

Policy Issues Paper for Public
Consultations:
Review of the Fiji Education Act 1966

Education Review Committee
May 2025

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Background

On 10 September 2024, Cabinet approved the official review of the Education Act 1966 by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Fiji Law Reform Commission. The Act is the foundational law for pre-tertiary education in Fiji and since its promulgation in 1966, has only been amended seven times.

The Act has not undergone a comprehensive review and it has thus become imperative that such integral legislation be reviewed and reformed to update it to modern standards and best practices, and to address the since developed and ever developing issues and concerns within the education system.

The Minister for Education, Hon. Mr Aseri Radrodro appointed the Education Review Committee to facilitate the review project, in March 2025. The Education Review Committee comprises:

- the Commissioner of the Education Act Review - Ms Rokobua Naiyaga;
- two legal drafters as consultants - Mr David Solvalu and Ms Lyanne Vaurasi-Ratulele;
- two legal officers from the Fiji Law Reform Commission - Ms Magdalena Ramoala and Ms Joyce Hicks; and
- Four Ministry of Education officers as ministry focal points - Mr Metuisela Gauna, Ms Adi Lamawainavalu Vesikula, Ms Maraia Seruvatu and Ms Rusila Buisamu.

The work of the Education Review Committee is also supported by funding assistance from the Global Partnership for Education through the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), as facilitated by two UNICEF officers, Mr Semiti Temo and Mr Jovesa Korovulavula.

Introduction

This Policy Issues Paper provides a comprehensive summary of policy issues identified by stakeholders participating in several information gathering workshops and meetings. These include two workshops focused on the review of the Education Act 1966: a one-day workshop held on 27 March 2025 at the Grand Pacific Hotel in Suva and a four-day workshop held from 31 March to 3 April 2025 at the Pearl Resort in Pacific Harbour. It also provides a summary of policy issues identified by key stakeholders in targeted one-on-one meetings held at Tanoa Plaza Hotel on 16 April and 5 May 2025.

In the first workshop, participants included representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Fiji Law Reform Commission, school management, faith-based institutions, trade unions and other relevant stakeholders. The workshop focused on providing a thorough understanding of the history and provisions of the Education Act 1966 as well as a general overview of the high-level instruments and binding treaties that would guide the outcomes of the review project. The list of participants and workshop feedback survey results may be found at **Schedule 1**.

The second workshop gathered similar representatives but in larger numbers. The workshop continued with a thorough analysis of the Act, however it focused more on defining the policy issues faced by the attendees and proposed policy reforms and solutions. The workshop also included presentations from key statutory bodies within the larger education ecosystem, providing much needed context and awareness around issues faced by teachers, higher education institutions and the statutory loans body (i.e. Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Service). This workshop also included an insightful presentation on the Denarau Declaration - Fiji National Education Policy Framework 2024-2033 (Denarau Declaration) and the commitments made by the State under this document and the indicators currently in development to measure progress towards these goals. The list of participants and workshop feedback survey results may be found at **Schedule 2**.

On 16 April and 5 May 2025, the Education Review Committee organised targeted one-on-one meetings with other key stakeholders to review their specific identified issues. These meetings were held with the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, Ministry of

iTaukei Affairs and the iTaukei Affairs Board, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, Higher Education Commission and Fiji Teachers Registration Board on 16 April 2025 and the Ministry of Education E-learning platform team, Fiji National Disaster Management Office, Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways and Ministry of Youth and Sports. A report on the issues discussed during these meetings may be found at **Schedule 3**.

This Policy Issues Paper has been developed based on the insights gathered from these workshops and meetings and will provide the skeletal structure for the issues to be considered, reviewed and addressed in the review process for the Education Act 1966 and related laws.

It is also supported by a questionnaire which is to be widely circulated to participants in order to gather clear policy recommendations and views. The questionnaire may be found at <https://forms.gle/cWrufHjLTtm8xDL9> or using the following QR Code:



Executive Summary

This Policy Issues Paper synthesizes 119 key concerns and recommendations identified during extensive stakeholder consultations regarding the review of the Education Act 1966. The findings are categorized into ten thematic clusters and reflect a collective aspiration to modernize, streamline, and realign Fiji's education legislation with contemporary needs, international obligations, and national development goals.

Cluster 1: General Issues

The Act's outdated language and provisions no longer reflect Fiji's educational landscape or national aspirations. There is a strong call to modernize its language and structure, rebrand it as the "Education Sector Act," and to ensure alignment with the National Development Plan, Denarau Declaration, regional instruments and international treaties. The absence of a National ICT Policy was also flagged as a major gap, with participants urging the development of a cohesive digital education framework.

Cluster 2: Scope of the Act

Participants called for a holistic, inclusive approach encompassing Early Childhood Education, Special and Inclusive Education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), lifelong learning, and digital learning. Calls for clearer definitions and recognition of non-traditional learning formats such as homeschooling and faith-based education were prominent. Higher education institutions emphasized the need for formal inclusion in the Act and stronger collaboration with the Ministry.

Cluster 3: Governance

Concerns about weak governance structures, power imbalances, and the non-existence of the Education Forum were widely shared. There were recommendations to establish a revitalized, multi-stakeholder National Education Advisory Council and statutory school inspection bodies, while ensuring representation from all sectors including students, NGOs, and faith-based institutions.

Cluster 4: School Management and Control

Ambiguity in school governance roles, lack of vetting for school managers, inadequate handling of complaints, and poorly defined school establishment and closure procedures were identified. Participants advocated for improved clarity, transparency, and regulatory oversight to ensure effective school operations and leadership.

Cluster 5: School Facilities and Student Welfare

Serious infrastructure and health-related issues were raised, including unsafe buildings, lack of sanitation, and inadequate emergency preparedness. Participants proposed codified safety standards, mandatory first aid capacity, nutritional regulations, mental health services, and pandemic resilience protocols. Accessibility for students with disabilities and transport safety also emerged as critical concerns.

Cluster 6: Finance, Funding, Fees, and Audits

Calls for stronger financial accountability included proposals for audit transparency, improved oversight of school fundraising, equitable funding for religious education, and review of transport allowances. Participants also highlighted ambiguities around the legal definition and regulation of school fees, grants, and levies.

Cluster 7: Curriculum and Assessments

There was strong consensus on the need for a modernized, relevant curriculum that includes digital literacy, climate change, career guidance, and moral values education. Participants recommended establishing curriculum councils, clear learning benchmarks, inclusive assessment models, and improved coordination with tertiary and industry partners to ensure workforce alignment.

Cluster 8: Teachers

The review revealed systemic issues around teacher training, registration, licensing, and welfare. Recommendations included the formal alignment of the Education Act with the Fiji Teachers Registration Act, establishment of a teacher recertification framework, improved housing and rural allowances, better induction

and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) systems, and recognition of religious educators.

Cluster 9: Compulsory Education

Participants urged the revision of the legal definition and age range for compulsory education, recommending alignment with actual schooling patterns and international standards. Proposals were made to expand compulsory education nationwide and clearly define entry and exit criteria.

Cluster 10: Enforcement and Monitoring

Concerns were raised about the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms. The Act's penalties were deemed inadequate and poorly defined between civil and criminal offences. Participants advocated for a robust compliance framework, stronger protection against school violence and abuse, clearer appeal processes, and regulated unannounced school inspections.

The consultations reveal a deep consensus on the urgent need to modernize Fiji's Education Act 1966 to reflect 21st-century realities. Key themes include equity, inclusion, digital transformation, transparent governance, and holistic development. A reformed Act should be responsive, rights-based, and grounded in both national values and global best practices, ensuring education in Fiji is accessible, safe, and fit for future generations.

CLUSTER 1: GENERAL ISSUES

Issue 1: Outdated Language and Provisions

Participants identified numerous instances where the language and structure of the Education Act 1966 are outdated. These include archaic terminology, obsolete administrative procedures, and provisions no longer relevant in a modern educational setting. The Act requires a full linguistic and structural modernization to reflect current educational philosophies, technologies, and governance standards.

Suggestions were made to restructure and possibly rename the Education Act to the 'Education Sector Act' to better capture its expanded scope. Recommendations for scope expansion are included in Cluster 2 of this paper.

Issue 2: Alignment with National Development Plan & Denarau Declaration

The Act must explicitly align with Fiji's national development goals under the National Development Plan, including workforce development, social equity, and sustainable economic growth. A modern education framework should be responsive to the country's strategic plans and development objectives.

The Act must also align to the Denarau Declaration, which sets Fiji's specific goals for the education sector and the actors within it.

Issue 3: Alignment with international treaties and instruments

The Act must align and give effect to international binding treaties and conventions to which Fiji is a party. These include the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The Act may also be reviewed with a view to incorporating key international and regional instruments such as the PIFS Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018–2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – particularly SDG 4: Quality Education.

Issue 4 : National ICT Policy

Given the increasing reliance on technology in education, the absence of a comprehensive national ICT policy was identified as a significant gap. An ICT policy would guide the integration of digital tools, cybersecurity, teacher training, infrastructure investments, and e-learning platforms to create a coherent and inclusive digital education ecosystem. There has been work undertaken to develop an ICT Policy, with a workshop held in March 2025¹; however, the Policy has not been launched as of the date of this paper. The review of the Act must be guided by this developing policy as well as Fiji's National Digital Strategy 2025-2030.

¹ See <https://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/News/NATIONAL-CONSULTATION-WORKSHOP-ON-ICT-IN-EDUCATION>

CLUSTER 2: SCOPE OF ACT

Issue 5 : Holistic Approach to Education

A call was made for the Act to reflect a holistic approach to education, embracing the spiritual, intellectual, and physical development of students. The revised framework should consider the full spectrum of student well-being and align with evolving educational philosophies.

Issue 6 : School Classification

The current classification system for schools (e.g. kindergarten, primary and secondary) does not accommodate the modern educational landscape. This leads to inconsistent support and recognition for diverse learning formats. Participants called for definitional clarity to ensure inclusive and structured policy development.

Significant educational domains are missing from the current Act, such as Early Childhood Education (ECE), Special Inclusive Education (SIE), TVET, digital education, and library services.

Workshop attendees proposed mandating ECE in the Act, requiring all government and non-government schools to offer ECE programmes and ensuring that these programmes meet national standards for quality, curriculum, and staffing. They stressed that ECE is vital for cognitive, emotional, and social development, and its absence contributes to unequal learning outcomes later in a child's educational journey. Participants also emphasized the need to clearly define the age range for Early Childhood Education in the Act. The definition should align with international standards while being tailored to Fiji's unique social and cultural context, ensuring that young children receive appropriate foundational education.

The Act must also create frameworks to distinguish clearly between formal, non-formal, and informal education and define co-curricular and extracurricular activities as well as provide for Special Inclusive Education (SIE), TVET, digital education, and library services.

Issue 7 : Homeschooling and Alternative Education

The Act's definition of 'school' excludes institutions with fewer than ten students, effectively omitting homeschooling. This lack of recognition

leaves families and students in such settings without a clear legal framework or oversight. The workshops called for the development of regulations that recognize and support homeschooling while maintaining educational standards and child protection measures.

Issue 8 : Inclusion and Role of Tertiary Institutions

Universities and other higher education institutions advocated for their explicit inclusion in the revised Act. They emphasized the need for stronger collaboration with the Ministry of Education and clearer definitions of roles and responsibilities. Concerns were raised about representation, especially given substantial public funding.

Participants also called for the formal recognition of faith-based teacher training and educational institutions, such as Corpus Christi and Fulton University College. This inclusion would ensure that all significant education providers are reflected in national education policy discussions and frameworks.

Concerns were raised about the inconsistency in quality and duplication of programmes among universities and teacher training institutions (TTIs). Participants stressed the need for rigorous quality assurance processes and national standards to ensure the credibility and effectiveness of higher education institutions.

Issue 9 : Cumbersome Registration Process for Higher Education Institutions:

The existing two-part registration process (recognition and registration) for educational institutions is lengthy and inefficient. Streamlining this into a single process is a key objective.

Issue 10 : University Autonomy vs. Governmental Oversight:

Universities' self-accreditation creates a potential conflict between academic autonomy and government regulation. The balance needs to be struck to ensure quality standards while respecting universities' right to determine their curricula, but also maintain some standardisation.

Issue 11 : Disjointed Education Pathways:

A significant gap exists between secondary and tertiary education, leading to challenges for students transitioning between levels. Improving the connection and alignment of curricula across these levels is vital.

Issue 12 : Inefficient Review Committee:

The current single Review Committee is overburdened, leading to lengthy review processes and delays in renewing institutional registrations, resulting in institutions operating without current registration. The small size of the committee also contributes to this issue.

Issue 13 : Confusing Definitions and Classifications:

The definition of "higher education institution" in the current act is unclear and leads to confusion regarding the classification of certain institutions (e.g., vocational schools, academies).

