



# Cook Islands

*Updated version, June 2007.*

## **Principles and general objectives of education**

The goal of education is to build the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values of Cook Islands people to ensure sustainability of the language and culture of the Cook Islands and its economic growth, and to enable individuals to put their capabilities to best use in all areas of their lives, become valued members of the society, and adapt successfully to the modern, ever-changing world.

As a result, Cook Islands people will be empowered to fulfil their social and economic needs and aspirations by being prepared to compete successfully in the global economy and to prudently control their physical and cultural environment. The guiding principles of education are of partnership, equity, efficiency, relevancy and quality. These principles form the basis of education policy and are embedded in school practices. (Ministry of Education Five-year Plan, June 2002).

## **Current educational priorities and concerns**

The Cook Islands consist of fifteen islands scattered over some two million square kilometers of the Pacific Ocean and located south east of Samoa and south west of Tahiti. The capital, Avarua, is on Rarotonga, the most populated island with 67% of the total population. Geographically, the Cook Islands is divided into two groups of islands, the Northern Group and the Southern Group that includes Rarotonga. The scattered islands with small pockets of populations, and isolated from markets and trade opportunities makes the delivery of basic economic and social services very costly and a significant challenge. The Cook Islands is a self-governing nation in free association with New Zealand. Cook Islanders hold New Zealand citizenship and have unrestricted access to reside, study, work and draw social benefits in New Zealand. As a result of increase in government revenue and foreign funding assistance (Australia and New Zealand Agencies for International Development, European Union) since 2000, budgetary appropriations has increased for health and education sectors resulting in improvements in the quality of health and education facilities and services nationwide.

The Ministry of Education Five-year Plan (June 2002) was drafted following the Education Sector Review of June 2001. The Plan fixed ten new strategic directions for education: providing guidance to the sector; building the foundations for literacy and numeracy at the pre-school level; implement strategies for effective learning of literacy and numeracy; introduce new and improved secondary qualifications and increase retention rates of secondary education students; improve the qualifications of teachers; engaging parents and guardians in education; improve the administration, management and delivery of education; ensure more equity in the provision of educational services; include students with special needs; and make educational services more efficient for the benefit of students and consistent with the needs and the economic situation of the country.



A National Development Plan Forum held in November 2003 and subsequent forums identified eleven national strategic priority areas and four national development goals to address in the Twenty-year Vision and five-year medium-term National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP 2006-2010).

About 99% of all of the school age population attend school and 1% is reported not to have attended school at any level at all. After the age of 14 and up to 18 years of age, enrolment levels start to drop from 90% to 30%. Of national concern is the growing number of young adults and school leavers without formal educational qualification and lacking the necessary skills for the local job market. Recently, the government established several vocational and trade skills training programmes under the National Department of Human Resources Development and a Department of Youth to address pressing issues facing young people in the communities.

In 2002, the New Zealand National Certificate in Education Achievement (NCEA) has been introduced to focus education on standards based assessment. This allows students to study multi level without having to repeat subjects every year. The NCEA also gives students the opportunity to continue into trade/vocational training. In 2004 the final phase of standards based qualifications was implemented with NCEA Level 3 replacing Form VII University Entrance/Bursary. Since the introduction of this new system, retention rates have improved slightly with more students opting to stay in school longer to complete their schooling. A fifteen-year strategic plan is being developed for the Education and Human Resources Sector that will identify problems between the sectors and ways to address them.

To address the emerging decline in qualifications and trade skill levels amongst the youth and school leavers, the Government has established various tertiary vocational learning institutions and programmes locally. Post-secondary institutions such as the University of the South Pacific (USP) Centre in the Cook Islands, Hospitality and Tourism Training Centre (HTTC), Cook Islands Teachers Training College, Cook Islands Nursing School have provided local Cook Islanders opportunities to study and qualify with internationally recognized qualifications within their respective fields and professions. A national trade school is being established by the National Department of Human Resource Development to provide youth with opportunities in various trades, and including internships and apprenticeships training schemes in the private sector. Government agencies and private sector interests, with support from donor agencies, have been providing a range of accredited training programmes. These national vocational programmes provide courses and qualifications through accreditation schemes with New Zealand, Australia and regional tertiary education institutions.

It is envisaged that Information Communication Technology (ICT) will close the information gap between the outer islands and Rarotonga. As a development tool, it is useful and economical in the long run to utilize this method of service delivery to raise outer islands educational standards to be on par with that of Rarotonga schools. It should also empower administrators and students to excel in their roles, given the opportunity and readily access to information, supporting resources and services in Rarotonga. (Cook Islands Government, 2006).

## Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The legal framework for education in the Cook Islands is the **Education Act 1986-87**, amended in 2003 (Education Amendment Act No. 20). The Act establishes the Ministry of Education, defines its functions and delegates responsibility for these functions to the Secretary of Education. The Act delegates responsibility for policy matters to the Minister of Education.

The Act centralizes authority with the Minister, Secretary and Ministry. The Minister, with the concurrence of Cabinet, has the authority to establish and close schools. The Act legalizes the establishment of School Associations and Committees but restricts their activities to supporting schools and specifically prevents such organizations from interfering with the approved management of government schools.

The Act specifies criteria for suspensions, expulsions, corporal punishment, instructional times, teacher registration and compulsory attendance. Education is compulsory and from 5 years of age through to the end of the year in which a student turns 15.

Other areas that warrant consideration for legislation and regulation development are national administration guidelines, criteria for school registration, guidelines for assistance to private schools, and regulations for all levels of education.

## Administration and management of the education system

Education is administered by the **Ministry of Education (MOE)**. The Minister is responsible for education policy and the Secretary of Education is responsible to the Minister for the functions of the Ministry and administering the provisions of the Education Act. All staff members are directly or indirectly responsible to the Secretary for the operation of the education system including the provision of curricula, teachers and schools.

**School principals** are responsible to the Secretary of Education or the Secretary of Outer Island Development for the management of students, teachers, ancillary staff and resources and facilities. **School Committees** represent communities and support schools with maintenance and fund raising but have no control over government school management.

The **National Department of Human Resources Development** manages human resources development throughout the Cook Islands, including scholarships for Cook Islanders studying at overseas tertiary institutions, apprenticeships and in-country training.

The **University of the South Pacific (USP) Extension Centre**, Rarotonga, offers degree and non-degree learning opportunities, the majority being USP courses delivered by distance education.



The **Ministry of Transport and Tourism** is responsible for the Hospitality and Tourism Training Centre (HTTC). The **Ministry of Health** is responsible for the Nurses Training School at the Rarotonga Hospital.

## Structure and organization of the education system

### Pre-school education

The Education Act defines a pre-school child as a child between the ages of 3½ and 5 years attending a pre-school institute. The Act stipulates that attendance at any pre-school institute shall be voluntary.

### Primary education

The Education Act defines primary education as “grades 1 to 6 inclusive of those grades.” The Act stipulates that attendance at school shall be compulsory from the age of 5. Primary school pupils are expected to be aged from 5 to 10/11.

### Secondary education

The Education Act defines secondary education as “forms 1 to 7 inclusive of those grades.” Form I follows Grade VI and is equivalent to the seventh year of formal education. Each form represents one year of education except for Form V, which previously involved two years. In the lower fifth form year, students studied for their Cook Islands School Certificate. In the upper fifth form year, students studied for their New Zealand School Certificate. However, the more able students usually spent seven years at the secondary level, often by being promoted from Form III to the lower Form V. Secondary education currently comprises Forms I-IV and three years at the senior secondary level (SL1-SL3). Secondary school students are expected to be aged from 11 to 17/18.

Post-secondary programmes are offered by the Cook Islands Teachers Training College (primary teacher pre-service training), the Rarotonga Hospital (training for nurses), the Hospitality and Tourism Training Centre (short-term hospitality/tourism courses), and the University of the South Pacific Extension Centre (degree and non-degree level courses, distance mode).

The Education Act stipulates that pre-school institutions shall be kept open for not less than two hours a day and for not less than 200 days a year; primary schools shall be kept open for not less than four hours a day and for not less than 200 days a year; and secondary schools shall be kept open for not less than five hours a day and for not less than 200 days a year.

## The financing of education

The Government is the main source of education finance. The government annually appropriates funds for education to the Ministry of Education and other department. Appropriations are the result of an output bidding process by Government ministries. A total of 5.922 million New Zealand dollars (NZ\$) was originally allocated for



education in the 1997/98 appropriation. The gross estimate education budget totaled NZ\$8.216 million in 2004/05. The Ministry of Education bids for the following outputs (appropriations in brackets): (i) curriculum development (NZ\$483,917); (ii) recruitment and Teachers Training College (NZ\$425,491); (iii) learning programmes (NZ\$6.578 million); (iv) schools support (NZ\$374,165); (v) standards (NZ\$354,730).

