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Quality and Relevance of Learning and Teaching

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REVISION RECORD

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Quality and Relevance of Learning and Teaching

Quality can be measured, to some extent, by the level at which learners achieve the knowledge, skills, and behaviours specified in the national curriculum. Society and parents expect more than good test scores; they also have expectations regarding students' attitudes and behaviour that are not easily measured but do affect public perceptions of the quality of education delivery.

An important dimension of the quality of education is relevance. What is taught, and how it is taught must be relevant, i.e. learning activities and environments must give learners the best possible opportunities for success and provide an appropriate curriculum and flexible delivery arrangements to meet their diverse needs.

Quality education needs quality providers. The professional leadership and management of schools and institutions is key to ensuring that the support systems, environments and programmes offered meet the needs of learners and allow them to develop to their fullest potential.

All education providers must offer appropriate and accessible study options in order to create a workforce that is technically and academically proficient. These options must address the future needs of both the learner and the country if sustainable, positive development and economic growth is to be achieved. High levels of knowledge, competencies and skills are considered to be the very basic conditions for active citizenship, employment and social cohesion.

Improving the quality and relevance of education relates to improving educational management, facilities, equipment, teacher/tutor competencies and professional development, curricular and resource development, and strengthening capacity in learner-centred and adult learning methodologies.

1. STATEMENT OF POLICY

The attainment of quality achievement in all learning activities offered within the Cook Islands is an integral part of the Ministry's commitment to excellence and opportunity at all levels of education.

2. Purpose

High levels of knowledge, competency and skills are considered to be the very basic conditions for positive citizenship, employment and social cohesion. The primary goal of quality education is to ensure that all learners have opportunity, are successful and are equipped to become fully participating members of their groups, societies and the global community.

Quality education promotes the opportunity for all age groups to acquire education of such a standard that everyone has equitable and positive opportunities for personal development. To ensure this the Ministry is committed to:

i.)   Meeting the purpose of Learning for Life -Cook Islands Education Master Plan   (2008-2023) which is:
   "All people in the Cook Islands will have equal access to quality learning   opportunities across the full spectrum of human endeavour from birth."

and includes the following relevant foci and goals:

Learning and Teaching

Focus: Equitable access to quality learning and the experience of success through a range of

programmes that meet individual needs and celebrate individual talents.

Goals:

• Equitable access for all learners to quality learning programmes.

Learning and the Community

Focus: A high level of community involvement in determining quality educational outcomes

Infrastructure and Support

Focus: The provision of appropriate legislation, research, guidelines and standards which support

and enhance opportunities for learning.

Goals:

• Adequate budget resource for education

• High quality buildings, grounds and facilities

• Well qualified and resourced teachers, administrators and support staff

• High quality management systems

ii.)   Meeting the aims of "Te Kaveinga Nui" - the National Sustainable Development Plan,which includes the priority area:

" A Cook Islands where all people who reside in our islands can enjoy opportunities to fulfil their potential, prosper and participate in the social, economic, political and cultural life of our communities and nation" (pg 15).

It also includes the strategies of:

Ensuring equitable access for all learners to quality learning programmes.

Ensuring that every child is literate and numerate by the end of Year 8.

Ensuring the education sector is responsive to the training needs of the wider community through collaboration and partnerships with other agencies.

Enabling every young person to have access to the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills to gain qualifications that they need to contribute to the development of the Cook Islands.

iii.)   Meeting the goals of the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF) which include:

To improve quality and outcomes

iv.)   Meeting the goals of the UNESCO 'Education For All' policy, which include:

Goal 6: Improving all aspects of the quality and excellence of education with measurable learning outcomes.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all parties who are bound by the requirements of the Education Act.

4. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES and OUTCOMES

Outcome

All levels and dimensions of education in the Cook Islands will consistently demonstrate standards of excellence. There will be a high quality of learning achieved through provision of an appropriate number of qualified teachers, administrators and support staff. Relevant national curricula and provider programmes will be supported by an adequate number of modern, relevant teaching and learning materials and facilities, and high standards of student literacy and numeracy. A culture of evaluation and quality assurance will promote ongoing development.

Strategic Objectives

To improve quality at all levels of education by:

- Provision of an appropriate number of effective, qualified teachers, administrators and support staff in the education sector.

- Development and maintenance of high quality approaches to learning and teaching based on pedagogical best practice.

- Development, distribution and use of relevant, high quality and current national and local provider learning programmes.

- Provision of an adequate current, relevant teaching and learning infrastructure and resources.

- Targeted professional development for all education sector staff.

- Monitoring and assessment of standards of student literacy and numeracy and students' progress in other learning areas and programmes.

- Developing and resourcing efficient and effective tertiary education within the Cook Islands.

- Effective overall monitoring and evaluation systems.