Issue 14 : Funding of Institutions:

The current funding model for the HEC needs review to ensure efficiency and appropriate resource allocation. There's also a need to consider allowing HEC to retain some of their earned revenue.

Issue 15 : Unnecessary Requirement for University-Specific Laws:

The current requirement for each university to have its own separate law is considered unnecessary and bureaucratic, and could lead to parliamentary delays and potential interference in university governance.

Issue 16 : Inconsistent Registration Durations:

The duration of registration doesn't align with the updated definition of higher education institutions, causing inconsistencies and administrative issues.

Issue 17 : Lack of Portability of Qualifications:

The lack of consistent recognition of Fijian qualifications abroad creates obstacles for graduates seeking international employment or further

studies. This is partly addressed by engagement with international accreditation bodies.

Issue 18 : Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Participants emphasized that TVET remains underfunded and undervalued despite its potential to address unemployment and meet labour market demands. Recommendations included increasing funding, improving policies, fostering industry partnerships, and promoting TVET as a viable educational pathway parallel to academic education. A national awareness campaign was also suggested to improve public perception of vocational training.

Issue 19 : MATUA Programme Expansion

The MATUA programme, which offers second-chance education, was praised for its success. Participants advocated for its expansion to all regions and debated whether its continuation should be enshrined in the new Act or handled through subsidiary policy mechanisms. Concerns were raised about its sustainability and long-term funding.

The current Education Act lacks reference to lifelong learning and adult education, which workshop participants noted as critical for an evolving workforce. They proposed the inclusion of a framework supporting adult literacy programmes, vocational retraining, and flexible evening or weekend classes for working adults. This would align Fiji's education system with global goals for lifelong learning and increase opportunities for economic mobility and societal participation.

Issue 20 : Climate Refugees in Education Planning

As climate change continues to affect population movements, the need to accommodate climate refugees within the education system was raised. Participants called for policy provisions to ensure displaced children have continued access to quality education, with attention to location, infrastructure, and psychosocial support.

Issue 21 : Accessibility and Support for Students with Disabilities

A recurring theme throughout the workshop was the need for greater support for students with disabilities. Participants advocated for policies

mandating the construction of accessible facilities, such as ramps, specialized toilets, and inclusive classrooms, to ensure that all schools meet accessibility standards.

Moreover, establishing comprehensive support systems within schools—such as the availability of aides or special educators—is essential to cater to diverse disabilities effectively. Teachers must also be equipped with the training and resources necessary to effectively support students with diverse learning and physical needs.

More detailed recommendations for ensuring schools are inclusive and accessible may be found in **Schedule 3**, Issues 5 to 9.

Issue 22 : Strengthening Parent and Community Engagement

The workshop identified a gap in provisions for parent and community involvement in education planning, school management, and policy input. Participants recommended that the Education Act be revised to include formal mechanisms for community and parental engagement at all school levels. This includes school boards, parent-teacher associations, and district-level education forums. Empowering communities through formal inclusion not only fosters ownership and accountability but also ensures that local cultural values and needs are reflected in school governance and curriculum delivery.

Issue 23 : Education for Incarcerated and At-Risk Youth

The issue of education access for incarcerated and at-risk youth was raised as a significant oversight in the current Act. Participants proposed specific provisions that mandate the continuation of education for youth in juvenile detention centers or other custodial settings, including the adaptation of curricula and assessments to suit rehabilitative contexts. This ensures that vulnerable children are not excluded from their right to education.

Issue 24 : Improving Emergency Preparedness in Schools

Participants emphasized the necessity of equipping schools with comprehensive emergency preparedness plans. These plans should address natural disasters, health emergencies, and human-made crises. The discussions included the development of clear evacuation routes, designated safety zones, and regular drills involving both students and

staff. The issue also includes the need to equip schools with basic emergency supplies and to integrate emergency preparedness into the school curriculum to build a culture of safety and resilience.

Issue 25 : Lack of Coordinated Disaster Recovery Planning

The workshop identified the absence of a centralized, coordinated disaster recovery and reconstruction plan for schools affected by cyclones, floods, and other natural disasters. Schools often face long downtimes due to overlapping mandates between ministries and delays in funding release. Recommendations included a centralized disaster recovery protocol, pre-allocated emergency funds, and school-specific contingency plans.

Issue 26 : Lack of Cultural Sensitivity in Education

Concerns were raised about the lack of cultural sensitivity in the Act, particularly regarding traditional practices. A specific example is the conflict arising from school policies regarding the iTaukei first shaving ceremony.

The need for integrating cultural appropriateness and tolerance is highlighted. This encompasses various cultural practices across different regions of Fiji, and strategies are sought to avoid misuse of cultural exceptions.

CLUSTER 3: EDUCATION SECTOR GOVERNANCE

Issue 27 : Developing Formal Governance Structures

The lack of formal and transparent governance structures in the education sector was seen as contributing to policy ambiguity and weak implementation. Participants advocated for the establishment of clearly defined organizational frameworks, accountability lines, and performance evaluation systems for education boards, councils, and committees.

Issue 28 : Power Imbalance Between Minister and Permanent Secretary

There is an evident power dynamic issue between the Minister and the Permanent Secretary. While Section 4 of the Act empowers the Minister to direct the Permanent Secretary, section 127 of the Constitution specifies that the Permanent Secretary retains certain powers, especially in disciplinary matters, with the Minister's agreement. Conflicts could arise when this agreement is absent. The workshop emphasized the need to align the Act with constitutional provisions to avoid legal disputes and clarify governance reporting structures.

Issue 29 : Revitalization of the Education Forum

Participants recognized the inactivity of the Education Forum, which is legally mandated to provide educational policy advice, as a missed opportunity for fostering national dialogue and inter-agency collaboration.

There were strong calls to transform this underutilized forum into a more functional body, potentially renamed the National Education Advisory Council, with the legal authority to make binding or near binding decisions, and with multi-stakeholder representation, and the mandate to guide policy and reform implementation.

Its expanded membership could comprise representatives from faith-based schools, higher education institutions, private schools, NGOs, special needs advocates, industry partners and civil society. It could also be reviewed to reflect the actual population distribution in education across the country.²

² See Schedule 3, Issue 22

This revamped council would focus on strategic guidance, policy review, conflict resolution, and ensuring that educational reforms reflect diverse community voices while promoting coherence in education policy.

Issue 30 : Inclusion of Student Councils in Governance

The importance of student voices in school governance was discussed extensively. Participants suggested a formal requirement for student councils or representative bodies in secondary schools, with clearly defined roles in decision-making processes, especially regarding school rules, extracurricular programmes, and peer support initiatives. Such inclusion would promote civic responsibility and leadership development among students.

Issue 31 : Limited Engagement of Local Government in School Governance

Participants highlighted the minimal involvement of municipal and provincial councils in educational planning and school governance. The need for enhanced collaboration between local authorities and the Ministry of Education was emphasized, especially in terms of resource sharing, school zoning (if continued), and enforcement of attendance policies. A recommendation was made to include a formal role for local authorities in the new Education Act.

Attendance enforcement is also a significant consideration under Cluster 9.

Issue 32 : Lack of Recognition for Village Education Committees

The consultation highlighted the need to formally recognize the roles of village education committees. This could improve collaboration between the iTaukei Affairs Board, teachers, and the Education Act. This is seen as a way to improve education in villages.

Issue 33 : Appeals Process and Conflict of Interest

Appeals against Ministry decisions currently go to the Minister, raising concerns about conflicts of interest. An independent body or tribunal was proposed to handle appeals to ensure impartiality, transparency, and public confidence in the education system's governance processes.

CLUSTER 4: SCHOOL GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT & CONTROL

Issue 34 : Role Ambiguity in School Governance

The Education Act fails to clearly define and differentiate the roles and responsibilities of various school governance actors, particularly between school managers, head teachers, and boards of governors. This ambiguity affects both government and non-government schools.

The term 'manager' is inconsistently applied across the Act, leading to confusion in school administration and the potential for conflict in decision-making and accountability. Workshop participants called for precise role definitions to ensure clarity in daily operations and governance.

Issue 35 : Lack of Due Diligence in Manager Appointments

The Act does not specify the vetting process or due diligence procedures for appointing school managers. While some responsibility is implied for the Permanent Secretary, there are no clear requirements or standards for assessing a candidate's suitability.

Workshop participants recommended defining a transparent, standardized process to ensure competent and trustworthy appointments in school leadership positions.

Issue 36 : Bias in School Complaint Investigations

School staff investigating internal complaints were seen as a conflict of interest. The lack of impartiality compromised the credibility of investigations.

Participants called for the use of neutral, professionally trained investigators to ensure fair outcomes and to build trust in the complaints process.

Additionally, as the school inspection process was viewed as infrequent and inadequate, participants proposed a statutory body to conduct regular, independent reviews of schools. These inspections would address issues like teacher-student ratios, infrastructure, quality of instruction, and overall school management to ensure adherence to national standards

Issue 37 : School Establishment Criteria

Participants identified the lack of clear and consistent criteria for establishing schools as a root cause of inefficient development of schools. Schools have been created without adequate infrastructure, teaching staff, or resource planning.

The recommendation was to establish robust, enforceable criteria, including requirements for teacher accommodation, digital connectivity, and minimum safety standards to ensure readiness and sustainability and avoid political interference.

Issue 38 : School Closure and Deregistration

The procedures for school closure or deregistration were criticized for their lack of transparency and fairness. Participants expressed concern about the absence of clear criteria and a reliable appeals mechanism.

The revised Act should include defined processes, stakeholder consultation protocols, and a transparent, fair appeal process that includes independent oversight to ensure that school closures are justified and lawful.

Issue 39 : Underutilization of School Data Systems

The workshop observed that while the Ministry of Education has introduced digital data collection platforms, these systems are underutilized or inconsistently updated across schools. This results in poor data for planning and policy implementation.

Participants proposed a legal mandate for real-time data entry, regular audits, and training for school administrators on data usage and digital literacy.

Issue 40 : Improving Regulation of Private and Faith-Based Schools

Concerns were raised regarding the inconsistent regulation of private and faith-based schools. Participants advocated for stronger legal and policy frameworks to ensure these schools meet national standards in terms of curriculum, inclusion, and accountability while preserving their unique identities and autonomy.

CLUSTER 5: SCHOOL FACILITIES AND CARE OF STUDENTS

Issue 41 : Health and Safety Standards

Section 17 of the Act lacks defined standards for school health and safety. The discussion emphasized the need for codified health regulations covering building safety, sanitation, hygiene practices, and emergency protocols. Schools should be held to clear benchmarks, with regular inspections and compliance mechanisms built into the law.

Although criteria for sanitation and health are provided under the Public Health Act 1935 these were not well understood and even predated the Education Act 1966. A review of these health standards and their current relevance is necessary.

Issue 42 : Enhancing Infrastructure Safety Standards

Concerns were raised over the structural integrity and safety of existing school buildings, particularly in older institutions and rural areas.

Participants recommended setting and enforcing minimum safety standards for classrooms, playgrounds, and sanitation facilities. Regular inspections and a reporting mechanism for identifying and addressing hazards were proposed as crucial components of the new framework.

Issue 43 : Mental Health and Wellbeing Support in Schools

Participants called for a stronger focus on the mental health of both students and teachers. This includes the establishment of school-based counseling services, training for teachers on identifying signs of distress, and school-wide programmes promoting wellbeing and resilience. The recommendation emphasized destigmatizing mental health and providing accessible support services as a routine part of the educational environment.

Issue 44 : Developing Food and Nutrition Standards

Participants expressed concern about the quality and nutritional value of food provided or sold in schools.

There was a strong push for national standards to guide school canteen menus, regulate on-site food vendors, and promote healthy eating habits.

The goal is to support physical health, reduce obesity, and reinforce good nutrition as a component of learning outcomes.

Issue 45 : Improving First Aid and Medical Response Capacity

The workshop highlighted the need for every school to have access to basic medical support and trained first aid personnel.

The recommendations included mandatory first aid training for a set number of school staff, the availability of medical kits, and partnerships with nearby health services for emergencies. Ensuring schools are equipped to respond promptly to injuries or health crises was seen as a core component of student welfare.

Issue 46 : Need for Regular Medical Inspections

Participants agreed on the importance of regular student health checks and immunization programmes in schools. The focus was on preventative healthcare and proactive student wellbeing. While supporting such initiatives, the group also recognized the importance of incorporating parental consent mechanisms and coordination with the Ministry of Health into school health policies.

Additionally, it was noted that registration requirements imposed by the FTRB hinder health professionals' access to schools, particularly for immunization drives. This was seen as conflicting with children's constitutional right to healthcare. Participants proposed regulatory exceptions or simplified processes to resolve this.

Issue 47 : Addressing Substance Abuse and HIV Concerns:

Both the iTaukei Affairs Board and the Ministry of Education expressed concerns regarding substance abuse and HIV among students.

