



Functions of the NEC

The National Education Commission (NEC) was established under the National Education Commission Act No. 19. of 1991 to make recommendations on educational policy in all its aspects including Pre-school Education, General Education, Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Education with a view to, improve the country's human resources. The NEC functions under the purview of the Presidential Secretariat but as an independent institution. The major functions of the National Education Commission are:

- To make recommendations to His Excellency the President, on educational policy in all its aspects, with a view to, ensuring continuity in educational policy and enabling the education system to respond to changing needs in society;
- To review and analyze periodically, the National Education Policy and Plan or Plans in operation and where necessary, to recommend to the President, changes in such Policy, Plan or Plans;
- To advice the President on any other matter relating to education which may be referred to the Commission by him.

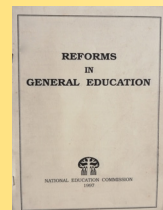
The First Commission was appointed for the period from 1991-1996. Professor Lakshman Jayathilleke an acclaimed educationist, was the first Chairman of the NEC. The Seventh Commission which functions presently, was appointed on 7th September 2017 by His Excellency the President. Emeritus Professor W.I. Siriweera, who was former Chairman of the University Grants Commission and the Founder Vice Chancellor of the Rajarata University serves as the Present Chairman. Dr. G.B. Gunawardena, an eminent educationist, serves as Vice Chairman (Policy) while Dr.T.A.Piyasiri, who has enormous experience in Technical and Vocational Education sphere, renders services as Vice Chairman (Planning). Three standing committees have been

appointed by the National Education Commission on General, Higher and Technical and Vocational spheres for purposes of policy formulation.

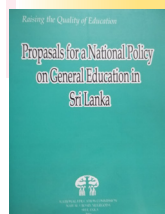
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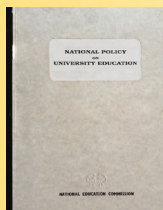
National Policy on Technical and Vocational Education - 2018



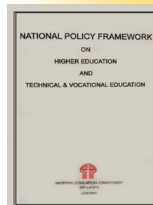
Reforms in General Education - 1997



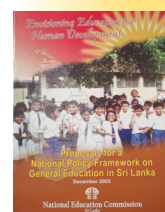
Proposals for a National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka - 2016



National Policy on University Education - 1996



National Policy framework on Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Education - 2009



Policy Proposals for a National Policy framework on General Education in Sri Lanka - 2003



The First Report of the National Education Commission - 1992

PRESENTING THE POLICY PROPOSALS ON TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION



The publication containing National Policy on Technical and Vocational Education was presented to His Excellency the President Maithripala Sirisena by the Chairman NEC: Prof. W.I.Siriweera, at the Presidential Secretariat on 03.05.2019. NEC Vice Chairmen and Chairman, Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission participated.

A technically qualified skilled workforce is the key for development and economic competitiveness of a nation. Therefore the government has placed great emphasis on Technical and Vocational Education in its Human Resource Development strategy for nation building and reduction of youth unemployment.

Technical and Vocational Education system in Sri Lanka has developed over the past several years and the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) Framework established in 2004 has contributed to the enhancement of labour market relevance and quality assurance of Technical and Vocational Education. However, initiatives are needed to increase the access to Technical and Vocational Education and to provide a planned transition of students from schools to technical and vocational education centres. There is also a need to provide diverse training opportunities in the existing and emerging areas of labour market with greater industry participation and to increase the operational efficiency of training institutions to reap full benefits of investments made in the sector.

Policy recommendations submitted by the National Education Commission address the above issues and projects a development vision to the Technical and Vocational Education sector while taking note of government's development vision as spelt out in the Public Investment Programme 2017 - 2020 and Chapter 4 of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The recommendations are presented in nine chapters and contain 73 policy proposals with key strategies for their implementation. Increase of access to TVET, Optimal utilization of physical, financial and human resources, Rationalization of training programmes at regional level to minimize overlap, Relevance and quality of TVET programmes, Interrelation among industry, employers, employees and TVET, Interrelation of TVET with General Education and Higher Education, Recruitment and career progression of TVET, improvement of Academic and administrative staff, Access to TVET for vulnerable and disadvantaged people, Information gathering, dissemination and career guidance are the focused areas covered in the policy document.

