

APPENDICES

Appendix One

Written Response by the Fiji Higher Education Commission



Fiji Higher Education Commission

Level 1 Red Cross Building | 22 Gorrie Street | Suva | Postal: P. O. Box 2583, Government Buildings, Suva
Phone: 3100031/7730084/8358165 | Email: info@fhec.org.fj | Website: www.fhec.org.fj

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8th March, 2022

Hon. Viam Pillay
Chairperson
Standing Committee for Social Affairs
Parliament of the Republic of Fiji
SUVA

Attention: Committee Secretariat – Ms Sheron Narayan and Ms Marica Tuisoso

Dear Hon. Pillay,

Re: Clarification of Issues on the Fiji Higher Education August 2016 – July 2017 Annual Report

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) writes in response to correspondence received on 18th February, 2022 from the Standing Committee of Social Affairs Secretariat seeking clarifications on queries pertaining to the August 2016 – July 2017 Annual Report.

Attached to this letter ([Appendix 1](#)) are comprehensive responses to the twelve queries posed by the Standing Committee.

For further clarification, please contact Mr Epeli Lesuma on email address epeli.lesuma@fhec.org.fj or Mr Epineri Rawalai on email address Epineri.rawalai@fhec.org.fj or call 3100031.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Rohit Kishore
Director

FIJI HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION
P. O. Box 2583 Government Building, Suva
Ph: 3100031



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Appendix 1: Responses to Questions from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the August 2016 – July 2017 Annual Report

- 1. We note that a review of the Fiji Qualifications Framework was undertaken in May 2017. Explain why the previous FQF launched in 2012, was considered irrelevant to the current development for the higher education sector. As highlighted on Page 24 of the Annual Report, how has the implementation of the 20 recommendations brought about greater efficiency, and improved systems and performance?**

The Fiji National Qualifications Framework (FQF) was reviewed in 2017 as five years had elapsed since its launch in 2012. Owing to the dynamic nature of the Higher Education sector, several changes were noted to have taken place, and a review was necessary to ensure the FQF remained on par with that of other international qualifications frameworks.

One such example was how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) sought to expand their scope by benchmarking themselves against international qualifications frameworks instead of the FQF. For HEIs with a regional presence, benchmarking themselves against the Australian Qualifications Framework to ensure the comparability of their qualifications would benefit their learners. Further to the above, the current legal framework does not penalise HEIs for delivering programmes that are not registered on the FQF.

The implementation of the 20 recommendations emanating from the review of the FQF has improved the efficiency, work systems and performance, as evident in the following examples:

- The development of the [Quality Standards for Fiji Higher Education](#) has strengthened efforts to register HEIs and quality assure the programmes they offer;
- The re-activation of the Fiji Qualifications Council (FQC) established the process for the recording of university programmes on the FQF;
- Improved efficiency of processes with the reduction of timeframes for developing National Qualifications (NQs) from 18 to six months.

- 2. What was the outcome of the HR review undertaken by KPMG in 2017, and what improvements were made to the Commission's HR systems and processes as a result?**



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The outcome of the Human Resources (HR) review by KPMG in 2017 was to identify opportunities to strengthen the HR functions, including the Performance Assessment System, ensuring transparency, equity and quality in the processes. The HEC's HR Manual (Policies, Guidelines and Procedures Manual) was an extensive document consisting of 26 sections. The manual was reviewed against contemporary best practices and included and included recommendations aligned to relevant legislation.

The HR Manual establishes the Chairperson and Commission as administrators of the HR functions instead of the Director. An important outcome was the review of existing policies and procedures and the development of new ones to enhance the HR functions of the organisation. As of February 2022, 14 HR policies have been developed, and one policy has been reviewed.

3. We note that under the FHEIP project, six FHEC staff members visited New Zealand to meet possible partners for the six outputs of the project. Outline the outcomes of the visits to each of the seven agencies.

