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Principles and general objectives of education

The main principle underlying the education system of St. Lucia is the belief that the promotion of the education of the people and the establishment of institutions devoted to that purpose shall contribute towards the development of the human, physical, mental, moral, cultural and spiritual resources of the community.

Towards this end is the general objective of the establishment of a varied, relevant and comprehensive education system that is characterized by excellence.

Among other objectives are: the development of the basic knowledge and skills in all persons; the promotion of the importance of the family and community; and the promotion of a Caribbean identity through regional co-operation and integration.

According to the Education Act of 1999, the Minister of Education shall establish specific goals and objectives for the education system in order to: a) encourage the development of basic knowledge and skills in all persons, including: the skills of literacy, listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy, mathematics, analysis, problem solving, information processing, computing; critical and creative thinking skills for today's world; an understanding of the role of science and technology in society together with scientific and technological skills; appreciation and understanding of creative arts; physical development and personal health and fitness; and the creative use of leisure time; b) develop self-worth through a positive educational environment; c) promote the importance of the family and community; d) provide opportunities to reach maximum potential; e) promote the recognition, understanding and respect for the Constitution, laws and national symbols of the state; f) develop an understanding of the principle of gender equality; g) to promote understanding of the history, language, culture, rights and values of Saint Lucia and their changing role in contemporary society; h) increase awareness and appreciation of the natural environment of the state; i) promote a Caribbean identity through regional cooperation and integration; j) develop an understanding of the historical and contemporary role of labour and business in society; and k) prepare for participation in the community and global society.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The main legislation for governing education in St. Lucia was enacted in 1977 as the Education Act No. 18. This law defined the powers and responsibilities of the Minister and made provisions for a better organization and management of the education system through: a statutory system of education comprising primary, secondary, further education and special schools; the supervision of public schools; the establishment of advisory committees and committees of management; technical and vocational education; and compulsory education.



Compulsory education refers to children aged 5-15, but the Act empowered the Minister to alter the limits of the compulsory age if he/she thinks that there is a need to do so. According to Article 14 of the new **Education Act No. 41** of November 1999, “subject to available resources, all persons are entitled to receive an educational programme appropriate to their needs.”

Another important piece of legislation is the **Teaching Service Commission Act** of 1977. This law brought fundamental changes in the teaching profession. Previously, the appointment, discipline and dismissal of teachers were handled by denominational authorities in the case of denominational schools and by the Department of Education in the case of government schools. Since the passing of this Act, the Teaching Service Commission became responsible for all appointments, transfers, discipline and dismissal of teachers. The independence of this Commission is protected in accordance with the Constitution, which came into effect in 1979.

The third piece of legislation is the **Sir Arthur Lewis Community College Act** of 1984. This Act amalgamated three existing institutions (the Advanced-level College, the Teacher College and the Technical College) to form the nucleus of a Community College and laid the basis for the addition of other divisions, which now include agriculture, nursing, the creative and performing arts. The Act created a Board of Governors for the management of the college and can be regarded as the legislation designed for guiding tertiary education in the country.

Since the early 1990s, the need for education reforms to respond to several issues related to teachers and their performance, students and school discipline, curriculum and instruction, the management of education, parental rights and responsibilities, among others, has been a major challenge for the education system. Some steps have been taken in this direction including the development of an Education Reform Strategy in collaboration with the Organization of East Caribbean States (OECS).

Administration and management of the education system

The education system is controlled and coordinated by the **Ministry of Education and Culture**, which is responsible for the initiation, formulation and effective execution of policies, plans and programmes relating to all aspects of education.

The Ministry is under the administrative head of a Permanent Secretary. He/she is responsible to the Minister who is the political head and who determines general policy directions. Within the Ministry there is an Education Service Department, under the supervision of the Chief Education Officer whose main responsibilities, among others, are to: ensure that schools and educational institutions are administered in a proper and efficient manner; develop administrative principles and procedures for implementing general policies administering the school system; and initiate curriculum innovation and reform and establish appropriate procedures for evaluating the instructional programmes.

The Chief Education Officer is supported by a number of education officers, each with individual responsibility for the various divisions: instruction, student



services, pre-school services, technical and vocational education, special education, adult education, and school supervision. In addition, there are also the key sections of: **Curriculum Development and Materials Production Unit (CADMU)**; Educational Planning; and Educational Testing and Evaluation. The first two are under the supervision of individual education officers, while a Registrar of Examinations heads the Examinations unit.

