



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

REVIEW OF FIJI HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 2016



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COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP



Chairperson

Hon. Viam Pillay MP

Government Member



Deputy Chairperson

Hon. George Vegnathan MP

Government Member



Member

Hon. Alipate Nagata MP

Government Member



Member

Hon. Salote Radrodro MP

Opposition Member



Member

Hon. Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu MP

Opposition Member

CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Fiji Higher Education Commission for the year ended 31 July 2016.

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

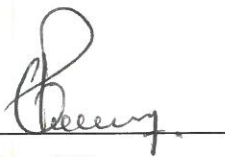
The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review.

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

The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from 1st January to 31st July 2016, conducted into: The Commission's administration; structure; budgetary allocation; programmes and activities; policies; challenges; highlights; priorities for the coming years; and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

At this juncture, I also wish to thank the Interim Director of the Fiji Higher Education Commission, Dr. Nikhat Shameem, and her staff for their assistance in this review process. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues namely: Hon. George Vegenathan (Deputy Chairperson), Hon. Alipate Nagata, Hon. Salote Radrodoro, and Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu for their contributions as well as to Hon. Simione Rasova for availing himself as an alternate member for those Members who were unable to attend the committee meetings. Finally, I thank the Secretariat, Ms. Sheron Narayan, Mr. Tevita Tuivanuavou, and Ms. Atelaite Leba for the assistance provided during the committee's deliberations.

I, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, commend the *Fiji Higher Education Commission Annual Report for the Year Ended 31 July 2016* to Parliament and request all members of this August House to take note of the committee's Report.



Hon. Viam Pillay
Chairperson

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CSOs	-	Civil Society Organisations
FEMIS	-	Fiji Education Management Information System
FHEC	-	Fiji Higher Education Commission
GESI	-	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
HEIs	-	Higher Education Institutions
HE	-	Higher Education
ISACs	-	Industry Standards Advisory Committees
IT	-	Information Technology
ITC	-	Information Technology & Computing
MEHA	-	Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts
MFAT GFA	-	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade New Zealand Grant Funding Agreement
NGOs	-	Non-Governmental Organisations
NQs	-	National Qualifications
SDGSs	-	Sustainable Development Goals
SPC	-	Pacific Community
TVET	-	Technical Vocational Education Training
USP	-	University of the South Pacific

RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has conducted a review of the Annual Report of the Fiji Higher Education Commission for the Year Ended 31 July 2016 and has no issues to bring to the attention of the House.

However, we urge the Fiji Higher Education Commission to compile its outstanding Annual Reports and submit them to Parliament in a timely manner, as prescribed under Section 49 of the Higher Education Act 2008.

INTRODUCTION

The January – July 2016 Annual Report of the Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC) was tabled in Parliament during the August 2019 meeting and referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for its scrutiny.

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

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

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FIJI HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

The Fiji Higher Education Commission is a government statutory body which began its operations on 1st January 2010 following the commencement of the Higher Education Act 2008. The Commission is responsible for regulating the establishment, Recognition, Registration, operation and standard of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

The Annual Report reviewed covers the period January-July 2016. The report provides progress on the FHEC's activities in the priority areas and financial performance towards supporting these activities. The priority areas from January to July 2016 were on:

1. Delivering on the Government's strategic priorities for Higher Education;
2. Providing a platform for excellence; and
3. Building the Commission's capacity.