Since 2017, the activities of the HEC has been supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), New Zealand, under the Fiji Higher Education Improvement Programme (FHEIP). The FHEIP has six outputs from which the HEC's activities cascade. These six outputs are as follows:

- i. Output 1 – Strengthened Fiji National Qualifications Framework;*
- ii. Output 2 – HEC implement higher education monitoring framework;*
- iii. Output 3 – HEC rollout new pedagogical approaches to higher education institutions;*
- iv. Output 4 – HEC implement strategic IT plan;*
- v. Output 5 – HEC implement organisational development; and*
- vi. Output 6 – MOUs in place between HEC and New Zealand agencies.*

The visit to New Zealand was directly linked to Output 6 in order to support the five other outputs of the FHEIP. The HEC sought to establish and strengthen relationships with key New Zealand agencies and institutions that had expressed an interest in developing Fiji's Higher Education Sector. These institutional linkages will support the long-term efforts of the HEC to develop not only its organisational capacity but also that of the HEIs within Fiji's higher education ecosystem.



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The visit to the following agencies was aligned to the expected outcomes of the six FHEIP outputs and are summarised, the outcomes of which are summarised below:

a) New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA)

- Review of the FQF
 - The HEC team explored the development and operations of the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.
 - Share information with the NZQA on the Fiji context and the operation of the FQF to better define anticipated areas for review from lessons learned in the New Zealand context.
- The rollout of National Qualifications
 - The HEC team explored the NZQA processes for the development and rollout of National Qualifications.
 - Share information with the NZQA on the Fiji context and identify opportunities to review and improve NQ development efficiency.
- Accelerate accreditation process for Levels 7–10
 - The HEC team learned about the NZQA processes for accrediting Levels 7–10 provider developed qualifications (qualifications developed by HEIs).
 - Share information on the purpose, process, and design of the Committee for the Accreditation of University Qualifications (CAUQ) at the HEC to accredit Levels 7-10 qualifications. The project will clear the backlog of programmes for accreditation and design a new system to fast track the backlog.
- Strengthening quality assurances systems and processes
 - Learning about the NZQA quality assurances systems and processes against the current monitoring framework at the HEC to identify opportunities for improvement.
- IT systems
 - Learning about the NZQA systems to identify opportunities for the HEC to improve and align its IT systems to support services delivery and information collection and dissemination.
- Organisational development and agreements
 - Learning about the structures of the NZQA to undertake their mandated roles.
 - Discussing broad agreements on advisory services that the NZQA can provide the HEC.



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b) Coolbear Ltd

- Implement the Organisational Development Plan by engaging Coolbear Ltd.

c) Waikato Institute of Technology (WINTEC)

- Teacher staff competency framework, culturally appropriate approaches, develop and implement a professional development programme
 - Explore the capabilities and interest of WINTEC in working with the HEC to develop a competency framework for teaching staff in the delivery of vocational education and training.
- Data collection from an end-user perspective
 - Learning how WINTEC (HEI perspective) collects data required by the Tertiary Education Commission (the HEC equivalent), the type of data collected and how this feeds into institutional monitoring.
 - Better inform the HEC on the type and requirements for data from another Higher Education sector context and the IT systems needed to support this at a regulatory and HEI level.

d) Ako Aotearoa - the key outcome of this engagement were to discuss the following;

- The HEC team explored Ako's capabilities and interest in working with the HEC to develop a competency framework for teaching staff to deliver vocational education and training.

e) Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) – the key outcomes of this engagement were to discuss the following;

- Strengthening quality assurance systems and processes.
 - Learn about the TEC systems and processes, monitoring framework and mechanisms to measure HEI performance.
 - Discuss the HEC reform process and the anticipated links to the NZQA and the TEC to add value and build capacity.
 - Learn how the TEC collects data from HEIs, what kind of data is collected and how the data is managed.
- Organisational development



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- This scoping visit provided an opportunity to examine how the TEC is structured to undertake its mandated roles in terms of organisational development. The aim of this was to analyse the appropriateness of the HEC's current structure and areas for improvement.

- f) **Pacific Island Education** - the key outcomes of this engagement were to discuss the following;
 - Develop and implement culturally appropriate approaches
 - Identify and learn about strategies and approaches that ensure teaching and learning caters appropriately to the needs of indigenous and Pacific Island communities.
 - The other policy interventions may be appropriate in the Fijian context.
 - How this knowledge can inform professional development for tertiary teaching staff.
 - Investigate how the Pacific Island Education develops and deliver programmes to Maori and how they ensure Maori pedagogical approaches can be mainstreamed. If so, what are the successes of this.
 - Learning how the Pacific Island Education collects data required by the Tertiary Education Commission (the HEC equivalent), the type of data collected and how this feeds into institutional monitoring.

