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CHAIRPERSON’S FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs report on *the Consolidated Review of the Fiji Higher Education Commission Annual Report 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021*.

As mandated under Standing Orders 109(2) (b), the Committee considers issues related to health, education, social services, labor, aviation, culture and media.

The Fiji Higher Education Commission 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’s main function is as follows:

1. Ensuring equitable access to quality post-secondary qualifications certified through the national framework.
2. Setting and enforcing governance standards for universities, colleges and other providers.
3. Supporting economic and social development by aligning programmes with industry, government and community needs.
4. Establishing and maintaining the Fiji National Qualifications Framework (FNQF) to standardise comparability across sectors.
5. Advising government and institutions on policy development, scholarships and strategic investment in tertiary education.

The FHEC’s core mandate is to regulate, register and accredit HEI, uphold national quality standards and maintain the Fiji National Qualifications Framework.

FHEC plays a pivotal role in ensuring that higher education in Fiji meets national and international standards and contributes to human resource development and national prosperity.

Some of the initiatives the FHEC undertook during 2018 - 2021 were as follows:

1. Reviewed 51 National Qualifications.
2. Dispensed the Government operating grant of FJD\$104,789,107 (2018-2019), FJD\$80,810,227 (2019-2020), and FJD\$81,385,814 (2020-2021) to ten HEIs.
3. Completed Graduate Outcome Survey Report.
4. Review of the HEI Grants Management System.
5. Registered 442 Qualifications on the Fiji National Qualifications Framework.

I sincerely thank Dr. Eci Naisele, the Director, Fiji Higher Education Commission and his Management team for their valuable contributions to this review process.

I am thankful to the Hon. Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, Hon. Alipate Tuicolo, Hon. Viam Pillay, Hon Alikia Bia and Hon Parveen Bala for their invaluable contribution and support. I extend my sincere appreciation to Hon Jone Usamate, for his contribution and support being an alternate member.

Finally, I thank the Secretariat for their hard work and dedication in compiling this report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this report to Parliament.



.....
Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu
Chairperson

ACRONYM

FHEC	Fiji Higher Education Commission
FNQF	Fiji National Qualification Framework
HEI	Higher Education Institute
TVET	Technical Vocation Education Training

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs (**‘Committee’**) is established under Section 70 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and Standing Order 109. The Committee’s mandate and functions are provided under SO 109 (2) and 110 (1) (a)-(d) & (f).

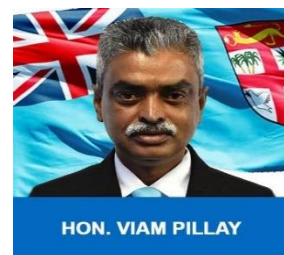
The Members of Committee are:



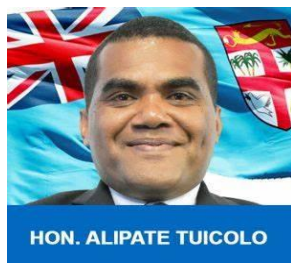
Chairperson
Government Member



Deputy Chairperson
Government Member



Opposition Member



Government Member



Opposition Member



Government Member

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Fiji Higher Education Commission Annual Reports 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 were tabled in Parliament on 12th July, 2024 and referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs pursuant to Standing Order 109 (2) (b).

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

1.1. Committee Procedures

Deliberations on the Consolidated FHEC Reports commenced in August 2025. The Committee read through the reports, prepared questions and sought clarifications on key issues of interest from the FHEC.

The Committee held a Public Submission with the FHEC on 21st August 2025.

Upon receipt of all pertinent information pertaining to the Committee's queries, the report was subsequently endorsed on 25th September 2025.

The Committee received responses from the FHEC, which can be viewed at the following link <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

2.0 COMMITTEE DELIBERATION AND ANALYSIS

The Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC) was established under the Higher Education Act 2008. As a statutory body corporate, FHEC is governed by a Commission appointed by the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts. Appointees typically represent academia, professional bodies, student associations and civil society.

FHEC modernised its processes via an enhanced digital portal for institutional registration and qualification accreditation. Its emphasis is on the following activities:

1. Integration of micro-credentials and credit-transfer tools to be aligned with the FNQF.
2. Greater enforcement of quality control to protect students from unaccredited institutions.
3. Expansion of outreach services including a regional office in Labasa.
4. Update funding criteria guiding government subsidy allocations.
5. Target capacity-building efforts to support institutions in meeting evolving education and innovation goals.

Analysis

The Committee reviewed and analysed the Fiji Higher Education Commission Annual Report (2018-2019, 2019-2020 & 2020-2021) and compiled this consolidated report.

3.0 KEY FINDINGS

The Committee conducted its review of the 2018 – 2021 Annual Report and identified the following key findings:

- 3.1 FHEC ensures that HEIs deliver quality and accredited programs to meet the market demand.
- 3.2 COVID19 Pandemic accelerated the need for Tech – Driven education, prompting FHEC to fund for the digital upgrades in HEI.
- 3.3 FHEC used a Grant Management System to track and monitor fund utilization across HEI.
- 3.4 FHEC formulated policy on recognition and registration to address the increased demand for higher education institutions.
- 3.5 The Committee noted the proposed establishment of the Skills Council of Fiji an independent national agency to manage TVET in Fiji.
- 3.6 The Committee noted that FHEC verified all HEI offering teacher education program that meets Fiji’s National Quality standards.
- 3.7 The Committee noted that the grants were allocated to institutions who were not approved by FHEC, namely Pacific Polytech and Service Pro Institute.
- 3.8 The Committee noted that all courses offered at Service Pro Institute and Pacific Polytech are not accredited by the FHEC.
- 3.9 The Committee noted that some HEI’s who are registered by FHEC were teaching and receiving funds from Government and their courses offered were not accredited.
- 3.10 The Committee noted that only 35 out of 49 Institutions complied with the FHEC requirements to qualify for the yearly grant.
- 3.11 The Committee noted that there were excessive number of students graduated from 13 caregiving institutions which were not accredited and later closed. The Committee further noted that all these 13 Caregiving Institution now reopened.

4.0 RECOMMENDATION

The Committee recommends the following

- 4.1 The Committee recommends that FHEC monitors and ensures the compliance of HEI with respect to the programs delivered.
- 4.2 The Committee recommends that the funding for the tech-driven program should continue in all HEI.
- 4.3 The Committee recommends that FHEC must strengthen the Grant Management System for tracking the utilization of funds across all HEI.
- 4.4 The Committee recommends that FHEC policy on recognition and registration must be reviewed and strengthened with urgency.
- 4.5 The Committee recommends that prior to the establishment of the Skills Council of Fiji there must be a clear guidelines or Terms of Reference for the running of this independent agency to manage TVET in Fiji.
- 4.6 The Committee recommends that the verification process must be reviewed and strengthened for compliance with FNQF.
- 4.7 The Committee recommends that grants must only be given to HEI who have clearly met the requirements of FHEC.
- 4.8 The Committee recommends that the future funding of the two institutions, namely Service Pro Institute and Pacific Polytech, must stop immediately.
- 4.9 The Committee recommends that FHEC ensure that all courses offered by HEI must be accredited.
- 4.10 The Committee recommends that FHEC must ensure that all registered HEI comply with the requirements of FHEC in order to qualify for the yearly grant.
- 4.11 The Committee recommends that FHEC ensures that these caregiving institutions must be fully registered and have accredited courses.
- 4.12 The Committee recommends a Commission of Inquiry be appointed by Parliament of Republic of Fiji to thoroughly investigate how funds were allocated to Pacific Polytech and Service Pro Institute. The Inquiry to look into the non-accreditation of the two institution and how the grant was allocated given that they did not meet the criteria by the FHEC.

5.0 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND GENDER ANALYSIS

Provided by the Fiji Higher Education Commission.

