



High Commission of the Republic of the Fiji Islands London

EDUCATION

Fiji's population is well educated, with virtually universal access to primary and lower secondary education. About a quarter of the entire population is of school-going age and although education is not compulsory at any stage, over 98 per cent of children between 6 and 14 years of age are attending primary schools. This year work on the Education for All by Year 2000 program will continue. This program aims to phase in compulsory primary education for all by the year 2000. All major exams have been localized and are conducted by the Ministry of Education.

The principal external examinations are the Fiji Intermediate Examination (Class 6), Fiji Eighth Year Examination (Form 2/ Class 8), Fiji Junior Examination (Form 4), Fiji School Leaving Certificate Examination (Form 6) and Fiji Seventh Form Examination.

Government maintains education standards through accrediting schools, recruiting teachers, developing the curriculum, providing teaching materials, and providing external examinations.

Government also encourages school attendance by rural and poor children through measures like the free tuition scheme for primary schools and per capital grants and remission of fees for secondary students. There is a high degree of community participation in the delivery of education services which is a strength of the system that needs to be maintained, which includes religion (Christian, Hindus, Muslims) and community organizations as well as localized communities. Most schools are managed by non-government organizations. Government operates only 2 per cent of the primary schools, 8 per cent of the secondary schools, 8 per cent of vocational and technical education schools, and 2 out of the 5 teacher training institutions. The government realizes that for ongoing economic development, the country needs an educated and skilled workforce. The future of the country depends on a good all -round education for all the people.

The broad outcome that Government seeks to achieve in education is to bring opportunities for learning within the reach of every child in our society. Quality education is the right of all children to prepare themselves for a productive and rewarding future. Tertiary and vocational skills training and

knowledge will be emphasized to prepare young people for gainful employment. The priority initiatives will include:

- The setting up of an independent Education Commission to review the current system of education in consultation with all stakeholders. This is to advise Government on policies and measures for the development of education to meet the aspirations of the people in the medium to long term.
- The Government will increase educational participation for all our children. Children in rural areas will be given improved access to pre-school education. More resources will be given by Government to schools for children with special needs. Compulsory education that is already in place in primary schools will be extended to Forms 3 and 4 by year 2001. Tuition free education will be extended to forms 5 and 6.
- The normal examination fee for Fiji Junior Examination is being abolished this year. This will be extended to include examination fee for Intermediate and Secondary Entrance Exams from next year for students faced with financial difficulties to access tertiary education, the Government will set up a fund that will pay the cost of their tuition, which students can pay later.
- In the interest of developing a professional and competent pool of teachers in the country, the Government will continue to work at upgrading and improving teacher training and working conditions. In addition, a Board of Teacher Registration will be set up to monitor teacher quality and professionalism. In cooperation with the two Teachers' Unions, the Ministry of Education will closely monitor the development of teachers to improve discipline and performance.
- In the interest of equity, special attention will be given to upgrading and improving services and facilities in Fijian schools. Empowering indigenous Fijians through improved performances and higher achievements in education and training will be the best long term solution to increasing their participation in commerce and other professions.
- Substance abuse will be addressed through the National Substance Advisory Council. The Council will focus on raising educational awareness on the effects of misuse and abuse of alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs and other substances.
- Values education will be given high priority to inculcate in students stronger feelings of national consciousness and of the importance of respect for others and of appreciation of Fiji's rich multi-cultural heritage and natural environment.
- The teaching of vernacular languages will be encouraged in all schools. In addition to English, the Fijian language will be made a compulsory subject, and Government will provide increased resources to support this program.

The quality of preschool education will improve from an increase in the salary grant to preschool teachers and an accelerated Secondary Teacher Training Course will address the shortage in Secondary School teaching resources.

Fee-free education in essence means tuition free. With free fee education schemes already implemented, focus in the years ahead will be on phasing in compulsory education measures to ensure the attainment of global primary education for all by the year 2000.

Form 7 education will also be consolidated further by improving the quality of courses in existing schools and centralizing in strategic centres. Positive measures will continue to be made to reduce the disparities between rural and urban schools by improving teacher quality, curriculum resources and upgrading student assessment.

Teacher training facilities are also available such as the Lautoka Teachers College, Corpus Christi, Fiji College of Advanced Education and Fulton College. The pupil - teacher ratio at the primary level is around 1:31 with a lower ratio (1:20) in the rural areas and higher ratio (1:42) for urban areas. Large class sizes in the urban areas, sometimes exceeding 50, are a direct result of high population growth, and rural - urban migration.

