

Chapter 10

Education and training

10.1 Education and training are the fundamental building blocks for economic and human development. They open up opportunities for employment and economic activities otherwise not possible, and provide both the incentive and necessary skills for economic progress. Furthermore, they deliver 'benefits down-stream in health, governance, productivity, gender equality and nation-building'.¹ The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) recognise the critical importance of education. MDG 2 seeks to achieve universal access to primary education; and MDG 3 aims to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary schooling by 2005 and at all levels by 2015.² But as noted previously, a number of Pacific island countries are 'seriously off track' in reaching their development goals. In this and the following chapters on employment, the committee looks at the role of education and training in economic development in Pacific island countries.

Skills shortages and unskilled workforce

10.2 As noted on a number of occasions in this report, skills shortages exist in many Pacific island countries. This situation adversely affects economic development because the countries must rely on low or unskilled labour or import highly-paid experts from overseas.³ In many cases, opportunities to start a business or expand production are foregone. The skills shortage cuts across all sectors of the economy—land, resource and business management, transport including aviation safety, hospitality, marketing and trade negotiation. There are skills shortages particularly in mining, oil and gas projects and in the forestry, banking and tourism sectors.⁴ For example, the Gladstone Pacific Nickel Ltd project to mine lateritic nickel ore in the Solomon Islands has workers who are 'under educated and untrained'.⁵

10.3 According to Mr Ian Clarke, President, Australia Papua New Guinea Business Council, with some projects, such as the PNG LNG, 'there is initially going to be a

1 The Hon Stephen Smith MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs and The Hon Bob McMullan MP, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, *Budget Statement 2009–10: Australia's International Development Assistance Program*, 12 May 2009, p. 4.

2 United Nations, Millennium Development Goals, Goal 2, http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2008/MDG_Report_2008_En.pdf#page=16, p. 14, (accessed 7 May 2009).

3 DEEWR, *Submission 64*, p. 9.

4 See for example ANZ Group, *Submission 51*, p. 5; ITS Global, *Submission 63*, pp. 25–26; Commonwealth of Australia, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, AusAID, Canberra, 2008, p. 14.

5 Presentation Memorandum to the Australia Pacific Islands Business Council, attachment to *Submission 60*.

need to bring in skilled labour, because PNG does not have the technical workers—the welders and the plumbers'. However, he did not believe skills shortages would be an ongoing issue.⁶ The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) argued that 'Skills shortages are already a capacity constraint on PNG's economy'.⁷ Fiji, Samoa and Tonga might face a similar challenge of skills shortage should migration continue at the existing rate.⁸

10.4 Even so, there is no shortage of potential labour in the region. At a time of skills shortage, many Pacific island countries have a large pool of unskilled workers which is increasing as a result of growing populations. The committee now considers the link between education and training in Pacific island countries and the skills shortage in the region.

Basic education

10.5 Despite investments in education by the island governments, educational achievements have stalled.⁹ In some countries, there is mounting concern about the increasing number of students not completing basic education; falling attendance rates at secondary schools; decreasing levels of literacy and numeracy; and low quality of, and inequitable access to, education.¹⁰ In 2008, as many as one million children were said to be out of school.¹¹ There is, however, significant variation between Pacific island countries in the performance of their education systems to the extent that AusAID concluded that progress toward universal primary education is mixed and 'the region as a whole is not on track'.¹²

10.6 According to the ADB, some Pacific island countries have 'a long tradition of near universal primary education', with participation rates averaging above 90 per

6 *Committee Hansard*, 25 March 2009, p. 61.

7 *Submission 55*, p. 4.

8 Institute for International Trade, *Research study on the benefits, challenges and ways forward for Pacer Plus*, Final Report, June 2008, pp. 47–48; also see Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Submission 69*, p. 6.

9 The World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, p. 1. The Forum Basic Education Action Plan Review found that the quality of education in the Pacific island region is alarming. The progress made in the 1990s had stalled by the year 2000. Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2009, p. xv.

10 The World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, p. 1.

11 Commonwealth of Australia, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, AusAID, Canberra, 2008, p. 1.

12 Commonwealth of Australia, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, AusAID, Canberra, 2008, p. 7.

cent.¹³ Most Polynesian countries 'have achieved close to universal primary education', with Niue, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu on the way to see their children, boys and girls alike, 'able to complete a full course in primary schooling'. Fiji is also 'progressing well' toward this goal.¹⁴

10.7 In stark contrast, primary school enrolment and completion rates are poor in the Melanesian countries of PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu and in the Micronesian countries of Kiribati and Nauru. Importantly, with about three quarters of the region's population, these countries are clearly 'off-track' or in the case of Solomon Islands and Kiribati 'of concern' in reaching their education MDGs. They face substantial difficulties with regard to compulsory education enrolments and the number of drop-outs before completing primary school. PNG is said to have the biggest challenge regarding enrolment of children in schools, with more than half a million children still outside the education system. Some estimates suggest that in PNG:

- one in five (19 per cent) children does not attend school; and six out of ten children entering grade one drop out by grade six;¹⁵
- 45 per cent of children in elementary and primary school are girls but only one in three complete primary schooling, with the figure decreasing and gender disparities growing with the level of education;¹⁶ and
- 54 per cent of Papua New Guineans are literate and complete primary school; and six per cent complete secondary school.¹⁷

10.8 In its latest report, AusAID noted that only 53 per cent of children in PNG are enrolled in school but of the number of children who start school, only 45 per cent are expected to complete primary school. It concluded, '630,000 children (or 76 per cent of all primary school aged children) are not finishing primary school'.¹⁸

13 Asian Development Bank, *Education and Skills: Strategies for Accelerated Development in Asia and the Pacific*, June 2008, p. 9.