COMMITTEE SITE VISIT TO THE FIJI HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION OFFICE



KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SITE VISIT

1. **Budgetary constraints** – The Commission is facing budgetary constraints in light of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade [MFAT] New Zealand Grant Funding Agreement due to end in 2021 and the reduction in Government Budget for the 2019-2020 financial year by \$764,101. The committee notes that the operating grant received from Government is only able to cater for staff costs whereas there is a need for more funding for work program activities. Furthermore, we note that the limited funding by way of the Government operational grant has posed some challenges for the Commission in the achievement of some of its strategic objectives under its 2017-2021 Strategic Plan.
2. **Delay in procurement of IT goods and services** – The committee was made aware of the delays faced in the procurement of IT goods and services due to delays from the Government Information Technology & Computing (ITC).
3. **Delay in the appointment of the Director role** – We also note that the position of the Commission's Director has been vacant for almost a year and a substantive Director is yet to be appointed. The Commission has had an Interim Director since February 2019 who is responsible for the administration and management of the functions and affairs of the Commission.
4. **Review of the Higher Education Act 2008** - The committee was made aware of the need to review the Higher Education Act 2008 so as to give the Commission greater regulatory powers over tertiary institutions. FHEC, in some instances, lacks the ability to enforce the Higher Education Act 2008.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

1. That appropriate action be taken by relevant Ministries and other key stakeholders in light of the key findings.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Fiji Higher Education Commission's work is aligned to the achievement of the SDGs and the targets attached to each goal; such as:

SDG 4: Quality Education

Goal 4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

- At the core of the FHEC's work is ensuring that HEIs in Fiji deliver quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, through its process of institutional Recognition/Registration and Programmes Accreditation which ensure certain minimum standards are met to offer learners the best possible education.

Goal 4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

- The FHEC's role in setting standards through the development of National Qualifications (NQs) in consultation with Industry Standards Advisory Committees (ISACs) ensures that programme is "fit for purpose" in producing graduates with the relevant skills and knowledge in specific Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) areas.
- The NQs also embed entrepreneurial skills so learners are equipped with the skills and knowledge to not only seek employment but also possibly create employment through the establishment of small-medium businesses upon graduating.

Goal 4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

- One of the priority areas under its current strategy for the FHEC is on Access and Equity. Under this priority, for the financial year 2019-2020, the FHEC is researching access and equity, which will examine the challenges for learners in accessing higher education opportunities in Fiji. In identifying the challenges, it will also allow the FHEC to facilitate or facilitate pathways for greater and equitable access to HE.

Goal 4.b By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries.

- One of the ways the FHEC is ensuring that it is meeting this Target is by partnering with the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, the Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Board and to the extent it also supports this initiative, the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority to ensure that scholarships being allocated are disbursed according to national priority areas.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

Broadly, gender equality in relation to Access and Equity in higher education is catered for under one of the FHEC's priority areas.

Priority 1: Improving access and equity. The FHEC is committed to:

- Providing seamless pathways from secondary education into higher education and employment.
- Developing access and equity data collection and analysis mechanisms.
- Working with Higher Education Institutions and the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA) to develop internal data collection capacity.
- Implementing the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS) Higher Education module.

Priority 3: Strengthening the Higher Education System

- The continuous improvements in the higher education sector as supported by the FHEC ensures that access and equity in the area of gender equality remains an area which HEIs would be assessed against.

SDG 13: Climate Change mitigation

Goal 13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.

- Through the EU PacTVET Project, the FHEC facilitated the development of eight regional qualifications at Certificate Levels 1-4 in Resilience (Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction) and Sustainable Energy.
- The development was done in close consultation with regional Industry Standards Advisory Committees (ISACs), with a diverse membership from 15 countries consisting of members from government, industry, academia, NGOs/CSOs, community practitioners, professional and licensing bodies.
- The EU PacTVET Project was jointly implemented by the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the Pacific Community (SPC). The FHEC was engaged to facilitate the development of these regional qualifications owing to its matured systems and processes in the area of developing qualifications and standards in the region.
- The development of qualifications at Certificate Levels 1-4 was touted as a global first in TVET and aimed primarily at enhancing the capacity of community-level practitioners and thus linked directly to Goal 13.3 of the SDGs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Annual Report makes limited reference to the SDGs and does not specify which SDG each of FHEC's programmes and activities relate to. The Committee recommends that the Fiji Higher Education Commission:
 - Change the format/layout of the Report to facilitate understanding of SDG information.
 - Explicitly link results with relevant/priority SDG goals and targets.
 - Include a section explaining how FHEC is prioritising action on the SDGs.
 - Report on the challenges faced with the implementation of the SDGs.
2. That the FHEC work in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy for capacity building of staff to enable a better understanding of issues relating to the Sustainable Development Goals and its linkages to FHEC's work.

