


# APPENDICES

## **Appendix One**

**Written Response by the University of the South  
Pacific**

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Our Ref: 2019/108

31<sup>st</sup> October 2019

Honourable Viam Pillay  
Chairperson  
Social Affairs Committee  
Parliament Complex  
Constitution Avenue  
**Suva**

Dear Sir,

**RE: Clarification of Issues – USP 2018 Annual Report**

I refer to your letter of 5 October regarding the abovementioned subject. I thank you for giving the University more time to provide the responses to a wide range of questions that your Committee had put forward.

I am pleased to attach the responses to all the questions. We have been given a new date and time to appear before the Standing Committee on Social Affairs and I confirm that we will attend on Monday 25 November from 2:00pm. I will lead the USP delegation and my Executive Director Finance, Mr. Kolinio Boila and Vice President, Regional Campuses and Estate and Infrastructure, Dr. Masasso Giulio Paunga will accompany me.

I look forward to meeting you and members of your Committee.

Yours sincerely,



**Professor Pal Ahluwalia**  
**Vice-Chancellor & President**

cc: Jajndra Karan- Executive Director Strategic Partnerships, Advancement & Communications.



**USP RESPONSES ON PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS QUESTIONS ON THE  
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	QUESTIONS	USP RESPONSES
1.	We note that USP is focused on becoming an Enterprising University with the aim of producing students with entrepreneurial skills, as job creators, not just job seekers. Provide data/analysis of students who have embarked on entrepreneurship.	<p>In 2017, (4%) and 2018 (3%) of the graduates were self-employed or embarked on entrepreneurship. Of those who were self-employed, most of the graduates ran Retail, Sales and Marketing (20%), Agriculture and Farming (13%) and Banking, Investment and Finance related businesses (7%) (P&amp;Q 2018 GDS Report).</p> <p>In 2019, USP opened its first Innovation Hub in conjunction with UNDP to promote entrepreneurship.</p>
2.	What are the types of programmes offered under the Pacific Technical and Further Education (Pacific TAFE) and is there a practical component in the courses provided?	USP Pacific TAFE offers pre-degree and sub-degree programmes. The sub-degree programmes (pre-service) have practical components which include industry endorsed curriculum, industry standards, industry mentoring and compulsory 6 months of assessed industry attachment. People from the industry are engaged to deliver certain courses in various programmes.
3.	How is the vocational and pathway education provided by Pacific TAFE different from the technical and vocational training provided by FNU?	USP Pacific TAFE only offers vocational qualifications, which are high and sustainable in demand and required by labour market. There is no neck to neck competition but a healthy one in demand areas, where students and employers get a choice. USP Pacific TAFE does not offer programmes in Electrical, Mechanical, Plumbing, Joinery etc. Most of the qualifications offered have international accreditations and recognitions. Programmes are also accredited on Fiji Qualifications Framework.
4.	During the University's last appearance before the committee, we were informed that work was underway on the establishment of the USP Trust Fund Board. What has been the progress on this issue?	USP Trust Fund Board is still not established and no major funds were raised during the 50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary, so there is no major investments for the Trust Fund to manage. We will begin this process in 2020 by first establishing Alumni Chapters in each of our member Countries.



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5.	<p>Staff Recruitment and Retention:</p> <p>a) Inform us on whether there were vacant academic staff positions in 2018 and whether these positions have been filled. Provide a breakdown of the vacant academic staff positions by Schools, Colleges and Centers.</p> <p>b) Due to the lack of academic facilitators in the University, were there challenges in ensuring that students were provided the right personnel to teach relevant programmes and courses?</p>	<table><thead><tr><th>Faculty/Campus</th><th>Vacancies</th><th>Filled</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td><b>FALE</b></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Kiribati</td><td>1</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Laucala</td><td>18</td><td>15</td></tr><tr><td>Marshall Islands</td><td>1</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td>Vanuatu</td><td>2</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td><b>FBE</b></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Alafua</td><td>3</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>Laucala</td><td>14</td><td>10</td></tr><tr><td><b>FSTE</b></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Alafua</td><td>1</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td>Kiribati</td><td>2</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>Laucala</td><td>28</td><td>25</td></tr><tr><td>Tonga</td><td>1</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td>Vanuatu</td><td>2</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td><b>Non-Faculty</b></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Alafua</td><td>1</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Emalus</td><td>1</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Laucala</td><td>3</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td><b>Total</b></td><td><b>78</b></td><td><b>61</b></td></tr></tbody></table>	Faculty/Campus	Vacancies	Filled	<b>FALE</b>			Kiribati	1		Laucala	18	15	Marshall Islands	1	1	Vanuatu	2	1	<b>FBE</b>			Alafua	3	2	Laucala	14	10	<b>FSTE</b>			Alafua	1	1	Kiribati	2	2	Laucala	28	25	Tonga	1	1	Vanuatu	2	2	<b>Non-Faculty</b>			Alafua	1		Emalus	1		Laucala	3	1	<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>61</b>	<p>b) Yes students were provided the right personnel to teach relevant programmes/ courses, while these academic positions were vacant, temporary appointments were made to ensure teaching was not affected.</p>	
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	<p>c) We note the challenges faced by the University in recruiting and retaining high caliber staff. What measures does the University have in place to address this pressing issue?</p> <p>d) The Annual Report states that the area of Human Resources has long been an under-performing section of the University. Explain why this has been the case, despite the HR section's importance. How has the University rectified this issue and is there a monitoring and evaluation system in place to keep track of the performance of the HR section?</p>	<p>c) The University is modelling a new approach using a business partner model and its working very well, from approximately 280 vacant position, we now have 103 vacant positions.</p> <p>d) The main reason would be that the HR leadership role was not filled from 2017 by anyone with an HR background, the interim director HR did not had HR experience and in May 2018 interim director was sent back to his substantive position due to some issues and HR department then reported directly to DVC Research and International, and then FSTE Dean was temporarily appointed as Vice President Human Resources and Digital Services. University has rectified this issue by appointing the New Executive Director People, workforce Strategy who will join the USP on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019, she will be looking at Performance management system and will set the KPIs and will monitor the performance for HR staff.</p>
6.	Provide further information on the research income generated and a breakdown of research income generated in 2018 amounting to \$12,194,443.	Taking the number of academic staff reported in the 2018 Annual report (319), it comes to \$38,227 per staff member, which is above the 2017 baseline. However, included in this academic staff total are a number of categories of staff who are not contracted to undertake research and therefore are excluded (e.g. TAs). That leaves us with 213 academic staff, which translates into \$57,251 per staff, which is well above our baseline of \$31k per academic staff member.
7.	The committee notes that the university had a total of 45,674 alumni as at the date of this Annual Report. Does the University receive contributions from these alumni and if so, what plans are there to increase these contributions?	Alumni are requested to voluntarily contribute to the Alumni Fund on a regular basis but the response has been very poor. This has been tried on a number of occasions. Going forward, USP will develop a number of projects and make a call for contributions. One of the issues has been to get a decision from FRCS to allow for the donations to be tax credited, as this was also highlighted by the University Grants Committee (UGC). This is an on-going discussion with FRCS and will also be taken up with other regional governments.



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8.	We note that USP achieved 80% of the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan's objectives. Which objectives of the Strategic Plan were not achieved, what were the reasons for their non-achievement, and have these been incorporated in SP 2019-2024?	There were certain areas in the Strategic Plan 2013-2018 that could not be delivered given the lack of funding and these included construction of accommodation units; facilitation of the Association of Heads of Tertiary Institutions in the Pacific Islands (AHTIPI); recruitment of more professors and the development of the new Solomon Islands Campus. The construction of the accommodation units and the new Solomon Islands Campus are being prioritised under the current Strategic Plan. The recruitment of professors is on-going priority. Please note that a new Strategic Plan has been adopted by Council at its November 2019 meeting.
9.	What has been the progress in the implementation of the University's SP 2019- 2024 and its Annual Plan 2019?	In 2019, the University experienced a downturn in its enrollments and had a substantial issue with member counties failing to provide contributions on time. As financial viability is the first prerequisite, all other strategic issues were partly deferred.
10.	Allegations of Mismanagement and Abuse of Office at USP: a) What was the outcome of the investigation into the allegations of mismanagement and abuse of office at USP?	<p>(a) At the Special Council Meeting on 28 and 29 August, the Council established a three-person Committee (Deputy PM Samoa as Chair and the two members are the AG Fiji and the PM Cook Islands) to oversee the recommendations of the BDO Report. The Council also approved the establishment of a Commission to implement the BDO findings and recommendations under the purview of the three-person Committee. The Commission has now been appointed. The Commission will develop an Action Plan, that will be made publicly available, to implement the BDO findings and recommendations.</p> <p>A Summary of the BDO Report dated 4 September 2019 is attached. The full BDO report was distributed in hardcopy to Council members only when they attended the Special Council meeting on 28 and 29 August. All hardcopies were returned to the Council and Senate Secretariat for safekeeping. No member of the Council was allowed to retain a hardcopy.</p>

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	<p>b) What were the recommendations made by the independent investigator (BOO Auckland) and how is the University planning to implement these recommendations?</p> <p>c) We note that the report by BOO identified the need for greater oversight, control and management of the HR and payroll functions of USP. Explain how the University will address each of these issues.</p>	<p>(b) and (c) The treatment of the BDO recommendations will be handled by the three-person Committee and the Commission. The Committee reports to the USP Council. The Commission will develop an Action plan and work with the Vice Chancellor to bring about change.</p>
11.	<p>Highlights of 2018: I</p> <p>a) Innovation Showcased at YES launch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide further information on the following innovative projects showcased at the YES launch:</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and Evaluation of EMI Sensors for Corrosion Measurements in Concrete</li> </ul>	<p>a) YES projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>EMI Sensors for Corrosion Measurements in Concrete</b> – Concrete is widely used for construction purposes. Corrosion of steel rebar's in concrete structures is the main cause of corrosion that causes damage and failure of the concrete leading to increased cost for inspection and maintenance to the damaged concrete. The two most commonly used techniques for assessing the corrosion level in concrete are electrochemical and destructive, both of which have advantages and disadvantages. To overcome the problems associated with such methods, an Electromagnetic Induction (EMI) based sensor was innovated considering state-of-the-art Non-destructive Evaluation (NDE) methods to identify concrete corrosion. Few different approaches were utilized such as Single-loop Coil (SLC), Multiple-loop Coil (MLC) design using copper wires and placement of the two coils while measuring corrosion was as also important. The co-planer placement of the</li> </ul>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Autonomous Motion Tracking Turrets with Laser Illuminators</li> </ul>	<p>MLC shows the promising outcomes. As the corrosion level increases in the concrete, the conductivity of the concrete also increases due to changes in the chemical content which causes changes to the electric field passed through the concrete and thus enabling corrosion to be measured in concrete using EMI based sensors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Autonomous Motion Tracking Turrets with Laser Illuminators</b> - This device is used for next level surveillance for companies such as banks, power stations, jewellery shops and private storage barns located in the remote areas, where high surveillance is needed. Main feature of this turret is to give 180deg motion with high efficiency processor support and camera. A laser mounted on the turret gives an accuracy of <math>\pm 10\text{cm}</math> for locating the target. In addition, the system tracks moving targets within the webcam range and puts a boundary box around the moving target initialising that there is motion. As the moving target moves around within the cameras range, the laser points at the moving target with the help of the turret. It runs on two modes, a) motion detection; and b) interactive mode. Motion detection starts the basic operation of motion detection whereas interactive mode enables the user to calibrate the turret manually (via keyboard) if the turret is not calibrated in line with the camera. A new feature with exclusive functionality with low cost equipment sure makes the device a unique motion detection system. It can be easily interfaced with Mobile devices and connected wirelessly.</li> <li><b>Braille Eye-Slate</b> - Braille Eye-slate is developed to teach basic Braille characters such as numerals and alphabets to visually impaired children. The slate contains a smart audible voice output upon button press and smart battery status monitor for charging and battery voltage through auditory means. Furthermore, 26 Braille keys serve for both alphabets and numeric with three adaptable mode change buttons. The device enables the user to remember Braille letters easily and independently.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morris Hedstrom (MH) App.</li> </ul>	<p>The current invention imparts certain advantages in the learning and teaching of basic Braille characters which prepares for the following outlined objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A portable standalone device with a primary purpose to teach Braille alphabets and numerals to the blind visually impaired children through audible aid and soft keys to press are main objectives of this invention.</li> <li>A low cost device that would be easier to be commercialized and to be used by visually impaired children in remotely located areas with little or no support at all and without the need of trained personnel or a Braille expertise is a prominent objective of this invention.</li> <li>Another advantage is to teach Braille alphabets in a very short span of time, this is fulfilled through a special feature that teaches a character with its suitable Phenom.</li> <li>Another key feature is to work with various modes, for instance a button for alphabets, a button that would change the mode to numbers and a specific button that would change the mode of the device to teach Phenom.</li> <li>The device is specially designed for targeted audience, children between 4 -8 years of age to impart early childhood learning and teaching of basic braille characters, hence the device is much toy like and easily adoptable by visually impaired children.</li> </ol> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Morris Hedstrom (MH) App</b> - Customer engagement is the main factor in business strategies and therefore, MH envisioned to develop a system that can keep its customer updated with its services. The main objective of the application is to take into consideration the customer feedback and provide efficient services over time. MH app is a sales and promotion application built for MH customers with the goal of empowering future innovations in providing quality services for better shopping experiences at MH stores throughout Fiji.</li> </ul> <p>The app will provide useful and user-friendly features in ensuring a convenient and time saving shopping experience. Core features such as Store Information, Customer Feedback, Price Checker and Sales and</p>



