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Equity, Access and Participation

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REVISION RECORD

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Equity, Access and Participation

All individuals have a right to learn and to fulfil their responsibility as citizens of, and contributors to their society. Government has a responsibility to ensure quality education for all.

The adoption of the Cook Islands Education Master Plan (EMP) in 2008 was an important milestone for education in the Cook Islands as it sets the strategic direction for the government in meeting its responsibility for education and provides a clear statement as to the values and priorities expected. An essential component of the EMP is the commitment to 'Learning for Life' - the provision of quality learning environments for all people in the Cook Islands from birth.

Given that the population of the Cook Islands is spread over 15 islands and atolls, with 1,400 kilometres separating the most distant islands of the country, and that two thirds of the population live on the island of Rarotonga, ensuring this commitment is met provides a significant challenge.

To meet this challenge a range of strategies for ensuring access and participation will be implemented, guided by definitive policies.

For the purposes of this policy “equity, access and participation” means that all Cook Islanders, regardless of ability, gender, wealth, location, language or ethnic origin, will be able to participate in relevant, quality and appropriate learning experiences. It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to provide such opportunities and mitigate any barriers to accessing them that may exist.

1. Policy Statement

The Ministry of Education will demonstrate its commitment to equity by promoting and supporting participation in a wide range of learning programmes and opportunities and ensuring these are easily accessible to learners across all levels of education.

2. Purpose

Delivering on the objectives of equity, access and participation is a key means of making a proactive contribution to the social, economic and cultural development of the Cook Islands. This policy provides a set of defining guidelines that will inform MoE operational management. Accessibility of education and high levels of participation are essential for achieving the objective of equitable access to education and high learner achievement. The MoE is committed to:

- i.) Creating learning environments that mitigate social, cultural, economic and physical barriers to participation in the education process.
- ii.) Developing teaching and learning practices that are effective in creating positive learning environments that promote access and participation for all current and potential learners including mature and part-time entrants, those who have special needs and those who live in remote and isolated communities.

iii.) Meeting the purpose of the Learning for Life - Cook Islands Education Master Plan (2008-2023) which is:

“All people in the Cook Islands will have equal access to quality learning opportunities across the full spectrum of human endeavour from birth.”

and includes the following relevant foci and goals:

Learning and Teaching

Focus: Equitable access to quality learning and the experience of success through a range of programmes that meet individual needs and celebrate individual talents.

Goals:

- *Equitable access for all learners to quality learning programmes*
- *Increased enrolment in ECE Centres*
- *Increased access to vocational courses at senior levels*
- *Systems that enhance student well-being*
- *Significantly increased participation in tertiary education*
- *Increased numbers of accredited institutions and courses available in-country*

Learning and the Community

Focus: A high level of community involvement in determining quality educational outcomes

Goals:

- *Wide community support and understanding of inclusive education*
- *Increased participation of the wider community in ongoing learning*

Infrastructure and Support:

Focus: The provision of appropriate legislation, research, guidelines and standards which support delivery and enhance opportunities for learning

Goals:

- *High quality buildings, grounds and facilities*
- *Effective, well qualified and resourced teachers, administrators and support staff*

iv.) Meeting the aims of “Te Kaveinga Nui” - the National Sustainable Development Plan, which includes the priority area:

“ A Cook Islands where all people who reside in our islands can enjoy opportunities to fulfil their potential, prosper and participate in the social, economic, political and cultural life of our communities and nation” (pg 15).

It also includes the strategies of:

Ensuring equitable access for all learners to quality learning programmes

Enabling every young person to have access to the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills to gain qualifications that they need to contribute to the development of the Cook Islands.

v.) Meeting the goals of the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF) which include - *“To achieve universal and equitable participation and access to Pacific education and training”.*

vi.) Meeting the goals of the UNESCO 'Education For All' policy, which include:

“All children will have the opportunity to fulfil their right to quality education in schools or alternative programmes at all levels of education.

All young people and adults must be given the opportunity to gain the knowledge and develop the values, attitudes and skills which will enable them to develop their capacities to work, to

participate fully in their society, to take control of their own lives, and to continue learning. All young people should be given the opportunity for ongoing education. Opportunities should be both meaningful and relevant to their environment and needs, help them become active agents in shaping their future and develop useful work-related skills.” - Education For All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments - Text adopted by the World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all parties who are bound by the requirements of the Education Act.

4. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES and OUTCOMES

Outcome

All people living in the Cook Islands, regardless of social, cultural, economic, intellectual or physical status, will have access to, and be able to participate in quality, appropriate and timely educational experiences which will enable them to realise their full potential, enjoy a quality lifestyle and contribute to Cook Islands society in a meaningful way.

Strategic Objectives

- Ensure that all education programmes are accessible to the widest possible range of stakeholders.
- Support specialised programmes where necessary to increase participation of under-represented groups.
- To consider the different needs of the wider community in the development of a range of educational programmes.
- Ensure that learning environments meet the needs of learners.