There are six non-government schools in the Cook Islands. The degree of public financial support for these schools varies widely. The decision on the level of assistance from the Government is ultimately decided by the Secretary of Education and is very much influenced by constraints on the annual education budget. In 2003/04 the Ministry of Education was appropriated NZ\$771,890 for the payment of grants to private schools.

Increased investments in school resources and facilities were made in 2003/04 through the European Funded Outer Island Development Project, procurements under the New Zealand Agency for International Development School Resources Project, the NZAID Special Education Project, and a variety of private donors.

## The educational process

### Pre-primary education

Pre-school education aims to improve the quality of care and education experienced by children in early childhood settings. The goal is to assist the Cook Islands to achieve a stronger and better educated society through the development of a more effective and efficient early childhood education sector.

The main objectives related to pre-school education are as follows: improving the quality of early childhood education by developing and providing a variety of educational resources to support the new curriculum; increasing the number of trained teachers and providing in-service training assistance; improving early childhood quality by the provision of better information about ongoing development of the early childhood sector; improving education of pre-school children by promoting awareness amongst parents and in communities of the parent's role as the first educator of their children.

The new early childhood curriculum was drafted in June 2005, and it is based on a Cook Island Maori perspective. One of its purposes is to make available to the next generation the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are regarded as valuable in the local culture. The curriculum draws on the cultural heritage of children and acknowledges the differences in dialects and individual islands, and makes links with families and the wider community. Its starting point is the learner and the knowledge, skills and attitudes that the child brings to their experiences. The curriculum is specifically designed for children from birth to school entry, and provides links to learning in school settings. It emphasizes the critical role of social and cultural transmitted learning and of two way and responsive relationships for children with people, places and things. Children learn through working together with adults and peers, and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and reflection.



The curriculum is based on six principles, and the related strands and goals. Implications for adult responsibilities for management, organization, and practice in early childhood settings are set out for each strand. Each strand has associated goals, which in turn have specific learning outcomes. Examples of experiences that will help to meet the needs of, and achieve the necessary learning outcomes, for infants, toddlers and young children, are also suggested in this part. Supporting resources will provide further assistance in planning, evaluation, assessment, and implementation. The curriculum is designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children and anticipates that special needs will be met as children learn together in all kinds of early childhood settings. The programmes of each centre will incorporate strategies to fully include children with special needs.

The six principles are: (i) the indigenous language (*Te Reo Kuki Airani*), which is the means by which local values, traditions and customs are expressed and communicated; *Te Reo Kuki Airani* is the first language and will be the language spoken mainly at the early childhood level; (ii) values, customs and Traditions, and spiritual belief; (iii) holistic development; (iv) family and community; (v) empowerment; (vi) relationships. The strands arise from the principles. They provide more detailed descriptions of the ways in which the principles apply to the day-to-day planning and activities with the early childhood education setting. The strands are: (i) identity (children will know who they are and will develop a sense of belonging); (ii) involvement (children will have the opportunity to become involved, develop self-confidence, build relationships with their peers, and with adults other than their parents and family members); (iii) inquiry (children will be encouraged to increase their awareness of their environment, to inquire, to explore and to expand their understanding through active exploration of the environment); (iv) communication (the language and symbols of the local culture and other cultures are promoted and protected); (v) contribution (opportunities for learning are equitable, and each child's contribution is valued). (Ministry of Education, June 2005).

Evaluation is essentially diagnostic and is to measure individual progress against defined achievement objectives. Specific behavioural objectives in the cognitive, social, affective and psychomotor domains are defined and checklists used to produce a record of behaviour and a profile of individual achievement. The methods employed include learning centres, samples of children's work, informal non-written tests (i.e. specified tasks) and anecdotal records.

In March 2005 there were 473 children enrolled at the pre-school level (of whom 89 in non-government schools) with twenty-three teachers (seven in non-government schools).

## Primary education

The strategic objectives for primary education are as follows: to provide qualifications which are nationally and internationally recognized; to ensure that all Cook Islanders are educated to their potential; to ensure that every Cook Islander has access to quality education and training; to develop an education and training system that operates to a high level of efficiency and effectiveness; to have Cook Islanders view education as a lifelong experience; to contribute, through education and training, to the development of an appropriate range of skills, knowledge and attitudes in the Cook Islands.