Issue 48 : Pandemic Preparedness

Drawing lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, participants advocated for incorporating pandemic preparedness into the Act. This includes enabling flexible learning systems, remote education mechanisms, and school-level health protocols to ensure continuity of education during public health emergencies.

Issue 49 : Early Identification of Special Needs

Participants stressed the importance of early identification and intervention for children with learning difficulties or disabilities.

The proposed Act should include provisions for screening programmes, specialized assessments, and early support systems embedded within the education process.

Issue 50 : Delayed School Infrastructure Projects

Participants raised concerns regarding the persistent delays in school infrastructure projects, especially in rural and maritime regions. Delays in construction and renovation of classrooms, sanitation blocks, and teacher quarters have impacted student learning conditions and teacher retention. Participants recommended the introduction of statutory deadlines for infrastructure projects and the inclusion of penalties for breach by contractors to improve accountability and timely delivery.

There was also broad agreement on expanding the scope of responsibilities of school management committees to include infrastructure development and maintenance. The revised Act should formalize the collaboration between these committees and the Ministry of Education in funding and executing school upgrades.

Issue 51 : Improving School Transport and Road Safety

Concerns were raised about the safety of students commuting to and from school, particularly in areas with poor infrastructure or high traffic. Concerns included unsafe bus routes, lack of pedestrian crossings near schools, and poor enforcement of traffic laws.

Participants proposed stricter regulations on school transportation, including additional licensing requirements for school buses, mandatory safety inspections, and training for drivers.

Suggested interventions also included conducting mandatory road safety awareness campaigns, and improving infrastructure such as signage and speed bumps near schools, pedestrian crossings and sidewalks for all school areas.

Issue 52 : Ensuring Safe Water and Sanitation

Access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation facilities was identified as a fundamental requirement for schools. Participants noted that inadequate water supply and unhygienic toilet facilities are significant barriers to student health and regular school attendance, particularly for girls and students in rural or maritime areas.

The recommendations included mandating access to clean drinking water, gender-segregated toilets, handwashing stations, and waste disposal systems. Regular maintenance and hygiene education programmes were proposed as part of a long-term strategy.

Issue 53 : Lack of Clear Jurisdictional Responsibilities: Defining Roles and Responsibilities

The lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities regarding children's welfare outside school hours leads to confusion, delays, and ineffective intervention. This necessitates:

- Clear inter-agency protocols and communication mechanisms.
- Defined roles for schools, social services, law enforcement, and health professionals.
- A streamlined referral system for reporting and addressing child welfare concerns.

Issue 54 : Need for Clear Demarcations of Responsibilities: Streamlining Intervention

A clearer definition of roles and responsibilities among different agencies involved in child welfare (schools, social welfare, police, health) is crucial for timely and effective response to incidents and needs. This requires clearer inter-agency guidelines and protocols.

Issue 55 : Support for Incarcerated Youth: Maintaining Educational Continuity

Maintaining educational access for incarcerated youth is essential but presents significant practical challenges requiring coordination between correctional facilities and educational institutions.

CLUSTER 6: FINANCE, FUNDING, FEES AND AUDITS

Issue 56 : Improving Accountability for Public Funding

Concerns were expressed about the ineffective use of public funding in education. Participants emphasized the need for stronger financial oversight, transparent budgeting, and rigorous auditing mechanisms. They called for establishing systems that track educational expenditure against outcomes and ensure funds are used efficiently to meet strategic goals.

The revised Act should include mandatory public disclosure of fund usage and mechanisms for addressing misuse.

Issue 57 : Inequitable Grant Policy Distribution

The existing grant policy, particularly how it allocates funds based on student numbers, disproportionately disadvantages rural schools with fewer students.

A review and adjustment of this formula are needed to ensure equitable funding for infrastructure and resources. The inflexibility of how the grant money must be spent also causes issues.

Issue 58 : Ambiguity Regarding Fees and Levies

This issue touches on legal interpretation and equitable funding, where the original proposal to remove 'government' from the section regulating school fees aimed to bring all schools under the same regulatory umbrella. However, this raised concerns about the Minister gaining control over private school fees, challenging principles of institutional autonomy.

Participants recommended clarifying the legal status of levies and defining the extent of government control over different types of school funding mechanisms.

Issue 59 : Lack of clarity on status of schools under the Financial Management Act 2004

The Education Act is unclear as to whether government and aided schools are recognised under the Financial Management Act as off-budget State entities given that they are either fully or partially funded by the Government, and flowing from that, the audit requirements for

government and aided schools, and whether the Auditor-General is responsible for auditing their accounts or whether they are at liberty to appoint their own auditors for audit purposes.

It is imperative that the framework for financial accountability be clarified under the Act.

Issue 60 : Definition and Classification of Fees

The term 'fees' is outdated in the context of modern education financing, where grants and levies are more common. Participants emphasized the need to clarify terms like 'fees', 'grants', and 'levies' in the Act. This would reduce ambiguity and align accounting and reporting practices across schools improving transparency.

Issue 61 : Funding for Religious and Values Educators

Disparities in funding between government and non-government schools were discussed, particularly regarding religious and values education. The current funding model may disadvantage non-government schools, and participants proposed that full government funding should be extended to ensure equitable educational experiences across institutions.

Issue 62 : Accessibility of Audit Reports

Audit reports are crucial for transparency and school improvement. The current lack of access to these documents by school administrators undermines collaborative governance.

Participants proposed increased accessibility to foster ownership and accountability.

Issue 63 : Inadequate Transport Allowance Scheme

The current transport allowance scheme for students was deemed insufficient, especially in rural and outer island areas where transport options are limited and costly.

Participants proposed revising the scheme to consider geographic realities, distance thresholds, and real transport costs, with periodic reviews built into the Education Act.

Issue 64 : Reinstatement of School Levy and Fundraising

Rural schools are advocating for the reinstatement of school levies and the ability to conduct fundraising initiatives to address urgent infrastructure needs. Currently, the long wait times for government funding for repairs are causing significant problems.

Issue 65 : Improved Oversight over School Fundraising Activities

Many schools conduct fundraising to cover operational shortfalls; however, there is limited oversight of how funds are raised or spent. Concerns were raised about undue pressure on parents and possible misuse of funds.

Participants recommended a regulatory framework for school fundraising, including transparency, limits on compulsory levies, and annual reporting obligations.

Issue 66 : Mandatory Allocation of Funds to Universities to be in the Act

A recommendation was made for the mandatory allocation of funds by the Government to universities like the Fiji National University and the University of the South Pacific. Representatives from the Ministry of Finance were of the view that the formula used to determine the amount of funds to be allocated should perhaps be included in the Act instead.

The Education Review Committee pointed out section 29(2) of the Financial Management Act 2004 which states that the Minister for Finance may limit funding to a university, for example, if the university contravenes any written law or government policy or if the financial situation of the Government warrants the limitation. Representatives from the Ministry of Finance submitted that the first two grounds (contraventions of written law and government policy) for the limitation should be removed.

Issue 67 : Inconsistent Funding Timelines:

The discrepancy between the government's financial year and the institutions' funding cycles creates logistical difficulties and planning challenges for universities.

Issue 68: High Fees for Accreditation and Foreign Qualification Assessment:

The fees charged for assessing foreign qualifications are considered excessively high, hindering Fijian graduates seeking employment or further studies.

CLUSTER 7: CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENTS

Issue 69 : Outdated and Vague Curriculum Definitions

The Act uses broad and outdated definitions for terms like 'curricula' and 'examinations.' This limits the flexibility and responsiveness of the education system.

Workshop participants recommended updating these terms to reflect continuous assessment models and holistic learning approaches aligned with 21st-century pedagogy. The Act should use terms like 'curriculum' and 'assessment' to encompass a broader, more inclusive understanding of education.

Issue 70 : Standardizing Language of Instruction

Participants highlighted inconsistencies in the language of instruction policies across regions and school types.

They proposed the Act include clear standards on the language of instruction, particularly in early education, where vernacular languages may be used alongside English. The goal is to support literacy development and cultural identity while ensuring a smooth transition to English-medium instruction in later years.

Issue 71 : ICT in the curriculum

Concerns were raised about the relevance and robustness of the current curriculum in preparing students for a rapidly evolving world. Given the increasing reliance on digital platforms, students must be equipped with knowledge about safe online behavior, digital rights and responsibilities, and recognizing cyberbullying or misinformation. The current curriculum is seen as insufficiently aligned with the skills and knowledge required in the modern workforce and global environment.

Participants particularly advocated for a curriculum that integrates digital literacy, cybersecurity, AI awareness, digital citizenship and online safety while aligning with different cognitive development stages. The Act should mandate the inclusion of such content across all school levels, supported by teacher training and digital learning resources.

Issue 72 : A Holistic Curriculum

A 'holistic curriculum' was proposed, integrating not just digital, but also environmental, socio-emotional and economic learning elements.

Issue 73 : Absence of Special Education Curriculum

Currently, students with disabilities are expected to use the mainstream curriculum, which does not meet their unique learning needs. The workshop advocated for a tailored curriculum that addresses diverse cognitive and physical abilities, supported by appropriate teacher training and resources.

Participants stressed the importance of early identification and intervention for children with learning difficulties or disabilities. The revised Education Act should include provisions for mandatory screening programmes in early childhood education settings and ongoing specialized assessments during primary education. Early support systems, embedded within the educational process, would ensure more effective and inclusive learning experiences

Issue 74 : Integrating Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness in Curriculum

Given Fiji's vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters, participants emphasized the urgent need to integrate climate change education and disaster preparedness into the national curriculum. This would equip students with knowledge on climate resilience, emergency response, and sustainable practices from an early age.

Issue 75 : Mental Health Education

The urgent need to incorporate mental health education into the curriculum was highlighted, particularly addressing the issue of youth suicide, which was raised in a 2023 ministry report. This aimed at early intervention and building resilience among students.

Issue 76 : Sexual and Reproductive Health Education

Integrating sexual and reproductive health education into the curriculum was another topic mentioned as an area for collaboration between the ministries.

Issue 77 : Policy-Making and Curriculum Development

The lack of a unified, centralized authority overseeing curriculum development and implementation across the education system was identified as a major gap. Participants emphasized the necessity of participatory processes in developing education policy and curriculum. Past instances of poor implementation due to a lack of stakeholder engagement were cited. There was a strong call for robust consultation mechanisms, including the use of the Education Forum, to shape sound, widely accepted educational reforms.

Participants also strongly recommended the establishment of a Curriculum Advisory Service or a Curriculum Council to provide expert support and policy oversight. These bodies would guide curriculum review, ensure quality standards, and align content with national education goals. The existing system was described as fragmented and insufficiently responsive to current educational demands.

Issue 78 : Absence of National Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks

Participants identified the lack of clear national benchmarks for literacy and numeracy achievement across year levels. This gap hinders the ability to measure student progress and compare performance across schools. Recommendations included establishing year-level competencies and incorporating them into curriculum and teacher performance evaluations.

Issue 79 : Literacy and Learning Support for Struggling Students

There was widespread concern about low literacy levels among students. The discussion called for more robust interventions beyond the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA), such as early remedial programmes and structured support for students falling behind.

Mandatory bilingual instruction using vernacular languages up to Year 3, and requiring teachers to have proficiency in at least one additional conversational language, were recommended to better support literacy development.

Issue 80 : Mandating Career Guidance Programmes

Career guidance was described as underdeveloped across most schools, despite its importance for student development and future success.

Participants proposed that the revised Act mandate career guidance programmes beginning at the lower secondary level. These programmes should include skills assessments, career counseling, university and TVET pathway awareness, and direct engagement with employers and tertiary institutions. The aim is to enable students to make informed decisions about their future and to reduce mismatches between education and employment outcomes.

Issue 81 : Disjointed Implementation of School Nutrition Programmes

The implementation of school feeding programmes varies widely between districts, with some schools receiving regular support and others excluded due to administrative inefficiencies.

The workshop proposed a national school nutrition policy that guarantees minimum service delivery standards and includes provisions for nutritional education. The Ministry of Health proposed a proactive approach through primary healthcare, focusing on prevention rather than treatment. This involved integrating health education into the school curriculum (as a core subject), promoting healthy eating in schools, and improving health literacy.

Issue 82 : Failure to Track Student Learning Outcomes

The Education Act lacks provisions that mandate consistent tracking of student learning outcomes.

Participants emphasized the importance of monitoring student progress using standardized tools beyond just final exams. It was proposed that the revised Act require all schools to implement annual learning assessments and submit progress reports to the Ministry for policy alignment and early intervention.

Issue 83 : Use of Visiting Teachers or Inspectors

Peer-to-peer school assessments are limited by internal bias and lack of professionalism. Participants recommended deploying trained external inspectors to improve the reliability and effectiveness of school evaluations and ensure impartial assessments.

Issue 84 : Religious Instruction

Religious instruction in schools triggered a multifaceted debate. While participants agreed on the importance of allowing students to opt out, they also acknowledged the logistical and pedagogical challenges that such opt-outs create. Concerns were also raised about the constitutional validity of compulsory religious education and how to uphold students' rights while preserving the cultural and religious ethos of the school.