5. Policy Detail

5.1 Quality Teaching

Quality education is not possible without quality teaching. Teachers are at the heart of every education system, and plans and strategies for the initial preparation and ongoing professional development of teachers are central elements of the process of achieving goals and targets relating to quality, access and equity in education.

Numerous social, cultural, economic and technological changes in society place new demands on the teaching profession. The ability of teachers/tutors to meet the challenges of increasing social and cultural diversity is crucial for the development of more equitable education systems and for progress towards providing equal opportunities for all.

The education and training of teachers/tutors is a fundamental element in the implementation of this policy. Future increases in the overall level of educational attainment and the pace of progress towards common objectives in education will be facilitated by the existence of effective systems of teacher education. Sustained teacher development, both pre-service and in-service, is essential for improving the quality of education. Recurrent inservice teacher training will encompass practical methods of teaching, ways to adapt the curriculum and programmes to the social and physical environment of the students, understanding how students develop and learn, methods of evaluating teaching and learning and parent-teacher and community relations. Teachers' working conditions affect their ability to provide quality education. The condition of infrastructure, availability of resources and class sizes all influence the teacher's experience as an educator. Teachers' remuneration also matters. Effective teachers are highly committed and care about their students; they need supportive working conditions to maintain these positive attitudes. Enhancing the professional status of teaching in the Cook Islands is a critical challenge.

Providing teachers with quality resources and facilities with which to provide learning opportunities increases the range of approaches and activities that teachers can utilize to engage students in learning and promote success.

5.1.2 Priority Policy Instruments and Actions – Quality Teaching

The Ministry of Education (MoE) will ensure:
- There is development of a number of strategies on training, recruitment, evaluation, remuneration and retention of teachers.
- Teaching and support staff are sufficient and are deployed according to the needs of learner groups.
- The provision of coherent, high quality and relevant teacher education programmes which respond effectively to the evolving needs of providers, teachers and Cook Islands society at large.
- Initial education, early career support and further professional development is coordinated, coherent, adequately resourced and quality assured.
- Teachers are encouraged and supported throughout their careers to review their learning needs and to acquire new knowledge, skills and competencies through formal, informal and non-formal learning, including exchanges and attachments.

- Resourcing policies which ensure teachers are supported with quality resources and facilities.
- Maintain a core of trained specialists at the MoE, and ensure that they are accessible to all providers for assistance with in-service delivery, curriculum and programme review and development, and qualifications expertise.
- Ensuring 100% of all educational professionals meet the professional standards of their teaching level with support mechanisms for advice, guidance and supervision where required.
- Ensure the inclusion and monitoring of targeted professional development plans as part of performance management systems.

5.2 Quality Leadership

Leadership is a strategic function. It is about setting a vision and a direction for any organization or institution. Leadership must be responsive to the actual and anticipated needs of stakeholders. Leadership is an active function. It is the ability to enlist others in working to meet a common goal. The Ministry of Education must promote quality leadership through promoting best practice.

Competency in leadership and management is key to creating a positive working culture and atmosphere and therefore provide quality education. The leaders of institutions need to be both curriculum and pedagogical frontrunners in their schools. They must also provide leadership to their staff.

5.2.1 Priority Policy Instruments and Actions – Quality Leadership

- Provide capacity building programmes to improve the leadership and management skills of educational leaders including human resources management, policy development, strategic planning, financial management and budgeting, management of resources, inventory of assets and reporting on use of education grants.
- Ensure leadership at all levels of the Ministry is current in terms of best practice models, specific position requirements and delivery of services both internally and externally

5.3 Quality Learning Environments

Positive learning outcomes happen in quality learning environments. The learning environment can be broadly defined as the "social, physical, psychological and pedagogical context in which learning occurs and which affect student achievement and attitudes (Fraser (1998) in Nix, Fraser and Leadbetter, 2005). It is not only the physical environment of the classroom but also the social environment and interactions between teachers and learner that effects the learning and teaching processes. The environment impacts not only on the direct learning outcomes for students but also on the "hidden curriculum".

An important part of providing quality education involves providers ensuring there are effective guidance and support processes available to all learners. The learning environment of the school must be conducive to learning where the learners feel secure, confident and are motivated to learn.

5.3.1 Priority Policy Instruments and Actions – Quality Learning Environments

- Establishing fully resourced providers to meet the teaching and learning needs of all students.
- There is access for all learners
- The teaching space is sufficient to meet the needs of all learners in relation to size, layout, heating, lighting, ventilation, safety and display.
- The teaching areas are flexible and can support a variety of formal and informal teaching approaches.
- Support providers in developing cultures which respect individuals, values positive relationships and welcome and support learners according to their individual needs.
- Strategies are developed which support the holistic development and wellbeing of learners.

