



World Data on Education Données mondiales de l'éducation Datos Mundiales de Educación

VII Ed. 2010/11



Mauritius

Updated version, September 2010.

Principles and general objectives of education

The current vision of education is guided by the principles of equity, justice and social inclusion. Education should promote the democratization of the Mauritian Society where every child has a rightful place for personal growth and overall development. Education thus becomes the vehicle, par excellence, for bringing about transformations at a personal, community and national levels. The child with special needs, the child who has certain inherent or acquired talents, finally all children must find their place to evolve at their pace in a lifelong learning context.

Quality should be the cornerstone of all educational endeavours so that young Mauritians may be employable in new sectors of economy, especially in view of the fact that the national economy is exposed to the fluctuations at the global level. Notwithstanding the need to think globally, education should also be responsive to the local socio-cultural reality and strengthen national solidarity. Education must fully empower the young people of Mauritius to become rationally autonomous individuals, capable of constantly adapting to changes in all spheres of life, while maintaining their moral integrity and sense of caring for all the other members of society.

The overarching goals of the National Curriculum, which is the first statement in the history of Mauritian education providing an overview and outlining the ways in which the curriculum will respond to the basic needs and interests of students in the context of modern society and economy, are to:

- promote an all-round development of the individual—physical, intellectual, social and emotional—leading to a balanced, active and productive lifestyle;
- foster understanding and appreciation of the biological, physical and technological world to enable the learner to arrive at informed decisions about the environment and the changing needs of our society and those of the individual;
- develop in the learner skills and knowledge to empower her/him to participate meaningfully in an information-driven economy;
- develop creative thinking skills and learning competencies required for the future;
- promote equity and social justice by providing opportunities for every learner according to her/his needs, interests and potential;
- foster national unity by promoting in the individual understanding of and respect for our multicultural heritage;
- promote in the learner an appreciation of her/his place in an interdependent global context;
- promote a culture of lifelong learning for greater access to an ever-changing job market. (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, 2006).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The **Constitution** of 1968 makes provision for: the State having responsibility for the provision of education; any individual having the right to open a school; and admission to a school not to be denied to any pupil on the basis of race, creed or sex.

The Mauritius Institute of Education was established by the **Act of 1973**.

A **Child Protection Act** was enacted in 1994 to ensure protection of children from all forms of abuse and protection. The national laws have been harmonized in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this respect, 23 laws pertaining to children have been amended in the form of **Child Protection (Miscellaneous) Act** enacted in May 1998, the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act and the Criminal Code Supplementary (Amendment) Act.

Education at all levels is governed by the **Education Act** of 1996, and subsequent amendments. Regulations related to the pre-primary sector are effective as from May 1997. In 2005, the Education Act was amended to provide for a separation of regulatory powers under different stakeholders at the Ministry. Thus the Mauritius Qualifications Authority became the regulator of the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector in Mauritius, with the regularity aspects of higher education then falling under the aegis of the Tertiary Education Commission.

The Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA) has been established by the **MQA Act** of 2001. The **Act No. 27** of 2003 provides for the establishment of the Human Resource Development Council.

A new **National Children's Council Act** was passed in Parliament in 2003 with the aim of making the Council more dynamic and responsive to the needs of children and to ensure the participation of children. The main aim of the Act is child participation in decision making through the setting up of a National Children's Committee comprising of members elected amongst children's and students clubs and associations registered with the National Children Council.

The **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Authority Act of 2008** provides for the establishment of the Authority in order to have a more efficient regulatory framework in relation to ECCE. The Act repealed and replaced the Pre-School Trust Fund Act.

The Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD), a body corporate established under **Act No. 12** of 2009, has taken over the activities of the Industrial and Vocational Training Board.

Under regulation 37, Subsections (1) and (2) of the Education Act of 1993, all children must attend primary school, failing which the responsible party is liable to a fine and imprisonment. Admission to a government or aided primary school is granted to pupils at the age of 5 until they are less than 13 years old.

Education is free at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Free education in Mauritius means that the government pays school fees and administrative charges at the secondary level. Prior to 2005, education was compulsory only up to the end of the primary cycle. However, following relevant changes in legislation, as from January 2005 education has become free and compulsory for all up to the age of 16, with the introduction of eleven-year schooling. (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, 2008).

Administration and management of the education system

The central administration formulates and executes educational policies. The **Ministry of Education and Human Resources** (formerly the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research) supervises and monitors all actions related to the support to be provided to education. Its main responsibilities are to provide free pre-primary and primary education, and to provide admission to all children to secondary education. The 2005 amendment to the Education Act provides for a separation of regulatory powers concerning the education system. Therefore, the Mauritius Qualifications Authority became the regulator of the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector, while the regularity aspects of higher education now fall under the aegis of the Tertiary Education Commission. In 2008, the pre-primary subsector (age group 3-5 years) has been placed under the supervision of the newly established Early Childhood Care and Education Authority (ECCEA).

The **Mauritius Qualifications Authority** (MQA) has been established with the objectives of developing, implementing and maintaining a National Qualifications Framework for an effective certification system, ensuring compliance with provisions for registration and accreditation as per the MQA Act 2001 and ascertaining that standards and registered qualifications are internationally comparable. To enhance the articulation and pathways to the TVET sector and academic education that would enable lifelong learning, the MQA which acts as a facilitator by providing the levels at which qualifications for such TVET programmes are pitched, has been given additional powers for assuming the responsibility for the recognition of prior learning. The concept is to translate prior learning and experience into a qualification, thereby allowing more people to acquire a duly recognized qualification. It is recognized as being critical to the development of an open, accessible, inclusive and integrated education and training system and is the foundation stone for lifelong learning policies.

The **Tertiary Education Commission** has as objects to promote, plan, develop and coordinate post-secondary education in Mauritius and to implement an overarching regulatory framework to achieve high international quality. It also has the responsibility to allocate government funds to the tertiary education institutions under its purview and to ensure accountability and optimum use of resources. Recently, the Tertiary Education Commission has been empowered to register and accredit private universities and other institutions offering post-secondary education and accredit their programmes.

The Pre-School Trust Fund used to look into all issues related to the pre-primary subsector. The **Early Childhood Care and Education Authority** (ECCEA), which replaced the Fund in 2008, aims at bringing a more efficient inter-sectoral



service delivery that would contribute to strengthen the foundation of ECCE programmes. The ECCEA shall: implement government policies with regard to ECCE (children aged 3-5 years); implement ECCE projects, programmes and activities initiated by the Ministry in collaboration with line ministries, NGOs or local and international agencies; set norms and standards for play equipment, play materials, play space, furniture, books and children's literature used by educational institutions; carry out the registration and supervision of educational institutions, their managers, educators and other staff engaged in ECCE; advise on the development of ECCE training programmes for educators and other staff in educational institutions.

The **Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare** is mandated to cater for children, with special attention to early childhood development (ECD). The ECD sector is characterized by a two-tier approach, with infant care services (home and daycare) for 0-3 age group. Activities of the ECD Unit in the Ministry are in line with the provisions of the Child Protection Act, 1998 and the Institutions for Welfare and Protection of Children Regulations 2000.

The **Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE)** provides pre- and in-service training to teachers from pre-primary through the secondary levels. As per its Act of 1973, the MIE mandate is to provide facilities and to engage in educational research, curriculum development and teacher education and thereby to promote the advancement of learning and knowledge in the field of education and, in particular, to provide a teacher education responsive to the social, economic, linguistic, administrative, scientific, agricultural and technological needs of Mauritius. The MIE has taken over all the activities of the National Curriculum Centre for Research and Development and has now the sole responsibility for curriculum supervision and development in respect of both the primary and secondary sectors in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

The **Private Secondary School Authority** is legally empowered with overall responsibility for the provision of grants to privately-owned secondary education institutions. Religious authorities (Catholic Bureau of Education, Hindu, Muslim, Anglican, Adventist authorities) are responsible for the management of schools falling within their purview.

The objectives of the **Human Resource Development Council**, as spelt out in the Act of 2003 are to: promote human resource development in line with national economic and social objectives; stimulate a culture of training and lifelong learning at the individual, organizational and national levels for employability and increasing productivity; and provide the necessary human resource thrust for successful transformation of the economy of the country into a knowledge economy.