The management structure also includes a team of six education officers—previously known as district education officers—who have individual responsibility for each of the six school districts. Their functions cover only primary schools and they come under the supervision of the education officer for primary schools.

There are also curriculum officers who are expected to provide leadership in developing and reviewing the curriculum for the different subject areas. These are attached to the Curriculum Unit (CAMDU) and report to the education officer who is head of that unit.

The three denominational authorities—Anglican, Catholic and Methodist—all have **boards of management** for the respective schools.

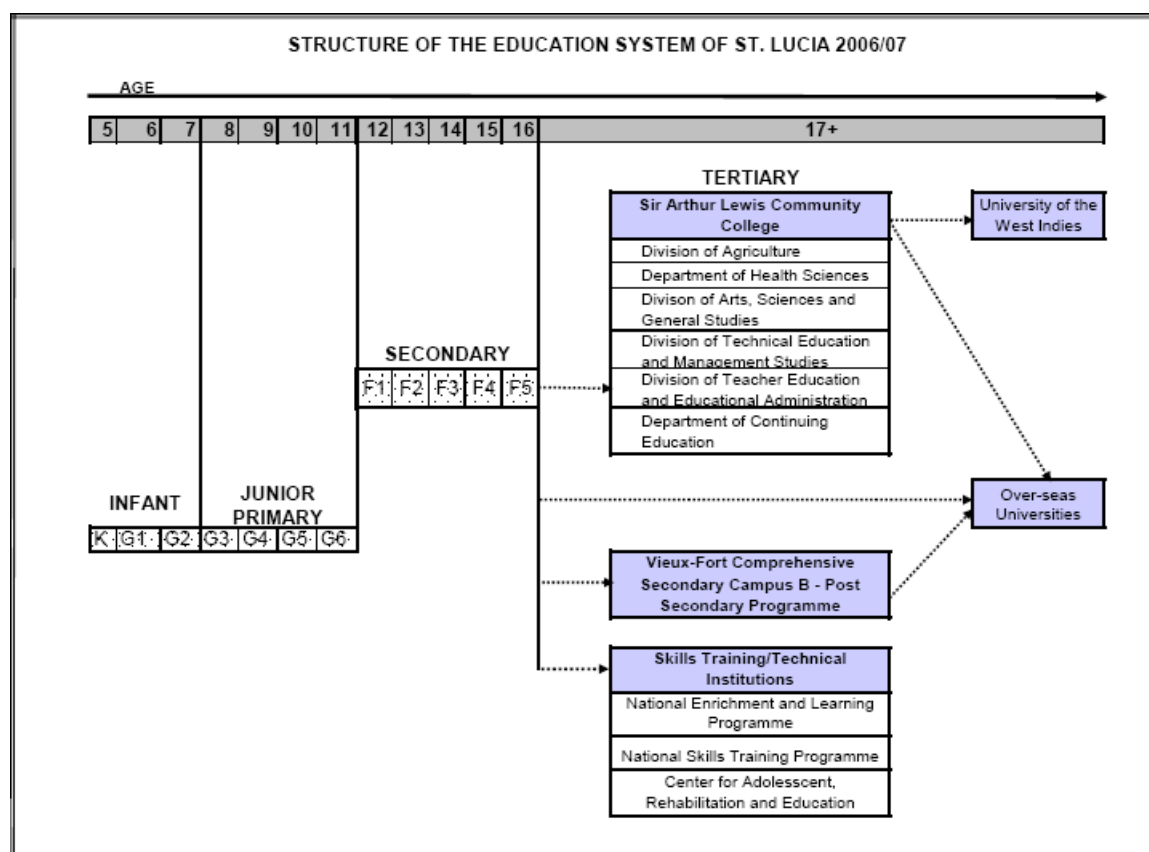
The denominational school boards play important roles in the selection and recruitment of staff as well as in the supervision of these schools. More particularly in the case of staff, the respective boards play a key role in the process of appointment of the principal as this is seen as important in maintaining the denominational character of the schools. There are some other school boards appointed by the Ministry of Education to manage the affairs of secondary schools. These boards, however, have become largely ineffective for a variety of reasons and in many cases have ceased to function.