14 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2009, pp. 10–21; AusAID, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, August 2009, p. 15. According to the World Bank, five out of nine countries (with two-thirds of the region's primary school population) are likely to meet primary school enrolment targets but only two countries, Samoa and Tonga, are likely to meet the goal of grade 5 survival rates, meaning that many students 'have little chance of mastering basic literacy and numeracy skills'. The World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, p. 2.

15 ITS Global, *Submission 63*, p. 3 and Mr John Millett, *Submission 21*, p. 6.

16 Crawford School of Economics and Government, *Submission 2*, p. 6.

17 DFAT, *Submission 68*, p. 7.

18 Commonwealth of Australia, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, AusAID, Canberra, August 2009, p. 15.

Table 10.1: Net primary enrolment (NPE) rates in Pacific island countries and progress against MDG¹⁹

Melanesia	Fiji	PNG	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu	
	On track NPE rate of 94 per cent in 2006. Primary completion rate increased from 91 per cent in 1996 to 99 per cent in 2003.	Off track NPE rate and primary completion rate were the lowest in the region in 2007, estimated at 53 per cent and 45 per cent.	Of concern NPE increased from 56 per cent in 1999 to 94 per cent in 2005. Primary completion rate declined from 85 per cent in 1991 to 79 per cent in 2005.	Off track NPE rate improved from 75 per cent in 1989 to 85 per cent in 2007. Primary completion rate declined from 90 per cent in 1990 to 59 per cent in 2006.	
Polynesia	Cook Islands	Niue	Samoa	Tonga	Tuvalu
	Of concern NPE rate increased from 92 per cent in 2001 to 100 per cent in 2007. Primary completion rate declined from 98 per cent in 1996 to 85 per cent in 2007.	On track NPE rate increased from 90 per cent in 2002 to 100 per cent in 2006. Primary completion rate increased from 91 per cent in 1998 to 100 per cent in 2005.	On track (limited data) NPE rate was 90 per cent in 2004. Primary completion rate was 94 per cent in 2000.	On track NPE rate increased from 89 per cent in 1996 to 95 per cent in 2005. Primary completion rate increased from 84 per cent in 1990 to 89 per cent in 2004.	On track (limited data) NPE rate increased from 98 per cent in 1991 to 100 per cent in 2002. Primary completion rate was 100 per cent in 2002.
Micronesia	FSM	Kiribati	Marshall Islands	Nauru	Palau
	Of concern NPE rate increased from 92 per cent in 2000 to 100 per cent in 2006. Primary completion rate was 67 per cent in 2000.	Of concern NPE rate increased from 76 per cent in 1990 to 97 per cent in 2005. Primary completion rate decreased from 98 per cent in 1990 to 82 per cent in 2003.	Of concern No change in NPE rate or primary completion rate between 1999 and 2003. NPE rate was 90 per cent in 2003. Primary completion rate was 89 per cent in 2005.	Off track (limited data) NPE rate declined from 75 per cent in 1992 to 60 per cent in 2002. Primary completion rate was 92 per cent in 2002.	Of concern NPE rate increased from 82 per cent in 1990 to 93 per cent in 2005. Primary completion rate was 80 per cent in 2007.

19 The table is based on Commonwealth of Australia, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, AusAID, Canberra, August 2009, p. 15.

10.9 Vanuatu was doing better than its Melanesian neighbours. AusAID explained that although enrolments at a basic education level have risen quite rapidly in Vanuatu:

...there are still problems with people falling out of the system at rather rapid rates the further up they go. As they reach years 8, 9 and 10 the attrition rate becomes quite marked...We might expect to see a lagging from there on literacy.²⁰

10.10 Indeed, the latest AusAID report shows that completion rates in Vanuatu for primary school declined from 90 per cent in 1990 to 59 per cent in 2006.²¹

10.11 Also, a large number of over-aged children are enrolling in schools in Pacific island countries.²² World Vision Australia observed that their retention rates remain low and in some cases are falling: children starting school aged 9 or 10 find it hard to adjust, eventually leading them to drop out of school.²³

Literacy and numeracy

10.12 A publication by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat noted that there is 'little valid and reliable data in the region on quality measures for education'.²⁴ The following table based on World Bank data provides some statistics on literacy skills in selected countries.

Table 10.2: Literacy²⁵

	Fiji	Kiribati	PNG	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Vanuatu
Literacy	93.7	-	64.1	99.4	-	99.6	91.7

20 Mr Robert Tranter, *Committee Hansard*, 12 March 2009, p. 26.

21 Commonwealth of Australia, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, AusAID, Canberra, August 2009, p. 15.

22 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2009, pp. 10–11.

23 World Vision drew attention to positive developments in this regard in one of its projects in the Solomon Islands which 'focuses on preparing children aged 3–5 to go to school' and is proving effective with girls enrolling in similar numbers to boys, *Submission 47*, p. 5.

24 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2009, p. xv.

25 CIA, *World Fact Book—Fiji* (accessed 11 May 2009); World Bank, *World Development Indicators database*, compilation of data from different years, http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/ddpreports/ViewSharedReport?REPORT_ID=5550andREQUEST_TYPE=VIEWADVANCEDandDIMENSION=YES (accessed 8 May 2009).