The **Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD)**, a body corporate established under the Act of 2009, has taken over the activities of the Industrial and Vocational Training Board (IVTB) as from November 2009. The objectives of MITD are to promote excellence in TVET; to promote research and enhance knowledge in TVET; to increase access to TVET through the setting up of training centres; to promote exchange programmes and courses with other TVET institutions; and to assist in the apprenticeship of persons who are, or will be, employed in commercial, technical and vocational fields. The IVTB, set up under the



Industrial and Vocational Training Act (1988), became operational in 1989 and was entrusted with the following responsibilities: to plan, monitor and evaluate training programmes; to design and develop training curricula; to implement training schemes and training programmes; to finance the training of school leavers and employees through a levy/grant system.

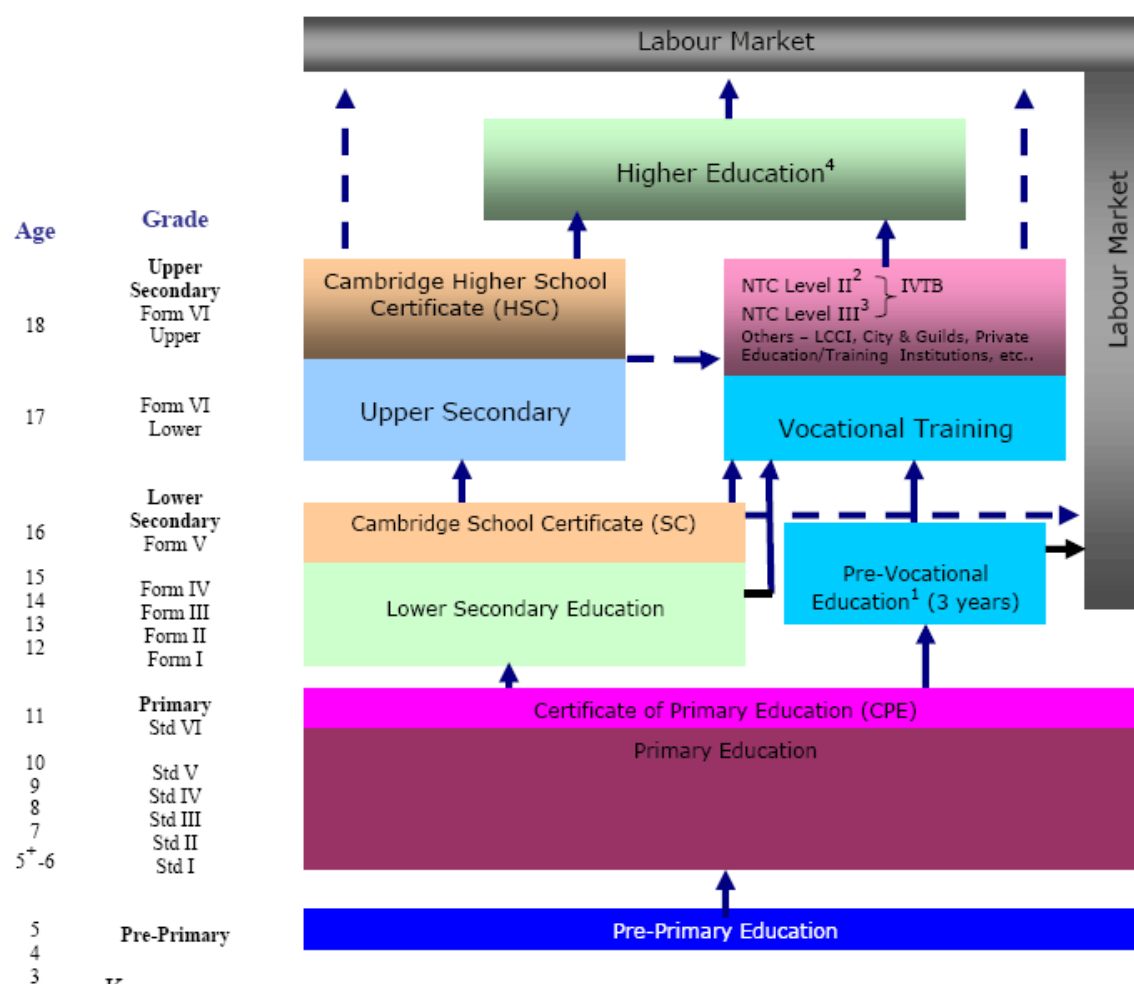
The **Mauritius Examinations Syndicate** has overall responsibility over all national and other examinations. It also carries out examination-based research. The **National Equivalence Council** validates certificates in keeping with certain international standards.

The **Mauritius Research Council** identifies issues at the national level for research purposes. The **Mauritius Educational Development Company** is a body responsible for the management of six private secondary schools. Representatives of Ministries of Health, Environment, Women's Rights and Child Welfare, Social Security are members of various committees related to the welfare of students.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are particularly active in the field of adult education and literacy. Sponsorship for various educational activities and scholarships are provided by private firms; their help has also been enlisted in the setting up of pre-primary centres.

Structure and organization of the education system

Mauritius: structure of the education system (2008)



Key:

1: Pre-Vocational education was provided for those pupils who have failed the CPE after a second attempt and hence were not eligible for admission in secondary schools. In 2001 pre-vocational classes were integrated in secondary schools alongside the mainstream classes. The pre-vocational curriculum provided for basic literacy, numeracy, science, technical and ICT skills over three years. Upon completion of the pre-vocational programme, students follow a bridging course- the NTC foundation course, which allows for progression in the TVET sector. Entry requirements for the TVET sector vary from completion of Form III to Form V.

NTC - National Trade Certificate, IVTB - Industrial & Vocational Training Board

2: Requirements for NTC Level II vary between SC and HSC or NTC III

3: Requirements for NTC Level III vary between Form III and SC or NTC III Foundation Course (Min. Age: 15)

4: Refers to Post A -Level / HSC

Pre-school education

Early development and education (age group 0-5 years) is organized in two separate systems covering two distinct phases, with the infant/toddler period (age 0-3) known as early childhood development (ECD) placed under the responsibility of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, and early childhood care and education (ECCE) for the 3-5 year-olds attending pre-primary schools under the



responsibility of the ECCE Authority. The focus of ECCE (age group 0-8 years) is the holistic development of the child and laying the foundation for lifelong learning.

Primary education

Primary education lasts six years, and according to the new curriculum framework (2008) is divided into three two-year cycles. All children must attend primary school from the age of 5. At the end of Standard 6, pupils sit the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) examination. This examination serves the dual purposes of certification and eligibility for admission to secondary school. For those students who have failed the CPE twice or who have reached the age of 12 but failed in the examination, a pre-vocational stream exists in secondary schools for a period of three years with a specific, skills-based curriculum. After this, the students of this stream are able to integrate a vocational institution to follow the one-year National Trade Certificate Foundation course which, on successful completion, allows them entry in the vocational sector towards the various levels of apprenticeship and trade certificates. On the basis of the new curriculum framework, there is the intention to gradually phase out the CPE examination.

Secondary education

Secondary education is divided into two cycles. The first cycle, of five years' duration, is divided into two stages: students in Forms 1-3 follow a more or less common general course; Forms 4 and 5 prepare students for the Cambridge School Certificate or the General Certificate of Education, Ordinary level (O-level) and cover both core subjects and a wide range of options. The second two-year cycle prepares students for the Higher School Certificate or the General Certificate of Education, A-level. The former structure made provision for students to follow HSC courses in sixth-form colleges for the state sector. A major change has been brought in 2006 with the abolishing of Form 6 colleges and all state secondary schools offering classes up to Form 6 (A-level).

Higher education

Post-secondary and university education are offered by polytechnics and a number of tertiary and university education institutions, including the University of Mauritius and the University of Technology Mauritius. Polytechnics offer a two-year diploma courses in information systems or business administration, and three-year courses leading to the *brevet de technicien* (*Lycée Polytechnique*, Flacq). The existing faculties at the universities offer certificate, diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate courses according to the different fields of studies. Bachelor's degree programmes usually last three years on a full-time basis. Master's degree programmes normally require an additional two years of study, while programmes leading to a doctoral degree usually last three years on a full-time basis.

The school year consists of thirty-nine weeks, divided into three terms of thirteen weeks each. The duration of teaching periods ranges from thirty to forty minutes.



The educational process

Decisions about curriculum issues are taken following new trends and weaknesses identified in pupils' achievement. While the policy is established by the Ministry of Education, the formulation was done by the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) through the preparation of curriculum guidelines within a framework. The National Centre for Curriculum Research Development produced the learning material as well as teacher's guides. In recent years, the MIE has taken over all the activities of the National Curriculum Centre for Research and Development and has now the sole responsibility for curriculum supervision and development in respect of both the primary and secondary sectors.

