



Belize

Revised version, September 2006.

Principles and general objectives of education

Education is a basic human right. The broad objective of education is to provide students with the knowledge, skills and attitude required for their personal development to reach their potential and for their full, active and free participation in society and the country's development, and the advancement of common values. This objective is developed through the following goals incorporating what is considered valuable in terms of knowing, doing, being and relating: The national goals of education for students in Belize are:

- A knowledge of Belize and a commitment to and involvement in its nationhood and development;
- An appreciation of and respect for different people and cultures and a commitment to justice and equity for all;
- Spirituality, social skills and personal qualities;
- Intellectual skills and qualities;
- A knowledge and practice of healthy lifestyles;
- An understanding of the economics of Belize and of the world, the appreciation of work, the capacity to participate in economic activities, skills in design and the ability to use a range of technologies;
- A knowledge of the universe and an understanding of our solar system with special attention to the earth (third rock from the sun);
- An understanding of systems and sub systems in the physical world, including the natural environment and the need to preserve it;
- An understanding of number, quantity and space and the application of relevant concepts;
- An appreciation of, and participation in, artistic ventures, particularly within the Belizean culture;
- The ability to communicate proficiently in English;
- The ability to communicate effectively in Spanish.

Decisions concerning the delivery of education are guided by principles recognizing: the rights of the individual to education regardless of gender, religion,



language or ethnicity; the uniqueness of the individual and the need for the complete development of each person; and the need to protect the individual by ensuring that the content and process of education are morally acceptable.

Current educational priorities and concerns

The economy of Belize is based primarily on agricultural exports, tourism, light manufacturing and subsistence agriculture. The ability of the country to diversify its economic base will depend, to some extent, on a population and labour force that are better skilled in technology, business and crafts in order to improve the use of natural resources, especially in eco-tourism, fisheries and agriculture. The development of a more highly skilled labour force will require a significant improvement in primary education to develop life skills, functional literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate.

Educational policies and reforms focus on the primary and secondary levels of education. These policies seek improvement in three areas: access, quality and management. In the case of primary education, policies are being formulated under the Primary Education Development (PED) Project with a view to reducing dropout rates. In the case of secondary education, an increase in the number of facilities, better accessibility to existing facilities and more efficient use of them are being considered to improve access. A policy of free secondary education has been announced, but limited access to schools has reduced its effects.

Quality in primary education is the main agenda item under the PED Project, with strategies for curriculum reform, pre-service and in-service teacher training, improvement in the assessment and reporting of student achievement, increased availability of textbooks and other materials and greater focus on children's needs. A similar project is currently being planned for secondary education that will place greater emphasis on accountability by developing standards for certification, emphasis on better pedagogy and more relevance and congruence between schooling and development.

The management policies seek a decentralization of the education system through the creation of district education councils and a democratization of school management through the establishment of school boards. Policies regarding efficiency relate to: (a) cost-effectiveness, including student-teacher ratio and teacher workload; (b) curriculum, including course relevance and affordability; and (c) academic factors, such as reduction of students dropping out due to in-school factors (such as observance of requirements concerning the number of class hours per day and school days per year).

Non-attendance and educational wastage at the primary level are significant concerns, in rural areas where lack of ready access to schools prevent regular participation in the educational process as well as in urban settings, where poverty and unstable home situations often lead to withdrawal from school. At the same time, there is a need for a correspondingly greater increase in access to secondary education (including technical vocational education) as the basis for further education or for employment and lifelong learning. There is currently approximately 50% coverage of



the age cohort at the secondary level. The objective, however, is not simply to increase access to secondary education as it now exists, but to increase availability of appropriate technical and vocational education to support the process of economic diversification. Finally, there is a dearth of appropriate, higher-level professional training including training in entrepreneurship, culture and technology to support an expansion and a diversification of the current economic base.

Multiculturalism in Belize not only poses special linguistic problems for the educational process, but also brings specific requirements for racial and cultural harmony and respect. The population consists of a diversity of ethnic groups, the major ones being Creoles of African descent, Mestizos, Mayas (Ketchi, Mopan, and Yucatec), and Garifuna (once called Black Caribs). There are also smaller populations of East Indians, Chinese, and persons of Middle-Eastern origin (Bennett, 1995, p. 92).

The Government's 2003-2008 Manifesto envisages a significant role for Information Technology (IT) and the internet. Besides a far-reaching twelve-point proposal for developing a "High Tech Belize", one of the government's specific goals is to establish "Computer Education Centers" in all districts. The Ministry of Education therefore is working towards facilitating the development and coordination of a unified software and hardware infrastructure throughout the national educational establishment, and also creating technical liaison to District Computer Education Centers.

The Ministry of Education Action Plan 2005–2010 identified the following key action areas in order to reshape the education system to allow for delivery of innovative ways to meet Belize's education needs for the 21st century:

- **Early Childhood Education and Development:** to increase access, enhance quality and accountability measures, establish linkages, and promote parental involvement at this level.
- **Teacher Training:** to facilitate provision of training opportunities, assure quality of programmes and course offerings, institute evaluation and accountability systems, and establish an appropriate resource centre.
- **Special Education:** to strengthen institutional capacities to support special education policies, establish programmes based on inclusion with appropriate teaching and learning aids, and create an enabling ("least-restrictive") environment for special needs learners in schools.
- **Adult and Continuing Education:** to build capacity of the staff and coordinators, increase access to programmes countrywide, establish system for programme monitoring and evaluation, creating linkages with community organizations and private sector.
- **Curriculum and Assessment:** to ensure that curricula are relevant and effectively taught at all levels, implement national assessment and use assessment data to inform educational planning, establish strong links with community and parents as well as volunteer opportunities.



- **Technical and Vocational Education:** to make accessible Centres for Employment Training (CETs) that are equipped and appropriate to training and economic demands, develop standards to ensure quality of programmes and support for student achievement, and improve efficiency of system to promote student graduates entering gainful employment.
- **Higher Education:** to complete and ratify policies for higher education, increase access to higher education to 15% by 2010 through funding programmes and partnerships with the private sector, and establish a National Accreditation Council and promote linkages to other institutions for quality assurance.
- **Policy Development** – to develop one document which will capture the key policies under one title: National Policy for Education.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

According to the **Education Act** (1990, amended in the year 2000), the eight-year primary education programme is compulsory and all children between the ages of 5 and 14 years are required to attend the school.