GENDER ANALYSIS

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

The committee notes that the FHEC is an equal opportunity employer and encourages diversity in the workplace. Recruitment is based on merit; successful candidates for vacant positions are selected, based on their ability to perform in a role, assessed against objective selection criteria which does not discriminate against or give preference to any group or individual.

Furthermore, over this year, the FHEC will be developing a gender policy aligned to the national gender policy and providing professional development around Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) to ensure that the principles in GESI are adopted in the workplace and in programming.

Staff Complement at the Fiji Higher Education Commission during the January – July 2016 Period

The committee notes three out of five managerial positions (60%) were women during the seven month period. The management team comprised of the following staff:

- Director - Salote Rabuka
- Team Leader Executive Office – Charmaine Kwan
- Team Leader Professional Services – Amelia Siga
- Team Leader Finance and Research - Robert Misau
- Team Leader Quality Assurance - Eci Naisele
- Team Leader Corporate Services - Robert Misau

In addition, the Commission had a total of 34 full-time staff in the seven month period comprising of 19 females and 15 males.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That future Annual Reports present a breakdown of gender equality and participation in the positions held within the Fiji Higher Education Commission.

CONCLUSION

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has fulfilled its mandate approved by Parliament which was to examine and review the Fiji Higher Education Commission's Annual Report for the Year Ended 31 July 2016.

The committee noted that the Commission's principal activity is to carry out regulatory and facilitative role in the higher education sector, as specified under Section 7 of the Higher Education Act 2008. To this end, the FHEC continued to advance efforts to improve Fiji's Higher Education sector and in furthering its mission and vision. Overall, the FHEC adjusted well to the change in the Government's fiscal year and the challenges faced in all areas of its operation during the seven month period.

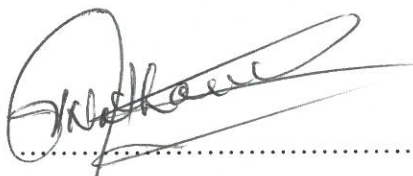
The review of the Commission's Annual Report was conducted in a very tactful and comprehensive manner. This has enabled the committee for Social Affairs to submit to Parliament a more reliable and a cohesive report.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE

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



Hon. Viam Pillay
(Chairperson)



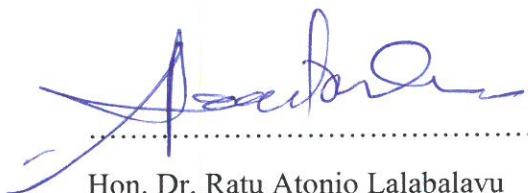
Hon. George Vignathan
(Deputy Chairperson)



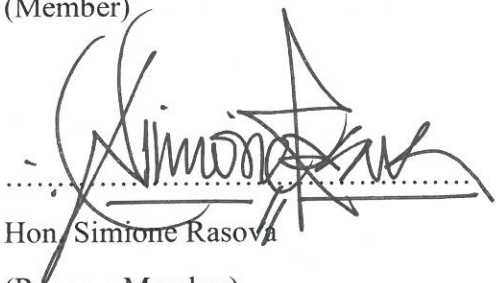
Hon. Alipate Nagata
(Member)



Hon. Salote Radrodoro
(Member)



Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu
(Member)



Hon. Simone Rasova
(Reserve Member)

APPENDICES

Witnesses

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

Tuesday 15 October, 2019

Fiji Higher Education Commission

Julian Moti QC, Chairperson, **Lepani Uluinaviti**, Commissioner, **Dr. Nikhat Shameem**, Interim Director, **Shirleen Ali**, Senior Manager Corporate Services, and **Lucia Kafoa**, Senior Manager Finance and Data Management Systems.

Published written evidence

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