



# Lesotho

*Updated version, September 2006.*

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

The broad goals and policies of the education system in Lesotho are as follows: (a) everyone should be provided the opportunity to develop competencies necessary for personal growth and social life through the provision of universal primary education; (b) a sufficient number of individuals should be provided with appropriate occupational, technical and managerial skills to enable them to participate in the country's socio-economic development; (c) opportunities for continuing education should be provided through non-formal programmes in literacy and numeracy and basic skills, agriculture, community development and vocational training programmes, and in-service training in industry, government and organizations; (d) educational programmes should incorporate cultural values and activities that enhance individual and social development; in particular, the role of the family and communities in school activities should be enhanced; and (e) there should be an active, co-operative partnership in education administration and management and provision of education services between and among the churches, the government, the community and other non-governmental organizations.

## **Current educational priorities and concerns**

The provision and management of education in Lesotho is characterized by a strong partnership between the government and the churches. School ownership and control has remained largely in the hands of the churches, with the government giving direction and financial support—mainly for payment of teachers salaries. In this context, education is widely regarded as a joint responsibility shared by the government, the churches and the community.

This partnership, however, has for many years suffered from lack of clarification of the respective roles and ambiguity over areas of responsibility and accountability. The result has been parallel management structures, with consequent ambiguity at the school level with regard to accountability. With local-level school management in the hands of managers appointed by the churches and not accountable to the Ministry of Education (MOE, today the Ministry of Education and Training), the task of enforcing Ministry regulations and policies at school level has proved a difficult one. Furthermore, teachers have been unclear as to whether their employer was the church or the government.

These weaknesses are being addressed through a comprehensive review of existing laws and regulations to specify more clearly the respective responsibilities of the MOE and the churches. The revised legislation provides for the strengthening and improvement of the partnership between the government and the churches through the establishment of an executive and autonomous Teaching Service Commission whose membership reflects the government-church partnership. The Commission is responsible for the appointment of teachers and the overall management and



administration of the Teaching Service. The authority of the Ministry at the school level is improved by strengthening the role of headteachers and ensuring the representation of teachers on the management committees. The interests of the churches are safeguarded by ensuring their representation in policy-making bodies of the Ministry. The inspectorate has been strengthened and decentralized to the districts to ensure that schools are inspected more regularly and effectively. The major role of the district offices is to provide support for schools, in the form of administrative assistance and professional guidance. The relationship between the individual school and the local inspectorate will thus develop along supportive lines.

Poor quality of primary education in Lesotho is a matter of concern and has multiple causes. The unfavourable learning environment is strongly related to severe overcrowding, especially in the lower primary standards. This situation is, in turn, caused by severe shortages of teachers and classrooms and high repetition rates. While, on average, a primary school teacher handled 48 pupils in 1980, that ratio has now risen to 55, significantly higher than the 1:40 ratio fixed by the MOE to provide a manageable learning environment. The actual teacher-pupil ratio is even higher than 1:55 in Standards I-III, where rates of wastage (drop-out and repetition) are highest, and where the least qualified teachers tend to be assigned. The situation is even worse with regard to the pupil-classroom ratio, with the average number of students sharing a classroom exceeding 67. If the 860 church halls serving as classrooms are excluded, the pupil-classroom ratio increases to over 100:1. The problem is, once again, particularly acute in lower primary, where several hundred pupils commonly receive instruction from two or more teachers in a single room, leading to problems of concentration and discipline. Overcrowding is also connected with high rates of repetition, with about 22% of pupils being held back each year.

In addition to overcrowding, primary education suffers from problems of teacher quality associated with the absence of regular in-service training opportunities for teachers; poor supervision by (frequently) inexperienced headteachers; inadequate inspection support; and a still high proportion (about 20%) of uncertified teachers. Shortages of furniture and learning materials are another major constraint. According to a recent MOE survey, 43% of primary school pupils have no furniture, while many others have chairs or benches, but no desks upon which to write. With regard to learning materials the MOE, through a national book loan scheme, has made impressive progress in providing basic textbooks—an average of 4.4 books per primary pupil—but shortages of supplementary materials such as teachers guides and pupils workbooks are apparent. Moreover, some schools lack a sufficient amount of textbooks because of snags in the distribution system. Finally, there is a need to introduce a system of continuous assessment to provide diagnostic information on pupils learning achievement to guide remedial work, contribute to promotion decisions and measure the quality of instruction across classes and schools. These factors, together with overcrowding and school wastage, have seriously undermined the internal efficiency of primary education in Lesotho, so that, at present, it requires an average of fourteen years of investment for each pupil completing the seven-year primary cycle.

There is widespread concern among educators, parents and MOE officials that the quality of secondary education has been declining. Indeed, Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) results indicate that only about one-fourth of students pass



the examination. The problem is partly the result of poor preparation in primary school; a “cascading” effect occurs, with a negative impact on secondary and post-secondary education. Several other factors also affect the quality of secondary schooling. A major constraint is the persistently high proportion of uncertified teachers, coupled with the fact that many qualified teachers are foreign nationals with a relatively high turnover rate. In addition, many schools are affected by a lack of special facilities (such as libraries and laboratories) which could help enrich the quality of secondary education. Finally, the absence of an effective inspectorate to provide guidance to schools has had negative consequences for educational quality. The recently established Department of Secondary Education for school inspection, among other responsibilities, should ensure that schools are inspected more regularly and effectively.

While recognizing that some quality improvements necessary at the secondary level will require additional resources, the Government is becoming increasingly concerned about the inefficient use of available resources. Unit costs have been rising substantially in recent years, mainly because teacher-student ratios have fallen to 1:21 (1990). However, education specialists agree that the ratio could be raised to 1:30 without any loss in the quality of instruction. This inefficiency has taken place because a large number of small secondary schools were built during the 1980s (mainly by church mission groups), many of which have quite small enrolments.

Nearly 90% of junior secondary schools (Forms I-III) and about 60% of high schools (Forms I-V) have fewer students than the minimum set by the MOE. In the former case, fewer than 200 and in the latter, less than 400 students. While a few of these schools are in sparsely populated mountain areas and are, thus, necessarily smaller, most are in lowland towns where several schools are in close proximity to each other. As a result, the limited student population residing in overlapping service areas is dispersed throughout the various schools. The use of resources in many secondary schools could also be improved by increasing the management skills of headmasters/headmistresses.