At the school level, **principals** have responsibility for the day-to-day management of these institutions. In the case of primary schools, these principals fall under the supervision of education officers responsible for their respective school districts. The principals of secondary schools come under the supervision of the education officer for secondary schools.

Under the Ministry of Education, the **National Enrichment and Learning Unit (NELU)** and the **National Skills Development Center (NSDC)** are the main public providers of adult education and learning opportunities.

Structure and organization of the education system

Saint Lucia: structure of the education system (2007)



Source: Ministry of Education and Culture, 2007.

Pre-school education

Early childhood education (ECE) provides educational services to children aged 1-4 and is offered through preschools and day-care centers. In some cases children over 5 years of age may attend preschools despite the fact that formal primary education commences at age 5. Many ECE centers provide both preschool and day-care services. ECE is not compulsory and all preschools were privately owned in 2007.

Primary education

Primary education is compulsory for children aged 5 and virtually universal. Traditionally the primary school consisted of: the infant department (kindergarten and grades 1 to 2); junior primary (grades 3 to 6); and senior primary (years 1 to 3), for those who were unsuccessful in obtaining a place in secondary school. With the full implementation of Universal Secondary Education in 2006/07, the senior primary grades have been phased out and primary education now covers the infant department (kindergarten and grades 1 to 2) and junior primary (grades 3 to 6). Pupils sit the Minimum Standards Test (MST) in grades 2 and 4, and the Common Entrance Exams



(CEE) at the end of grade 6, which serves to assign the available places at the secondary level on the basis of merit and the choice of school.

Secondary education

Secondary education lasts five years and covers Forms 1 to 5, divided into lower cycle (Forms 1 to 3) and upper cycle (Forms 4 and 5). The course of study is based mainly on syllabi set by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). At the end of Form 3 students sit the Minimum Standards Test. Students sit the Caribbean Secondary Examinations Certificate (CSEC) on completion of the five-year secondary programme (Form 5).

Higher education

Post-secondary and tertiary level programmes are provided through the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College and the Vieux-Fort Post-secondary Department. The Community College integrates three former institutions and, through its various divisions, it offers programmes in various fields leading to a certificate (one year), a diploma (two years), or an associate degree (two years). CXC/CSEC holders can enrol in programmes leading to GCE Advanced-level (two years of study) or the CXC/Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE); programmes leading to the award of a certificate take one year to complete, while diplomas are awarded after successful completion of a two-year programme. The Community College in collaboration with the University of West Indies also offers a bachelor in education programme, normally lasting three years for GCE Advanced-level or CAPE diploma holders.

The school year at all educational levels consists of thirty-nine weeks on the average. These are divided into three school terms: September-December, January-March/April and April-July.

The educational process

Pre-primary education

The main goal of pre-primary education is the provision of an enriched environment—safe and stimulating—in which dignity, self-worth, discipline and national pride can be nurtured at an early age. The programme includes a number of specific objectives that are intended to meet the developmental needs—physical, intellectual, social-emotional, spiritual, and creative— of each child, and encourage and strengthen cultural and family involvement in pre-school programmes. Other objectives include promotion of self-confidence in the young child together with developing the ability to relate to others in various social contexts.

Early childhood education in Saint Lucia evolved from the traditional public school system. In 1976, Canada Save the Children Fund submitted a proposal to the Minister of Community Development to make community centers available for pre-schools and learning playgroups. In 1979, UNICEF responded to the government's request for assistance with the expansion and focusing on educating and developing



children from birth to 5 years of age; six government sponsored day-care centers were established. In 1980, centers catering to the children of agricultural workers, operated by the Ministry of Community Development became fully operational.

A Pre-school Unit within the Ministry of Education has responsibility for supervising the centers and for providing training for preschool teachers and operators. The Unit also provides a leadership role in the development of preschool curricula and other teaching materials. In general, there is recognition of the need to strengthen education at the preschool level and thereby better prepare young children for the transition to primary school. National minimum standards for operating early childhood facilities have been developed.

The curriculum is broad-based and non-prescriptive, providing the flexibility and creativity for meeting the children's level of development and prepares them for the next stage in the primary schools.