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	<p>b) Natural Disaster Detection Improved at the Emalus Campus - Has this concept been used in Fiji and has there been collaboration between relevant stakeholders in how this can be effectively used in other Pacific Island countries?</p> <p>c) 2018 Student Forums - The committee notes the various issues raised in the student forums on the General Service Fees, the Buddy System for students with disabilities, and on-campus accommodation. What has been the progress in dealing with each of these issues?</p>	<p>Promotions is the building blocks of the entire MH application. The application is built on Android platform and is compatible with all android mobile devices. The idea of making shopping services online and portable gives MH customers better services to choose from within MH outlets. The main vision of the application is to provide customers with relevant and accurate shopping information shifting the power to its customers.</p> <p>Note: USP is currently developing a Mobile APP on Narcotics at the request of the Fiji Ministry of Defense.</p> <p>b) <b>Natural disaster detection at Laucala campus</b> and other campuses is not available as this service is provided by respective national disaster management offices. However, USP has a disaster management committee chaired by VCP to ensure all campuses are prepared for natural disasters and all campus directors lead their respective campus emergency response teams in their countries assisted by their national disaster departments.</p> <p><b>General Service Fee (GSF)</b> is an important fee that allows the Student Association to operate and provide invaluable services to the student body.</p> <p><b>Buddy System for students with disabilities</b> The Student Buddy model, whereby students with a Disability that need assistance in getting to class and around the campus and help with their studies before, during and after class are assigned a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year student buddy throughout the semester or for the whole year if need be. Senior students (student Buddies) provide one to one daily support and also assist socially. In addition they provide the following one to one services:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Notetaking for their student with disabilities.</li> <li>2. Record lectures for students with disabilities using a voice recorder.</li> <li>3. Recaps after class with students what was learnt, and goes over assignments and guides student as to how to do assignment.</li> </ol>

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		<p>All Students with a Disability after disclosure, have access to the Student Buddy Support model, and are provided with reasonable accommodations thereafter to ensure they are supported Academically and Socially whilst at USP. The list below highlights accommodations made to cater for differing needs of each student in regards to attending lectures, after hours study, examination preparation and examinations.</p> <p>Lectures: <u>Students with Disabilities do attend the same lectures as other students but are provided with a buddy who can deliver:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Notetaking for their student with disabilities.</li> <li>5. Record lectures for students with disabilities using a voice recorder.</li> <li>6. Recaps after class with students what was learnt, and goes over assignments and guides student as to how to do assignment.</li> <li>7. Sign Language Interpreters are arranged and present in class for students with hearing impairment.</li> <li>8. Catch-ups are had with the teaching staff if student is having difficulty to see how best to assist (i.e. additional tutorials are arranged at times)</li> </ol> <p>As a direct result of developing and funding USP's Buddy System for students with disabilities model and the recent USP Regional Disability Scholarship model, USP has been recognized as a leader in HE Disability support in Fiji and across the Pacific by 1) the Australian Government and 2) by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC).</p> <p>In addition our Disability Support model was used by FNU in the past as a benchmark when they developed their Unit and looked at replicating many of our special accommodations for students with a Disability.</p> <p>In addition and to assist the honorable members of parliament in possessing a detailed understanding of the amount of support that is provided to assist students with disabilities who choose USP to study, the following is highlighted:</p>



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		<p>The USP Disability Resource Centre (DRC) also provides a range of support services to students that disclose their disability at USP such as :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. DRC provides Sign Language Interpreter's to persons with hearing impairment.</li> <li>2. DRC ensures students that require Braille are accommodated.</li> <li>3. DRC has assistive technology such as screen reader software (JAWS/NVDA) installed on 7 computers in the DRC computer Lab for our students with low vision or are totally blind. The Computer Lab is also fully air conditioned for the comfort of the students.</li> <li>4. DRC has a dedicated printer in the DRC computer Lab for all USP Students with a disability to use.</li> <li>5. USP students with a disability have a dedicated student common room that was opened in 2017 at a cost of \$160k that has a large working space for our students to use for study, kitchen facilities, a furnished dining and lounge area, toilet and shower facilities. This facility is <u>very</u> similar to the set-up of a Post Graduate common room within the Faculties at USP.</li> <li>6. USP's Disability staff closely with the Student Learning Support teams within the Faculties ensuring our students are given the Academic Support throughout the semester and Exam preparation support prior to exams. In addition the Student Learning support staff come up to the Disability Resource Centre during the semester and provide sessions on helping students as a group or individually in specific subjects students are having difficulty with.</li> <li>7. At the beginning of each semester we email a student profile to teaching staff highlighting the needs of students with a disability in their classes and the support they require academically.</li> </ol> <p><b>On-Campus Accommodation</b> - USP has tried to build additional 400 rooms since 2016. However, funding has been a major issue. USP has reached its debt limit and has no CAPEX funding available. Joint venture arrangements have been explored but there have difficulties finding partners as USP Laucala site is on a restricted lease land from the Fiji Government, and there is only one</p>

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	<p>d) Royal Visit to the Laucala Campus - Have there been any recipients of the following new scholarships and grants announced by Their Royal Highnesses, Prince Harry and Meghan as part of their official visit to Fiji:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 new Queen Elizabeth scholarships for students from the Caribbean and Pacific regions to study climate change related subjects?</li> <li>• Grant for workshops to empower female staff?</li> </ul> <p>e) USP and Griffith University to Establish the Pacific Water Centre - Has the Pacific Water Centre been established at USP? If not, by when is this project expected to complete?</p>	<p>lease title. USP has applied for subdividing and rezoning its Laucala land.</p> <p>Washing machine and hot water issues were fixed immediately upon receipt of the complaint.</p> <p>(d) This has not been granted yet. The British High Commission has yet to advise us on this. It has sought assistance from its office in London for an update on the grant.</p> <p>e) The <b>Pacific Water Centre</b> will be established and ready to roll out its programme plus all of its intended activities as stated in the MOU at the latest by 2021. The principal funding entity for the PWC is the Australian Government through DFAT. The decision on the PWC funding by DFAT will be known by next year.</p>
12.	In light of the decline in international enrolments in 2018, what plans are in place to increase the intake of international students? What benefits and incentives does the University offer in order to attract more international students?	To increase the intake of international students studying at USP, the International Office (IO) has established partnership agreements with recruitment agents, who market USP and recruit International Students within their specified target markets. IO has developed study tours to USP. Initiatives like this will greatly increase our visibility as a study abroad destination. USP has also proposed to Council to consider decreasing International Fees from 2020. Establishing the International Student Marketing Committee, allows key people at the different faculties and support services to contribute and assist the



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		<p>International Office. A particular issue lies with International students not having the ability to work part-time as they do in Australia or New Zealand.</p> <p>International students benefit when choosing USP as their destination of study as the IO adopts a one stop shop policy approach when it comes to handling students. It also assists students with their admissions, registration, permit application and accommodation requirements. This type of services ensures that information received by students is streamlined and they do not get inundated with information or having to deal with multiple departments and faculties.</p>
13.	What are the scholarship benefits offered to USP students participating in student exchange programmes who are placed at partner institutions in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Japan?	<p>IO's role is not only to recruit International Students but also provide our students in the region an opportunity to study abroad and build capacity. USP Exchange programme offers students at USP the opportunity to study with our exchange partners in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA and Japan. The programme funds student travel, insurance and visa requirement and the student pay local fees at their home university instead of the international fee they would normally pay if they studied as an independent international student. The International Office working with its partners will assist students with their admission process and securing accommodation as partner University. This programme offers our regional students the opportunity to experience learning and integrating at an international level. The experience positively contributes to the graduate attributes and enhances their employability.</p>
14.	What has been the progress of the USPNet Infrastructure Upgrade project?	<p>The NZMFAT-funded USPNet Infrastructure Upgrade Project is targeted at facilitating a transformative impact in higher education delivery to the Pacific Region through investment in the upgrade of USPNet ICT infrastructure and services. The project involves firstly the construction of replacement USPNet satellite antenna systems for end-of-life infrastructure installed in Suva and all main regional campuses in USP member countries. Additionally as part of this project, key networking, systems and services infrastructure will be upgraded to optimize connectivity over the new satellite infrastructure and provide a truly</p>

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	QUESTIONS	USP RESPONSES
		<p>transformative experience for USP staff and students with regards to access to online teaching, learning and research resources.</p> <p>USP has commenced the replacement of regional campus antennae since April 2018 and have current completed over 70% of the planned regional campus sites – with the remaining campuses to be completed by Dec 2019. Construction of the new USPNET Hub antenna in Laucala Campus will commence in October 2019 with targeted completion for March 2020. The remaining network, systems and services infrastructure enhancement components are intended to be completed in June 2020.</p>
15.	<p>Communications Building fire:</p> <p>a) Has assessment by the engineers been completed and the assessment report received? If so, provide details on the content of the report, in particular on the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value of damage to the building</li> <li>• Extent of insurance claim to be made to re-build on the site</li> </ul> <p>b) What were the lessons learnt from the 2018 Communications Building fire?</p> <p>c) Has the University implemented a Contingency Plan for such disasters in the future?</p>	<p>a) The Structural Integrity Assessment Report has been received. QBE appointed Shri Singh &amp; Associates (Structural Engineers) to prepare a structural integrity assessment of the Building. The report was provided to USP on the 6<sup>th</sup> June where it was independently assessed by USP's Project Managers and Structural Experts NRW Macallan. NRW Macallan's review of the report is a fundamental part of the current negotiations on the claims amount by the USP Claims Management Team. The amount for the damages, at this stage, is not available. There are critical areas in which the two engineers seem to be of some notable differences, however, we are expecting a positive way forward soon before the end of November.</p> <p>b) We need to install effective sprinkler systems; improve detection equipment and links to the National Fire Authority (NFA), reduce flammable materials in buildings, and to attend to deferred maintenance in a timely manner. In addition, it is important also for the university to ensure and consider a second and third data back-up storages either locally, internationally or both. We have now made sure that we have data backup in Tonga.</p> <p>c) Yes, the University has used the experience gained from this incident to develop and improve on its Contingency plans.</p>