Despite the presence of a generally well-trained staff and adequate physical facilities—except in a few areas, such as science laboratories—academic quality at the National University of Lesotho (NUL) suffers from a number of drawbacks. One key drawback is the structure of the academic system, which is termed the “unit course” system. Although designed with good intentions to combine the best elements of the British and American systems, it has become increasingly complex and fragmented, making it very difficult for students to follow a well-structured, coherent progression of studies. Moreover, opportunities for tutorial work and exposure to practical situations are extremely limited, in part because the complex requirements of the unit course system excessively absorb faculty time with record-keeping and paperwork. Another factor which affects the quality of education is the large proportion of faculty time devoted to committee work, rather than teaching or research. This is due to the existence of an inordinately large number of committees (twenty-two) and the fact that faculty are rewarded for participation in committees while research, until recently, was not explicitly recognized. Lack of funds for library books, journals and research activities is also a major problem affecting academic quality, as is the failure to reap teaching quality benefits from encouraging regular interaction between the four research institutes and relevant faculty departments.



Apart from issues concerning academic quality, there is also widespread concern about the adequacy of NUL's government and management system, under which the authority of the Council and the senior management cadre is seriously limited, *inter alia*, by excessive devolution of decision-making authority to faculty committees in the Senate. Moreover, the Senate itself and many of its committees are unnecessarily large, making it difficult to reach consensus and implement decisions on both academic and non-academic activities. No comprehensive management information system exists which could help inform policy and administrative decision-making on a regular basis. Moreover, there is a need to integrate academic planning, staff development and more general university development activity to ensure coherence in the aims and implementation of these functions.

With regard to university revenue and expenditure, the most pressing need is to continue to review and implement options for containing costs in non-teaching areas, which account for over half of NUL's annual expenditures. Specific areas where further action is indicated include energy conservation; in-house services, such as the laundry and garage; reducing numbers of grounds and maintenance staff; and subsidies provided to university employees, including housing subsidies and community and education allowances. Encouraging NUL's research institutes to generate a greater proportion of their operating costs from sources external to the university budget could also have a substantial impact on university finances. With regard to generating additional revenue, the Government has given consideration to the option of raising student fees to cover a higher proportion of operating costs. However, given the small size of the student body (about 1,200 full-time students) and the fact that the majority of students receive government loans to cover tuition, board and lodging costs, it was concluded that the net effect of increased fees on government allocations was likely to be relatively small, besides being politically very difficult to implement. In this context, the government is focusing its attention on enforcing repayment of student loans, for which the recovery rate is presently under 10%. The principal option being considered is to transfer the administration of the student loan funds to commercial banks, which are better equipped to enforce repayment.

The Education Sector Development Plan (1991-1996) implemented by the MOE focused on:

- improving the quality and efficiency of the education sector with emphasis on primary education;
- expanding and improving technical and vocational education;
- addressing the key institutional, management, personnel, financing and resource allocation issues which constrain the overall performance of the sector.

In 2000 the process for Lesotho *Vision 2020* was started. The main objectives for the process were to identify successes and failures of development strategies, to find common ground among all Basotho for the development of a long-term vision and to lay this down in a visionary plan. A three-day dialogue took place early 2001, which focused at analysing the current situation, formulating a Vision and Strategy



and identifying the way forward. The agreed Vision Statement was: “By 2020, Lesotho shall be a stable democracy, united prosperous nation at peace with itself and its neighbours. It shall have a healthy and well-developed human resource base. Its economy will be strong, its environment well managed and its technology well established.”

The government envisages the provision of an equitable basic education to all of the population as a key development goal, at the same time as ensuring acceptable standards of quality. Basic education is regarded as an integral component of social and economic development and as a fundamental human right. It is also seen as an essential pre-condition for mid-level employment and secondary and post-secondary education and training, which will create the practical skills that, will facilitate rapid integration of the population into society, particularly into the employment market. Within the framework of the most recent Education Sector Strategic Plan, key policy goals and objectives have been set and can be summarized as follows:

- Universalisation of early childhood care and development (ECCD)
- Achievement of universalisation and equity in access to ten years of basic education, particularly for girls and other disadvantaged groups
- Increase in the number of children completing ten years of education
- The preparation of Basuto boys and girls for mid-level employment in the private and public sector through secondary education, technical and vocational training and life-long learning
- The creation of the very best opportunities for higher education within Lesotho
- Review of the curriculum across the sector in order to make it more relevant and practical
- Review of assessment practices and student performance standards across the sector
- Re-designing and expansion of pre and in-service training and professional development opportunities for teachers
- Improvement in the quality of instruction by focusing more on learner-centred teaching methodologies
- Rehabilitation and equipment of facilities including libraries and laboratories

## Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The **Education Act** of 1971 was the principal law governing education in Lesotho. Several amendments have been approved between 1971 and 1992. The **Education Act No.10** of 1995, amended in 1996, was enacted to regulate provision of early learning, primary and secondary education. This Act is under review to ensure that it addresses issues of Education for All, Convention on the Rights of a Child, the Millennium Development Goals, the Constitutional provision of free and compulsory education and the *National Vision 2020* aimed at eradicating poverty through the provision of basic education for all. The envisaged review will also regulate and set standards for early learning education. It will also further entrench participation by civil society in the management of education at school and district level by devolving more powers to local level management structures.

The **Technical and Vocational Training Act** of 1984 regulates technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes. Whereas under this Act,





TVET is the responsibility of the Minister of Education and Training (MOET) acting on the advice of the Technical and Vocational Training Advisory Board, the law is also under review to provide for greater participation of the private sector in skills development and in enhancing; enhance greater correlation between training programmes and the labour market and put in place governance and management structures that are appropriate to a demand-led system and above all, enable the system to respond quickly to the needs of the economy. The Department of Technical and Vocational Training of the MOET is the policy-implementing arm of the Board, and the nerve-centre of the TVET system.

In 2002, the MOET promulgated the **Teaching Service Regulations** which guide teacher management and support, asserting the provisions of the Education Act and Teachers' Pensions Act.

The **Higher Education Act** enacted in 2004 regulates provision of higher education in a new context where there are public and private providers. This Act seeks to: (i) regulate higher education through the establishment and registration of both public and private institutions; (ii) establish a Council on Higher Education, whose main functions are accreditation and quality assurance of higher education institutions; and (iii) provide guidelines on governance and funding of public institutions in the sub sector. Two public institutions of higher learning, e.g. the Lerotholi Polytechnic and the Lesotho College of Education (formerly the National Teacher Training College), to which provision of autonomy was legislated in 1997, were granted this status effective from 2002. This move was aimed at enhancing the professional effectiveness of these institutions with greater academic freedom and a degree of self-determination in human and financial resource management.

In Lesotho currently there are no legal provisions concerning compulsory education. Nevertheless, according to the **Constitution** (1992), "Lesotho shall endeavour to make education available to all and shall adopt policies aimed at securing that: (a) education is directed to the full development of the human personality and sense of dignity and strengthening the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; (b) primary education is compulsory and available to all; (c) secondary education, including technical and vocational education, is made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular, by the progressive introduction of free education; (d) higher education is made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular, by the progressive introduction of free education; and (e) fundamental education is encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed their primary education." (Article 28).

The introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2000 necessitated a review the teaching strategies that are mainly teacher-centre and emphasize knowledge over skills.



## Administration and management of the education system

As mentioned, the provision and management of education is characterized by a strong partnership between the government and the churches. The churches own and operate over 90% of the schools. The government pays the salaries of more than 95% of the teachers. In addition, the government provides school facilities through its capital budget. The government, through the **Ministry of Education and Training** (formerly, the Ministry of Education), is responsible for the management, provision and regulation of education and training in the country.

The immediate responsibility for the appointment, transfer and discipline of teachers usually has been vested in the school manager who is a representative of the proprietor. However, the legislation now provides for the appointment, transfer and discipline of teachers by a **Teaching Service Commission** composed by representatives of the government and the churches. The community is represented through advisory **School Committees** and School Management Committees, whose role is to advise the school proprietors in the administration and management of schools.

The Ministry of Education is decentralized at the district level through the **Inspectorate**. The major role of the **District Offices** is to provide support for schools in the form of administrative assistance and professional guidance.

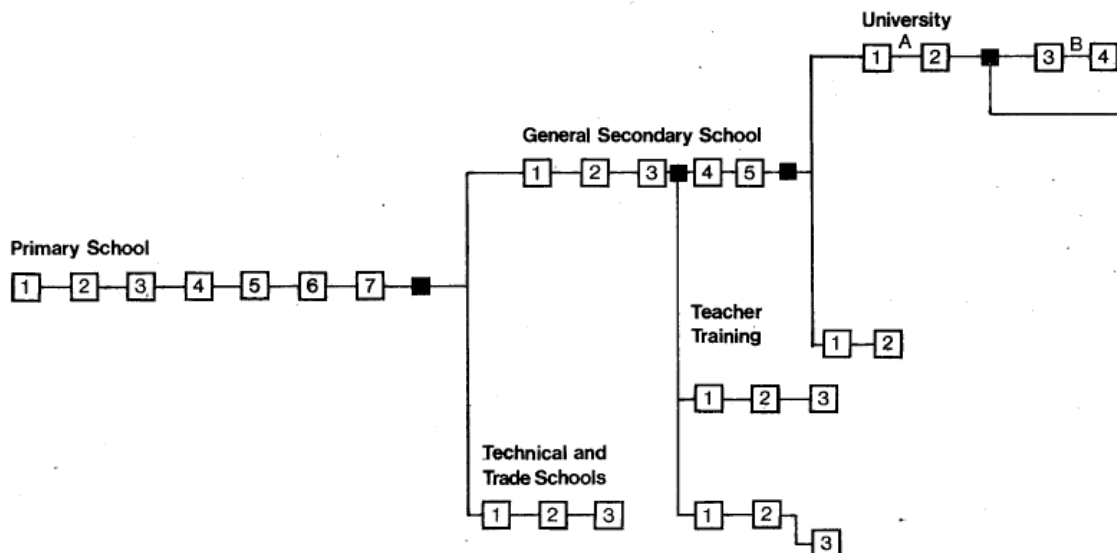
The current structure of the MOET is under review to be more in line with the *Public Sector Improvement and Reform Programme*, whose main thrust is the professionalisation of the public service. Decentralization of management and services in education and training remains a priority of the government and is addressed through gradual decentralization of services to district level and ultimately to local levels pending election of local councils. The MOET has prioritized early-childhood care, primary education and teacher management for decentralization by 2007.

All assessment and examinations in technical education subjects are the responsibility of the MOET through the **Examinations Council of Lesotho** (ECOL) in close collaboration with TVET Commission.

Other ministries and non-governmental organizations play an important role in the provision of adult and non-formal education programmes. The co-ordination of these programmes is vested in the Ministry of Education through the **Lesotho Distance Education Teaching Centre**.

## Structure and organization of the education system

### Lesotho: structure of the education system



### Pre-school education

Pre-school education (early childhood education) caters to children aged 3-6. Day-care centres are mainly operated by the local communities and non-governmental organizations. Attendance is not compulsory.

### Primary education

Primary education lasts seven years and the official entry age is 6 years, although many children enrol at 6+. At the end of Grade VII, pupils sit the Primary School Leaving Examination. A policy of free primary education has been introduced in 2000.

### Secondary education

Secondary education extends over five years, comprising the three-year junior secondary and the two-year senior secondary (high school) cycles. Progression from the junior secondary to the senior secondary school is through the nationally administered Junior Certificate Examination. The Junior Certificate is the minimum requirement for admission to craft courses and other forms of pre-vocational training. Senior secondary education culminates in the external examination of the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (GCE O-level), granting access to most tertiary programmes, including higher education. Technical and vocational education and training are offered in some secondary and post-secondary level institutions. A number of vocational schools are for girls only, offering home economics as a three-year post-primary programme. Some secondary schools offer pre-vocational training





programmes. A few technical schools offer three-year craft courses. One institution offers two-year post-secondary diploma courses.

Programmes offered at the post-secondary and university levels usually last three to six years. Most teacher training programmes and technical or vocational programmes last three years. The duration of university studies ranges from four (junior degree level) to six years (senior degree level).

At the primary level, the school year consists of 190 working days, divided into four terms extending from January to December, with a six-week winter break in June-July and a six-week summer break in December-January. At the secondary level, the school year consists of 180 working days. The post-primary vocational institutions and the craft-level technical institutions follow the same school calendar as the rest of the secondary schools. The academic year in the polytechnics starts in August and ends in June.

## The financing of education

The education sector is currently financed by public funds, parental contributions and donors assistance. Generally speaking, recurrent expenditures are covered by the government and parents, while most capital expenditure is met by donors. The parents bear a significant portion of the costs of primary and secondary education. They cover: the costs of new school facilities, maintenance, some teachers salaries, textbooks and writing materials, school uniforms and students transportation. The government pays most teachers salaries.

In 1990/91, the education sector absorbed 18% of the government recurrent budget, and in 1991/92 teachers' salaries constituted 75% of the education recurrent budget. In 1991, primary education absorbed about 53% of the recurrent budget. Parental contributions at the primary and secondary levels are high, while almost all costs at the university are borne by the government. In 1991/92, the recurrent cost per student (excluding parental contributions) was 208 *maloti* (M) at the primary level, M921 at the secondary level, and M15,024 at the National University.