Participants called for clearer guidelines on opt-out provisions, inclusive curricula for diverse student populations, and frameworks for engaging parents in determining the religious ethos of a school.

Issue 85 : Standardizing Moral Values Instruction

Participants called for the development of a consistent framework for moral values education across schools. While recognizing the diverse religious and cultural contexts of Fiji, the goal was to ensure that every student receives foundational instruction in ethics, citizenship, and social responsibility as part of their education experience.

Providing a stronger emphasis on values education was also specifically requested by the iTaukei Affairs Board and provincial councils.³

Issue 86 : Hygiene and Sanitation (WASH Program)

The importance of hygiene and sanitation, especially in the context of the ongoing dengue outbreak, was discussed, advocating for incorporating WASH education into the school setting to create lasting behavioral changes.

Issue 87 : Automatic Progression

The automatic progression policy sparked significant debate. Critics argued that without adequate support systems—including better teacher-student ratios, effective assessment tools, and digital support—automatic progression could lead to learning gaps and unprepared students.

Proponents emphasized its role in reducing psychological stress and dropouts, advocating for a more nuanced and supportive implementation.

³ See Schedule 3, Issue 32

The rigidity of current age-based progression rules was linked to high dropout rates. Participants proposed more flexible systems that consider a student's learning needs and pace, including alternative assessments and bridge programmes to reduce barriers to completion.

Issue 88 : Year 10 Examinations

The introduction of a standardized Year 10 examination was proposed to help students make informed decisions about career paths and future studies.

Issue 89 : Outdated List of Unsuitable Publications (Section 30):

The list of unsuitable publications in section 30 requires updating to reflect current information and standards.

CLUSTER 8: TEACHERS

Issue 90 : Alignment of FTR Act with the Education Act

The FTR Act mandates teacher registration, but the Education Act lacks a workable corresponding requirement. This disconnect weakens regulatory enforcement and creates ambiguity around teacher eligibility. Clarifying and aligning these laws is essential to ensure cohesive governance.

The importance of formally incorporating Teacher Training Institutions into the Education Act was underscored. Concerns about entry requirements, quality assurance, and the prevalence of fast-track summer programmes highlighted the need for better regulation and accountability in teacher preparation.

Issue 91 : Naming Inconsistencies and Legal Delays:

While the Fiji Teachers Registration Board (FTRB) became the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority (FTRA) in 2013, the legal documents still reflect the older name. This inconsistency needs to be addressed in the revised legislation.

Issue 92 : Expanding FTRB's Mandate:

There's a suggestion to broaden FTRB's role beyond teacher registration. This expansion could include overseeing teacher welfare (financial, health, well-being, security of living arrangements), student-teacher ratios, and teacher support. This would require a significant increase in FTRB's resources and staff. However, concerns about their operational capacity and budget constraints exist. Discussions are needed to determine the feasibility and scope of this expansion.

Issue 93 : Clarity on Teacher Registration Requirements

Participants discussed the unclear requirement for registration of individuals such as Ministry of Health personnel, coaches, chaplains or other administrators and volunteers who directly interact with students. The group proposed clearer definitions of who must be registered with the FTRB.

Issue 94 : Teacher Licensing and Certification Framework

Concerns were raised about inconsistencies in teacher licensing and ongoing certification. The current framework does not provide clear timelines, requirements, or renewal processes. Participants recommended a structured licensing system with periodic renewal based on continued professional development, performance reviews, and adherence to professional standards. This would improve teacher quality, accountability, and retention.

Issue 95 : Teacher Training and Capacity Building

Training teachers to become health ambassadors was seen as critical, enabling them to effectively deliver health education and promote healthy lifestyles among students.

Issue 96 : Establishing a Teacher Recertification Process

Participants discussed the need for a formal, periodic teacher recertification process to ensure continuous professional development and uphold high teaching standards, as the lack of such a system contributes to inconsistent teaching quality and outdated methodologies.

The proposed process would include regular evaluations of teachers' knowledge and skills linked to professional development credits and classroom performance, mandatory participation in accredited training programmes, and the implementation of a centralized teacher portfolio system to track progress and maintain accountability.

Additionally, establishing minimum Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements would keep educators updated with curriculum changes and best practices, ultimately fostering a culture of lifelong learning and enhancing overall teaching quality.

While 20 hours of mandatory professional development is required every three years for in-service teachers, the current system faces challenges. There are inconsistencies in funding, and teachers don't always complete the 20 hours. There are also overlapping functions with the Ministry of Education, leading to confusion about responsibilities and potential duplication of efforts. The current professional development is largely funded by the Ministry and FTRB, but there are ongoing debates on

whether this should be enshrined in law and if the 20-hour requirement is appropriate.

Issue 97 : FTRB's Role in Teacher Induction

The induction process currently emphasizes compliance and legal matters but lacks curriculum-specific content. Participants recommended standardizing induction to include pedagogical and curriculum training, particularly to bridge gaps between different types of schools.

Issue 98 : Insufficient Teacher Training for Inclusion

Inadequate training and resources for inclusive education hinder teachers' ability to effectively support students with special needs.

The revised Act should mandate specialized training modules, continuous professional development, and resource allocation to ensure inclusion is practical and effective.

Issue 99 : Tenancy Agreements and Management of School Quarters

The lack of formal tenancy agreements for school housing has caused disputes and legal uncertainties, particularly affecting teacher morale and housing security.

To address underutilization of these quarters, proposals included the introduction of legally sound tenancy agreements, mandatory rental income declarations, and improved management frameworks to ensure compliance with regulations and protect the rights of teachers.

Issue 100 : Deficiencies in Teacher Quarters in Rural Schools

A significant portion of the discussion revolved around the alarming shortage and poor condition of teacher quarters, especially in rural and non-government schools. Many existing structures were found to be insufficient to withstand even category 3 cyclones following TC Winston. This shortage directly impacts teacher morale, retention, and ultimately, the quality of education.

Issue 101 : Operational Inefficiencies in FTRB

Bureaucratic bottlenecks and redundant paperwork in the teacher registration process have caused long delays, particularly around police

and medical clearances. Participants proposed streamlining procedures, digitalization of application processes and inter-agency coordination, including integrating systems to streamline registration.

The FTRB's large size (nine members) and lack of delegation provisions hinder efficient decision-making. This is further compounded by communication challenges, with some members being unresponsive and unavailable. Reducing the board's size and delegating operational decisions would improve efficiency.

There is also a noticeable overlap in the responsibilities of FTRB and the Ministry of Education, especially in areas of teacher professional development, creating confusion and inefficiency. Clarifying and separating their respective roles would help streamline processes.

Issue 102 : Teacher Welfare, Retention and Shortages

Participants raised concerns about poor working conditions, inadequate housing, and limited allowances for teachers, particularly in rural areas, impacting teacher retention and job satisfaction. Prolonged teacher shortages were identified as a significant challenge, necessitating urgent policy interventions.

Proposals include location-based allowances, housing support, salary reviews, recruitment drives, and improved career development opportunities to retain skilled teachers and attract new professionals.

Issue 103 : Teacher-Student Ratios

High student-to-teacher ratios were noted to negatively affect education quality and teacher morale.

Participants called for targeted recruitment, resource allocation, and classroom infrastructure investment to bring these ratios in line with international benchmarks.

Issue 104 : Provision for Teacher Sabbaticals and Research

Participants proposed the inclusion of provisions in the Act for teacher sabbaticals and research leaves. These would allow educators to engage in academic research, curriculum innovation, or further education without sacrificing job security. Such programmes would contribute to the

advancement of teaching methods and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Issue 105 : Formal Recognition of Religious Teachers

The role of religious teachers in delivering values and religious instruction was acknowledged, but participants noted that their work is often under-recognized in formal policy. The workshop proposed that religious teachers be officially recognized in the education framework and that provisions be made for their remuneration and professional development.

Issue 106 : Prioritizing Rural Trainees for Teacher Positions

There's a strong recommendation to prioritize selecting teacher trainees from rural areas. This aims to increase the number of teachers willing to work in remote areas.

Issue 107 : Policy for Mature Female Teachers in Lower Grades

The participants expressed concern over the assignment of fresh graduates or male teachers to teach younger grades (Year 1 and Year 2). They suggested a policy prioritizing mature female teachers for these positions, believing that their nurturing approach is beneficial.

CLUSTER 9: COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Issue 108 : Compulsory Education Scope

The age range for compulsory education, currently defined as 6–15 years, was called into question. The prevailing concern was that in practice, education continues until Year 12, and the legal framework should reflect this. Participants recommended revisiting the exit point for compulsory education. Alongside this, participants advocated for ensuring compulsory education covers ten full years, ensuring that every child receives at least a basic secondary education.

Issue 109 : Expanding Compulsory Education Nationwide

Currently, compulsory education is legally enforceable in only specific geographic regions of Fiji. Participants recommended expanding this mandate nationwide to eliminate disparities and ensure that all children, regardless of location, are legally entitled to and required to attend school for a minimum number of years.⁴

Issue 110 : Enforcement of Compulsory Education

Participants noted the difficulty of enforcing compulsory education in Fiji, and the lack of an actual enforcement mechanism in the Act.

Recommendations included a similar framework as Singapore. A body may be established to look into cases of contravention and to provide social support or recommendations where necessary to encourage compliance. If this is unsuccessful, a penalty may be imposed on the parents as a last resort.

The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the iTaukei Affairs Board have recommended collaboration between their institutional framework and the education framework. Consideration may be given to the existing subsidiary laws under the iTaukei affairs framework.

⁴ See also Schedule 3, Issue 23

CLUSTER 10: ENFORCEMENT - PENALTIES, OFFENCES AND/OR MONITORING

Issue 111 : Inadequate Penalties for Managerial Misconduct

Section 12 of the Act sets a maximum penalty of \$200 for managerial offenses, which participants strongly criticized as insufficient. Such lenient fines fail to deter misconduct. The workshop called for higher, more meaningful penalties. Defining offense categories based on severity was also recommended.

The current penalty of \$200 for abuse within schools was viewed as insufficient to serve as a deterrent. Participants called for broader protection that includes not only students but also teachers, parents, and visitors. This issue reflects a systemic gap in ensuring safe learning and working environments in schools.

Issue 112 : Civil vs. Criminal Distinction

The Act lacks clarity in distinguishing between civil and criminal offences. This ambiguity complicates the legal handling of misconduct cases and creates uncertainty for school administrators and stakeholders.

Participants called for explicit categorization of offences and corresponding legal procedures, which would help ensure appropriate standards of proof and procedural safeguards.

Issue 113 : Lack of Policy Monitoring and Enforcement

Participants highlighted how the absence of effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms rendered many policies ineffective. The example of the canteen policy illustrated how regulations could be ignored without consequences. The need for a legal compliance framework and regular evaluation mechanisms was strongly advocated.

Issue 114 : Enforcing Compliance through Penalties

Many existing educational policies lack enforcement mechanisms. Participants advocated for introducing clear penalties to ensure compliance, particularly around compulsory education, school registration, and minimum standards. Without such mechanisms, many policies risk being ignored or inconsistently applied.

Issue 115 : Lack of Prosecution Powers:

The Higher Education Commission lacks the authority to prosecute non-compliant institutions, leading to lengthy delays in addressing compliance issues and relying on the DPP's office which can cause even longer delays.

Issue 116 : Addressing Violence and Abuse

Participants raised the critical issue of violence and abuse occurring within school environments. There was consensus that a comprehensive legal framework must be established to prevent and address cases of physical punishment, teacher misconduct, and abuse directed at students. Participants recommended the inclusion of confidential reporting mechanisms and robust investigation protocols to ensure protection for all students. The legal framework should also define acceptable disciplinary practices clearly and ensure that any form of corporal punishment is explicitly prohibited. Participants emphasized the importance of training educators on child protection policies and ensuring that students and parents are aware of their rights.

Issue 117 : Unannounced Inspections of Non-Government Schools

Unannounced inspections were intended to ensure accountability but often led to superficial, short-term fixes by schools rather than sustainable improvements. Participants debated whether advance notice might encourage genuine, long-term enhancements while maintaining accountability.

OTHER/MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES

Issue 118 :Inequities in Boarding School Access

Concerns were raised regarding the unequal access to boarding schools for students from remote islands and highland regions. Criteria for enrollment were reported as inconsistent and prone to political interference. The workshop proposed clear eligibility criteria, transparency in selection processes, and adequate funding for boarding facilities to ensure equitable access to education.

Issue 119 :Lack of Flexibility in Regulations:

The rigidity of regulations and forms limits the Higher Education Commission's ability to adapt to changing needs and implement efficient processes (e.g., transition to online applications).