5.1 SGD on Gender Equality

SDGs	HECF Gender Equality and Related Policies
Goal 5: Gender equality <i>"Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." Indicators include, for example, having suitable legal frameworks and the representation by women in national parliament or in local deliberative bodies</i>	The equal opportunities for employment policy under HR has a Policy objective to ensure that the HECF does not discriminate on the grounds of ethnicity, gender or disability and seeks to provide equal employment opportunities and dignity for all. As such, HECF aligns all recruitment on merit with minimum qualifications for entry. However, there were cases in areas of speciality where it was tough to judge and appoint based on gender, and hence there has been a greater inclination towards males than females during the review period.

5.2 FHEC Faces the following obstacles in implementing SDG's

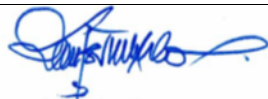
Obstacles in implementing SDGs	Obstacles faced in implementing SDG's
Goal 1: No Poverty Goal 2: Zero hunger Goal 3: Good health and well-being Goal 4: Quality education Goal 5: Gender equality Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, Technology and Infrastructure Goal 10: Reduced inequality Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production Goal 13: Climate action Goal 14: Life below water Goal 15: Life on land Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals	1. Professional and technical high-level skills are needed in the specific areas, and staff must be upskilled and retrained to match the job description required. Example, Skills in high-level data in-depth research and analysis, especially for universities. 2. The absence of the VC Forum or Committee for the accreditation of university qualifications (CAUQ), which drives the universities' academic agenda and is aligned to HECF policies of registration and accreditation. 3. Senior management staff and staff turnover during the period under review. 4. Review of legal framework, legislation and sub-regulations to align with the modern practices in the higher education sector. 5. Align the supply side (industries) to the demand (education) in terms of the right training programmes to match the market needs

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Committee after having reviewed the Consolidated Reports of the Fiji Higher Education Commission 2018 – 2021 is of the opinion that the Commission must be given full autonomy without any interference. The FHEC must also ensure that all higher education institutions should comply with requirements and standards set by the Commission.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE

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

Committee Member	E-Signature
Hon. Ilesia Vanawalu Chairperson	
Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure Deputy Chairperson	
Hon. Alipate Tuicolo Member	
Hon. Viam Pillay Member	
Hon. Parveen Bala Member	
Hon Aliko Bia Member	
Date: 25 th September 2025	

ANNEXURE

Published evidence

Written evidence, transcripts, and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link: <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

HECF Response to Social Affairs Standing Committee Questions

Deadline: Friday, 15th August 2025

Financial Performance

1. What were the key revenue streams for FHEC during this period, and how did they evolve over the years?
 - Government grants have constituted our primary source of revenue, providing essential financial support for our core operations and strategic initiatives. This funding has enabled us to maintain service delivery, invest in capacity-building, and pursue projects aligned with public sector priorities. They remain the dominant source; tightened during COVID-19 due to national budget cuts .
 - Registration & Accreditation Fees : Collected from HEIs for institutional registration, program accreditation, and renewals. They evolved by increasing slightly as more institutions sought accreditation.
 - Project-Based Funding: Occasional funding for specific initiatives (e.g. SDG 4, vocational training). They evolved via becoming more target and performance-linked post-2019
2. Can you provide insights into the major expenditures and how they contributed to operational efficiency?

2018-2019

 - * Funding was directed towards Quality Assurance, program accreditation and capacity building for HEI staffs which Strengthened compliance with national standards, reduced duplication of programs, and improved stakeholder confidence in qualifications.
 - * Investment was done in finance and data management to support student enrollement, grant tracking and performance metrics. These increased efficiency by improving transparency, reduced manual errors, and enabled evidence-based decision-making.

2020-2021

 - * Institutional Grants to Higher Education Institutions which supported remote learning during covid, staff salaries and retention and student support services. These enabled efficiency by providing uninterrupted academic delivery during lockdowns, supported digital transition, and maintained institutional stability.

- 2) Allocated funds for ICT upgrades, Online teaching platform to Accelerate digital adoption, reduced reliance on physical infrastructure, and improved access for remote learners.
3. Were there any significant financial challenges faced between 2018 and 2021, and how were they addressed?

2018-2019

- * FHEC operated under a tight fiscal envelope, with limited increases in government funding.
- * More institutions sought registration and accreditation, increasing the workload and requiring additional financial and human resources.
- * FHEC aimed to upgrade its Finance and Data Management Systems (FDMS) and internal IT infrastructure. These upgrades were essential but cost-intensive, requiring phased implementation due to budget limitations. Some ways in which HEC mitigated these risks were :
 - a) Streamlined internal operations to reduce overhead and improve cost-effectiveness.
 - b) Deferred non-essential projects to future fiscal years
 - c) Adopted a staggered approach to system upgrades and policy rollouts, aligning with available funding.

2020-2021

- * During Covid the Commission faced reduced staffing, remote work challenges, and delays in service delivery while Procurement and financial reporting were strained due to emergency spending and relaxed controls.
- * COVID accelerated the need for tech-driven education, prompting HEC to fund digital upgrades in HEIs.
- Fiji's overall government revenue dropped by over 36% during the pandemic, which affected allocations to statutory bodies like HEC.
- HEC had to operate within tight fiscal limits, prioritizing essential services and delaying non-critical projects.
- Disruption in receiving grant on a timely manner.
- Despite financial strain, HEC remained responsible for quality assurance, registration, and monitoring of HEIs.

- Some ways in which the risk were mitigated:

- A) Used a Grant Management System to track and monitor fund utilization across HEIs .
 B) Conducted virtual consultations with HEIs to assess needs and adjust funding models.

Policy and Regulatory Changes

4. What major policy changes were implemented during this period, and how did they impact FHEC services?

Policy Changes	Comments
2018	
Policy 3-1 Assessment of FNQF Qualifications Levels 1-6 Approved 31/05/2018	- Under the MFAT project, Output 5 HECF Implement Organisational Development Plan, this policy replaced <i>Policy 3-1 Competency Based Assessment of National Qualifications</i>. The revised policy devolved the responsibility for assessment to higher education institutions (HEIs) rather than being managed by HECF, and has much clearer definitions and expectations regarding assessment. HECF retained the responsibility for coordinating external moderation. - The policy now covers the expectations for all forms of assessment of National Qualifications (NQs). While most NQs will continue to be unit standards-based, some may focus more on the graduate profile rather than individual work-based tasks.
Review of the Recognition and Registration Processes	In 2019, the Recognition and Registration Committees were merged under new leadership. The merger allowed for a more streamlined and efficient process and ensured the assessments were made by a single committee for both processes. In the past, differing views of the Recognition Committee and Registration Committee resulted in fewer Registration applications being successfully processed, as well as extensive delays in application processing times.
HECF Communications, Engagement and Branding Strategy Approved 03/05/2018	- Under the MFAT-funded project (Fiji Higher Education Improvement Programme), the Commission developed a Communications, Engagement, and Branding Strategy to increase its visibility, promote and advocate the understanding of and adherence to higher education standards set by HECF and develop dialogue and support partnerships. - Key messages outlined in the strategy:

Policy Changes	Comments
	○ HECF is the guardian of all higher education in Fiji. ○ HECF sets the standards for improved quality and delivery of higher education in Fiji. ○ Registration with HECF is required for all higher education institutions to operate in Fiji. ○ Promotion of the Fiji National Qualifications Framework and the need for all programmes to be accredited.
2019	
Policy 2-1 Accreditation of FNQF Qualifications Levels 1-10 Approved 23/01/2019	• The policy was expanded to specify that accreditation applications relating to professional or licensing careers must have the endorsement of the relevant professional/licensing body. • Level 7-10 qualifications are required to have gained international accreditation from a relevant quality assurance regulator or professional association. • Provisions regarding internationally accredited qualifications being offered in Fiji were included.
Policy i-0-7 HEC Guide to Roles and Responsibilities	• Provided clarity in the roles of governance and the operational arms of the Commission. • Historically, arguments could be made in which governance interfered with operations. This document provides clarity in roles and responsibilities, as well as acts as a Terms of Reference that expands on the provisions of the Higher Education Act 2008 and its subsidiary legislation.
Quality Standards for Fiji Higher Education	• Outlines the quality assurance of higher education institutions (HEIs) and qualifications, i.e. Recognition, Registration (including Review) and the accreditation of qualifications. • The QS expands in detail the criteria and standards for each process, providing for a holistic assessment of a HEIs capability to operate and deliver quality programmes.
2020	
Policy 0-1 Recognition and Registration (including Review) of Higher Education Institutions	• The consolidated policy replaced the standalone policies for Recognition and Registration, respectively. The new policy focused on providing a clear, transparent, and efficient framework that ensured alignment with the existing higher education legislation. • The new policy incorporated the Quality Standards for Fiji Higher Education (approved and implemented since 2019), legislative changes made by the Higher Education (Amendment) Act 2017, particularly to the definition of higher education institutions (HEIs).

