COOK ISLANDS
Ministry of Education
Maraurau o te Pae Api'i

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Equity, Access and Participation

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Equity, Access and Participation

All individuals have a right to learn and to fulfil their responsibility as citizens of, and contributors to their society. Government has a responsibility to ensure quality education for all.

The adoption of the Cook Islands Education Master Plan (EMP) in 2008 was an important milestone for education in the Cook Islands as it sets the strategic direction for the government in meeting its responsibility for education and provides a clear statement as to the values and priorities expected. An essential component of the EMP is the commitment to 'Learning for Life' - the provision of quality learning environments for all people in the Cook Islands from birth.

Given that the population of the Cook Islands is spread over 15 islands and atolls, with 1,400 kilometres separating the most distant islands of the country, and that two thirds of the population live on the island of Rarotonga, ensuring this commitment is met provides a significant challenge.

To meet this challenge a range of strategies for ensuring access and participation will be implemented, guided by definitive policies.

For the purposes of this policy "equity, access and participation" means that all Cook Islanders, regardless of ability, gender, wealth, location, language or ethnic origin, will be able to participate in relevant, quality and appropriate learning experiences. It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to provide such opportunities and mitigate any barriers to accessing them that may exist.

1. STATEMENT OF POLICY

The Ministry of Education will demonstrate its commitment to equity by promoting and supporting participation in a wide range of learning programmes and opportunities and ensuring these are easily accessible to learners across all levels of education.

2. PURPOSE

Delivering on the objectives of equity, access and participation is a key means of making a proactive contribution to the social, economic and cultural development of the Cook Islands.
This policy provides a set of defining guidelines that will inform MoE operational management. Accessibility of education and high levels of participation are essential for achieving the objective of equitable access to education and high learner achievement.

The MoE is committed to:

i.)   Creating learning environments that mitigate social, cultural, economic and physical barriers to participation in the education process.

ii.)   Developing teaching and learning practices that are effective in creating positive learning environments that promote access and participation for all current and potential learners including mature and part-time entrants, those who have special   needs and those who live in remote and isolated communities.

iii.)   Meeting the objectives of the *Learning for Life - Cook Islands Education Master Plan (2008-2023)*. The plan acknowledges that, *"all people in the Cook Islands will have equal access to quality learning opportunities across the full spectrum of human endeavour from birth." (Ministry of Education, 2008)*

It includes the following relevant foci and goals:
Learning and Teaching
Focus: Equitable access to quality learning and the experience of success through a range of programmes that meet individual needs and celebrate individual talents.
>   *Goals:*
>   • *Equitable access for all learners to quality learning programmes*
>   • *Increased enrolment in ECE Centres*
>   • *Increased access to vocational courses at senior levels*
>   • *Systems that enhance student well-being*
>   • *Significantly increased participation in tertiary education*
>   • *Increased numbers of accredited institutions and courses available in-country*

Learning and the Community
Focus: A high level of community involvement in determining quality educational outcomes
>   *Goals:*
>   • *Wide community support and understanding of inclusive education*
>   • *Increased participation of the wider community in ongoing learning*

Infrastructure and Support:
Focus: The provision of appropriate legislation, research, guidelines and standards which support delivery and enhance opportunities for learning
>   *Goals:*
>   • *High quality buildings, grounds and facilities*
>   • *Effective, well qualified and resourced teachers, administrators and support staff*

iv.)   Meeting the aims of "Te Kaveinga Nui" - the National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2020, which includes the 2020 national vision:
"To enjoy the highest quality of life consistent with the aspirations of our people, and in harmony with our culture and environment" (pg 8).

It includes the relevant goals and indicators of:
Goal 8 - Inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities;
Goal 7 - Improve health and promote healthy lifestyles; and
Goal 15 - Ensure a sustainable population, engaged in development for Cook Islanders by Cook Islanders.

i.)   Meeting the goals of the UNESCO "Education 2030" mandate ,which includes in its strategies:

•   *By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.*
•   *By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.*
•   *By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.*

- *By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.*
- *By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.*

ii.)   Meeting the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals, relevant to this policy, which includes:

- Goal 4 - Quality Education
  Ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning
- Goal 3 - Good Health and Well-being
- *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*
- Goal 5 - Gender Equality
  Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 10 - Reduced Inequalities
  Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 17 - Partnerships for the Goals
  Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

3. SCOPE

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

4. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES and OUTCOMES

Outcome
All people living in the Cook Islands, regardless of social, cultural, economic, intellectual or physical status, will have access to, and be able to participate in quality, appropriate and timely educational experiences which will enable them to realise their full potential, enjoy a quality lifestyle and contribute to Cook Islands society in a meaningful way.