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	QUESTIONS	USP RESPONSES
	d) What progress has been made in seeking support from development partners and member countries to reconstruct the building?	d) The University Management continues to approach potential development partners and member countries but there has not been a confirmed interest registered yet.
16.	In light of the increase in enrolments at the Lautoka and Labasa Campuses, what infrastructure developments has the university invested in to cater for increasing enrolments in the two Campuses?	The University is operating these two campuses from rented premises. The University has invested in upgrading spaces conducive to the learning and teaching needs of the students at these campuses. Our Pacific TAFE section has also invested in expanding to a new site in Labasa, and two sites in the West – Namaka and Namoli/Lautoka. The University has also invested in seeking potential sites not only with the Fiji Governments but with potential landowners in Labasa. These expansions will assist the Campuses in accommodating the increasing student enrolments.
17.	Provide a status update on the development of the new Solomon Islands Campus, the reasons for its delay, and how the University plans to address the issues surrounding the Campus' development?	We have made good progress. The tender for rebidding for construction of new campus was issued on 24 September 2019. Tenders closed on 4 November and we anticipate a contract to be awarded by mid-January 2020 with construction completed by end 2021. The main delay has been due to the preparation of Tender Bid Documents in compliance with stringent ADB procedures and requirements.
18.	Highlight the progress made in the implementation of the following EU funded regional development projects and who will be the beneficiaries of these projects:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership</b> A number of specific outputs were advanced for KRA 6 over the period Jul 18 - Jun 19. A comprehensive Training Needs and Gap Analysis (TNGA) was undertaken, the report of which will inform the KRA 6 activities for the rest of the project period. A Continuing Professional Development (CPD) strategy is now in place to support a more systematic approach for upskilling of marine and</li> </ul>

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	QUESTIONS	USP RESPONSES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparent and Effective Policies and Public Financial Management</li> <li>• Intra -ACP Global Climate Change Adaptation, Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change and Resilience Building</li> </ul>	<p>fisheries personnel in the region. Six scholarships were awarded for Masters and PhD research, and 27 regional participants were supported towards the Certificate IV in Coastal Fisheries &amp; Aquaculture Monitoring, Compliance and Surveillance. For KRA 6 visibility, a project website was established and housed within the USP's Institute of Marine Resources' web-page, and a Talanoa session was convened for project stakeholders. The strategy taken for acceleration of year 2 activities and project expenditure is to undertake extensive stakeholder engagement process at country level, roll-out delivery and support for training on existing and amended marine and fisheries related TVET, short courses and research scholarships while the new training courses are being developed. The TNGA recommendations will be used to inform the specifics of these activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Transparent and Effective Policies and Public Financial Management</b></li> </ul> <p>This is a 3 year project starting in January 2019. A number of workshops will be delivered by this project in the areas of accounting and audit standards, fraud investigation, and public procurement. The necessary personnel and consultants for the project are being identified and the preparation of workshop materials are being prepared.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Intra-ACP Global Climate Change Adaptation, Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change and Resilience Building</b></li> </ul> <p>The Project Team Leader; Project Interns to assist with COP25 activities; and the Graphic Designer have been appointed. The Inception meeting and launch of project was held in Apia, Samoa to introduce project to stakeholders/partners; project plans discussed and preliminary plans put in place.</p> <p>The Pre-COP training has been implemented as a build up towards the COP meeting and geographical locations finalised by SPREP for Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and PNG while the process of developing a TOR/advertisement to hire</p>



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	QUESTIONS	USP RESPONSES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Global Climate Change Alliance Plus Scaling Up Pacific Adaptation</li> </ul>	<p>a consultant to develop a standard Participatory Needs Analysis (PNA) tool that will be used across the 5 project countries to identify gaps and set baselines and targets for capacity building at sub-national levels is in progress. A TOR is being developed for a consultant to develop a Participatory Needs Analysis (PNA) tool that will identify gaps in the existing Resilience Certificate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Global Climate Change Alliance Plus Scaling Up Pacific Adaptation</b></li> </ul> <p>Project Design Document (PDD) developed in RMI and activities will focus on Lifestyle Changes and Climate Resilience. EU GCCA+ SUPA will be implemented in communities across 3 atolls (Majuro, Arno and Jaluit). Consultations with potential consultants to design a participatory needs analysis tool in progress. The Project Coordinator North is in the process of conducting a desktop review of similar exercises carried out by other agencies in the identified sites</p> <p>Discussions have been initiated with government ministries in Tonga, FSM, Palau, RMI, Kiribati and Cook Islands during in-country consultations led by SPC on how best to address future needs.</p> <p>Research and Community Officers (RCO) for Cook Islands, Kiribati, Tonga, and Niue, Tuvalu have been selected and HR is in process of finalising contract. For the RCO in Nauru, head-hunting is in progress to identify a local candidate. USP Campus Director Nauru, Ms. Alamanda Lauti is assisting the PACRES team in identifying potential candidates. The CC/DRM Coordinator assumed her role on 16/9/2019.</p>
19.	Has a new agreement been reached with the Laucala I&J and Hourly paid staff following the previous Collective Agreement's expiration on 31 December 2018? Enlighten the committee on the challenges faced in a new agreement not	HR department has just received the Log of claims on 7 <sup>th</sup> November 2019 from the Union. According to the current Union president, the union were not in good terms with management in 2018 and there were some conflict between union executives and members which lead to a new Union president and general Secretary been appointed, this new Union executive are working very with the management and the new collective agreement will be signed before

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	<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>USP RESPONSES</b>
	being reached before the expiration.	<p>December 24<sup>th</sup>.</p> <p>The Union at that time had agreed as per the Law will allow this current CA to run for 12 months to allow the parties for negotiation and replacement agreement.</p> <p>It should also be noted that there was no CA for the period 2013-2015 as the University was not willing to enter into negotiation. The last CA was for period 2010-2012. Nevertheless, all backpay issues were settled with the Union this year.</p>
20.	<p>The Annual Report, with respect to the various issues raised by staff in the two Vice-Chancellor's Staff Forum held in 2018, states the following:</p> <p>'The first Forum was held on 14 March... [Staff] raised issues on the renewal of contracts and five-year contracts for academic staff; the Whistle-Blower Policy; validity of work permits; staff reviews and subsequent appeals; salary structure; and security on campus...'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Renewal of contracts for academic staff</b> depends on the staff review committee award, if a staff gets 1 award i.e increment or bonus on his / her performance then it's renewed for 3 years, if a staff gets 2 awards, i.e increment and bonus on excellent performance gets 5 year contract renewal.</li> <li>• The <b>Whistle blower policy</b> is in place and currently managed by Director Assurance and Compliance. And from 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019, it will be managed by Executive Director, people and workforce strategy.</li> <li>• <b>Staff grievance policy and Procedures</b> has been approved at the November 2019 Council meeting.</li> <li>• <b>Work permit</b> issues - The senior management with VCP has met the director immigration twice. We are working as team to ensure timely permit renewals and approval are done. We have noted very good response time from immigration this year.</li> </ul>



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	QUESTIONS	USP RESPONSES
	<p>"The second Vice-Chancellor's Staff Forum for the year was held on 14 September...Staff raised concerns about the implementation of biometrics and the general operations of the HR department. They also addressed issues including the lack of parking space on campus, the need for a revamp of the USP website, the Dining Hall, on campus accommodation for students with disabilities, and the use of the gym for classes"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Staff reviews and appeals</b> are dealt now in timely manner and staff are informed via the issuing of letters informing staff of decisions. For regional campus salary structure is part of collective agreements and for Laucala intermediate and junior staffs had 5% pay rise in 2019.</li> <li>• <b>Bio metric</b> is on trial at the moment, time and attendance has been captured on bio metric, ITS and HR department is rectifying issues raised in trial and drafting the policy and procedures and will undertake stakeholder consultation.</li> <li>• <b>Website revamp</b> - The University is currently undertaking the Website Revamp project. The tender process has completed and the successful consultant has been finalised. The project is expected to take 6 months to complete.</li> <li>• The <b>Dining Hall</b> is a commercially tenanted space. Food quality is monitored in accordance with requirements by Suva City Council Health Department and we regularly report this to SCC.</li> <li>• <b>Campus accommodation for students with disabilities</b> - Student accommodation on Campus that is newly build are disability friendly, but the very old student accommodation are not disability friendly.</li> </ul> <p>Where possible, every effort is being made to make USP disability friendly. In 2019, rooms for disabled students are available after USP modified the 2nd Hall B Block in late 2018 / early 2019 at a cost of \$110k. Currently USP has dedicated 2nd Hall A &amp; B Block for allocation to students with a disability – USP now has 11 dedicated and specifically modified single rooms available. This consists of 5 rooms in 2nd Hall A block and 6 rooms in B Block. B Block (6 rooms) underwent under renovations in late 2018 / early 2019, especially to cater for wheelchair bound students. In addition USP has renovated a 2 bedroom Family Quarters that can accommodate a disabled student and her / his family. The above accommodations catered for all our student needs</p>

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	QUESTIONS	USP RESPONSES
	How has the Senior Management strived to address the above issues?	<p>under the Regional Disability Scholarship for the 2019 year. Further to the above "reasonable accommodations" being undertaken by USP in the area of Disability services, please note that in late 2018, USP utilized \$ 65K to a new build disability Toilet with ramps at the USP Student "Wot Eva Bar "on Campus, to ensure disabled persons across the Pacific who choose USP to study, can participate in the normal social aspects of obtaining a Higher Education qualification.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USP allows all formal classes to be held in the <b>USP fitness Centre</b> that is organized by USP, but USP does not allow anyone to commercially use the Fitness Centre as a teaching venue by external parties.</li> <li>• The Senior management present in the staff forum has dealt with the concerns raised.</li> </ul>
21.	<p><b>Salary Adjustments:</b></p> <p>a) Elaborate on the salary adjustments made for Academic Staff and members of the Senior Management Team, including the Vice-Chancellor and President, for the 2016 to 2018 triennium.</p> <p>b) What was the total amount expended on these salary adjustments? Provide a breakdown of the salary adjustment made to each position.</p>	<p>a) The salary adjustments were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professors and Associate professors – 12% (approved by Council)</li> <li>• Senior lecturers and lecturers – 10% (approved by Council)</li> <li>• Assistant lecturers – 7% (approved by Council)</li> <li>• Teaching assistants – still under dispute (not yet paid – approved by FIC)</li> <li>• Intermediate, Junior and Hourly Paid positions – 5% (approved by FIC)</li> <li>• Regional Campuses – average increase of 5%, depending on local comparators (approved by FIC)</li> <li>• SMT's – above 5%, depending on the median point of the agreed comparators for each position (approved by Council).</li> </ul> <p>The total emoluments are published in the annual reports and therefore for public consumption, including parliament, as it meets the international reporting requirements for public institutions.</p> <p>b) EDF has highlighted that the information is private and confidential and the above is sufficient. Information is available in the Council Papers of which Minister Education has a copy of.</p>



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	QUESTIONS	USP RESPONSES
	c) With these salary adjustments, has USP managed to recruit the Executive Director, Human Resources, and other senior staff for the efficient operation of the University? Has this also led to the recruitment of staff on senior academic positions that have been vacant for some time? Specify what these positions were.	c) USP has appointed a new Executive Director People and workforce strategy and the start date is 2 <sup>nd</sup> December 2019. Two Dean positions have been advertised with an international search currently underway for both FAE and FBE
22.	Has the University's Monitoring & Evaluation Framework for all committees and boards been developed and implemented to allow an annual self-evaluation of performance and committee effectiveness?	The M&E Framework is a new initiative proposed to document any monitoring and evaluation processes and/or tools that are currently in place for committees and boards. The existing M&E tool used to assess the performance and effectiveness of the committees and boards are the Annual Self-Evaluation forms, which are circulated to all the committees at its last meeting of the year. Following this, the results are analysed using a basic formula-driven excel sheet to which a report is then written to summarise the responses provided. The M&E Framework is to build on from the existing tool highlighted above, however, this is yet to be developed. A review of current processes within the University with regards to M&E together with research on comparator Universities and other benchmarks are still being carried and information/findings should be available by first quarter of 2020.
23.	Pages 66-67 of Annual Report (Commercial Operations): a) Accommodation and Leased Out Properties - Explain why, despite the	a) The Annual Report describes an increase in consolidated surplus for lodges from FJD 0.14m (2017) to FJD 0.3m (2018).

