



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Review of the Fiji Higher Education Commission August 2016 – July 2017 Annual Report



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP 3

CHAIRPERSON’S FOREWORD 4

LIST OF ACRONYMS 5

RECOMMENDATION: 6

1.0 INTRODUCTION 6

 1.1 Committee Procedure 6

2.0 ABOUT THE FIJI HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION 7

3.0 COMMITTEE’S OBSERVATIONS 7

4.0 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS 8

5.0 CONCLUSION 9

COMMITTEE MEMBERS’ SIGNATURE 10

APPENDIX 11

 Published written evidence 11

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 period from August 2016 – July 2017.

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 March of this year and formulated questions pertaining to the Annual Report which were sent to the Commission for its response. Upon receipt of all relevant information on the committee's queries, the committee compiled its findings and subsequently endorsed its report in March.

Some pertinent findings of the committee emanating from the scrutiny process was as follows:

1. Review of the Fiji National Qualifications Framework in 2017 to ensure that it remains on par with that of other international qualifications frameworks.
2. Progressive works on creating a Higher Education Commission System to enable access by Higher Education Institutions to upload learner data and other necessary data for higher education. This will subsequently facilitate data integration onto the Fiji Education Management Information System.
3. Review of the Commission's Human Resource systems and processes was carried out in 2017 by KPMG. This review was undertaken to strengthen the Commission's HR functions, including its Performance Assessment System.

At this juncture, I wish to thank the Director of the Fiji Higher Education Commission, Dr. Rohit Kishore, 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

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ECE	-	Early Childhood Education
HEC	-	Higher Education Commission
HECSys	-	Higher Education Commission System
HEI	-	Higher Education Institution
HR	-	Human Resources
FHEC	-	Fiji Higher Education Commission
FEMIS	-	Fiji Education Management Information System
FQC	-	Fiji Qualifications Council
FQF	-	Fiji Qualifications Framework
MP	-	Member of Parliament

RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has conducted the annual review of the Fiji higher Education Commission for 2016 - 2017 and recommends that the House take note of its report.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The 2016 - 2017 Annual Report of the Fiji Higher Education Commission was tabled in Parliament during the February 2021 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 March to deliberate on and formulate questions pertaining to the 2016 - 2017 Annual Report of the Fiji Higher Education Commission which was sent to the Commission for its response.

Upon receipt of all relevant information on the committee's queries, we compiled our findings on the Annual Report and subsequently endorsed it in the latter part of this month.

We received written response from the Fiji Higher Education Commission 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 HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

The FHEC oversees the development and improvement of higher education in Fiji with the aim of ensuring that learners have the best possible opportunity to gain relevant qualifications required to support and sustain Fiji's economic and social prosperity.

The FHEC regulates the registration and operation of all higher education institutions, ensuring they meet quality standards and guidelines that reflect national and international imperatives. It is also responsible for establishing and maintaining the Fiji Qualifications Framework which enable Fiji qualifications to be measured both in Fiji and internationally.

The FHEC was established as a statutory body in 2010 under the Fiji Higher Education Act 2008.

3.0 COMMITTEE'S OBSERVATIONS

3.1 The Fiji National Qualifications Framework was reviewed in 2017 as five years had elapsed since its launch in 2012. The review was necessary to ensure the FQF remained on par with that of other international qualifications frameworks. We note that the implementation of the recommendations stemming from the review of the FQF brought about greater efficiency and improved systems and performance. This is apparent in the following examples:

- 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 from 18 to six months.

3.2 We queried the Commission on the progress of work undertaken with the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts HEIs to integrate Higher Education data onto the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS). The four phase project sought to create a seamless system for longitudinal reporting of learners' information from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to Higher Education. We were informed by the Commission that the project has not progressed due to challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the budgetary constraints.

Accordingly, the committee was made aware that a revised solution and systems-based approach are now required. The HEC is currently working to build a Higher Education Commission System (HECSys) that the HEIs will access and upload learner data and other necessary data for higher 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.

- 3.3 We noted that a review of the Commission's Human Resource systems and processes was carried out in 2017 by KPMG and enquired FHEC on its outcome. We were enlightened that this review was undertaken to strengthen the Commission's HR functions, including its Performance Assessment System. An important outcome of this exercise was the review of existing policies and procedures and the formulation of new ones to enhance HR functions of the organisation. We note that as of February 2022, 14 HR policies have been developed and one policy reviewed.
- 3.4 In 2016-2017, the Commission's total operating revenue was \$2,251,373 and its operating expenditure was \$2,236,733. This resulted an operating profit of \$14,640.
- 3.5 We noted that the auditor issued an Emphasis of Matter on the 2016-2017 accounts of the FHEC on the following issues:
- The Commission collected revenue from registration fees, annual fees and renewal of registration fees totalling \$39,770 which was deposited in the Consolidated Fund Account during the year. This amount remained to be reconciled with the records of Ministry of Education.
 - The Commission did not carry out a detailed survey of the registered institutes for the year ended 31 July 2017. Therefore, it was not in a position to determine if all institutes operating in Fiji in 2017 were registered and paid their registration fees.

Upon enquiring with the Commission, we were informed that the two issues highlighted by the auditor have 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.

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

4.0 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the HEC, in consultation with Higher Education Institutions and the Ministry of Education, ensure that the Higher Education Commission System is expeditiously completed to enable the collection of learner data and other relevant higher education data for integration onto FEMIS.

2. That, upon completion of this project, the Commission ensure that Higher Education Institutions are trained to effectively utilise the Higher Education Commission System and ensure that data entered therein are accurate and uniform.
3. That the FHEC ensure that the required Human Resources skills level and needs are fulfilled through recruitment and training.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The committee has fulfilled its mandate to review the 2016-2017 Annual Report of the Fiji Higher Education Commission. As part of its review process, the committee received written response from the Commission.

In this review report, the committee has highlighted various areas that need to be strengthened by the FHEC 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 Radrodro
(Member)



Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu
(Member)

APPENDIX

Published written evidence

Written evidence was received from the 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/>