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Sri Lanka

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Principles and general objectives of education

The Constitution of Sri Lanka, in its chapter on directive principles of State policy and fundamental duties, recognizes to all persons the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels. The traditional objectives of educational policy in Sri Lanka can be summarized as follows:

- develop and understand the cultural and religious heritage and the democratic traditions of the country, as well as an appreciation of the contributions made by the different ethnic groups to the national culture;
- develop a basic understanding of the environment and skills relevant to the needs of life and society;
- cultivate an appreciation of the arts, literature and science, and develop attitudes conducive to harmonious relations among the different ethnic groups;
- promote moral, spiritual and physical development and inculcate a sense of commitment to national development;
- develop and promote a system for the acquisition of technical knowledge and vocational skills to meet the manpower needs of the country;
- promote lifelong education and knowledge renewal through programmes of formal and non-formal education; and
- promote the democratization of education.

The education reforms implemented from 1998 were proposed with two primary goals in mind. They were intended to: (i) provide an education system that would equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes, to empower them and make them employable and productive citizens of Sri Lanka; and (ii) create a generation of young people with correct values, compassion and care towards fellow citizens and who will be able to live with tolerance towards one another.

In the light of World Declaration on Education (2000), the National Education Commission put forward nine national educational goals targeting a learning society in the future. The nine goals are: achievement of national cohesion, national integrity, and national amity; the establishment of pervasive patterns of social justice; the evolution of a sustainable pattern of living; the preparation for work opportunities that are dignified satisfying and self-fulfilling; the institution of a variety of possibilities for all to participate in human resources development; the generation of a continuous sense of deep and abiding concern for one another; learning to learn and adapt to changing situations; the capacity to cope with the complex and the unforeseen; and the development of competencies, which will help secure honorable place in the international community.



Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The existing legislative framework includes the **Education Ordinance** of 1939 and subsequent amendments, and a number of acts enacted to set up various supportive bodies.

The main objective of enforcement of the **Regulation on Compulsory Education** (Gazette notification 1003/5 of 25 November 1997), which came into force in 1998, is to ensure that all children in the age group 5-14 years attend school. Special committees have been set up to motivate parents to send their children to schools, and some conditions related to entry requirements have been relaxed. A mass campaign using media has been carried out to ensure the provision of compulsory education. The regulation also indicates an intention of providing at least nine years of compulsory schooling. This intention was also reflected in the proposal under the education reforms to have a two-tier school structure with a nine-year elementary school and a four-year senior school. (MEHE, 1999).

The university system in Sri Lanka operates within the framework laid down by the **Universities Act No. 16** of 1978 and subsequent amendments. The Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) was established in 1991 under the **Tertiary and Vocational Education Act No. 20** of 1990 and reconstituted as a statutory body by the **TVE (Amendment) Act. No 50** of 1999.

The National Education Commission was established under the **National Education Commission Act No. 19** of 1991.

An important constitutional amendment that led to far reaching effects on the management of the education system has been the **13th Amendment to the Constitution**, which created the provincial council system. Under this piece of legislation most of the functions performed by the central government have been devolved to the provincial authorities.

Administration and management of the education system

The Ministry of Education (previously the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Education and Cultural Affairs–MHRDECA) is responsible for general education, *pirivena* (temple or monastic) education, and teacher education nationwide. In addition to the Divisions in charge of the different programmes, there are the following major statutory institutions under the Ministry: the Department of Examinations and National Testing Service; the Department of Educational Publications; the National Institute of Education; and the National Library Services Board. The history of *pirivena* education goes back to the third century B.C., when Buddhism was first officially introduced. *Pirivena* is the institution which delivered the formal education from primary level to higher education, now classified as: *mulika pirivena* (grades 1-5), *maha pirivena* (grades 6-11) and *pirivena vidyathanaya* (from grade 10 to higher education). Teacher salaries are paid by the government and these institutes are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.



Education is a shared function between the centre and the provinces. The **Ministry of Education** is responsible for national policies and plans, the management of national schools, teacher education, higher education, as well as the maintenance of standards in all schools including quality assurance. Policy implementation is increasingly becoming a provincial function with the establishment of the **Provincial Councils of Education**, in accordance with the Constitution adopted in 1978 and amended on 14 November 1987. There is a provincial Ministry of Education in each of the nine provinces under a Provincial Minister assisted by a Provincial Secretary of Education. The preschools and schools are managed by **Provincial Departments of Education** under a Provincial Director of Education. For purposes of administration, the provinces are divided into a number of **Educational Zones** headed by a Zonal Director of Education. The administrative functions and supervision of schools are mainly handled by the Zonal Education Office. Each zone has approximately 100 to 150 schools. The zones are further sub-divided into **Divisions** and the Divisional Officer in charge of a division functions as a field officer to assist the Zonal Director. (MOE, 2001).

All public examinations are conducted by the **Department of Examinations**. Although it covers more than 400 different examinations each year, the Department's heaviest commitment is in the area of the following examinations: Grade 5 Scholarship at the end of primary education, General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary-level, and GCE Advanced-level.

The **Department of Educational Publications** is responsible for preparing, editing, publishing and distributing of school textbooks. All textbooks for grades 1-11 are provided free of charge to pupils, including those who attend private schools and *pirivenas*.

The **National Institute of Education**, which functions under the Ministry of Education, is responsible for implementation of activities mainly in the field of teacher training, educational management, curriculum development and educational research. The Institute carries out the above activities according to the policy decisions and changes undertaken by the government from time to time. NIE is organized in four faculties and two divisions: Faculty of Languages, Humanities and Social Sciences; Faculty of Science and Technology; Faculty of Education Leadership Development and Teacher Education; Faculty of Education for All; Division of Research, Planning and Development; and Division of General Administration. The two faculties of Languages, Humanities and Social Sciences, and of Science and Technology are responsible for curriculum development, curriculum research and evaluation in the primary, secondary and senior secondary cycles. Each faculty has separate units for different subject areas gathered according to broader categories. The Primary Education Unit and the two committees (Secondary and Senior Secondary) are established within the two faculties to ensure the consistent flow of curriculum delivery throughout the cycles. The Faculty of Educational Leadership Development and Teacher Education is responsible for enhancing managerial and leadership competencies of education managers and the professional development of teacher educators and teachers.