Article 25 states that “The education system shall ensure equitable access for both genders to education at all levels, shall be sensitive to the particular needs of the female gender, and shall cater to the special needs of challenged pupils. Schools shall be free of gender, racial and other biases, and shall be managed in such a way that all students shall, as far as may be applicable, co-exist as peacefully and harmoniously as possible.”

Administration and management of the education system

The **Ministry of Education and Labour** (previously the Ministry of Education and Sports) is the main education authority in the country. The Ministry establishes and sets national education goals and policies; provides support systems for the effective delivery of appropriate and equitable educational services at all levels of the education system; and monitors the quality and effectiveness of education at the pre-school, primary, secondary and post-secondary levels. It ensures the development of relevant curricula, its implementation, and the provision of supportive environment that facilitates the teaching/learning process, in a system that is managed by qualified staff. The Ministry works in consultation and co-operation with the churches, communities, voluntary and private organizations, and other bodies recognized as education partners for the sufficient, efficient, and equally accessible provision of education in Belize.

Within the Ministry of Education, School Services is responsible for functions relating to the administration and resource provision of schools, and ensures that operational decisions relating to these are taken at the regional level. The purpose of the School Services is to support the Chief Education Officer in his/her duties through: managing school supervision and inspection; devising criteria for the

equitable delegation of school resources; providing for the sale of textbooks and allocation of grants/bursaries; monitoring School Children Transportation Service to ensure safety and equity; monitoring the work of the School Attendance Officer and Rural School Officers.

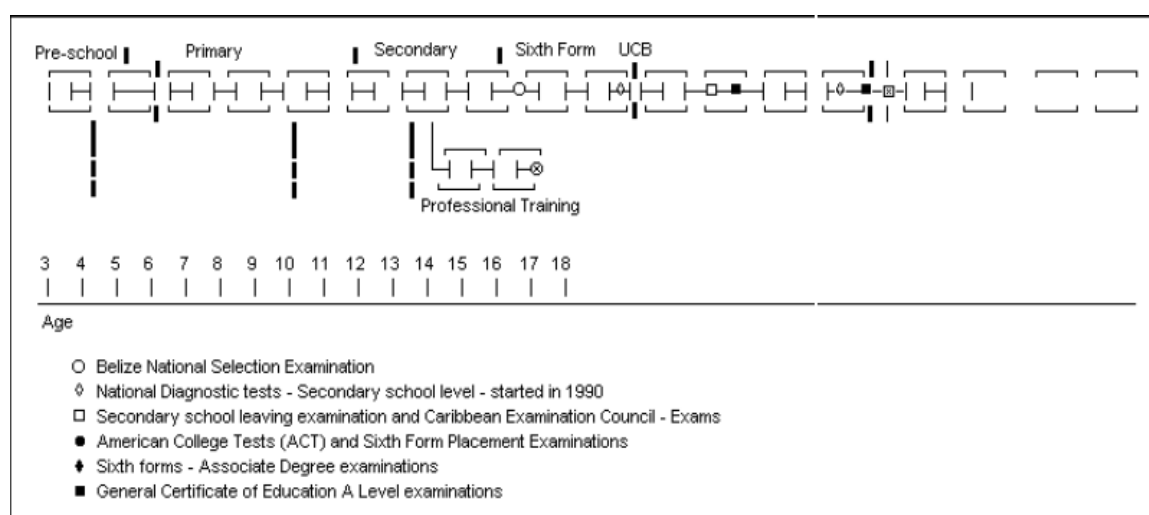
The **Quality Assurance and Development Service (QADS)** of the Ministry ensures relevant quality education through the development and monitoring of the implementation of national standards for the performance of students, teachers and schools, and is comprised of the following Units/Services: Curriculum Development Unit; Assessment and Evaluation Unit; Teacher Development and Licensing Service; Administration and Finance Unit; and Production Unit.

The **National Council of Education**, established by the Education Act passed in 1990, has the specific purpose of advising the Minister of Education on all matters relating to education.

Additionally, **District Education Councils** are established to assist the Ministry in planning, managing and monitoring the delivery of educational services in each of the six districts of Belize. Managers, managing authorities or boards are responsible for the proper and efficient organization of individual schools or institutions and for the adequate provision of such support systems required to deliver appropriate education to students enrolled in schools (with assistance and in partnership with the government under the conditions for grant-in-aid as specified in the Education Act).

Structure and organization of the education system

Belize: structure of the education system



Pre-school education

Pre-school education caters to children between the ages of 3 and 5 years. It is community-supported and is not compulsory, but is becoming more widespread as its benefits are recognized by parents.



Primary education

Primary education is compulsory for all children between the ages of 5 and 14 years. The eight-year programme is divided into infant grades (I-II) and junior grades (III-VIII or Standards I-VI). The completion of primary education is marked by a nationally administered examination to determine access to secondary school. Most primary schools are church-related, but receive public funding under the church/state system of management. Primary schools follow a ministry-prescribed curriculum that prepares students for the Belize National Selection Examination.

Secondary education

Secondary education includes four-year schools offering general education (in most cases including an element of vocational-technical education) and vocational or trade schools offering short-term courses in basic trades (Centres for Employment Training).

Post-secondary institutions include sixth-form establishments, offering two years of post-secondary schooling; institutions for professional training (agriculture, nursing, teaching); and the university.

The length of the school year for pre-primary, primary and secondary education is approximately 175 working days with a minimum of four, five and five and a half hours of classes per day, respectively. The school year usually begins in September, with breaks at Christmas and Easter, and extends to the end of June. Summer holidays last nine or ten weeks. Primary schools usually divide the year into three terms, the end of each corresponding to the Christmas, Easter and summer vacation periods. Secondary schools divide the year into three terms or two semesters. Post-secondary institutions usually divide the year into two semesters, with the University College of Belize maintaining a summer programme equivalent to a third semester.