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	<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>USP RESPONSES</b>
	<p>implementation of strict debt policies and a faster turnaround time between tenants, there was a decrease in the consolidated Surplus of Income for lodges to FJD 0.3m in 2018, compared to FJD 0.14m for the same period in 2017.</p> <p>b) Student Lockers - How does the University plan to increase Student Locker income and how has the issue of locker break-ins been addressed?</p> <p>c) Book Centre and Computer Shop - We note that Pacific books revenue increased due to a government purchase order of FJD 165,000. Provide further information on this purchase order.</p>	<p>b) Lockers are losing their popularity and the volume available continues to be reduced. Policy changes to allow bags into the Library also impacted upon demand. Lockers have been relocated into areas where they are more visible.</p> <p>c) Book Centre revenues reflect the Fiji Government's student book allowance now being paid directly to students bank accounts, whereas previously this was paid to the Book Centre for distribution through book purchases or associated course materials. We expect revenue decline in this area in the future. This is an issue as some students do not spend the allocated funds.</p> <p>The Pacific Books Purchase Order was raised by the Ministry of Education, Arts &amp; Heritage for a range of Pacific Books for Years 1 -10. The largest elements were YR 9-10 for 15,630 copies of Tali Magimagi (Short Stories) and YR13 for 7,680 copies of Langakali.</p>
24.	Inform us on the development of the Quality of Governance Index to enhance and further embed good governance throughout the University.	At its November 2019 meeting Council has approved new KPIs as this Quality of Governance Index was not a reliable measure as it was a self-measure that could not be benchmarked.
25.	<p>Enlighten the committee on whether the following new agreements have been finalised and what work will be undertaken as part of these agreements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USP-Australia Partnership Agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>USP- Australia Partnership</b> was signed on 5 April 2019, with a total contribution AUD84m. Work has progressed under this Partnership in 2019, two Partnership Group meetings have been held involving USP and DFAT, as part of the Partnership Agreement.</li> </ul>



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	QUESTIONS	USP RESPONSES
	<p>2019-2024</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USP-New Zealand Partnership 2019-2021</li> <li>• Are there plans in place to have partnership agreements with other Member Countries?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>USP- New Zealand Partnership</b> is currently being developed and this will be finalized before the end of this year. The new Partnership will be effective from January 2020. MFAT</li> <li>• We have no plans to have <b>partnerships with member Governments</b> as they already provide grants as part of their annual contribution.</li> </ul>
26.	<p>Page 70 of Annual Report (WSCUC Accreditation) - What progress has been made in the implementation of the seven recommendations made by the WSCUC Seeking Accreditation Visit 1 (SAV1) Review Team?</p>	<p>The Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education (DVC E) is overseeing and coordinating the University's response to sustaining the commendations and addressing the recommendations and is in the process of developing a comprehensive Action Plan and Schedule of Activities in order to meet these obligations in preparation for the next phase of accreditation cycle. Simultaneously, work has been carried out and progress in a number of key areas related to the commendations and recommendations as follows:</p> <p><b>(i) Approval of Postgraduate Outcomes (Recommendation 3)</b></p> <p>The University developed a set of generic outcomes for postgraduate studies at Postgraduate Diploma, Masters and Doctoral levels. These postgraduate outcomes were informed by the USP graduate outcomes at undergraduate level, Fiji Higher Education Commission qualifications framework as well as frameworks and exemplars from both Australia and New Zealand. The postgraduate outcomes were developed in consultation with the academic community and were approved by Senate 3, 2018. These outcomes will now be used to shape learning, teaching and assessment practices at all levels of postgraduate studies. Postgraduate programmes will also need to be reviewed to ensure congruence with these new outcomes. The outcomes can be accessed via the Research Office <a href="#">website</a> and Learning &amp; Teaching <a href="#">website</a>.</p> <p><b>(ii) Curriculum Review and Development Work (Recommendations 3, 4 and 7)</b></p> <p>To maintain and sustain curriculum improvement, the Office of the DVC E</p>

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	QUESTIONS	USP RESPONSES
		<p>developed the <u>Curriculum Review and Development Plan</u> as a framework for curriculum review and enhancement for undergraduate degree programmes. It is also a systematic tool to review programmes that are due for academic external programme review. The implementation of the Curriculum Review and Development Plan has been formalized since early 2018; focusing initially on disciplines in the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education (FALE). The work has been extended to other faculties, particularly where a programme is preparing for external review.</p> <p>The Office of the DVC E is leading the curriculum review and development work and aspires to build the capacity of academic staff members to take ownership of the ongoing improvement of their teaching and learning processes. In order to promote academic staff ownership of their curricula, the Office of DVC E is using a collaborative model of staff development in which review and development work is undertaken in partnership with discipline teams. The associated professional development is a specific response to Recommendation 7. Since the formal inception of this process, considerable progress has been made with the review and enhancement of the curriculum and assessment of the following disciplines: Economics, Education, History, Journalism, Land Management, Law, Literature, Psychology, Social Work, Sociology, and Tourism.</p> <p><b>(iii) Use of Standardized Course Outline Template for Undergraduate Courses (Commendation 6)</b></p> <p>The Office of DVC E is committed to ensuring that the standardized course outline template is used consistently for all undergraduate courses. Correspondingly, an audit was carried out on 2018 courses to check for compliance and feedback was provided to all Schools to facilitate any required modifications. This audit will be carried out each semester. As a result of the approval of the postgraduate outcomes, a new standardized course outline template for postgraduate courses will be developed for use in 2020.</p>



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	<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>USP RESPONSES</b>
27.	<p>The University of the South Pacific Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2018</p> <p>The committee notes that there was a backlog of capital expenditure approved but not spent which will be spent in 2019. Explain why this was the case and which projects the funds were allocated for.</p>	<p>The delay is due to the very high costs of construction in the market post the Winston Cyclone and the University were considering other options to undertake these. Some of these projects are now on tender, most to do with upgrades of roads, and upgrades of roofs to meet new Cyclone codes in Fiji, but most to do with upgrades of very old buildings at the campuses (the most in Alafua Campus in Samoa).</p>
28.	<p>VAT on Fijian Government contributions (1992 - 2007) - Provide a status update on this issue and whether the matter has been closed with FRCS.</p>	<p>This is still outstanding with FRCS. We hope the Social Affairs Committee could help raise this through Parliament so we could close the matter.</p>



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4 September 2019

The University of the South Pacific

## INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION SUMMARY REPORT

*This document is a summary of the independent investigation report, dated 21 August 2019, which was prepared by BDO Auckland.*

### Introduction, objective, and scope

1. BDO Auckland ("BDO") has completed an independent investigation, which was commissioned by the Audit and Risk Committee of the University of South Pacific ("USP"), and tabled its findings in a report at a special meeting of the USP Council on the 29 August 2019. The investigation focussed on allegations made by the recently appointed Vice-Chancellor & President ("VCP") of the USP. These allegations primarily relate to human resource and remuneration decisions that were made by the former VCP and the senior management team of the USP.
2. The objective of the investigation was to independently test the veracity of possible breaches outlined in the VCP's paper titled: Issues, Concerns, and Breaches of Past Management and Financial Decisions (the "Paper").
3. The Paper put forward twenty six allegations of mismanagement by the former VCP of the USP who held office from 2008 to 2018. To a lesser extent, the Paper implicated other members of the USP's senior management team as either beneficiaries, or decision makers. These twenty six allegations formed the scope of the investigation. Two additional matters were added during the investigation given their similarity to other allegations within the Paper, and the quantum of the amounts involved.
4. The investigation, which commenced in early July 2019, was carried out at the Laucala campus of the USP.

### Key observations and recommendations

5. BDO identified three key observations during its investigation into the allegations raised in the Paper. These observations do not directly relate to any one allegation, however, they do address many of the control weaknesses that have been the cause of those allegations. Each observation, and BDO's associated recommendations, are summarised below.
6. **Remuneration policies and control** - BDO is of the view that oversight, governance, and control of remuneration is a key weakness across the USP. This was the key theme throughout the investigation as many of the matters raised in the Paper, or the likely motivations behind those matters, relate to remuneration. The USP's current policy framework, while extensive, is overly complex, fragmented, outdated, and generally isn't fit-for-purpose. As a result, four remuneration mechanisms have collectively been exploited and have led to significant cash leakage across the USP over a number of years. These mechanisms are outlined below.



### **Inducement allowances**

- 6.1. BDO found that a number of allowances had been paid to some local and expatriate staff over a number of contract renewals and in contradiction of the conditions and intent of the Inducement Allowance Policy.
- 6.2. BDO recommended a full review of the USP's approach to inducement allowances. As part of this, the USP should move away from paying inducements as a percentage of salary and rather set modest one-off sign-on bonus amounts which are pegged to, and commensurate with, position grades. Additional recommendations include a review by the Remuneration Committee and full review of all inducement allowances currently being paid.

### **Responsibility and acting allowances**

- 6.3. BDO found that these allowances have been paid to some staff extensively, with very little policy guidance, which has inflated their total remuneration. These allowances are also out of alignment with other universities that the USP benchmarks itself against.
- 6.4. BDO recommended that the USP develop a single, comprehensive policy for all staff setting out its approach to responsibility and acting allowances. This policy should outline strict parameters for the use of such arrangements and should be approved by the Remuneration Committee of the Council.

### **Bonuses**

- 6.5. BDO found that bonuses and, in some cases, multiple bonuses have been paid extensively to staff which is in breach of the USP policies. It appears that a culture of entitlement to bonuses has developed rather than being a mechanism to reward exceptional effort and performance.
- 6.6. BDO recommended a full review of the USP's approach to bonus calculations and payments. As part of this, the USP should consider and make clear its approach to 'multiple' bonuses. This process should be led and governed by the Remuneration Committee of the Council.

### **Consultancy arrangements**

- 6.7. BDO found that the application of the consultancy arrangements policy, and the allocation of income between USP and academic staff, has been inconsistent. The policy intends to ensure that the USP recovers all costs associated with delivery of the services, however, this was not observed across the agreements that BDO reviewed.
- 6.8. BDO recommended a forensic review of consultancy agreements that are either currently active, or have recently been completed. BDO's current analysis indicates that some of the consultancy arrangements may contravene the intent of the policy.

- 7. **Leadership and oversight of the human resources function** - It is clear from a review of personnel files, other Human Resource ("HR") documents, and the decisions that are documented therein, that the USP's HR function has been without consistent leadership for many years. USP has had three substantive HR Directors and one Interim HR Director since early 2011, with only one holding the role for more than 18 months. Over the past 24 months, HR has been led by four people - one of these was in an acting capacity and two others were in a responsibility capacity alongside their substantive role.