5.4 Relevant Quality Programmes

In modern society, where changes in knowledge are rapid and the mobility of the population is increasing, education is expected to provide more than the basic skills and competencies. The social relevance of curricula is essential for ensuring that comprehensive education programmes support people to become active citizens.

Programmes delivered must be of cultural, social and practical relevance. To attain the objectives of the EMP teaching must be meaningful and prepare learners for rapid changes in Cook Islands society, including its relationship regionally and internationally.

Quality content refers to the intended and taught curricula of schools and programmes of learning institutions. National goals for education, and outcome statements that translate those goals into measurable objectives, provide the starting point for the development and implementation of curricula. Curriculum and programmes therefore need to focus on developing the critical capabilities of students, enabling them to know themselves and to think for themselves, thus becoming active and confident learners. The curricula must take advantage of Cook Island values such as cooperation, reciprocity, sharing and respect and at the same time promote self-esteem of all students.

5.4.1 Priority Policy Instruments and Actions – Relevant Quality Programmes

- Ensure a Cook Islands Curriculum Framework that provides for the implementation of a wide range of programmes.
- Develop locally relevant programmes and resources in accordance with the national curriculum.
- Develop partnerships between providers and the community to enhance the content and delivery of programmes.
- Develop technical and vocational programmes in secondary schools to scaffold learners to tertiary programmes
- Develop appropriate tertiary and continuing education programmes that enhance economic growth and development opportunities.

5.5   Quality Systems

The term quality systems refer to the policies, processes and actions through which the quality of education is maintained and developed. The main objective of quality systems is to provide information and understanding about how education is functioning, what the results are, how it can be improved, and to take responsibility for creating favourable conditions for quality.

Quality systems need to be in place at all levels of education and governance. In responding to central government, the Ministry must assure quality at a national level. Systems must also be in place to assure quality in our schools. Another equally important objective is to provide an opportunity for education providers to account to their communities for the work delivered and the use of the public resources provided.

Evaluating the attainment of the objectives of education is central for quality assurance. It is important to have accountability of providers of education. It is also important to produce information revealing the effectiveness of education and the attainment of common objectives.

Improvement in teaching and learning relies on the appropriate data being collected and reported, effective analysis of that data, problem identification to inform the type of intervention required, appropriate activities carried out and evaluation of those activities.

5.5.1 Priority Policy Instruments and Actions - Quality Systems

- Utilise audit processes to ensure quality, compliance and strategies for improvement.
- Ensure providers conduct evaluation of their own activities.
- MoE will evaluate the activity of providers and analyse statistical data to inform decision making
- An external evaluation, conducted by a party independent of administration will be carried out to review structure, systems and process to ensure that MoE is providing the best possible support for school improvement.

6. Risk and Mitigation

The table below lists examples of possible consequences, along with mitigating actions, that relate to this policy not being adhered to:

Issue/Risk - examples	Mitigation - examples
• Lack of teachers. • Use of untrained and unqualified teachers. • Poor teaching processes. • Lack of resources. • Unsuitable learning environments. • Out-of-date, inappropriate curricula. • Inconsistency of standards between schools. • Lack of acceptable achievement by learners. • Learners not gaining work-force related skills. • Low skill levels in literacy and numeracy. • Poor school leadership. • Currency of Training Needs Assessment • Decreased scope of providers • Loss of provider accreditation • Lack of regional and international recognition and acceptance of qualifications.	• Provide scholarships for Cook Island teachers to access higher learning and training overseas. • Provide professional in-service training. • Put in place community, business and international partnerships to assist with resourcing of schools. • Ensure all learning environments functional, safe and appropriate through regulation, inspection and policy. • Community-wide consultation on curricula requirements. • Regular monitoring of assessment results by schools and MoE. • Quality management systems maintained to ensure ongoing accreditation. • Programmes developed to meet the outcomes of the TNA. • Special programmes and projects to address key concerns. • Targeted training of Principals to establish quality school cultures.

7. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

Monitoring is keeping track of the workings of a policy -noting whether the policy is referred and adhered to during the development of education processes and programmes.

Evaluation involves making careful judgements about the worth, quality and benefit of a policy. It provides feedback on the efficiency, effectiveness and performance of policy and is critical to policy improvement and innovation.

Review refers to implementing any required changes that have become apparent during the monitoring and evaluation processes.

- The Planning and Development Division will monitor and evaluate the implementation and impact of this policy and report as required.
- The policy will be reviewed as per the policy register on an ongoing basis by the Director, Planning and Development
- Feedback will be presented to key stakeholders in a range of modalities.

This policy will be reviewed 24 months after implementation and thereafter every 36 months.

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S Paio   Date
Secretary of Education

Reference
Nix, R.K, Fraser, B.J.,&Ledbetter,C.E. (2005). Evaluating an integrated science learning environment
    using the Constructivist Learning Environment Survey. *Learning Environments Research: An
    International Journal, Vol 8, pp 109-133.*