STATEMENT BY MINISTER

EDUCATION SECTOR - CURRICULUM REFORMS

The Minister of Education and Human Resources (Mr D. Gakhoël): Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry launched, last week on Wednesday 08 November, the document 'Towards a quality Curriculum-Strategy for Reform' which forms part of the overall reform programme of this Government in the education sector. I would like, with your kind permission, Mr. Speaker Sir, to inform the House of the highlights of the document.

When I took office as Minister of Education & Human Resources, my priority was to start curriculum reforms that are at the heart of Government’s programme 2005-2010. A national debate was held in December last with all stakeholders and we were able, thus, to capture the aspirations of the nation. Meanwhile, we introduced a number of initiatives like free public transport for students.

There is a common thread in the concerns of the World which unites us to the global community. Be it at the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) or at the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers this year, or at UNESCO, or in the first ACP Conference of Ministers of Education or even at the Conference of Ministers of Education of countries where French is spoken, the preoccupation of all Governments is the quality of education we provide to our children.
Our pledge has been and will remain 'A World Class Quality Education accessible to all.'

I must stress that quality education for all pupils is an inclusive education, which caters for the needs of each child even if these needs are diverse. We want all children to learn with pleasure, to discover the world around them in novel and interesting ways, to make learning exciting - so that we get the child to develop its potential to the maximum, to become creative, imaginative, autonomous, and responsible. This is the overall aim of Government. This is the rationale behind our efforts to bring world quality education to all. This is the rationale of a new curriculum.

It is imperative for us to transform all educational institutions into dynamic centres for the delivery of high quality teaching and learning. Since July 2005 we have adopted a holistic, comprehensive and inclusive approach by introducing reforms on all fronts, from pre-primary to secondary, from past secondary to tertiary, from prevocational education, zip schools to children with special needs. This approach goes beyond access and addresses the issues of relevance, pedagogy, performance, evaluation and outcomes. These principles of equity underpin all these considerations.

During the national debate held in December last three broad themes were identified as central issues to curriculum reforms -

(i) the mission of schooling in terms of the profile of learners in the local and global contexts;
(ii) competencies to be developed in learners at the end of every cycle, and
(iii) implementation issues related to new curriculum/teaching and assessments.

It was agreed that the curriculum should be modern, contextualised and forward-looking. The reforms kick started with capacity-building of curriculum designers and developers. We had the first visit of a Senior Consultant and Programme Coordinator from the JBE/UNESCO for a ten-day workshop to help Mauritians develop skills for a competency-based curriculum.

The document ‘Towards a Quality Curriculum’ was approved by Government last month. It highlights the national vision of education, which is to be guided by principles of equity, justice and social inclusion. The child with special needs and the child who has certain inherent or acquired talents
(ii) competencies to be developed in learners at the end of every cycle, and
(iii) implementation issues related to new curriculum/teaching and assessments.

It was agreed that the curriculum should be modern, contextualised and forward-looking. The reforms kick started with capacity-building of curriculum designers and developers. We had the first visit of a Senior Consultant and Programme Coordinator from the JBE/UNESCO for a ten-day workshop to help Mauritians develop skills for a competency-based curriculum.

The document ‘Towards a Quality Curriculum’ was approved by Government last month. It highlights the national vision of education, which is to be guided by principles of equity, justice and social inclusion. The child with special needs and the child who has certain inherent or acquired talents must all have their place to evolve at their own pace in a life-long learning context. Education must strengthen national solidarity and help our youth become rationally autonomous individuals with a high sense of moral integrity.

An Early Childhood Authority will be set up to provide the guidelines for pre-primary education.
The primary cycle is being divided into three stages of two years each to enable customised learning according to age-specific objectives and to ensure appropriate follow up.

The primary curriculum will be deloadeed to ensure that learning matches the development needs of children in each phase. This will provide teachers with more time to use interactive, hands-on, innovative teaching strategies and to attend to the individual learning needs.

The document recommends that, during the first two years of the child's schooling, emphasis should be placed on language acquisition and fundamental mathematical skills and gives an important place to health and physical education. We are determined to stall the scourge of failure at CPE by ensuring that literacy and numeracy become strong foundational support for further learning. The novelty is in the importance given to life-skills programmes which will include environmental awareness, values, citizenship education and sex education. ICT will be used as a support throughout the Primary Curriculum to diversify learning strategies.

At secondary level we need to develop in our youth scientific thinking, oral and writing competencies in different languages, knowledge of technology, artistic development, mathematical skills, entrepreneurial responsibility. Information and Communications Technology will be a core subject. In a world governed by science and technology, it is imperative that we prepare our children to meet the daunting challenges of the 21st
century. Our children require a balanced education. To that end, children who do not take pure sciences, should opt for a “general science subject” compulsorily up to School Certificate while those, opting for Pure Sciences, will have to take up either one literature or one social science subject. New subjects will be introduced into the Secondary Curriculum such as Travel and Tourism, Environmental Management, Entrepreneurship Development, Physical Education, Philosophy, and Psychology.

The secondary curriculum will also contain a strong dose of extracurricular activities. We want to encourage voluntary social work, environmental awareness, tolerance, integrity, and intercultural understanding.
SC/D33/P19/01
Statement (contd.)
(Mr Gokhool)
(4.10 p.m.)

In view of this vast programme of reforms, we must review our teacher-training programmes so that we have the profile of a teacher who can implement the mandate. We are already planning to ensure that every teacher entering the profession is equipped with a teacher’s license that will prepare him to join the teaching profession. Continuous professional development is envisaged to accompany the teacher throughout his career.

The importance of assessment and evaluation cannot be forgotten. Continuous assessment will be adopted to provide adequate feedback to diagnose weaknesses for remedial action.

The CPE examinations will be progressively phased out as soon as an alternative mode to the present summative assessment is put in place. Continuous assessment should become a systematic feature of teaching and learning. We have to successfully pilot and implement new assessment proposals by phase so that the formative assessment may be recognised for certification purposes.

The overall objective is to do away with CPE, in its present form, as both a certification and a selection tool. The pressure on our children at CPE will gradually diminish because the document recommends a National examination at Form III. (National Certificate of Lower Secondary Education NCLSE).

The document also recommends the desirability of exploring alternative possibilities such as a joint Mauritius Examinations Syndicate/Cambridge International Examinations School Certificate or an International Baccalaureate.
This package of reforms touches all strands of educational activity. We are looking forward towards a future that will make the school become a place of learning for fun. We have to prepare our children for the new challenges awaiting them and I am confident that with this unprecedented curriculum reforms we are on the right track.

I have set up a National Curriculum Advisory Committee (NCAC) and a National Curriculum Steering Committee (NCSC) to work out the National Curriculum Framework and an Action Plan.

The ultimate measure of success for this curriculum will depend on effective and constructive partnership. We cannot go at it alone - we need support from all. This is a curriculum that responds to the expectations of all Mauritians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let the future of our children, our youth and our society unite us. And not divide us. It is in unity that we can meet the daunting challenges facing our society today. And leave a legacy of a prosperous future for our future generations.

I am placing a copy of the document in the Library of the National Assembly.

Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.