- g) **Te Whare Wananga O Awanuiarangi (TWWoA)** - the key outcome of this engagement were the following;
 - Develop and implement culturally appropriate approaches
 - Identify and learn about strategies and approaches that ensure teaching and learning caters appropriately to the needs of indigenous communities.
 - The other policy interventions may be appropriate in the Fijian context.
 - How this knowledge can inform professional development for tertiary teaching staff.
 - Investigate how the TWWoA develops and delivers programmes to Maori and how they ensure Maori pedagogical approaches can be mainstreamed and if so, what are the successes of this.
 - Learning how the Pacific Island Education collects data required by the Tertiary Education Commission (the HEC equivalent), the type of data collected and how this feeds into institutional monitoring.



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4. Enlighten us on the roles and responsibilities of registered national assessors.

Assessment is the formally structured evaluation of an individual's ongoing performance against approved performance competencies or standards. The assessment process involves collecting evidence of the individual's achievement and performance.

The interpretation and description of that achievement and performance is an assessment. This is done by considering collected evidence of what the individual knows and can do, as measured against the competencies.

The role of an assessor is to:

- i. Prepare learners for assessments.
- ii. Develop assessment plans in consultation with the learners.
- iii. Conduct assessments.
- iv. Provide feedback to the learners.
- v. Submit assessment records to the HEC for the generation of the Record of Learning (transcripts).

They were called National Assessors because they assessed the National Qualifications only and are registered with the HEC; thus, they are called Registered National Assessors. Only the HEC registered or approved assessors are allowed to assess National Qualifications.

However, due to the high cost of assessments by National Assessors, the most cost-effective solution was to have HEI trainers conduct assessments. These trainers undergo assessors' training using the standard WA00014 to develop their capacity. To further save costs associated with training due to the pandemic, the HEC is conducting this training online. While the face-to-face training was very successful, the HEC is yet to determine the success of the online training.



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One of the requirements for assessors is to ensure that they are current with the industry, and this is done either through industry attachments or upgrading their qualifications. National Assessors were chosen from industries and some from HEIs with current industry experience.

5. What is the progress of the collaborative work with MEHA on FEMIS and the integration of Higher Education data?

Progress of the collaborative work with MEHA and HEIs on FEMIS from 2017 to date

The HEC collaborated with the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA) and HEIs to integrate Higher Education data onto the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS). This project sought to create a seamless system for longitudinal reporting of learners' information from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to Higher Education. As the national student education database, FEMIS can track rates at which learners progress through education. This would enable the HEC to have a complete overview of the education sector and to be better equipped to provide the government with education research and policy advice.

FEMIS currently comprises three databases: Fiji Education Staffing Appointment (FESA), Schools Information Management System (SIMS), and Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (LANA). The MEHA's policy on FEMIS governs all learner data collected by and contained within FEMIS. The release of all data must first receive the approval of the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (PS-EHA).

There are four phases in this data collaboration process.

- *Phase 1* - includes a signed agreement on exchanging data and proposed processes.
- *Phase 2* - is dedicated to implementing the agreed changes defined in Phase 1. This includes a system of exchanging data and a report. The report includes changes to business processes such as university student registration.
- *Phase 3* - refines and builds on Phase 2 by adding disability and other data too complex for Phase 2. Phase 3 also intends to address any issues such as security limitations. It allows for prototype



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web service connections at MEHA and universities that will enable real-time sharing of data without the manual shipment of files.

- *Phase 4* - automates the data movement using web services prototypes in Phase 3.

The HEI module was developed for FEMIS focused on developing useful internal data collection. This approach required HEIs that are not universities to enter data into the FEMIS to support national reporting directly. The universities and HEIs with existing IT and student management systems will exchange data with FEMIS to enable that same national reporting. Two HEIs, ServicePro International Tourism and Hospitality Institute and Vivekananda Technical Centre,¹ piloted FEMIS as the Student Management System.² Pacific Flying School was in the progress of integrating into FEMIS before the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Due to certain circumstances, the project has not progressed, including:

- MEHA's FEMIS team, who is the key owner and custodians of the FEMIS project, lacked sufficient human resources in the IT team, which has affected the project's progress;
- The HEC embarked on providing a series of information workshops for HEIs to garner buy-in. Unfortunately, the impact of COVID-19 restrictions had led to delays in developing HEI profiles from MEHA, and the information sessions have been postponed. The Sangam Institute of Technology (SIT), for example, was due to come onboard for FEMIS. However, this was delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions, which led to the onboarding and training workshop being postponed; and
- HEIs lack training and expertise in formatting data into CSV³ or SQL⁴. To integrate the FEMIS, HEIs need to provide data in CSV or SQL formats that can be imported.