5. Policy Detail

5.1 Equity

Equity and excellence go hand in hand. In an equitable system, factors such as ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status do not prevent students from achieving ambitious outcomes. We must be committed to reaching every student regardless of circumstances. Provisions must be made to mitigate disparities, barriers and challenges.

5.1.1 Priority Policy Instruments and Actions - Equity

- Greater gender equity in all forms of education is achieved including the resourcing of education and the retention and achievement of young men in learning programmes.
- Appropriate, culturally sensitive and gender inclusive/balanced resources are produced.
- Provide inclusive education, i.e. all young people learning together in mainstream pre-school, primary and secondary institutions with appropriate networks of support.
- The concepts of human rights and human dignity are borne in mind in all processes involving students with disabilities.
- All teaching, administrative and non-teaching staff have a thorough understanding of the potential barriers to learning and the diverse needs of learners.
- Ensure a range of strategies to support and resource learning for learners with additional support needs is available including training in best practice solutions for support staff.
- The circumstances and needs of learners in isolated communities are taken into account when developing and implementing education programmes.
- Strategies are in place to ensure all school leavers, regardless of social and economic background, are supported to access higher level education and empowered to realise their potential.

5.2 Access

Ensuring access to education for all is necessary for education to make an effective contribution to the social, economic and cultural development of the Cook Islands. The physical and demographic spread means that this is a challenge and the sector will need to look both internally and externally to meet the intentions of this policy.

5.2.1 Priority Policy Instruments and Actions - Access

- Strategies are in place for distance education, isolated students, second chance learning and continuing and adult education.
- There is active collaboration with community and industry groups to provide and improve access and inclusion in relation to content and delivery of relevant learning programmes including recognised work based training programmes.
- Strategies to increase the access of Cook Islanders to regional and international education programmes are developed.
- Flexible delivery and assessment modes are offered to improve access
- Adult learners have the opportunity to develop their potential and can access and participate in effective learning programmes at any level.
- Resourcing formulae to take into account the different barriers to and forms of access utilised by different groups of learners.
- Ensure disability access is provided to all education buildings.

5.3 Participation

It is the Ministry's role to work with other partners to ensure the conditions required for people of all ages to take up the opportunity of learning and to be successful in their endeavours.

5.3.1 Priority Policy Instruments and Actions - Participation

- Assets of education provision are a community resource and therefore enable the continuing education of the wider community.
- Student support systems are in place to facilitate retention, progression, and successful completion of learning programmes.
- Develop a range of strategies for ensuring continued participation in education of isolated students.
- Provide re-entry programmes on all islands for people who have been away from learning.
- Establish and resource Community Education Centres.
- Barriers to participation, especially for isolated learners, are identified and mitigated.
- Participation is encouraged through a range of marketing and publicity strategies including the targeting under-represented groups.

6. Risk and Mitigation

The table below lists examples of possible consequences, along with mitigating actions, that relate to this policy not being adhered to:

<i>Issue/Risk - examples</i>	<i>Mitigation - examples</i>
Lack of Equity in Provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social inequality • Higher crime rate • Lack of gender parity • Social disruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible delivery and assessment modes • Promotion of equality of opportunity • Account taken of social diversity • Monitoring recruitment, retention and attainment for equality
Lack of Access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low standards of literacy and numeracy • Reduced quality of life for those with disabilities • Increase in emigration • Depopulation of Pa Enea • Economic and social dependence • Inability to take full advantage of new technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access for all learners including people with disabilities • Materials, facilities and equipment to enable learners with disabilities to access learning • Provision of literacies programmes to support language and numeracy development • Collaborative arrangements to provide and improve access • Range of access modes
Low Participation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poorly trained workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of marketing and publicity strategies to encourage and widen participation

- High unemployment
- Lower standard of living
- Poor standards of health
- An under performing economy
- Reliance on international aid

- Targeting of under-represented groups (for example, workplace and /distant//disengaged learners)
- Programme planning to meet specific learner or employer needs

7. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Monitoring is keeping track of the workings of a policy, noting whether the policy is referred and adhered to during the development of education processes and programmes.

Evaluation involves making careful judgements about the worth, quality and benefit of a policy. It provides feedback on the efficiency, effectiveness and performance of policy and is critical to policy improvement and innovation.

Review refers to implementing any required changes that have become apparent during the monitoring and evaluation processes.

- The Planning and Development Division will monitor and evaluate the implementation and impact of this policy and report as required.
- The policy will be reviewed as per the policy register on an ongoing basis by the Director, Planning and Development.
- Annual statistical evaluation will be used to measure both access and participation rates.
- Feedback will be presented to key stakeholders in a range of modalities.

This policy will be reviewed 24 months after implementation and thereafter every 36 months.

S Paio
Secretary of Education

Date