8. It is reasonable to conclude that this lack of leadership has contributed to the weaknesses identified across the function. This quick succession of leadership change has made it difficult for HR efforts and projects to gain momentum.
9. BDO recommended a comprehensive structural review of the USP's human resources function. The review should focus on building institutional knowledge to drive consistent, efficient policy applications and behaviour. BDO has also recommended an urgent review of the USP's core human resources policies, procedures, and forms. The focus of this review should be on simplifying policies to drive more efficient, transparent, and equitable behaviour. There are currently three ordinances, 58 policies, four procedures, and 38 forms stored in the human resources section of the USP Policy Library.
10. **Succession Planning** - BDO noted that USP has a significant reliance on employees who have reached retirement age. BDO noted that numerous senior academic and professional positions are held by staff members who have reached retirement age. In itself, this is not an issue. However, BDO also noted that many of these individuals had been appointed in those roles numerous times after reaching retirement age. This would suggest a lack of succession planning across these senior roles. It is appreciated that the USP faces recruitment challenges, particularly at senior levels, however this only emphasises the need for meaningful succession planning.
11. BDO recommended a full review and amendment of the USP's approach to the employment of people who have reached retirement age. At a minimum, this should involve the revision of the Re-Employment of Retirees policy and particular attention should be paid to the duration of contracts that are awarded to those who have reached retirement age. In its current form, the policy is vague and relies heavily on interpretation.
12. Furthermore, BDO recommended that the role and remit of the Remuneration Committee be expanded to include succession planning for all key senior roles across the USP. At present, the Remuneration Committee's focus, among other things, only extends to succession planning for the role of VCP.

## Conclusion

13. The investigation was carried out on an evidential basis, with allegations or assertions being traced through to documentary evidence. However, due to the level and/or quality of documentation retained by the USP, this wasn't always possible. As a result, BDO was not able to substantiate a number of the allegations.
14. BDO's view is that a majority of the decisions investigated were made within the boundaries of the VCP's Ordinance. However, when critically analysed, the rationale for many of the decisions taken is unclear. BDO is of the view that further investigation is required and a number of policies and ordinances require significant alignment and stronger oversight from the Executive Committee and Council.
15. BDO noted that similar themes and control weaknesses were identified by the USP's internal audit service provider over the past few years. These HR and payroll concerns were reported in accordance with USP's standard internal audit reporting process across three reports. The conclusions within these reports point clearly to a need for greater oversight, control and management of the HR and payroll functions at the USP. The outcomes of the BDO investigation suggest that the recommendations raised have only been partially implemented, or in some cases, not at all.



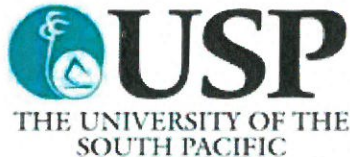
16. While the allegations highlighted in the Paper have arisen in an unfortunate manner, they have raised serious concerns that require attention and action. These provide USP with an opportunity to reflect and take corrective action that will ultimately improve the culture and quality of education and research at USP.

Yours sincerely  
**BDO AUCKLAND**

*BDO Auckland*

**From:** [All-Staff/All-Student Email Distribution](#)  
**To:** [all-students\\_forward; all-staff](#)  
**Subject:** PRESS RELEASE: USP COUNCIL RECEIVES BDO INVESTIGATION REPORT  
**Date:** Monday, September 2, 2019 12:20:15 PM

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29 August 2019

**PRESS RELEASE: USP COUNCIL  
RECEIVES BDO INVESTIGATION REPORT**

A Special Meeting of the USP Council in Nadi, Fiji today received a Report prepared by Auckland-based accounting firm BDO (Report) on the Independent Investigation commissioned by Council at its meeting in Port Vila, Vanuatu in May 2019.

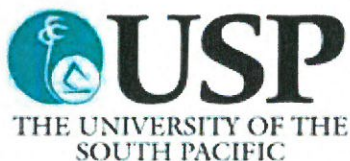
The Investigation was undertaken following a paper prepared by the Vice-Chancellor & President Professor Pal Ahluwalia earlier this year, titled 'Issues, Concerns and Breaches of Past Management and Financial Decisions' (Paper).

The Report considered all the issues raised in the Paper and made a number of recommendations for strengthening the management and governance oversight at the University.

The Council is currently considering the Report and will be working through the evening and tomorrow on a range of actions to be taken in response to the recommendations.

A further update will be provided at the end of the Council Meeting tomorrow.

Mr Mahmood Khan, Chairman of the Audit & Risk Committee and the Deputy Pro-Chancellor & Deputy Chair of Council, Ms Aloma Johansson



30 August 2019

**TOWARDS A STRONGER USP**

The Council of University of the South Pacific today agreed to appoint a Commission to implement the findings and recommendations of a Report by BDO Auckland.

The Council requested BDO Auckland to undertake an Investigation into the Allegations raised in a Paper by the Vice-Chancellor & President, Professor Pal Ahluwalia titled "Issues, Concerns and Breaches of Past Management and Financial Decisions."

The Report from BDO Auckland resulted in a range of findings and recommendations that will need to be addressed to ensure the sound operation of the University.

The Commission will be overseen and report regularly to a Committee of Council comprised of the Prime Minister of Cook Islands, Hon. Henry Puna, the Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa, Hon Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa (Chairperson) and the Attorney General of Fiji, Hon Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum.



ommission's work will cover but not be limited to:

- Remuneration policies and control
- Inducement Allowances
- Responsibility and Acting allowances
- Bonuses
- Consultancy Arrangements
- Succession Planning
- Human Resources
- Transition Arrangements
- Governance and Oversight
- Operation of Senior Management Team
- Interface between Governance and Management
- Committee Structure and Responsibility

The Commission will develop an Action Plan, which will be made publicly available, to be implemented over the coming year. The Council may choose to extend the term of the Commission should it be necessary.

Summary of the BDO Auckland Report will be made publicly available in due course.

Approved by the Council of the University of the South Pacific.

**For: Hon. Fiame Noami Mata'afa, Deputy Prime Minister, Samoa**

**Michelle Tevita-Singh, Manager Communications, USP**

## **Appendix Two**

### **Supplementary Response**



## Melini L. Vuniwai

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**From:** Rahkel Mercy <rahkel.mercy@usp.ac.fj>  
**Sent:** Friday, 7 February 2020 12:37 p.m.  
**To:** Atelaite Catimaibulu  
**Cc:** Professor Pal Ahluwalia; Kolinio Boila; Sheron R. Narayan; Tevita W. Tuivanuavou; VCPA Account  
**Subject:** RE: Clarification of Issues USP 2018 Annual Report

Dear Atelaite

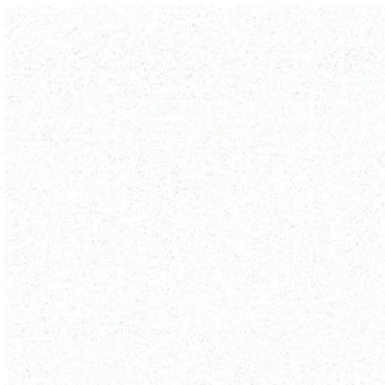
Thank you for your email seeking further information. These are the University's clarifications:

1. The \$9.9m will not be received, this relates to outstanding grants from 2018/2019 financial year. The government has confirmed in writing that this portion will not be paid. The first grant of \$12.8m for the financial year 2019/2020 has been received, the next quarter will be received in February after the University has acquitted for the quarter ending January 2020.
2. The new Queen Elizabeth scholarships and the provision of grants for female staff empowerment has not been granted yet. The British High Commission has yet to advise us on this. It has sought assistance from its office in London for an update on the grant.

Vinaka  
Rahkel Mercy  
Executive Officer to the Vice-Chancellors and President, USP

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**From:** Atelaite Catimaibulu <[atelaite.catimaibulu@parliament.gov.fj](mailto:atelaite.catimaibulu@parliament.gov.fj)>  
**Date:** Wednesday, 5 February 2020 at 4:21 pm  
**To:** Professor Pal Ahluwalia <[pal.ahluwalia@usp.ac.fj](mailto:pal.ahluwalia@usp.ac.fj)>, VCPA Account <[vcpa@usp.ac.fj](mailto:vcpa@usp.ac.fj)>, Rahkel Mercy <[rahkel.mercy@usp.ac.fj](mailto:rahkel.mercy@usp.ac.fj)>  
**Cc:** "Sheron R. Narayan" <[sheron.narayan@parliament.gov.fj](mailto:sheron.narayan@parliament.gov.fj)>, "Tevita W. Tuivanuavou" <[tevita.tuivanuavou@parliament.gov.fj](mailto:tevita.tuivanuavou@parliament.gov.fj)>  
**Subject:** Clarification of Issues USP 2018 Annual Report



Good Afternoon Sir,

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs have highlighted few questions that needs clarification from your good office. The Committee would be grateful if provision of responses to the questions and related documents to be provided before COB on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> February , 2020.

Question are as follows:

1. The committee would like further clarification on the government grant which is given to USP. In particular:

- Inform us on whether the \$9.9 million government grant for FY 2018/2019 has been received.
- Provide an update on the FY 2019/2020 grant.

During the committee's site visit, we were also informed that \$8 million government grant for the FY 2018/2019 was withheld. Please provide further clarification on this.

2. Has any progress been made in liaising with the British High Commission on the new Queen Elizabeth scholarships and the provision of grants for female staff empowerment?

Looking forward to your response.

Thank you



"A Resilient  
Parliament responsive  
to the needs of the  
people and driven by  
the ideal of a better  
quality of life for all  
Fijians"

Atelaite Leba (Ms)

Committee Unit

Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

PO Box 2352, Government Building

Suva, Fiji.

Phone : (679) 3225623 Mbl: (679)8933074

Website: <http://www.parliament.gov.fj/>



Please consider the environment before printing  
this email



## **Appendix Three**

### **Verbatim Report**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON**  
**SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

**Submittee: University of the South Pacific (USP)**

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*[Verbatim Report of Meeting]*

**HELD IN THE**  
**COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST WING)**

**ON**

**MONDAY, 25TH NOVEMBER, 2019**



**VERBATIM NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS HELD IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM (WEST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS ON MONDAY, 25TH NOVEMBER, 2019 AT 1:57 P.M.**

**Interviewee/Submittee: University of the South Pacific (USP)**

In Attendance:

1. Professor Pal Ahluwalia : Vice Chancellor/President, University of the South Pacific
  2. Mr. Kolinio Boila : Executive Director, Finance
  3. Dr. Giulio Masasso T. Paunga : Vice President, Regional Campus, Estate and Infrastructure
- 

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Honourable Members, and welcome back.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, we would like to welcome the Vice Chancellor and President of the University of the South Pacific - Professor Pal Ahluwalia, the Executive Director, Finance - Mr. Kolinio Boila, thank you, Sir, for coming, and also Dr. Masasso - Vice President, Regional Campus, Estate and Infrastructure. Welcome, Sirs.

Honourable Members, the Team is here to present to the Committee in regards to the 2018 Annual Report. For your information, we have sent the questions, and they have also responded to those 25 questions. After the presentation, they will also be going through the questions, providing the answers and then I will be allowing Honourable Members for supplementary questions.

Mr. President and Vice Chancellor, I will now give you the opportunity to present to the Committee and following the presentation, you can also go through the questions which we have sent briefly and then I will give the opportunity to our Honourable Members for further questions.

Thank you once again for coming, and now the time is yours, Sir.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Good afternoon, Your Excellencies. I will use the USP responses which I think you all have and really highlight a few points rather than going through each one individually because I think that would be a waste of time for you, I think, you can see that on the issue of us becoming an enterprising University. We have shown that we have two things: firstly, we have opened a new Innovation Hub; and secondly, that our Graduate Destination of Students is showing where things are going and given that, I think it is not a bad result where they are.

On the types of programmes offered under Pacific TAFE, you can see that we really do not compete with Fiji National University (FNU). We have our own TVET Programmes that we focus on and we offer pre-degree and sub-degree programmes. It says here that we only offer vocational qualifications which are high in sustainable demand and required in the labour market so, we do not compete with things like electricians, plumbing, et cetera.

