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## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

### **Review of the Fiji National University 2019 Annual Report**



**PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**  
**Parliamentary Paper No. 66 of 2021**

*September 2021*

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## **ACRONYMS**

CAFF	-	College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
CBHTS	-	College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies
CEST	-	College of Engineering, Science and Technology
CHE	-	College of Humanities and Education
CMNHS	-	College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences
FNU	-	Fiji National University
MP	-	Member of Parliament
TVET	-	Technical and Vocational Education Training
NTPC	-	National Training and Productivity Centre

## COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP



### **Chairperson**

Hon. Viam Pillay MP

Government Member

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### **Deputy Chairperson**

Hon. George Vegnathan MP

Government Member

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### **Member**

Hon. Alipate Nagata MP

Government Member

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### **Member**

Hon. Salote Radrodro MP

Opposition Member

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### **Member**

Hon. Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu MP

Opposition Member

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## CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Fiji National University for 2019.

This review was undertaken 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 committee first met to deliberate in April and formulated questions pertaining to the Annual Report.

In order to comply with health directives and protocols on public gathering and social distancing, the committee accepted a written response from the Fiji National University in lieu of a face-to-face hearing. Following our deliberations on its written response, we wrote to the University requesting for further clarification on other related matters. Upon receipt of all relevant information on the committee's queries, the committee compiled its findings and subsequently endorsed its report in August.

At this juncture, I wish to thank the Vice-Chancellor of the Fiji National University, Professor Toby Wilkinson, and his staff for their timely assistance in this review process. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues namely: Hon. George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Hon. Alipate Nagata, Hon. Salote Radrodoro and Hon. Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu for their contributions during the committee's deliberations.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and request all members of this august House to take note of the Report.



**Hon. Viam Pillay**

**Chairperson**

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has conducted the annual review of the Fiji National University for 2019 and recommends that the House take note of its report.

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The 2019 Annual Report of the Fiji National University was tabled in Parliament during the December 2020 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.*”

### **1.1 Committee Procedure**

We first met in April to deliberate on and formulate questions pertaining to the 2019 Annual Report of the Fiji National University which was sent to the University for its response.

Following our deliberations on its written response, we again wrote to the University requesting for further clarification on other related matters. Upon receipt of all relevant information on the committee's queries, we compiled our findings on the Annual Report and subsequently endorsed it in August.

We received written and supplementary responses from the Fiji National University for this annual review. They are available on the Parliament website, at the following link: <http://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

## **2.0 ABOUT THE FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

The Fiji National University was established by the Fiji National University Decree 2009 (as amended by the Fiji National University (Amendment) Decree 2010). The principal activities of the University are the provision of post-secondary programs of study in higher education, technical, vocational education and training that are responsive to the needs of industry, the market place and nonformal sector of employment to students from Fiji and other countries in the South Pacific region.

## **3.0 COMMITTEE'S OBSERVATIONS AND AREAS OF CONCERN**

### **3.1 Non-Release of Operating and Capital Grants**

We note that the slowdown in the economy in 2019 flowed through to the University in two important ways. The first was that the final quarter payments of operating grant (\$20.7m) and capital grant (\$7.8m) for fiscal 2018/19 were not paid on time. The second was that while the University's baseline operating grant for fiscal 2019/20 was unchanged at \$53.1m, the capital grant was reduced to \$15.0m in the June 2019 budget. This fell short of the University's contractual commitments for fiscal 2019/20 for four construction projects, which had up to this point been fully funded by the Government. As a consequence, the second half of the year was dominated by a period of intense cost control, designed to protect the University's cash flows from the changed economic circumstances.

The University had identified a reduction in capital grant and operating grant as its two major risks in the institutional risk register and had accumulated financial reserves as the main form of risk mitigation. Notwithstanding this important strategic buffer, the University had to make significant one-off savings in the second half of 2019, mainly by freezing staff recruitment and minimising discretionary expenditure, to absorb the shock.

The Table below shows the spike in expenditure in 2019, which reflects the provision for the unpaid Government operating grant. The expenditure savings in the second half of 2019 meant that the operating deficit was, at \$6.1m, was considerably lower than forecast at the start of fiscal 2019/20, minimising the charge against reserves and freeing them to be allocated to meet capital commitments.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Income (m)	\$143.2	\$149.1	\$156.7	\$164.2	\$173.1
Expenditure (m)	\$140.5	\$134.9	\$148.1	\$148.2	\$184.1
Operating Surplus (m)	\$3.5	\$15.8	\$12.4	\$20.0	(\$6.1)
Operating Surplus % income	2.4%	10.6%	7.9%	12.2%	(3.5%)

## Recommendation

1. That the University continue to discuss with the Ministry of Economy for the release of funds as soon as applicable.

## 3.2 Capital Projects undertaken in the Period under Review

The University provided an update on the completion of the following capital projects:

### **Maritime Academy 3-Storey Building**

The project is currently 79% complete. Works on site have been extremely slow since the start of 2021 due to issues between the main contractor and the sub-contractors. Mindful of the need to complete the building expeditiously for the benefit of FNU students, and to achieve value for money in the expenditure of public funds, FNU has, in accordance with the contract, removed the balance of works from the main contractor and will, through the project superintendent, engage subcontractors directly to complete the remaining works. The estimated time for these works to be completed is 16 weeks. It is expected that these works will commence as soon as COVID-19 restrictions permit.