Commented [S51]: This also reflected in my answer to Q.9.

Policy Changes	Comments
	- The policy introduced practical measures that are drawn from international best practices from Australia and New Zealand, e.g. conducting periodic audits or academic audits. - The policy removed inconsistencies and outdated practices: - Recognition Certificates are not renewable/extendable. Within 6 months, a HEI must apply for Registration. - New and existing HEIs must have at least one of their qualifications accredited on the Fiji National Qualifications Framework (FNQF). - Previously, the Recognition and Registration Committee reached differing assessment outcomes. Hence, a need to standardise assessments and vetting of findings by a QA working group. The Recognition Committee and Registration Committees no longer assessed Recognition and Registration applications, respectively.
Policy 5-1 Information Security and Protection of Data Collected by HEC	The new policy made provisions for data privacy and safeguarding, maintaining data integrity, procedures on data collection and facilitating stakeholder requests relating to the different data collected and managed by the Commission.
2021	
No policy changes were implemented during this period.	

Commented [SS2]: same here

5. Were there any amendments to regulations that directly affected the Education Stakeholders?

There were no amendments to the Higher Education Regulations 2009 and Higher Education (Qualifications) Regulations 2010.

Infrastructure Development

6. What were the key infrastructure projects undertaken between 2018 and 2021, and how did they improve educational efficiency?

Higher Education Strategy (HES) Priority Areas:

1 – Improving Access and Equity

- 2 – Developing linkages to employment in Fiji
- 3 – Strengthening the Higher Education System
- 4 – Building the capacity of the HECF to support the delivery of the HES

Fiji Higher Education Improvement Programme			
Project	Period	Priority Area	Comments
Research on Access and Equity Issues in Fiji	2018-2019, 2019-2020	1, 4	The HECF was established to oversee the development and improvement of higher education in Fiji to ensure that learners have the best possible opportunity to gain relevant qualifications required to support and sustain Fiji's economic and social prosperity. Anecdotal evidence suggests that quite a significant number of students encounter challenges to enter higher education in Fiji, particularly those living in remote areas. This study highlighted the issues and challenges faced by stakeholders relating to access and equity in the higher education sector.
Graduate Outcomes Survey	2018-2019, 2019-2020	2, 3	Consultancy aimed to design, coordinate, and manage the Fiji Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) that will collect rich and robust information on the activities and perspectives of graduates who graduated in 2018.
Establishment of the Skills Council Fiji, plus a new apprenticeship scheme	2019-2020	2, 3	To develop a policy paper for the establishment of an independent national agency to manage TVET in Fiji. The new body was to be called the Skills Council Fiji (SCF), to incorporate Apprenticeship Fiji. This is a sub-activity of the TVET Review, which came from one of the recommendations from the TVET Rapid Review consultancy undertaken by Prof Hitendra Pillay of Queensland University of Technology, Australia, in 2018.
National TVET Review	2018-2019	2, 3	
Review of the National Apprenticeship Scheme	2017-2018	2, 3	The consultancy aimed to streamline the TVET Report Review Recommendations 2018 and to develop policy guidelines for a Cabinet paper on the future direction of TVET in Fiji (to also include the endorsement of the establishment of the Skills Council Fiji).

Fiji Higher Education Improvement Programme			
Project	Period	Priority Area	Comments
Reform of key processes relating to the Quality Standards for Fiji Higher Education	2019-2020	2, 3	• Development of Quality Standards guide, templates, directives and factsheets. • Programme Accreditation – review of the existing policy, development of guidelines and templates for programme developers. • HEI Registration and Review – development of audit manual and related templates, registration templates, factsheets, Terms of Reference of the Review Committee. • Staff support and mentoring of all revised and developed processes, including programme development, competency-based training assessment and moderation, programme accreditation, and HEI auditing.
Assessment and Moderation Review (new model adopted)	2017-2018	2, 3	• New assessment and moderation system developed and implemented.
Teacher Competency Framework	2017-2018	1, 2	•
Delivery of the National Certificate in Teaching of TVET	2017-2018	1, 2	
Teacher Qualifications Review	2018-2019	1, 3, 4	• Review of the teacher training programmes offered by the five (5) teacher training institutions and make recommendations to align their programmes with the Pre-Service Teacher Attributes Framework and maximise their effectiveness and impact.
New Funding Model	2017-2018	1, 2	• Review existing funding model and design a new model. Cabinet paper was drafted.

Fiji Higher Education Improvement Programme			
Project	Period	Priority Area	Comments
Monitoring Framework for HEIs	2017-2018	1, 3, 4	Focus on the conceptualization, design and development of a Monitoring Framework which sets out the systematic process of monitoring the performance of HEIs based on an evaluative risk management principle.
Internal Quality Assurance for HEIs	2018-2019	1, 2	Review the IQA systems for HEIs. This work supports the HECF to continue the reform of key systems, including processes for review and improvement of HEI IQA systems and teaching training programme quality.
Develop and Review National Qualifications	2018-2019	1, 2	Areas: sports, applied technology, sports, sports coaching, aquatics, aqua fitness and water recreation, automotive electrical, automotive mechanic, electrical fitter mechanic, music, sugar, forestry, entrepreneurship, tourism, agriculture, office technology, aged care, community care, wholesale and retail, IT, fabrication and welding, security, plumbing and sheet metal.
Capacity Needs Analysis	2019-2020	1, 2	CNA conducted of HECF (teams and individuals). Based on the analysis, a comprehensive capacity development plan for each functional section and individual will be developed and aligned to the HEC's strategic framework.
National Job Fair	2018-2019	3, 4	Initiative to support the HECF's linkages to employment in Fiji.
Establishment of HECF Policy Framework	2017-2018	3, 4	- The HECF's policy framework was established, and work to develop much-needed policies and procedures commenced. - Policy list: Recognition and Registration (including Review), National Qualifications, Program Accreditation, Registration of Qualifications on FNQF, Quality Standards for Higher Education, Record of Prior Learning, HR, Finance, IT, HECF Roles & Responsibilities.

Fiji Higher Education Improvement Programme			
Project	Period	Priority Area	Comments
Review of the Fiji National Qualifications Framework (FNQF)	2017-2018	1, 4	•
Develop Higher Education Strategy	2017-2018, 2018-2019	3, 4	•
Re-establishment of the Committee for Accreditation of University Qualifications	2017-2018	2, 3	• Support the three universities (Fiji National University, University of Fiji, and University of the South Pacific) to prepare and submit the currently offered qualifications to the HECF for recording on the FNQF.
Review and development of the HECF Internal Monitoring and Evaluation Template	2018-2019	3, 4	• Internal monitoring mechanism on the HECF's progress and achievement of key performance indicators. The related risks are also monitored and assessed. The evaluated reports would be an important tool for the development of the annual reports, risk mitigation strategies, and would be linked to staff performance and appraisal.
Develop HECF Risk Registers and ABP development processes	2017-2018	3, 4	
Development of new HECF Performance Appraisal and Planning Process	2017-2018	3, 4	• A holistic system was developed and is linked to capacity development. Previously, the appraisal and planning process was ineffective and was a systematic task with no proper incentives being considered.
Review of HECF Organisational Structure	2017-2018	3, 4	•
Implementation of Dynamics and Office 365	2017-2018	3, 4	•
Development of the Fiji Qualifications Register	2017-2018, 2018-2019	1, 2	• Development of the Qualifications Register for Fiji Higher Education on the Microsoft Dynamics platform.