If you remember when we were here last, you asked me then about the Trust Fund Board. We still have not found that primarily because we are finding it very difficult during our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations last year. The idea was to raise substantial funding for the University through the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I think Mr. Boila can speak to that in a minute if he wants to but I think we actually did not raise any money. It is very difficult to get philanthropy in the region. It is something that we have to begin in a slightly different way and we will begin by setting up some alumni chapters. We do have a rich history and it is those alumni chapters which we have never done before in the University's history.

We are intending to have one alumni chapter in each country and then use those alumni chapters to raise funding. It might be that the Trust Fund Board is not the best way to begin with, given that we have such a small footprint in terms of philanthropy.



I use Max Machine, I am struggling with the PC, that is all right. As you can see, this is an important question that I think has been coming up for several years for this Committee and that is the question about staff recruitment retention. You will see that when I took over at the beginning of the year, there were something like 280 vacancies, now we are down to 100 and some odd vacancies which I think is a really good success rate for us. It is still a challenge and the challenge is on a number of issues, which is also to do with our remuneration, but it is also to do with the work permit issue and so these things are challenging but I think we are managing them well.

Please, I do not know whether you want to stop me at any point to ask me a question or whether you like me to go through the whole presentation.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, go through the whole presentation then the Honourable Members will follow with supplementary questions.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- The challenges faced we have talked about, I said we had 280 positions, we now have 103, which I think is really moving in a very positive direction. One of the other key issues, as you know is that, we have had for a long time an Interim Director. We have finally appointed an Executive Director for a try. That person will actually be arriving in Fiji this week and will officially commence duties on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, so we are very optimistic that things will look a lot better.

As you can see, we have actually changed the scope or the position. It will now be called the Executive Director, People Workforce Strategy, because it is not just about Human Resources (HR), it is about really looking at succession, it is looking at a number of issues which really we have not had before, so we will be doing this. This was done after an international search and the person coming up, I believe, has some very good experience.

In terms of research income, I think, although we have given you the per staff member figure for research, the reality is that, we are really dependent on getting research funding from overseas.

There is no Research Council in the region at all which our staff can apply to, so in addition to the \$12 million that we have raised through outside funding, and this is predominantly project-based which means that we have to spend those funds in very specific ways. We also have to invest in research internally and typically, we are spending about a million dollars a year, funding our own researchers because we really believe that to be a world class university, you have to have research. If you do not, then you cannot really compete with the other Research Universities.

I think you also asked about our alumni and I may have said a little bit earlier about alumni. Please, bear with me while I am trying to drive this. We have 45,674 alumni and, as I have said, we have tried to get people to really engage in philanthropy but this is being very difficult, and if I might point out, we are not alone in this - this is across the world. Other than the United States, I think, nobody really knows how to tap into the alumni market. They are the ones who really know how to do this test. I think, the only two or three places in Australia that have done it well are Melbourne, Sydney and Queensland but other than that, it is very difficult for anyone to raise funding through alumni.

I think one of the things that would really help me going forward would be some tax credits - that is the incentive that really helps. People want to give something if they get something in return, so everywhere else, Singapore is the best example that I can give you, that for every dollar that somebody contributes to the university, they get \$2 in tax credit, so there is a huge incentive to give to the universities so that culture of philanthropy is really starting to do well in the Singapore context.



The other question you asked about was that we achieved 80 percent of our goals or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan. As we have said, there were certain areas that we did not do well in, particularly around building the Solomon Islands Campus but also I think it is very difficult to quantify ever from one strategic plan to another, an exact percentage because these are very difficult things to measure, I think that is why universities have set KPIs.

I am saying this because we have now just approved our 2019-2021 Strategic Plan that I have developed with my team, and the reality is, there would be 17 KPIs which we will be measured by, but for me to ever say that I have achieved 80 percent or 70 percent or 60 percent would be almost like not the right thing to say. I think these are continuums and you have to look at how you are tracking against your KPIs, so to give a percentage I think sometimes can be problematic.

I think one of the big things for this year which is the next question is really being along the issue of the fact that our enrolments were down this year and, of course, one of the issues that have been very challenging for us is that for the first time rather than our enrolments growing, they went down. There are several reasons for that, a couple of them I can give very quickly: One is predominantly that I think the economic downturn globally which has begun has started to affect people on the ground, and so I think they are concerned. I think the people are less reluctant to go to university.

The other thing was that our own marketing was not as aggressive as it could have been. We are trying to address that and one of our challenges was the fact that it was very difficult for us to go to schools to do marketing, which was probably the most effective way in which we have ever done marketing, which is that we go into schools and we talk to students. I think there was a ruling from the Ministry of Education that it was too disruptive for students so we are trying to work with the Ministry, find ways around how we tackle that challenge.

The next one is about the allegations of mismanagement and abuse at our Office at USP. You have asked what the outcomes of the investigation were into the allegations and the abuse of office: so for me, as you know, I have today always maintained that these are matters for the USP Council, that I have not commented in public on these matters but, of course, I am here. I would be in contempt of Parliament if I did not answer this question honestly. I can say that at the special Council Meeting on 28th August and 29th August, 2019 where the independent company, Binder Dijker Otte (BDO) from Auckland was asked to investigate the allegations that I had made into the former administration. It established a three-person committee: the Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa as Chair; the Attorney-General of Fiji and the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, to oversee the recommendations of that Report. The Council also approved the establishment of a commission to implement the findings. That commission would develop an action plan and then that would be made publicly available to implement those recommendations and findings. The reality is that, probably 75 percent to 80 percent of the allegations that I had levelled, I believe were recognised by BDO as being true and which is why they set up a three-member Committee to oversee this. And I think that is in the summary which we attached for your benefit, because I do not have access to the Report, which clearly shows that there were issues at USP and these should be dealt with.

I might add at this juncture, because I think this is one of the most important things that we will probably discuss this afternoon, that my motive for doing this was purely that I was a new Vice Chancellor who had come in. I had lots of whistle-blowers coming to me. I have nothing personal to gain out of the exposure but let me tell you that I have been victimised and really think very ill-treated in this process, so I am very concerned but I would be happy to answer any questions.

As we speak, the three-member Committee will meet with the Commission tomorrow. They are all arriving in Auckland today to start the work that the Commission will do, and the initial appointment of the Commission would be for a year to recommend how we change things.



The only other point that I would make is that, the Council has the Report, it has not been released to anyone. We were all asked to return it to the Council, and so I have read the Report but I actually do not have a copy of the Report, and I think that summary tells us the key things that they have recommended. As I said all the hard copies were returned.

The second part of the question is: what were the recommendations made by the independent investigator and how is the University planning to implement these? So the recommendations were really “around room”, if I can say what I remember hearing that they said, that USP was being treated as a “remuneration cow”, that it was a “gravy train” but you get the message.

There was one other thing they said and that is how it had been treated. This was the independent auditors from BDO and as we have noticed that it will be the Commission now that will deal with those.

There were some very serious breaches of financial nature and I think those are very well-detailed in that Report. And so, of course, one of the biggest things that they did also point out was the greater need for oversight control and management of HR, and as I have said earlier, in particular, payroll, I think those will be both things that they will also look at. But I think equally having a new Executive Director will be of immense value to the University, and I am hoping that the next time when I am here, in a year's time hopefully I would be able to give you an update which will be far more positive about HR. It is a very difficult area as you can imagine.

Then when we come down to Highlights of 2018, of course, there are the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES) projects which, of course, have a lot of details, I do not want to go through them but I will if there are questions. There is the EMI Sensors for Corrosion Measurements in Concrete, please, bear with me while I figure out how this goes down.

Of course, there is the Autonomous Motion-Tracking Turrets with Laser Illuminators, that was another project.

Braille Eye-Slate: we have actually said under each of those responses what the innovation entailed and what it did. I think these are very important things, they are part of our research at the University and I am very proud of what our researchers are accomplishing, including Natural Disaster Detection at our Laucala Campus.

The second issue was around the General Service Fee (GSF) which is an important fee that allows our Students Association to operate and provide services to the student body, and sorts of things that we have done there.

The Buddy System does not come out of the Students Service Fee but we have been asked about the Buddy System, so particularly with students with disabilities, we have put a lot of effort into enrolling more people with disabilities into the University. There are kinds of things that they have been doing like the Buddy System where someone takes your notes, record lectures for students with disabilities, recap after class with students what was learnt, so it is a real effort to help people who are disabled to really operate more efficiently, and they have all accessed to this Buddy support and are provided with reasonable accommodation to ensure that they are supported academically and socially.

Students with disabilities attend the same lectures as other students but are provided with a buddy as we have noticed there who are pointed out the kinds of things that they do. I think we have had very good success rates since we have introduced the Buddy System, and it was a model that, of course, was used by FNU, the passes are benchmarked when they developed their Unit and looked at replicating many of our special accommodations. So we also have a Disability Resource Centre and we have kind of pointed out what we do.



They have got a Dedicated Student Common Room. Our staff are working closely with the Learning Support Teams within Faculties as well.

**On-Campus Accommodation:** We have tried to build another 400 rooms since 2016. This is another issue but funding has been a major challenge for us and we are maxed out in terms of borrowing, particularly since we have borrowed a substantial amount of money to build a Campus in the Solomon Islands. So we are very careful and we are now exploring ways in which we can build additional rooms with the private sector and perhaps even with the FNPF. We are looking at different partners to see how we might be able to realise that, especially given that we do have a demand for student accommodation.

There is a challenge, of course, already this year that the TELS has told us that the actual funding per student will be cut next year. So the three universities are looking at that as an issue as well. So there were some complaints and, of course, those have all been addressed very quickly as outlined in the actual full text.

**Scholarships from the British Government:** We actually have not received those scholarships in aggregate yet, but we do expect to receive funding for that because there were four new Queen Elizabeth's Scholarships given to students from the Caribbean and Pacific and grants for the workshops to empower female staff, so we are expecting both of those.

**Pacific Water Centre:** We are running a bit behind because the Director of our Institute of Applied Science, Mr. Johann Poinapen, who was the expert in this area resigned and relocated back to Australia. We have some expertise but we do not have the kind of expertise that we really needed in that area but this is a very important area of research. When we appoint the substantive Director of Institute of Applied Science, we will be looking for that but as you can see, we also have an application with the Australian Government through DFAT which we are very hopeful of getting, which should probably help us to recruit someone of very high calibre.

We had a decline in international enrolments. I think I spoke about this the last time as well because of the competition we have with Australia and New Zealand, which most people want to go to Australia and New Zealand because of the Post Study Work Visa, which Australia has, of course, now increased to four years. In our particular context, it makes it very difficult, we are trying to get our own graduates into positions, let alone getting people from overseas into jobs, that is a particular challenge.

I think we have to think out of the box now on how we deal with the whole international-student question. I think the way we have probably approached it is probably being able to offer some very niche programmes and really continue in our study-abroad programmes, recognising that it would be very difficult for international students to come to Fiji. One of the barriers was the high fees we charge for international students, which was actually higher than in some courses than courses charged in Australia and New Zealand.

Our Council resolved in November this year to reduce those fees and so it will be a work-in-progress to see if we can incentivise more international students. We will be spending a lot more time in particular with agents and we have just last week had a review of our international office done by two Pro-Vice Chancellors from Australia and New Zealand, so I will be looking forward to seeing what their recommendations are. But I think the overarching feeling was that it had to do with finding the niche rather than thinking that we can participate or do things across the board, so I think there are opportunities but we are yet to really see those.