The evaluation is carried out through reactions and suggestions from all parties concerned. The basic assumptions and general principles of the existing curriculum are related to the fact that children attending school must develop skills and aptitudes to be able to be full integrated members of society. Hence, the primary curriculum ensures basic education, namely communication, numeracy and literacy while at the secondary level it provides the general basis for training in specific skills as well as leads towards appropriate studies.

The different types of knowledge are selected along these lines and organized in an order of priority, taking into consideration the core knowledge (languages, mathematics, health) and the peripheral which allows flexibility for artistic and aesthetic activities. Teachers are trained to integrate subjects to make teaching wholesome. Various methods and approaches are used to strengthen the inter-relatedness between teaching and learning. Students are encouraged to do team work and to prepare projects; very often the physical layout of the class is changed to adapt to interaction among students. Real-life situations are most of the time the starting point of lessons. Teachers are familiar with the concept of participative role of students, being trained during their pre-service and in-service courses.

The Primary Curriculum Framework, launched in January 2008, has been developed within the broader perspective of the National Curriculum Framework for the Republic of Mauritius along the lines laid down in the document issued in September 2006 by the then Ministry of Education and Human Resources entitled *Towards a Quality Curriculum – Strategy for Reform* (this also applies to the National Curriculum Framework Pre-primary, 3-5 years, launched in July 2010; and the National Curriculum Framework, Secondary Education, issued in November 2009). The Framework sets out the rationale, the learning outcomes, the specific learning competencies for all learning areas constituting the primary curriculum, as well as the implications for assessment, evaluation and teacher training. The Primary Curriculum Framework reflects contemporary educational thinking and up-to-date pedagogical practices regarding what pupils need to learn in our specific context to derive the maximum benefit for their overall growth and development. It also prepares them to embark successfully on their post primary education. Furthermore, it provides a basis for the continuous review and restructuring of curricular objectives and pedagogical practices. It will help generate more focused research in all the domains related to primary education.



The Government's Programme 2005–2010 states that it will undertake a comprehensive review of the curriculum at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels in the light of developments worldwide, and according to national needs. These were identified in the National Consultative Debate on Curriculum Reforms held on 30 November and 1 December 2005. The reform strategy has taken into consideration a number of changes and issues:

- Major socio-economic and technological changes, both at the national and international levels, have made it necessary to re-adjust educational practices in order to empower the Mauritian child to face the emerging challenges of the new millennium.
- Changing trade patterns are driving countries to make their labour force as competitive and flexible as possible. This means that, as a nation, Mauritius has to look beyond mere academic achievement and think more in terms of professionalizing manpower resources and cultivating a spirit of entrepreneurship. Youth must be prepared to work in conditions where jobs are no longer permanent, and where they will have to continuously retrain themselves throughout their career. They must, therefore, be empowered to use productively all the information and technological tools available to become lifelong learners.
- The social and cultural fabric is undergoing radical transformations and, as such, young people need to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and values to ensure social cohesion and national unity.
- Furthermore, because of the constant threat posed to environment by developmental changes, Mauritius needs to foster in its people and especially children, a commitment to values related to the preservation of the environment and to the concept of sustainable development.

The Curriculum Framework envisages a shift from a subject-centred to a child-centred, from a compartmentalized to an integrated approach to teaching and learning. This has profound implications for the school curriculum, teachers and all stakeholders. For instance, the approach to the teaching of human values, human rights, and education for national unity is rooted in the conviction that the values they embody can best be internalized not by being taught as separate subjects, but by being integrated in subject domains cutting right across the curriculum. This approach, in addition to being in line with modern pedagogical thinking, makes it possible to plan a comprehensive curriculum which must be constructively de-loaded to make schooling a joyful experience in the life of all children.

By placing the child at the heart of education, this will bring about a major paradigm shift in our educational approach and practices, preparing the ground for the gradual phasing out of the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) examination, and progressively replacing it with a child-centred and holistic system of evaluation that will include continuous assessment and diagnostic monitoring, accompanied by appropriate measures for remediation. In fact, the overhauling of the curriculum became necessary considering the rate of failure at the end of the primary cycle (33.8% in 2007) and the low transition rate to mainstream secondary (70.9% in 2007). The gradual phasing out of the CPE does not mean a leveling down of standards at the expense of those who are more academically 'gifted'. In an age characterized by competition at a global level, high achievers should be given every opportunity to



excel to provide the country with the cadres indispensable for its continued growth and well-being, while at the same time paying special attention to learners with difficulties. The optimization of human resources must ensure that those who are presently unable to pass the CPE must be provided with opportunities to reach a level of achievement for lifelong education.

In terms of the National Curriculum Framework, for the learner to be able to function effectively in a rapidly changing socio-economic context, it is expected that he/ she should:

- be numerate and literate;
- have relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to function in society;
- fully understand his/her role as a citizen of Mauritius and the world;
- develop desirable social skills for living in a multicultural society;
- have sound communication skills;
- use Information and Communications Technology tools;
- have a rational and scientific mindset;
- develop artistic sensitivity and participate in creative activities;
- display a willingness to engage in change;
- show critical thinking and independence of thought;
- be trainable; and
- develop a sense of belonging to the Mauritian nation.

Generic Learning Statements (GLS) have been derived from the national educational goals for the Republic of Mauritius. The GLS refer to the essential and desirable knowledge, skills and values which students at all levels of the educational system from pre-primary to secondary need to achieve. They cut across all subject areas, and provide teachers, curriculum developers and teacher educators with guidelines on which learning and teaching materials will be designed, planned and developed.

The GLS are useful and worthwhile educative and instructional guidelines that reflect the overall policy statements that have been listed in the goals of the National Curriculum. The GLS will require the commitment of all stakeholders and, to a very large and most significant extent, the full commitment of the teaching profession which will be playing a key role in ensuring that every learner is able to develop her/his level of achievement and success to her/his highest potential. In terms of the GLS, learners should be able to:

- Acquire language skills for effective communication and meaningful interaction with self and others through listening, speaking, reading and writing; the correct acquisition of language skills is central to the whole process of thinking in every curricular activity.
- Derive meaning and understanding from numerical and spatial concepts and engage in the process of developing logical and rational thoughts.
- Behave in a responsible manner with regard to everybody's right to feel valued and to live peacefully.
- Appreciate the diversity of Mauritian culture and interact positively among themselves.



- Engage in thinking processes to develop and construct knowledge.
- Recognize desirable and worthwhile values as the foundation of good citizenship.
- Understand, appreciate and adapt to change and selectively use new technologies.
- Understand and be sensitive to local, regional and global environmental issues.
- Develop interpersonal knowledge and skills with a view to the strengthening of positive attitudes, understanding and sharing of common values and also respect for persons and human rights.
- Adopt a safe and sound lifestyle by developing physical fitness and proper nutritional habits.
- Participate in arts, music, dance, drama and appreciate the different aspects of aesthetic expressions and the diversity of Mauritian traditions.
- Enjoy learning by experiencing and celebrating success. (Ministry of Education and Human Resources & MIE, 2008).

Pre-primary education

The new *National Curriculum Framework (NCF), Pre-primary (3–5 years)* has been launched in July 2010, completing the cycle of reform of the national curriculum framework for the education sector after the launching of the curriculum frameworks for primary (January 2008) and secondary education (November 2009). The basic principle underlying the curriculum framework is the same that are at the heart of the National Education and Human Resources Strategic Plan 2008–2020, e.g. is to ensure that all children start primary education on equal footing.

The NCF has been developed within the broader perspective of curriculum reform started in September 2006 that aims at implementing quality curriculum at pre-primary, primary and secondary education levels. The document is the outcome of intersectoral consultations with all stakeholders and stems from the collaborative effort of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority (ECCEA) and the Mauritius Institute of Education, among others.

The NCF for the pre-primary level is based on an all-inclusive approach, where growth as well as development of the child are given high priority. The document provides clear statements of what children are expected to achieve at the end of their pre-primary education and effective ways of supporting them to attain those achievements. The NCF is expected to act as a guideline document for educators and planners to translate curriculum into reality. Capacity building towards the effective implementation of the framework has already started as well as the launching of a kit to guide those trainers. Parents are called upon to play an active role in the pre-schooling stage of their child as the framework also caters for the involvement of parents in supporting children and ensuring follow-up of school activities at home.