Fiji Higher Education Improvement Programme			
Project	Period	Priority Area	Comments
Develop Communications Strategy	2017-2018	3, 4	- Multi-channel communication and stakeholder engagement strategy for the HECF in alignment with the Higher Education Strategy. - Implementation plan for the Communications Strategy was developed, including a monitoring and evaluation system to measure the reach and effectiveness of the strategy.
Development of HECF website	2017-2018	1 – 4	
Grant Management System	2019-2020	1, 3, 4	
Automated HR and Finance Systems	2018-2019, 2019-2020	4	

7. How did FHEC ensure sustainability in its infrastructure development plans?

The majority of the infrastructure development plans were borne out of the MFAT-funded Fiji Higher Education Improvement Programme (FHEIP). Relative expenditure costing was absorbed into the HECF operating cost; new budgetary submissions to the Ministry of Finance included the aforementioned costs, e.g. IT licencing costs.

8. Were there any delays or budget overruns in major projects, and what measures were taken to mitigate them?

Yes. For delays, contract addenda were made with the consultants, e.g. legislative review timelines were delayed from the outset. Approval from Cabinet took time to secure; therefore, the entire project timeline had to be deferred.

Registration and Compliance

9. What initiatives were introduced to improve the registration requirements of Higher Education Institution during this period?

- Formulation of policy on Recognition and Registrations (Including Review) of Higher Education Institutions together with checklist aligned to the legislative requirements.
- Quality Standards for Fiji Higher Education was developed and implemented to assess and monitor the new and existing Higher Education Institutions.

10. How did FHEC enforce compliance with registration regulations, and were there any notable enforcement challenges?

- We follow the systems and processes in place, which are aligned to the Higher Education Act and its subsidiary legislation. Apart from the requirements mentioned above in question 9, HECF has a two-level vetting process before the application is approved by the Commission (Board). Firstly, the secretariat vets the application and makes a submission to the Recognition & Registration Committee (RRC), which then deliberates on the submission and makes a recommendation to the Commission (Board) either to approve or decline the application.
- No, we do not register any institution that does not meet the requirements and the provisions of the legislation. We also have a review process where we conduct audits before renewing an institution's registration. There are checks and balances in place.
- We also have a revocation process for those who are found to be non-compliant.

11. Were there any significant changes in strengthening the higher Education system, and what measures were taken to address them?

- Yes, HECF has embarked on reviewing the Higher Education Act 2008 (work-in-progress).
- HECF has now moved to a fully online application system for Recognition & Registration Application and programme accreditation.
- Greater awareness is being undertaken through various platforms.

Public Engagement and Transparency

12. How did FHEC engage with the public and stakeholders to ensure transparency in decision-making?

The FHEC engaged with the public and stakeholders through regular information sessions, public awareness campaigns, and stakeholder forums. Updates and key decisions were also published on the Commission's website and official social media platforms to ensure timely access to information.

13. Were there any public consultations or feedback mechanisms that influenced policy changes?

Yes. The Commission conducted public consultations and sector-specific meetings prior to the implementation of major policies and regulatory frameworks. Feedback was gathered through written submissions, online surveys, and face-to-face discussions with HEIs, professional bodies, and community representatives.

14. How did FHEC address concerns raised by the public regarding Teacher registration provided by the Higher Education Institution?

Concerns raised by the public regarding teacher registration were addressed in close collaboration with the Fiji Teachers Registration Board (TRB) and the relevant HEIs. The FHEC verified that institutions offering teacher education programs met national quality standards and were compliant with approved program requirements.

15. How did FHEC addresses concern raised by public regarding academic program and its recognition, delivered by the Higher Education Institution.

The FHEC responded to such concerns by conducting programme audits, compliance checks, and institutional reviews to confirm that all academic programs delivered by HEIs were quality-assured.

the HEC Secretariat would contact the institution to ascertain whether the internal grievance procedures were fully exhausted. Unresolved complaints could only be escalated to the point of the HEC's intervention if the internal grievance process of an institution was fully exhausted.

SDGs and Gender

16. How Sustainable Development Goals assisted the FHEC to maintain Gender equality on its own as well as policies of other Higher Education Institutions.

SDGs	HECF Gender Equality and Related Policies
Goal 5: Gender equality <i>"Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." Indicators include, for example, having suitable legal frameworks and the representation by women in national parliament or in local deliberative bodies</i>	The equal opportunities for employment policy under HR has a Policy objective to ensure that the HECF does not discriminate on the grounds of ethnicity, gender or disability and seeks to provide equal employment opportunities and dignity for all. As such, HECF aligns all recruitment on merit with minimum qualifications for entry. However, there were cases in areas of speciality where it was tough to judge and appoint based on gender, and hence there has been a greater inclination towards males than females during the review period. For this period under review, a male/female percentage ratio of 60/40, 75/25, 70/30 and 72/28 was noted.

17. What were some of the obstacles faced in implementing SDG's

Obstacles in implementing SDGs	Obstacles faced in implementing SDG's
Goal 1: No Poverty Goal 2: Zero hunger Goal 3: Good health and well-being Goal 4: Quality education Goal 5: Gender equality Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, Technology and Infrastructure Goal 10: Reduced inequality Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production Goal 13: Climate action Goal 14: Life below water Goal 15: Life on land Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals	1. Professional and technical high-level skills are needed in the specific areas, and staff must be upskilled and retrained to match the job description required. Example, Skills in high-level data in-depth research and analysis, especially for universities. 2. The absence of the VC Forum or Committee for the accreditation of university qualifications (CAUQ), which drives the universities' academic agenda and is aligned to HECF policies of registration and accreditation. 3. Senior management staff and staff turnover during the period under review. 4. Review of legal framework, legislation and sub-regulations to align with the modern practices in the higher education sector. 5. Align the supply side (industries) to the demand (education) in terms of the right training programmes to match the market needs

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

FIJI HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

**SUBMITTEE: FIJI HIGHER EDUCATION
COMMISSION**

VENUE: Big Committee Room, Parliament

DATE: Thursday, 21st August, 2025

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS HELD AT THE PARLIAMENT PRECINCT, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, SUVA ON THURSDAY, 21ST AUGUST, 2025, AT 1.29 P.M.

Interviewee/Submittee: Fiji Higher Education Commission [FHEC]

In Attendance:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| (1) Dr. Eci Naisele | - | Director |
| (2) Mr. Epineri Rawalai | - | Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Officer |
| (3) Ms. Frentina Antrea | - | Records & Policy Manager |
| (4) Ms. Ani Lacanivalu | - | Accreditation Officer |
| (5) Ms. Alini Korovulavula | - | Professional Officer – National Qualification Education Commission |

MR. CHAIRMAN.- A very good afternoon to us all, and it is a pleasure to welcome everyone to this public hearing submission. At the outset, for information purposes, pursuant to Standing Order 111 of the Standing Orders of Parliament, all committee meetings are to be open to the public. Therefore, please note that this submission is open to the public and the media platforms and will be aired live via the Parliament channel on the *Walesi* platform and will be streamed live on the Parliament Facebook page. For any sensitive information concerning the matters before us this afternoon that cannot be disclosed in public, can be provided to the committee, either in private or in writing.

However, please be advised that pursuant to Standing Order 111, there are only a few specific circumstances that allow for non-disclosure, and this includes:

- national security matters;
- third-party confidential information;
- personnel or human resources; or
- deliberations and discussions conducted in the development and finalisation of Committee recommendations and reports.