The financing of education

Almost all educational institutions in Belize are affiliated to a church. These are public institutions under the church/state system of education. The major exception is the pre-primary level, where most institutions are funded by the community or privately. There is very little information on expenditure on private education at any level, but it is estimated to be less than 1% of the public expenditure.

On the other hand, the statement above refers specifically to expenditure by institutions in the formal education system that are considered as private, that is, those schools which do not receive grant-in-aid from the government. The figure, however, does not include expenditure by denominational, grant-aided (public) schools financed from sources other than the government, such as parents and community donations. Major capital expenditures by denominational schools are often financed from private donations, fund raising and head offices. In addition to these, all grant-aided secondary schools levy additional fees collected directly from parents. It is



estimated that schools raise an additional 15-20% of their revenue beyond that which is paid by government as salary grants and student tuition fees.

For public higher education institutions falling within the portfolio of the Ministry of Education, the proportion of government funding is approximately 70%, with the remaining 30% derived from fees and other sources. Other government institutions, such as the College of Agriculture and the School of Nursing, are 100% government-funded.

Significant expenditure is also incurred by the State for students studying abroad. Students are assisted through partial or complete scholarships covering costs for tuition and maintenance expenses. The major expenditure is in connection with students studying at the University of the West Indies, to which Belize is a contributing country.

In 1994/95, education was the largest budget item accounting for 28% of the total current expenditure and 20% of the total current and capital expenditure. Government expenditure on education in 1994/95 represented 6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The breakdown of expenditure allocations at the various levels of the system for the same year was as follows: 1% to preschool education; 55% to primary education; 24% to secondary education; 14% to post-secondary education; and 6% to educational administration and development, including teacher training for primary schools.

In 2004/2005, the government devoted 22% of the recurrent expenditure on education. The breakdown of expenditure on education was as follows: 0.5% to preschool education, 61.3% to primary education, 27.7% to secondary education, 4.1% to post-secondary education, 1.1% to tertiary education, 1.5% to Centres for Employment Training (CETs), 0.7% to special education, and 3.1% to other.

Government recurrent spending per student by level of education in 2004/2005 in Belize Dollars (BZ\$) was as follows: BZ\$237 per preschool student, BZ\$982 per primary student, BZ\$1,743 per secondary student, and BZ\$1,732 per post-secondary student.

The educational process

Pre-primary education

Pre-primary education emphasizes socialization and the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Pre-school education is not yet fully developed. In 1994, there were ninety pre-school establishments, of which seven were maintained by the Ministry of Education and eighty-three by communities and private organizations. Pre-school centres are generally small, with the large majority of teachers being untrained, i.e. having not completed a formal teacher training programme.



The Pre-School Unit of the Ministry of Education believes that all pre-school children deserve the best possible education through a quality child-centred environment. This will allow them to develop fully the skills that will enhance future learning and educational potential. The Pre-school Unit is able to provide assistance to the pre-school community through support from UNICEF, VSO and the Peace Corp. The Unit is responsible for: providing teaching training for pre-school and early childhood workers; doing licensing inspection and visits to pre-schools; providing support to managing bodies of pre-school programs; advocating with government and aid agencies for financial support and recognition; developing and implementing early childhood curricula for pre-school education; conducting a school readiness summer programme in areas where there is no pre-school education programme available.

According to the Ministry of Education Action Plan 2005–2010, “The period of early childhood is that period of a child’s life that spans from age zero to 8 years. The education system has traditionally given far from sufficient attention to this most important phase in children’s development. There is urgent need to increase access to opportunities and quality of education at this critical stage in children’s development... Meaningful connections are initiated with the first stage of early childhood from birth to three years, the preschool years, and the later stage of early childhood, which includes the transition from preschool to primary school. Emphasis is also placed on initiating and maintaining strong links with other sectors addressing early childhood issues.” Envisaged activities within the Plan include:

- Support attachment of preschools to primary schools in all districts;
- Pay salaries for all preschool teachers in licensed pre-schools;
- Construct/support construction of pre-schools where none exist;
- Establish Summer Preschool Experience Program where none exist;
- Establish and resource a specialized unit—Early Childhood Education and Development Centre (ECEDC)
- Train & certify 50% of preschool teachers;
- Complete the curriculum development and implement it in all pre-schools;
- Ongoing monitoring of preschools countrywide by district supervisory teams.

In 2004/2005, there were 4,412 children enrolled in pre-primary education and the average pupil-teacher ratio was 17.2:1.

Primary education

The ultimate goal in primary education is to have all students successfully succeed, and perceive themselves as successful learners, and demonstrate a desire to obtain further education.



The primary school curriculum is grouped around four areas of study:

- language (English and Spanish);
- mathematics, science, work & technology (aspect of technology relating to production);
- social studies and personal development (aspect of personal development relating to social/cultural, spiritual, economics);
- the expressive arts, physical education, health (including the physical aspect of personal development).

Religious education and/or Bible studies commonly feature in denominational schools. Life skills are also a common element.

In 1994, total enrolment amounted to 51,377 pupils in some 244 primary and infant schools, and the average pupil-teacher ratio was 26:1. In 2004/2005, there were 63,473 students enrolled in primary education and the average pupil-teacher ratio was 23.8:1.

Students are formally assessed and evaluated at the end of every term/semester and at the end of each school year to determine promotion. At the end of primary education, students take the Belize National Selection Examination (BNSE) composed of tests in English usage and composition, mathematics, science and social studies. Based on test performance, the student is issued a percentile rank that forms the basis for entry into secondary schools on a competition for available space basis. The student is also issued a certificate presenting a letter grade (A to D) for each of the four subjects listed using a norm-referenced method of grading.

Figures for educational wastage vary, but the generally accepted national dropout rate average between entry and completion of primary school is 25%. Educational wastage increases during the latter half of schooling and the repetition rate is high (9.7% over the eight grades). In 2003, the primary school completion rate was 40.4%. In 2004/2004, the transition rate from primary to secondary school was 87.7% (88.8% males and 86.5% females).