10.13 The paucity and unreliability of statistical information on education in the region, however, makes it hard to determine the actual levels of literacy and numeracy. Mr Robert Tranter, AusAID, provided a telling example:

People will always overstate their literacy levels. In Vanuatu, for example, literacy rates at one point were stated to be about 70 per cent amongst adults. A recent survey, which took a significant sample of the population and did testing around people's ability to read and write in Bislama, showed that the literacy rate would be more in the order of between 30 per cent and 35 per cent. It can highlight some overstating in statistics when they are done in a cursory way.²⁶

10.14 This conclusion is supported by a Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat study, which found that existing data painted 'a picture of stagnating quality or even regression'.²⁷

10.15 These observations about the lack of literacy and numeracy skills in some Pacific island countries are worrying. According to an AusAID study, many children in the region are leaving primary school unable to read, write or solve basic mathematical tasks.²⁸ For example, in Vanuatu, almost three in ten of Year 6 students could not write a simple dictated sentence.²⁹

10.16 Consistent with school attendance, performance on literacy also varies among Pacific island countries. Professor Helen Hughes and Mr Gaurav Sodhi, Centre for Independent Studies, argued that the Pacific is 'sharply divided between islands that are functionally literate and those that remain basically illiterate'.³⁰ The Pacific is 'bipolar': one group of islands (Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Samoa and Tonga) have moderate population growth and reasonable education.³¹ Indeed, 'indicators for Fiji and Polynesian countries compare favourably to major Asian countries'.³² Tonga has a very high literacy rate, estimated to be at 98 per cent in English and Tongan.³³

26 *Committee Hansard*, 12 March 2009, p. 25.

27 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2009, p. xv.

28 Commonwealth of Australia, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, AusAID, Canberra, 2008, p. 7.

29 Commonwealth of Australia, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, AusAID, Canberra, 2008, p. 7.

30 *Submission 11*, attachment, p. 9.

31 Hughes and Sodhi, *Submission 11*, attachment p. 2; and 'Pacific Performance and Outlook, Background Paper' for *Pacific Economic Survey 2008*, pp. 28–29.

32 See findings of 'Pacific Performance and Outlook, Background Paper' for *Pacific Economic Survey 2008*, p. 29.

33 HE Mr Bruce Hunt, *Committee Hansard*, 25 September 2008, p. 5.

10.17 The second group of islands, including Solomon Islands and PNG, are performing poorly. A research paper noted 'the relatively low enrolment and literacy rates for both girls and boys' in both countries.³⁴ Indeed, they have 'some of the highest population growth rates in the world and high levels of illiteracy'.³⁵

Secondary education

10.18 The UN commented that for children 'to reach their full potential and countries to develop, the gains made in universal primary education must be replicated at the secondary level'. It noted, however, that in Oceania at present, 'almost two thirds of children of secondary school age are out of school'.³⁶ AusAID also noted that secondary school enrolment rates are low in most countries (around 30 per cent in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu).³⁷ Even Polynesia, which has good enrolments rates at the primary level, has 'access issues at secondary level particularly for children in remote areas'.³⁸ Statistics taken from the ESCAP Economic and Social Survey 2009 show the latest available statistics for enrolment rates in some Pacific island countries though the data is quite old:

Table 10.3: Secondary level enrolment rates in some Pacific island countries³⁹

	Cook Islands	Fiji	Kiribati	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Vanuatu
Secondary level—Net enrolment rate (per cent)	64.4 (2000)	79.1 (2006)	68.3 (2005)	66.0 (2004)	27.3 (2003)	60.4 (2003)	38.1 (1999)

These figures contrast with secondary school attendance rates for Australia 87.2 in 2006 and Japan 98.7 in 2006.

34 'Pacific Performance and Outlook, Background Paper' for *Pacific Economic Survey 2008*, pp. 28–29. It noted 'A particular concern is the decline in the enrolment rate in primary education for both girls and boys in PNG and the widening gap between girls and boys'.

35 Hughes and Sodhi, *Submission 11*, Attachment, p. 2.

36 United Nations, Millennium Development Goals, Goal 2, http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2008/MDG_Report_2008_En.pdf#page=16, p. 14 (accessed 7 May 2009).

37 Commonwealth of Australia, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, AusAID, Canberra, 2008, p. 7.

38 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2009, p. xv.

39 Table 13b, ESCAP, *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2009: Addressing Triple threats to development*, New York 2009, p. 187.

Non-formal education

10.19 At their meeting in Tonga in March 2009, the Pacific Islands Forum education ministers noted the 'growing alarm over the large numbers of young people, both boys and girls, who leave school without adequate skills to further their education or obtain employment'. In their view, the formal sector of the economy offered few employment opportunities and a great need existed for non-formal education (NFE) that would provide training in life-skills.⁴⁰

10.20 Rather than 'a *central* basic education strategy with a national place and role in its own right', NFE is often seen as a 'supplementary basic education strategy'. NFE activities are expanding into areas such as environment education, legal literacy and sustainable micro-enterprise development. It is increasing links between the community and schools through 'incorporation of what started as NFE programs into school programs and for government employees'.⁴¹ An ADB study explained:

Local communities, church groups, and NGOs offer functional literacy and skills development programs...Others provide flexible skills development programs emphasizing functional literacy, microbusiness, and other livelihood skills to help youth and adults with low educational attainment to develop their potential to generate income in informal sector self-employment and wage employment.⁴²

10.21 World Vision Australia acknowledged the vital role of informal education, stating that it 'operates as a safety net to catch the many people who have not achieved literacy and numeracy through the formal system', and prepares people for vocational education and employment.⁴³

10.22 Donor investment in NFE is said to be considerable, directed to both continuing education and training aimed at poverty alleviation and governance.⁴⁴ NFE, however, is hamstrung by a number of factors. It lacks national policies, plans and coordination, which has led to the duplication of some training activities and gaps in programs. This sector also lacks funding for human resources infrastructure and,

40 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education*, Draft financing proposal, 9th EDF, p. 1.