There are four main categories of government schools in Sri Lanka, depending on the terminal grade offered: (a) Type 1AB: schools with classes up to GCE A-level



(e.g. grade 13) in all subject streams (science, commerce, and arts); (b) Type 1C: schools with classes up to GCE A-level in the arts and commerce streams; (c) Type 2: schools with classes from grades 1 to 11 (up to GCE O-level); and (d) Type 3: primary schools (grades 1 to 5). Most of the schools are managed by the provincial authorities and only a few (e.g. national schools) are under the central Ministry.

The functions of the **National Education Commission**, established in 1991, are to: make recommendations to the President on educational policy in all its aspects, with a view to ensuring continuity in educational policy and enabling the education system to respond to changing needs in society, including an immediate review of educational policy and plan or plans and the making of recommendations to the President, on a comprehensive National Educational Policy; review and analyze periodically, the National Educational Policy and Plan or plans in operation and where necessary, to recommend to the President, changes in such Policy. Plan or plans; and advise the President on any other matter relating to education which may be referred to it by the President, for its advice. The Commission may make recommendations on the following matters: (a) the changes in curricula and teaching methods in educational institutions that are necessary to match education to employment, industry and social needs; (b) the adequacy of guidance and counseling to students in educational institutions, to enable them to develop their potential to the full; (c) the measures necessary to strengthen the links between educational institutions and the community; (d) the development of educational institutions as resource centers for all round human development in the community; (e) the measures necessary to reduce disparities among schools; (f) the measures necessary to enhance the professional standing of teachers and other education service personnel; (g) the alternate programmes that could be provided for the benefit of the children leaving primary and secondary schools prematurely, to enable them to develop their potential to the full; (h) the changes in curricula necessary to foster the cultural and religious aspirations of students of all communities and religions; (i) the legislative changes necessary to give effect to any such recommendations.

The **Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs** was established at the end of the year 2005 in order to focus on the broad area covering matters related to children development and empowerment of women. Within the Ministry, the **Children's Secretariat** has the mission to ensure the holistic development of children through formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes. The Secretariat has to: formulate a national policy on early childhood care and development (ECCD) and become the machinery of its implementation; coordinate and network the early childhood development programmes with the public, non-governmental and private sector organizations; research, collect data, and prepare programmes relevant to ECCD; prepare and implement the training programmes related to total development of the child in his/her early childhood period; build awareness and sensitize public on the importance of early childhood.

The mission of the Ministry of Skills Development, Vocational and Technical Education (formerly the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Training), established in 2004, was to formulate and implement policies, strategies and plans in collaboration with all stakeholders in education and training including the employees in order to maintain an efficient tertiary education and training system which meets the challenging needs of the industry. The main statutory institutions within the higher



education and technical and vocational education and training sectors include: the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission; the Vocational Training Authority; the National Institute of Technical Education; the National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority; the University Grants Commission; and the Open University of Sri Lanka. By 2011, higher education is coordinated by the **Ministry of Higher Education** and TVET is under the **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development**.

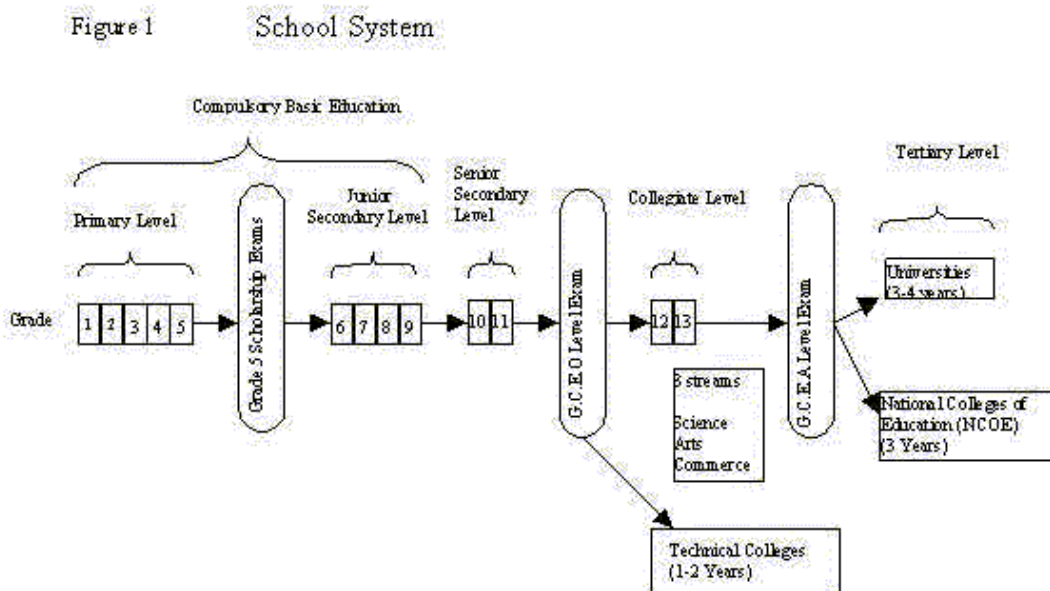
The National Apprenticeship Board, predecessor to the **National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority** (NAITA), was established in 1971 by an Act of Parliament. It was renamed as NAITA and functions within the purview of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development. NAITA conducts island-wide training programmes aimed at small, medium and large scale enterprises, under the advise and direction of a board of management appointed by the Minister of Youth Affairs and Skills Development.