The Education Act provides for the establishment of legally binding regulations for curriculum requirements. The draft regulations of 1998 stated that primary schools provide formal instruction in: *Te Reo Kuki Airani* (Cook Islands local Maori language); English language; mathematics; science/technology; social science; arts (music, art, crafts, singing, dancing, culture); health education; physical well-being (includes physical education and health).

The total minimum instructional time for primary schools is 1,200 minutes (twenty hours) per week. The minimum instructional time per week allocated to individual subjects in each grade according to the draft regulations of 1998 is shown in the table below:

**Primary education: weekly lesson timetable**

Subject	Weekly time allocated to each subject (in minutes)					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Maori	480	420	380	340	110	110
English	120	180	250	340	460	460
Mathematics	150	150	200	250	250	250
Science/Technology	60	60	90	90	90	90
Social sciences	60	60	90	90	90	90
Health	30	30	30	30	40	40
Physical well-being	150	150	100	100	100	100
The Arts	150	150	60	60	60	60
<b>Total weekly time</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>1,200</b>

*Source:* Ministry of Education, *Pre-school and primary school regulations 1998*. Draft, February 1998.

The new Curriculum Framework was finalized in July 2002. It applies to all government and private schools, all students regardless of gender, ethnic group, religion, location, background, ability or disability, and it covers all years of schooling, from early childhood to the completion of secondary school. It consists of a set of national curriculum statements, which set out the principles, achievement aims, and objectives that all schools in the Cook Islands are required to follow. The school curriculum consists of the ways in which the school plans to implement the policy set out in the national curriculum statements. It must take into account students' needs, the local community's aspirations, and resources, and must be developed in consultation with the parents and the community.

The new Curriculum Framework identifies eight essential areas of learning and sets out the essential skills to be developed by all students. The essential areas of learning are: languages; mathematics; social sciences (including history); science (including biology); technology; the arts; enterprise (including economics); health and physical well-being. The school curriculum will promote the use of Cook Islands Maori and English languages for transmission of knowledge, values and culture, and for creating and fostering understanding of self, of others and of the world around us. It will provide students with the opportunity to be proficient and confident in communicating in Cook Islands Maori and English in a variety of situations. The school will use a bilingual approach that is responsive to the language profiles and learning needs of the students, and that will promote *biliteracy*.



The essential learning areas together form the body of knowledge and understanding that all students need to acquire, and provide the context within which the essential skills, attitudes and values are developed. Individual Curriculum Statements will guide learning and teaching in each of the eight essential learning areas and the skills, attitudes and values appropriate to each learning area. Schools are to ensure that all students undertake courses of study in all the learning areas during the first ten years of schooling (that is, up to Form 4 or Year 10). Thereafter, schools are to maintain a balanced curriculum, while providing for the pursuit of courses for a range of qualifications, in preparation for future training and career pathways for students. Form 5 (Year 11) students will be required to undertake study in a minimum number of subjects, including designated core subjects. At Form 6 and Form 7 (Years 12 & 13), students will be offered a choice of courses that will lead them to further study, or to employment and training opportunities.

The eight groupings of essential skills are: communication (including literacy) skills; numeracy skills; artistic and creative skills; self-management, work and study skills; physical skills; social and co-operative skills; information skills; and problem-solving skills. The eight categories represent the full range of skills that are considered essential to enable students to achieve their potential and to participate fully in society, both within the Cook Islands and outside of it. They also reflect and respond to the call from parents, the community, the workplace and other stakeholders for schools to produce fine, responsible, able young people capable of meeting the demands of the modern world, with a strong sense of who they are, where they have come from, and where they want to be. The categories are simply convenient ways of grouping and labelling the skills that students will develop. They are not linked to any particular essential learning area or subject, but will be developed through the essential learning areas and in different contexts across the curriculum. Teachers must plan learning programmes that provide students with opportunities to develop the whole range of essential skills at levels appropriate to their stage of learning and development, and in ways that make them meaningful and relevant. Students will develop the range of essential skills to the best of their ability in different contexts within the various curriculum areas through group and individual activities, classroom-based programmes, and activities outside the classroom or school. (Ministry of Education, July 2002).

Standardized tests of achievement are sat by all pupils in Maori language at Grade V and in English language at Grade VI. A national examination is sat by all Grade VI pupils in Maori, health, social science, English and mathematics.

Pupils are assessed against achievement objectives for which there are descriptors and the criteria for four levels of achievement: pre-competent, gaining competency, competent and quality achievement. The primary school records system is evolving so that it is to be based on subject profiles reflecting standards achieved by students rather than on comparisons between students.

