

Distance Education

Wednesday, 11 July 2007

Outer islands students have traditionally undertaken Distance Education courses because their schools have difficulty employing secondary teachers. Rarotongan secondary schools now also offer distance courses to their senior students to expand their subject options. The Correspondence School (TCS) in Wellington, New Zealand provides learning programmes over a range of subjects and levels - from Year 9 to NCEA. There are currently 138 Cook Island students engaged in 411 TCS distance courses. Teresa Tararoa Distance Education Manager

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{mospagebreak title=Correspondence}

The Correspondence School became involved in the education of secondary students in the Cook Islands via an agreement between New Zealand's largest distance education institution and the Cook Islands Ministry of Education at the end of the 1990s. This agreement enabled Cook Islands students to enrol with TCS through the school's secondary dual enrolment policy.

Students are now enrolled via the school's online enrolment process. This has certainly reduced the enrolment processing time so that learning programmes have been actioned within the school and mailed out to students a lot faster than in the past. Curriculum delivery

The Correspondence School provides their learning programmes via a variety of medium. The traditional booklets are often accompanied by audio and video tapes. These are now being converted to CDs and DVDs which is particularly appropriate because tapes tend to deteriorate quickly in the island environments. All schools in the Cook Islands have computers for student use although only some schools have them connected to the internet. These computers are stored in air-conditioned rooms. Some school also have DVD players so that they can use these for their TCS learning programmes rather than taking up time on the school computers which can be used for other purposes. Information and Communication Technology:

Technology is also helping to make things a lot easier for our students to receive and return course material. Completed work in booklets that was once posted back to the school in Wellington, is now scanned onto CD and sent to Rarotonga for emailing on to Wellington teachers. When outer island schools eventually get broadband, they will be able to email their work directly to the teachers themselves. Outer island schools have email facilities, and sometimes email teachers to discuss work. Teachers are already returning their marking comments via email to the students. The Ministry of Education plans to produce more locally contextualised programmes for junior secondary and as broadband becomes available, interactive video-conferenced lessons from school bases on Rarotonga or elsewhere will further enhance learning opportunities for these students.

{mospagebreak title=School Information}

You may have been enrolled with the Correspondence School for one of three reasons:

- You are in an outer island school where there are no secondary teachers and you have to do your studies by distance
- You are enrolled in one of the secondary schools on Mangaia, Aitutaki, Mauke or Rarotonga and there is no secondary teacher to take a subject required for your chosen career pathway
- You are a special circumstances enrolment with the Ministry of Education on an Alternative Education programme.

The Correspondence School offers you the opportunity to continue with a NZ-based education despite not being in a normal face to face school. You can study the same work, and carry out the same programmes required for NCEA as other Cook Islands (and NZ) senior secondary students.

With the Correspondence School, you will be sent a programme of learning based on your needs and goals. Course materials are posted out at present, but if the Cook Islands ever gets broadband to the outer islands, this material could be emailed to you, or you could be doing quite a bit of your work online.

The important thing about working by distance is to give yourself enough TIME to successfully complete your studies. Each activity from your booklets should be done as if it were a test or a project. Teachers get to learn a lot about you by the way you complete and present your work. With broadband, we would be able to video-conference so that you could see and talk to each other but until then, students and teachers can only rely on communicating via the schoolwork that teachers mark and the emails they send to each other.

Outer islands students in the past have been just as successful in their NCEA passes as students on Araura and Rarotonga. All it takes is that you work hard, and ask your supervisor or principal for help when you need it. Also, make sure that your work is sent to Rarotonga for email transfer to the teachers in Wellington.

GOOD LUCK !

{mospagebreak title=Enrollment}

Principals of outer islands schools with secondary students, are entitled to enrol their students with The Correspondence School in New Zealand, if there are no available qualified secondary teachers in the school. All enrolments are via the Distance Education Manager. Correspondence School Enrolments 2008

All proposed enrolments with The Correspondence School for 2008 must sent to the Distance Education Manager before the end of the Cook Islands school year - December 14, 2007. Details should be emailed to jwoodger@education.gov.ck

Due to the heavy demand of enrolments made to the Wellington based school at the beginning of each school year, Principals who delay enrolments risk their students not having work on hand for the first day of the new school year.

When sending in student enrolments, Principals must include:

- The student's full name (as verified by their birth certificate or their passport). A hard copy of one of these documents should be kept in the school files.
- The student's date of birth (also from the birth certificate or passport)
- The subjects and levels that the student will be enrolled in. Course handbooks are seldom printed any more, so please use the outlines on the school's website www.correspondence.school.nz to find the most appropriate courses and levels for each student.
- It would be of value to the teachers in Wellington for other background information be sent to give the teacher some idea of the students and their capabilities. For example, current reading age (from the latest running record or PAT test). Samples of their written work or a maths test would also be helpful.

{mospagebreak title=Supervisors}

School Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that distance learning students are enrolled onto appropriate courses; communication is maintained with the TCS coordinator in Rarotonga and with teachers in Wellington; and that progress records are sent regularly to the TCS coordinator in Rarotonga. Any problems with communication with Wellington or work returns should be referred to the TCS Coordinator (The Distance Education Manager) in Rarotonga.

At the beginning of each year, School supervisors will be sent a progress sheet with the names of students who have been enrolled with The Correspondence School and the courses that they have been enrolled in.

When schools receive the learning programmes assigned to individual students, supervisors are required to enter the assigned courses to the class level progress sheet. As students complete their booklets or other projects, these are to be entered onto the progress sheet with the date of completion.

Ideally, completed work should be scanned onto a CD, so that the students completed activities to be marked by the teacher in Wellington can be transferred to the TCS Coordinator in Rarotonga, for email transfer directly to Wellington teachers. Compared to a couple of years ago when hard copy booklets took months to make their way to the school in Wellington and back by boat, students can now get email feedback within days.

Please remember to send in your progress sheets to the Distance Education Manager, Ministry of Education (mhilyard@education.gov.ck) at the end of each term. This will allow the Ministry to record this information into their own reports to government.

The Correspondence School will return upated information about students who have achieved unit standards and internal achievement standards at the end of each term.