### **Sports Complex at Nasinu Campus**

The construction of the Sports Complex was completed in December 2020 and the Gym and multipurpose rooms have been operational since the start of Semester 1. Installation of the high performance flooring for the court was delayed due to travel restrictions. In order to complete the building and up-skill the local workforce, FNU has negotiated with the specialist contractors based in Australia to train via video-conferencing a local company, Fortech Construction Ltd, to complete the flooring works. They are expected to be completed by July 2020 depending on COVID-19 restrictions.

### **New campus in Labasa**

FNU has two over-arching objectives in Labasa: to provide enhanced learning and teaching facilities for students in the Northern Division as soon as possible, and to achieve the best value



for money in the investment of public funds. Given the major economic impact of COVID-19, FNU has put further expenditure on the proposed new campus on hold. The University is exploring other opportunities to deliver its objectives more swiftly and at significantly less cost to the public purse.

### **Recommendation**

1. The committee recognises the importance of these three incomplete capital projects for the benefit of the University and its students and recommends that FNU continue to liaise with relevant Government agencies and other partners for the completion of works.

## 4.0 GENDER ANALYSIS

Standing Order 110(2) provides that where a committee conducts an activity, the committee shall ensure that full consideration will be given to the principle of gender equality so as to ensure all matters are considered with regard to the impact and benefit on both men and women equally.

We note that the University has made a major commitment to gender equality and to increasing the proportion of female staff in areas where they are underrepresented, notably some of the science-based colleges and in senior positions. In terms of students, the University, like most in the developed world, is majority female. In part, this reflects the changing structure of the University. As the table below shows, women are disproportionately represented in higher education programmes (bachelors and postgraduate), so the gradual shift from TVET to higher education is accelerating the relative participation of women.

	2015 (%)	2016 (%)	2017 (%)	2018 (%)	2019 (%)
Female % enrolments	47.6	50.4	52.7	59.6	55.7
Female % higher education enrolments	62.3	62.0	66.4	68.0	64.8

In terms of overall staffing, the University is relatively evenly balanced. Professional services divisions tend to have a slight majority of female staff, but the pattern is more concerning in terms of academic staff. The following Table shows that the proportion of female academic staff remained in the range 41-43%, while there are major imbalances by college. The two science-based colleges, CAFF and CEST, as well as NTPC are overwhelmingly male, while CBHTS is broadly balanced and CHE and CMNHS have a majority of women.

College	2017		2018		2019	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
CAFF	66.3	33.7	62.0	38.0	62.9	37.1
CBHTS	53.3	46.7	51.8	48.2	51.5	48.5
CEST	79.0	21.0	77.7	22.3	77.0	23.0
CHE	44.6	55.4	39.7	60.3	41.2	58.8
CMNHS	33.7	66.3	34.6	65.4	35.4	64.6
NTPC	64.9	35.1	65.4	34.6	63.3	36.7
Total	58.7	41.3	57.2	42.8	57.1	42.9

When shown by seniority, the Table below shows the distribution in 2019. It shows that in both the TVET and higher education ranks, the proportion of women at the entry grades is high – 41.9% in TVET and 57.0% in higher education. However, female participation drops significantly at the more senior ranks. The University is committed to improving female participation in the science colleges and to promoting the advancement of women in their academic careers and has embarked on a series of initiatives to address gender imbalances.

TVET Ranks	(%) Female	Higher Education Ranks	(%) Female
Principal Instructor	22.2	Professor	10.0
Senior Instructor	23.8	Associate Professor	30.8
Instructor	27.3	Assistant Professor	33.7
Assistant Instructor	21.0	Lecturer	54.5
Tutor	41.9	Assistant Lecturer	57.0

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

The committee has fulfilled its mandate to review the 2019 Annual Report of the Fiji National University. As part of its review process, the committee received written and supplementary response from the Fiji National University.

In this review report, the committee has highlighted various areas that need to be strengthened by the University and relevant recommendations have been made for the resolution of issues.

## 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 Vegnathan  
(Deputy Chairperson)



Hon. Alipate Nagata  
(Member)



Hon. Salote Radrodoro  
(Member)



Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu  
(Member)

# APPENDIX

## Published written evidence

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