The curriculum framework lays emphasis on the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that need to be acquired and developed during the pre-primary years (age group 3-5 years). The objectives of the holistic development (e.g. ‘whole child



approach') are to be achieved through the six learning areas, embedding ICT for learning in the early years. The six learning areas focused on the overall development of the child are: personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; expressive, creative and aesthetic development; health and physical development; body and environmental awareness; and mathematical and logical thinking. In terms of the overarching learning outcomes, to be reflected in each of the six learning areas, by the end of pre-primary education children are expected to:

- socialize with family, friends, peers, teachers and other adults;
- accept each other and live together, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age and ability;
- adapt to and enjoy experiences related to change, surprise and uncertainty;
- develop confidence by exploring the world using their body and senses;
- understand fairness in relation to themselves and others;
- participate in the making, following and reworking of rules in the day to day activities;
- communicate thoughts and experiences creatively, using many forms of expressions; and
- develop physical coordination and healthy habits. (MIE & ECCEA, 2010.)

The aim of ECCE (age group 0-8 years) is to focus on the holistic development of the child and to lay the foundation for lifelong learning. It is to be noted that the Strategic Plan 2008-2020 has proclaimed that all children aged 3 to 5 years will have to attend pre-primary school, followed by six years of compulsory primary schooling starting at age 5. For the age group 0-3 years the developmental progress of the child is monitored through the developmental milestones and objectives. These are specified in the 0-3 guidelines document by the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. At this level, the role of parents and caregivers is crucial in the provision of quality interaction with the child.

For the 3-5-year-olds, at pre-primary level the developmental objectives are attained through the above-mentioned learning areas using an integrated approach. For the 5-8 year-olds, the development and learning of the primary school child are achieved through the different learning areas as outlined in the primary school curriculum. However, to ensure a smooth transition from pre-primary to primary education and a gradual progression from pre-primary to Standard 1, the Ministry of Education has instituted the Bridging the Gap Initiative (BGI) as a transitional process.

The comprehensive approach aims at constructing children's learning on their previous experiences and to make schooling a joyful experience in the life of all children. The National Children's Policy (March 2004) introduced the 'whole child approach' which is a new way of looking at, of thinking and acting in favor of the child, based on a right approach founded on the principles of indivisibility and universality. It promotes a culture of 'child first' where, in all decisions and actions related to the child, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration and priority is given to children. The curriculum also adopts an inclusive approach in the sense that all children will be taken on board, enabling each and every child to develop according to their needs and capabilities. It will ensure that there is no form

of discrimination based on ethnicity, culture or religion, home background, gender, special educational needs, disability, or differential ability.

In terms of the NCF for the pre-primary level, the pedagogical approaches to be used are: play-based, child-centered, integrated, project-based, multicultural, and in strong partnership with parents and the community at large. All these approaches would be supported by the use of multimedia and ICT tools to make children's learning experiences enjoyable. The integrated approach has been adopted as it reflects real-world educational experiences and matches what children and adults do outside the classroom. The integrated curriculum consists of organizing the teaching and learning process through chosen themes and related to the six areas of learning. Integrated learning makes the curriculum more relevant as it allows an in-depth study of a chosen theme, project or story. The educator chooses the appropriate theme related to the needs and interest of the children. One theme can be studied for 3-4 weeks.

At preschool level, assessment is integrated in the learning process. It continuously encourages, motivates and engages the learners who perceive it as an opportunity and a challenge. Assessment of young children is an ongoing process that documents evidence of early learning in order to make informed instructional decisions. This evidence may include observations, anecdotal records of children's conversations and behaviors in individual, small and large group situations, samples of artwork, drawings and photographs, and recordings or other records of children engaged in activities and play. The portfolio is an important assessment tool used by educators to compile and organize information on the individual child.

In the NCF document for the pre-primary level, each learning area is dealt with in a separate section so as to facilitate planning of activities. As mentioned, an integrated approach must be used to plan activities in all areas of learning in a thematic unit. At the end of the pre-primary schooling, the child will demonstrate readiness to step into primary school confidently, take pride in his/her achievements and develop a sense of patriotism. The descriptors and performance indicators give an indication of what the child needs to achieve in the first year and the second year of preschool education, based on a graded approach related to the developmental stage of the child.

The descriptors for the six learning areas are the following:

- Personal, social and emotional development: develop self-awareness; care and respect for self and others; share and relate to others; exercise self-control and independence; and spiritual development.
- Communication, language and literacy: communicate with others; develop and demonstrate appropriate listening skills; build and extend vocabulary and show interest in new words; engage in speech audibly, with clarity and confidence; acquire and develop reading skills; demonstrate early writing skills; engage in creative output.
- Expressive, creative and aesthetic development: descriptors concerning creative arts (visual arts and crafts), performing arts (drama, music, rhythm and movement), poetry and storytelling, as well as human values (truthfulness, etiquette, patriotism, and care and consideration for others).



- Health and physical development: gross and fine motor skills; coordination balance and strength; safety measures; socialization and following simple rules; creativity and movements; healthy habits and practices.
- Body and environmental awareness: develop body awareness; use the five senses; acquire scientific skills; identify the different components in the environment including living and non-living things; explore and study the environment; develop awareness of the technological world.
- Mathematical and logical thinking: recognize basic colours and shapes; distinguish between different sizes; classify/group items; count; acquire a sense of relative positions and directions; manipulate/model objects or materials; carry out organized manipulations; experience and compare quantities/qualities; acquire and use the concept of volume; use the concept of time; use expressive mathematics; display the ability for spatial orientations. (MIE & ECCEA, 2010.)

Under the previous curriculum, on average 15 weekly hours were dedicated to the different subjects, mainly to language development and creative activities. Some additional ten hours included welcome, breaks, lunch and rest.

In order to make preprimary education accessible to every child, specific measures have been taken. Children aged 4+ who are attending a private preschool receive a monthly per capita grant. Additional pre-primary classes have been added to existing and new primary schools while the private sector is encouraged to set up its efforts to provide quality pre-primary education. Furthermore, the Mauritius Institute of Education provides appropriate training to preschool teachers through the two-year Certificate of Proficiency in Early Childhood Education. This proficiency-based training programme is a very flexible proposal for practitioners who are currently working in the ECD/preschool sector. A one-year supplementary training programme leading to a Teachers' Certificate (Pre-Primary) is also available.

In 2001, 177 out of 278 primary schools had a preschool centre while 1,000 private preschools were registered with the Ministry. In 2004, there were 1,075 preschools (839 private, 174 state-owned, and 62 maintained by local authorities), and the gross enrolment ratio (GER) for the age group 3-5 years was estimated at 96%. In 2003, some 31,700 children aged 3+ and 4+ were enrolled in preschool establishments. The Ministry of Education reports that in 2007 the GER was 94% (84.7% for age 3 and 87.3% for age 4). In the same year, there were 1,076 preschools, of which 179 state-owned. The total enrolment was 36,467 children (of whom 18,105 were girls); the total number of teachers was 2,513 and the total number of non-teaching staff was 893.

According to official data, in March 2009 there were 1,057 schools providing pre-primary education: 1,024 in the Island of Mauritius and 33 in Rodrigues. Of these schools, 803 (76%) were privately run institutions; 182 (17%), operating on government primary school premises, were administered by the ECCEA (ex Pre-School Trust Fund) and the remaining 72 (7%) were administered by either Roman Catholic or Hindu education authorities or municipal/village councils. The total enrolment was 35,974 children, of whom 18,097 were boys and 17,877 girls. The GER (pre-primary enrolment as a percentage of the population aged 4 and 5 years) was estimated at 96% in 2009. The total number of staff in pre-primary schools was

3,451, of whom 2,518 were teachers and 933 non-teaching staff, for an average children-teacher ratio of 14:1. (Central Statistics Office, 2010).