## The educational process

Whereas there has been a curriculum review process which started in the mid-1990s for primary and secondary education resulting in the current curricula organization, fresh challenges in response to the imperatives of Millennium Development Goals and the quest for more relevant national curricula as envisaged in the *National Vision 2020*, results from the Impact Assessment of HIV & AIDS on the Education Sector and the Gender Audit in Education, have necessitated a need for a review of curriculum and assessment framework. The need to mainstream the response to the HIV & AIDS pandemic in the curriculum is one of the major imperatives for curriculum and assessment review process. The MOET, established a Task Force with broad stakeholder representation including, academics, teacher educators, policy-makers, curriculum developers, examinations officers, teacher representatives and school administrators and school proprietor representatives, to develop a new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Framework.



The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Framework development is oriented towards approaches placing primacy on survival skills for learners, not only in their schooling routine but in the local and global community that poses ever daunting challenges in the lives of young people. It is driven by the need to:

- determine the nature and direction of required reforms in national curriculum and assessment system;
- address the emerging issues pertaining to new demands, practices and challenges in particular mitigating the impact of HIV & AIDS, environmental education for sustainable development and a gender responsive curriculum;
- monitor quality, relevance and cost effectiveness in the development of basic and secondary education curriculum;
- define different assessment levels and redirection of assessment processes towards standardized measurement of acquired and potential abilities of students, their skills and competency levels alongside measurement of knowledge achievement levels; determine timeframes and draw intervals for National Assessment Studies aimed at objective description of levels of mastery of various skills in the process of social and intellectual development of a child; and
- coordinate and maintain consistency between what is learned, taught and assessed.

The content of education ought to be geared towards fostering participation in democratic processes so as to promote peace, stability and prosperity, and to prepare people to take control of their own destiny. It should further be skills-based in conserving and maintaining the environment and sustainable development. Similarly education should equip learners with skills with entrepreneurial skills necessary for participation in the national, regional and international economic arenas. Increasingly, technology, especially Information and Communication Technology (ICT), is becoming a driving force in all sectors. Education should therefore provide technological skills to learners in order to enable young Basotho to compete at all economic levels.

A sound education should integrate emerging issues such as HIV & AIDS, gender, population and family life education, human rights and democracy in a dynamic and evolving nature. The intention of the MOET is to aggressively address the impact of the HIV & AIDS pandemic on the education sector in general, and in particular on school-going age children in a country which is one of the worst affected by HIV & AIDS in the world. These realities have been acknowledged in Lesotho and inform the current curriculum reform programme. As a direct response to some of the critical challenges facing Lesotho, especially the need to provide basic education for all at an affordable cost, a comprehensive review of the curriculum organization at the primary level is being undertaken to reduce the number of subjects to a manageable number which provides opportunity for sufficient emphasis on literacy and numeracy acquisition, and offer an integrated package of Life Skills education. The curriculum review process is expected to be completed in 2007.

Curricula and content at post-secondary level of technical and vocational training are developed and determined by the Board through its committees and sub-committees. Both these processes are coordinated by TVET Commission. The



National Curriculum is in place for the following courses: automotive mechanics; bricklaying and plastering; business studies; carpentry and joinery; electrical installation; home science and secretarial studies. The report on the National Skills Needs Survey will assist in determining which new courses have to be developed.

## Pre-primary education

Whereas access to early childhood care and development (ECCD) remains low with an estimated 30% of the age cohort accessing this service in 2003 from 22% in 1999, there are gradually more boys accessing this level of education than girls. Increased levels of household poverty and minimal support from the state have made this level of education inaccessible for most children. A draft policy that will guide provision of this level of education has been developed and is under consideration for adoption by the government.

The MOET is piloting a home-based approach to early childhood care which seeks to empower parents with parenting skills providing care for children within their homes and in neighborhood groups at minimal costs. The home-based approach is intended for families that are jobless and cannot afford heavy fees paid in the ECCD centres. Each village has identified a caregiver, who is in turn provided with training by the ECCD Unit through workshops. The caregivers work as volunteers, because there are no fees paid by parents; they work from Monday to Friday. Each day of the week the caregivers take about 3 hours (9 to 12) with children in the presence of parents, who take turns on different days of the week. Parents attend these sessions so that they can have an insight into what takes place and have a better understanding of child development and what kind of activities can be done with young children. This helps in that some of the activities can even be continued at home with the help of parents.

The process of developing a draft National Policy Document on ECE started in 1998 while the Directory of ECE centres in Lesotho was completed in July 1999, with financial assistance from UNICEF.

The curriculum covers widely the five areas of child development and ways to stimulate children positively so they can realize healthy development. As they reach 5 years of age, they are engaged in a school readiness programme that will enable them to get prepared for formal learning.

The number of ECE centres increased from 1,530 in 1997 to 1,578 in 1998, while children's enrolments increased from 35,124 in 1997 to 36,079 in 1998. In a majority of cases, there was one teacher in each centre. Since 2003, the MOET started to capture statistical data on ECCD. Due to the high mobility of many ECCD centres and the fact that many are inaccessible, current data on ECCD seems to portray less ECCD centres (only those that were reached during data collection; efforts are in place to continue data capturing of all ECCD centres, including the most inaccessible ones.) According to the 2004 statistics on ECCD, there are 1,225 ECCD centres and Home-Bases with a total enrolment of 34,552 children (2-5-year-olds) and 1,452 teachers.



## Primary education

The revised national aims of basic education in Lesotho, as defined in 1992, are as follows:

- to ensure permanent and functional literacy in Sesotho—the national language—and English, and basic numeracy as a foundation for further learning and effective living;
- to prepare learners to communicate effectively;
- to help learners to acquire appropriate standards of social living needed in the present society;
- to help learners appreciate and interact with their environment;
- to provide learners with an awareness, understanding and appreciation of their culture, and to enhance cross-cultural awareness, as well as aesthetic awareness;
- to encourage learners to investigate and think for themselves and to test hypotheses, as well as to review their assumptions, thus laying a foundation for scientific thinking;
- to provide for suitable activities aimed at improving health and standards of living;
- to give learners a basic understanding of their civil and human rights, as well as responsibilities for effective participation in their society;
- to provide character training as well as moral and religious education;
- to provide socially acceptable and appropriate skills to prepare learners for the world of work;
- to prepare learners to adapt primarily to scientific and technological change, as well as other changes.

Primary education has been recognized as a component of basic education with the purpose to help the child to develop fully as an individual and become a member of society and the community, and to lay a foundation for further learning and effective living.

The seven-year primary education cycle (Standards I-VII) is not compulsory. The government is implementing a policy of free primary education in phases, beginning with Standard I in the year 2000. In addition, the MOET is exploring the feasibility of extending the primary (basic) education cycle from seven to ten years (Ministry of Education, 1999).



Most primary schools are in the lowland areas. Schools in the remote mountain areas are small and most of them do not offer the complete primary course. In 1994, about 33% of pupils enrolled were above the age of 12.