Teachers have very little autonomy. There is a centrally developed national curriculum with associated guidelines specifying what is to be taught at what levels and sometimes how. A new curriculum is currently being developed under the PED Project. It will give significant freedom to principals and teachers to determine the actual content and classroom strategies and teaching sequence. The new curriculum seeks to identify learning outcomes rather than specific content and sequence.

Secondary education

The curriculum for the first two years of secondary education generally consists of English, Spanish, science, mathematics, social studies, religion and literature. During the last two years, students are streamed and the subjects studied will depend on the stream. There are usually three streams, i.e. business studies, secretarial studies and



academic studies. The latter consists of studies in the sciences, mathematics and the arts. Schools usually allow a mixture of all three with emphasis in one.

At the secondary level, the curriculum is dictated by the syllabi of the various external end-of-school examinations, such as the General Certificate of Education (GCE) and the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). A significant number of teachers were involved in determining the syllabi of the various CXC subjects.

In 1994, there were thirty secondary schools with a total enrolment of 10,147 students. The student-teacher ratio was 15:1, although at the upper grades it was 10:1, because of the proliferation of courses and the reduced number of students due to dropout and repetition at the lower levels. In 2004/2005, total enrolment in secondary education was 16,150 students. The student teacher ratio was 14.3:1.

Students are formally assessed and evaluated at the end of every term/semester and at the end of each year of schooling to determine promotion. At the secondary level, students are issued a diploma by the institution attesting to the successful completion of the prescribed course of study based on its own internal assessment and standards. Most students also take examinations set by the Caribbean Examinations Council, which often form the basis for employment and further studies. There is no connection between award of the diploma by the institution and performance on the external examination. There is no national standard and assessment of performance at the secondary level similar to the BNSE at the primary level. Sixth-form establishments and other post-secondary institutions operate similarly to secondary schools in issuing diplomas certifying successful completion of the prescribed course of study.

Educational wastage between entry and completion of secondary education is similar or slightly higher than that at the primary education level. The dropout occurs early, usually after the first or second year. The repetition rate averages 6% over the four years of secondary education. In 2003, the secondary school completion rate was 51.3%. In 2004/2005, the repetition rate in secondary school was 7.8% and the dropout rate was 6.5%.

There is now at least one sixth-form or Junior College in each of the six administrative districts. They either operate within the administration of a secondary school or provide tertiary level education as an institution with its own administrative structure. The total enrolment is calculated at 1,300 with a total teaching staff of 121.

English is the language of instruction at all levels. In some cases where there is a homogeneous class, as in the case of isolated Mayan villages, the mother tongue is partially used as the language of instruction in the early years. The proposed language policy for education seeks oral and written competence in English and Spanish and literacy in one of the mother tongues. This is not yet fully implemented, however.

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The Assessment and Evaluation Unit of the Ministry of Education contributes to the assessment of learning achievement nationwide through:



- Providing the education system with high quality assessment instruments at critical stages of the primary and secondary level;
- Conducting analyses of achievement data in order to provide information on student performance in relation to outcomes determined by national curricula;
- Providing the education system with evaluative information from national examinations of student learning to enable review of curriculum, pedagogy and to inform the policy making process;
- Directing activities related to the administration of national and international examinations;
- Participating in the development of policies governing the provision of educational services as required by the Ministry of Education;
- Liaising with national, regional and international entities in matters related to curriculum and assessment;
- Establishing clear guidelines for classroom assessment;
- Collaborating with other Service Units in the provision of educational services to the education system.

Higher education

The mission of Belizean higher education is to promote and sustain human resource development and socio-economic growth, provide access to emergent ideas and technologies, and enable their application to domestic needs. It is to contribute to the development of knowledge, enterprise, leadership, governance, participatory democracy, and poverty alleviation. It attracts foreign investment through the development of a more skilled workforce. Finally, it is to facilitate the movement of skilled workers and knowledge within the region.

Higher education in Belize therefore is gearing toward the development of persons who are capable of seizing the economic opportunities inherent in globalization; who demonstrate multiple literacies and can exercise independent and critical thinking; who are equipped with foreign language skills; who have an informed respect for the cultural heritage of Belize; who embrace and use gender differences and who take advantage of opportunities to control, improve, maintain and promote physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. Thus, the funding, development and delivery of public higher education are guided by national development needs and reflect a commitment to continuous quality enhancement.

Belize's single university, the University of Belize (UB)—previously the University College of Belize (UCB), is a national, autonomous, and multi-location institution committed to excellence in higher education, research and service for national development. The institution functions according to its Act and under



governance of its Council. The University of Belize is dedicated to fostering Belize's development by producing graduates who are socially and ecologically responsible, analytical, self-confident, disciplined, ethical, entrepreneurial, and skilled communicators who are committed to using these skills and values for Belize's enrichment. UB currently has 34 diverse programs—within the study fields: management & social sciences, science & technology, education & arts, and nursing & allied health.

In 1994, the total number of students enrolled at the University College of Belize, which at that time offered two programmes leading to degrees (business administration and teacher education), was 570. The number of full-time teachers was twenty-four, supplemented by twenty-nine part-time lecturers. In 2004/2005, there were a total of 2121 students enrolled in UB.

Most other post-secondary institutions are community or denominational institutions and are managed by their respective boards. The contact with the Ministry of Education usually comes at the time of budget preparation when a salary grant to the institution is determined. Government institutions are autonomous in determining programmes of study and standards. They are not autonomous, however, as far as the appointment of staff is concerned.

Student performance is evaluated using written examinations and an assessment of coursework done over the period of the semester. Students are assigned a letter grade, which is converted to a numerical equivalent for the purpose of calculating averages. However, there is no method of evaluating the performance of the establishments, other than informal comparisons on the performance of students on external examinations. Not all students from all institutions take these exams, so there is no comprehensive basis of comparison.

There is little or no attempt to match the number of graduates in different fields of training with the needs of the employment market. Student enrolment in various courses is generally a matter of what has been traditionally offered. There is a preponderance of students enrolled in business administration programmes that provide a general education for employment in many fields.

Significant work has been done by the UB towards recognition of degrees in North American, Latin American and Caribbean institutions. The recognition of teacher education diplomas is facilitated through links with the University of the West Indies and nursing diplomas are recognized regionally in the Caribbean, since qualifying examinations are set by the regional association of nurses. Sixth Form diplomas are recognized for credit in American institutions. The amount of credit awarded varies with the institutions in question.