Strategic Objectives
- Ensure that all education programmes are accessible to the widest possible range of stakeholders.

- Support specialised programmes where necessary to increase participation of under-represented groups.

- To consider the different needs of the wider community in the development of a range of educational programmes.

- Ensure that learning environments meet the needs of learners.

5. POLICY DETAIL

5.1 Equity

Equity and excellence go hand in hand. In an equitable system, factors such as ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status do not prevent students from achieving ambitious outcomes. We must be committed to reaching every student regardless of circumstances. Provisions must be made to mitigate disparities, barriers and challenges.

5.1.1 Priority Policy Instruments and Actions - Equity
- Greater gender equity in all forms of education is achieved including the resourcing of education and the retention and achievement of young men in learning programmes.
- Appropriate, culturally sensitive and gender inclusive/balanced resources are produced.
- Provide inclusive education, i.e. all young people learning together in mainstream pre-school, primary and secondary institutions with appropriate networks of support.
- The concepts of human rights and human dignity are borne in mind in all processes involving students with disabilities.
- All teaching, administrative and non-teaching staff have a thorough understanding of the potential barriers to learning and the diverse needs of learners.
- Ensure a range of strategies to support and resource learning for learners with additional support needs is available including training in best practice solutions for support staff.
- The circumstances and needs of learners in isolated communities are taken into account when developing and implementing education programmes.
- Strategies are in place to ensure all school leavers, regardless of social and economic background, are supported to access higher level education and empowered to realise their potential.

5.2 Access
Ensuring access to education for all is necessary for education to make an effective contribution to the social, economic and cultural development of the Cook Islands. The physical and demographic spread means that this is a challenge and the sector will need to look both internally and externally to meet the intentions of this policy.

5.2.1 Priority Policy Instruments and Actions - Access

- Strategies are in place for distance education, isolated students, second chance learning and continuing and adult education.
- There is active collaboration with community and industry groups to provide and improve access and inclusion in relation to content and delivery of relevant learning programmes including recognised work based training programmes.
- Strategies to increase the access of Cook Islanders to regional and international education programmes are developed.
- Flexible delivery and assessment modes are offered to improve access
- Adult learners have the opportunity to develop their potential and can access and participate in effective learning programmes at any level.
- Resourcing formulae to take into account the different barriers to and forms of access utilised by different groups of learners.

- Ensure disability access is provided to all education buildings.

5.3 Participation

It is the Ministry's role to work with other partners to ensure the conditions required for people of all ages to take up the opportunity of learning and to be successful in their endeavours.

5.3.1 Priority Policy Instruments and Actions - Participation

- Assets of education provision are a community resource and therefore enable the continuing education of the wider community.
- Student support systems are in place to facilitate retention, progression, and successful completion of learning programmes.
- Develop a range of strategies for ensuring continued participation in education of isolated students.
- Provide re-entry programmes on all islands for people who have been away from learning.
- Establish and resource Community Education Centres.
- Barriers to participation, especially for isolated learners, are identified and mitigated.
- Participation is encouraged through a range of marketing and publicity strategies including the targeting under-represented groups.

6. RISK and MITIGATION

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

Issue/Risk - examples	Mitigation - examples
Lack of Equity in Provision • Social inequality • Higher crime rate • Lack of gender parity • Social disruption	• Flexible delivery and assessment modes • Promotion of equality of opportunity • Account taken of social diversity • Monitoring recruitment, retention and attainment for equality
Lack of Access • Low standards of literacy and numeracy • Reduced quality of life for those with disabilities • Increase in emigration • Depopulation of Pa Enua • Economic and social dependence • Inability to take full advantage of new technology	• Access for all learners including people with disabilities • Materials, facilities and equipment to enable learners with disabilities to access learning • Provision of literacies programmes to support language and numeracy development • Collaborative arrangements to provide and improve access • Range of access modes

Low Participation	
• Poorly trained workforce • High unemployment • Lower standard of living • Poor standards of health • An under performing economy • Reliance on international aid	• Range of marketing and publicity strategies to encourage and widen participation • Targeting of under-represented groups (for example, workplace and /distant//disengaged learners) • Programme planning to meet specific learner or employer needs

7. MONITORING, EVALUATION and REVIEW

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

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

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

- The Planning and Development Directorate will monitor and evaluate the implementation and impact of this policy and report as required.
- The policy will be reviewed as per the policy register on an ongoing basis by the Director, Planning and Development
- Annual statistical evaluation will be used to measure both access and participation rates.
- Feedback will be presented to key stakeholders in a range of modalities.

G Townsend   Date 19 September 2016

Secretary of Education