41 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education*, Draft financing proposal, 9th EDF, p. 5.

42 Asian Development Bank, *Better Learning, Better Future: Education and Training Sector Strategy for the Pacific*, July 2005, p. 18.

43 *Submission 47*, p. 5.

44 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education*, Draft financing proposal, 9th EDF, p. 5.

according to a Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat paper, is 'a neglected area of research and policy information'.⁴⁵

10.23 The paper suggested that NFE and formal education need to improve their sharing of resources and ideas and student mobility between them. NFE is also said to 'overwhelmingly favour males at the post-secondary and technical tertiary level, although training courses for women and girls increase at community level'.⁴⁶

Vocational education

10.24 The small number of students with secondary qualifications and the many who need transitional courses to qualify for classes create significant challenges for vocational and higher education and training in the region.⁴⁷ Thus, although vocational education is a pathway to employment, enabling people to earn their own livelihoods, an ADB study found that it suffers from the low educational attainment even in basic subjects such as maths, science and English. It concluded that 'Time is consequently wasted in remedial instruction, and dropout levels are high'.⁴⁸

10.25 Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is provided through schools as part of the formal education system, which includes pre-vocational in secondary schools and post-secondary technical institutions; centre-based trade training; and apprenticeships. Almost all Pacific island countries have some skills courses in secondary schools and centres, and half of the countries have an apprenticeship system in place.⁴⁹ An ADB paper divided the Pacific island countries into three groups in terms of their needs for vocational education and training:

- Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu should be 'training for the informal sector, particularly rural agriculture and related occupations'.
- Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, and Tuvalu, should focus training on the informal sector, 'with special emphasis on delivering services to remote areas and outer islands'. Improvements should be made regarding financial sustainability, affordability of TVET systems and dependence on external financing. Training should facilitate migration.

45 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Review of Implementation of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Auckland, 26–28 November 2007, pp. 7 and 13–14.

46 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education*, Draft financing proposal, 9th EDF, p. 5.

47 Hughes and Sodhi, *Submission 11*, attachment, p. 12.

48 Asian Development Bank, *Education and Skills: Strategies for Accelerated Development in Asia and the Pacific*, June 2008, p. 104.

49 Asian Development Bank, *Skilling the Pacific: Technical and Vocational Education and Training*, Executive Summary, 2008, pp. 11–12.

- Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, Samoa, and Tonga 'have relatively good prospects from tourism, emigration, and remittances'. Their top priorities are 'to expand training for the wage sector and fill vacancies created by emigration'.⁵⁰

Higher education

10.26 The statistics on enrolment at tertiary institutions in Pacific island countries are outdated and incomplete. Data taken from the ESCAP Economic and Social Survey 2009 show the latest available statistics for gross enrolment rate (per cent) in some Pacific island countries:

- Fiji 15.4 (2005)
- Tonga 6.0 (2004)
- Vanuatu 4.8 (2004)⁵¹

10.27 Mr John Millett, who spent some 30 years working in various capacities in the region, informed the committee that 1,200 students graduate annually from universities in PNG.⁵² Ms Jenny Hayward-Jones, Lowy Institute, was of the view that unless there are more university graduates in the region, foreign investors will continue to employ expatriates and the development of needed skills will not occur.⁵³

10.28 In the case of Tonga, it should be noted that, although there is a very small campus of the University of the South Pacific in Nuku'alofa, many students go abroad to study—Australia, New Zealand, the west coast of America or Hawaii.⁵⁴ The Australian High Commissioner to Tonga informed the committee that Tongans claim 'to have the highest number of PhDs per capita in the world'. In his view:

Having been there for two years, I would be prepared to say that they could be right. You do meet a lot of PhD doctors in Tonga. They will move through the education system and get the best out of it.⁵⁵

10.29 The committee now considers the major impediments to improving the standard of education and training in Pacific island countries.

50 Asian Development Bank, *Education and Skills: Strategies for Accelerated Development in Asia and the Pacific*, June 2008, p. 33.

51 These figures contrast sharply with 2006 figures for Australia (72.7 per cent), Japan (57.3 per cent) and New Zealand (79.7 per cent). Table 13b, ESCAP, *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2009: Addressing Triple threats to development*, New York 2009, p. 187.

52 *Submission 21*, p. 6. Mr Millett worked in the region as a civil engineer from the early 1960s, then as managing director of a 'new statutory financial institution, director of the Institute of National Affairs and then a privately funded "think tank".

53 *Committee Hansard*, 24 March 2009, p. 13.

54 *Committee Hansard*, 25 September 2008, p. 5.

55 *Committee Hansard*, 25 September 2009, p. 5.