The areas of focus include: a) physical development: fine and gross motor skills development and sign development; b) cognitive development: literacy, numeracy, science, language and other related areas; c) creative development: drama, art and crafts, musical experiences, dance and movement; d) spiritual development; and e) social-emotional development: understanding of self, others and the world around them, the ability to interact and communicate with peers and others.

Training emphasizes the need to plan, facilitate and implement activities that are child-focused/centered, meaning that key issues such as the child's development, culture and interests are of paramount concern. The early childhood schedule is planned to ensure that children are engaged in activities that are both physically active and quiet, and to include both indoors and outdoors. In terms of teaching periods, the typical school day consists of: two sessions every school day with a snack break of thirty minutes and a lunch break of one hour; play/learning activity periods of not less than two hours in the morning, and one hour in the afternoons; and rest period or quiet activities for not less than an hour.

Day-care services cater to children from birth to 4/5 years of age. Many early childhood education (ECE) centers provide both preschool and day-care services thus making it difficult to categorize them as a day-care center or a preschool. In 2006/07, there were 36 day-care centers, of which 20 were government owned and 16 were privately owned. There were about 1,400 children enrolled and the number of caregivers was 159, for an average caregiver/child ratio of 1:9. Preschool education is provided through privately operated preschools. In 2006/07, there were 105 preschools with a total enrolment of 3,824 children. Approximately 40% of all preschools were located in Castries (the capital) and its environs. There were 353 preschool teachers in 2006/07 and the teacher/children ratio was 1:11. (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Primary education

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school. With the full implementation of Universal Secondary Education in 2006/07, the senior primary grades have been phased out and primary education now covers the infant department (kindergarten and grades 1 to 2) and junior primary (grades 3 to 6). Pupils are assessed through the Minimum Standards Test (MST) in grades 2 and 4, and sit the Common Entrance Exams (CEE) at the end of grade 6, which serves to assign the available places at the secondary level on the basis of merit and the choice of school.

The main goal of primary education is to equip pupils with basic literacy and numeracy skills, develop critical thinking and promote their creativity. Primary education is also intended to provide the foundation for acquiring further academic, technical and vocational skills that can help prepare school-leavers for gainful employment. In other words, the mission of primary education is to provide every child with the basis for learning, and to develop skills, values and attitudes that would make the child a useful and productive citizen. This can be accomplished through quality instruction in a physically and socially congenial environment.

The curriculum areas are: mathematics; language arts; general science; social studies; health and family life education; home economics; agriculture; physical education; religious education; music; and art and crafts.

Pupils receive instruction five days per week. On the average there are thirty-five periods of teaching per week, each lasting thirty-five minutes. The length of these periods can however increase to forty minutes where there is a senior level. The typical allocation of instructional time per subject at the beginning of 2000s is shown in the table below:

Primary education: Weekly time allocation per subject

Subject	Average weekly time allocation (in minutes)		
	Infant level	Junior level	Senior level
Language arts	500	350	280
Mathematics	200	280	200
Social studies	100	180	160
Health science	60	60	80
General science	40	60	80
Home economics (Agriculture in rural schools)	-	105	160
Music	40	60	80
Physical education	60	60	80
Art and crafts	75	70	80
Religious knowledge	150	150	150
Assembly/break and dismissal	125	125	125
Total weekly time (minutes)	1,350	1,500	1,500

There has been a gradual but steady decline in enrolment at the primary level over the past years. The trend is noteworthy as it reflects not only the results of a decline in the birth rate but also the considerable increase in the number of school places provided at the secondary level.

Formal evaluation takes the form of tests, which are given at the end of each school term. Pupils are also assessed through the Minimum Standards Test (MST) in grades 2 and 4, and they sit the Common Entrance Exams (CEE) at the end of grade 6. In the past the Standard 6 School-leaving Examination was taken by those pupils who did not continue their studies beyond the primary level; successful candidates were awarded the School-leaving Certificate for the subjects taken.

In 2004, total enrolment in primary education was 23,821 pupils, with a gross enrolment ratio of 106% and a net enrolment ratio of 91%. According to national sources, in 2007/08 there were 75 public primary schools with a total enrolment of 20,164 pupils; the total number of teachers was 922 and the average teacher to pupil ratio was 1:22. In 2006/07, 83% of primary school teachers were reported as trained. In the same year, the gross enrolment ratio (kindergarten to grade 6) was estimated at 99.3%.