There is a question on scholarship benefits offered to students participating in student exchange programmes. Again our international office provided our students in the region with this opportunity to study abroad and build some capacity, so we do spend some money, we do get resources to do that. I think a lot of that has been very positive to date. I think most of my experiences are of overseas, the more our students are exposed



to international opportunities, the more benefit they get. Most universities in overseas now are actually wanting their students to have outward mobility.

We at USP are very lucky to have a network of campuses. Over time, we would like to see our students move around these campuses which at the moment is very difficult given our financial situation. But I think some day or time will come when someone who is studying law here will be able to go to Emalus in Port Villa and spend some time with the law lecturers there. Similarly, someone who is doing Journalism might be able to go to Kiribati for a stint of getting some experience. I think we are going to be looking at student mobility more actively but it is very much work-in-progress.

I think, one of our success stories has been about the USPNet. It is a project that has been funded by the New Zealand Government for us. We are currently in the process of installing a number of antenna, and some other work will happen in Suva in the background, but at the moment we are upgrading a lot of our facilities. This actually coincides with the way in which our University is really focused on making sure the connectivity is so vital to higher education, but also to make sure that where cable service is now available then we use those, and the USPNet then becomes a real backup wherever we need it.

There are lots of places where we still have to deploy our network and it is really important to have that capacity. I think we are very grateful to New Zealand for doing that.

As I had said, we have done quite a bit on the replacement of antenna. We think that the project should be finished around March, but the infrastructure enhancement will happen a bit later and we hope this will be completed by June, 2020.

The other really big challenge as you know we had was a fire at Laucala last November. We are currently in a difficult situation where two sets of engineers after the fire are effectively in dispute. The insurers and the engineers believe that they can rebuild on the same structure that existed. Our engineers believe that this 42-year old building has dangers associated with rebuilding on it, so I think this will take a little bit of time. We were hoping that would be solved. We are really worried about the foundation of an exposed structure like that with most of the high rainfall we have, et cetera. So, I think this will be something that we keep arguing with the insurance company, and we are hopeful that we will sort this out. Of course, we do have contingency.

One of the pleasing things for me because I was still in a transition period at that time when the fire happened was that on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, we set up a Taskforce which was headed by Dr. Paunga. We really worked through very quickly, we had to relocate people, make sure that there were no frontline services that were affected so we have done a lot of that. Our biggest contingency was really around our infrastructure in terms of IT because a number of our services were destroyed, not all of them were there.

So, now we have backup plans with services located in Tonga as backup and we are trying to have more backup wherever we can, some of it in the "cloud".

The other question was about the two Campuses in Lautoka and Labasa. As you know, I have said that we do not have any capacity to build new campuses. We are operating from rented premises and we are working with private partners, particularly in Labasa, to see if we can, in some way, get someone to invest and then we would lease the properties back from them. So, it is important to us because these are markets that are really growing for us but, of course, we are very dependent on the funding.

The Solomon Islands Campus, as I said earlier, is going ahead. The Tender Board will meet shortly and, I think, we have a couple of companies that have met all the criteria and ADB is happy with this. So, I think by the end of this month, we will have actually signed off and by January, we will have a contract so that construction



can begin. We had to scale the project back because of the escalating costs and we only had a limited amount of funding available from ADB.

Pacific European Union Maritime Partnership: You can see that in here, a lot will depend on the KRA 6 Activities for the rest of the project period. A Continuing Professional Development (CPD) strategy is now in place to support a more systematic approach for the upskilling of marine and fisheries personnel in the region. Some scholarships have been awarded and I think even the Pacific TAFE has taken on some of the burden.

Transparent and Effective Policies in Public Finance Management: This is a three-year project starting in January, and there are a number of workshops that are being delivered in this project in the areas of accounting and audit standards, fraud investigation and public procurement and the necessary personnel and consultants for the project have been identified and the preparation of workshop materials are being prepared by our School of Accounting.

Project on Intra African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Global Climate Change, Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change Resilience: I think the Project Team Leader intends to assist with COP25, so it will be Professor Holland who will be going on our behalf. A lot of activities are happening around this and even the Pre-COP training has been implemented to build-up towards the COP Meeting and geographical locations finalised by Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) for Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea (PNG) while working the process of developing a terms of reference.

Again, you can see the Global Climate Change Alliance Plus (GCCA+), Scaling Up Pacific Adaptation (SUPA) is another project. This has been developed in the Republic of the Marshall Islands and activities will focus on lifestyle, changes in climate resilient implemented in communities across three atolls, and discussions have also started with other governments.

On the question: Has a new agreement been reached with the Laucala I&J staff following the previous Collective Agreements which expired on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2018?

Two things on this: first of all, there was a very long outstanding issue of back pay for our I&J staff. So, I am very pleased to report that we have actually met that. We agreed with the Union on a 5 percent pay rise backdated to 2016 which has already been paid, and the Union has now just recently put a log of claims in and we are working through carefully through each of those. It has been my view that these are our most low paid professional staff and that we have a real duty of care to them, and so we are paying particular attention to this notwithstanding our current financial issues. In principle, we have agreed also to a pay rise for 2019 but until we receive the next tranche of our Government grant from Fiji, we will not be able to pay that.

So, two forums apparently were held last year and people raised issues: the Whistle Blower Policy and the Staff Grievance Policies have been developed.

I have already spoken a bit about work permit issues and the renewal of contract for academic staff. There were some ambiguity about some of these things and the policies were very good but the implementation was very poor which is also part of what the BDO Report spoke about so, I think, we have really addressed those issues this year.

Campus Accommodation for Students with Disabilities: I have spoken about that as well, as well as the Fitness Centre. We expect people to commercially use the Fitness Centre as a teaching venue by external partners.



Salary Adjustments: These were adjustments made in accordance with our Remuneration Committee and, of course, all these happened before I came to the University but the Professors and Associate Professors received the 12 percent, you can see how it went.

In terms of our senior staff, of course, was above 5 percent but you know it was a lot higher but, of course, all the senior staff salaries were always reported in the Annual Report, so you can actually see how many people were above \$300,000 and how many were above \$400,000, et cetera. Our Director, Finances, also highlighted that this information is private and confidential, and if anything is required beyond that, you can easily get it through the Ministry which is party to those Council meeting papers, but effectively, we have all of that in the Annual Report.

As I have said, we are making several senior level appointments. The first is the Executive Director of Human Resources but currently, we also have two vacant Dean positions and shortly, we will have a position on January 25<sup>th</sup>, as our Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education, will also be retiring and we will be creating a new position of Chief Operating Officer for the University.

At some point next year, Vice President Paunga will become a Deputy Vice-Chancellor as approved by our Council. He will be predominantly responsible for our regional campuses.

The next question was around the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for all committees and boards as had been developed. This is a new initiative proposed document on Monitoring and Evaluation Process. The existing tool used to assess the performance and effectiveness of Committees and Boards are such as the Annual Self-Evaluation forms, and I think there are some work to be done on this, but we are trying to find better ways to do that evaluation. I think we want the questionnaires themselves to be more open-ended, sometimes these questions are very limited, they just have "Did you find this satisfactory or unsatisfactory?" I think getting some more qualitative response is going to be important to us and something that was highlighted at our Council by one of our Council members this year.

The increase in consolidated surplus for lodges from FJD 0.14m (2017) to FJD 0.13m (2018). I think there is very little shift and I might get Boila if he could just speak to that item on question 23 on Accommodation and Leases - Explain why despite the implementation (We have given the answer there).

MR. K. BOILA.- Yes, for accommodation, Honourable Members, there is an increase from our leased-out properties and the challenge is that, we cannot increase it further because of the rent freeze. We are limited with that effect, but whatever accommodation that is available, we rent that out at current rates.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- You can see the issues of student lockers vary, the demand is declining. On the Book Centre, where the revenue is paid per student, which meant that they could use it in the Book Centre, has changed because it now goes directly to people's bank accounts and they are choosing not to buy books which is a worry to us. We are seeing a decline in book sales because of that and then the Pacific Book Purchase Order was raised by the Ministry of Education for a range of Pacific books and the largest elements were the Year 9 to 10 which were sold as you can see the figures there.

On the Development of the Quality of Governance Index to enhance and further embed good governance throughout the University, as I said earlier in the 2019 Council meeting, we have had a very robust discussion about good governance, particularly in relation to the allegation that I had made and the subsequent investigation and, of course, a lot of our members argued for a full review of our governance structure. I think that is something that the committees will pick up and we actually looked at this quality, I reviewed every KPI the University had. There were 35 KPIs and I think we have retained only 17 because a lot of them did not make any sense. They could not adequately be tested, replicated or be independently verified, so we have gone to 17 from 35 and those



are very focused on ensuring that these things can be tested. This was one that was lost and the Council approved the changes to that.

I think the next was on our agreement with Australia. As you know, we received \$84 million from the Australian Government and work has progressed under this partnership. Of course, some of that funding as I have said, was blocked by Australia while they were doing their due diligence and with New Zealand, we had a one-year extension but we are now very close to completing our partnership arrangements with them and we hope that that will happen before the new year. We have no other partnerships with member governments as they already provide grants to us annually.

On the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) Accreditation, you can see that this is coordinated through the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Education. The University's response to sustaining the commendations on addressing the recommendations is in the process of developing a comprehensive action plan because WSCUC Accreditation comes for a limited amount of time and then we will have to apply for re-accreditation. I think we have until 2021 when an interim mid-term report will be produced by WSCUC on what we are doing. That also entails curriculum review and development work which the University is carrying out continuously and using standardised Course Outline templates for Undergraduate Courses. As you can see that we have given some very clear indications.

On the Financial Statements of the University, there is a backlog of Capital Expenditure, not approved, and you can see that some of that has to do really with the fact that *TC Winston* really affected pricing and in some cases, because we held off, we actually got better prices - prices of construction materials have gone down in Suva, particularly. The best example, I think, we can give you of that is our Library Commons Project which was going to be far more expensive. We held off and we got a much cheaper price so sometimes it is just trying to balance that.

This year, we have been very careful with Capital Expenditures so next year, you would probably see an even worse spending regime, but we have to do that because if we did not do that, we would be facing a liquidity crisis given that the contributions of different governments have not been forthcoming.

The Value-Added Tax (VAT) is a long standing issue for us. We have spoken to the FRCS again, Mr. Boila and I had a representation to them earlier in the year. We do want this issue resolved and we are really hoping that your Committee can also assist us in getting some closure to this issue, that is it, yes. Thank you very much. I hope that provides you with some clarity.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Professor Pal Ahluwalia, the Vice Chancellor and the President of USP, and the team for the presentation and also providing the answers to all the questions that were sent to you. Thank you very much. Now, I will give an opportunity to our Honourable Members for questions. Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair and I thank Professor Ahluwalia, Dr. Paunga and Mr. Boila, for your presentation this morning. I acknowledge the fact that Professor Ahluwalia, you have come in at a very difficult, interesting time at USP and I hope and pray that we will be able to make a lot of difference in the running of our University of the South Pacific.

We have just been given this BDO Investigation Report, I have not really had the time ....

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- You have got the four-page summary, I think.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- A summary.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- That is just an executive summary, the full Report is about 120 pages long.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Okay.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Each of the allegations that I had made are discussed in detail in the Report.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- All right, and my particular interest is on the Report itself because I am of the view that a lot, if not all, of the challenges that USP is facing right now could be resolved with the implementation of the outcomes of the recommendations of that Report.

So I have the following questions which actually focus on the Report:

- 1) Why has the full Report by BDO not been released, and why has it not been made public?
- 2) When will it be released?
- 3) Can this Report be tabled in Parliament?
- 4) When are they going to implement or address the recommendations in the Action Plan as I hear that an action plan has been done by the Commission?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Yes, Professor.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Thank you, Honourable Salote. I think you are right, I think a lot of the challenges are related to things that have come out in the Report.