As a result of the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the budgetary constraints, a revised solution and systems-based approach are required. The HEC is working to build a Higher Education Commission System (HECSys) that the HEIs will access and upload learner data and other necessary data for higher

¹ VTC - Vivekananda Technical Centre.

² SMS - Student Management System.

³ CSV - Comma - Separated Value File.

⁴ SQL - Structured Query Language.



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education. The HECSys will facilitate data integration onto FEMIS and should enable the generation of data/reports required by and for MEHA/FEMIS. As of 31st January, 2022, the HECSys is still a work in progress due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which shifted priorities for the HEC and the HEIs, alike.

6. What are some of the challenges encountered in the recognition, registration and re-registration of Higher Education Institutions for example, in recognising the South Pacific Aviation Training Institute in 2016-2017?

Prospective applicants and institutions have experienced challenges in providing the relevant and appropriate documentation to demonstrate their compliance to the Recognition, Registration, and Review requirements. The challenges have stemmed mainly from the lack of technical and professional competencies by some prospective applicants or smaller institutional providers who are not well versed with the holistic approach adopted by the HEC in assessing Recognition, Registration, and re-registration applications (Review). The Higher Education legislation outlines the principal requirements and is further guided by the Quality Standards for Fiji Higher Education.

The HEC has adopted a consultative process to simplify the application process to address these challenges so that prospective applicants and HEIs are aware of the requirements. The HEC regularly conducts awareness and capacity building sessions and provides supplementary materials, templates, and evidence guidelines to better inform prospective applicants and HEIs on the fundamental requirements needed to provide quality education to learners. The requirements include:

- Demonstrating the HEIs ability to promote good governance;
- Quality assurance; continuous improvement;
- Maintaining financial sustainability;
- The HEI is well-resourced with qualified educators, staff and training materials and equipment; and
- There are documented business processes and academic regulations to safeguard learners' wellbeing and the learning experience when enrolling in post-secondary school, award conferring programmes.



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- 7. FHEC, through its Funding Model, plays an important role in advising the government on funding allocations for eligible HEIs, in recognition of the critical role they play. As such, what advice did the Commission give to the Government on the detrimental effects of withholding grant to the University of the South Pacific? In the Commission's assessment, how will this affect national development and what will be the mid-term and long-term impact on the provision of quality tertiary education to students?**

Regarding the withholding of the grant, this matter pertains to the 2019-2020 financial year. However, in 2016-2017, the Fijian Government disbursed a total of \$30,217,468 to the University of the South Pacific. Funding was utilised to enhance learning and teaching, research and support operational and institutional costs.

In addition, the Fijian Government is one of the twelve member countries that own The University of the South Pacific ("USP"). The HEC recognises and honours the autonomy of HEIs and their governing bodies by refraining from interfering with decisions made at a governance level. The HEC, however, ensures that as an institution of higher learning, the USP is compliant with the Quality Standards for Fiji Higher Education and the regulatory provisions in delivering quality education. The HEC anticipates the matters of interest are resolved in a timely manner between both parties to minimise further disruptions to the quality of teaching and learning experience in this challenging environment

- 8. Are all of the registered HEIs fully funded by Government?**

Registered HEIs are eligible to be considered for funding by the Government. Out of all the registered HEIs in 2016-2017, ten (10) registered were provided with the operating grant by the Government. Most of the HEIs have been historically funded by the Government. Below is the list of HEIs funded:

- i. The University of the South Pacific;
- ii. The University of Fiji;
- iii. The Fiji National University;
- iv. Centre for Appropriate Technology and Development;



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- v. Corpus Christi Teachers College;
- vi. Fulton Adventist University College;
- vii. Montfort Technical Institute;
- viii. Montfort Boys' Town;
- ix. Sangam Institute of Technology; and
- x. Vivekananda Technical Centre.

