



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Review of the Fiji National University 2020 Annual Report



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP	3
CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD	4
RECOMMENDATION:	5
1.0 INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Committee Procedure	5
2.0 ABOUT THE FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY	6
3.0 COMMITTEE'S OBSERVATIONS	6
4.0 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS	8
5.0 CONCLUSION	9
COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE	10
APPENDIX	11
Published written evidence	11

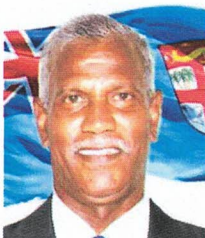
COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP



Chairperson

Hon. Viam Pillay MP

Government Member



Deputy Chairperson

Hon. George Vagnathan MP

Government Member



Member

Hon. Alipate Nagata MP

Government Member



Member

Hon. Salote Radrodoro 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 National University (FNU) for 2020.

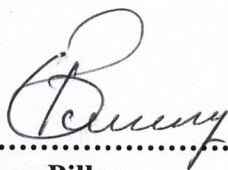
This review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media. The committee first met to deliberate in May of this year and formulated questions pertaining to the Annual Report, which were sent to FNU 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 June.

FNU is a 'dual sector' university, offering technical and vocational education and training (TVET) from levels 1-6 and higher education from levels 5-10 (up to doctoral degrees). The University recorded operating surplus for the year, achieving an operating surplus of \$7.4m compared to \$6.1m deficit in 2019. The University has undertaken a major upgrade of its digital infrastructure, which enabled it to make a speedy transition to fully online learning at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the University's campuses, there is also extensive building and renovation work underway as the University transforms its campuses to meet the needs of 21st-century students.

FNU is an institution committed to investing in its staff. In 2020, the University had a full-time staff body of 785 academic staff and 1,016 professional services staff. In terms of overall staffing, the University is relatively evenly balanced between men and women. The committee acknowledges FNU's commitment to the improvement of female participation in the science colleges and to promoting the advancement of women in their academic careers and has launched a series of initiatives to address gender imbalances.

Finally, I thank Dr. William May who at the time of inquiry was acting as the Vice-Chancellor of the Fiji National University, 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 Radrodro and Hon. Ratu Tevita Niumataivalu who substituted for 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.



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Hon. Viam Pillay
Chairperson

RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has conducted the annual review of the Fiji National University for 2020 and recommends that the House take note of its report.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The 2020 Annual Report of the Fiji National University was tabled in the May 2022 Parliament and referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for its scrutiny.

Standing Orders 109(2)(b) allows the 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 May to deliberate on and formulate questions pertaining to the Annual Report, which were sent to FNU 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 early part of June.

We received written response from the Fiji National University for this annual review. It is 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 in its current form in 2010, with a mandate to make tertiary education and opportunity accessible to all Fijians. 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

- 3.1 Construction of a three new storey building commenced at the Fiji Maritime Academy (FMA) on 1st of August, 2018. The building will cater for Marine High Voltage Room, Safety and Survival Equipment Labs, computer lab, Fisheries Lab, and a number of lecture rooms. This facility will enhance the maritime industry in the country and the region through the provision of trainings and qualifications that are internationally benchmarked. We note that the Fiji Government has provided funding for the project.

The committee notes, however, that the project completion has been delayed due to Covid-19 restrictions, supply chain issues, wet weather and contractor default. As of June 2022, 85% of project works have been accomplished with completion now anticipated by August of this year.

- 3.2 The College of Business, Hospitality, and Tourism Studies (CBHTS) Complex is being built on Nasinu Campus. The complex is a four-storey building with two wings. One wing will be dedicated to a lecture theatre, while the other wing will have three levels. This building will make provision for state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities.

We note that construction of the project commenced on 2nd December 2018 and 94% progress has been made as of June 2022. This project too, has been delayed due to Covid-19 restrictions, supply chain issues and wet weather conditions. The project handover is expected to be done in July 2022.

- 3.3 We queried FNU on the progress of works to the FNU Labasa Campus at the Naiyaca Subdivision. We were informed that the project was at 47% completion when work was halted in March 2020. Since then, no work has been carried out on site. The overall project consisted of the main building, a services yard, porte coche're, carparks, and a walkway from the road to the main building.