The National Institute of Technical Education (now the University of Vocational Technology) was established under Act No. 59 of 1998 to perform the functions of teacher training and curriculum development activity for the TVET sector, and also provide training at the certificate and diploma level, and conduct degree level programmes. The **University of Vocational Technology** (UNIVOTEC), which began operations in March 2009, is empowered to initiate, promote, conduct and coordinate research in relation to any aspect of the development of technical and vocational education and training. The specific objectives of the UNIVOTEC are to: provide pedagogical training up to degree level for trainers serving in the technical and vocational education sector and industry; provide courses of study for middle level technical personnel, with qualifications acceptable for admission to UNIVOTEC, up to degree level, and provide courses of study for those with National Vocational Qualifications to upgrade their competencies and acquire a degree level qualifications; and provide extension courses on continuous professional development.

Established in 1979, the **University Grants Commission** (UGC) is the apex body of the university system in Sri Lanka which operates within the framework of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978. The functions of the UGC are to: allocate funds to the universities and university institutes; serve as central admission agency for undergraduate studies in universities; plan, coordinate and monitor the activities of the university system with a view to maintaining standards; and implement the national policies in respect of university education. The UGC funds higher education, research and related activities at universities, post-graduate institutes, and higher education institutes. Since its establishment in August 2005, the **Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council** (QAAC) under the UGC has been performing an important role in assuring the quality of degree programmes offered by public higher education institutions in Sri Lanka.

Structure and organization of the education system

Sri Lanka: structure of the education system



Source: Ministry of Education.

Pre-school education

Pre-primary education is offered by local authorities, religious bodies, voluntary organizations and the private sector. Pre-primary schools generally cater to children aged 3-5. It is estimated that about 90% of children attend preschool, although on a non-systematic basis (i.e. for periods ranging from few months to one or two years).

Primary education

Admission to the five-year primary education programme is at age 5+. Primary education is divided into three key stages, i.e. grades 1 and 2, grades 3 and 4, and grade 5. Compulsory education regulations were enacted by Parliament in 1997 and came into force in 1998. These regulations also indicate an intention of providing at least nine years of compulsory schooling. Upon completion of primary education, pupils sit the grade 5 Scholarship and Placement examination.

Secondary education

Secondary education traditionally consisted of two three-year cycles, i.e. junior secondary (grades 6-8) and senior secondary (grades 9-11). On the basis of the educational reforms implemented from 1998/99, junior secondary education now lasts four years (grades 6-9) and senior secondary covers grades 10 and 11. At the end of senior secondary education, students sit the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary-level examination. The last stage in the formal education system is the collegiate level, which comprises two years of schooling (grades 12 and 13) leading to



the GCE Advanced-level examination. Students' performance in this examination is the basis for selection and admission to universities and other higher education institutes.

Higher education

At the post-senior secondary level, technical colleges offer two-year programmes to GCE O-level holders leading to a vocational diploma; three-year programmes lead to the teacher certification diploma. At the university level, bachelor's degree programmes usually require three to four years of study (four years in the case of the special degree; five years in the case of medicine and architecture; six years in the case of traditional medicine). Master's degree programmes take two years to complete. Doctoral degree programmes normally last three to five years.

The school year lasts from January to December, is divided in three terms, and consists of a minimum of 190 school days. The academic year is divided into three terms (old system) or two semesters.

The educational process

The national curriculum is developed by the National Institute of Education (NIE), which is a corporate body under the Ministry of Education. Syllabi and teachers guides are prepared by the NIE with the assistance of experts in the field and distributed to schools. Teachers have the freedom to adopt the curriculum to the local environment to make teaching and learning more meaningful and interesting. NIE has a continuous dialogue with teacher groups in order to get a feedback from the schools. NIE also trains in-service advisors who in turn conduct training programmes for the teachers in the provinces. There are also teachers' centres in the provinces to conduct teacher training for upgrading the skills of teachers.

The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) was established in the 1960s mainly to develop curricula in science and mathematics. Later it took over the development of curricula in other subjects also. In 1985 the NIE was established by an Act of Parliament with wide powers to develop education in the country. The reforms of 1972 attempted to improve educational quality through a major curricular revision, e.g. a common general curriculum of nine years' duration including science, mathematics, social studies, languages, aesthetics and pre-vocational studies. These reforms introduced immediately after the first youth revolt were aimed at imparting the skills necessary for the world of work under a general education as unemployment was considered to be the main factor responsible for the youth uprising. However due to political changes this attempt was not continued to a successful conclusion. The reform of 1981 also tried to improve the quality of education and diversify the curriculum for the development of skills, but suffered the same fate as the previous attempt.

The most recent education reforms at all levels (from primary to senior secondary) were introduced in 1997 with the goal of developing manpower needed to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. The general education reforms introduced changes in the curriculum and advocated transformation in learning and



teaching techniques in order to improve the quality of education and its relevance to individual and national needs. In 1997 the revision of the primary curriculum focused on the achievement of competencies related to communication, natural and social environment, ethics and religion, use of leisure time, and learning to learn upon the completion of the primary cycle. The reforms at the primary level made changes in the structure, curriculum content, teaching and learning process, and assessment. These reforms brought about certain changes in the instructional process in the classroom by making the curriculum more child-centred and activity-based, as opposed to traditional teacher-centred and textbook-oriented teaching methods. The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the NIE and the provincial educational authorities was expected to develop a system for continuous monitoring and supervision of the implementation of the reforms. At the end of 2003 implementation of the reforms was completed across the five-year primary programme.

