



Encouraging innovation at the school and provincial level

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OF VANUATU
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
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Acronyms

APTC	Australia Pacific Training Coalition
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
GEDSI	Gender Equity, Disability and Social Inclusion
GoV	Government of Vanuatu
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MEO	Mobile ECCE Officer
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PEB	Provincial Education Board
PEO	Principal Education Officer
PT	Provincial Trainer
QA	Quality Assurance
SBM	School Based Management
SEO	Secondary Education Officer
SICO	School Inspection and Compliance Officer
SIO	School Improvement Officer
TA	Technical Adviser
TG	Teacher Guide
USP	University of the South Pacific
VEMIS	Vanuatu Education Management Information System
VESP	Vanuatu Education Support Program

1 Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to outline an approach for Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training's (MoET) to encourage local innovation and collective school action to improve student learning. Through support from the Vanuatu Education Support Program Phase II (VESP II), the Ministry can work closely with a province, and a school zone or cluster (and their communities) to try new ways of working that help a group of schools to deliver a quality and accessible education and to share successful ideas, practices and outcomes with other schools and provinces.

This paper will be a 'working' document that will be updated over time to reflect learning and adaptations of the approach.

2 Encouraging innovation at the school and provincial level

In the context of devolution, this paper outlines an approach to introduce a 'bottom up' way of thinking and working at the school and provincial level. It complements existing and new Ministry policies and processes¹ to encourage local school solutions to locally identified education challenges², to improve student learning. It is proposed that the school leaders be supported by the provincial education officers³ to identify challenges to delivering education, then work together to try new ways of overcoming the challenge. The approach will encourage collaboration and partnerships within schools, school communities and among a group of schools in a zone or cluster. It is anticipated that for 2020 up to three motivated school zones/clusters (40 schools maximum) will be selected across two provinces. The schools along with the Principal Education Officer (PEO) will receive targeted support to address their identified local challenge. Through close monitoring with MoET, evidence on what works and what doesn't work to improve student learning will be collected with a view to inform future MoET policy and forward programming.

The approach will be led and managed by the MoET Education Services Directorate, through the School Based Management (SBM) unit⁴.

¹ Significant work has been carried out by MoET to devolve responsibility to the school level in recent years. e.g. School Improvement Planning, Minimum Quality Standards, School Principal training (Instructional Leadership)

² This concept draws from the Overseas Development Institute's concept of Doing Development Differently and Harvard University's Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation process which focuses on problems (not solutions) and follows a step by step process (not a rigid plan) that allows for flexible learning and adaptation.

³ This includes the Provincial PEO, the School Improvement Officers and Coordinators, Provincial Trainers and Mobile Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) officers that are responsible for the zone or cluster.

⁴ This unit is will be called the School Improvement Unit, pending approval of the new MoET structure.

3 What does innovation⁵ mean?

Innovation often may mean to apply some 'high tech', digitalised solutions. However, for this approach, it means simple, contextually relevant solutions with the potential to tackle local challenges, as well provide learning and examples for other schools in similar contexts across Vanuatu. The innovation should draw on local resources (expertise, financial and human resources) that are available and committed at the local school level.

When experimenting with new ways of working, it is important to also acknowledge and accept the risk of failure. However, the possibility of failure should not be a deterrent to trying something new. There is always an opportunity to learn, adapt and evolve ideas rather than to consider it as a wasted investment.

4 Rationale for encouraging innovation at the school level

With the introduction of devolution, including new structures and tools for school improvement, it is timely for the MoET to consider how best it can support complementary 'bottom up' approaches to improve the delivery of education in its schools. A 'bottom up' way of thinking and working can encourage and foster greater self-reliance and make a positive influence on student learning at the school level. Lessons learned from other development assistance programs⁶ demonstrate that well-structured, flexible partnerships at the local level (involving national and local government stakeholders) lead to improved access, better quality and more accountable service delivery than can be achieved when using only the traditional 'top-down' approaches. By working in contextually relevant ways and giving a voice and decision-making power to schools and their communities (who understand more deeply their local needs), it is argued that such an approach will improve education outcomes.⁷ The approach will foster self-reliance at provincial and school level as it:

- encourages and draws on the knowledge and experience of schools and communities;
- encourages local leadership and initiative;
- fosters creativity and new ways of working; and
- strengthens ownership and accountability at the school and provincial level.

Local schools and their communities are more likely to be aware of, and to factor in, the political landscape and power relations and dynamics that affect local decision-making and which need to be considered when trying to reform teaching and learning.

⁵This definition is consistent with DFAT's new Innovation Strategy <https://d3qlm9hpgjc8os.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/03095158/DFAT-Innovation-Strategy-FINAL.pdf> (Accessed June 2019)

⁶ Barbara, J. (2018) Thinking and working politically in the Vanuatu skills sector: supporting local leadership and building for a political constituency for change, ANU, See http://www.vanuatuvet.org.vu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/VSP_FINAL_website_2019.pdf and DFAT (2019) KOMPAK Living Design Document

⁷ Smith, W.C. & Benavot, A. Asia Pacific Educ. Rev. (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-019-09599-9>

Creating an enabling environment for collaboration, identifying priorities and taking collective action is a key feature of the approach (See Figure 1). There are schools in Vanuatu that collaborate using the school zone/cluster groups and have a clear purpose. However, many schools struggle to overcome the planning, logistical and financial constraints that limit their capacity to come together regularly to share experiences, learn, support each other and potentially develop and share resources.