Various scholarship awards and financial disbursements are available through the government of Belize to students who wish to pursue higher studies in Belize or abroad.

In 2004/2005, there were 3,464 students enrolled in post-secondary education, 944 students in tertiary education, and 490 students in vocational schools.



Special education

The Special Education Unit (SEU) of the government of Belize is committed to providing appropriate educational support to children and youth with special educational needs. The nature of the need may be physical, sensory, intellectual, behavioural, emotional or multiple. Services provided under SEU include screening, diagnostic assessments, teacher-training, parent and school support and specific therapies for students with special needs. The SEU operates on the philosophy that it is the human right of ALL children to have the opportunity to achieve his or her individual best in all aspects of life. The SEU recognizes its response to pupils' needs not only as a moral duty but also as a genuine social responsibility and obligation to the equitable development of all children.

Two major principles must govern the provision of education for children with special education needs in Belize: the principle of Inclusion and the principle of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Inclusive education demands a system which seeks to develop a better quality of life for all without any form of discrimination and that recognizes and accepts diversity as a basis for social coexistence. The principle of inclusion is based on the affirmation of the same right of equal education for every person to learn within his or her own community. The Least Restrictive Environment recognizes the wide range of diversity among students at either end of the learning continuum as well as for unique forms of need. This principle recognizes that where it is not in the best interest of the child to be included in the class he or she may need a different setting for the teaching learning process, for example special schools and classes, resource classrooms and home schooling.

Special education is provided at a central school for children who are severely challenged physically and in terms of learning ability. The approach to special education has changed from exclusion, to mainstreaming, to inclusion. District Centres provide support to parents whose children have special education needs.

Private education

The new educational policies set all requirements for the establishment and operation of private educational institutions, as they do for the establishment and operation of a public school. The reporting requirement is significantly lower for private schools than it is for grant-aided schools.

The curriculum of primary schools is centrally established by the Ministry of Education, while the curriculum at the secondary level depends on the external examination councils.

There are very few private schools in Belize. The country has an established church/state system of education and thus church schools and schools run by various voluntary organizations receive public funding and are declared public schools.

In 2004/2005, the number of private or private/special assisted schools was 84 for the preschool level, 34 for primary, 9 for secondary, 2 for post-secondary, and 6 tertiary.



Means of instruction, equipment and infrastructure

Textbooks and other materials for primary schools are available for purchase at the various bookstores. In order to reduce the cost of textbooks, the Ministry of Education and Sports maintains a bookstore that sells books and other materials to schools at a reduced rate. Textbooks and other materials for secondary schools and sixth-form establishments are available for purchase at the various schools and at bookstores. The problem with textbooks is, therefore, not their availability but rather their affordability. The cost of textbooks and other materials such as workbooks is prohibitive. The Primary Education Development Project maintains a textbook loan scheme through which basic books are provided to schools for distribution to students who cannot afford to purchase them. The school is responsible for identifying those students who receive textbooks under the scheme. The Ministry of Education provides financial assistance for the purchase of textbooks to approximately 10% of the secondary school population.

Books and other educational materials are imported. The BRC Press publishes mathematics and English textbooks and workbooks for use in primary schools. These materials are generally of lower cost. It is not yet determined whether they are of the same educational quality as other materials. They are mostly used in rural Catholic schools and do present an alternative source which is much more affordable. Books and educational materials for secondary schools and post secondary institutions are imported since these are common to the Caribbean countries subscribing to the CXC examinations.

There is also a shortage of audio-visual equipment and other teaching and learning resources and materials, including science laboratory equipment, workshop equipment and materials, computers and business equipment (such as typewriters, photocopiers and other duplicating equipment). With the assistance of private foundations, computers were introduced in primary and secondary schools in the six districts of the country and set up as a network. However, for a variety of reasons, computers are not being used to their fullest capacity.

The Ministry of Education provides transportation for students attending primary school beyond a given distance from home. This tends to be the case in the rural south of the country inhabited by the Maya Indians. Transportation is also provided for secondary students in the south of the country. In most cases, however, students attending secondary school will board in the municipality in which the school is located. Residential accommodation is not a problem since this is often done on a family basis.

In the 2004/2005 academic school year, there were 118 preschools, 282 primary schools, 45 secondary schools, 9 post-secondary institutions, 7 tertiary institutions and 4 vocational schools. The average number of students per classroom was 27 in urban areas and 24 in rural areas.



Adult and non-formal education

Literacy and non-formal programmes are normally organised by voluntary and private organizations. Some of these voluntary organizations are primarily associated with other Ministries, such as the Ministry of Human Resources, which includes the portfolio of youth and women affairs, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which is responsible for refugees. Some secondary schools also successfully offer evening programmes as alternative secondary education. There are also several organizations, such as the Belize Institute of Management, which offer professional, management and business training. Continuing education to build upon success is becoming an important ally of and complement to the formal education process, allowing the formal education system to focus on education as opposed to specific training, which is often best given while on the job.

In the recent years, the Literacy Council of Belize has emerged as an arm of the Ministry of Education with the responsibility in conjunction with the Adult and Continuing Education section of the Ministry to conduct literacy programmes. Some secondary schools also undertake their own evening schools for those who wish to upgrade their education. Various non-governmental organizations also conduct training programmes relating to their particular missions and objectives. Among the most prominent are: the Society for the Promotion of Education and Research, focusing particularly on Spanish-speaking immigrant communities; the Belize Family Life Association, whose mission is to educate women in the areas of health and family planning; the Belize Red Cross, which focuses on first aid training; the YWCA and the YMCA, which run classes for young people in the usual school subjects and in vocational training areas. Today there are a growing number of smaller organizations, including the Youth Enterprise Services, focusing on non-formal education especially for young female school leavers and dropouts. The Belize Institute of Management, the Belize Enterprise for Sustained Technology, the Belize Tourism Industry Association and the Belize Chamber of Commerce provide training and technical assistance services in the area of management and enterprise development.

