

**Education for Living: A Brief Overview of the
Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET)
Policy in Solomon Islands.**

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1. INTRODUCTION

I am honoured and have much pleasure in making this short presentation on the Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Policy for Solomon Islands, which has been approved by Cabinet in March 2005. The formulation and development of the TVET Policy is not only in line with the Education Strategic Plan 2004 – 2006 but moreover, it addresses the Government’s Priorities, Strategies and Targets in the provision of Basic Education services and TVET. In specific terms, the Government undertook to “Adopt as a matter of policy the establishment of and support for Vocational Training Schools as a stream parallel to the academic stream”, and to “Shift emphasis from the philosophy of ‘Education for What?’ to the philosophy of ‘Education for Living’”. In view of this Government Policy Objective, this TVET Policy is appropriately entitled “Education for Living” as a fitting response to the question posed by the “*Education for What?*” Report more than thirty years ago in 1973.

The Policy document fully explains the process by which the draft policy was developed, as well as its structure and main features. This final Policy document is a result of extensive consultations by members of a Task Force, and two National Workshops, with nearly one hundred participants representing all stakeholders and all Provinces. The first workshop contributed ideas for the draft policy, and the second discussed an outline of the draft and amended and approved it. Members of the Task Force also visited areas of three Provinces, holding meetings with teachers, students, parents and members of local communities in Rural Training Centres, Community High Schools, Provincial Secondary Schools and a National Secondary School.

The Draft Policy Document is divided into three Parts. **Part 1** of the document, pages 9 to 15, is a **People’s Summary** (Executive Summary), summarising the whole document for busy people who have not got time to read the whole document. **Part 2** of the document, pages 17 to 41, is a **Summary of the Policy**, containing all the main elements of the policy itself. **Part 3**, pages 43 to 107, is the **Main Policy Statement**. After each section the main elements of the Policy are outlined in **bold**. It is these main elements which form the Summary of the Policy in Part 2. Those reading Part 3, therefore, do not need to read Parts 1 and 2.

The Policy encompasses the following main features: *Structure of Education; Curriculum and Teaching Method; Access; Teacher Training; Links with Communities, Employers and SICHE; Follow-up and Assistance to Leavers; Assessment, Certification, Standard and Inspection; Solomon Islands Association of Rural Training Centres (SIARTC), and Public Attitudes and Perception.*

2. Why do we send our children to school?

In developing the TVET Policy for Solomon Islands, one of the important questions asked is “Why do we send our children to school?” Some responses to this question might be:

- ⌚ To help them find a job?
- ⌚ To help them earn money?
- ⌚ To go on to further studies?
- ⌚ To learn skills they can use when they leave school?
- ⌚ To come home and help us improve our lives?

Probably we send our children to school for all of these reasons, but for most people the first two – to find a job and earn money – are the most important. We pay fees as an investment so that later our children will help us by paying back what we have invested.

The third reason – to go on to further studies – is also linked to the first two. We want them to go for further studies so that they can get a better job. Most Solomon Islanders think this way because this is what has happened in the past. Students who reached Form 5 (Grade 11) almost always got a job. Students who reached Form 6 (Grade 12) almost all went to University or College.

But is this true today?

NO! WHY?

Two things have changed.

1. We are sending far more children to school, especially Secondary school. In 1978 at Independence, 385 students went to Form 1 (Grade 7). Now there are over 5,700 in Form 1! In 1994 there were only about 30 Secondary Schools. Now, with the great success of the Community High Schools, there are 140 Secondary Schools!

2. The number of paid jobs has not increased as fast as the number of people in school. Due to the ethnic tension the number of jobs has actually gone down in the last 5 years. Also the number of places for further studies has not increased. So now it is impossible to expect all those who leave school to get paid jobs or go to further studies.

We have already seen that most of those leaving Form 3 (Grade 9) have little chance of a job or further studies, so now we want everyone to go to Form 5 or 6. But now most Form 5 and 6 leavers also fail to get jobs.

This is not their fault or the fault of the education system. There are just not enough paid jobs or places in further study for all the increased number of Form 5 and 6 leavers.