Impediments to higher educational standards

Affordability

10.30 A 2007 paper prepared by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat recognised that although most Pacific island governments provide 'free education', many parents are still unable to meet additional costs 'such as transportation, maintenance of school buildings and contribution fees'.⁵⁶ Mr Geoffrey Tooth, DFAT, noted:

My experience of Papua New Guineans is that the parents and the children have a great love of education and a great desire for it. In recent years they have been required to fund their education, and from everything I have seen, parents do put aside a great deal of their limited disposable income to ensure their children do get whatever schooling is available to them. But, as I said, there is a long way to go...⁵⁷

10.31 Pacific Islands Forum education ministers noted that while many countries have enjoyed high rates of access to education, this was 'in danger of slipping in the face of increasing poverty as children from poor families tend to have poor attendance rates'.⁵⁸ Children who are engaged in paid or domestic work are most at risk of not completing primary school, which is a particular issue for students from outer islands. Their 'absence from local farming or fishing enterprises is a hardship for their families'.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the global financial crisis may affect many families working small plantations: if nobody buys their produce, they will not have money to send their children to school.⁶⁰ For such children, there is a lack of 'meaningful "second-chance" learning opportunities' in Pacific island countries.⁶¹ An ADB report stated that the poor 'need to be the primary focus of education policy and public action' and that 'a basic, high-quality service' would address this disengagement from education.⁶²

10.32 The cost of education also influences access to vocational and higher education where opportunities exist for only a minority, approximately 5–20 per cent

56 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Review of Implementation of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Auckland, 26–28 November 2007, p. 11.

57 *Committee Hansard*, 21 November 2008, p. 20.

58 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2009, p. xv.

59 Commonwealth of Australia, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, AusAID, Canberra, 2008, p. 7; and the World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, p. 3.

60 HE Chris Moraitis, *Committee Hansard*, 19 March 2009, p. 6.

61 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2009, p. xvi.

62 Asian Development Bank, *Better Learning, Better Future: Education and Training Sector Strategy for the Pacific*, July 2005, p. 34.

of those entering the labour market and to those 'who can afford to pay'.⁶³ An ADB study found that in PNG, many students 'drop out and do not receive certificates because their parents cannot afford continued tuition charges'.⁶⁴

10.33 The World Bank noted that a number of government policies could assist poor students to participate in education: governments could establish sliding scale fees or provide means-tested scholarships; and quota systems could be used to ensure equitable selection of students.⁶⁵

Physical access

10.34 Physical access to schools is difficult for children in rural and remote villages and in the outer islands, making the traditional delivery of education unviable.⁶⁶ With regard to secondary education, the World Bank noted that 'most secondary schools are in urban areas [and] outer island students face expenses for travel and boarding away from home'.⁶⁷ The same applies to vocational training, where students in rural areas and outer islands do not have ready access to organised skills development.⁶⁸ Ms Hayward-Jones remarked:

In Melanesia it is a case of capacity and in a way geography and logistics. In Papua New Guinea, the Solomons and even Vanuatu...the terrain is very difficult to cover.⁶⁹

Facilities

10.35 The physical learning environment is said to be poor in most countries, ranging from inadequate learning materials to the lack of maintenance of school buildings and infrastructure.⁷⁰

63 Asian Development Bank, *Skilling the Pacific: Technical and Vocational Education and Training*, Executive Summary, 2008, p. xxi.

64 Asian Development Bank, *Education and Skills: Strategies for Accelerated Development in Asia and the Pacific*, June 2008, p. 102.

65 The World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, p. 7.

66 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2008, p. xiv.

67 The World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, p. 3.

68 *Pacific Education Development Framework 2009–2015*, March 2009, p. 10.

69 *Committee Hansard*, 24 March 2009, p. 14.

70 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2009, pp. xvi and 6.

10.36 Information and communication technologies (ICT) has the potential to improve work and study opportunities through distance learning in remote Pacific island communities. The use of ICT in schools and other educational institutions, however, is limited.⁷¹ Internet and computer access levels for Pacific island primary and secondary schools would be 'well below 10 per cent' but in urban tertiary institutes access could be as high as 70 per cent. In general, approximately 17 per cent of the Pacific population have access to the Internet.⁷² The problems with infrastructure noted in the previous chapters flow through to the education sector. For example, the lack or shortage of electricity in most of the outer islands makes it difficult to have ICT systems in place. The need for technicians to service ICT equipment is a further complication.⁷³

10.37 The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat argued that educational institutions 'fully comprehend' the need for ICT access in schools but the costs for equipment, development and training, and access to services hinder the facilitation of universal access and economic and social inclusion.⁷⁴ It is estimated that 'an investment of some \$50 million would be required for basic development ICT in education'.⁷⁵

71 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Pacific ICT Capacity and Prospects*, Working Paper, 2001, p. 12.

72 Robert Whelan, *eLearning in the South Pacific: Current Status, Challenges and Trends Survey Findings from the Pacific eLearning Observatory*, Draft, 21 September 2007, p. 20, http://www.usp.ac.fj/fileadmin/files/schools/dfl/pdsu/pdfs/pelo_survey_full.pdf (accessed 26 February 2009). Project internet address is <http://www.usp.ac.fj/pelo/>.

73 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Review of Implementation of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Auckland, 26–28 November 2007, paragraph 64.

74 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Pacific ICT Capacity and Prospects*, Working Paper, 2001, pp. 6–7.

75 Robert Whelan, *eLearning in the South Pacific: Current Status, Challenges and Trends Survey Findings from the Pacific eLearning Observatory*, Draft, 21 September 2007, p. 25, http://www.usp.ac.fj/fileadmin/files/schools/dfl/pdsu/pdfs/pelo_survey_full.pdf (accessed 26 February 2009). Project internet address is <http://www.usp.ac.fj/pelo/>.