Policy formulating work was done by appointing nine working panels comprising of those with wide TVET experience and persons from the industry, academia and other relevant government bodies. Draft Policy Proposals were peer reviewed and discussed at several stakeholder forums before the approval was granted by the National Education Commission. The financial and expertise support given by the Ministry of Skills Development for the Policy development work is greatly acknowledged.

The Policy Document is available in all three languages and can be downloaded from www.nec.gov.lk or www.tvec.gov.lk.



FORMULATING POLICY PROPOSALS ON HIGHER EDUCATION



Members of policy formulating group on Higher Education during a discussion on draft report

Challenges faced by Sri Lanka's system of university education emanate from both internal and global sources. The internal challenges originate from factors intrinsic to Sri Lankan system of school and higher education. The external challenges arise from global factors in the context of the contemporary transformations of the global system of political economy, knowledge economy and the employment markets. The responses to these challenges are interconnected in their impact on shaping the on-going policy reforms on University Education.

The expansion of opportunities for higher education in traditional and new areas of learning and training has been dramatic during the past few years. The government has been encouraging the universities to establish new Faculties of Medicine, Engineering, Technology, and Nursing to meet the increasing demand for vocation-oriented degrees. The state universities are no longer the sole provider of higher education in Sri Lanka as Private Higher Educational Institutions (PHEIs) are increasing in numbers and contributing to the expansion of student enrolment. These changes are responses to the dynamics in the global economy, rapid and unprecedented changes in new technology and communication, shifts in the nature of global as well as national employment markets. New demands are thus placed on the very idea of university education.

The quality of education and training and the capacity of the economy to provide employment to graduates are two immediate issues that have arisen with the expansion of undergraduate education by

the state and non-state sectors. Rapid expansion of PHEIs since 2013 has placed new responsibilities on the MoHE and the UGC with regard to their registration, accreditation, quality, infrastructure, human resources, and collaboration. In response to these concerns, the Ministry of Higher Education and the University Grants Commission have been spearheading reforms in the university sector. Improving the quality and standards of undergraduate education through reforms has been a key goal in recent reforms initiated by the MoHE and the UGC. The universities are also being encouraged to integrate skills training into undergraduate education as a measure to address the mismatch between university education and employment among the graduates in some fields, particularly in arts, humanities, commerce and science.

The current policy re-orientations have also led to a counter argument calling to recognize the need for universities to remain connected to their original mandate of being bastions of free speech and critical analysis in democratic society. This perspective warns that remaining unaware of the larger trends in modernization and development of education and employment, and overemphasizing the utilitarian goals of education at the cost of its value as a democratic social good, could produce a new trap from which public universities might find it difficult to escape.

The National Education Commission is in the process of formulating Policy Proposals on Higher Education. A series of workshops and meetings were conducted by the NEC with the participation of almost all stakeholders.

The draft Policy Proposals formulated are based on the themes: Governance and Financial and Resource Management, Access to Higher Education, Student Admissions and Identification of Demand for New Subjects / Disciplines, Career Guidance and Counselling, Student welfare and Discipline, Postgraduate Education and Research, Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Government and Non-Government Higher Education Institutions, Academic and Non-Academic Staff Development, Private Higher Education Institutions and Public Private Partnership. Final policy document is to be completed before the closure of the year 2019.



Workshop on National Policy on Preschool Education in progress

Sri Lanka's National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) defines early childhood as the period from conception to the age of five. This period is marked by an impressive growth in a child's brain, influenced both by the environment he or she grows up in and the people around him or her. Consequently, the quality of the experiences that children have in their early life is strongly correlated to the development of their brain's architecture. In this view, it is vital for young children to have appropriate, growth-promoting early experiences through responsive interactions with caring parents and caregivers, as they grow up, with their teachers at a preschool.

With good health and nutrition, a safe, secure and responsive home environment and opportunities for early learning, these young children grow, learn and thrive. Leading educationists agree that high-quality early childhood programmes can be life-changing for young children and can reap benefits in better health and educational outcomes.

Researches reveal that children enrolled in at least one year of preschool education or Early Childhood Education (ECE) are more likely to develop the critical skills they need to succeed in school and less likely to repeat grades or drop out of school. Therefore they are more able to contribute to peaceful and prosperous societies and economies when they reach adulthood. Moreover, data unequivocally supports the notion that investments in high-quality early childhood services save costly expenditures for compensatory services over time. The investment in young children, is a powerful elixir for cost-effective, child-positive country development. Universal provision of preschool education is often thought to be the base

for providing equal opportunities for all children.