At the junior secondary level (grades 6 to 9), the main emphasis was to revise the subjects. The social studies curriculum was changed to introduce concepts related to peace education, national harmony, democratic principles, human rights, gender equality and environmental conservation. It was envisaged that it would help in developing and reinforcing the proper attitudes and patterns of behaviour relevant to social responsibilities, civic consciousness, national integration and harmony. Another change was the shift from science to science and technology. In the new curriculum the subject 'life competencies' was expected to cover a diversified area incorporating diverse contents related to food and agriculture, visual and graphic arts. Teacher training for second national language teaching (Teaching Sinhala in Tamil-medium schools and teaching Tamil in Sinhala-medium schools) commenced in 2001. Orientation to the world of work is another requirement to be fulfilled by the secondary school curriculum. The inclusion of 'practical and technical skills' in the curriculum was envisaged for the development of aptitudes and preparation for the world of work. The technical skills component of the core curriculum in the junior secondary grades provides the basic knowledge and the generic skills to equip students to function effectively as employees, employers and self-employed members of the labour force. In 2001 with the initiation of the Secondary Education Modernization Project, ICT facilities, junior science laboratories, activity rooms, resource rooms for English were provided. The professional development of teachers through awareness programmes for effective use of quality inputs and strengthening guidance and counselling services was also carried out. Another concern underlying the reforms was the need to break the dominance of public (summative) examinations through the introduction of school-based assessment in order to make evaluation become an integral part of the teaching and learning process. In 2007, the following changes were being implemented: (a) introduction of history, civics and geography as separate subjects to replace environmental studies in grade 6 and social studies in grades 7 to 11; (b) integration of generic skills such as critical thinking, entrepreneurship, problem solving, team work and human values in the content, activities and teaching and learning experiences; (c) introduction of a new subject called 'technology' with six options and practical components in grades 12 and 13 (GCE A-level). The competencies that each student should attain at the end of each key stage have been identified and grouped into two categories, e.g. the essential learning competencies and the desirable learning competencies. (MOE, 2008).



“The primary education curriculum has been reformed to implement the policy framework proposed by the National Education Commission (1997). Three key components of these policies are: (i) integration of the primary curriculum around the subject areas of first language, mathematics, religion and environmental studies; (ii) introduction of oral English from grade 1 onwards and formal English from grade 3 onwards; and (iii) organization of the primary education cycle along the key stage model used in England, with three key stages, grades 1-2, grades 3-4 and grade 5. Essential learning competencies have been set for each key stage, so that mastery of these competencies can be assessed. The junior secondary education curriculum has been organized to emphasize activity based learning, practical projects and subject content knowledge, with greater emphasis on practical work at the earlier levels of secondary schooling. The senior secondary education curriculum awards importance to subject content depth, broad general knowledge and awareness, problem solving skills, strong reasoning ability and accurate comprehension.” (World Bank, 2005).

Pre-primary education

Early childhood is defined in Sri Lanka as the period of child’s life from conception to age 5. The upper limit of the age in this definition differs from the international definition, which is age 8. At the same time, Sri Lanka has used the term early childhood care and development (ECCD) instead of the term early childhood care and education (ECCE). The terminology used in explaining ECCE programmes vary significantly although they convey the same meaning in different circumstances. ECD centres, preschools, Montessori schools, daycare centres and crèches are terms commonly used in this context. The services provided by daycare centres and crèches differ from the other institutions since these take care of children in place of their working parents for longer hours. The services provided by the other institutions are almost the same. Similarly, various terms are used with reference to ECCE care providers, preschool teachers, ECCD officers, ECCD instructors, caregivers and crèche workers are the names generally used for ECCE care providers. Care at the family level is strengthened through the Home Based ECCD Programme implemented by the Ministry of Health where the public health midwife is the grass root level worker providing services to children from birth until the age of 5 years with special focus on the first three years.

Inclusion of early childhood education in the general educational reforms in 1997 has been a major step taken by the government towards reaching a national policy on ECCE. The reforms have proposed an early childhood department in a university to train teachers and a child study centre to conduct research and other relevant activities related to ECCD. This has been implemented by establishing the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and the Child Study Centre at the Open University of Sri Lanka in the year 1999 and 2001 respectively. Furthermore, the Department of Special Needs Education was also established in the Open University.

The Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Affairs (MCDWA) was created in 2005 (at that time as Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Empowerment) and has under its purview the Children’s Secretariat, the Department of Probation and Childcare Services, the National Child Protection Authority and the National Committee of Women. The National Policy on ECCD was released in



October 2004 and could be described as a milestone in the history of ECCE in the Sri Lankan context. The MCDWE has the task of implementing the National Plan of Action prepared in 2004 by the ministries of Health, Education, Justice, Water Supply, Labour, Women Empowerment and Social Welfare.

The Children's Secretariat has introduced minimum standards for preschools which have been stated in the National Policy with a view to provide quality ECCD/ECCE programmes. The Secretariat has carried out home based programmes to raise awareness of parents and elders on ECD. Training programmes for preschool teachers, and programmes on providing daytime facilities for the care of children of employed parents, prevention of child abuse, and food and nutrition were also some of the measures taken by the Secretariat. Apart from these measures, the Secretariat also has appointed ECCD officers for each divisional secretariat. Monitoring the provisions for ECCE is also within the purview of the duties of these officers.

Although child's development during the first three years is optimized through the Home Based ECCD programmes, preschool is the most accepted and commonly used provision in ECCE for children between 3 to 5 years. The government, private and non-governmental organizations are involved in managing preschools and preschool teacher training programmes. Preschools are mostly run by local government authorities such as municipal councils and urban councils. The Children's Secretariat and Divisional Councils conduct preschool and teacher training programmes while Plantation Trust Fund conducts training programmes for crèche workers. Out of the local NGOs involved in preschool education, *Sarvodaya* Movement manages preschools throughout the country to serve urban and rural low income sectors and provides short-term training for preschool teachers.