Schedule 1 - List of Participants and Feedback Survey Results - 27 March 2025 Workshop

List of Participants:

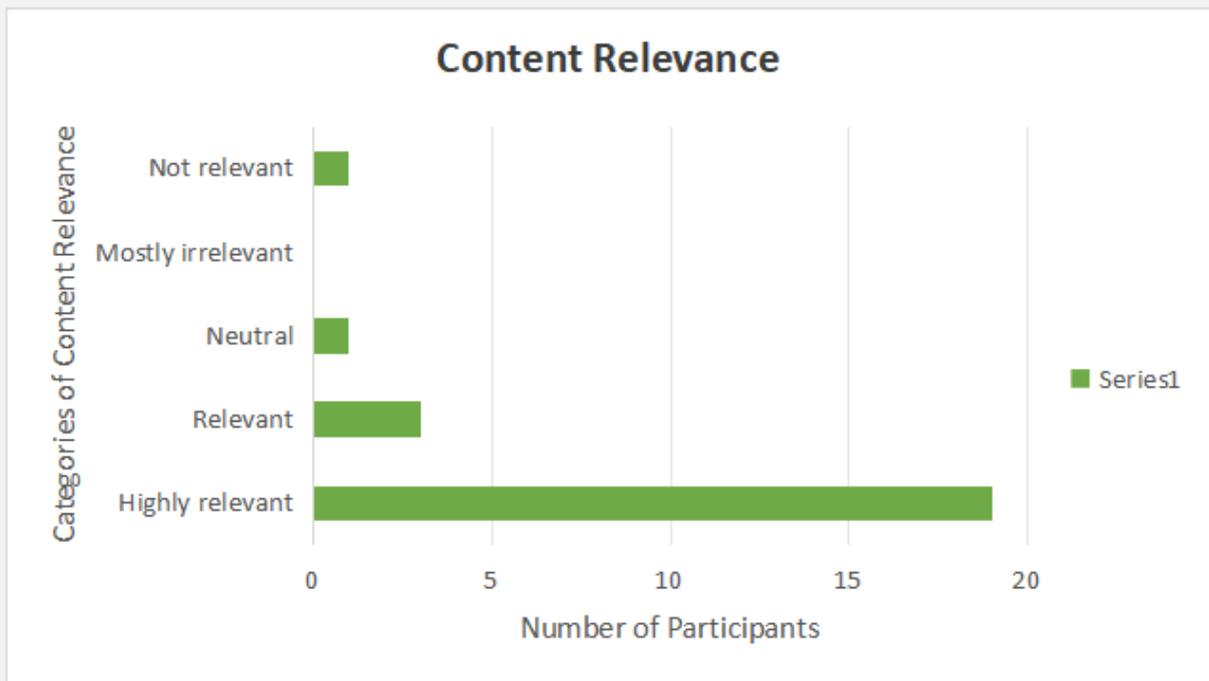
1. Iowane P. Tiko	12. Dr. Vijay Nair	22. Mavis Senibulu
2. Kamlesh Arya	13. Serupepeli	23. Adi Vesikula
3. Lyanne Vaurasi	Udre	24. Rubyna R
4. David Solvalu	14. Metuisela	25. Aminiasi V
5. Rokobua	Gauna	26. Isoa .T
Naiyaga	15. Maraia	27. Anasa Vateitei
6. Anaseini Jese	Seruvatu	28. Apisalome T
7. Viliame S. V	16. Rusila	29. Paula M
8. Alumeci	Buisamu	30. Fotu Yavala
Seruisavou	17. Govind Singh	31. Paula Koli
9. Litea Naliva	18. Pene Aropio	32. Anne Mausio
10. Rapuama	19. Sereana Davui	33. Magdalena
Corerega	20. Poonam Singh	Ramoala
11. Amitesh	21. Mosese V	
Chandra	Caucau	

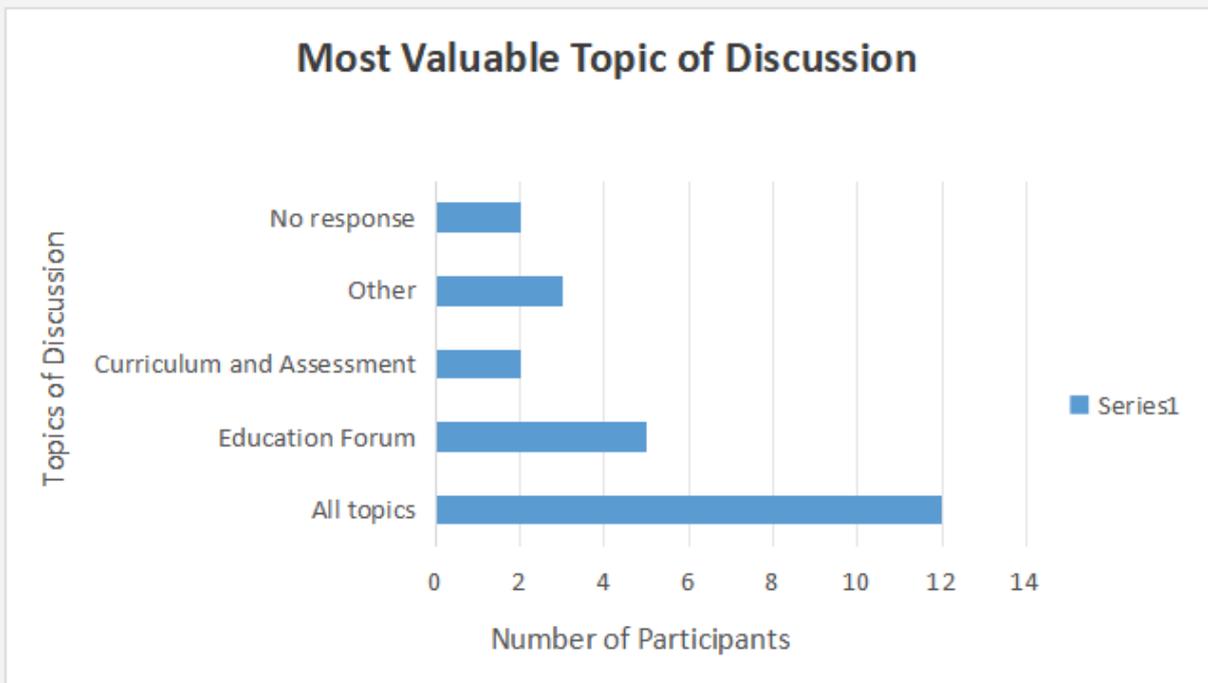
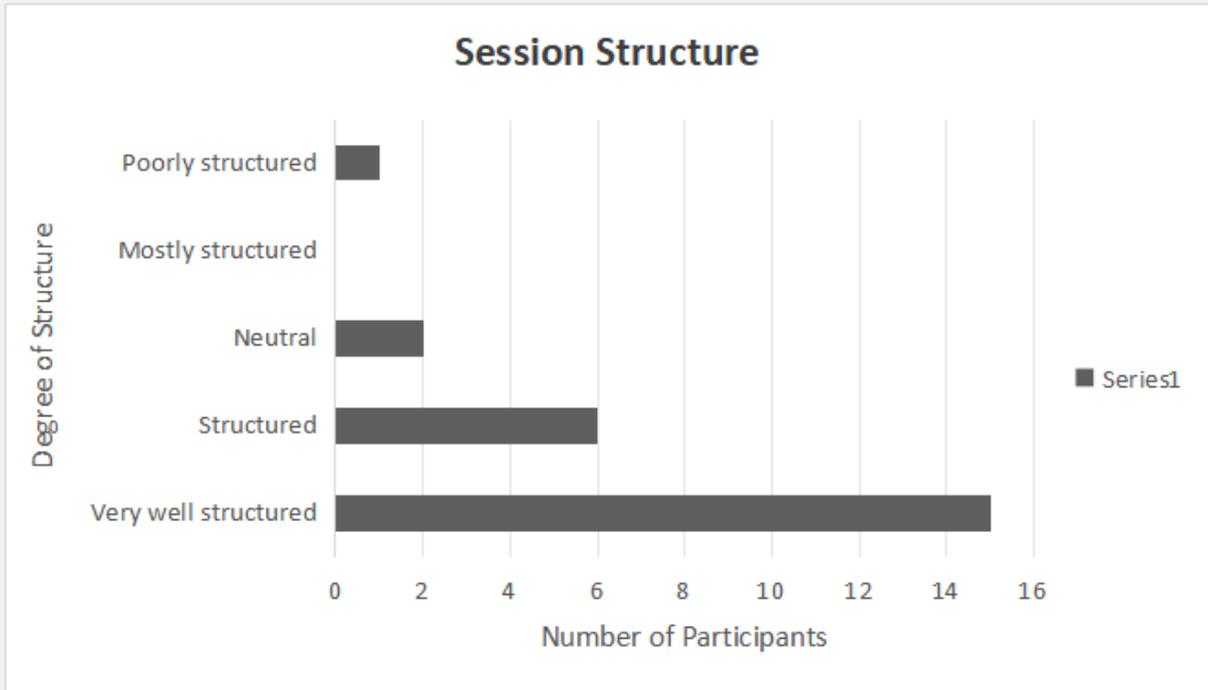
Feedback Survey Results:

This data was collated from a Feedback form that was circulated to all participants that were present at the Workshop venue. Apart from the 7-member Review Team, only 23 participants filled out the feedback survey (including one of the Review Team members, bringing the total number of responses to 24).

Below are the relevant graphs which reflect the feedback from these 24 participants. They cover the overall satisfaction of the Workshop, the relevance of the content, what they thought about how the sessions were

structured and what they thought was the most valuable topic of discussion.





Schedule 2 - List of Participants and Feedback Survey Results - 31 March - 3 April 2025 Workshop