For these reasons, multi-national organisations have made strong efforts to support the advancement of ECE throughout the world. Sri Lanka is a party to several key international legal instruments, recommendations, declarations, frameworks for action supporting education and is bound to advance their objectives, particularly on children's right to education, including quality preschool education.

In Sri Lanka, preschools operate as commercial businesses or not-for-profit organisations. The Government does not set standards and regulate the sector. It is not compulsory for children in Sri Lanka to receive one or more years of education at a preschool. Preschool education is not a constituent to the formal education policy and administration system either.

There are several types of preschools operating in Sri Lanka, applying different labels such as preschool, kindergarten, nursery school, montessori or child development center. Their differences range from the environment in which children learn, medium of instruction and philosophies that guide their learning.

The Commission is presently engaged in the process of formulating policy on Preschool Education in collaboration with UNICEF. A series of workshops have been conducted with the relevant authorities in both public and private sector. The draft policy document on the themes such as Equitable access to Preschool Education, ensuring quality in Pre-school Education, Pre-school workforce development, Parental, family and community participation, Data, research, evaluation and documentation, Governance and financing are about to be completed.

Sri Lanka stands ahead in the region in terms of education indicators for literacy and the status of education of girls. Our public school system has played a vital role in raising the living standards of the most vulnerable sections of society, by cultivating the values of education and equality. Though the overall picture of the education remains optimistic, the school system and their classification need drastic changes and improvement. Long held tradition of selecting few schools and resourcing them by the government while neglecting the poor schools have created disparities. In rural areas, this disparity is interlinked with the crisis currently facing the rural economy. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2012/13 revealed that the average monthly cost borne by a household in Sri Lanka for education is Rs. 1,448. It is also noteworthy that this amount ranges between Rs. 2,762 in urban sector and Rs. 532 in the estate sector.

According to the National Education Commission report on General education (2003), the classification of schools lacks clarity because of ad-hoc changes undertaken over the years. The commission proposed the current scheme of Type 1AB, 1C, 2 and 3 schools be replaced by three categories of schools as; Primary (Gr. 1-5), Secondary (Gr. 1-11/Gr.6-11), and Senior Secondary (Gr. 1-13/Gr.6-13) schools. It further emphasized the need of improving the quality of education provided and addressing the lack of access to children in economically disadvantaged families to enhance the quality of secondary education.

With the Easter bombings, the attention has been specially drawn to the existing racial and religious segregation of school system. The students raised in such schools meet the other communities with possible insular opinion of them. This fear of the "other" is seen as a thought possibly exploited by opportunistic elements to spread division and hatred.

The present government leaders have pledged their will to end the system of schools segregated on racial and religious basis. It will be a most conceivable solution to overcome many issues in the present system of schools. Students who attend multi-communal or common schools evidently have a better worldview and feeling of unity than those who attended segregated schools. This optimistic concept of multi-racial common schools should be put into practice by restructuring both public and private schools in incremental stages. In such a system, students will be able to speak and understand all three languages while becoming comrades of a multiethnic and cohesive society. Regulating and maintaining the standards of education in such a context will also be easy.

The education system of every country plays a critical role in promoting personal, national and global growth and shared prosperity. Sri Lanka has made a significant progress in expanding access to education showing 93.1% literacy rate. The structure of its education is divided into four segments namely: primary (Grade 1 to Grade 5), junior secondary (Grade 6 to Grade 9), senior secondary (Grade 10 to Grade 11) and collegiate (Grade 12 to Grade 13). School Census report in 2017, revealed that the total number of government-sponsored schools is 10,194 and among them 353 are National Schools, which are considered the better schools, funded directly by the Ministry of Education while the Provincial schools are run by the grants of the local governments. There are also 80 government approved private schools in Sri Lanka.

The School System in Sri Lanka is facing many issues such as, duality of schools and continuation of the disparities, poor distribution of secondary schools, overlapping of the nomenclature of the types of schools, the marginalization and the neglect of small schools and overcrowded classes in large popular schools in urban areas. The standards of so called International schools too is a cause for anxiety.

The Commission is determined to review the School System in Sri Lanka and publish a separate document on the subject. With the aim of identifying the current situation and the issues in the existing School System, Special discussions were conducted with directors of the Ministry of Education and director of Muslim affairs, Provincial Directors of Education, selected 25 sample of Zonal Directors of Education islandwide, 25 divisional directors of education from western province and representative group of principals of private and international schools for the same.