The aims of the National Policy on ECCD of 2004 are:

- to assure, for every child, the best start in life by ensuring access to adequate health and nutrition services along with the opportunities for responsive psychosocial stimulation;
- to promote the importance of the integrated approach that brings together health, nutrition, psychosocial stimulation, safe water, hygiene and sanitation services;
- to develop standards and guidelines that regulate the development and implementation of ECCD programmes, i.e. home based programmes, child development centres, etc.;
- to clarify the role and responsibilities of central, Divisional and local government authorities in the provision and support of the ECCD services indicating their commitment to the care and development of the young child;
- to clarify the relationship between governmental, non governmental agencies, the private sector, communities and families in the provision of ECCD services;
- to synchronize and coordinate the services provided by the different stakeholders in ECCD so as to maximize the availability and use by all sectors of the population;
- to mobilize and allocate increasing financial resources for and investment in ECCD programmes;



- to promote the importance of the roles of parents, caregivers and the community in the development of children;
- to enhance the capacity of parents/caregivers and communities to be able to adequately support their children's development.

Although the Open University has been conducting one-year certificate (level 1) and one-year advanced certificate (level 2) programmes since its inception in 1980, opportunity for teachers to obtain a bachelor's degree in early childhood education was not available until the year 2006. It was in the year 2006 that the Open University commenced offering the two-year diploma (levels 3 and 4) programme in early childhood and primary education for those who are interested in progressing in the field of ECCE. This diploma could be envisaged as the first step in developing a bachelor of education degree in early childhood and primary education. The University of Sabaragamuwa also conducts a teacher training programme in preschool education from the year 2000. The duration of this programme is one and half years. Nevertheless, a study conducted in 2003 on childcare provisions in preschools with a sample drawn from nine provinces revealed that 45.1% respondents have followed programmes of less than a month duration and only 15.1% have followed programmes of one year duration. This clearly shows the inadequacy of training received by care providers. Experiences and qualifications of some of the trainers are also questionable. (MOE, 2008).

In 1994, the gross enrolment ratio at the preschool level was 43% and increased to 63% in 1999. The highest participation related to the 4- and 5-year-olds. The districts where participation was highest were Colombo and Hambantota, while the lowest participation was in the Nuwera Eliya district. In 1994, 43% of children between the ages of 3 and 5 years were enrolled in preschools. By 1999, the net enrolment ratio was estimated at 63% according to a survey carried out in six provinces (MEHE, 1999). According to the Child Secretariat Office, by the end of 2000 there were 7,725 preschools with 11,366 teachers and 204,695 children enrolled. It is estimated that about 62% of children in the age group 3-4 attended some form of preschool centre in 2004, although on a non-systematic basis (i.e. for periods ranging from few months to one or two years).

Non availability of systematically updated comprehensive databases on a national level makes it difficult to provide a valid statistical picture of ECCE programmes (home-based programmes, health programmes, crèches and preschools). For 2006 statistical data on the preschool level were available only in 185 Divisional Secretariats out of a total of 315 Secretariats. The available data indicated that there were 9,247 preschools with 223,540 children enrolled, for an estimated gross enrolment ratio of 80% at the national level, ranging from a maximum of 94% in the Western province to a minimum of 57% in the Sabaragamuwa province. (MOE, 2008). The World Bank reports that by 2003 the number of preschools was estimated between 11,000 and 12,500. (World Bank, 2005). In 2005, it was estimated that 90% of the new entrants to primary grade 1 have attended some form of organized ECCE programmes. (MOE, 2008).

Primary education

Admission to the five-year primary education programme is at age 5+. Primary education is divided into three key stages, i.e. grades 1 and 2, grades 3 and 4, and grade 5. Upon completion of primary education, pupils sit the Grade 5 Scholarship and Placement examination. The Grade 5 Scholarship is an important grant made to students of low income families. Annually about 10,000 bursaries are given to children of such families.

Sinhala and Tamil are official languages and English is the link language. The medium of instruction in school is generally Sinhala or Tamil. English is taught starting from grade 3. Preliminary steps have been taken to teach Tamil to Sinhala pupils and vice-versa. Instructional sequences in the different years are being organized to help the pupils acquire an increasing knowledge of the respective languages.

The weekly lesson timetable for primary education (before the introduction of the curriculum reform) is shown in the table below:

Sri Lanka. Primary education: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly hours in each grade				
	Key stage 1		Key stage 2		KS 3
	1	2	3	4	5
First language (Sinhala/Tamil)	5h	5h	5h	5h	5h
English language	–	–	3h	3h	3h
Second national language (Tamil/Sinhala)	–	–	1h	1h	1h
Mathematics	3h30m	3h30m	5h	5h	5h
Environment-related activities*	6h	6h	7h30m	7h30m	7h30m
Religion	1h15m	1h15m	2h	2h	2h
Optional curriculum (**)	–	–	–	–	30m
Co-curriculum (***)	30m	30m	30m	30m	30m
Total teaching-learning time	16h15m	16h15m	24h	24h	24h30m
Breaks	1h15m	1h15m	2h30m	2h30m	2h30m
Morning assembly and religious activities	1h15m	1h15m	1h15m	1h15m	1h15m
Drill and physical activities	1h15m	1h15m	1h15m	1h15m	1h15m
Total school hours per week	20h	20h	29h	29h	29h30m

Notes: (*) Environment-related activities is an integrated subject including: social studies, science, health and physical education, and aesthetic subjects (art, music and dancing).

(**) Grade 5 pupils can choose some optional subjects according to their interests and capabilities and depending on the facilities available. Some primary schools offer dancing, arts and agriculture.

(***) Co-curricular activities can include participation in religious festivals or cultural events, meditation, etc.



As mentioned, a new curriculum has been designed focusing on five major competency categories, namely: communication; the environment; ethics and religion; play and leisure; learning to learn. At key stage 1 the mode of learning is primarily play and activities. In key stage 2 there is a mix of play, activities and deskwork. In key stage 3 there is greater emphasis on deskwork. Class-based assessment frameworks have been developed, and materials and training provided for assessment of competency levels, throughout the learning and teaching process. Provision has been made to train teachers to conduct teacher-made tests and achievement tests. (MOE, 2008).