Telecommunications facilitate education and learning for children in remote Pacific island communities, for example in Nauru (image courtesy of AusAID).

Teacher training and supply of teachers

10.38 Inadequate literacy and numeracy skills are said to result from a number of factors, including lack of 'ongoing professional development of teachers in the area of literacy and numeracy'.⁷⁶

10.39 While teacher competence is 'of crucial importance in improving student achievement levels', the supply of qualified teachers also 'remains an issue despite

76 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Review of Implementation of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Auckland, 26–28 November 2007, pp. 12–13.

considerable attention and investment over the years'.⁷⁷ Remote village schools, in particular, lack trained teachers and proper infrastructure, such as classrooms and storage facilities.⁷⁸ According to the World Bank, 'school quality on the outer islands needs special attention', with difficulties to staff remote schools with trained teachers.⁷⁹ Ms Hayward-Jones noted:

It is difficult to get teachers to go out to some of the remote areas and to provide them with the right kind of housing so that they will stay. The government's capacity to pay teachers is often questionable.⁸⁰

10.40 As a result, several countries employ 'under-trained teachers so as to ensure the continuation of school programmes'.⁸¹ Universities also have difficulties attracting qualified staff apart from short-term guest lecturers.⁸²

Curriculum and relevance

10.41 In many island countries, the curriculum is said to lack meaningfulness and relevancy and several countries have a limited variety of courses on offer.⁸³ The Pacific Education Development Framework noted that despite efforts at redevelopment to meet vocational and life skill needs, the school curricula 'remain largely academic and do not fully meet the needs of all Pacific students'.⁸⁴ The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat noted that the secondary education system lacks 'relevance to village life and to the country's labour market needs'. Thus, despite limited public sector employment opportunities, too much emphasis rests 'on the expectation of

77 The World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, p. 5.

78 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Review of Implementation of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Auckland, 26–28 November 2007, paragraph 38.

79 The World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, p. 3.

80 *Committee Hansard*, 24 March 2009, p. 14.

81 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Review of Implementation of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Auckland, 26–28 November 2007, paragraph 52.

82 Hughes and Sodhi, *Submission 11*, attachment, p. 12.

83 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2008, p. xvi; PIFS, *Review of Implementation of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Auckland, 26–28 November 2007, p. 14.

84 *Pacific Education Development Framework, 2009–2015*, agreed to by Pacific Islands Forum Education Ministers, March 2009, p. 8.

future white collar jobs or professional employment'.⁸⁵ The ADB argued that because of its importance, training for those working in the informal sector should be the 'top priority'.⁸⁶ In chapter 4, the committee highlighted the importance of education for food security and cited, for example, Fiji which called for agricultural sciences to be incorporated in the school curricula at primary and secondary level.⁸⁷

10.42 Many commentators and organisations, such as the ADB, drew attention to the problem of the disjunction in school-to-work transitions.⁸⁸ Indeed, the Pacific Education Development Framework suggested that training systems tend to operate in isolation of labour market demand.⁸⁹ Equally damning, the ADB study on skills in the Pacific noted that most TVET systems in the region 'tend to operate in the dark both on skills demand and on supply'.⁹⁰ One study observed that courses—such as welding—are offered because staff is on the roster, regardless of labour market demand.⁹¹ An ESCAP study noted the gap in skills in many Pacific island countries suggesting that they:

...continue to rely on traditional types of training, through schools and tertiary institutions, and expect the products of that training to fit into contemporary labour markets. But economic structures have changed over the last decade while skill development and training have failed to adapt.⁹²

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- 85 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Review of Implementation of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Auckland, 26–28 November 2007, p. 15 and AusAID, *Pacific 2020—Background paper: Employment and labour markets*, May 2006, pp. 9–10.
- 86 Asian Development Bank, *Skilling the Pacific: Technical and Vocational Education and Training in the Pacific*, Executive Summary, 2008, p. 8.
- 87 See paragraph 4.9.
- 88 AusAID, *Pacific 2020—Background paper: Employment and labour markets*, May 2006, pp. 9–10 and Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Review of Implementation of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Auckland, 26–28 November 2007, p. 14.
- 89 *Pacific Education Development Framework, 2009–2015*, agreed to by Pacific Islands Forum Education Ministers, March 2009, p. 10.
- 90 Asian Development Bank, *Skilling the Pacific: Technical and Vocational Education and Training in the Pacific*, 2008, p. 127.
- 91 'In Samoa, most TVET providers use traditional time-based courses...In Vanuatu, rural training lasts 2 years without achievement of skill levels needed to be productive in the labour market', Asian Development Bank, *Skilling the Pacific: Technical and Vocational Education and Training*, 2008, p. 127; see also AusAID, *Pacific 2020—Background paper: Employment and labour markets*, May 2006, pp. 9–10.
- 92 ESCAP, *Improving Employment Opportunities in Pacific Island Developing Countries*, United Nations, 2007, p. 18.