This is a Parliamentary meeting and all information gathered is covered under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act. Therefore, bear in mind we do not condone slander or libel of any sort, and any information brought before this committee should be based on facts. In terms of protocol, please minimise the usage of mobile phones and all mobile phones are to be on silent mode while the meeting is in progress. I wish to also remind honourable Members and our guests that all questions asked are to be addressed through the Chair.

(Introduction of Committee Members)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Today, the Committee will be hearing submissions from the officials of the Fiji Higher Education Commission. This is in relation to the Fiji Higher Education Commission Annual Reports from 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. We acknowledge the response. Due to the essence of time, you may give a brief response to the honourable Members, and they will intervene with their supplementary questions as you continue with your presentation. I will reiterate the importance of the essence of time given to us. As alluded to, the answer to the response from the Higher Education Commission is already with us. Our time limit is 45 minutes to one hour. I believe the report is well understandable by the Committee in terms of its deliverables.

DR. E. NAISELE.- Mr. Chairman and honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs. A very good afternoon to you all. It is a pleasure to be here with my team from the Fiji Higher Education Commission to respond to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs concerns on the 2018-2019 Annual Reports.

(Introduction of the team from the Fiji Higher Education Commission)

DR. E. NAISELE.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin by saying the Commission was established under the Higher Education Promulgation, now the Higher Education Act 2008, with two sub-regulations; Higher Education Regulations 2009 and Higher Education (Qualifications) Regulations 2010. These are the legal documents that bind the periphery of our work at the Commission for the last 15 to 18 years. The years mentioned before us this afternoon basically come under that Act, which is currently under revision. The presentation is based on the questions that came from Parliament in terms of the financial performance, policy and regulation changes, infrastructure development, legislation and compliance, and public engagement and transparency. Some of the things we do are aligned with the national goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically, under gender.

Financial performance — In terms of the financial performance, there are key issues raised regarding the revenue streams for the Commission for the period under review. There are three main revenue streams:

- (1) Government grants;
- (2) Registration and Accreditation Fees that are collected from our Higher Education Institution services to enable them to register as a higher education institution in Fiji. Under our law, we are required to register non-award conferring higher education institutions that are delivering training programmes in Fiji; and
- (3) project-based funding occasionally tied to a specific initiative, specifically for the SDG 4, something very critical, how best we can help vocational training in terms of providing skills training and aligning our institutions to the demand and the need of our skilled workforce in Fiji.

Major expenditures — There were key expenditures that were targeted around quality assurance and accreditation of the institution, with the programmes. It is critical to ensure that our higher education institutions, including our universities, continue to apply and deliver quality programmes that are needed by our private sector and industries. There are also investments in finance and data systems to improve transparency with reduced error and evidence-based decisions.

For the period between 2020-2021, institutional grants, which the Commission gives out to our higher education institutions, supported remote learning, staff retention, student services, ensuring continuity and stability during the COVID-19 period. There was an increase in terms of expenditure, particularly ICT and online platforms, as we move towards improving the system, not only within the Commission, but more critically, our three universities and also our Higher Education Institution in terms of ICT upgrading.

Challenges — We were operating on a tight financial limit with minimal Government funding at the time. Also, there was a huge demand for registration of Higher Education institutions. The people are demanding, they want to establish institutions in order to deliver training that matches the needs of our industry at that time.

There was also an upgrade in the Finance and Data Management System, which is also critical as far as some of the challenges are concerned. In terms of mitigation, we work to streamline the

operations and also defer non-essential projects under the upgrades and policy. In 2021, as we all know was COVID time. There were a lot of challenges but we mitigated them through the introduction of the Grant Management System. This encouraged virtual consultations, and adjust the funding that was given to us.

Policy and Regulatory Changes — In terms of policy and regulatory changes during the period, Mr. Chairman, Sir and honourable Members, there was an increase in the assessment of the qualifications at all levels, especially for the early levels, such as level one to level six on the qualifications framework. Also, the review of the recognition of registration process, which we need to fine-tune to ensure that there is rigour in this process as institutions continue to come and request them to register as a Higher Education institution and also to deliver the programmes.

Accreditation of the qualifications that are also increasing as students in institutions are increasing and continue to develop programmes that align with the needs of the industry under their consultation. Likewise, at the same time, we also try to work through the development of our national qualifications based on the needs of our industries.

Guide to roles and responsibilities — Quality standards for all, not only for the Commission, but quality standards were also developed and adopted to give some kind of standard and quality criteria for all our Higher Education institutions. There was also an increase in recognition registration, including the review. As we move through the years after the establishment in 2011, most of the registrations of these Higher Education institutions, including the universities, are also lapsing. They need to go for the review, not only for the institution, but also for the programmes they deliver.

Policy and Regulatory Changes — Mr. Chairman, Sir, in terms of policy and regulatory changes, there were no amendments to the regulations that directly affect the stakeholders during the time of the review.

Infrastructure Development Projects — In terms of infrastructure development projects undertaken Mr. Chairman, Sir, there is an increase in research on access and equity. This is due to the demand of our institutions reaching out to the people because of the research and the need, particularly the three universities and those offering programmes at the higher level - level seven, a Degree, and also at Master's level for some of the colleges.

The graduate outcome survey was highlighted to determine how many of our graduates coming out from these institutions are matching into the world of work. That is very important to ensure the supply and demand. We continue to regulate all these programmes that come through institutions are matching into the industries of our country.

The establishment of the Skills Council was proposed, plus a new Apprenticeship Scheme. The Skills Council will essentially support our work and work closely with other industries. We understand that the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation (FCEF) are currently looking after them, but only quite a few industries are registered. We also have time for the National TVET review. Most developed nations and even developing countries, TVET and trade are the backbone of the economy. We are also trying to help with the TVET system. We support the work on the apprenticeship scheme, which has been inactive for almost ten years. Most of our skilled workers who went through the apprenticeship scheme under FNU have migrated or retired, hence the review is critical.

Other key performance requirements for projects were undertaken, like assessment moderation which is critical to ensure the assessment system within the Commission is rigorous. This

in terms of how higher education institutions, including universities, deliver their programmes specifically from level six onwards to diploma, degree, et cetera.

The reform of key processes relating to quality standards was also taken on board and the teacher competency framework. We found out that the higher education sector and FTRA do not regulate teachers in the tertiary sector. We felt the need for our teachers, lecturers or faculty staff members in tertiary institutions to go through some form of teacher training and hence the development, adoption and delivery of the National Certificate in Teaching of TVET. This to help equip our teachers, especially TVET teachers, to be able to deliver the training to the students.

Teacher qualification review — A new funding model was also adopted. Monitoring was critical to ensure that whatever we presented in the Strategic Development Plan and Annual Business Plan were closely monitored. The internal key was underpinning not only for us, but also for our institutions, the development and the review of the national qualification. Quite a number of them are expiring and we are working on reviewing them. Building the capacity of our team is continuing, and we are also building all our training institutions' capacity, particularly those that need training in specific areas like policy development, programme development and accreditation of their programmes.

In terms of infrastructure development, the development of a higher education strategy was also developed. An important document that helped guide us at the Commission, like the reshuffle of the Committee for the Accreditation of University qualifications in some countries, the College, the University, the Vice Chancellors Forum or the Vice Chancellors Committee that specifically deals with the university activities.

Since they have the self-accrediting status, they have the freedom to be able to do things on their own. At the same time, because of our national sovereignty, they still need to comply, they are operating within Fiji. Once we understand the self-accrediting status, they must also be aware that the Commission is also here to help guide them through. Instead of accreditation, the provision for them is termed as a recording. All the programmes come through our process, and the programmes are recorded in terms of Degree, Masters and PhD that they deliver at the university level. Development of the performance appraisal was critical to ensure that everything is performance-based and how our people are awarded towards their performance and the rating of their performance. Our organisational structure is also going through some kind of restructuring during this period under review.

To ensure the efficiency of the operations from the management level to staff members going across and delivering goods to our institutions a communication strategy was critical to ensure they continue to contact each other. The development of our websites with a grant management system and an Automated Human Resources and Finance System was also critical. We are a small organisation growing to become bigger. As the years passed, there were plans to extend the services of the Commission to our people, and because of planning during this period, 2018-2021, today, we have offices in Labasa and also in Lautoka.