A repeater is considered as a pupil retained in the same class for another year for not being able to reach a level of achievement to justify progression to the next grade. This decision is taken by the head of the school on the recommendation made by the teacher in charge of a particular class. Out of the four types of schools (1AB, 1C, Types 2 and 3), grade repetition prevails mainly in Type 2 (grades 1-11) and Type 3 (grades 1-5) schools situated in the remote areas, plantation areas and in deprived urban areas of the country. Repetition rates are rather low in all grades and show a generally declining trend over the years.

In 2006 there were 9,714 government schools in the country. Out of them, 2,846 were primary schools offering grades 1-5 (e.g. Type 3 schools); 490 were primary schools with classes from grades 1 to 8; 4,199 were Type 2 schools (e.g. covering grades 1-11); 2,213 were schools covering grades 1-13; 27 were grades 6-11 schools; and 299 were grades 6-13 schools. In addition to government schools, there were 40 non-fee levying private schools receiving a grant to pay teacher salaries from the Ministry of Education, as well as 653 *pirivenas* (monastic schools receiving a grant from the Ministry) with a total enrolment of 54,899 students. In 2005 the overall gross enrolment ratio at the primary level was 99% for boys and 94% for girls, and the net enrolment ratio was 90% and 88% respectively. Research studies have revealed that about 8% of the children in the age group 5-14 years do not participate in education (not enrolled or dropouts). The transition rate from primary to lower secondary was estimated at 98% for boys and 99% for girls in 2005. (MOE, 2008).

A review of the grade 5 Scholarship and Placement examination of 2005 reveals that wide disparities exist in the performance of pupils among different schools, between urban and rural schools, and also between schools in the plantation sector and other schools. Children in urban schools perform better than children in rural schools. Performance of children of low-income families is lower than that of higher-income families, and girls perform better than boys at the examination. (*Ibid.*).

Secondary education

Secondary education includes junior secondary education (grades 6-9) and senior secondary (grades 10 and 11). At the end of senior secondary education, students sit the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary-level examination. The last stage in the formal education system is the collegiate level, which comprises two years of schooling (grades 12 and 13) leading to the GCE Advanced-level examination. Students' performance in this examination is the basis for selection and admission to universities and other higher education institutes. As mentioned, in

recent years several changes have been introduced in the secondary education curriculum.

The weekly lesson timetable for junior and senior secondary education (before the implementation of the curriculum reform) is presented below:

Sri Lanka. Junior and senior secondary education: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade					
	Junior secondary				Senior	
	6	7	8	9	10	11
First language (Sinhala/Tamil)	5	5	5	5	5	5
English language	5	5	5	5	5	5
Second national language (Tamil/Sinhala)	2	2	2	2	–	–
Mathematics	5	5	5	6	6	6
Environment-related activities*	9	–	–	–	–	–
Religion	3	2	2	2	2	2
Health and physical education	4	3	3	3	–	–
Aesthetic subjects **	4	3	3	3	3	3
Science and technology	–	6	6	6	6	6
Social studies and history	–	5	5	5	5	5
Life competencies/practical skills	–	3	3	3	–	–
Technical subject	–	–	–	–	4	4
Additional subject I	–	–	–	–	2	2
Additional subject II ***	–	–	–	–	2	2
Group activities	3	1	1	–	–	–
Total weekly periods	40	40	40	40	40	40

Notes: Each teaching period lasts 40 minutes. (*) Environment-related activities is an integrated subject including: social studies, science, health and physical education, and aesthetic subjects (art, music and dancing). (**) Aesthetic subjects include art, music (Oriental and Western) and dancing (Sri Lankan and Karnatic). (***) Students are expected to choose two additional subjects from the following: history; geography; development studies; Sinhala/Tamil as a second language; literature (Sinhala, Tamil, English or Arabic); a modern or classical language; health and physical education.

Students who have completed eleven years of schooling sit the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary-level (O-level) examination. On the basis of the MOE Circular 2006/09, students at the senior secondary stage have to offer nine subjects, including three 'optional' subjects. A candidate has to pass six subjects, including mother tongue and mathematics, and have at least three credits passes among them, to be considered as having passed the GCE O-level with qualification to enter the collegiate level. As regards the GCE O-level examinations in 2001 and 2005, sharp differences in achievement were exhibited by students in different categories of schools. Students in urban schools and Type 1AB schools have achieved better results. Students in plantation sector schools have fared poorly when compared to students of other schools. Sinhala students have attained better achievement levels than Tamil and Muslim students. In 2005, the overall pass rate was 53.3% for boys and 60.7% for girls. (MOE, 2008).

The collegiate level is comprised of two years of schooling (grades 12 and 13). Students are free to select science, commerce or art streams according to their GCE

O-level examination, their capabilities and their preferences. Three subjects are to be offered for the GCE Advanced-level (A-level) examination at the end of two years of schooling at the collegiate level. In addition students are allowed to sit for general English and must take and pass the general knowledge subject in order to enter a national university. Since the performance in this examination is the basis of student selection for universities and other higher education institutes, and considering that available places are limited, student competition on the examination has become very emulous. Only the most successful students at the GCE A-level examination are selected.

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is provided at technical colleges; around ninety training programmes are offered. A large number of agencies, both in the public and the private sectors, run non-formal TVET programmes. Coordination is ensured by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC). National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) are designed to measure the competency of different vocational skills. The intention of having NVQ is to produce Sri Lankan workforce globally competitive, in order to suit industry specific, through a standardized technical and vocational education system.

The National Vocational Qualification Framework of Sri Lanka (NVQSL) has been established to support the efforts of fulfilling above objectives of NVQ. NVQSL is the key element in unifying TVET. The national skill standards are prepared in consultation with the industry. NVQSL has seven levels to qualify. Each level describes the process, learning demand and the responsibility applicable to each level of performance. Competency-based training (CBT) curricula and appropriate training, learning and assessment materials are included in the framework, together with the requirements for registration and accreditation for training providers and courses respectively. The NVQSL makes provision for a nationally consistent skill development relevant to economic and social development and in line with international standards.