The curriculum is centrally developed by a unit of the MOET—the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC). Currently, five subjects are offered at primary schools: Sesotho, English language, mathematics, science, and social sciences.

However, the NCDC has recently revised the curriculum and new syllabi are being trialled in fifty schools throughout the country. The revised curriculum includes an additional five subjects, namely: agriculture, home economics, Bible study, arts and crafts, and music. Sesotho, English and mathematics are the core subjects. Practical and vocational subjects have been introduced in the curriculum, as a result of the national conference on the clarification of education policies in Lesotho

The length of a school day is normally 6½ hours. This time includes both instruction periods and break/lunch times. During the first four years of primary education, Sesotho (mother tongue) is the medium of instruction and English is offered as a subject. In Standards V-VII the medium of instruction is English. As a matter of policy, the following time allocation per subject is followed:

**Primary education: weekly lesson timetable (1996)**

Subject	Average number of weekly periods in each grade						
	Std. I	Std. II	Std. III	Std. IV	Std. V	Std. VI	Std. VII
English language	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Sesotho	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Science subjects	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Mathematics	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
All other subjects	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
<b>Total weekly periods</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>

*Note:* Each teaching period lasts forty minutes.

The recommended teacher-pupil ratio for primary schools is 1:40, but the national average in 1990 was 1:55. In many districts the average number of pupils per classroom is more than 120.

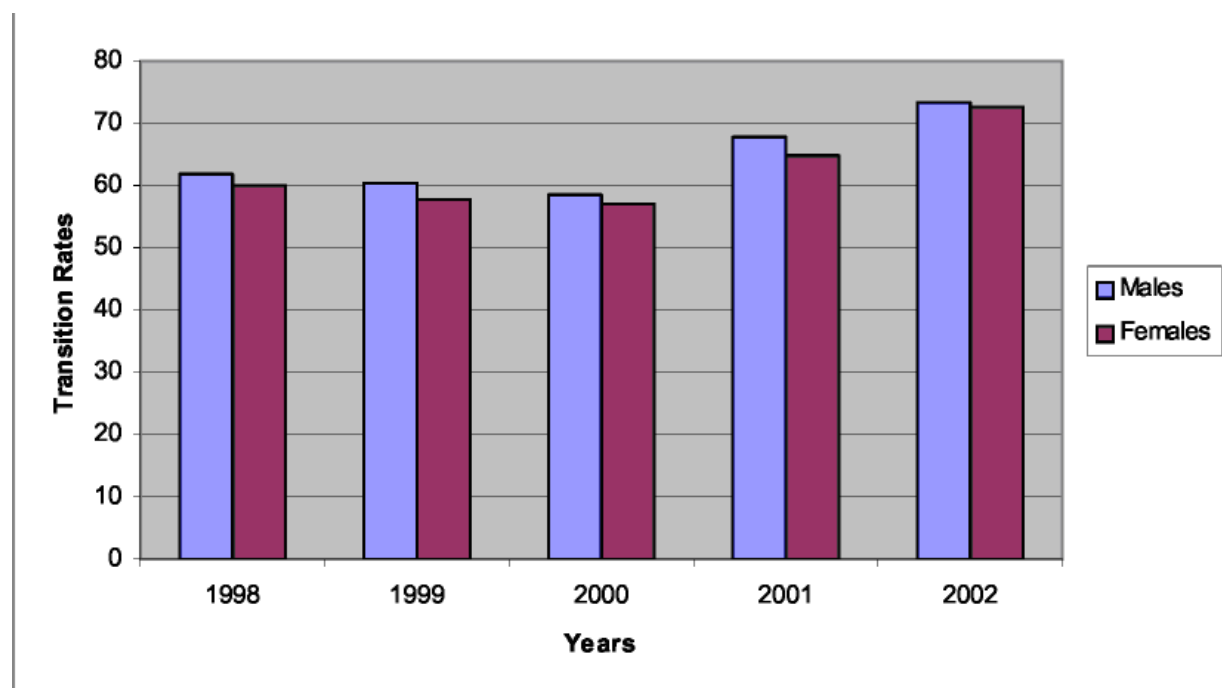
At the end of Standard VII, pupils sit a national examination, the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) in five subjects. The examination is composed mainly of multiple choice questions, except in the two official languages (Sesotho and English) where candidates write compositions, stories and letters. Successful candidates are awarded certificates issued at the Ministry of Education; these are classified according to students performance. The PSLE forms the basis for selection into post-primary institutions.

Repetition is highest in lower primary, exacerbating the already serious overcrowding in Standards I-III. Repetition, overcrowding and poor quality of education create a particularly vicious cycle: classrooms swell with repeaters; learning suffers because there are too many pupils for the teacher to handle, many of them overage (e.g., about 30% of pupils enrolled in Standard I are aged 9+); the teacher's morale and self-confidence are undermined and school performance of pupils is affected; and because of poor performance, a large proportion of pupils are required to repeat the grade. Drop-out rates are also high, reaching 14% in Standard I and 11.5% in Standard VI.

A 1990 cohort analysis of repetition and drop-out rates showed that for every 1,000 pupils currently entering the system, less than 50% graduate with a PSLE pass. If all pupils are taken together (including the drop-outs) over fourteen years per pupil are required to produce one graduate at the primary level.

In 2003 there were 214,746 boys to 214,974 girls in Lesotho primary schools, representing—according to national estimates—a gross enrolment ratio of 124.9% and a net enrolment ratio of 85%. Efficiency in primary education has remained poor in spite of the gains in access in the past five years of Free Primary Education. In 2002 repetition rates for males and females were 23.5% and 18.65 respectively. Contrary to the repetition rates, drop out rates declined between 1999 and 2002 from 8.6% to 6.4% for boys and from 5.5% to 3.2% for girls. Overall promotion rates increased over the period for both males and females.

### Transition rates from primary to secondary education, 1998-2002



Source: MOET, 2004.



## Secondary education

Secondary education extends over five years, comprising the three-year junior secondary (considered as part of basic education) and the two-year senior secondary cycles.

The normal school day at the secondary level is eight hours long. There are four core subjects at the junior secondary level: English, Sesotho, mathematics and science. In addition, schools offer several other subjects, including practical subjects. English and Sesotho are compulsory at the junior secondary level, while only English remains compulsory at the senior secondary level. English is a medium of instruction throughout the secondary cycle. An example of the weekly lesson timetable at the junior secondary level is shown in the table below:

**Junior secondary education: example of weekly lesson timetable (1996)**

Subject	Number of weekly periods		
	Form I	Form II	Form III
<i>Compulsory subjects</i>			
English language	7	7	7
Mathematics	7	7	7
Sesotho	5	5	5
Science	5	5	5
<i>Two elective subjects chosen from:</i>			
History, geography, development studies, English literature, additional mathematics (only in Form III), religious education (four weekly periods for each subject)	8	8	8
<i>One elective subject chosen from:</i>			
Arts and crafts, music, physical education	3	3	3
<i>One practical subject chosen from:</i>			
Agriculture, business, home economics, technical or vocational subjects	*5	*5	*5
<b>Total weekly periods</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>

(\*) Schools offering practical studies are strongly advised to allocate ten weekly periods to practical subjects and to operate on a forty-five weekly period basis. Each teaching period lasts 40 minutes.