Primary education

In terms of the revised primary curriculum of 2001, the primary aim of education was conceived with the following considerations: i) to empower children to realize their full potential and to optimize their innate aptitudes; and ii) to develop a keen sense of active citizenship and adequate workforce. The curriculum was expected to meet the development needs of the country, in terms of an educated and a skilled workforce. In the 2001 proposal, there were eight (lower primary, Standards 1-3) or nine (upper primary, Standards 4-6) compulsory subjects and two optional subjects. The weekly lesson timetable proposed in 2001 is presented below:

Primary education: weekly lesson timetable (as proposed in the new primary school curriculum)

Subject	Weekly time allocated to each subject (in minutes)					
	Lower primary			Upper primary		
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Languages (English and French)	500	500	500	550	550	550
Mathematics	225	225	225	250	250	250
Information technology	100	100	100	100	100	100
Science, history, geography	125	125	125	–	–	–
Science	–	–	–	125	125	125
History and geography	–	–	–	125	125	125
Civic education	100	100	100	100	100	100
The Arts	100	100	100	100	100	100
Physical education/Health and physical education	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total weekly time	1,250	1,250	1,250	1,450	1,450	1,450
Optional subjects:						
Oriental languages	200	200	200	225	225	225
Religious education	50	50	50	50	50	50

Source: MESR, March 2001.

Environmental studies (EVS) encompassed a whole range of areas. The components of civic education and health and nutrition in EVS were to be off-loaded and made an integral part of citizenship education and health and physical education, respectively, as from Standard 1. The remaining components of EVS were to be split at the upper primary level into science and history and geography. Although the study of an Asian Language/Arabic has to remain optional, efforts were envisaged towards motivating all pupils to study an Asian Language/Arabic or, at least, to have an exposure to one of them. Religious education classes offered in schools were to be maintained. Citizenship education was a new area of study encompassing elements that were part of the existing curriculum, mainly in EVS, but also including new areas such as multicultural education and an awareness of everybody's rights and duties in order to play an effective role as responsible citizens at the local, national and global levels.



As mentioned, the new Primary Curriculum Framework (PCF) has been launched in January 2008. It follows the goals of the National Curriculum and the Generic Learning Statements derived from the national educational goals (see above). It puts in place a new approach in the structuring of the six years of primary schooling (to be divided into three two-year stages) and attempts to: i) ensure a smooth transition between pre-primary and primary and between the different stages and standards at the primary level; ii) lay emphasis on proficient language acquisition by the end of Standard 3; iii) allow the acquisition of fundamental life skills through an integration of health and nutrition, moral and civic values, physical education, creative education, and environmental education; iv) shift the emphasis from a mainly content-based to a process-based and competency-based learning; and v) ensure a closer monitoring of the desired learning outcomes at the end of each stage and timely remediation.

The overall goal for primary education is to sustain equitable access to quality education, ensuring that all learners attain high levels of achievement in literacy, numeracy, information and communications technology (ICT) and essential life skills as a basis for lifelong learning. In Standards 1 and 2 (stage 1), the emphasis will be on preparing the young child to successfully adjust to the school environment. In Standard 1, the 'Bridging the Gap' project will strive to create a smooth transition from the pre-primary to the primary. Standard 1 will contain components of the pre-primary curriculum to ensure that every child starts on an equal footing. During this stage, emphasis will be placed on literacy, numeracy and health and physical education. Other subjects such as basic science, the environment, the arts, history and geography, will be integrated in the core subjects. Such an approach will de-load the curriculum to a large extent. Children will learn through activities such as music, singing, drawing and other forms of creative activities as well as ICT.

In Standards 3 and 4 (stage 2), there will be a consolidation of elementary skills and key learning competencies in languages and mathematics. The focus will also be on the development and understanding of basic scientific concepts, environmental issues and values that would lay the foundations for healthy living. In addition to languages (English, French, Asian languages and Arabic), mathematics, health and physical education, pupils will be introduced to basic science, history and geography and the arts. Other elements like values, citizenship education, ICT, and body awareness will continue to be integrated in the core subjects. The same core areas will be reinforced in Standards 5 and 6 (stage 3) with a view to preparing the pupils for the end of primary cycle evaluation. A component of sex education will be introduced in this stage with a view to creating an early awareness of life skills. ICT will be used as a support by teachers in the three stages, and the teacher should ensure that the pupils have the necessary ICT prerequisites. The new curriculum makes provision for multimedia support to enhance learning and make it more interactive. Each school has been equipped with some 15 computers and an ICT teacher has been trained to transact with not only the ICT curriculum but also to assist in the teaching of other areas. Though English is the medium of instruction, the use of the language of the environment as a facilitator and support language is encouraged throughout the primary level. This becomes more important for children coming from deprived areas where the home environment compounds the linguistic difficulties they face in the classroom.



The number of hours of instruction in the primary school sector is 975 hours per year on average, amounting to an average of 27 hours of teaching time per week. (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, 2008).

Generic learning outcomes refer to the competencies to be achieved by the learners during their primary education. At the end of Standard 6, pupils are expected to be able to:

- listen, speak, read and write to express, share and generate ideas and feelings through the language acquired;
- engage in the process of logical thinking and thereby develop reasoning skills to enable them to act as independent learners;
- understand, visualize and discriminately apply numerical and spatial concepts;
- understand, describe and appreciate universal values and engage in appropriate behaviour and activities;
- develop or acquire skills of self-organization and responsible behaviour by caring about themselves, their studies and their interactions with others;
- interact with others by developing socially acceptable behavioural patterns;
- acquire skills of communication to construct meaningful expressions of their thoughts and to interact successfully with others;
- practice motor skills, physical movement and control through free and spontaneous exercise of body functions;
- use appropriate technologies so as to maximize learning across all subject areas;
- develop body awareness and health consciousness and mind their nutritional habits;
- develop creativity and appreciation of aesthetics through participation in artistic activities and observation of nature;
- learn to appreciate their natural environment and care for its preservation;
- develop self-identity and an appreciation of the multi-faceted cultural setting of Mauritius; and
- strive towards self-actualization through a process of self-discovery.

All the domains of education, i.e., the cognitive, affective and psychomotor, have to be assessed in order to make the teaching and learning process effective. The assessment of the pupils' performance has so far been characterized by external examinations (e.g. the Certificate of Primary Education examination) and by formal end-of-term test and end-of-year examinations, which are school-based. The CPE pass rate has stagnated at around 65% over the last decade, with the performance of girls far exceeding that of boys (74.3% against 62% percent in 2006). The transition rate to the secondary level has evolved from 50% in 1993 to 71% in 2007. Only around 72% of a cohort completes the CPE examinations successfully at their first or second attempt. Of this cohort, only 55% successfully complete their School Certificate (O-level), only 35 % access the Higher School Certificate (A-level), and only about 28% of every cohort is successful at HSC. (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, 2008).



There is an automatic promotion system till Standard 5. Grade repetition becomes very significant at Standard 6 level (about 25%), as a large proportion of those pupils who fail the CPE repeat a year, with the aim of improving their performance at the examination the following year. The strategy adopted since 2002 has been the adoption of the grade system, whereby a new alphabetical grade system has replaced the ranking system such that all children obtaining the minimum pass grades now join the secondary mainstream while those who do not achieve these after two attempts at CPE join the secondary pre-vocational stream. (MESR, 2004). Although ranking of pupils at the CPE examination was abolished in 2002, the CPE still serves the dual purpose of certification and selection for admission in secondary schools. The primary school environment thus remains competitive, resulting in more than 85% of parents having recourse to private tuition for their children. Since 2007, a baseline profiling is carried out at the beginning of Standard 1 to assess the state of readiness of entrants. In 2008 a diagnostic assessment was carried out at the beginning of Standard 3 to identify gaps in the pupils' learning at this level for remediation. These measures are efforts to bring about an equitable distribution in learning outcomes.

The new curriculum also aims at preparing the ground for the phasing out of the CPE and its gradual replacement by a child-centered and holistic system of assessment. According to the PCF of 2008, at the end of Standard 3 there will be a competency-based evaluation/test in mathematics, languages and basic science. Other life skills (values, arts, movement education, music, body awareness) will be assessed through Portfolio. At the end of Standard 4, a national test in languages, mathematics, basic science, history and geography will be administered. Assessment of life skills through portfolios will be carried out by the teacher. The purpose of the tests that will be held at the end of Standards 3 and 4, is to keep parents informed of the progress of the child and to detect any gap in her/his learning. The portfolio will also be used to keep the best samples of the pieces of the pupils' work and will help to remind them of their strengths and weaknesses. During the last two years of primary schooling the record cards and portfolios will continue to be used. However, more stress will be laid on formative assessment rather than summative assessment. A gradual redesigning of the CPE will start so that the results provide a better profile of the aptitudes of the children. This is expected to take 3-4 years during which period the use of continuous assessment will be reinforced. At the end of Standard 5, a national test in languages, mathematics, basic science, history and geography will be administered. Assessment of life skills through portfolios will be carried out by the teacher.