10.43 It indicated that tourism was now one of the leading sectors but skills-training had not changed to support the development of the industry in the region.⁹³ Yet another study underscored the need to bring business education, especially relating to entrepreneurship and innovation, into schools to orientate young people towards business activity.⁹⁴ For example, participants to the Solomon Islands people's survey 2008 identified the lack of business knowledge and training as a widespread problem.⁹⁵ The Australia Pacific Islands Business Council also called for aid programs to focus more on business development, particularly the building of business and entrepreneurial skills.⁹⁶

10.44 According to the ADB, the Fijian TVET authority is 'arguably one of the best providers of trade training in the region' and was a model for other Pacific island countries. It has developed a testing system to ensure the standard for training. It involved employers in the review of the training content which focuses on 'practical applications' and 'has an enterprise ethos'.⁹⁷ Even so, the Australia Fiji Business Council urged the Fijian Government and aid donors to work closely with business to identify future employment needs so that 'the education system is tuned to produce workers with the appropriate skills and training to enable their absorption into the workforce'.⁹⁸

10.45 Concerns have also been raised about the appropriateness of university courses for Pacific economies and conditions. Fiji's Acting High Commissioner to Australia noted that the courses on offer in Fiji 'do not fully meet Fiji's manpower and workforce needs because a good number of specialised study programmes are not available in Fiji'. These include engineering, architecture, veterinary science, forestry, fisheries, forensic science and meteorology. He argued that this situation created a need to recruit overseas engineers, businesses and consultants 'at exorbitant rates' for major construction works.⁹⁹

Standards

10.46 The *Pacific 2020* background paper on employment commented on the standards reached in technical and training institutes in the region. It noted that there had been 'little attempt to establish minimum competency standards' and suggested:

93 ESCAP, *Improving Employment Opportunities in Pacific Island Developing Countries*, United Nations, 2007, p. 18.

94 AusAID, *Pacific 2020—Background Paper: Employment and labour markets*, May 2006, p. 14.

95 Australian National University Enterprise, *People's survey 2008*, p. 13.

96 *Submission 60*, p. 4.

97 Asian Development Bank, *Education and Skills: Strategies for Accelerated Development in Asia and the Pacific*, June 2008, p. 103.

98 *Submission 58*, p. 7.

99 *Submission 28*, pp. 15–17.

A regional approach to the setting and administration of competency standards through a regional accreditation system involving governments and business would better align training standards with the realities and needs of regional labour markets and facilitate greater global skilled migration.¹⁰⁰

10.47 Mr Edward Vrkic, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, acknowledged the Forum education ministers' support for 'benchmarking standards and standardising'.¹⁰¹

Committee view

10.48 The committee believes that the training and skilling of Pacific island people for employment in their own labour markets is of paramount importance and strongly supports attempts to align education and training with local needs. It notes the many and persistent calls for attention to be given to the informal sector.

10.49 There are a number of other areas in the education systems in Pacific island countries that require attention, including gender disparity in school enrolments, inadequacies in services for those with disabilities, and early childhood education. Although the committee has not dealt with them here, they nonetheless remain important issues that should be addressed.

Funding

10.50 Finance for education in Pacific island countries comes from multiple sources and includes 'allocations from government budgets, support from external development partners, and funding from parents and non-government providers'. In most Pacific island countries, 'primary education is a government responsibility, and secondary education is predominantly church run'.¹⁰² For example, in PNG churches administer approximately half of the education system.¹⁰³ An ADB study suggested that 'Government and church collaboration is the usual way to expand the provision of education services where public funds are scarce'. However, while aid agencies provide 'a large part of education spending', '[m]uch of it is not reflected in the official budget'.¹⁰⁴

10.51 On average, Pacific island governments allocate approximately 17 per cent of the budget to education.¹⁰⁵ An ADB study noted that because such a large proportion

100 AusAID, *Pacific 2020—Background Paper: Employment and labour markets*, May 2006, p. 14.

101 *Committee Hansard*, 19 June 2009, p. 13.

102 Asian Development Bank, *Better Learning, Better Future: Education and Training Sector Strategy for the Pacific*, July 2005, pp. 29–30.

103 HE Chris Moraitis, *Committee Hansard*, 19 March 2009, p. 6.

104 Asian Development Bank, *Better Learning, Better Future: Education and Training Sector Strategy for the Pacific*, July 2005, pp. 29–30.

105 Asian Development Bank, *Skilling the Pacific: Technical and Vocational Education and Training*, Executive Summary, 2008, p. 31.

of government resources was already allocated to education and training, 'it is unlikely that they will be able to afford to increase it'.¹⁰⁶ As an example, to achieve universal basic education, PNG 'would require a doubling of ongoing spending by 2015, and large up-front investments in school infrastructure'.¹⁰⁷

10.52 While Pacific island governments allocate significant funding towards improving their education systems, the World Bank described the outcomes as 'weak'.¹⁰⁸ In addition, there are growing demands on the education budget:

...resources for education are becoming relatively scarcer as the education agenda expands to meet increasing populations, expansion of compulsory education years, the broadening of education to include Early Childhood Education (ECE) and life skills learning, and the drive for equity.¹⁰⁹

10.53 Some commentators claim that universal basic education is still out of reach for too many children under 15 years of age because more than half the education budget is allocated to the tertiary sector.¹¹⁰ For example, the World Bank noted that tertiary education 'consumes a disproportionate amount of education budgets' and suggested:

Given the unmet needs in primary and secondary education, Pacific governments have the opportunity to reallocate tertiary funds, to achieve a larger impact on their most urgent priorities.¹¹¹

10.54 Despite this allocation, funding and resources are also issues for the vocational and higher education systems. Many TVET institutions have inadequate resources to carry out their functions. According to the Lowy Institute, universities suffer from 'chronic under-funding, staff shortages and inadequate facilities'.¹¹² The ADB was of the view that infrastructure development is one of the most 'salient' needs of the Pacific islands higher education sector.¹¹³

106 Asian Development Bank, *Better Learning, Better Future: Education and Training Sector Strategy for the Pacific*, July 2005, p. 33.