The question that you asked of why the Report has not been released is one that I cannot answer because unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, when this Report was being discussed in Nadi, I spent most of the time outside the room, I had to recuse myself as the person who had actually made the allegations. So the decision was one made by the Council that it should not be released. When will it be released? As far as I understand, there are no plans to release it other than to governments who ask for the Report. So for example, both Australia and New Zealand, as far as I am aware, have asked for their Report on a confidential basis to do their due diligence and they have been given the Report.

So I am told that the three member Committee, Chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa who had said that any Government that asks for the Report will be given that Report. Can it be tabled in Parliament? I think it is up to you to write to the Deputy Prime Minister, and I see no reason why she will not table that in Parliament given what she has done with Australia and New Zealand.

These are publicly-funded institutions and, of course, I think, the only question would be the question of confidentiality. As long as it is confidential to Members of Parliament, I cannot see why not, but I cannot really speak for that three member Committee. I can only suggest what I think would be the right thing of what they have said in public that it would be given to those governments that ask for it.

Finally, on the Action Plan, Honourable Salote, the Action Plan is to be developed. The Commission was only appointed at the beginning of November and as I have said at the outset, the Committee is meeting with the Commission tomorrow, so they will then be given their terms of reference I imagine. It will take some time for them to develop that Action Plan. So we are very hopeful that they will start doing their work probably early into the next year.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Professor. I believe the three member Commission that is set up are currently dealing with this Report.



PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is why maybe they are holding it back with it.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes, that is what they have done. They have said that they should go to the Commission but as I said the Deputy Prime Minister has ruled that if any of the 12 member governments and Australia and New Zealand have asked for it, they would get a copy of it. So, Australia and New Zealand already have a copy of it on the condition that they would keep it confidential because they wanted to do their due diligence. So I personally have only read the Report once but I do not have a copy of the Report.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Professor, I understand our Honourable Attorney-General is also part of that ...

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes, he would have a copy of it, I imagine.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you. Yes, Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a follow-up question in that and may I, in the presence of the Professor, Dr. Pauga and Mr. Boila from USP and with the Committee, make a request that that Report be tabled through Parliament so that it comes to this Committee whereby we could continue to keep an oversight in regards to the implementation of those recommendations as taken on by the Commission in their Action Plan. Thank you.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Honourable Member, would you like me to make that request on behalf of the Committee or would the Committee write to the Deputy Prime Minister themselves?

HON. V. PILLAY.- Professor, there is a point raised by Honourable Salote Radrodro. It has been noted here and you can also take note of it, but we will deliberate further when we sit as a Committee and we will see what needs to go to Parliament from our end.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Thank you.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Any other questions, Honourable Members?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Yes, Mr. Chairman. I made that request, maybe if the Professor and his team could take that up from their perspective in regards to tabling the Report and in your next Report if that Report could be made part of your Annual Report.

HON. V. PILLAY.- If that is possible after that inquiry which is going, obviously since our Attorney-General is here, then the Government is going to get a Report like the other governments have got their reports. But after our findings as a Committee, we will surely also put our views and recommendations through our Report but as Honourable Salote Radrodro has said, you can also take note of that point ...

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes, we have taken note of that.

HON. V. PILLAY.- ... and take it to that level and provide some clarity on that. Honourable Alipate Nagata?

HON. A. NAGATA.- Thank you, Vice Chancellor. I am glad to hear that you mentioned that there will be a review on the tuition levied on the national students. Do you have plans to review the tuition levied on regional students?

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- I am going to let our Executive Director, Finance, to answer that.

MR. K. BOILA.- We review the fees every year then the Council is the only body that approves. For the last few years, we only increased or adjust them based on inflation readjustments that is for increasing the cost of doing business but there has been no major increase since 2016.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Mr. Boila. Why he is raising that, I believe, is because we have also discussed this before as Professor has said, that if the cost or the tuition fee is lower in other countries then why do these foreign students come here? I understand it is good that we have a review as said by Professor that will attract more students.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes, this is for our international students, not regional students.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, because in your presentation, you did say that the cost is lower like in some of the areas in Australia and New Zealand.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes, our international fees were four times our regional fees and that was why we are not getting any international students at all.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I think this review will help in regards to getting some students. Yes, Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much, Vice Chancellor, Professor Ahluwalia, Mr. Boila and Dr. Paunga, for that very elaborate presentation. I also agree with Honourable Salote Radrodoro and I believe you are doing a good work there at USP with regards to the Report that we have here. I believe that is part of our work too as a Committee to help at your worksite. You have mentioned that all throughout the University, there will be a reduction in grant next year.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- No, I think what I said is that, we have been advised that the accommodation grant will be cut next year.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Just the accommodation?

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Because mostly the students are staying outside?

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes, those who have been staying in halls of residence. So some changes are being made.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Only on accommodation?

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes, only on accommodation.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- But the overall grant itself?



PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- There are no changes made and we are very grateful to the Government for the TELS grant, because this is giving people so much opportunity to study, and I do not think our people could study without those grants. So they are just such an important way for people to have access to higher education.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Even with the TELS grant being offered, you have mentioned that you had a reduction in the enrolment?

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes. So let me explain to you: We had a reduction in enrolment and predominantly the major reduction occurred as a result of a decision that the University made in 2018 about excluding students who did not have a GPA of at least 1.5 or who had attempted certain compulsory courses at least three times. The impact of that decision probably was about \$8 million to \$10 million on our budget.

The second component is that, of course, we did not receive nearly \$9.9 million funding for the 2018/2019 grant that we get from the Fiji Government and we are still waiting for our 2019/2020 grant which we are very hopeful we will get shortly, so that puts a lot of pressure on us and we are not alone in this, the same happened to FNU. So it is like all of USP is being treated in a different way.

At the same time, because of the Report that I wrote, the Australian Government withheld funding. They give us \$14 million a year, so they only paid us \$3.5 million in the first quarter and since then, they have not paid us any additional funding.

Now that the Commission has been formed, they have said that they have three conditions and one of them was that the Commission be formed. The Commission is formed, they will now release another \$3.5 million. I think our financial precariousness was predicated on those issues, but we really managed our costs. I think we will be returning a healthy surplus and at the same time will be looking to do some other things that we have put off, so that our financial situation looks a lot better.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Professor.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- You mentioned something with regards to reduction in sales in your Bookshop. Usually, I remember during my time, the money goes directly to the University and we just go in there and get the books. That being said on the reduction in sales of text books, what are the students using, are they buying from other students?

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- I think this has been a problem for us. Actually, a lot of them are trying not to buy books and so there our libraries are really overused, if I can put it that way. Many of our students are not preparing adequately without books, so that decision is not a direct correlation but we can only imagine because now that funding is going directly to the students as opposed to coming through the University where we would purchase books for students, is having some effect.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Does it affect the results?

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- I think it possibly could, and I cannot give you an absolute definitive answer but I would imagine, it would. We are really looking at this issue as well. We are ourselves thinking, every year we give our first year students Tablets when they come to University and the idea was that, we would preload the Tablets with a lot of reading materials that they require. Our experience with Tablets is that, the students are not 100 percent happy with these Tablets that they are not of such quality - fast. A lot of people have devices themselves which are a lot faster. So, we are looking at alternative ways and, in fact, this is just a meeting that we are about to have where the Executive Director, Finance, myself and our Director of Commercial to think about alternative ways in which we might support our students. We might actually say that if you do not use one of

our tablets, you might get some funding to spend on books, as a way of encouraging our students but it still takes a very formative idea. We have not made any concrete plans, we would have to go to our Senior Management for approval. These are just our preliminary thoughts on how we best support our first year students.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Professor. Welcome, Honourable Vijay Nath, your question.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you so much, Professor, for your comprehensive, in-depth and very encouraging presentation. My question is on the Royal Visit to the Laucala Campus: What impact did that have on our students; the four scholarships which she has mentioned, what are we doing about that?

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- I am sorry, I did not hear the last bit - the four scholarships?

HON. V. NATH.- Yes, you mentioned that the Royal Excellency mentioned the four scholarships. Where are we in that process?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- What is the progress on that?

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes, it is progressing, the British High Commission here who will tell us. It is managed through the Association of Commonwealth Universities so there has not been full progress yet on that. The impact of the Royal visit, I think it was our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary last year, and I was not here at that time but, I think, it had a real lifting sort of, it elevated the spirit of a lot of people that the Royals chose to come to USP. It was an important year, it is a University that is set up by Royal Charter. The only way the Charter can be changed is that it gets referred back to the Queen, so there is a direct linkage with the Royal Family and so I think it was very important, not just for the students but the University community as a whole that we were able to host the Duke and Dutchess. So, I think that was something very good.

I think we will get the scholarships, it is just a matter of time and the scholarships are to allow people to go and study predominantly in the United Kingdom.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Professor. Just going back to the question on books, I believe the money was paid directly before to USP for the students to get books. Now the money is paid directly to the students to get the books, to buy from USP ...

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Or from anywhere.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- From anywhere; the books are also available outside?

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes. Obviously books are available online, they are available, yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- But you have said that according to your observation, it may be not happening.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes, I think students are probably finding other ways to spend that money.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you for that information.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Any other questions, Honourable Members? Thank you very much, Professor. Before we actually finish off here with the presentation, one thing I would like to tell you: Professor, you did



highlight in your last presentation that there were some issues as far as USP was concerned. You were very brave as you came out with that very boldly and today we see the Reports in front of us, already the indications are there. There has been a lot of money being put in from various governments. It is all with the thought that our students will get the best from this University, USP has been there for a while.

Year by year, a lot of funding has been channelled there. Now, we see what you said during the last term with the findings in the Report with the Commission, and as the Honourable Salote has also highlighted, we need to get the results of this. What is the outcome and what are the other information? We need to know about this but I must thank you on behalf of the Committee for coming out very bravely and saying it. That is why we are here today with this investigation now, I believe. Professor, would you like to say anything before we end?

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Yes, the Honourable Pillay and Chairman of the Committee, on behalf of my colleagues, first of all, we want to really thank you all. I think this is a very important meeting for us because it is a way of us also being sure that we are being accountable, that we are not doing things without anyone noticing. I think our new strategic plan makes it very clear that accountability and ethics are at the heart of what a global institution like ours should do. So, we are very thankful for your very incisive questioning because I think the level of questions that were put to us has been very high, and we really appreciate that because that shows how seriously you take this work so we want to thank you for that.

Sir, if I can say this, personally, I probably want to say that I am in Parliament, I would never say this outside of this room, I know the media is here and they will not get any interviews from me, but what I will say in this room, because it is under Parliamentary Privilege, is that it has been a year of hell. I have suffered enormously and so as my family for doing the right thing and so your words meant a lot to me. I am deeply touched by what you said because it has been a very, very difficult year for both me and my wife. There have been many days when I have contemplated why I have come to Fiji but I felt that there was a calling that I had to give back and that God is my witness that, you know, what I did was the right thing. I think at the end of it, once we get over all the emotions, the best thing is that, this will never happen again, and that is all I wanted. So, I want a clean University, I wanted a way to go forward.

Now, I can also tell you that since I wrote that paper, I could write another one, but the things that I have discovered subsequently, that was only my first six weeks in the job, I discovered something virtually on a daily basis. I could write another paper but I will save all that for the Commission to investigate and look at. So, thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Professor. Once again, on behalf on the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, on behalf of all the Members, the Secretariat team, I must thank you very much for your time. Should we need any other information, our Secretariat team will be contacting you.

Once again, I would like to tell you that you have really done a very important thing. You have come out very clean on the issues and I believe this is the way forward - how we can improve things for the betterment of our students and the University of the South Pacific. Thank you very much for your time.

PROF. P. AHLUWALIA.- Thank you, Sir.

MR. CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, we will resume in half an hour's time, thank you.

The Committee adjourned at 3:07 p.m.