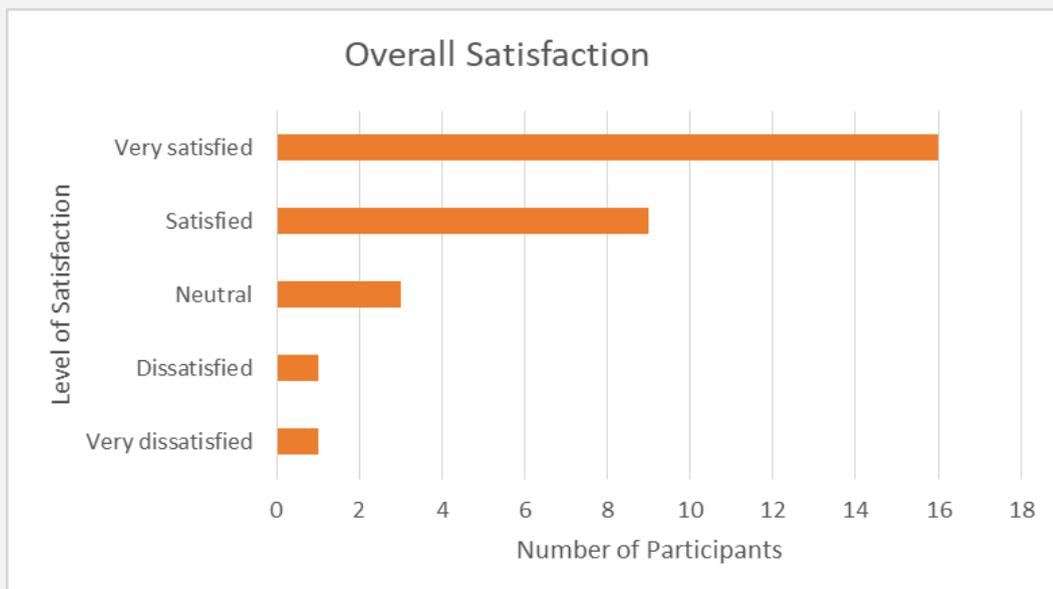
List of Participants

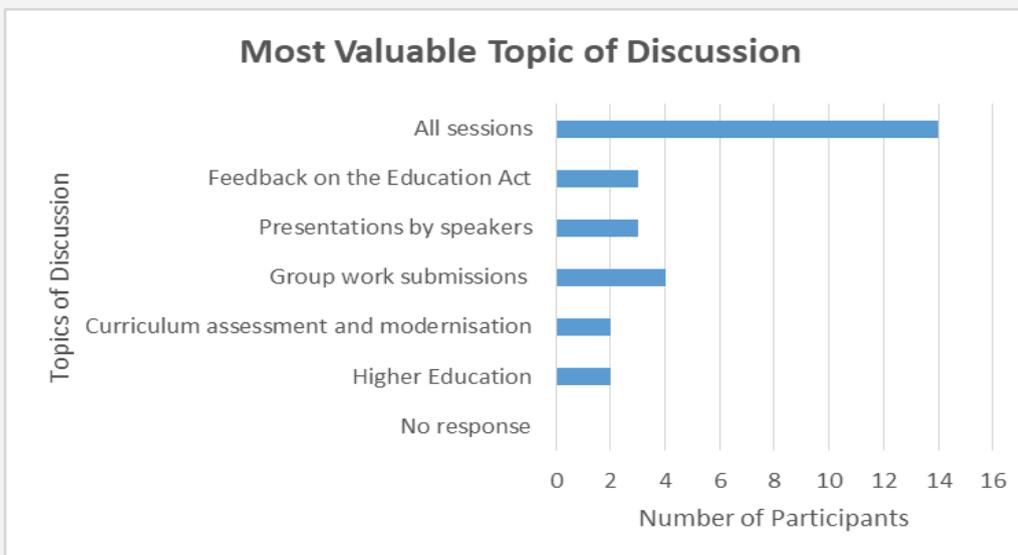
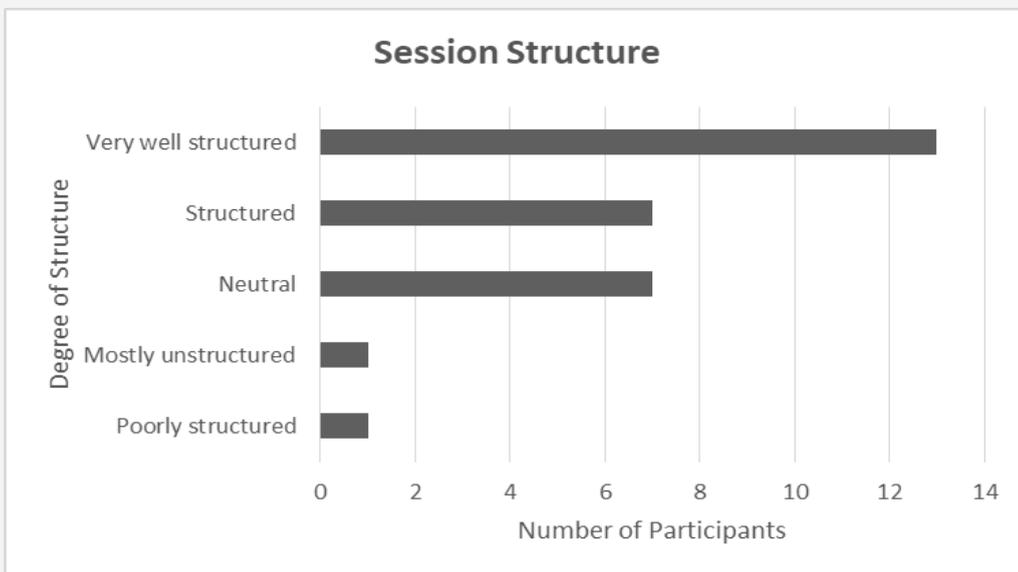
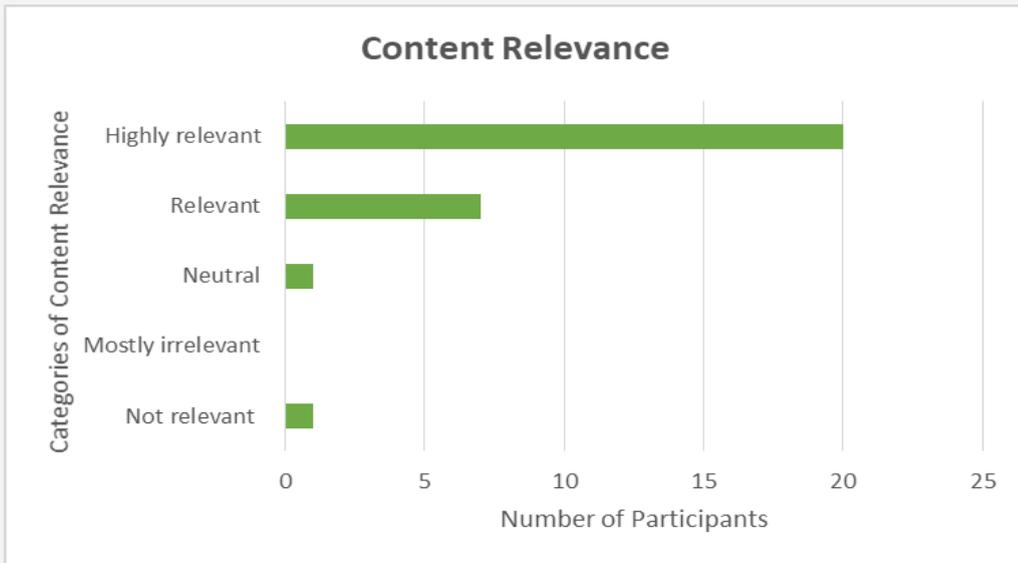
- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Litea Naliva | 19. Laiseini Cama |
| 2. Apisai Vatoga | 20. Joseva Chale |
| 3. Urmila Arya | 21. Napolioni Silatolu |
| 4. Amitesh Chandra | 22. Tokasa A. Wilson |
| 5. Kaminieli Vunissa | 23. Naisa Cama Toko |
| 6. Anaseini Jese | 24. Taniela Domoni |
| 7. Alumeci Seruisavou | 25. Lasarusa Senibale |
| 8. Rubyna Ravasua | 26. Jolame W. Delai |
| 9. Mavis Senibulu | 27. Jiuta Wainibula |
| 10. Jone T. Rabuatoka | 28. Timoci Bure |
| 11. Rapuama Corerega | 29. Sanaila Nauga |
| 12. Iliseva Volai | 30. Sekope Toduadua |
| 13. Isoa Taurisia | 31. Naipolione Locoloco |
| 14. Ana Vecenayawa | 32. Ragni G. Roy |
| 15. Aminiasi Voresara | 33. Paula Manumanunitoga |
| 16. Sereana Davui | 34. Rusila Buisamu |
| 17. Pene Aropio | 35. Maraia Seruvatu |
| 18. Piniana Maria | 36. Nemani Drova |

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 37. Anasa Vateitei | 47. Alini Baba |
| 38. Kamlesh Anya | 48. Epa |
| 39. Iowane P. Tiko | 49. Adi Vesikula |
| 40. Isoa Tauribau | 50. Metuisela Gauna |
| 41. Serupepeli Udre | 51. Rokobua Naiyaga |
| 42. Kinisimere V. | 52. David Solvalu |
| 43. Govind Singh | 53. Lyanne Vaurasi |
| 44. Vijay Nair | 54. Joyce Hicks |
| 45. Sashi Mahendra Shandil | 55. Magdalena Ramoala |
| 46. A. Narokoliwa | 56. Janice Manueli |

Workshop Feedback Survey Results

A feedback form was circulated to all participants present at the workshop venue. Although there were over 50 attendees, the team successfully collected responses from 29 participants. The following graphs reflect the insights from these participants and capture overall satisfaction with the workshop, the relevance of the content, the structure of the sessions and the most valuable topics of discussion.





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16 April & 5 May 2025
Tanoa Plaza
Suva

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Introduction

On 10 September 2024, Cabinet approved the official review of the Education Act 1966 by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Fiji Law Reform Commission. The Act is the foundational law for pre-tertiary education in Fiji and since its promulgation in 1966, has only been amended 7 times and has not undergone a comprehensive review. It has thus become imperative that such integral legislation be reviewed and reformed to update it to modern standards and to address the since developed and ever developing issues and concerns within the education system.

The Minister for Education, Hon. Aseri Radrodro appointed the Education Review Committee to facilitate the review project in March 2025. The Review Committee comprises the Commissioner of the Education Act Review, Ms Rokobua Naiyaga; two legal drafters, Ms Lyanne Vaurasi-Ratulele and Mr David Solvalu; two legal officers from the Fiji Law Reform Commission, Ms Magdalena Ramoal and Ms Joyce Hicks; and three Ministry of Education officers as ministry focal points, Mr Metui Gauna, Ms Adi Lamawainavalu Vesikula and Ms Maraia Seruvatu. The work of the Committee is also supported by funding assistance from the Global Partnership for Education and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), as facilitated by two UNICEF officers, Mr Semiti Temo and Mr Jovesa Korovulavula.

The Review Committee began its work in March, holding two stakeholder workshops, in Suva (27 March 2025) and in Pacific Harbour (31 March - 3 April 2025). The objectives of these workshops were to create awareness on the history, context and existing provisions of the Education Act 1966 and to gather and collate a list of issues faced by stakeholders.

On 17 April 2025, the Review Committee organised targeted one-on-one meetings with other key stakeholders to review their specific identified issues. These meetings were held with the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the iTaukei Affairs Board, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, Higher Education Commission and Fiji Teachers Registration Authority.

Targeted Meetings Report

This Report compiles the issues identified by these key stakeholders for further consideration and input into the review of the Education Act 1966 and related laws within the Fiji education system.

Executive Summary

As part of the Education Review Committee's ongoing efforts to reform the Education Act 1966, extensive consultations were held with key government agencies to identify structural, policy, and operational gaps. These meetings revealed cross-cutting concerns regarding governance, inclusivity, funding mechanisms, legislative consistency, and institutional coordination within Fiji's education system.

The Ministry of Finance discussions focused on the legal and fiscal status of government and aided schools, particularly regarding whether they qualify as off-budget State entities and who holds audit responsibility. While the Ministry could not provide definitive answers, it committed to clarifying its position. The meeting also discussed embedding mandatory funding provisions for universities in the Act. The ministry recommended inserting the funding allocation formula in the Act. Additionally, it flagged its intent to submit a list of challenges with the Education Act and the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection emphasized deep systemic failures in inclusive education, identifying it as a "second-class" experience for children with disabilities. It outlined key barriers such as inadequate teacher training, poor infrastructure, limited assistive technology, unclear jurisdictional responsibilities, and social stigma. Financial constraints, lack of comprehensive data, and insufficient inter-ministerial collaboration were identified as structural obstacles. The Ministry called for universal design principles, stronger values education, better counselling services, and enforcement of anti-discrimination measures in schools.

Consultation with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the iTaukei Affairs Board raised several concerns specific to iTaukei communities, including the need for cultural sensitivity in education, reinstatement of levies and fundraising, equitable grant distribution, and recognition of village education committees. Stakeholders proposed the return of specialized teacher training colleges, policies for assigning teachers to rural schools, and the integration of vernacular instruction. They also supported establishing an independent curriculum body and revisiting compulsory education enforcement, particularly in rural areas.

The Ministry of Health strongly advocated for integrating health literacy, mental health education, and sexual and reproductive health into the national curriculum. It emphasized proactive prevention to address the rising cost of non-communicable diseases and youth suicide. Teacher training in health education and WASH programs was identified as essential. Inter-ministerial collaboration was highlighted as critical to achieving sustainable health and educational outcomes.

The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development highlighted severe deficiencies in teacher quarters and rural school infrastructure, directly linking these to low teacher retention, student dropout rates, and reduced academic performance. The Ministry called for standardized cyclone-resilient building codes, equitable funding mechanisms, and more realistic government-community partnerships to support school development in underserved areas. Vocational training and community resilience initiatives were also discussed.

The Higher Education Commission raised concerns about fragmented legislation, institutional registration inefficiencies, lack of prosecutorial powers, and inadequate funding models. It proposed consolidating existing laws under a single Act and streamlining registration processes. Challenges such as qualification portability, misaligned funding timelines, and the high cost of foreign qualification assessment were also noted. The Commission highlighted the need for flexible regulations and an expanded, better-resourced review system.

Lastly, the Fiji Teachers Registration Board (FTRB) advocated for aligning the Education Act with the Fiji Teachers Registration Act 2008 to ensure consistency in teacher licensing. It highlighted operational inefficiencies due to legal gaps, naming inconsistencies, and inadequate delegation powers within its board. Registration delays, unclear requirements, and low teacher training completion rates were flagged. The Board also proposed expanding its mandate to cover broader aspects of teacher welfare and professional development, though this would require increased resources and clearer role delineation between FTRB and the Ministry of Education.

Collectively, the consultations underscored the need for a comprehensive, inclusive, and forward-looking education law that harmonizes legal mandates, modernizes governance and funding structures, strengthens institutional capacities, and embeds equity and access at its core.

Issue 1: Accountability and Transparency

The consultation meeting focused primarily on understanding the public finance management requirements related to public monies allocated to, and used by, government schools as well as aided schools in Fiji. The Education Review Committee was particularly interested in understanding whether government and aided schools are recognised by the Ministry of Finance as off-budget State entities given that they are either fully or partially funded by the Government. The Education Review Committee was also interested in understanding the audit requirements for government and aided schools, and whether the Auditor-General is responsible for auditing their accounts or whether they are at liberty to appoint their own auditors for audit purposes.

The Ministry of Finance was unclear in its position on whether government and aided schools are recognised as off-budget State entities. At first, the representatives of the Ministry of Finance confirmed that government and aided schools are neither budget sector agencies nor off-budget State entities. Later, they mentioned that they would reconfirm their official position with the Education Review Committee. They were also unclear on whether the Auditor-General is responsible for auditing the accounts of government and aided schools, but did inform the Education Review Committee of the practice undertaken by such schools.