The Employment Training and Educational Services (ETES) of the Ministry of Education is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that youth and adults are provided with quality occupational employment training and education services that will empower them to become gainfully employed and thus actively contribute towards the development of the nation. The vision of ETES is to enhance a national Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system that will provide equal access, empowerment opportunities and a better quality of life for all.

Centres for Employment Training (CET) offer courses such as small engine repair, food preparation, catering, cake decorating, arts and crafts, cushion making, woodwork, computer training and literacy, in keeping with the stated goal of training for today's job market. The centres are accessible to all, but the major target group is the disadvantaged young people who did not get an opportunity to get into secondary school but would like to have a skill in order to be able to get a job. They also cater to adult education for people who are already working but may need to improve on their skills or learn an additional one. The courses vary in length ranging from three months to ten months in duration.



So far, there are no strict criteria relating to the specific characteristics and qualifications of teachers who participate in non-formal education programmes. Each agency attempts to obtain the services of the most qualified teachers or those of the persons with the most appropriate knowledge and skills in the subject(s) being taught. Most essential are communication and interpersonal relations skills. Due attention is also paid to the amount of time which individuals can spare to devote to volunteer teaching after their regular working hours. Regular teachers from the formal school system do participate in non-formal educational programmes but no study has been made as to the number and the conditions under which they work.

Teaching staff

The recent paradigm shift in the role of the teacher is one that views the teacher as facilitator/guide to learning, a view that sees the student as participating and generating understanding rather than the teacher being the sole source of knowledge. Teaching as a profession is a vision of the teacher as one who:

Has a sound academic background and, therefore, demonstrates knowledge of the content area to be taught.

Has an appreciation for children's social, emotional and cognitive development. This appreciation will recognize each student as a unique individual with her/her own talents and dispositions and will endeavour to prepare instructions to meet the uniqueness.

Is willing to make decisions on changes, particularly those for the benefit of students and the larger society.

Has concern for both the planned and hidden curriculum. Such a teacher will utilize resources wisely in planning quality curriculum and instructional materials, will model positive behaviours as well as inculcate sound, societal values and attitudes. He/she will select goals and set standards that are challenging but achievable.

Has a repertoire of instructional techniques and classroom management skills. These are essential to enabling the teacher to deal effectively with the various learning styles and behaviour patterns of students.

Has an awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses, and the needs of each particular class. This allows for much forward planning such as guest speakers, field trips, etc., to ensure that students get maximum benefit from each and every teaching/learning experience.

Reflects on and analyses practices as a means of improving teaching, holding oneself accountable for the progress of the students they teach. In summary, the role of the teacher is to design coherent instruction to promote good teaching. This can be described as a coordinated approach that considers the various elements outlined above into an effective programme to meet the needs of the individual students and that of the wider curriculum.



Believes that each student is capable of achieving. Teacher expectations of students have proven to have tremendous effect on students' achievement in the classroom. It is important therefore that teachers make positive inferences about students' potential for achievement.

The vision of the teacher as a professional is one in which a multiplicity of roles must be played. One of these essential roles is that of creating a warm and caring atmosphere, particularly as many students come from broken and dysfunctional homes. The teacher should create an environment where there is excitement for learning, is a safe place for risk-taking, and promotes high expectations for achievement. In brief, the school and classroom environment should be one in which the teacher as facilitator is indisputably in charge but students can still regard them as a special sort of friend, a protector, a challenger, someone who will permit no harm.

In 2004/2005, the total number of pre-primary teachers was 256. The large majority of teachers in pre-schools (99% of whom are female) have not attended and completed a formal institutional programme of teacher training (only 7% of pre-primary teachers were trained in 2004).

In primary schools, there is still an insufficiency of trained teachers (those certified after completing a formal programme of teacher training). In 1994, there were 398 uncertified teachers, 373 certified teachers and 1,205 trained teachers. The thrust over near the end of the 1990s was to increase the proportion of trained teachers in primary schools to a level of at least 80% by the year 2000 to meet the labour force needs of the schools, whose enrolment has been increasing by some 2% each year. In 2004/2005, there were 2,664 teachers in primary education, 51.4% of whom are trained, and 72% of whom are female.

Secondary schools also suffer from an insufficiency of appropriately trained teachers. The teacher needs of the secondary schools are influenced by the continuing increase of the primary school enrolment which impacts on the output of the primary schools and consequently on the demand for secondary school places. These needs are also influenced by a widespread insufficiency of teachers qualified to instruct at the secondary level, as well as the shortage of specialist teachers in the various disciplines of secondary school curriculum. In 2004/2005, there were 1,131 secondary school teachers, of whom 64% were female and 37.6% trained.

In 2004/2005, there were 143 post-secondary teachers, 225 tertiary level teachers, and 47 vocational teachers.

The Teacher Development and Licensing Services of the Ministry of Education establishes standards for initial and teacher education and continuing professional development for teacher at all levels, as well as developing criteria for licensing of teachers and establishing standards for teaching at all levels and monitors teacher and teacher education against standards established.

There are variations in recruitment, which are not linked to any clear-cut national criteria. At the primary level, recruitment of teachers has been traditionally linked to the pupil-teacher system. Under this system, a primary school-leaver (14 years of age) may be recruited as a candidate to the first Teacher Examination, which



is usually sat two years following admission to the schools' teaching staff. Subsequently, such a teacher studies and sits the Second Class Certificate Examination and finally the First Class Examination. At this point, the teacher is officially recognized as a fully certified but not as a trained teacher. Someone may also be recruited after completing three years of secondary education. In that case, the person must sit the two final certificate examinations, or, as a high school graduate, is exempted from certain academic subjects but has to qualify for the award of the First Class Teacher Certificate. Finally, a person may be hired as a trained teacher who has completed a teacher training college certificate or diploma course; or as a university graduate; or even as someone holding a post-graduate degree or diploma. Within the church/state system of educational administration, the religious faith of the recruit may also influence the decision to hire.

There are two basic (minimum) requirements for admission into the Belize Teacher College, the only teacher training institution for primary school teachers. The first is three CXC passes at the general proficiency level, one of which must be English; or successful completion of the First Class Teacher Certificate, a local examination that caters to those persons who may not have completed high school or who completed high school but did not obtain the minimum score required in the CXC examinations. The second requirement is successful completion of an entrance examination in English and mathematics.