FIJIAN EDUCATION

To improve the academic of ethnic Fijians, Government has provided more scholarships and better education facilities. This assistance will be opened to other ethnic minority groups. The non-indigenous Fijians benefit from Multi - Ethnic scholarships provided by government.

Government has confirmed its investment in improving science teaching in rural Fijian schools.

In the meantime initiatives such as the Viti program are being encouraged. This involves the adoption of selected schools each year for more focused professional assistance . The learning of either conversational Hindi or Fijian is being encouraged in all schools and colleges as a step towards building bridges between the various communities. Rotuman is now an examinable subject.

While Government is committed to reducing the relative size of the public sector in the economy, education has been identified as a priority sector and its share in the budget is programmed to increase. A major investment program is being developed with the assistance of the World Bank. Key features include:

- Upgrading preschool education relying on community efforts with strategic inputs from Government;
- Development of basic education, particularly improvement of access to secondary education for rural students. Special incentives and training could be given to teachers to work in rural areas; and
- Quality of general education is to be improved at all levels through pre and in service teacher training, increasing availability of textbooks and teaching materials, and upgrading student assessment and evaluation.

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

The University of the South Pacific (USP), established in 1968 and located in Suva, is the only regional university of its kind in the world - belonging to 12 Pacific island countries. They include: Fiji, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Island, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Western Samoa. USP is governed by its own council, which includes

representatives of the member country governments, academic staff and students, and from regional organizations and countries including Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. In the past 25 years, the university has grown enormously, and now has a campus in Western Samoa and centres in ten member countries. The number of external students, studying by distance education program and through University Extension is around 5194. This gives a total, both on and off campus, of 9208. There is a large increase in internal enrollments. Others attend summer schools and other short courses run by the university's six institutes.

FIJI SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

The school has become a regional training centre for medicine and the paramedical professions and is the oldest medical school in the Australasian and Pacific basin regions. Established in 1885, the school has trained and graduated physicians and health care workers in dentistry, environment health, medical laboratory technology, nutrition and dietetics, pharmacy, physiotherapy and radiography for Fiji and the South Pacific region. At FSM the first year intake in 1996 was 20, in 1999 it is 41, in the year 2000 it will be 45, and in 2001 it will be 50.

FIJI COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

The Fiji College of Agriculture established in 1954 offers a two-year program leading to a Certificate in Tropical Agriculture. Today, the college, offers an external Diploma in Tropical Agriculture with the assistance of the University of the South Pacific. Students from Fiji as well as other parts of the South Pacific attend the college.

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT) is the country's main technical centre. Now an autonomous body, plans are underway to upgrade it to a polytechnic status. Some \$20 million is to be spent over the next 10 - 15 years to upgrade staff and facilities so that FIT becomes effective and responds to the demands of the labour market.

New directions in school-based agro/technical/vocational education will be developed through diversification of schoolbased programs linked to national tertiary institutions to cater for the lower to medium level skilled workers now much in demand in our economy.

Government also plans to establish three new vocational and technical education centres close to the main centres of employment.

The centres would be designed to provide lower and middle level technical training. One of the centres is to be established at Ratu Kadavulevu School at Lodonu, Tailevu. The school will provide quality training mainly to Fijians on a fully residential basis. The Fiji National Training Council, a statutory organization, was established by a Parliamentary Act and given the responsibility of skilling the workforce of the nation to help them become increasingly efficient and highly productive. Some 50,000 employees of public and private sector organizations have successfully gone through the Council's varied commercial and technical training courses since its formation in 1973. The council is a tripartite organization with representation from Government, employers and employees. Its activities are financed through a one per cent levy on the payroll of employers.

Program at FIT will be diversified to further facilitate an increased production of medium to higher level skilled workers and technicians.

FNTC has reviewed its courses and established a medium term corporate plan to improve linkage between the council and industry.

Government has endeavored to provide a balanced program of both academic and practical courses to develop and equip our youths in a rapidly changing society. In this regard, the government had allocated \$0.35 million for the establishment of the Montfort Technical School in Savusavu. The institute has 48 students undergoing courses in cabinet making, upholstery, motor mechanics, panel beating and agricultural technology.

Currently there are 33 school-based vocational and technical centres in secondary schools offering courses for students and school leavers.

Scholarships are provided for tertiary education, whilst annual appropriations are also provided for vocational and technical institutions.