SO WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

Many people want all the Community High Schools to go to Form 5, all the PSS to go to Form 6 and all the NSS to go to Form 7. They think that if children go to higher classes they will be more likely to get jobs.

BUT IS THIS TRUE? NO!

As we have said, the problem is not lack of education but not enough jobs. So even if more and more students go to higher classes they will still not get paid jobs. There will just be more highly educated people looking for jobs.

SO WHAT IS THE REAL ANSWER?

At present those who leave school and fail to find paid jobs do not know what to do. Their schooling has mainly taught them knowledge and skills which are useful in paid jobs. They cannot use this knowledge or skills to look after themselves or live happily back at home if they do not get a job.

So they often become unhappy, feel they are a 'failure' and cause trouble.

This TVET Policy, suggests that the answer is to change our schools and education system so we give students more skills which they can use to look after themselves at home or elsewhere, to help improve their home communities, or even to make money for themselves – what we call self-employment.

These skills will include skills like being able to build a house, grow food, cook better food, look after children, fish, make a canoe, make furniture and so on.

But they will also include skills which students can use to improve the way they and their families live: wiring a house for solar electricity; growing crops permanently on one piece of land; new ways of cooking food; making or repairing water supplies or toilets; repairing outboard motors or tape recorders; sewing clothes for the family and many others.

Some of these skills may be useful for making money also. Schools leavers may set up a small business sewing dresses or school uniforms; making food safes and tables; building permanent houses or helping people with solar electricity.

HOW WILL THESE SKILLS BE TAUGHT?

Under this TVET Policy, we are proposing a number of things.

1. In all Secondary schools from Form 1 to 3, more of these skills should be taught. Students would still learn the normal subjects but they would also learn more skills.
2. For those who leave Form 3, we would create far more Training Centres like the present Rural and Vocational Training Centres, which teach all these skills in a practical way.
3. Selection for Form 4 would be based on testing all subjects, including the practical skills, not just English and Maths. Students would be selected for Form 4 by using the 5 best marks, so some of those good at practical skill subjects would also have a chance of getting to Form 4.
4. In Form 4, 5 and 6 schools would have Technical streams where students would learn mainly practical skill subjects, as well as the present Academic streams.
5. Those who do well would be able to go to SICHE or other further studies. Those who do well in the Rural Training Centres could also go to SICHE to learn skills subjects.
6. The majority who did not go to further studies or get a job would have some practical skills which they can use to look after themselves. Hopefully some of them would use their skills to help their families or to use their local resources to make money.
7. People like to feel that their skills are recognized, so we would also introduce a National Vocational Certificate. This would test specific skills like sewing dresses, repairing water supplies, growing vegetables or operating a computer – not whole subjects like Home Economics or Agriculture.

Testing would be done by testing whether you could do the skill, not by a written exam. Anyone could be tested and gain a Certificate whether you are in school, a Training Centre, a job or even back at home – as long as you have that skill. This would be a way of gaining a qualification in addition to the present systems of sitting examinations through the Solomon Islands School Certificate (SISC) and Trade Testing.

We hope this would help students and young people to have confidence in themselves, to gain useful skills and not to feel that they are ‘failures’ if they do not ‘pass’ Form 3, Form 5 or Form 6. We hope such people will have more confidence to go and do something useful to look after themselves, not just hang around Honiara or other urban centres looking for a job.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the Solomon Islands TVET Policy might appear ambitious, we believe that it is forward-looking, eminently sensible and displays a deep understanding of contemporary Solomon Islands society. As envisaged in the Government's policy for the Education Sector, it advocates Ministry of Education's central role in directing and coordinating policies to produce an enlightened society as well as an educated manpower readily available for the Country's development requirements and advancement into the 21st Century. Furthermore, it would gear the system to cater for the interests of our children and people in education and training rather than the system maintaining itself for its own sake, as is the case at present. Overall, approval of this policy will result in the review, reform and re-structuring of the whole education system in Solomon Islands as outlined in the Government's Priorities, Strategies and Programme Targets for 2002 – 2005.