Once appointed, opportunities for promotion occur with the opening of new schools or with vacancies arising from the departures or transfers of principal teachers. At the secondary and tertiary levels, opportunities emerge with the expansion of the curriculum that necessitates new speciality or department heads. In this connection, in-service training providing for the professional development of teachers is highly important. Much of this is provided at the primary school level, by the Belize Teacher College, since its full-time teacher training programme includes student teachers who are already certified teachers on study leave. At present, there is an expanded training programme conducted through the distance education mode. There is also a newly launched training programme for principals being offered through this mode. The Education Development Centre provides short-term in-service training of a few days duration in the areas of curriculum development and testing and measurement. Additionally, the National Teachers Union offers a three-week in-service programme of training for primary school teachers annually. Specialized workshops and on-site training are also offered by the National Drug Council, the Belize Zoo, the Tropical Education Centre and a few other NGOs, in the interest of promoting their own programmes through the schools.

In its true sense, pre-service training for primary school teachers began in 1988 with the admission of high school graduates into the Belize Teacher College. Prior to that time, such a programme did not exist given the fact that only teachers who were in the profession were able to pursue training (between 1954 and 1988, the college offered a programme for teachers already in the profession which provided initial training rather than pre-service training for teachers). The pre-service programme has limited intake because candidates find it more profitable to first secure a teaching job before seeking admission to the college. This afforded them the privilege of having a secure job until they have completed training, and receiving full salary while in training. This paradox is due to the fact that admission to the teaching profession



requires only a high school diploma and in some cases only a primary education certificate (it is worth noting that admission to the profession is regulated by the Ministry of Education while admission to the college is regulated by the Joint Board of Teacher Education—UWI, Mona—to meet the standards of the region). Also, the country's historical developments in education relied in the past on the pupil-teacher system of training for teachers. This situation is fast changing. The Ministry of Education has established a policy that requires training before entry into the profession and has put increased emphasis on the upgrading of teachers currently in the profession through the efforts of the Primary Education Development Project. Entry of high school graduates into the teaching profession without teacher training qualifications is now controlled to meet current demands, so the core of untrained teachers in the profession is now being reduced.

With only one training college located in Belize City, and with the core of the untrained teachers in the schools having families to support, teachers from the districts have found it increasingly difficult to attend the college. To meet their needs, the college launched an extra-mural programme in 1994 that allows teachers to study and qualify in their districts. This programme utilizes distance-learning materials developed by the college. This move has had a significant impact especially on the two southern districts, where enrolment in the college has increased from under ten students per year to 15-20 annually from each district.

The decision to offer the first level of training purely by the extra-mural mode in 1994 has now created the need to examine and develop new policies for pre-service training of primary school teachers. This will become necessary, especially when the current core of untrained teachers in the profession are upgraded and the demand for new teachers increases.

The training programme for primary teachers entitled Three-Year Certificate Programme with School Experience is accredited with the Joint Board of Teacher Education at UWI, Mona. This programme, started as a pilot programme in 1990, was formally introduced under the Primary Education Development Project in 1992.

This new Programme can be pursued through two modes:

(a)

- one-year full-time studies at the college (Level I), followed by
- one to two years of experience in the field, returning to the college for
- one additional year of full-time studies (Level II);

(b)

- two and a half years in the extra-mural programme (Level I), utilizing distance-learning materials, followed by
- one year of full-time studies at the college (Level II).



A Certificate in Teaching Level I is granted by the Ministry of Education at the end of the first level. The Joint Board of Teacher Education grants certification for the entire programme at the end of Level II. Teachers receive a salary increase after successfully completing Level I, and another after successfully completing Level II. This programme prepares a teacher to teach in primary schools.

Since its introduction in 1990, over 700 teachers have been enrolled in the Level I Certificate Programme. More than 160 teachers have been enrolled in the Level II programme since its introduction in 1994.

An opportunity for further training will soon be possible with the introduction of a bachelor's degree programme in primary education, which is currently being developed by the University College of Belize and the Belize Teacher College.

In order to improve the quality of instructional inputs in primary schools and increase the achievement levels of pupils, the Primary Education Development Project (PED) has invested heavily in improving the teacher education programme for primary school. Prior to the introduction of the project, the programme was criticized as being too theoretical. Therefore, conscious efforts have been made to focus on the development of pedagogical skills while addressing content upgrading. New courses were introduced to meet the new demands and challenges facing teachers and schools.

The new model of training assumes that teachers admitted into the programme will have at least a high school diploma or its equivalent, but given the current employment practices, this is not always possible. If the programme is to succeed, efforts will have to be made to admit only those who meet established entry standards. The new approach also attempts to train teachers using the methodologies they are expected to use in their classrooms and to place greater emphasis on developing process skills.

Notwithstanding the many changes that have taken place recently, other needs should be addressed, and especially:

- Developing skills to cope with teaching in multi-grade schools (of 244 schools countrywide, 167 are rural of which 100 are multi-grade). While this topic is covered as a unit in the teaching methods course, teachers still find themselves at a loss when they are assigned to such schools.
- Preparing teachers to meet the technological changes and their impact on teaching.

In-service training of teachers occurs in two forms: (a) pre-college academic upgrading of teachers to meet the entry qualifications of the training college; and (b) post-initial training for teachers.

The pre-college upgrading programme seeks to provide an opportunity for teachers to upgrade their content knowledge and to acquire the minimum entry requirement for admission into the college through attendance of in-service classes on Saturdays. The target group is the untrained portion (40-45%) of the primary teaching force. The programme is organized and delivered weekly in the district towns under



the supervision of teacher college faculty stationed in the respective districts. The newly constructed district centres serve as the meeting point for these and other teachers in the various programmes being offered in the districts. Teachers pursuing this programme sit any of the three qualifying examinations depending on their academic background. Teachers sitting the First Class Examinations (highest level) are usually high school graduates who may not have passed any CXCs. Those sitting the First Teacher Examinations (lowest level) are usually primary school-leavers who may have completed two years of high school studies and dropped out. Teachers are required to study six examinations at each of the three levels (i.e. English, literature, history, geography, mathematics and science). Teachers pursuing the First Class Certificate are required to follow a course in child psychology and teaching methods, and are assessed in teaching practice, in addition to the six subjects. Teachers must complete all courses in a level before progressing to the next higher level. Completing all the courses at each of the three levels can take several years. Although time limits were set at three years per level for completing the courses, these were not strictly enforced until recently.