In March 2005 there were 2,201 pupils enrolled at the primary level (of whom 440 in non-government schools) with 137 teachers, of whom twenty-six in non-government schools.



## Secondary education

The goals and strategic objectives of secondary education are the same as those stated for primary education.

Draft regulations state that secondary schools are to provide formal instruction in all compulsory subjects and one or more optional subjects as stated below. Principals may stipulate certain optional subjects to be regarded as compulsory subjects for their school. However they cannot deem any compulsory subject to be regarded as voluntary. The minimum time allocation in minutes per week in Forms I-IV according to the draft regulation of 1998 is shown below:

### Secondary education (Forms I-IV): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Weekly time allocated to each subject (in minutes)			
	I	II	III	IV
<i>Compulsory subjects:</i>				
English language	180	180	180	180
Integrated commercial studies	120	120	120	120
Cook Islands Maori cultural studies	180	180	180	180
Mathematics	180	180	180	180
Science	120	120	150	150
Social sciences	150	150	150	150
Physical education	120	120	120	120
<i>Elective subjects:</i>				
Accounting	120	120	120	120
Home economics	120	120	120	120
Agriculture	120	120	120	120
Technical drawing	120	120	120	120
Art	120	120	120	120
Typewriting	120	120	120	120
Clothing	120	120	120	120
Woodwork	120	120	120	120
Computer science	120	120	120	120
Home science	120	120	120	120
Engineering	120	120	120	120
<b>Total prescribed weekly time (min.)</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>1,200</b>

Source: Secondary school regulations 1998. Draft, February 1998.



## Forms I-IV

Compulsory subjects	Optional subjects	
English language (180)	Accounting	Home economics
Integrated commercial studies (120)	Agriculture	Technical drawing
Cook Islands Maori cultural studies (180)	Art	Typewriting
Mathematics (180)	Clothing	Woodwork
Science (FI-II : 120, FIII-IV: 150)	Computing	Home science
Social science (150)	Engineering	
Physical education (120)	(120 minutes for all options)	

## Form V (lower fifth form)

Compulsory subjects:		
English, Cook Islands Maori cultural studies		
Optional subjects:		
Accounting	Clothing	Mathematics
Agriculture	Technical Drawing	Science
Art	Typewriting	Social Science
Clothing	Woodwork	Physical Education
Engineering		

The minimum instructional time for all subjects is 150 minutes per week except physical education, which is ninety minutes (*Secondary school regulations 1998*. Draft, February 1998).

## Form V (upper fifth form)

Compulsory subjects:		
English		
Optional subjects:		
Mathematics	Science	Geography
History	Accounting	Economics
Human biology	Typing	Workshop technology
Art	Home economics	<i>Te Reo Maori</i> (New Zealand)



Upper fifth form students must be following a programme totalling a minimum of 1,200 minutes per week of full-time secondary school study to be considered a candidate for the New Zealand School Certificate qualification.

#### *Form VI*

<b>Compulsory subjects:</b>			
English			
<b>Optional subjects:</b>			
Biology	Chemistry	Physics	Mathematics
Accounting	Economics	History	Geography
Typing	Computer studies	Journalism	Workshop technology

For all subjects a minimum of 240 minutes per week of instruction is required to qualify as a candidate for the award of the New Zealand Sixth Form Certificate.

#### *Form VII*

##### **All optional subjects:**

Biology	Chemistry	Physics	Mathematics-statistics
Accounting	Economics	History	Mathematics-calculus
Geography	English		

Secondary students at all levels are able to enrol in correspondence courses from the New Zealand Correspondence School in subject areas that are not being offered at their particular school. In 2003 there were 191 students enrolled in 487 New Zealand Correspondence School courses.

The total minimum instructional time for Cook Islands secondary schools is 1,500 minutes per week. The minimum instructional time for individual subjects, in minutes per week, are in the previous section on curriculum elements. New Zealand qualifications generally require a minimum of 1,200 minutes of full-time study and a minimum of 240 minutes per week for individual subjects.

Achievement-based assessment has been introduced with students being assessed against achievement objectives for which there are descriptors and the criteria for different levels of achievement.

Traditionally, lower fifth form students enrolled for Cook Islands School Certificate. Assessment in each subject generally included combining marks from internal assessment with marks from a traditional exam paper. Upper fifth form level students enrolled for the New Zealand School Certificate. Assessment in most subjects involved a single end-of-year exam. Sixth form certificate students enrolled for New Zealand Sixth Form Certificate. Seventh form students enrolled for New



Zealand Higher School Certificate and New Zealand University Entrance, Bursaries and Scholarships awards. These generally involved end-of-year examinations with marks being scaled for inter-subject moderation.