Issue 2: Mandatory Allocation of Funds to Universities to be in the Act

The Education Review Committee informed the Ministry of Finance of the recommendation made at the Internal Stakeholders Workshop held previously at the Pearl Resort on the inclusion in the Act of the mandatory allocation of funds by the Government to universities like the Fiji National University and the University of the South Pacific. Representatives from the Ministry of Finance were of the view that the formula used to determine the amount of funds to be allocated should perhaps be included in the Act instead.

The Education Review Committee pointed out section 29(2) of the Financial Management Act 2004 which states that the Minister for Finance may limit funding to a university, for example, if the university contravenes

any written law or government policy or if the financial situation of the Government warrants the limitation. Representatives from the Ministry of Finance submitted that the first two grounds (contraventions of written law and government policy) for the limitation should be removed.

Issue 3: List of Concerns to be Provided

The Ministry of Finance indicated that they have a list of issues with the Education Act 1966 as well as some of their challenges with the Ministry of Education, that they will be submitting to the Education Review Committee in due course.

Issue 4: Inadequate Inclusive Education: A Systemic Shortfall

The core issue revolves around the persistent inadequacy of the Fijian education system in fully including children with disabilities. While progress has been made toward inclusive practices, many children with disabilities still receive a significantly inferior education compared to their peers. This is not merely a matter of resource allocation and the challenges around accessibility for children with disabilities, but systemic issues within curriculum design, teacher training, and societal attitudes. The term "second-class" education accurately reflects the experiences of many, highlighting the gap between policy aspirations and on-the-ground realities.

Issue 5: Preconditions for Inclusive Education: Addressing Multiple Deficiencies

The following interconnected factors prevent effective inclusion:

(a) School Accessibility: Beyond Ramps

Accessibility is not solely about ramps and wider doorways. It encompasses a comprehensive design approach considering all aspects of the physical environment. This includes:

- Accessible toilets with appropriate fixtures and grab bars.
- Appropriate gradient and surface texture for ramps.
- Clear signage and wayfinding systems.
- Accessible entrances, corridors, and classrooms.
- Safe and adaptable spaces for various types of disabilities.

- Transportation to school, considering needs for specialized transport.

(b) Accessible Curriculum: More Than Just Modifications:

Curriculum accessibility requires more than simply adapting existing materials. It necessitates:

- Differentiated instruction tailored to individual learning needs.
- Use of diverse teaching methodologies (visual, auditory, kinesthetic).
- Availability of materials in accessible formats (Braille, large print, audio).
- Assistive technology integration within the curriculum.
- Development of inclusive assessment methods.

(c) Trained Teachers: Specialized Knowledge and Skills:

Teacher training is crucial, requiring:

- Comprehensive understanding of various disabilities and their impact on learning.
- Knowledge of inclusive pedagogy and differentiated instruction techniques.
- Skills in adapting teaching materials and methods to meet diverse needs.
- Ability to work collaboratively with support staff and parents.
- Ongoing professional development and mentorship opportunities.

(d) Assistive Technology: Addressing Diverse Needs:

Providing appropriate assistive technology is essential but requires:

- Assessment of individual needs to determine appropriate devices.

- Provision of a wide range of assistive technologies, considering financial constraints.
- Training for teachers and students in the use of assistive technologies.
- Maintenance and repair services for these devices.

(e) Support Services: Comprehensive and Coordinated Care:

Support services must be integrated and coordinated:

- Sign language interpreters for deaf students.
- Speech therapists for students with communication difficulties.
- Occupational therapists to address fine motor skill challenges.
- Physical therapists to address mobility issues.
- Psychological services to address mental health needs.

Issue 6: Financial Constraints: A Persistent Barrier

The financial burden of implementing inclusive education is a major obstacle, including the cost of assistive technology, teacher training, infrastructure modifications, and specialized support services.

This necessitates exploring diverse funding mechanisms, including government allocation, private sector partnerships, international aid, and community-based initiatives. Moreover, the existing allocation of resources often fails to reflect the real costs associated with supporting students with disabilities.

Issue 7: Transition Challenges Between Education Levels: A Seamless Pathway

The transition between educational levels (ECE, primary, secondary, tertiary) is especially challenging for children with disabilities. This necessitates:

- Individualized transition plans developed in collaboration with parents, teachers, and support staff.
- Dedicated support services during the transition process.

Targeted Meetings Report

- Consistent communication between educational institutions.
- Assistive technology adapted for the new learning environment.
- Ongoing monitoring and adjustment of transition plans.

Issue 8: Geographic Limitations of Special Schools: Expanding Access

The concentration of special schools primarily in urban areas limits access for children in rural communities. Solutions must explore:

- Expansion of special education services to rural areas.
- Training and support for teachers in inclusive practices in mainstream schools located in remote areas.
- Use of technology to deliver specialized instruction remotely.
- Improved transportation options to allow rural children to attend special schools in urban centers.

Issue 9: Discrimination and Negative Attitudes: Addressing Social Barriers

Overcoming societal biases is crucial. This requires:

- Public awareness campaigns to challenge misconceptions and stereotypes.
- Teacher training to address discriminatory attitudes.
- Policies and measures to prevent and address bullying and discrimination.
- Community engagement to promote inclusion and understanding.

Issue 10: Lack of Clear Jurisdictional Responsibilities: Defining Roles and Responsibilities

The lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities regarding children's welfare outside school hours leads to confusion, delays, and ineffective intervention. This necessitates:

- Clear inter-agency protocols and communication mechanisms.
- Defined roles for schools, social services, law enforcement, and health professionals.

- A streamlined referral system for reporting and addressing child welfare concerns.

Issue 11: Need for Comprehensive Data: Informing Policy and Practice

Disaggregated data on disability prevalence, types of disabilities, and associated educational needs is crucial for targeted resource allocation and evidence-based policymaking. This requires:

- Improved data collection and reporting mechanisms.
- Development of standardized data collection tools.
- Analysis of data to identify patterns and inform policy decisions.
- Regular reporting and transparency.

Issue 12: Inadequate Counselling Services: Supporting Mental Health Needs

The shortage of counselors in schools undermines the ability to address students' mental health and well-being. This necessitates:

- Increased funding for counselor positions in schools.
- Expansion of counselor training programs.
- Establishment of community-based mental health services.
- Integration of mental health support within educational services.

Issue 13: Gender Imbalance in Decision-Making: Promoting Equitable Representation

The underrepresentation of women in the Education Forum established under the Act needs to be addressed to ensure gender balance.

Issue 14: Opposition to Corporal Punishment: Adherence to Child Rights Conventions

The strong rejection of corporal punishment reinforces Fiji's commitment to international child rights conventions.

Targeted Meetings Report

Issue 15: Compulsory Education Enforcement: Balancing Rights and Responsibilities

Balancing the right to education with the responsibilities of parents requires careful consideration of the approach to compulsory education. This involves weighing the effectiveness of a soft approach versus a penalty-based system.

Issue 16: Inadequate Minimum Standards for Schools: Modernizing Infrastructure Requirements

Outdated minimum standards for school infrastructure need to be revised to incorporate modern accessibility requirements and address the specific needs of children with disabilities. This should include specific criteria and building codes.

Issue 17: Insufficient Inter-Ministerial Collaboration: Creating Synergies

Collaboration between Ministries (Education, Health, Women, Children) is critical for providing comprehensive support for children with disabilities. Siloed approaches are inefficient and fail to address interconnected challenges.

Issue 18: Advocacy for Universal Design: Inclusivity for All

The concept of universal design goes beyond accessibility for students with disabilities; it promotes a design that benefits all students. It is a more comprehensive and cost-effective approach than providing solely specialized accommodations.

Issue 19: Need for Clear Demarcations of Responsibilities: Streamlining Intervention

A clearer definition of roles and responsibilities among different agencies involved in child welfare (schools, social welfare, police, health) is crucial for timely and effective response to incidents and needs. This requires clearer inter-agency guidelines and protocols.

Targeted Meetings Report

Issue 20: Support for Incarcerated Youth: Maintaining Educational Continuity

Maintaining educational access for incarcerated youth is essential but presents significant practical challenges requiring coordination between correctional facilities and educational institutions.

Issue 21: Review and Alignment of Existing Acts: Harmonizing Legal Frameworks

Existing laws relating to disability rights and child welfare should inform and align with the Education Act to create a cohesive legal framework. This requires a review of existing legislation and harmonization of policies.

Issue 22: Imbalance in Education Forum Membership (Section 7):

The current distribution of members in the Education Forum (3 in the Western Division, 2 in the Central Division) is considered unsuitable and doesn't reflect the actual population distribution. A re-evaluation to ensure fair representation is needed.

Issue 23: Compulsory Education Orders (Section 38):

The current system allows the Ministry to issue compulsory education orders on a case-by-case basis. The suggestion is to shift to a national compulsory education requirement with the Minister having the authority to grant exceptions (e.g., for homeschooling).

Issue 24: Outdated List of Unsuitable Publications (Section 30):

The list of unsuitable publications in Section 30 requires updating to reflect current information and standards.

Issue 25: Lack of Teacher Protection (Section 31):

The penalties for disturbances in Section 31 should include safeguards and provisions for the protection of teachers.

Issue 26: Cultural Insensitivity in Education:

Concerns were raised about the lack of cultural sensitivity in the Act, particularly regarding traditional practices. A specific example is the

conflict arising from school policies regarding the iTaukei first shaving ceremony.

The need for integrating cultural appropriateness and tolerance is highlighted. This encompasses various cultural practices across different regions of Fiji, and strategies are sought to avoid misuse of cultural exceptions.

Issue 27: Reinstatement of School Levy and Fundraising:

Rural schools are advocating for the reinstatement of school levies and the ability to conduct fundraising initiatives to address urgent infrastructure needs. Currently, the long wait times for government funding for repairs are causing significant problems.

Issue 28: Inequitable Grant Policy Distribution:

The existing grant policy, particularly how it allocates funds based on student numbers, disproportionately disadvantages rural schools with fewer students.

A review and adjustment of this formula are needed to ensure equitable funding for infrastructure and resources. The inflexibility of how the grant money must be spent also causes issues.

Issue 29: No Repeat Policy:

The automatic progression policy in its current form is concerning to rural schools, particularly regarding iTaukei students who may mature later. The ability for students to repeat a grade should be reconsidered to support their academic progress.

Issue 30: Lack of Recognition for Village Education Committees:

The consultation highlighted the need to formally recognize the roles of village education committees. This could improve collaboration between the iTaukei Affairs Board, teachers, and the Education Act. This is seen as a way to improve education in villages.

Targeted Meetings Report

Issue 31: Reinstatement of the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU):

The participants advocated for the reinstatement of the CDU to ensure consistent and culturally appropriate curriculum development. They expressed concern over the frequent changes and lack of rigorous vetting in the current system.

Issue 32: Inadequate Emphasis on Values Education:

A stronger emphasis on values education within the school curriculum is desired. Provincial councils have specifically requested this inclusion.

Issue 33: Enforcement of Compulsory Education Regulations (1997):

The need to effectively enforce the compulsory education regulations of 1997 was highlighted. Collaboration between the iTaukei Affairs Act and village council regulations is suggested.

Issue 34: Reinstatement of Specialized Teacher Training Colleges:

The participants emphasized the need to reinstate specialized teacher training colleges, which they believe fostered a stronger sense of professionalism and dedication among teachers compared to the current system of integrating teacher training within a general university setting.

Issue 35: Prioritizing Rural Trainees for Teacher Positions:

There's a strong recommendation to prioritize selecting teacher trainees from rural areas. This aims to increase the number of teachers willing to work in remote areas.

Issue 36: Policy for Mature Female Teachers in Lower Grades:

The participants expressed concern over the assignment of fresh graduates or male teachers to teach younger grades (Year 1 and Year 2). They suggested a policy prioritizing mature female teachers for these positions, believing that their nurturing approach is beneficial.

Issue 37: Improvement of School Library Services:

The importance of strengthening library services in schools was highlighted, recognizing the crucial role libraries play in fostering reading habits among students. Many schools currently have underutilized or nonexistent library spaces.

Issue 38: Vernacular Language Instruction:

There is discussion around using vernacular languages (iTaukei and Hindi) as the language of instruction, at least in early childhood education, as a means of improving comprehension and learning. The question of whether it should be compulsory through Year 8 is brought up, and the various practical implications of this policy are discussed.

Issue 39: Grant Allocation Formula Review:

The current formula for allocating education grants needs review. The system disadvantages rural schools and leads to inflexible budgeting practices which sometimes require schools to purchase unnecessary items to spend the allocated funds.

Issue 40: Early Childhood Education (ECE):

Recent improvements in ECE teacher recognition and pay were mentioned, along with plans for further development and improvement of this sector. However, challenges remain regarding teacher qualifications and the amount of funding.