Progression from the junior secondary to the senior secondary school is through the nationally administered Junior Certificate Examination of the Lesotho and Swaziland Examinations Syndicate. The Junior Certificate is the minimum requirement for admission into craft courses and other forms of pre-vocational training. Senior secondary education culminates in the external examination of the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC, GCE O-level), granting access to most tertiary programmes, including higher education. In addition, individual schools use their internal assessment on a quarterly and yearly bases. A continuous assessment system

is being encouraged in mathematics and science, although it still has problems. Promotion from one level to another is strictly based on examination performance.

Technical and vocational education and training are offered in some secondary level and post-secondary level institutions. A number of the vocational schools are for girls only, offering home economics as a three-year post-primary programme. Some secondary schools offer pre-vocational training programmes in basic handicraft which includes technical drawing, metalwork and woodwork. A few technical schools offer three-year craft courses in: leatherwork, bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, fitting and turning, plumbing, auto mechanics, basic electronics, electrical installation, masonry and upholstery. Only one institution—a Polytechnic—offers two-year post-secondary diploma courses. These courses are: civil engineering, electrical and electronic engineering, mechanical engineering, business studies and secretarial studies. In 1994, a total of 1,697 students were enrolled in technical and vocational institutions, of whom 677 were girls enrolled in home economics courses.

### Enrolment in TVET institutions by course, 1999-2003

<i>Type of Course</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>
Architecture	33	34	51	51	51
Auto Electrics	0	0	10	10	10
Basic Electronics	8	10	0	0	0
Bricklaying	183	262	237	229	230
Business Studies	59	59	60	120	121
Carpentry	116	107	162	161	155
Civil Engineering	36	38	54	54	54
Commercial Studies	97	57	0	0	0
Dressmaking	15	15	15	37	37
Electrical Engineering	49	52	55	92	58
Electrical Installation	121	135	132	96	131
Fitting and Turning	41	38	45	45	45
Home Science	595	681	655	423	424
Marketing	20	20	24	44	44
Mechanical Engineering	46	51	53	47	47
Motor Mechanics	142	154	174	163	148
Panel Beating	31	32	32	31	31
Plumbing	97	74	84	88	84
Secretarial Studies	0	0	60	120	121
Tailoring	15	15	15	25	25
Welding	8	8	9	9	9
Leather Works	10	17	12	14	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>1722</b>	<b>1859</b>	<b>1939</b>	<b>1857</b>	<b>1837</b>

Source: MOET, 2004.



The recommended teacher-student ratio for secondary school is 1:25, although the national average is 1:21. As already mentioned, poor overall regulation and the failure to implement systematic plans has resulted in a proliferation of secondary and high schools, many of which have enrolments which are too small for them to be educationally or economically viable. Almost 70% of secondary schools and 60% of high schools fall in this category.

There is also a high degree of wastage at the secondary level, but the pattern differs markedly from the primary level. Repetition is relatively low, but drop-out in all forms is very high, as the following table illustrates. This is particularly true for Form V, where the low number of COSC passes gives rise to a very low promotion rate (promotion at Form V level is measured in terms of COSC passes).

### Secondary education. Promotion, drop-out and repetition rates by Form, 1990 (%)

	Form I	Form II	Form III	Form IV	Form V
Promotion rate	73	65	57	66	29
Repetition rate	7	8	7	7	2
Drop-out rate	20	27	36	27	69

A cohort analysis based on the above figures yields alarming results: for every 1,000 students entering Form I, only 71 graduate with a COSC pass. This very low success rate means that the secondary system is extremely inefficient. On average, forty-four years of investment are required to produce one graduate.

The total enrolment for secondary education from Form A to Form E (Forms I to V) increased from 72,437 in 1999 to 83,104 in 2003. According to national estimates the gross enrolment ratio for secondary education increased from 24.9 % and 36.0% in 1999 to 30.1% and 39.1% in 2003 for males and females respectively.

### Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The responsibility for monitoring improvements in learning achievement falls under the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) of the MOE.

The NCDC planned to extend the national assessment in all primary school subjects and standards by the year 2001. In the late 1980s, the Evaluation, Research and Testing (ERT) section of NCDC produced skills checklists and end-of-level tests for use in schools. Checklists were produced for Standards I-III, while end-of-level tests were produced for Standards IV-VI. These were for the following subjects: Sesotho, English and mathematics. There were plans to extend to other subjects later on. The skills checklists are tools to measure pupils' achievement in relation with each objective. End-of-level tests were used by teachers as guidelines to draft their own tests.

In 1993, USAID sponsored the Primary Education Project, where attainment tests were prepared to replace end-of-level tests. These were produced to be used as



checkpoints at two levels—Standards III and VI. These are also meant to work as a prediction tool for performance at the end of primary schooling.

The first administration of these tests in 1993 helped to establish a national average of 70% in all the three subjects. In the subsequent sittings, pupils were said to have mastered the tests if their individual scores were 70% or better. The following table shows the percentage of pupils who attained a score of 70% or more:

Subject	Percentage
Sesotho	70%
English	33%
Mathematics	50%

Source: Ministry of Education, 1999.

## Higher education

There is only one institution of higher learning in the country, the National University of Lesotho (NUL). As a centre of excellence it occupies a unique position among the educational institutions of the country. It mainly offers four-year degree programmes in education, humanities, natural sciences, agriculture, social sciences and law. The university also offers some doctoral degree programmes on a restricted basis, depending on staffing and research facilities being available for the particular research project contemplated.

The university is an autonomous institution granting it own degrees and is governed by a Council, with academic matters being in the hands of academic persons. External assessors and examiners participate, respectively, in the selection of senior members of staff and in the main examinations, thereby assisting in the maintenance of proper academic standards in degree and diploma programmes. Special relationships, exchanges and research projects are shared with several universities abroad.

The university is responsible for the management of its resources. However, the main source of support is the government, which provides the university with a subsidy required to meet its recurrent costs. The government also mobilizes donors funds for capital projects. In addition, through its own effort, the university has established linkages with institutions abroad which also help in mobilizing some financial resources.

In 1994, there were 1,866 students enrolled, of whom 973 were female. The total number of academic staff was 229.