In 2002, the New Zealand National Certificate in Education Achievement (NCEA) has been introduced to focus education on standards based assessment. This allows students to study multi level without having to repeat subjects every year. The NCEA also gives students the opportunity to continue into trade/vocational training. In 2004 the final phase of standards based qualifications was implemented with NCEA Level 3 replacing Form VII University Entrance/Bursary.

In March 2005 there were 1,899 students enrolled at the secondary level (of whom 257 in non-government schools) with 122 teachers, of whom fifteen in non-government schools.

### Assessing learning achievement nation-wide

Grade IV diagnostic tests were introduced in 1999. Pupils are tested in English, Maori and mathematics. The Maori and mathematics tests were translated into seven island dialects including *Pukapukan*. Pupils sat the Maori test in their local island dialect and elected to sit the mathematics test in either English or the local island dialect. The Maori and English tests comprised listening (5 marks), reading (5), writing (5) and dictation (4). The mathematics test comprised calculations (10 marks), numbers (4), measurement (3), algebra (2), geometry (5) and statistics (1). Marks for each subject were converted to a 5-point scale (achievement levels 1–5). Achievement levels 1–2 are considered to be below the minimum standard of basic competency in the subject concerned. Achievement levels 3–5 are deemed to be above the minimum standard and levels 4–5 are deemed to be a high standard of basic competency.

#### Grade IV pupils who achieve the minimum standards in basic learning competencies (1999)

	Maori	English	Mathematics
Northern Group	84%	35%	48%
Southern Group	78%	53%	73%
Rarotonga	63%	82%	76%
National average	71%	66%	72%

Source: Ministry of Education, 1999.

### Grade IV pupils who achieve high standards in basic learning competencies (1999)

	Maori	English	Mathematics
Northern Group	49%	8%	4%
Southern Group	36%	25%	37%
Rarotonga	25%	54%	46%
National average	32%	38%	39%

Source: Ministry of Education, 1999.

Competency in Maori is directly related to isolation from Rarotonga. The more isolated Northern Group islands have the highest percentage of pupils attaining minimum standards in Maori as well the highest percentage of pupils attaining high standards in Maori. Achievement of Southern Group pupils, although not as high as Northern Group students, is nevertheless significantly higher than the achievement of pupils in Rarotonga. Over a third of Rarotonga pupils fail to reach the minimum standard of competence in Maori. The low level of achievement in Maori in Rarotonga is generally attributed to parents and teachers assigning priority to English as the main language required for higher education and professions. The reverse trend is true for competency in English, which is strongest in Rarotonga, weaker in the Southern Group and weakest in the Northern Group where only one third of pupils achieve the minimum standard of competence. In the outer islands Maori is the dominant language. Mathematics also follows a similar trend to English although the gap between Rarotonga and the Southern Group is not so pronounced.

All students sit Standardized Tests of Achievement-Cook Islands (STACI) papers from Grade V to Form I. The subjects are Cook Islands Maori (Rarotongan dialect) in Grade V, English in Grade VI and mathematics in Form I. The purpose of the tests is both diagnostic and to monitor national standards and standards within each school. English and Maori tests assess reading comprehension, listening comprehension, vocabulary and grammar. The standard of English and mathematics is highest on Rarotonga, less in the Southern Group and lowest in the Northern Group.

All Grade VI pupils sit exams in: Maori; Health (in Maori); Social science (in English); English; Mathematics (in English). Pupils are ranked in each subject and in overall marks, and public recognition is accorded to high achieving pupils and their schools. The tests are not standardized; therefore annual trends cannot be determined.

In 2003, 349 Grade VI pupils were tested in Maori, English and Mathematics. 22% of the students are at risk in language, higher than in 2002 (19%) but less than in 2001 (32%) and 2000 (32%). 36% of the students are at risk in mathematics, higher than in 2002 (29%) but less than in 2001 (38%) and 2000 (45%). In 2004, 331 Grade IV pupils were tested in Maori, English and Mathematics. Students at risk in language have decreased from 24% in 2000 to 14% in 2004 while at risk students in Mathematics have decreased from 36% to 25%.