It is proposed to have a medium-term formula which is broad-based and has the advantage of not only unburdening the examinations but of also taking into consideration those subjects (the arts, health and physical education, etc.) which have until now been ignored. These aptitudes are as important in life and on the job market as any of the other subjects. The CPE certificate will no longer be based exclusively on a one-off end-of-year written exam, but also on the basis of continuous assessment. Once the medium-term mode of assessment for certification has been successfully implemented and validated, it will be possible to implement the long-term proposal providing for the inclusion of continuous assessment marks for both certification and selection purposes at the CPE. It is only after the successful implementation of the medium-term objectives that it will be possible to abolish the CPE altogether as a



certification and selection examination. (Ministry of Education and Human Resources & MIE, 2008).

In 2008, the number of candidates who took part in the CPE examination was 26,211 (23,664 school candidates and 2,547 private candidates), with an overall pass rate of 64%. The pass rate among school candidates, comprising 12,299 boys and 11,365 girls, was 67%. The girls were more successful than the boys, with respective pass rates of 73% and 62%. School candidates who took part in the CPE examination for the first time did much better than those taking the examination a second time, e.g. 75% against 40%. (Central Statistics Office, 2010).

According to official data, in March 2009 there were 302 schools providing primary education, 289 in the Island of Mauritius and 13 in Rodrigues. The majority (220) of the schools was run by government, 51 by the Roman Catholic Education Authority (RCEA), two by the Hindu Education Authority, and the other 29 were private non-aided schools. The total enrolment stood at 117,922 pupils in 2009, a decrease of 1,100 from the 2008 figure. Boys represented 51% of the primary school population and girls 49%. Around 73% of the pupils were enrolled in government schools. The gross enrolment ratio (primary enrolment as a percentage of the population aged 6 to 11 years) was estimated at 101%. A total of 8,090 persons were employed in primary schools. Of this number, 5,454 were teaching staff: 4,080 general purpose teachers and 1,374 oriental language teachers. The remaining 2,636 comprised 303 head teachers, 918 deputy head teachers, and 1,415 administrative and other workers. The pupil-teacher (general purpose teachers) ratio was 29:1. (Central Statistics Office, 2010).

Secondary education

As mentioned, the first five-year cycle of secondary schooling leads to the Cambridge School Certificate (SC) or the General Certificate of Education, Ordinary level (O-level) and the second two-year cycle prepares students for the Higher School Certificate (HSC) or the General Certificate of Education, A-level. Up to Form 3, students follow a broad-based curriculum. Options are available as from Form 4. All schools do not offer the same options. Streams offered are general, vocational, scientific, commercial and technical. The former structure made provision for students to follow HSC courses in sixth-form colleges for the state sector. A major change has been brought in 2006 with the abolishing of Form 6 colleges and all state secondary schools offering classes up to Form 6 (A-level).

In terms of the former curriculum, the main objectives of secondary education were to:

- further the process of basic education started at primary level and to raise achievement levels;
- provide the general basis for training in specific skills;
- prepare pupils for obtaining the qualifications needed for entry into higher education both locally and abroad;
- help identify the aptitudes of individual students and guide them towards appropriate studies;

- help inculcate in students the values and attitudes conducive to a better understanding of Mauritius plural society, and the need for healthy living.

A wide choice of options including both academic and practical subjects is available. Asian languages have been introduced in the curriculum since 1986. Core subjects include: English, French, mathematics, science, and commercial studies. Other subjects are: English literature, French literature, art, geography, Asian languages, music, computer studies, design and communication, design and technology, home economics, food studies, fashion and fabrics, physical education, sociology and business management. The former weekly lesson timetable in Forms 1-3 is presented below:

First stage of secondary education (lower secondary): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Weekly time allocated to each subject (min.)		
	I	II	III
English language	200	200	200
French language	200	200	200
Mathematics	200	200	200
Integrated science	240	240	240
Social studies	200	200	200
Visual arts	80	80	80
Computer literacy	80	80	80
Home economics	80	80	80
Design and communication	80	80	80
Physical education	80	80	80
Library	40	40	40
Total weekly time (minutes)	1,480	1,480	1,480
Asian language/Arabic	120	–	–

Note: Teaching periods usually last 40 minutes.

As mentioned, the new National Curriculum Framework–Secondary (NCFS) was launched in November 2009. The framework has been prepared after a careful analysis of the views of different stakeholders, including students, teachers and heads of schools, and also taking into consideration the recommendations of the national debate on the curriculum and the curriculum goals approved in 2006. The NCFS sets down the overarching learning outcomes for secondary education and the specific learning outcomes of each domain of learning. It also provides additional information as level descriptors which are specific guidelines on the content for each domain of learning. While it focuses on lower secondary (Forms 1 to 3), it lays down the guidelines for Forms 4 and 5. The framework advocates a teaching and learning approach based on a model that views knowledge as an integrated whole, rather than fragmented in subject areas.

Based on the new NCFS, in terms of the overarching learning outcomes for lower secondary students are expected to:

- develop and use language through a diversity of disciplines at secondary schools to understand and communicate information, ideas, feelings and opinions;



- recognize when and what information is needed, how to obtain it from a range of sources and how to use and share it;
- select, integrate and apply numerical and spatial concepts and techniques in a variety of situations;
- use logical and critical thinking skills to judge, assess and solve a broad range of both theoretical and real life problems;
- understand, use and adapt technologies and ICT tools confidently to meet their needs;
- understand, appreciate and preserve the physical and natural world;
- develop awareness of their cultural, geographic, historical and economic contexts and acquire the knowledge, skills and values for social integration and a culture of peace;
- interact with others from diverse cultures, develop pride in our nation and recognize that everyone has to feel valued and safe;
- demonstrate aesthetic appreciation and develop artistic, expressive and creative skills;
- develop emotional, social and moral intelligence to achieve a sense of well being;
- demonstrate self management skills, positive self esteem and confidence for active participation as citizens of the Republic and of the world;
- express their respect for people, plants, animals and resources through informed and responsible choices as consumers and producers; and
- develop awareness and understanding of their body, nurture self respect and make responsible choices in pursuance of a healthy lifestyle. (MECHR & MIE, 2009).

The learning areas are grouped according to their inter-relatedness, and general outcomes are identified for each group. Specific learning outcomes for each subject area/discipline within each domain are developed, and their relations to the general learning outcomes are specified. They form the basis on which the level descriptors and competencies will eventually be worked out for each level of the lower secondary curriculum (Forms 1-3), and on which curricular materials will be designed. An indication of the teaching strategies deemed appropriate for each subject area is also provided. The NCFS also addresses the pre-vocational curriculum reform. Government vision is translated into general learning outcomes, then into outcomes for domains, and specific areas of learning, which are further detailed into level descriptors for each year of the pre-vocational cycle. Furthermore, an indication is provided for the direction that the upper secondary (Forms 4 and 5) will be taking, thus covering the whole range of compulsory education, that is, till age 16.

The major innovations brought by the NCFS are in terms of emphasis on process rather than content, on learning outcomes, and on the need to engage students in meaningful and integrated learning experiences. The core domains of learning present in the primary curriculum will be extended, taking into account the requirements to provide adequate scope for learners to make meaning of their world while building incrementally on skills acquired at the primary level. Some of the elements like sustainable development, citizenship, developing and maintaining a culture of peace and coping with stress will cut across all domains. The domains of learning will be as follows: i) languages (English, French and other languages such as



oriental languages and Arabic); ii) mathematics; iii) sciences (biology, chemistry and physics); iv) technology; v) health and physical education; vi) social sciences (history, geography and sociology); and vii) the arts (visual arts, music, and drama and dance).