Although the education system caters for automatic promotion of pupils, there have been a number of repeaters over the years. The average repetition rate for



2006/07 was 2.7%, and boys' repetition was almost twice as high as girls. The dropout rate is low (approximately 0.4% in 2006/07).

As regards special education, in the 2006/07, there were 5 special education centers in the island, with a total enrolment of 281 students and 52 teachers (of whom 58% were trained). The teacher/pupil ratio was 1:5. These schools cater to students who are developmentally challenged, hearing impaired, and have mixed disabilities.

Secondary education

At the secondary level, the main goal is to consolidate skills acquired at the primary level while at the same time providing opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills required for further learning, as well as for gainful work. Furthermore, the aim is to provide a stimulating and conducive environment to teaching and learning so that students can develop to their full potential. All secondary schools offer a full five-year programme, with Forms 1–3 comprising the lower cycle of secondary education and Forms 4 and 5 the upper cycle.

The programmes followed in secondary school are wide-ranging, consisting of both the traditional academic as well as technical and vocational subjects. Students are able to select options from a programme of study that can include up to thirty subjects. Not all subjects, however, are offered at all schools.

At the lower forms, all students are required to study a common core of subjects to include English language, mathematics, science, social science, a foreign language (Spanish and/or French), a technical/vocational area, physical education, art, music, and health and family life.

At the upper forms, students select options from the above as well as from other subjects in the additional groups of business education and information technology. However, both English and mathematics are compulsory at all levels and must be included by all students as part of their course of study. A science subject and a language option is also a requirement for graduating students. Most of the subjects can be taken at one of two levels of proficiency examined by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), i.e. the basic level or the more challenging general level.

There are forty teaching periods per week with eight periods per school day. Each period is forty minutes long with double periods included where necessary (particularly in the case of home economics, agriculture or other practical subjects).

According to national sources, in the academic year 2007/08, there were 23 public secondary schools with a total enrolment of 15,630 students. The number of secondary education teachers was 924 and the average teacher to student ratio was 1:17; in 2006/07 the percentage of trained teachers was estimated at 59%. In 2006/07, the gross enrolment ratio (public and private sectors, age group 12-16 years) was estimated at 86.2%.

The main evaluation system at this level is through the CXC, which administers end of secondary school examinations in the entire range of the



curriculum and awards certificates to successful candidates. These examinations combine school-based assessments with written examination papers. Other forms of internal assessments include assignments and end-of-term examinations, which schools use for monitoring students and for promotions. The percentage pass rate for secondary schools in the 2007 CXC general/technical exams was 66.9%, an increase by approximately two percentage points from the previous academic year. That for basic was 29.5%, a decrease by approximately 8 percentage points from the 2006 exams. The pass rates for schools at the general/technical proficiency level ranged from 99% to 38%. (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Repetition is not encouraged as this is regarded as denying access to other deserving students. Dropout rates are relatively insignificant—estimated at 0.1% in 2006/07. All students in the lower levels of the secondary system move up to the upper levels. Promotion to the post-secondary level, however, depends greatly on the results of the CXC examinations. A pass in five subjects including English language and mathematics is required to enter the Advanced-level programmes at the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College.

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The thrust of educational testing to date has been on terminal examinations oriented towards measurement of aptitude and used as screening tools to select those students who will be provided the opportunity to advance to the next level of education. Hence, originally no standardized benchmarks/reliable standards existed to measure the quality of primary education within the primary cycle, either in individual schools or across schools. Promotion was automatic, with no systematic, standardized test of achievement at the end of each grade and, hence, no marker of an individual student's mastery of subject matters until the end of the cycle.

The Ministry of Education introduced minimum standards or benchmarks as a means of quality control. The process of minimum standards testing embodies monitoring, assessing, analyzing performance results, providing feedback, and taking corrective action.

The main instrument being developed for assessing pupils at the primary level is a test of minimum standards. Tests were developed in English language, mathematics, and general paper for pupils in Grades III and V of primary education. The first tests were administered to all Grade V pupils in May 1998.

The consultation process lasted eighteen months. During that period, participants received a comprehensive explanation of minimum standards testing, including the purpose for it, and were afforded the opportunity to express their concerns and give feedback on the process. Feedback from the consultations and specific indicators from discussions with education officers, curriculum officers, principals, teachers and students were used to dovetail the examination to ensure validity.