## Higher education

In the Cook Islands there are the following tertiary-level institutions:

*Cook Islands Teachers Training College.* Eleven primary teacher trainees graduated in 1996. The College employed one full-time principal, four part-time lecturers and three full-time ancillary staff. The College was closed in 1997 but opened again in 1998 with an intake of fifteen trainees enrolled in a two-year primary training course.

*Rarotonga Hospital Nurses Training School.* The nurses training school reopened in 1997 with twelve trainees, two tutors and one office staff. The training course is three years in duration.

*Hospitality and Tourism Training Centre.* The number of trainees in the 1997/98 financial year was estimated at 400-500. In previous years enrolment was estimated at 800 per annum and has exceeded 1,000 in one year. One reason for the decline may be that the Centre has succeeded in meeting the basic level training needs of the majority of hospitality workers.

*The University of the South Pacific (USP) Extension Centre.* Enrolment in one or more USP degree or pre-degree level course in the second half of the 1990s was as follows: 1996: 360; 1997: 222; 1998: 221. Data refer to the number of students enrolled in the first semester plus the number enrolled in the second semester in each year. Staff included: three full-time administrators/tutors; five part-time tutors; three ancillary staff.

Scholarships to overseas universities are also offered.

## Special education

The strategy is to provide special needs students initially with a special programme of education followed by the students being gradually phased into the mainstream education system.

Rarotonga school-age pupils may enrol at the *Te Apii Apiianga Po-roro* (special education class) located at Avarua School. As pupils develop their knowledge, skills and confidence, they are progressively phased into the mainstream classes. In 1997 there were fifteen special education needs pupils (twelve in 1998).

The *Ngaei Tou* Memorial Centre was operated by the Disabled Persons Society and catered to pre-school and adult special needs people. In 1996 the centre catered to six school-attending preschoolers, six home-based preschoolers and ten adults.



## Private education

The Education Act 1986-87 specifies the registration of private schools. It specifies that the Minister of Education, with the concurrence of the Cabinet, may register any private school which makes an application provided that he/she is satisfied that the school meets the criteria set out in regulations and that he/she is satisfied that the school would fulfil an existing need in the Cook Islands. Regulations specifying the criteria for registration are yet to be established.

In 1997 there were thirty-seven schools in the Cook Islands: twenty-nine government-run, six operated by Churches and two private (neither owned nor operated by a religious organization). The Catholic Church operated three schools, the Seventh Day Adventist two schools, the Assembly of God Church one school, and two schools located in Rarotonga were operated by secular community groups. Non-government schools enrolled 755 students (15% of total enrolment). Church schools enrolled 611 students (12% of total enrolment) and secular private schools 144 students (3%). All private schools have access to curriculum advice and teacher development courses provided by the Ministry of Education. The Government pays the salaries of some teachers in all private schools except for the Assembly of God Church school and one secular private school. Except for the inclusion of religious studies in church schools, all private schools except one comply with the Cook Islands Curriculum as instructed by the Ministry of Education. The only exception is Imanuela Akademia School operated by the Assembly of God Church which delivers the Accelerated Christian Education programme. Schools are audited by the Ministry's Directorate of Audit and Quality Assurance for compliance with the Ministry's requirements. The Secretary of Education may approve the operation of existing private schools but only the Minister, with the concurrence of the Cabinet, can revoke the registration of a private school if it fails to comply with the Education Act and its regulations.

In March 2005 there were thirty-three schools, of which twenty-five operated by the government. There were 603 students with 36 teachers in schools operated by Churches (the pupil/teacher ration was 1:17), and 183 students with 12 teachers in the two private schools (the pupil/teacher ration was 1:15). (Ministry of Education, 2005).

## Means of instruction, equipment and infrastructure

All instruction is by single shift although double shifts have been raised as a possibility for consideration regarding pre-school education.

There has been a long-term shortage of instructional materials at all levels of education but this has been rectified through the Education Development Project, funded by a loan from the Asian Development Bank. In 1998 there were seventy computers in Cook Islands schools. This approximates to seventy students per computer. Of the thirty-six schools in 1998, thirteen (36%) had at least one computer. A total of sixty-nine computers were in schools with secondary students resulting in a ratio of twenty-six students per computer. A total of twenty-seven computers were in schools with primary pupils resulting in a ratio of 100 pupils per computer. Tereora



College had twenty-three computers (18 students per computer) and provided formal courses in computer studies up to Form VI.