During the recession, Mr. Chairman, Sir, Fiji is the first country in the region apart from Australia and New Zealand to ratify the Tokyo Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education. That means Fiji have free access to any country in Asia and the Pacific in terms of qualification evaluation. If any of our students move across it is easy. It is through this Convention that we are able to determine the validity of our qualification. Likewise, for those coming across from Asian countries and other Pacific islands to work in Fiji or study in Fiji. Those are critical because of the world that we live in.

There are two things that people do when they move around:

1. Look for further employment in other countries for greener pastures; and
2. Further education.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, in terms of continuing with infrastructure development on sustainability, a majority of infrastructure development plans were born out of MFAT funding under the Fiji Higher Education Improvement Programme. We managed to secure NZ\$5 million, F\$7 million and that helped support our work. They are actually supplements and support our Government budget. We are thankful to the New Zealand Government through MFAT, which helped us during the time under review.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, in terms of delays, our contract agenda underwent consultations, legislative review, timelines were delayed from the onset and approval from Cabinet took time. Therefore, the entire project timeline had to be deferred.

Mr. Chairman, in terms of registration and compliance — the formulation of our recognition and research policy. Together with the checklist aligned with the legislative requirements, the quality standards of future education were developed during that time. So, that is a critical process. Enforcement of Compliance Commission follows systems aligned with the Higher Education Act 2008, with a two-tier level vetting process involving the Secretariat and recognition by the Recognition and Registration Committee before the Commission's approval. These are some of the processes that we instill at the time to ensure the rigorous processes moving forward.

Strengthening the Commission and the systems — The Commission has embarked on reviewing the Higher Education Act 2008 and as I speak we are almost in the final stage of the review. Great awareness has been undertaken through our various platforms.

Public engagement and transparency — The Commission was engaged with the public and stakeholders through regular information sessions. Our Communications team have been moving around not only within the Suva region, but to other centres as well, to the provinces, marketing and showcasing what we do and how best we can continue to help our people to attain any higher education qualification.

In terms of public consultation and feedback mechanism — the Commission conducted public consultations and sector specification meetings prior to the implementation of the major policies. This to ensure the feedback was gathered through written submissions, online surveys and face-to-face with other stakeholders, including professional bodies and community representatives.

Public engagement and transparency — There were concerns raised by the public regarding the teacher training registration. It was addressed in a close collaboration with FTRA. Teachers' qualification and teachers' registration - we are now working closely, at that time it was a not. We worked on teacher qualifications and how best we can continue to support FTRA in the recognition and the verification of the qualifications for student-teachers joining the teaching workforce.

On the SDG agenda we try to maintain gender equality, equal opportunities for employment under the policy. HR has a policy to ensure that the commission does not discriminate on the grounds of ethnicity, gender or disability. For us as a Government statutory body, we ensure that gender is critical and is a priority. In terms of sustaining the SDG, professional technical high-level skills are needed in specific areas, and staff members must be upskilled and retrained to match the job description required, for example, our skills in high-level data, in-depth research and analysis, especially for universities. The absence of the VC forum at that time was critical. When it was there

our three universities sort of gone beyond the scope to do what they want to do. I am glad the Commission was there to continue to guide the work that they do for the programmes they deliver to ensure that whatever they deliver is current and continues to align with the needs of the industry.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, Sir, the review of the legal framework was also taken onboard, and legislation and sub-legislation to align with modern practices in the Higher Education sector. For us at the Commission, just to finish up, it is critical that whatever we do align to our legislation. We continue to deliver what is best for our nation, and the mandate from the Government of the day to ensure we continue to provide that demand side from our Higher Education institution, being the pivot point in between so that comes a time when a student completed his or her studies, he is work-ready and be able to match whatever skills he has gained from any university or higher education institution, into the world of work.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, and members of the Committee we now welcome questions, and thank you so much for your attention.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I believe that most of the area that we need to clarify has been alluded to during the presentation. Nevertheless, the floor is open to the honourable Members for supplementary questions. Please minimise questions, it must be relevant to the subject area that we discussed this afternoon.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, my question is in regard to the compliance part. Are the higher education institutions registered with Fiji Higher Education Commission complying with the requirements to qualify for the grants each year. There was a mention of some issues in the earlier presentation and the report, and even when we visited your office at the Higher Education Commission in Suva.

DR. E. NAISELE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, regarding the grants to our institutions, we have a process. The institution must be fully registered. There are certain criteria involved in the registration of the institutions, 12 altogether. Recognition, which is the first stage of quality assuring a higher education institution coming on board, and then registration, which comes with a programme they need. If any institution has not been given the full registration status, meaning either the provisional registration, then that institution does not qualify. Based on the formula of the grant, 49 registered higher education institutions in Fiji, are now registered.

In all these criteria, this is one of the criteria. The team might be able to tell you more about the other criteria, but all the criteria are scrutinised, and it is submitted to the Permanent Secretary for Education through the honourable Minister before it goes to the Ministry of Finance for endorsement and approval. It must go through the Commission first for endorsement to ensure that all the rigorous requirements in terms of the process and quality are adopted within the Commission before the grant is given out. There are two types of grants, one is the operational grant and the other the capital grant.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Chairman, for a small country like Fiji, how many higher education institutions do we have?

DR. E. NAISELE.- Mr. Chairman, we have 49 registered higher education institutions in Fiji, including our three universities. We have a fourth university coming up, which has been provisionally registered this year, that is the former Pacific Theological College, and now it is the Pasifika Communities University. There are also applications for Fulton College, which is now Fulton Adventist University College. They are applying to be a fully-fledged university. To move from a college to a university is not easy. They must be able to do research, publication, provide all

the facilities, equipment and staffing. One cannot deliver in Masters if a Master graduate is teaching that particular course. If you are delivering a Masters qualification, the faculty and the lecturer must be a PhD holder. Hence the process to gain the status of a fully-fledged university is quite rigorous. All the current universities have been through registration process. For USP, it took them two and a half years during the review for registration; FNU took almost three and a half years; University of Fiji took almost three years.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- The core essence of your work is accreditation. How many institutions or lessons they teach are accredited in our country? Probably for our understanding, when you say accreditation, what do you mean in Fiji's context?

MS. A. LACANIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, in terms of the accreditation, we will look at the programme and how it is being delivered, if it is appropriate to the nature of the qualification.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- What if someone take their Degree from here and go and work in Australia or in New Zealand? Is that part of the work that you do?

MS. A. LACANIVALU.- When they take their qualification from Fiji and go overseas, the respective country has a similar regulatory agency like ours. They would go through a process of recognising the qualification from Fiji, and likewise, we also do the same when someone who studies from abroad come for further studies or work here.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Are the lessons taught in our universities accredited?

MS. A. LACANIVALU.- The university has self-accreditation, and they go through the recording process, but before they go through the recording process with HEC they need to complete their own internal quality assurance processes. They have to complete that, and then submit their qualifications for recording.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- This is one of my concerns. It was raised to me by the honourable Minister for Agriculture, who is actually a doctor for animals, what do you call them?

MS. A. LACANIVALU.- Veterinarian.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- They do not do those kind of lessons that they used to do before like for FNU now, am I correct? Our veterinary courses in Fiji, they are not recognised, am I correct?

DR. E. NAISELE.- That is correct.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Yes that is the essence of my question. If our lessons or the courses being taught are not recognised, what is the way forward there from your end. There is a majority of students who want to be veterinarians. The honourable Minister of Agriculture was sharing this with me. He is a veterinarian himself. He was telling me the courses that are now being taught, are not recognised. So, why are they being taught? If our students want to be Veterinarians, but the courses that are being taught are not recognised, how do you adjust that as an institution who is supposed to be the oversight for Higher Education learning. What is the way forward?