Examinations are set annually by the Belize Teacher College following course outlines developed jointly by the tutors in the programme. Because teachers have to pay for the tutoring that they receive, and because attendance is not compulsory, the enrolment is low. In 1995, for example, 524 teachers sat the First Class Examinations, but only 35–40% of those were registered in the district programmes. The results from the examinations have shown that the successful candidates are usually those who attend in-service classes. In 1995, 95% of those who were successful attended in-service classes. Teachers who do not attend classes cite such problems as transportation, funding and remoteness of the area in which they are teaching as the main reasons for not enrolling in the classes.

The college is currently developing a course in multi-grade methodologies for in-service teachers. This is an area of dire need in the country. Many teachers complain that they do not know how to cope with teaching several classes with children of varying abilities. This new programme, scheduled for introduction in the second semester 1997, will target all teachers in multi-grade schools. Training will be done through the training of trainers approach, beginning with district supervisory teams and moving down to the teachers in the schools.

The college is also offering a programme for principals in educational leadership and administration, in anticipation of a more decentralized form of school management with the principal assuming an enhanced leadership role and greater school autonomy in determining teaching strategies and learning experiences in a curriculum with greater social relevance. This programme was introduced in 1995 and utilizes the *Better Schools* distance learning modules developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat. The programme is scheduled to run for one academic year (September to June). Principals enrolled in the programme must have completed the 2+1 Certificate or the Level II programmes and have at least three years of teaching experience. Those enrolled are supported by supervisors in the field who visit them once a month and conduct monthly workshops.



Teachers' workload (1994-1995)

| Level and type of education | N° of hours per week devoted to classroom teaching | N° of hours per week devoted to classroom preparation |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Pre-primary education | 20.5 | 5-10 |
| Primary education | 27.5 | 10-15 |
| General secondary education | 22.0 | 15-20 |
| Vocational education | 24.9 | 15-20 |
| Higher education | 24.2 | 15-20 |

Source: Ministry of Education Planning Unit.

Educational research and information

Very little high quality educational research is done on a sustained basis. There are sporadic research efforts, usually associated with a student fulfilling thesis or course requirements. The focus of study in the case of such research is usually the classroom or problems in the delivery of education. There are also specific studies conducted under development projects such as the PED Project. In these cases, the focus of study relates to the objective of the project and therefore includes a wide range of issues.

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UNESCO Institute for Statistics. *Global Education Digest 2006: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World*. UIS, Montreal, 2006.



Web resources

Ministry of Education: <http://www.moes.gov.bz/> [In English. Last checked: October 2007.]

University of Belize: <http://www.ub.edu.bz/> [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>

Annexes

Belize Teacher College programmes

2+1 Certificate Programme: Last intake 1991

| Course | Hours | Credits |
|---|---|---------|
| Required courses | | |
| Educational methods (incl. visual aids) | 90 | 4 |
| Educational psychology | 60 | 4 |
| Educational sociology | 60 | 4 |
| Educational philosophy | 60 | 4 |
| Mathematics | 180 | 12 |
| English language | 150 | 10 |
| Language arts | 120 | 8 |
| Science | 90 | 6 |
| Social studies | 90 | 6 |
| Art education | 90 | 6 |
| Physical education | 90 | 6 |
| REAP | 90 | 6 |
| Divinity | 60 | 4 |
| Electives 1 (one from:) | | |
| English literature | 90 | 6 |
| Special education | 90 | 6 |
| Early childhood education | 90 | 6 |
| Spanish | 90 | 6 |
| Electives 2 (one from:) | | |
| Music education | 90 | 6 |
| Computer studies | 90 | 6 |
| Home economics | 90 | 6 |
| Industrial arts | 90 | 6 |
| Internship | one school year in the field (20 credits) | |
| Research paper | done during the internship year (8 credits) | |



New programme introduced in 1992

Three-Year Certificate Programme with School Experience

Admission Requirements: three CXC G1 or G2 including English or a First Class Certificate plus a pass in an Entrance Examination

Level I

| Courses | Hrs. | Credits |
|------------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Compulsory courses | | |
| Teaching methods | 60 | 4 |
| Child development | 45 | 3 |
| Testing & measurement | 45 | 3 |
| Classroom organ. & Mngt. | 60 | 4 |
| Instructional aids | 30 | 2 |
| English language | 105 | 7 |
| Language arts | 90 | 6 |
| Mathematics | 90 | 6 |
| Belizean studies | 45 | 3 |
| Social studies | 45 | 3 |
| Divinity | 30 | 2 |
| Electives (two from:) | | |
| Art education | 45 | 3 |
| Physical education | 45 | 3 |
| Music education | 45 | 3 |



Level II

| Courses | Hrs. | Credits |
|------------------------------------|------|---------|
| Compulsory courses | | |
| Education & society | 45 | 3 |
| Guidance & counselling | 30 | 2 |
| Principles of education | 30 | 2 |
| Research methods | 45 | 3 |
| English language | 75 | 5 |
| B'zean & Carib. Lit. | 90 | 6 |
| Mathematics | 90 | 6 |
| Electives 1 (one from:) | | |
| Art education | 45 | 3 |
| Physical education | 45 | 3 |
| Music education | 45 | 3 |
| Electives 2 (one set from:) | | |
| Early childhood education | 120 | 8 |
| Special education | 120 | 8 |
| Educ. Leadership & Admin | 120 | 8 |
| Electives 3 (one from:) | | |
| Spanish | 90 | 6 |
| REAP | 90 | 6 |
| Guidance & counselling | 90 | 6 |
| Computer studies | | 90 |

Internship: one semester (fifteen weeks with supervision after completion of course work requirements)

Student Teaching: six weeks (done before the second semester of course work)