The post-secondary courses of the TVET system encompass various forms and levels of training, which generally start after completion of grade 11 and go up to the diploma level. Training programmes leading to a certificate are designed to produce semi-skilled to crafts-level workers; the duration of these programmes ranges from six months to four years. Programmes leading to a diploma cater to students who passed their GCE A-level examination with relatively good marks in mathematics, physics and chemistry. These programmes, lasting three to four years, are designed to train versatile technicians capable of performing a broad spectrum of work between that of an engineer and a skilled worker. The National Certificate in Engineering (Craft Courses) is the main technical education programme, lasting two years on a full-time basis. (MOE, 2008).

In 2005 the gross enrolment ratio at the national level for secondary education was estimated at 94% (92% for boys and 95% for girls); the net enrolment ratio was estimated at 90% island-wide (88% for boys and 91% for girls). In the same year, the transition rate from lower to senior secondary was estimated at 94% for boys and 96% for girls. (MOE, 2008).



According to MOE statistics, in 2010 there were 9,675 government schools in the country: 2,866 were primary schools; 4,084 were schools covering grades 1-11; 2,013 were Type 1C schools; and 712 were Type 1AB schools. Out of the total, 6,765 were Sinhala-medium and 2,910 were Tamil-medium schools. Most of the schools (e.g. 9,335 schools) were managed by the provincial authorities. In 2010 there were 3,932,722 students enrolled in the school system, according to the following breakdown: 362,782 students enrolled in primary schools (Type 3); 917,003 in Type 2 schools (grades 1-11); 1,279,102 in Type 1C schools (grades 1-13); and 1,373,835 students in Type 1AB schools (grades 1-13). A total of 2,926,507 students were enrolled in Sinhala-medium schools, and 1,006,215 in Tamil-medium schools. The total enrolment in schools under the provincial authorities was 3,147,810 students. There were 215,638 teachers in 2010, of whom 21,223 in primary schools, 66,694 in Type 2 schools, 69,203 in Type 1C schools, and 58,518 in Type 1AB schools. A total of 162,670 teachers were in Sinhala-medium, 51,044 in Tamil-medium, and 1,924 on English-medium schools. Most of the teachers (e.g. 182,970) were in schools managed by provincial authorities. In terms of qualifications, 78,412 teachers were graduates, 127,153 were trained, 6,362 were untrained, and 3,711 were under the 'other' category.

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

In the 1990s two surveys were completed to assess the achievement levels of grade 5 pupils. The first was conducted in 1994, and the second in 1999. In the 1994 survey, a national sample of 3,991 pupils was selected from 204 schools. In the 1999 survey, a group of 8,398 pupils was selected from 462 schools representing all the twenty-five districts.

The tests designed for the surveys were in accordance with the guidelines given by the Basic Education Division of UNESCO. The literacy test included items in vocabulary, comprehension and writing. The numeracy test included items on conceptual understanding, knowledge of procedures and problem solving. The life skills test included test items for sub-skills, namely duties and responsibilities, science skills, environmental skills and health skills. In designing the achievement tests, syllabi used at primary cycle was also considered. In the 1999 survey, the achievement tests used were the same tests that were used in 1994. In the analysis of test results, pupils scoring 80% of the marks or above were considered as ones achieving mastery in each subject.

Overall mean scores in literacy for the years 1994 and 1999 were 62 and 61, respectively. Mean scores in numeracy and life skills have shifted upward, from 45 to 50 and from 27 to 55, respectively. This improvement in performance is witnessed also by the upward trend evident in percentages of pupils achieving mastery.

A research study report published by the National Education Research and Evaluation Centre revealed serious discrepancies in achieving mastery of grade 4 pupils in key subjects (first language, mathematics and English). According to this report, Gampaha, Colombo, Matara, Kalutara, Kurunegala and Kegalle districts show better achievement levels, while Mannar, Trincomale, Nuwara Eliya, Batticaloa, Mullativu and Kilinochchi districts have achieved very poor levels. All three districts of the Western province are in the group of six districts with better achievement



levels. Out of the six districts with lowest achievement levels, five districts belong to the North and East provinces. The achieving mastery percentage was particularly low in English in all the districts. (MOE, 2008).

The World Bank reports that “Cognitive achievement tests among primary school children show substantial shortfalls in mastery of fundamental language and numeracy skills towards the end of the primary cycle. In first language (Sinhalese and Tamil), average mastery is only 37%. Writing (28%) and syntax (30%) are the weakest mother tongue skills. Comprehension (45%), too, is poor. English language skills are extremely low. Only 10% of primary children achieve the targeted level of mastery. English language writing skills are virtually non-existent, with just 1% of children exhibiting the required skill level. In mathematics achievement, too, overall mastery is only 38%. Mastery of mathematical concepts is 45%, procedures 51% and problem solving only 34%. In addition to these low overall achievement levels, there are also significant disparities in achievement between urban and rural areas. First language (Sinhalese or Tamil) mastery in urban areas is 51%, but falls to 34% in rural areas. In English language skills, 23% of urban children achieve mastery, but in rural areas only 7% of children reach mastery. In mathematics, 52% of urban children attain mastery, while just 35% of rural children achieve the required level of competence. These urban-rural differences can be attributed to a combination of factors, such as the lower quality of education services in rural areas, poorer parental capability and support, and weaker opportunities for child activities that promote learning.” (World Bank, 2005).

“The time trend of GCE O-level GCE A-level pass rates shows that, over about the past ten years, there has been improvement in GCE O-level pass rates, but that GCE A-level pass rates have been relatively constant. GCE O-level pass rates have risen from about 22% in 1993 to 37% in 2002, with much of the improvement occurring in the mid-late 1990s. In the GCE A-level cycle, pass rates have remained fairly steady between 1994 and 2002 (around 50%), except for one unusually high year, 1995 and one poor year, 1999.” (*Ibid.*).