One significant change that is being proposed in the NCFS is the introduction of technology as a compulsory learning domain for both boys and girls. This domain includes design and technology, ICT, and the design, clothing and textiles section of home economics. All these components will be compulsory for all students, removing thus the gender bias which has worked against both girls and boys. ICT will be used both as a tool for learning and teaching as well as a discipline on its own, in view of its increasing importance. The framework proposes that more transparency be given to health and physical education to integrate it where possible with other core domains of learning in contrast with the more conservative approach which focuses on integrating it with co-curricular activities only. The health and physical education domain also incorporates a substantial element of sex education and values education. The social sciences will be an integral part of the philosophy of a broad-based education that will continue at the upper secondary level. Thus, students opting for sciences will be required to opt for one of the social sciences (history, geography, sociology as well as economics) depending on the subject/s on offer at school. The NCFS proposes that in the first two years of the lower secondary education, science and technology be taught using a thematic approach. The themes would be related to each of the three sciences (biology, chemistry and physics), which would help to support cross links within the sciences. In order to help students develop a broad educational outlook, the policy document for curriculum reform (2006) proposes that general science becomes compulsory for those students who are not opting for any pure science (biology, chemistry and physics). The new framework for science, technology and society at the lower secondary level will cater for students of both non-science and science streams. It is proposed that science will be taught as an integrated subject in Forms 1 and 2, while at Form 3 level the three science subjects will emerge as separate subjects. For the non-science stream students at Form 4 level, the knowledge and skills acquired up to Form 3 will be reinforced through general science as part of their School Certificate award. Economics, business studies and principles of accounting will be offered from Form 4 onwards.

Apart from the distinct discipline-based curricular elements, other essential knowledge, skills, values and attitudes are to be integrated across the curriculum. These are: environmental education, values, anti-drug education, humanitarian law, cultural understanding, human rights, occupational safety and health, sex education, HIV and AIDS awareness, peace education, and sustainable development. The NCFS reiterates the importance of those areas in contributing to life skills, promoting civic awareness and enhancing pro-social behaviour. Thus, each domain of learning must offer adequate learning opportunities to enable students to address them. Four key cross-cutting issues are stressed in the NCFS, namely: sustainable development, peace education, education and communication for sustainable lifestyle, and addressing HIV and AIDS.

It is also proposed that students will have activity time during which they can choose from a range of co-curricular activities. These activities include art and craft, computing, debating, drama, dance, music, singing and a wide range of physical activities. Activities should centre on areas of learning that deal with a wide variety of



issues related to world affairs, healthy lifestyles, sports civics, environment, literacy, culture, science, mathematics, ICT, the society, the economy and so on.

The approach adopted for designing the prevocational framework is similar to the one used for the mainstream curriculum framework insofar as it is inclusive, holistic, integrated and comprehensive. Emphasis will be placed on providing more diversified opportunities to celebrate success, value the learner as a person and make her/him develop a positive image of her/himself as an able and competent learners. The focus will be on enhancing learner engagement by involving everyone in projects that are concrete, broad-based and problem driven. Also, keeping in mind the reality of the world of work and the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to be developed for active and informed citizenship, the focus will be on: i) developing functional numeracy and literacy; ii) using ICT as a support for learning; iii) developing basic scientific skills and environmental awareness; iv) learning to manage emotions and developing positive self esteem; v) promoting creativity, artistic dispositions, physical and health fitness; and vi) mastering relevant technical skills. Prevocational education must:

- Enable the holistic development and character formation of each individual learner.
- Foster the ability for understanding, judgment, critical thinking, creativity and self-expression in learners.
- Prepare learners for lifelong learning by developing the necessary mind frame, technical and entrepreneurial skills and attitudes.
- Develop functional literacy and numeracy that will serve as the basis for vocational training, apprenticeship or further education.
- Develop an awareness of own role, strengths and limitations and to contribute positively in a challenging social context.
- Acquire enabling life, livelihood and problem solving skills to become economically and independently productive persons who can earn a living with dignity.
- Develop communication, pro-social and emotional skills to facilitate integration in society and promote active democratic citizenship.

Because of the renewed emphasis on trade, social and emotional skills, communication, the need for meaningful and concrete learning experiences, the project based method, the curriculum is crafted around four learning domains, which are: i) communication skills; ii) numeracy and problem-solving skills; iii) life skills; and iv) livelihood and trade skills.

The assessment of the students' performance has so far been characterized by external examinations administered at 16+ (e.g. the SC/CGE O-level examinations) and at 18+, e.g. the HSC/ GCE A-level examinations, in addition to formal end-of-term tests and end-of-year examinations, which are school-based. The curriculum framework proposed is outcome-driven, process-based and attempts to integrate the knowledge, understanding, values and attitudes from various learning areas so as bring about holistic learning. Such an approach, which is new for the Mauritian public school, calls for a new system of assessment. This issue has been comprehensively dealt with in the curriculum framework proposed for the primary level, and the same philosophy and approach are adopted for the secondary level. Since the curriculum



highlights the process rather than the product of learning, the focus of assessment should be on assessing the multidimensional aspects of learning as it is taking place in the classroom. Formative and continuous assessment must be given more emphasis.

Summative assessment will consist mostly of formal continuous assessment which determines whether the stated outcomes for each level and each learning area are being attained. This will be multi-faceted and will use several measurement devices such as curriculum embedded tests, term-wise assessment, and projects. These will be school-based in Forms 1 and 2 (term 1: 20%; term 2: 30 %; term 3: 50%). In Form 3, learning outcomes will be assessed at school level in all learning areas for terms 1 and 2 (term 1: 20%; term 2: 30%; end of year: 50%). At the end of Form 3, students will be initially assessed at national level in literacy in English and French, numeracy, ICT and social studies, leading to a National Certificate of Achievement (NCA). This certificate will provide a statement of the level achieved by each student in these core competencies. Each and every child at the end of Form 3 will be awarded this certificate that recognizes his or her achievement, independently of the level achieved. It will not be a selective exam and it will provide an opportunity for students of either the prevocational or the main stream to switch pathways if they so wish. In addition to the NCA, it is also proposed that the school provides each student with a statement which records his/her achievement in key competencies as enunciated in the overarching learning outcomes. This statement will describe, for example her/his ability to work in a team, to solve problems, to take initiatives, to interact with peers from other cultural backgrounds or to participate in creative activities. While keeping the option of Cambridge examinations (end of Form 5), possibility for offering alternatives to the existing examinations will also be explored; this will include the possibility for students to sit for the International Baccalaureate examinations. (MECHR & MIE, 2009).

In 2008, out of 17,794 candidates (8,262 boys and 9,532 girls) who took part in the Cambridge School Certificate examination, 13,617 were successful. Comparison with the 2007 results shows that the overall pass rate has declined from 76.7% to 76.5%. The number of students taking part in the 2008 Cambridge Higher School Certificate examination stood at 8,907 (3,999 boys and 4,908 girls). The overall pass rate was 78.7% compared to 77.8% in 2007. (Central Statistics Office, 2010).

According to official data, in March 2009 a total of 54 schools were offering secondary academic education only, six prevocational education only, and 125 schools both secondary academic and prevocational education. Out of the 179 schools dispensing secondary education, 174 were in the Island of Mauritius and five in Rodrigues. State administered schools numbered 69, while the other 105 were private aided and non-aided schools. The total enrolment was 116,226 students, of whom 52% were girls and 48% were boys. About 42% of the students were in state schools and 58% in private (aided and unaided) schools. The gross enrolment ratio (secondary education enrolment as a percentage of the population aged 12 to 19 years) for the academic stream was estimated at 69% in 2009. A total of 131 schools were offering prevocational education: 126 in the Island of Mauritius and five in Rodrigues. Fifty-six of these schools were state secondary schools and state prevocational schools while the remaining 75 were private schools. The total enrolment was 8,033 students, comprising 5,114 boys and 2,919 girls. About 30% of the students in prevocational



schools were in state schools. The number of teachers working in schools offering secondary and prevocational education was 8,186. The number of teaching staff in the academic stream was 7,564 (3,256 males and 4,308 females). The student-teacher ratio works was 15:1. The number of teaching staff in prevocational education was 622 (220 males and 402 females), giving an average of 13 students per teacher. (Central Statistics Office, 2010).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

During school visits, while inspectors observe the teaching and learning process, they also assess the methodology, preparation of work, equipment and materials used, in order to ensure that these suit the learning needs of pupils. The implementation of the scheme of work is carefully monitored, so that pupils are exposed to the programme and amount of work planned for them in the curriculum. Copybooks are verified on a random basis, not only to ensure that work is properly corrected, but also to see that units of knowledge taught in class are consolidated.

The Inspectorate takes cognizance of the general trends from schools and takes necessary action to advise and guide teachers, within limits, as to possible means for improvement. When the need arises, several activities are carried out in order to ensure staff development (workshops, seminars, etc.)

Subsequent to such national assessments, areas of concern are identified and root causes analyzed. These inform educational policies in which a focused approach is sought to eliminate the problems involved. In this context, there is currently the implementation of a continuous comprehensive evaluation scheme, followed by a programme of remediation.