9. How are the grants for each HEI calculated (provide formula used if any)? Of the HEIs funded in 2016/2017, how many have since ceased operation?

Formula for HEI Funding through the HEC:

The HEC funding formula attempts to address critical issues around equity, quality, and access in HEIs. It has provided a basis for formulating advice to the Government on the funding of HEIs from 2014. The funding model comprises two funding components: enrolments funding and leverage funding.

Enrolments Funding Component

Enrolments funding is driven by the number of student enrolments and is calculated as the difference between the total cost of running a programme and the expected tuition fee revenue earned for that same programme. A shortfall in revenue is subsidised by the Government at a certain percentage. The Government's level of subsidy depends on the type of institution.

Leverage Funding Component

The second component of funding in the HEC funding model is the Leverage Funding, awarded to all institutions and on the following basis:

- i. The uniqueness or special character of the institution's programmes;
- ii. The institution's internal quality assurance systems; staff and facilities – including the level of qualifications of the teaching staff, and the quality of facilities, for instance, library and internet access and speed;
- iii. How the institution supports disadvantaged learners (learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and with disabilities) as well as learners from remote areas;



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All ten (10) HEIs funded by the Government in 2016/2017 are in operation.

10. Enlighten us on the Pacific Eye Institute.

Pacific Eye Institute ("The Institute"), located on Brown Street, Suva, is a registered HEI offering eye care training for doctors and nurses from Fiji and other Pacific Island countries. In partnership with the Fiji National University's (FNU) College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, the institute offers training resources and facilities and professional support services to FNU learners enrolled in postgraduate programmes related to eye care. The institute is managed and funded by the Fred Hollow Foundation New Zealand and has been registered with the HEC since 1st August, 2011. In 2017, the institute was reviewed for quality assurance purposes and was subsequently granted renewal of registration until 22nd May, 2022. The institute is scheduled to undergo another review in 2022.

11. With the Government's pledge to "leaving no one behind", how does FHEC collaborate with HEIs to ensure that students living with disabilities are given equal access to learning opportunities, have ease of physical access to HEI premises, and are sufficiently equipped with tools to assist them in learning for example, assistive devices?

In its effort to protect and safeguard the welfare of learners with disabilities and special needs, the HEC mandates registered HEIs to ensure their training facilities and premises are adequately resourced with disability accessibilities, educators and staff are well-trained to provide training and services for these special groups, and appropriate strategies and support services are offered to enable them to attain their learning potential fully. The requirements mandated under the Quality Standard for Fiji Higher Education under Quality Standard 6 – Infrastructure and Quality Standard 9 – Learner admissions, welfare and support.

In 2019, the Commission also embarked on a research project on "*An Investigation into Access and Equity Issues in Fijian Higher Education*" through the New Zealand Government funded Fiji Higher Education Improvement Programme (FHEIP). More specifically, one of the research aims was to assess the level of preparedness of HEIs to cater to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and learners with special



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needs to gain admission and successfully complete their programme of study. The research report provides important findings of the current situation of access and equity in higher education in Fiji. This information is needed to provide a way forward for the Government, relevant stakeholders, and the higher education sector to identify feasible solutions to strengthen access and equity and promote quality higher education opportunities for all.

Providing Government Grant as a Mechanism

The HEC, over the years, has closely collaborated with the funded HEIs to ensure that adequate support is established for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and with disabilities. This has been carried out in two ways. Firstly, the HEC's funding formula has incorporated a funding component related to initiatives implemented by HEIs in terms of providing access to learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and learners with disabilities. Secondly, the funding provided by the Fijian Government has been used by HEIs to deliver programmes for learners with special needs, provide counselling services, and subsidise costs associated with providing physical access to teaching and learning facilities.

12. Audited Financial Statements of FHEC for the Year Ended 31 July 2017 on Page 45 of the Annual Report, the auditor highlighted two issues under Emphasis of Matter. Confirm whether the issues have been resolved and internal controls put in place to prevent their recurrence.

The issue has been resolved in the subsequent audit. The HEC has implemented internal control procedures to ensure that collection is reconciled on a monthly basis with the records of the Ministry. The HEC has maintained a list of registered HEIs and reviews them annually to ensure that all collectable fees have been billed.

Further on, the HEC is in the process of implementing controls to ensure that all HEIs operating in Fiji are operating within the legal framework.