investments from donors, USP lacks sufficient finances to warrant a Trust Fund.

In addition, the University Trust Fund Board is yet to be formed. During the evidence session with the University, the committee was informed that prospective Board members, who were

approached had declined the invitations hence, a Board comprising of five members is yet to be filled.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. That the Vice-Chancellor and President of the University as the Chair of the USP Trust Fund, must ensure that the University Trust Fund Board is established.



## COMMITTEE SITE VISIT TO THE USP LABASA CAMPUS



### BACKGROUND

The USP Labasa Campus is currently located on the first floor of the Charan-Katonivere Building situated at the corner of Jaduram Street and Nasekula Road, within the Labasa Central Business District. The Campus officially began its operation on March 2000.

Labasa Campus like any other USP Regional Campus, provides teaching and learning facilities, teaching and support staff, learning resources and technologies that support the delivery of programmes either through face to face, or through other modes of delivery to its diverse students.

With the establishment of Labasa Campus, USP is in a position to serve the North better, as there has always been a pressing need for more higher education in the North. The Centre's area of operation covers the whole of Vanua Levu, Taveuni, Rabi and other outlying islands.

### KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SITE VISIT

1. **Increasing rental expenses for the Labasa campus** – A high proportion of the Budget for Labasa campus goes towards rental expenses. This is increasing over time due to increasing property rates in the market. The committee was informed during the site visit that USP wishes to build its own campus in order to ensure long term sustainability of the campus and continuing delivery of its services in the Northern Division.

2. **Physical infrastructure** – The ability of the Campus to operate as a normal University is being restricted because of its current facility and the University has been in this situation for the last 20 years. A fully fledged Campus with boarding facilities is needed with standard University Science laboratories for science and agriculture students.
3. **Lack of trained regional and non-regional librarians** – There is a lack of trained human resources in libraries in the North and in Fiji generally. At present, there are less than 15 professionally trained regional librarians in the USP. As such, scholarships and grants are needed to build career paths for upcoming generation of students to be librarians.
4. **Increasing number of enrolled students** – The size of students in USP Labasa campus is increasing by 10% every new semester therefore, learning support resources, facilities and infrastructure need strengthening to provide students with quality learning and teaching and equitable access to quality information.

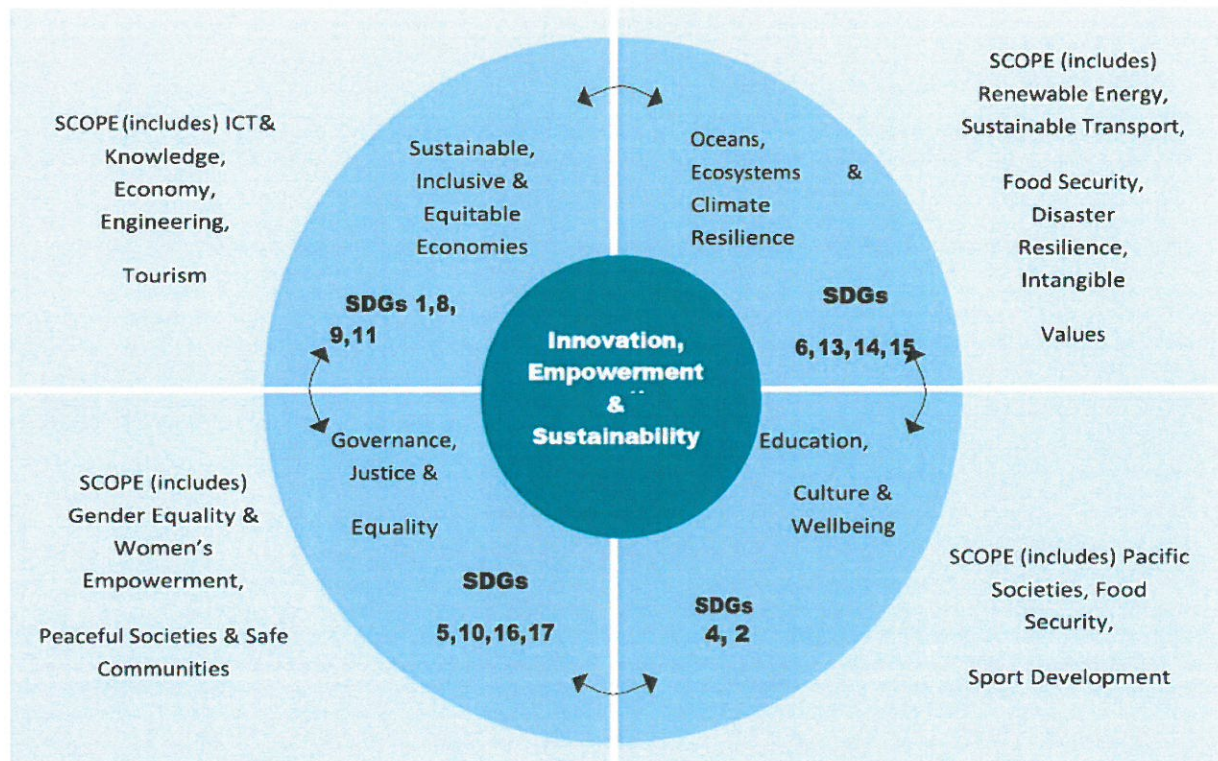
## **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION**