The 1998, the Grade 5 test was administered to 3,330 pupils. Results showed that a high percentage of primary school pupils perform far below the acceptable standard at that grade level, indicating that the problem of poor performance was



much greater than was anticipated. The percentage performance of pupils in each of the subject areas was below the criterion level of 60%. Mathematics registered the poorest performance with a national average of 33.8%. District averages in each subject area were far below the 60% minimum requirements.

The Grade 3 test was administered for the first time in 1998 as a pilot examination. Designed as a diagnostic test, it provided schools with feedback on strengths and weaknesses in literacy and numeracy performance and also provided achievement data at the national level. Pupils were examined in mathematics, English language, and a general paper covering socials, general science, and health science and study skills. (Ministry of Education, 1999).

Currently, at the primary level besides writing end-of-term exams, at Grades 2 and 4 the national Minimum Standards Tests (MST) are written in English language, mathematics and in some instances general paper. In 2002, the national mean performance in the Grade 2 MST was 34.73% for English language and 38.4% for mathematics. The national mean performance in the Grade 4 MST was 45.12% for English language, 36.32% for mathematics, and 45.53% for general paper.

At grade 6, the national Common Entrance Examination (CEE) is written, the results of which are used to assign students to secondary schools. In 2003, approximately 60% of the 4,477 students who wrote the CEE were assigned places at secondary schools; this is an increase from 40% in 1995 and 28% in 1987.

In the 2007 Grade 2 MST, the national mean performance for English language and mathematics were 54.22% and 51.77% respectively. In the Grade 4 MST, the national mean performance for English language decreased slightly to 48.1% over that of the previous year whilst that for mathematics increased from 44.6% to 47.1%. In the 2007 CEE about 47% of the students scored at or above the national mean. (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Students at the Form 3 level of the secondary schools also write MST. The results of the Form 3 MST show that the national mean performance for English language continues to be higher than that for mathematics. In the 2007 Form 3 MST, the mean performance for English language was 48.5% whilst that of mathematics was 38.4%. At Form 5, the students sit the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examinations, which are administered by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), and written in May/June and January. This exam is written at both the Basic and General Proficiency levels by most schools.

In sixth form, better known as A-level, students write the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examinations administered by Cambridge in London, or the Caribbean Advance Proficiency Examination (CAPE) administered by CXC.

Teaching staff

The minimum qualification for entry into the teaching service and to teach at the primary level is four subject passes at the General Proficiency Level to include English language, and more recently mathematics as well. These teachers are



classified as untrained teachers and they must subsequently move up to the level of qualified teacher, which is obtained after completion of the two-year teacher education programme offered by the Community College. Those teachers who were recruited without adequate qualifications have sometimes remained for several years as untrained teachers.

The minimum entry requirement for secondary school teaching is one or more Advanced-level passes. These persons can also become qualified teachers following a teacher education course. Many choose to proceed to degree programmes at a university and become graduate teachers.

The teacher education programme is geared mainly for the primary level. It consists of: foundations in education; content and method courses in language arts; mathematics; social studies and science; health and family life education. Teaching practice and an individual study complete the compulsory component of the programme. Teachers are also required to choose options from subject areas such as home economics, special education, art, drama, physical education, library studies and music. The programme is of two years duration and is certified by the University of the West Indies.

Teachers' workloads at the different educational levels often vary. In primary schools, where teachers generally teach all subjects for their given class, the normal workload is seven teaching periods of thirty-five minutes per school day. In secondary schools, a teaching load is normally set at thirty teaching periods out of the weekly total of forty.

Working and employment conditions as well as salaries and other benefits are negotiated from time to time between the St. Lucia Teachers' Union and the Government. However, matters such as regulations for guiding professional conduct and behaviour of teachers fall under the authority of the Teaching Service Commission.

Training is an ongoing process for all teachers including principals and other education personnel. A variety of opportunities are offered locally through courses at the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College or short workshops/seminars sponsored by the Ministry of Education. Many teachers avail themselves of these while others pursue programmes at educational institutions overseas.

Financing for such training may be assisted by government- or other donor-sponsored scholarships or private funding often through student loans.

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Web resources

Ministry of Education and Culture: <http://www.education.gov.lc/> [In English. Last checked: June 2010.]

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