## National University of Lesotho: enrolments by programme, 2003-2005

### Academic year 2003/04

Faculty	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
Education & Humanities	446	453	496	229	1,624
Law & Social Sciences	925	748	367	218	2,248
Sciences, Applied Sciences	251	328	183	123	885
<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>	1,622	1,529	1,046	560	4,857
Institute of Extra-Mural Studies	835	604	310	27	1,776

### Academic year 2004/05

Agriculture	28	36	24	41	129
Education	351	350	275	233	1,209
Health Science	66	74	45	2	177
Humanities	73	101	61	80	315
Law	190	327	163	91	771
Natural and Applied Sciences	224	147	96	70	537
Social Science	514	392	413	229	1,548
<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>	1,446	1,427	1,077	746	4,686
Institute of Extra-Mural Studies	555	372	341	42	1,310

Source: MOET, 2004.

## Special education

The Ministry of Education's policy on special education is mainly aimed at promoting the integration of children with special needs into the regular schools at all levels.

In an attempt to implement this policy, the Ministry of Education established a Unit of Special Education staffed with one inspector and two assistant inspectors. For the period 1994-96 the Unit developed the following strategies to reach out to children with special needs:

- finalizing the special education teacher training package (which consists of: a teacher guide; syllabi in intellectual disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment and physical disability; assessment booklet; in-service teacher course content; pre-service teacher course content);
- evaluating the programme;
- integrating the course content into the National Teacher Training College programme.

The above-mentioned package was piloted in ten primary schools across the country selected on the basis of the feasibility study conducted by the Unit in 1992, which found that in 314 sample primary schools 17% of children had some kind of special needs. The programme was evaluated in 1995; the results indicated that the "pilot programme can be regarded as broadly successful in its objectives and should be extended to all schools in the country."



In 1990, there were approximately 250 disabled children accommodated in special centres. There were three trained teachers of the blind who were employed in two resource centres in the capital, Maseru, one for primary and the other for secondary school age students. They supported a total of 40 students who were integrated into the adjacent schools. There was also one residential school for deaf children, situated in Leribe, with one trained teacher. The existing centres which cater to the special educational needs of the disabled are almost entirely funded by non-governmental organizations.

## Private education

Information is not available.

## Means of instruction, equipment and infrastructure

In 1984, the Ministry of Education put into operation the Book Rental Scheme (BSU) in an attempt to solve the problem of unavailability of affordable and relevant instructional materials at the primary education level. Since then, textbooks have been more sufficiently distributed and supplied to all primary schools in the country; the success of the scheme is demonstrated by the ratio of one book to one child in all core subjects in different standards. The School Supply Unit (SSU) maintains a revolving fund supported by parental contributions in order to sustain the scheme. Science equipment, chemicals, biological charts and teachers guides are also made available to all schools, especially secondary and high schools.

More than 56% of all textbooks being supplied to primary schools by SSU are imported. However, a larger percentage of these books are being produced by the National Curriculum Development Centre through the assistance of the international and local publishers.

In terms of physical facilities at the primary level, it must be noted that a significant proportion of pupils are still taught outside the classroom, particularly at the lower standards. Furniture is also a major problem, with over 50% of Standard One-Three pupils being taught while sitting on the floor. The lack of a proper writing surface, combined with the discomfort of sitting on cold mud or concrete floors during Lesotho's harsh winters, renders learning very difficult. Instructional materials are also in relatively short supply. Although the above-mentioned revolving fund supplies textbooks to pupils at all levels for a minimal fee, there is a great lack of supplementary materials.

From the 2004 school year the MOET has introduced a *Secondary Schools Textbooks Rental Scheme* at a highly subsidized rate. The aims of this scheme are (a) to reduce the high cost of education at this level through a subsidy in the purchase of quality textbooks which have hitherto constituted one of the highest costs to parents, (b) to improve the participation rates at this level since the majority of students dropout due the escalating poverty and (c) to improve the quality of teaching and learning materials in use through a stringent screening procedure before textbooks can be recommended for use in secondary schools. It is this last aim that serves as a quality control measure while at the same time ensuring that a majority of students





has access to good quality learning materials at a reasonable cost. The scheme is introduced on an incremental basis starting with Form A in 2004.

## Adult and non-formal education

Non-formal education in Lesotho is offered by the Ministry of Education and non-governmental organizations. The MOE has established a Non-Formal Education Office (NFE) which started operating in January 1995. The NFE is expected to co-ordinate all programmes in the country; to facilitate the development of a national structure that will help formal and non-formal education to complement each other; and to define a national policy for non-formal education.

Furthermore, the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC) is an institution which offers correspondence education at the Junior Certificate and the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate levels. It also offers literacy and post-literacy programmes for herdboys, miners, out-of-school youth and adults. The LDTC is organized into four main programmes: Literacy and Numeracy, Correspondence Education, Basic Rural Education, and the Service Agency.

Other organizations operating in the field of non-formal education include the Bethel Business and Community Development Centre (sponsored by UNICEF and the Church), offering a two-year course in a number of practical skills, such as solar technology, agriculture, building, metalwork, etc.; the Lesotho Opportunities Industrialization Centre, a community-based, non-formal, non-profit vocational and business skills training institution, that trained 377 persons between 1993 and 1996; the Juvenile Training Centre of the Lesotho Prison Institution, offering literacy and numeracy and vocational training to juvenile delinquents or offenders; the Plenty Lesotho (a Canadian-funded project) dealing with both basic literacy and functional literacy; the Lesotho Association for Non-formal Education, that trains animators for literacy; the Lesotho Federation for Democratic Unions, dealing with literacy and post-literacy education for workers within the Union; and the Development for Peace Education, which is a Basotho Ecumenical Organization whose aim is to facilitate the empowerment of the needy people.

It is estimated that 38% of adult Basotho (citizens of Lesotho) are illiterate, and 54% are functionally illiterate. The total number of people over the age of 15 who lack reading and writing skills for use in productive, remunerative labour is thus estimated at around 500,000. Herdboys, out-of-school youth and miners constitute the largest group of functionally illiterate. At present, literacy agencies operating in the country are reaching only about 4% of illiterates.

## Teaching staff

The Lesotho National Teacher Training College (NTTC, now the Lesotho College of Education) was established in 1975 when it was decided to replace the teacher training colleges operated by the Lesotho Evangelical Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church. This decision was taken in response to a long-felt need for a centralized institution for both pre-service and in-service teacher training. The mission of the NTTC is to train teachers for the primary, secondary and



vocational/technical schools. Since its creation in 1975, the College has been a department of the Ministry of Education and its budget has been provided by the government. The College is open to all prospective teachers from Lesotho and from the rest of the Southern Africa sub-region, upon agreed terms. The NTTC is the only provider of primary school teachers and it plays a role in the provision of junior secondary school teachers and secondary/high school teachers of technical subjects.