1. That the University build its own campus with boarding facilities in Labasa to address the above issues.



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The University very closely aligns its work, through the Strategic Plan, with that of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the SAMOA Pathway and the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (FPR). This is to ensure that its education outcomes, research and innovation efforts and regional cooperation and integration effectively address the key medium and long-term priorities of the region. The University has ensured that its five Strategic Research Themes (SRTs) are aligned to the SDGs, as illustrated in the diagram below:



## GENDER ANALYSIS

Gender is a critical dimension to parliamentary scrutiny. Standing Order 110 (2) requires committees to consider gender equality and ensure that the impact on both men and women is explored in all matters.

The committee noted that USP has a sound process for recruitment and is guided by Minimum Qualification Requirement (MQR) to ensure that every applicant is treated fairly and equally. One of the ways which USP is achieving this is through equal opportunity recruitment practices which includes the development of job descriptions and advertisements, to short listing and interviewing candidates. USP focuses on the skills and experience required for a position which limits discrimination and bias and ensures equality of opportunity at every stage of the recruitment process.

For training, the University has an established Staff Development Committee (SDC) and all applications for training are reviewed and decided by this Committee to ensure fair treatment for all applications received. For Academic Staff promotions, the University has a promotion process that goes through the Staff Review Committee (SRC) and are assessed on basis of the Quality of Teaching (QOT) and Quality of Research (QOR) criteria. For promotion of Professional Staff, the process includes advertisement of the position providing opportunities for local candidates to apply. Expatriates are only recruited if the required expertise and experience for positions is not locally available.

Furthermore, the committee notes that the University has an established Gender Mainstream Advisory Committee which is responsible for:

- Overseeing the implementation and further development of the University's Gender Policy.
- Supporting the achievement of the University's KPIs and equality objectives, by raising awareness of gender equality and acting as a body of expertise on gender issues; and
- Advising DEIC and Human Resources on measures addressing gender equality at USP.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. That future Annual Reports of the University of the South Pacific present a breakdown of gender equality and participation in all positions held within the University.

## CONCLUSION

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has fulfilled its mandate approved by Parliament which was to examine and review the 2017 Annual Report of the University of the South Pacific.

The University of the South Pacific is a non-profit educational institution providing higher education to member regional countries, with its main operations domiciled in Fiji. The University is the provider of tertiary education in the Pacific region and an international centre of excellence for teaching, research and consulting on all aspects of Pacific life.

The Royal Charter, University Statutes and the USP Convention form the overriding governance instruments of the University.

USP's Strategic Plan 2013-2018 came to its conclusion in 2018 with the University achieving 84% of the overall aims and objectives of the Plan. Much of 2017 was devoted to work on the development of the new Strategic Plan 2019-2024 which is currently under review to make it more strategically focused and aligned to the University Grants Committee Cycle (2019-2021).

The committee has made nine recommendations to the University in light of issues on the shortage of academic staff, lack of adequate teaching and learning facilities and support services, and shortage of accommodation. The University also needs to establish the USP Trust Fund Board and be bolder in seeking funds from the private sector and from alumni to help finance its operations.

The review of the 2017 Annual Report of the University of the South Pacific was conducted in a very tactful and comprehensive manner. This has enabled the committee for Social Affairs to submit to Parliament a more reliable and a cohesive report.



## COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE

We, the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, hereby agree with the contents of this report:



Hon. Viam Pillay  
(Chairperson)



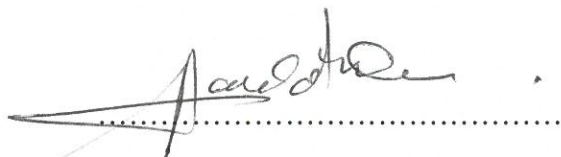
Hon. George Vignathan  
(Deputy Chairperson)



Hon. Alipate Nagata  
(Member)



Hon. Salote Radrodra  
(Member)



Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu  
(Member)



## APPENDICES

### Witnesses

---

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link: <http://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

**Tuesday 19 March 2019**

University of the South Pacific

**Professor Pal Ahluwalia**, Vice Chancellor and President, **Professor Arvind Patel**, Acting Dean Faculty of Business and Economics, and **Kolinio Boila**, Executive Director Finance.

## **Published written evidence**

---

Written evidence and supplementary information was received from the University of the South Pacific and can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:  
<http://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>