Teaching staff

Parliament Act No.30 of 1986 paved the way for the establishment of colleges of education for pre-service teacher education. The teacher education network consists of the National Institute of Education (NIE), faculties/departments of education in the universities, national colleges of education, teachers colleges, some 100 teacher centers, and 30 Regional English Support Centres (RESCs), the latter established to provide in-service continuing teacher education for English teachers. In addition to these, some of the universities and the NIE have their own regional centres to offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes on an island-wide basis.

Teachers for grades 1 to 11 are recruited from colleges of education which offer two-year residential training programmes and one-year internship period in schools leading to the teacher certification diploma. Teachers for A-level classes (grades 12 and 13) are recruited from University graduates. Untrained teachers are trained in teacher training colleges and by the NIE through the Distance Education Programme and the colleges of education provide pre-service training for new entrants to the teaching profession. In addition, short-term continuing education



courses are conducted in teacher education institutes and Teacher Centres distributed throughout the Island. The Universities also offer one-year postgraduate diploma programmes in education.

In 1997, the decision was taken to create a central authority—the National Authority for Teacher Education (NATE)—to coordinate all teacher training programmes. The role expected of this Authority was to advise on policy and coordinate, monitor and accredit teacher education programmes. Due to the fact that NATE had functions that overlapped with other institutions, it failed to achieve its objectives, and ceased to function by year 2002. Its powers were so wide that it could have succeeded only as an autonomous institution outside the Ministry with linkages to Universities, the NIE and other initial and continuing teacher education institutes.

Studies conducted for teacher education reforms of 1997 also brought to notice the outdated curricula of teacher education institutes that had little relevance to schools. This necessitated a conscious effort to be made to re-orient these curricula and associated teaching methodologies to improve the learning and teaching process in schools. In view of this, a large-scale curriculum diversification was initiated in year 2000. The number of specialization courses of colleges, originally at seven, was increased up to 25. Keeping in line with the new assessment procedure introduced at school level, a new evaluation scheme was also proposed for the colleges. This brought down the weight given to external evaluation from 60% to 40% requiring the staff to focus more upon internal assessment and evaluation. The general component of this curriculum attempted to meet existing needs in the areas of international language, second national language, computer literacy, practical and technical skills, Sri Lankan culture, and life competencies. Subjects such as mother tongue, religion, aesthetic education, health and physical education, were also included here to help prospective teachers.

Generally speaking, the country has a dual system of teacher education which provides both pre-service and in-service training programmes. The pre-service component is concerned with initial professional development. Some of the in-service programmes focus on the training of untrained teachers; others are concerned with the continuous professional development of all categories of in-service teachers. The recruitment of over 55,000 untrained teachers in 1989 and 1990 to meet the needs of the system increased the size of the backlog of untrained teachers to such an extent that it included nearly 50% of the teaching force in 1991. In 1992, the school system had about 20,000 untrained graduate teachers (university graduates) under the age of 50 and 51,000 untrained non-graduate teachers (untrained teachers without a university degree). As mentioned, in 2010 there were 215,638 teachers in government schools, of whom 21,223 in primary schools, 66,694 in Type 2 schools, 69,203 in Type 1C schools, and 58,518 in Type 1AB schools. A total of 162,670 teachers were in Sinhala-medium, 51,044 in Tamil-medium, and 1,924 on English-medium schools. Most of the teachers (e.g. 182,970) were in schools managed by provincial authorities. In terms of qualifications, 78,412 teachers were graduates, 127,153 were trained, 6,362 were untrained, and 3,711 were under the 'other' category.

Continuing teacher education is provided to meet national and local needs of the education system and facilitate career development of practicing teachers. These programmes, adopting a thematic approach, attempt to develop knowledge and skills



of teachers in new content areas introduced by education reforms. Efforts are also taken to inculcate attitudes required by teachers to be successful in their jobs, and improve their proficiency in IT and English that are needed for curriculum implementation. Teacher Centres, assigned with the responsibility of continuing teacher education, are attached to the Colleges of Education for academic purposes and to the zonal education offices for administrative purposes.

The general education reforms of 1990s proposed a Teachers' Service Commission to be made responsible for recruitment, deployment, promotion, and working conditions of teachers. The Sri Lankan Teachers' Service set up in 1995 in place of this Commission reduced the multiplicity of grades available for teachers to five and formulated a scheme of salaries for them. Reforms of 1990s also emphasized the importance of the quality and efficiency of the teaching community in achieving the expected outcomes of education. To ensure quality, a carefully structured teacher appraisal system was proposed to be made mandatory for transfers, promotions and selection of teachers for scholarships and training.

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Web resources

Department of Examinations: <http://www.doenets.lk/> [In English. Last checked: July 2011.]

Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs:
<http://www.childwomenmin.gov.lk/> [In English, Sinhala and Tamil. Last checked: July 2011.]

Ministry of Education: <http://www.moe.gov.lk/> [In English, Sinhala and Tamil. Last checked: July 2011.]

Ministry of Higher Education: <http://www.mohe.gov.lk/> [In English. Last checked: July 2011.]

Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development: <http://www.youthmin.gov.lk/web/> [In English, Sinhala and Tamil. Last checked: July 2011.]

Department of Education and Training, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development: <http://www.techedu.gov.lk/> [In English, Sinhala and Tamil. Last checked: July 2011.]

National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority: <http://www.naita.slt.lk/> [In English. Last checked: July 2011.]

National Education Commission: <http://www.nec.gov.lk/> [In English, Sinhala and Tamil. Last checked: July 2011.]

National Institute of Education: <http://www.nie.lk/index.html> [In English. Last checked: July 2011.]

Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission: <http://www.tvec.gov.lk/> [In English, Sinhala, and Tamil. Last checked: July 2011.]

University Grants Commission: <http://www.ugc.ac.lk/> [In English, Sinhala and Tamil. Last checked: July 2011.]

Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council of the University Grants Commission: <http://www.qaacouncil.lk/> [In English. Last checked: July 2011.]

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>