Issue 41: Teacher-Student Ratio and School Size:

Large class sizes, particularly in urban areas, are a concern and there are fears that schools manipulate student numbers to receive higher levels of funding.

Issue 42: Addressing Rural-Urban Migration:

The current situation is causing rural students to move to urban areas due to lack of teachers and resources. Strategies to reverse this trend are under discussion.

Targeted Meetings Report

Issue 43: Addressing Substance Abuse and HIV Concerns:

Both the iTaukei Affairs Board and the Ministry of Education expressed concerns regarding substance abuse and HIV among students.

Issue 44: Creation of an Independent Curriculum Body:

Proposal for an independent body to develop and oversee curriculum development and assessment was discussed. The aim is to ensure objectivity, cultural appropriateness, and better quality control.

Issue 45: Integration with the iTaukei Affairs Act (Section 11):

There are discussions on how the new Education Act will interact with existing iTaukei Affairs legislation, specifically regarding whether a new education bill must be reviewed by the iTaukei Affairs Board.

Issue 46: Values Training for Teachers:

There is support for values-based training for teachers to be integrated into teacher training or be provided as ongoing professional development. The importance of fostering professionalism and a sense of pride in teaching was stressed.

Issue 47: Combating Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs):

The high cost of NCDs (estimated at 600 million in the last five years) was a major concern. The Ministry of Health proposed a proactive approach through primary healthcare, focusing on prevention rather than treatment. This involved integrating health education into the school curriculum, promoting healthy eating in schools, and improving health literacy.

Issue 48: Mental Health Education:

The urgent need to incorporate mental health education into the curriculum was highlighted, particularly addressing the issue of youth suicide, which was raised in a 2023 ministry report. This aimed at early intervention and building resilience among students.

Issue 49: Health Literacy as a Core Subject:

The suggestion to introduce health literacy as a core subject in the curriculum aimed to empower students with knowledge and skills to make informed health choices, reducing the burden on the healthcare system in the long term.

Issue 50: Sexual and Reproductive Health Education:

Integrating sexual and reproductive health education into the curriculum was another topic mentioned as an area for collaboration between the ministries.

Issue 51: Hygiene and Sanitation (WASH Program):

The importance of hygiene and sanitation, especially in the context of the ongoing dengue outbreak, was discussed, advocating for incorporating WASH education into the school setting to create lasting behavioral changes.

Issue 52: Teacher Training and Capacity Building:

Training teachers to become health ambassadors was seen as critical, enabling them to effectively deliver health education and promote healthy lifestyles among students.

Issue 53: Infrastructure and Accessibility:

The need for inclusive education and accessible infrastructure in schools was discussed, particularly linking it to WASH programs.

Issue 54: Inter-Ministerial Collaboration:

The consultation repeatedly emphasized the importance of strong collaboration between the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and other relevant ministries to effectively implement the changes and achieve the goals outlined.

Issue 55: Inadequate Emergency Preparedness in Schools:

The initial objective was to discuss improving emergency preparedness plans in schools to address natural disasters, health emergencies, and human-made crises. The lack of comprehensive plans and the vulnerability of school buildings were central concerns.

Issue 56: Deficiencies in Teacher Quarters in Rural Schools:

A significant portion of the discussion revolved around the alarming shortage and poor condition of teacher quarters, especially in rural and non-government schools. Many existing structures were found to be insufficient to withstand even category 3 cyclones following TC Winston. This shortage directly impacts teacher morale, retention, and ultimately, the quality of education.

Issue 57: Funding Gaps for Rural School Infrastructure:

The meeting highlighted the absence of consistent and sufficient funding for the construction and maintenance of teacher quarters. While some funding existed through the Ministry of Education's FEG, it didn't adequately cover teacher quarters, leading to reliance on community contributions which are often insufficient. The historical shift of building grants away from the Ministry of Rural Development also exacerbated the funding gap. A budget allocation increase in 2023 indicated a belated recognition of this problem.

Issue 58: Community Responsibility vs. Government Support in Rural School Infrastructure:

Tension emerged regarding the responsibility for providing teacher quarters. The Ministry of Education's stance emphasized community responsibility for infrastructure when establishing new schools. However, the reality of impoverished rural communities' limited capacity to fund construction was acknowledged. The discussion highlighted the need for a balanced approach, where the government complements community efforts.

Issue 59: Impact of Infrastructure Deficiencies on Education Quality:

The lack of adequate teacher housing directly affects the quality of education. It leads to teacher shortages, lower teacher morale, and indirectly impacts student performance, particularly reflected in literacy and numeracy rates. The discussion linked poor infrastructure to increased school dropout rates, particularly in rural areas.

Issue 60: Economic Challenges and Rural Community Resilience:

The need for economic resilience in rural communities was raised. This involved supporting vocational training (TVET) to equip individuals with skills for employment and entrepreneurship. Reintegrating former prisoners and NEC (National Employment Centre) employees back into the workforce through vocational training was also suggested as a strategy to address economic hardship and increase economic activity in rural areas.

Issue 61: The Need for Standardized Building Codes:

The discussion stressed the importance of developing and enforcing building standards that ensure school infrastructure can withstand extreme weather events, such as category 5 cyclones. This involved collaboration with the Ministry of Trade to ensure access to and use of high-quality building materials.

Issue 62: Fragmented Education Legislation:

Currently, various laws govern different aspects of the education system. The proposal is to consolidate all these laws under a single, comprehensive act for better clarity and efficiency.

Issue 63: Cumbersome Institutional Registration:

The existing two-part registration process (recognition and registration) for educational institutions is lengthy and inefficient. Streamlining this into a single process is a key objective.

Issue 64: University Autonomy vs. Governmental Oversight:

Universities' self-accreditation creates a potential conflict between academic autonomy and government regulation. The balance needs to be

struck to ensure quality standards while respecting universities' right to determine their curricula, but also maintain some standardisation.

Issue 65: Disjointed Education Pathways:

A significant gap exists between secondary and tertiary education, leading to challenges for students transitioning between levels. Improving the connection and alignment of curricula across these levels is vital.

Issue 66: Inconsistent Funding Timelines:

The discrepancy between the government's financial year and the institutions' funding cycles creates logistical difficulties and planning challenges for universities.

Issue 67: High Fees for Accreditation and Foreign Qualification Assessment:

The fees charged for assessing foreign qualifications are considered excessively high, hindering Fijian graduates seeking employment or further studies.

Issue 68: Lack of Prosecution Powers:

The Higher Education Commission lacks the authority to prosecute non-compliant institutions, leading to lengthy delays in addressing compliance issues and relying on the DPP's office which can cause even longer delays.

Issue 69: Inefficient Review Committee:

The current single Review Committee is overburdened, leading to lengthy review processes and delays in renewing institutional registrations, resulting in institutions operating without current registration. The small size of the committee also contributes to this issue.

Issue 70: Confusing Definitions and Classifications:

The definition of "higher education institution" in the current act is unclear and leads to confusion regarding the classification of certain institutions (e.g., vocational schools, academies).

Issue 71: Funding of Institutions:

The current funding model for the HEC needs review to ensure efficiency and appropriate resource allocation. There's also a need to consider allowing HEC to retain some of their earned revenue.

Issue 72: Unnecessary Requirement for University-Specific Laws:

The current requirement for each university to have its own separate law is considered unnecessary and bureaucratic, and could lead to parliamentary delays and potential interference in university governance.

Issue 73: Inconsistent Registration Durations:

The duration of registration doesn't align with the updated definition of higher education institutions, causing inconsistencies and administrative issues.

Issue 74: Lack of Portability of Qualifications:

The lack of consistent recognition of Fijian qualifications abroad creates obstacles for graduates seeking international employment or further studies. This is partly addressed by engagement with international accreditation bodies.

Issue 75: Lack of Flexibility in Regulations:

The rigidity of regulations and forms limits the commission's ability to adapt to changing needs and implement efficient processes (e.g., transition to online applications).

Issue 76: Alignment of the Fiji Teachers Registration Act with the Education Act:

The Fiji Teachers Registration Act mandates teacher registration, but the Education Act lacks a corresponding requirement. This inconsistency creates a legal gap and needs to be resolved by aligning both Acts. The proposed solution is to incorporate the Fiji Teachers Registration Act's provisions into a revised Education Act, creating a unified legal framework for teacher registration.

Issue 77: Naming Inconsistencies and Legal Delays:

While the Fiji Teachers Registration Board (FTRB) became the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority (FTRA) in 2013, the legal documents still reflect the older name. This inconsistency needs to be addressed in the revised legislation. Further, the submission of the revised Fiji Teachers Registration Act to the Office of the Solicitor General is facing delays due to communication breakdowns and changes in personnel within the ministry.

Issue 78: Teacher Licensing in the Education Act:

The current Education Act omits any mention of teacher licensing. This oversight contradicts the existing Fiji Teachers Registration Act and needs rectifying. The proposed solution is to explicitly include teacher licensing requirements in the new Education Act. This change is also an opportunity to address the fact that this requirement was inadvertently removed during a previous repeal of a portion of the Education Act.

Issue 79: Expanding FTRB's Mandate:

There's a suggestion to broaden FTRB's role beyond teacher registration. This expansion could include overseeing teacher welfare (financial, health, well-being, security of living arrangements), student-teacher ratios, and teacher support. This would require a significant increase in FTRB's resources and staff. However, concerns about their operational capacity and budget constraints exist. Discussions are needed to determine the feasibility and scope of this expansion.

Issue 80: Inefficient Teacher Registration Processes:

The current teacher registration process faces several issues. The retrospective approval of teacher registrations by the board is causing delays, leading to teachers working illegally and experiencing payment delays. This is caused partly by a change in the board's policy and partly by the board's slow response times and unreliable communication. The sheer number of board members (nine) slows down decision-making. A lack of delegation provisions in the Fiji Teachers Registration Act prevents the CEO from efficiently handling operational tasks, further exacerbating the problem. These delays also affect private schools and international schools.

Issue 81: Unclear Registration Requirements:

Uncertainty surrounds who exactly needs to be registered. The current regulations are unclear on whether other school personnel, such as coaches, chaplains, and other administrators who work directly with students, require registration and certification. The current limited authority to teach provision is considered too broad, and needs further clarification.

Issue 82: Teacher Professional Development (PD):

While 20 hours of mandatory professional development is required every three years for in-service teachers, the current system faces challenges. There are inconsistencies in funding, and teachers don't always complete the 20 hours. There are also overlapping functions with the Ministry of Education, leading to confusion about responsibilities and potential duplication of efforts. The current professional development is largely funded by the Ministry and FTRB, but there are ongoing debates on whether this should be enshrined in law and if the 20-hour requirement is appropriate.

Issue 83: Low Teacher Training Completion Rates:

A significant number of teacher trainees drop out before completing their training, impacting teacher supply. The orientation and induction programs need to address this issue by providing realistic expectations of the teaching profession from the beginning of the training period.

Issue 84: Overlapping Functions and Responsibilities:

There is a noticeable overlap in the responsibilities of FTRB and the Ministry of Education, especially in areas of teacher professional development, creating confusion and inefficiency. Clarifying and separating their respective roles would help streamline processes.

Issue 85: Board Composition and Decision-Making:

The FTRB's large size (nine members) and lack of delegation provisions hinder efficient decision-making. This is further compounded by communication challenges, with some members being unresponsive and

unavailable. Reducing the board's size and delegating operational decisions would improve efficiency.

Schedule - List of Participants: 16 April 2025

- **Ministry of Finance:**
 1. Dr Neelesh Goundar
 2. Ema Rokowaqa
 3. Melissa Karan
 4. Mereani Nata

- **Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation:**
 5. Setareki Macanawai

- **Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection:**
 6. Penina Gabriel
 7. Kelani Volavola
 8. Sovaia Q

- **Ministry of iTaukei Affairs:**
 9. Joeli Ditoka
 10. Josefa Turaganivalu

- **Ministry of Health:**
 11. Meli, Executive Support Unit, MOH

- **Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development/National Disaster Management Office:**
 12. Osea Ratuyawa

- **Higher Education Commission of Fiji:**
 13. Frentina Antrea
 14. Epi Rawalui
 15. Ani Lacanivalu
 16. Alimi Korovulavula

- **Fiji Teachers Registration Authority:**
 17. Sangeeta Singh

- **Review Team:**
 18. Rokobua Naiyaga
 19. David Solvalu
 20. Lyanne Vaurasi
 21. Joyce Hicks
 22. Magdalena Ramoala
 23. Adi Vesikula
 24. Rusila Buisamu

List of Participants: 5th May 2025

1. Tomasi Lakeba
2. Joji Waqata
3. Salote Madanavosa
4. Kavinesh Sami

Review Team:

1. Rokobua Naiyaga
2. David Solvalu
3. Lyanne Vaurasi
4. Joyce Hicks
5. Magdalena Ramoala
6. Metuisela Gauna
7. Adi Vesikula
8. Rusila Buisamu