The College offers four full-time, pre-service programmes. Each of these programmes is of three years duration leading to a certificate which is accredited by the National University of Lesotho. The programmes offered are: the Primary Teacher Certificate (PTC), the Secondary Teacher Certificate, the Diploma in Primary Education, and the Diploma in Technology Education. In February 1995, the College introduced a specialization in early primary education. This is a course intended to train Standards I-III teachers. The new Diploma in Education (Primary) (DEP) programme started in September 1998 in order to replace the PTC. It is a programme lasting three and a half years; the first semester is a bridging course, designed to upgrade student achievement in the core subjects and to prepare them for tertiary study. (Lefoka and Stuart, 2001).

In addition to the pre-service programmes, the College provides a number of in-service programmes for unqualified teachers serving in the schools. In 1992, an in-service primary teacher certificate programme was introduced to address the pressing issue of the 4,300 primary teachers with either no teaching qualification or unsatisfactory qualifications. In 1986, an in-service programme was introduced for primary school managers and administrators. To date, 158 school managers have graduated and a further 111 are enrolled in the current programme. The part-time distance education programme lasts three years and a half for unqualified teachers and two years and a half for principals. It is offered on-campus during school vacations and through outreach workshops held eight weekends per year.

The College is growing rapidly, though it has not yet reached the required enrolments to graduate sufficient numbers of primary school teachers to significantly reduce teacher-pupil ratios in primary schools. In 1995, the total number of students enrolled was 795, comprising 629 female and 166 male students. In 1996, the College had an enrolment figure of 807 students, of whom 589 were females and 218, males.

The minimum qualifications required to teach in the College are a bachelor's degree in or with education, plus a minimum teaching experience of three years. A majority of lecturers, however, now hold a master's degree. It is also envisaged that some of the lecturers should begin to enrol for doctoral studies as a way of improving standards in general.

Prospective teachers enrolled in the primary teacher certificate programme are expected to master the five core subjects (mathematics, science, Sesotho, English and social studies) taught in primary schools, in addition to professional studies. There are also other subjects that are offered, some as semester courses. These are: art and crafts, music, health education, home economics, agriculture and physical education. These are intended to produce a well-rounded teacher, able to teach pupils in schools, as well as identify and nurture children's talents. The diploma in primary education



trainees specialize in two teaching subjects and education administration. They also complete other semester courses, among those stated above.

As for the secondary teacher certificate and the diploma in technology education, prospective teachers are required to specialize in two subjects and one teaching subject respectively. The subjects in which students specialize may be English, Sesotho, mathematics, science, agriculture development, development studies and home economics for the secondary teacher certificate, and metalwork, woodwork and technical drawing for the diploma in technology education.

All prospective teachers spent four months in schools on teaching practice or assignment. They are visited in schools, at least four times during their service period, in order to provide the necessary support and assessment of their teaching performance. All teachers, whether newly qualified nationals or expatriates, will be required to register with the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) and will be interviewed by a member of the TSC staff.

The situation regarding working and employment conditions of teaching staff is still under review. Generally speaking, salaries depend on teachers' certificates and leadership positions occupied (such as head or deputy head). Working conditions vary widely across schools. On first appointment, the teacher is allocated to a corresponding grade and step in the career structure, according to qualifications and experience. The teacher will then proceed, by annual increments, to the highest step of the grade. At this point no further progress can be made without applying to the TSC for advancement, which will only be granted on a satisfactory assessment of performance, experience and qualifications (PEQ). On satisfactory assessment, the teacher will be promoted to the next grade. Advancement can continue to the top of senior teacher position (grade). Further progression in the career structure is by competition and interview for leadership positions. Leadership positions in the primary school include the posts of deputy principal and principal. When these posts become vacant, they are advertised nationally by TSC and all teachers eligible may apply. The posts are filled by the TSC on the recommendation of the management committee responsible for the school.

Posts within the post-primary career structure are divided into classroom positions (from non-graduate assistance teacher to graduate senior teacher), leadership positions (from head of department to high school principal) and advisory positions (area resource teacher). Advisory positions are held by staff with responsibility for work in more than one school.

The number of teachers has been increasing considerably in attempt meet the increasing need as enrolments rose and in an attempt to reduce teacher pupil ratios. Given the low level of output from our teacher preparation programmes and high teacher attrition rates of qualified and experienced teachers, the system has had to resort to unqualified teachers and expatriates to meet teacher shortages. The need for regular and continuing professional development for teachers and improving their working conditions has to compete with the urgent need increase numbers of qualified teachers. To address this need, a comprehensive Teacher Education and Training policy is being developed to provide guidance for a balance between quality and quantity in teacher supply and demand (MOET, 2004).



The number of teachers in primary education increased from 8,225 in 1999 to 9,294 in 2003. In this period the ratio of unqualified teachers increased from 22% to 32%. The majority of primary school teachers are female (almost 80%). The challenge to increase intake levels and to improve the quality of output is taken seriously at the Lesotho College of Education. The primary teacher qualification has now been raised to diploma from certificate level and a Distance Teacher Education Programme for serving under- and unqualified teachers, has been instituted. Whereas this will easily produce double the number of teacher usually coming out of the pre-service, it will still fall short of the required numbers to reverse the current level of unqualified teachers. In secondary education, the main concerns are in connection with teachers of specialized subjects. According to Education Statistics 2003, there were 3,421 teachers in secondary and high schools, and out of those 1,543 were male and 1,878 were female. There is still a net shortage of qualified teachers in subjects such as science, mathematics, business studies and technical subjects (MOET, 2004).

## Educational research and information

The Lesotho Education Research Association (LERA) was legally established in 1982 as a non-profit, voluntary organization concerned with the promotion of educational research in the country. The Secretariat of the Association is the Institute of Education at the National University of Lesotho (NUL).

LERA membership is open to anybody interested in research on education and related fields: students and university professors, teacher educators, curriculum developers, education specialists, education officers, policy makers, etc. The Association's main activity is the training of members and other individuals and groups in research techniques. Research studies cover a wide range of areas, while the findings are disseminated through reports, publications, seminars and conferences.

The Association has close links with sister associations in Botswana and Swaziland. Together they form the BOLESWA Educational Research Association, whose main aim is to enhance educational research in the three countries. Research carried out in recent years includes: teaching and learning strategies in primary schools, causes of wastage in primary schools, early childhood education, environmental education, and many others.

The Institute of Education at the NUL also carries out research, either commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Training or on its own.

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## Web resources

Ministry of Education and Training: <http://www.education.gov.ls/> [In English. 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>