107 AusAID, *Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific*, 2008, p. 15.

108 The World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, p. 4.

109 University of South Pacific, PRIDE Draft Financing Proposal 9th EDF, p. 2, http://www.usp.ac.fj/fileadmin/files/Institutes/ioe/pdf/PRIDE_DFP_9th_EDF.pdf (accessed 4 December 2008).

110 Mr John Millett, *Submission 21*, p. 6. See also Hughes and Sodhi, *Submission 11*, attachment, p. 12.

111 The World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, p. 4.

112 *Submission 14*, p. 4.

113 Asian Development Bank, *Education and Skills: Strategies for Accelerated Development in Asia and the Pacific*, June 2008, p. 59.

Governance and administration

10.55 The problem with education in some Pacific island countries is not only the lack of funds but also the capacity of governments to deliver education as an essential service. Ms Hayward-Jones observed that while Pacific island countries may well have sufficient money in the budget, 'getting it out to the provinces and spending it on the right things [schoolbooks and attendance] is proving to be more difficult'.¹¹⁴ According to the review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan, all Pacific island countries 'have major capacity gaps in their systems that are holding them back in responding to the access, quality and equity challenges'. These include: 'the ability and skills to efficiently manage sector resources (at national, state, provincial and school level) including donor provided resources'. Pacific Island countries were also deemed to have capacity shortfalls in their ability to:

- develop and analyse policies at sectoral and sub-sectoral level;
- develop, manage and modify education management information systems (EMIS);
- develop and nurture stakeholder relationships with other government departments, civil society, and other educational authorities; and
- track sector performance because of a lack of fully institutionalised monitoring and evaluation systems.¹¹⁵

10.56 PNG provides an example of some of the administrative and capacity constraints it faces delivering an education service. For example, schools must deal with both the provincial and national education offices and are often forced to wait 6-12 months for a teacher to be placed on the payroll. According to Palms Australia, issues such as the delays and frustration caused by dealing with the bureaucracy 'are most profound for rural or isolated communities due to unreliable communications infrastructure'.¹¹⁶

10.57 The World Bank also noted the need for governments to set up good policies and 'well-functioning institutional structures for social service delivery'. It suggested that a coherent policy and regulatory framework is needed with quality assurance mechanisms such as an accreditation system.¹¹⁷

10.58 Governance issues also apply to vocational and higher education. According to ADB, strategic planning is, in addition to infrastructure development mentioned

114 *Committee Hansard*, 24 March 2009, p. 14.

115 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2009, p. 23.

116 *Submission 44*, p. 3.

117 The World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, p. 4.

earlier, another of the most pressing needs of the Pacific islands higher education sector.¹¹⁸ The Papua New Guinean TVET administration 'can be seen as dysfunctional' according to ADB, with each authority having:

...its own board and management structures; develops its own policies and forges its own linkages with enterprises, is responsible for some registration and certification of training providers, and each uses different criteria in the process.¹¹⁹

10.59 The World Bank argued that the focus should be on improving effective resource management.¹²⁰ In its view, future improvements in education would be related to how well policy makers manage existing resources and how effective they are in engaging partners outside the sector in broad governance activities. These activities include gathering and using data, increasing transparency, decentralising services and mobilising community participation. Also, resources and priorities should be better aligned, tracking mechanisms improved and teacher development, standards and curriculum reformed. For example, in most systems, teacher salaries 'represent over 90 per cent of recurrent budgets' and is an area where efficiencies could be made.¹²¹

10.60 The World Bank also recognised that governance activities involve numerous 'stakeholders inside and beyond ministries of education'. For example, the private sector plays a role in the form of curriculum development, mentoring and providing apprenticeship opportunities. Thus, public-private partnerships between the government and communities and churches are important to raise and manage additional funds. The World Bank suggested that changing the governance structure means 'altering in some way the society-wide frameworks within which the education system performs'.¹²²

Conclusion

10.61 The education and training systems in Pacific island countries face a multitude of challenges. In particular, governments have difficulties finding the resources and the management skills to deliver appropriate education services to many

118 Asian Development Bank, *Education and Skills: Strategies for Accelerated Development in Asia and the Pacific*, June 2008, p. 59.

119 Asian Development Bank, *Education and Skills: Strategies for Accelerated Development in Asia and the Pacific*, June 2008, p. 101.

120 The World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, p. 4.

121 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and Associated Regional Processes*, Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, Tonga, 24–26 March 2009, p. xvi.

122 The World Bank, *Opportunities to Improve Education Sector Performance*, Summary report, Working paper 38865, January 2007, pp. 5–6.

of their children, particularly those living in remote communities. As a result, in many countries:

- children in remote areas have difficulties attending school;
- schools are poorly equipped with inadequate learning materials and school buildings;
- there is a chronic shortage of qualified teachers;
- the curriculum does not meet the needs and priorities of local communities; and
- the vocational system is not producing graduates with the higher level skills needed to support their economies.

10.62 In some Pacific island countries, notably PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Nauru, the education system is failing to the extent that school attendance and the levels of literacy and numeracy are very poor for a significant proportion of the population. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, education and with it literacy and numeracy skills are the essential building blocks of any society. By failing to achieve basic universal education, a number of Pacific island countries are undermining their country's economic potential and severely curtailing opportunities for their people to develop.