National Education Commission also conducted a study on Review of School System in the Sabaragamuwa Province. Several discussions were held with provincial secretary of education, all the directors of education of the province, selected 60 school Principals and teachers to obtain proposals and suggestions. Data were collected from In-Service Advisors, principals, teachers, students, parents and old students of the selected sample of 292 schools through questionnaires. Collected data are being analyzed and the policy statement for the school system would be completed soon.

STUDY ON “INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS”

The so called International School Education system in the country has gradually expanded. Therefore, a viable regulatory and quality assurance system to ensure the approved level of relevance and quality of education throughout the country is needed. The system of International schools should be an integral part of education in Sri Lanka and meet the education goals set nationally and globally. In order to facilitate a regulatory and quality assurance system, the development of appropriate regulatory and quality assurance mechanisms and a credible national organization(s) to conduct quality assessment reviews are essential.

Regulation of “International Schools” by the Ministry of Education or any other state body will primarily require their registration under such identified body. In order to provide legal framework for registration, an amendment to the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act No.8 of 1961 or an enactment of a new Act is necessary.

Even though one model of quality assurance may not fit for both public schools and non-state schools that include “international schools”, making every effort to identify common domains, as much as possible, for the assessment of the quality of education is very important. In 2010, the Management and Standards Unit of the Ministry of Education formulated a set of guidelines to facilitate quality assurance activities at public schools and to provide quality assurance information to the higher authorities at Provincial and Ministry level. The eight domains were identified in this quality framework for the assessment of the quality of education provision. The Cabinet and the Ministry of Education(MOE) have requested the National Education Commission to formulate a policy on “International schools” regarding Quality Assurance and Monitoring. The NEC has submitted its proposals in April 2019 in this regard.

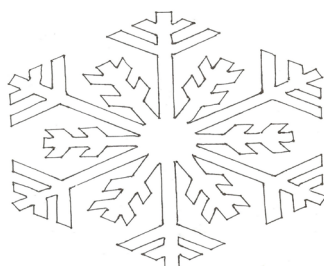
INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE STUDY TOUR TO INDIA



Sri Lankan delegates with professionals of PSSCIVE

Studying current systems of education in various parts of the world is important in policy making. In this context, an international study tour for capacity building of young NEC officers was conducted from 25th November to 2nd December of 2018. The destination was the PSS Central Institute of Vocational Education (PSSCIVE) Bhopal, India which is a constituent unit of National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India. It is an apex research and development organization in the field of vocational education. The tour enabled the NEC staff to share practical and theoretical knowledge and experience on various aspects of education with their counterparts.

Sri Lankan delegates had opportunity to obtain an understanding of the existing education policy framework in India at regional and national levels inclusive of policy formulating processes. They visited important Indian institutes such as Centre for Research and Industrial Staff Performance (CRISP), Regional Institute of Education (RIE), Jagran Lakecity University (JLU), Government Subhash Higher Secondary School for Excellence and National Institute of Technical Teachers Training and Research (NITTTR).



WORKSHOP ON CAREER GUIDANCE - UK



Discussion with British students and the British Council Representatives by the visiting representatives of the NEC

The Chairman of NEC, Prof. W.I. Siriweera and Vice Chairman (Policy) Dr. G.B. Gunawardana participated at the Workshop on Career Guidance at the Bradford University and Career Connect, Liverpool, UK in March 2019. The visit was sponsored by the British Council. The Gatzby Benchmarks system was discussed in detail at the workshop. Besides, Transformation of knowledge to reach the aim of capacity building on Career Guidance and engagement of stakeholders were also discussed at the workshop.



MEMBERS OF THE PRESENT COMMISSION



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Dr. G B Gunawardana (Vice Chairman - Policy), Emeritus Professor W I Siriweera (Chairman),
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Not in the photo: Prof. M A Nuhman, Mrs. Nayana Nathavitharana

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Upcoming Events....

- * Reappraised of National Policy on School based Career Guidance
- * Research on Outcomes of Diploma Programmes of State and private Institutes at NVQ Levels 5 and 6.
- * Re-appraisal of National Goals and Guiding Principles of General Education.
- * Review of Teacher Development at Primary Level
- * Review of Curriculum Development at Primary Level

Your comments and suggestions are welcome and will assist us in improving the future volumes of our newsletter. Please send your comments and suggestions to:

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