The project was hindered due to continuous contractual defaults by the contractor, which were non-payment issues to sub-contractors and workers. There was a lack of progress from August 2019 to March 2020 after numerous meetings/reminders. The main contractor was terminated on 13th March 2020 due to unsatisfactory progress with the project. Upon termination, the contractor made claims against FNU for unlawful

termination and for stay-order on the performance bond. The litigation was finally completed in October 2021 in favour of FNU.

The University Council is currently looking at options for progressing the unfinished work. That may include repurposing the current site to suit the University's needs for Labasa. In doing this it will work closely with both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Economy.

3.4 We note that at the end of 2020, the University was in discussion with the following Ministries regarding outstanding grant payments to the University that were initially pledged but not paid to the University during the 2010 financial year:

1. Ministry of Health - \$563,602 (\$500,000 for Fiji School of Medicine (FSM) 4th quarter grant & \$63,602 short payment for Fiji School of Nursing (FSN) Grant); and
2. Ministry of Agriculture \$100,000 - short payment for Fiji College of Agriculture (FCA) Grant.

The University informed us that the funds have not been received. We note that the outstanding debt is from the merger of the colleges in 2010 and remains outstanding to date. The University has followed up on the outstanding grant payment on several occasions with the respective Ministries, which has been turned down due to the nonallocation of budget. The Ministries were requested by the Ministry of Economy to look within their budgetary allocations and identify savings from which the payments can be sourced but to date, no arrangements have been made.

3.5 We note that the finalisation of boundaries and allocations of land leases to certain properties have not been completed. The following provides an update on the status of transfer of land leases to these properties:

Property Name	Update
Legalega	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• FNU has the Agreement for lease of this property from TLTB for 99 years from 2005.• There are 33 Conditions from the Department of Town & Country Planning (DTCP), which must be fulfilled before a proper TLTB lease is made under FNU's name. FNU has made an application for deferment and waiver of conditions until the development stage.
Nasinu Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• FNU has the Approval Notice of this property for 99 years from 2018.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FNU's engaged surveyor is addressing the comments from Nasinu Town Council and DTCP.
Koronivia Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Lease is being processed by TLTB. Ministry of Agriculture has surrendered the three portions of the CAFF that is FNU's boundary.
Natabua (Beside Lautoka Corrections Centre)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FNU has the Approval Notice of this property for 99 years from 2014. FNU has made an application for deferment and waiver of conditions until the development stage.
MacGregor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The area occupied by FNU has been surrendered to FNU by Ministry of Health. FNU's application will be processed after the requirements of Fiji Roads Authority is met. The University's surveyors are facilitating this.

The FNU Council has made every effort to complete this process and is confident that the transfer of this remaining property will be finalised as per the FNU Act.

4.0 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the University speed up the finalisation and allocation of land leases to the following properties:
 - Legalega;
 - Nasinu campus;
 - Koronivia campus;
 - Natabua; and
 - MacGregor.
- That the University must work closely with the Construction and Implementation Unit of the Ministry of Economy and relevant stakeholders in reviewing and strengthening its tender processes as well as the monitoring and implementation phases of every capital project.
- That the University pursue the completion of all incomplete projects delayed as a result of Covid-19 restrictions, supply chain issues, wet weather conditions and contractor defaults.

4. That the University collaborate with the Ministry of Economy in resolving the long outstanding grant issue with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The committee has fulfilled its mandate to review the 2020 Annual Report of the Fiji National University. As part of its review process, the committee received a written response from the University.

This review report highlights the committee's findings on the University's performance for 2020 and makes suggestions for improvement of processes.

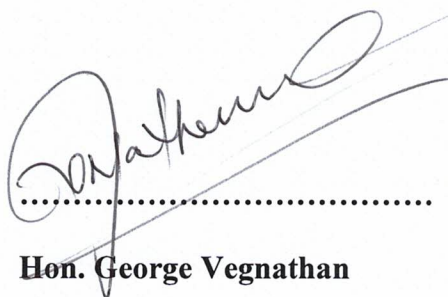
COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE

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. Salote Radrodro

(Member)



Hon. Alipate Nagata

(Member)



Hon. Ratu Tevita Niumataiwalu

(Alternate Member)

APPENDIX

Published written evidence

Written evidence was received from the Fiji National University which, together with the transcript of the public hearing, and can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link: <http://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>