In March 2005 there were thirty-three schools in the Cook Islands, of which fourteen in Rarotonga, eleven in the Southern Group, and eight in the Northern Group. Most of the schools enrol a combination of pre-school, primary and secondary education students. The total number of classroom was 293 (excluding specialist rooms; 164 classrooms were in good conditions and the others needed maintenance) and the total number of computers was 264. There were also fifteen science laboratories (of which seven in good conditions) and thirteen workshops (six in good conditions). (Ministry of Education, 2005).

## **Adult and non-formal education**

Non-formal educational opportunities are provided by various non-government agencies. No data is available on types of programmes and numbers of participants. There is no data on illiteracy rates but senior Ministry personnel expect the rate to be less than 10%.

## **Teaching staff**

The Education Act specifies that all teachers must be registered. This requires a teacher to hold a teacher's certificate issued in the Cook Islands, New Zealand, Australia or other country considered by the Secretary to have a comparable teachers' certificate. Conditional registration may be granted to those who have completed an initial course of teacher training or are holders of a relevant university degree or diploma. Other than being registered as a teacher there are no official criteria for teaching at pre-school, primary or secondary level.

At least 80% of teachers are expected to participate in in-service training. Participation is not officially sanctioned as being compulsory. However, it is generally accepted that a teacher selected by principals and/or Ministry officials to attend a specified course should attend unless there are special circumstances preventing such attendance. Opportunities are available for in-service training for the vast majority of teachers. Principals and senior teachers are required to provide professional support for their staff and all schools have ready access to the Ministry's Curriculum Advisers and Professional Development Facilitators.

In March 2005 there were 282 teachers (including principals and senior teachers); 234 (of whom 230 certified) were in government schools and 48 (of whom 31 certified) were in non-government schools. A total of 58 teachers were degree holders. Seventy-five percent of teachers were women and 84% of teachers were from Cook Islands. A total of 165 teachers were in the island of Rarotonga. (Ministry of Education, 2005).

The Education Act specifies only the minimum hours of instruction for each level of education. These equate to a minimum of: pre-school, ten hours per week; primary, twenty hours per week; secondary, twenty-five hours per week. In reality, teachers are usually expected to be at their institutions for: pre-school, fifteen to



twenty hours per week; primary, twenty-five to thirty hours per week; secondary, thirty to thirty-five hours per week.

Phase I of a new teachers' salary scale was implemented in February 1998. The salary scale has four divisions: Q1 (<1/3 of a university degree), Q2 (>1/3 and < 2/3 of a university degree), Q3 (>2/3 and < a complete university degree), and Q4 (completed university degree). Step I is the first year of teaching after graduation from the Teacher College. After one year of satisfactory performance on one step a teacher will move onto the next step. Step VIII is a salary bar and only those teachers which demonstrate exceptional performance will proceed past this bar.

In addition to the basic salary there are allowances for positions of responsibility generally ranging from NZ\$500 up to NZ\$10,000 for the principal of the largest school. Phase I has generally resulted in the implementation of Steps I and II of the salary scale. In June 1998, the average salary (including allowances) for teachers was NZ\$14,692, an increase of NZ\$2,784 (+23%) compared to March 1997.

The majority of teachers are members of the New Zealand Government Superannuation scheme contributing 6.5% of their salary with the Ministry of Education paying the employer's contribution of 7.7%. The scheme is no longer available to new recruits. The new salary scale includes incentives for continued study at university level, satisfactory and exceptional performance, and taking on positions of responsibility. Extra allowances may be payable to attract teachers to outer island schools.

Professional development for principals includes monthly articles on school management published in the Education Gazette, annual visits from Audit and Quality Assurance staff and in-service courses conducted in Rarotonga. All senior Ministry staff attend, on average, at least one formal training course or seminar each year. Middle-level staff have formal training opportunities, on average, approximately once every two years. Formal training opportunities are rare for junior staff. Overseas courses are usually sponsored by international co-operation agencies (New Zealand and Australia) and international organizations (UNESCO, Asian Development Bank).

## **Educational research and information**

The Ministry of Education's Directorate of Planning and Finance has the responsibility for managing research, the Educational Management Information System (EMIS), statistics and the dissemination of educational information. There is no known private funding for educational research.

Research is mainly focused on gathering and interpreting data on enrolment, teachers, facilities and student achievement. Most of the data is disseminated through an annual Education Statistics Digest which is sent free of charge to all schools, Ministry of Education senior managers and to selected government departments and non-governmental organizations.



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## Web resources

Ministry of Education: <http://www.education.gov.ck/> [In English and Maori. Last checked: October 2007.]

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