The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy was devised subsequent to surveys and analyses carried out revealing that more than 30% of primary school cohorts leaving school face reading and writing difficulties in English and French. These also showed that standards of numeracy have to be improved. The Strategy was accordingly introduced in June 2003 across the whole spectrum of primary schools.

A National Qualification Framework (NQF) has been established in recent years to bring about a reform of the training system. The Framework encompasses all qualifications from CPE to PhD, widening access and giving greater opportunity to learners thus providing parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications with a view to harmonize all qualifications. The underlying rationale of the NQF is that it would open up learning and career pathways for all Mauritians, whatever their previous formal education, training or work experience. The NQF consists of 10 levels, starting with Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) at level 1 and ending with the PhD at level 10 and is made up of unit standards and qualifications. Level descriptors provide broad descriptions of learning outcomes at a given level of knowledge, skill and competence. The NQF ensures greater articulation between education, training and the world of work. It would see to it that training responds to standards set up by industry and as the same time encourages lifelong learning through recognition of prior learning (RPL) and flexible delivery of training. (MESR, 2004).



Mauritius participated in the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) projects I (1995) and II (2001), focusing on the assessment of levels of skills in reading and mathematics of Standard 6 pupils. Concerning the SACMEQ II study, it has been found that at the national level 18.7% of Standard 6 pupils had acquired pre-reading or emergent reading skills as their highest level of attainment. This implies that 18.7% of Standard 6 pupils had not acquired skills that would enable them to undertake basic reading. While this does not mean that these pupils are illiterate, such pupils would experience difficulty in demonstrating the basic skills that would enable them to be effective members of society. This result compares unfavourably with data from SACMEQ I study, where this percentage was at 7.2% only. In 1995, Standard 6 pupils were not tested in mathematics. In 2001, it was found that 20.6% of Standard 6 pupils were innumerate.

When examined by socio-economic index, more pupils coming from a high socio-economic status (SES) home background attained higher levels of reading competence than those coming from a low SES home background. It was noted that 45.8% of pupils coming from a high SES home background were at levels 6, 7 and 8 combined as compared with only 27.4% of those coming from a low SES home background. The percentage of standard 6 pupils coming from a high SES home background demonstrating only levels 1 and 2 reading competence was 16.1% as compared to 22.8% for those coming from a low SES background. A similar trend was observed in 1995. As for reading, Standard 6 pupils coming from a high SES home background demonstrated higher competence in mathematics than those from lower socio-economic levels. The percentage of pupils from high SES home background showing competence at levels 7 and 8 combined was 22% compared to 10.7% for those coming from a low SES home background. More pupils from low SES home background were at the lowest levels as compared to their counterparts from high SES home background, with 17% achieving levels 1 and 2 combined as against 26% of Standard 6 pupils coming from a low SES home background. (SACMEQ, 2005).

Teaching staff

The majority of teachers at the primary education level are government employees. All teachers of government and grant-aided schools follow a two-year full-time pre-service training programme dispensed by the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE). Since 2002 the entry requirement to join the teaching profession has been upgraded from O-level to A-level qualifications. The Pedagogical Inspectorate monitors and supports teaching and learning to improve the teacher effectiveness.

Recruitment of teachers for the government primary and secondary schools is carried out by the Public Service Commission as the case is for state employees. Private institutions, grant aided ones included, recruit their teachers on their own. In the state sector, there is a mobility of teachers as well as heads of schools as part of a procedural transfer exercise. Hence in the primary subsector, teachers complete a six-year cycle before being eligible for a transfer (for heads of primary schools, it is a four-year term).

In addition to curriculum, the MIE is involved in teacher education. Its principal function is to improve the quality, competence and qualifications of the



teaching force spanning the entire continuum of the education system from the pre-primary and primary up to the secondary level. The Council of the MIE is responsible for overall management and administration and has general control over the conduct of the affairs of the Institute. The Academic Board of the Institute is the academic authority and is responsible for the academic work of the MIE in teaching and research.

The MIE offers a variety of courses ranging from the pre-primary to the secondary level. These include teacher certificate and advanced certificate in education, teacher diploma, postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE), advanced certificate in educational management and diploma in educational supervision and administration programmes.

The part-time teacher's certificate (prevocational) programme lasts two years. The duration of the part-time teacher's diploma (secondary or prevocational) programme is three years (six semesters). As regards early childhood education (ECE), suitable qualified practicing pre-primary school teachers can enrol in the two-year Certificate of Proficiency in ECE programme; certificate of proficiency holders can enrol in the one-year teacher's certificate or in the two-year teacher's diploma in ECE.

The PGCE part-time is a two-year (four semesters) programme for secondary school in-service education officers. It is run over four semesters and is offered to practicing education officers who are holders of a degree in different specialist areas. The PGCE programme comprises of three major components, namely, professional studies, professional practice and major study. Each component seeks to develop a particular set of competencies with a view to helping acquire the necessary up-to-date knowledge, skills and attitudes to become an effective practitioner. The professional studies modules aim at providing both a theoretical and practical foundation in order to help trainees address a number of issues pertaining to classroom practices. The introduction of four subject didactics modules is an innovation as more emphasis is placed on pedagogical content knowledge. The professional practice component involves a number of peer teaching sessions and school-based experience which aims at creating an interface between theory and practice. The experience gathered in real classroom situations will be ploughed back into discussions during lectures. The major study component aims at enabling trainees to carry out small scale studies in the context of their classroom and schools reality with a view to addressing pressing concerns that they encounter as a professional.

The MIE also runs a joint a three-year bachelor of education programme with the University of Mauritius. The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), single honours, is a three-year, part-time, post-A-level and post-teacher diploma course. The subject area that a candidate intends to study at the B.Ed. (honours) level depends upon the subject area that he/she has studied at teacher-diploma level. Furthermore, the postgraduate programme provides for graduate and experienced professionals in education to achieve a two-year part-time master's degree in education at the MIE.

Most of the training for heads of schools is of an in-service nature. The MIE offers a course leading to a Certificate in Educational Administration for heads of primary schools, while the Ministry of Education has been offering training



workshops as part of the capacity building programme. As for inspectors, a two-year, part-time (six semesters) course leading to a Diploma in Educational Supervision and Inspection started in 1997 at the MIE.

The new curricula are introducing a number of key changes and teacher training in the primary sector will be crucial for the achievement of literacy and numeracy targets. The proposed curriculum innovation, in so far as assessment is concerned, will require both the MIE, the Ministry of Human Resources and other stakeholders to carry out intensive training sessions in all zones with teachers, head teachers, pedagogical inspectorate so that a shared vision of good practice that does justice to the philosophy of equity and fairness is fostered. Once this phase is completed, teachers will have to follow training courses on continuous assessment for the various disciplines/subject areas. A zonal and regional as well as a school-based approach can be adopted. When the guidelines for learning competencies and their performance indicators are finalized for each subject area, the focus should be on enhancing those skills and learning competencies which are considered essential in a competencies-based approach to assessment. The aim of providing training in assessment is not to transmit rigid guidelines for teachers to apply but to enable teachers to understand the purpose and develop their own tools as per the requirements of their pupils and their profiles. This approach recognizes that each child is unique and has every right to have access to an education that respects her/his aptitudes, needs, aspirations and learning styles.

Teacher training will be designed to: i) provide short-term intensive workshop regarding continuous assessment for teachers, head teachers, deputy head teachers, mentors and inspectors; ii) enhance teachers' use of language and communication skills; iii) help teachers develop lesson plans of activities which integrate core values across subject areas; iv) enhance teaching strategies and the teachers' commitment to the activity-based and discovery methods of learning and cooperative learning to make learning fun and enjoyable; v) enable early identification of learning difficulties for remedial activities; vi) promote the development of ICT skills so that teachers can use multimedia as a pedagogical tool; vii) help teachers recognize and value diverse abilities and devise such activities which promote the holistic development of each child.

Special attention in the primary sector will be given to improve the language and communication skills of teachers and to equip them with the relevant scientific knowledge. In a science and technology driven era, teachers must be empowered to use and develop and adapt learning materials to suit their learners' need. Reform requires the transformation of primary classrooms into busy laboratories where hands-on activities and self-driven learning become current features. Teachers will also be required to emphasize differential learning techniques, self-directed and child-centered learning, role play and story telling to further the aims of primary schooling. Since school teachers will need the collaboration of head teachers, school Inspectorate and parents, ways and means must be devised to run workshops to ensure good practice in classroom activities. (Ministry of Education and Human Resources & MIE, 2008).



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