MS. A. LACANIVALU.- The way forward there, Sir, we suggest to institutions, before they even go through the process of developing a programme, they need to do their own due diligence. Since some of the qualifications are regulated by law even for professional registration, those would be conditional on the stipulations of the relevant legislation.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- The thing that worries me, when the funding comes from the Government, it is too late because you have already passed the floodgates. Probably something that you may look into. There are 49 registered institutions, Director. How do you determine who gets the funding? How do you determine who gets which amount? Is this based on their proposal, or how do you determine the funding?

DR. E. NAISELE.- Mr. Chairman, as I have already alluded to, there is a formula. All the 49 registered institutions, if they are all registered, they apply. Only those that fit or comply with the criteria, we submit. I think for the funding this year, for example, a total of about 35 of the 49 submitted, but far less were eligible for the funding. We even submitted, and even when it came out at the announcement of the Budget, the number fell right down, and some that we did not even fund were actually on board. I am not really sure what the other pathway is. They did not come through, we are the only legislated institution in Fiji to give out funding on behalf of the Fiji Government. Anyone else allowing funding to go through is not legal.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Very interesting. You can be registered, but you are not eligible.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Just following on my colleagues, can you reveal those institutions who were not recommended by your commission, but got funding?

DR. E. NAISELE.- For this year, Sir?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Yes, because you said there were some institutions without your recommendation, and you were surprised to hear and see in the Budget that they were given funding. Can you reveal the names of those institutions which were not recommended by the Commission, but got the funding?

DR. E. NAISELE.- There were about two or three that did not come through or if they came through, it is either late or did not meet the requirement. Mr. Chairman, Sir, I can mention Service Pro International and Polytech. Those are two that came through, but because they did not meet the criteria, it was not recommended.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, you said you are the authority in terms of these institutions. So, can we say that the grant has been illegally given to these institutions?

DR. E. NAISELE.- I guess rightfully honourable Bala and Mr. Chairman, Sir, in a way, I would say yes. It did not come through our system because we did not recommend anything, they did not meet the requirement. For that matter, I would say yes.

HON. P.K. BALA.- On a lighter note, in recent times, there has been a headline on FNU and USP, I believe, rejecting the fundings of the Commission. Have those issues been addressed?

DR. E. NAISELE.- Mr. Chairman, the case did not come to us. For FNU, I cannot recall that particular case.

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, in order to enhance the capability of the Higher Education Commission, you have mentioned in your presentation that sometimes these higher institutions are given the freedom to do whatever they want, but later they realise there are regulations and policies in place from the Higher Education Commission they need to follow. Do you believe there is more power needed to be vested in the Commission to get these actions going?

DR. E. NAISELE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, our Act was established in 2008, and it is currently under review. It is still very much limiting, and to answer the question, yes, definitely, we would love flex some muscles to ensure that we have the power to be able to capture some of the things that are now in existence for almost 20 years. Some of the things that are sort of loose. We cannot do that unless we change our legislation, and we hope to get this legislation through to Parliament, hopefully by this year, if possible, to be reviewed by the Cabinet and the Parliament. The education sector has moved to another level over the last five to ten years. There are systems that have been in place within our Higher Education systems institutions that our law limits.

We can come in to help execute some of those key requirements, for example, right now there is a talk of artificial intelligence in almost all institutions but not all of them are not doing that. It was just about two or three years ago. There is nothing specific on AI in our law. It is a big shift. The industry has shifted to another level for the last five years or ten years, and most of our institutions are still delivering what were meant for 10 to 20 years ago. Just an example, if you drive a car, 20 years ago most of the engines were four-stroke engines. Now no more, we have automated hybrid cars. We already have electric cars and other forms of transportation. The industry has shifted, and we should be on par with what the industries are demanding.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am just worried about accreditation. We are teaching lessons that are not accredited. You are an academic, Sir, you should be worried. Institutions bring up courses that are not accredited and they are getting funding. This does not seem fit. Can they be taken to task? We cannot continue this way. In my humble opinion, it makes me worried for myself. I am a graduate of USP. I hold a Bachelor of Laws and now I am worried. What about the other thousands graduates that came through our institutions?

I had to take us back because this is the only opportune time we have with you. We will be taking this report to Parliament. We will eventually debate this. I am just worried about accreditation. I am seriously worried about that. So, if these institutions are teaching non-accredited lessons, what is being done to them? Is there a slap on the wrist or something, or how can they be taken to task? Please, you are the experts in this.

DR. E. NAISELE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Commission was established in 2011. Most of these institutions were here 100 years ago, like FNU, for example, USP — 60 years now. I remember the time when I went to USP, they said, “Who are you to come and tell us what to do? You were just born yesterday.”

We had to engage, I used the word engage because we are just legislators. There was a provisional accreditation required law that was there that we managed to capture. That is why honourable Alikia Bia’s point is very important. It gives a provisional accreditation while an institution is registered. That gives the leeway of about eight months for the programme to be provisionally accredited. It took ages for USP, for example, which has almost 500, 400 plus or so programmes. It took our time. I only have two staff members sitting on my right who do programme accreditation. They do recordings. It is a little bit faster because we trust they do their own internal and external QA but, you are right, honourable Vakalalabure. Over the years, we managed to speed up the process. When I came back just three months ago, there was a huge improvement. I remember when we took Bachelor of Laws on board, the Commission went to Vanuatu Emalus campus. The university asked

us a question, “*Why do you have to go there? That is a different country.*” It is not because of an alternative, it is because of Fijian students studying in Vanuatu. We want to know how are they looked after? What is the programme like? Mr. Qetaki was the commissioner at the time, but this time as well led the team that went over there. Likewise, for Alafua in Samoa, Bachelor of Agriculture. So, the Commission is really concerned about this programme, and accreditation is slow.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I requesting our Commission to be given more energy in terms of funding so that I can get more staff members. Now we have changed our approach, instead of waiting for institutions to come to us, our team have been going out, spending half a day, a couple of hours with USP and FNU to try to fast-track the process of accreditation. Your point, Sir, is very important because once the qualification is accredited, then that can go right across the globe. They can join any workforce for that matter and the Tokyo Convention comes into play for that matter as well.

I cannot reiterate what honourable Vakalalabure is saying. How important accrediting a programme for our citizens, our people are as they move across. A lot of people are moving across to Australia and New Zealand. Just to follow on your question earlier on, in terms of qualifications recognised in other countries, we have what is called country sovereignty. We cannot tell Australia that our level three is also their level three. They will tell us your level three is our level two. Your degree at level seven is our diploma. It is their prerogative as a sovereignty as a nation.

Likewise, for those coming to us. But again, we talk at the level as the Australian qualifications framework, how best we can equate that to the same level. It took a little bit of time. We have a department, that looks after the programme evaluation of external qualifications coming into Fiji. Our people slowly graduating from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, coming in, how do we equate that? We use the framework language, level 10, and see how we can get there.

We have the final say. If they have a degree at level 7, we can even raise it up to level 8, a Postgraduate, maybe a Honorary Degree at level 8, or even come down to level 6, a Diploma at level 6.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Very big work.

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- Mr. Chairman, I have one question on the recognition of caregiver qualification. We are aware that one of the challenges you face in the years under review was the temporary suspension of caregiver training programmes due to concerns about the lack of job opportunities for graduates. Would you be able to update us and the public on the progress of your work with international partners in exploring alternative pathways for graduates and to identify areas where their skills could be utilised?

DR. E. NAISELE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am not sure whether I can answer that because of the duration of this report we are focusing, but just for information, last year we closed 13 caregiving higher education institutes. This is due to an excessive number of graduates coming out from the 13 institutions. There was a blanket umbrella to close them. They were just opened again three, four weeks ago, based on the request and the demand from the people who are going to the Minister, even to the Prime Minister for that matter. It did not open just like that. We set aside a six-month monitoring, and we revisited them to ensure that they have the key requirements to be able to deliver. Apparently, it was closed because of almost 3,800 graduates, they have the qualification in caregiving but could not find employment in Fiji. They were promised employment in Australia and New Zealand and because of that, we are currently reviewing the delivery, and we are treading carefully, even though they have been given the umbrella approval, we are reviewing them one by one, all the 13 that delivers the aged-care programme, most of which are of private provider programmes. Some claim it came from Australia or delivers Australian qualifications. Apparently, when they graduated, they could not match into the Australian market in caregiving.

Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, Sir, we are currently working with Pacific Australia Skills. You would remember APTC, one time they were here for almost 20 years, Asia Pacific Training Coalition. They have closed their registries, they are no longer here, but we got in place Pacific Australia Skills. They are coming in full force, but this time we are working closely with them to provide this bridge to help our students. USP Pacific TAFE and TAFE Queensland is coming on board. USP Pacific TAFE has promised to provide training to these 3,800 students free of charge, with the support of Pacific Australia Skills. We are signing the MOU. In a couple of weeks, this programme will roll out. We are going to support them in identifying the whereabouts of these 3,800 graduates. Some are working, but we must identify the others, we will try to get in touch with their parents to ensure we get them to either TAFE Queensland or USP Pacific TAFE to align them to the Australian market and New Zealand market, likewise for our own local market in the Pacific.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- How many national qualifications do we have in Fiji?

DR. E. NAISELE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, 162. That is quite a lot.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- So 162 are offered. Do you offer them to institutions?

DR. E. NAISELE.- They are offered free of charge. It is their national qualifications. We facilitate the development. Actually, the industries develop those 162. We are talking about a Diploma in Caregiving, Counselling, and all the trades, heavy commercial, heavy mobile, automotive, mechanic, agriculture, aircraft maintenance, bus driving Certificate IV, Basic Skills at the Operational Level 2, deck watch rating for seafarers, even small boat operations, we have a Certificate Level 1 for them. These are all national qualities available. We are currently championing this to our vocational schools. We are reaching out to vocational schools for them to take this on board because they are free and are already pre-accredited. It has gone through all the rigorous requirements.

There are two types of qualifications, Sir, one is a provider qualification that is developed by the institutions. That one goes through Ani and her team in terms of accreditation, they go through detail. The other is the national qualification, the one that we are currently championing. Yesterday, we signed some kind of agreement with our provincial officers, so now the whole 14 provinces have been identified. We are going to take this across to our provinces so they can take this on board with the support of Nadave. They are registered under Centre for Appropriate Technology and Development (CATD), Nadave. We have an agreement with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. The honourable Minister and the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs were also there.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Is this like what FNU does? FNU usually goes around to rural areas. I was in Vanua Levu and they came down to Dawa Village for one week, teaching people in changing chainsaws and all that. Is it like this?

DR. E. NAISELE.- Actually, it is totally different. It is neither accredited nor a qualification, and it is a non-award. Non-award meaning, it falls below the 40 credits and 400 hours of learning. Anything less than three months and two weeks is not a qualification. You give them a certificate of participation or attendance, or a certificate of competency. A qualification is a full Certificate Level I in Counselling. Certificate Level III in boat-building, a Bachelor of Commerce, a Bachelor of Law, a Master's degree in Economics, for example. That is a full-ledge qualification.

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Chairman, I have noted that there is a revocation process. What are the processes involved for the Commission to determine that an institution needs its licence to be revoked?

DR. E. NAISELE.- I will get Ani to answer that.

MS. A. LACANIVALU.- For the revocation process, it normally applies to the institution that has been fully registered and not operating for more than two to five years. When the institutions are not registered, then the Quality Assurance Team at the Higher Education Commission will go for a follow up. There is a process that we must follow, and then we have to write a paper to the Board for the close-up of that particular institution. It must be removed from our registered, which is known as National Information Centre (NIC).

HON. A. BIA.- Does it involve those who do not meet the requirements also? Sorry, there are some that are in existence, but are not complying to the requirements from the Fiji Higher Education Commission. Do they go through the revocation process as well?

MS. A. LACANIVALU.- Sir, not really. Throughout the registration, the institution will run for five years and there will be a review process. So, within that period of five years, the Quality Assurance team will do a thorough follow-up process for the institution to comply to the criteria that they were not compliant with. For the revocation, it applies to those that are not operating at all.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I believe I will ask the last question. A lot has been discussed; we talked about the whole operations of the Commission. After our discussion this afternoon, the honourable Members will go back to the drawing board and look at our key findings. From there, we will derive our recommendation and that will be tabled in Parliament. For our public consultation today we are almost in deliberation in Parliament. That is normal to the Committee, but for me personally, in order for us to finalise a good recommendation what are the top five priorities, challenges that you want us to incorporate in our report's recommendation? If you can provide it now, or if you want to get back to us, the floor is open for you.

DR. E. NAISELE.- Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, off my head, before I ask the team:

- (1) Our budget allocation. There is a real need. Now we have expanded to the North to look after our people in the North. Also not forgetting the West. We also have an office in Lautoka to look after our people all the way from Yasawa-i-rara, who over the years have been travelling over to Suva, and people from Udu Point, the village of Tawake, or Wainiika, coming to pursue a qualification. This year, we were slashed by \$1 million in terms of budget, so that prohibits us in the things we do. We had a finalising RSDP, and our KPIs for last year, two weeks ago, before the beginning of the financial year.
- (2) We have significantly cut back our expenses in terms of projections for the new financial year to be able to maintain the machinery, to be able to work there. Apart from funding, we will need more capital, human resources, so we will need more people, more staff members. The skill of accreditation, you can learn it, no one in any university in the world. It is a specific skill. We must retrain our people. For myself, it took me 12 years. I have been moving across Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, during my days, to learn the skill of accreditation. Not easy to accredit a programme. We must specifically build the capacity of our people, and I am glad our people are still here, so enhance the resources, the manpower.

I just want to thank the Government so far for supporting us. We are realising our critical position in Government and in Fiji, in providing the demand side before our people move on to the world of work.

- (3) Legislation Review - we are currently going through that, and I would love to see, as the propose need right now to amend our legislation to align to the current demands of education in the education sector specifically. So that is critical.

Now we are moving towards vocational schools. We are targeting all the secondary schools in Fiji to look after our people. Our national qualifications have also been going across the secondary schools. We ensure no one is left behind. Still on that, we have tapped on the legislation review and the review of the Fiji Qualifications Framework with smaller non-award programmes or macro qualifications. In some countries, they call it macro credentials. There is nothing in place to look after them in the framework. We are reviewing together with the legislation to ensure they are also captured in the qualifications framework. Our current law, legislation allows that in award conferring, we will have to include award and non-award, which is below a Certificate Level I - non-awards.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- If I can just cut short there and just for the benefit of the members, what is the status of your review? Is it in Cabinet or still in consultation? We have the powers to help push or fasten it.

DR. E. NASELE.- The last was behind the review process.

MS. A. LACANIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the current update, we have finalised the majority of our stakeholder consultations. We are in the process of having one more internal consultation with the staff members, because additional provisions have to be included or considered to be recommended. Also, we had received a directive that we were to also liaise with the committee that is looking at the review of the Education Act (1996). So, we are currently working with them and we hope to finalise and submit our minutes to our line minister by the end of the year.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, honourable Members, secretariat and the team from the Higher Education Commission. We take this opportunity to thank you very much for adhering to the request that actually comes from the Committee. At this juncture, we are thankful for this live public hearing session. We thank you for your time and hope that you will avail yourself for any other further queries or clarification from the Committee that they may see fit to justify other pending issues that comes after this presentation. We will probably communicate with you through our secretariat and for the Committee members, I believe the report now is 100 percent clear. There were a lot of correspondence going in and out, to understand the report, before we do our key findings, recommendation and table it in Parliament. Emphasising your challenges will help us out because that will be the issue taken inside the House when both parties are in Parliament, and that can spearhead and speed up the processes for this Committee. On that note, I conclude this public submission and we thank you very much.

The Committee adjourned at 2.39 p.m.