Figure 1: Bottom Up Diagram

A 'Bottom Up' way of Thinking and Working



5 Guiding principles

Through consultations with MoET officers and stakeholders, there are several principles (also considered as pre-conditions) that underpin the approach. These are:

- A genuine commitment from schools and communities to improving their students' learning
- A respect for local knowledge at the provincial and school level
- A willingness to build on and strengthen local education management systems, processes and cooperation
- A flexibility and openness to try out the schools' new ideas and ways of delivering quality and inclusive education
- A willingness to share information with other colleagues and schools and a commitment to work collectively on a shared idea
- A commitment to co-contribute to the new and innovative approach to teaching and learning (e.g. financial support and in-kind contribution from provinces and the schools).

6 Sustainability: building on existing MoET systems and processes

The approach will be iterative, focusing on a selection of motivated school clusters/zones and building on the existing MoET devolution, provincial and management systems, in particular the school improvement planning process. Through a shared commitment to a specific education challenge, and using and strengthening MoET systems, sustainability of the approach will be promoted at provincial and school levels with potential to ‘scale up or out’⁸ successful approaches over time. The approaches’ management and monitoring will be embedded within MoET’s current operating model, providing an opportunity to test new ideas at the school level and improve provincial and school level planning. Through feedback to provinces and to MoET executive management on what is working, the approach has potential to establish an evidence base of what education practice works well at the local level. A communications plan will be finalised, that will enable progress and lessons learned to be fed back into the provincial and national education levels and (where appropriate) to positively influence policy development and identify opportunities for wider implementation. The MoET’s systems and processes that can be strengthened through the approach include:

- Provincial Education Office: Supporting PEO leadership and other functions of the office such as planning, communicating with their schools and encouraging innovation to improve student learning.
- Provincial Education Officers: School Improvement Officers (SIOs) including SIO coordinators, Provincial Trainers (PTs) and Mobile ECCE Officers (MEOs) will receive support and be key facilitators of the approach at selected schools.
- Provincial Education Board (PEB): To promote closer collaboration between the Provincial government, Provincial education officers, the Education Authorities, communities and the selected schools the Board will be involved throughout the planning and support process as a model of new ways of engaging with schools.
- School Improvement Plans (SIP): A ‘bottom up’ way of thinking and working will be introduced through the SIP training package to all SIOs. A process to identify the priority challenges at the school level and support needed from the PEO will also inform provincial level planning and monitoring systems. The agreed innovation to be supported further by the provincial level will align with the MoET’s Minimum Quality Standards⁹, in particular those relating to quality.
- School Zones/clusters/networks: The approach supports and incentivises the coming together of an existing or newly formed school network that is committed to working together on improving an important aspect of education. This network may consist of Principal Associations and/or Zone Clusters, Professional Learning Communities or church groups. Working together, this group of schools will identify the education challenge, causes, agree on an innovation, set targets, and commit to cooperation and collective action on the agreed priority education area.
- School Inspection and Compliance Officers (SICOs): SICOs will be involved from the outset to ensure an understanding of the approach and its objectives, providing an evidence base of what is working and what is not.

⁸ In many developing countries, ‘scale out’ refers to other nearby schools or provinces adopting the approach. ‘Scale up’ refers the approach being adopted at the National level and rolled out nation-wide.

⁹ There is currently a process of “standard harmonisation” across ECCE, Primary and Secondary taking place at MoET.

7 Process for encouraging innovation at the school and provincial level

Part 1 – Socialisation of the approach

Socialisation of the approach will take place through Ministry processes, in particular through the School Based Management Unit and the School Improvement Planning process. Information on the approach and selection process will be conveyed through dedicated meetings with each PEO and other education officers including SIOs, PTs and MEOs, with a fact sheet to be emailed and other relevant information on MoET's website.

As part of School Improvement Plan training and for longer term sustainability of the strategy, all SIOs will receive coaching in 'bottom up' thinking and working facilitation techniques¹⁰ to assist in finding 'local solutions to local challenges' to improve student learning.

Part 2 – School zone/cluster Selection

After socialisation of the strategy, to action the strategy, a call out will be made to school zones/clusters to put forward local solutions to a clearly identified challenge that they wish to address. The PEO along with other relevant officers will support motivated school zones/clusters to draft a one-page expression of interest to implement either a newly developed innovation within a cluster or expand and build on a successful innovative approach to delivering education. A MoET panel will select 2-3 school zones/clusters. This will involve up to 40 schools (maximum) and the selection will be based on an agreed selection criterion (See Annex 1).

Part 3 – Agreement with selected schools

Once a motivated province and their school zone/cluster has been identified with clear ideas and strategies, an agreement will be drafted between the PEO, school leaders and MoET. This agreement will outline the innovation, targets, the intent of all schools and the process to be followed in finalising, implementing, monitoring and reporting. This also includes the roles and responsibilities of each of the parties and their combined co-contribution in addressing the agreed priority education challenge and targets. This will include a commitment on the part of school leaders to participate in a baseline and to collect data on progress to support SICOs with the monitoring and evaluation. See Annex 2 for an Implementation Plan and indicative timing.

8 What are the priority areas for innovation that will be supported?

The approach will contribute to the National Sustainable Development Plan's goal¹¹ of Quality Education – an inclusive, equitable and quality education system with life-long learning. Within this framework, innovation that improves (or seeks to improve) student learning through collaborative approaches will be considered for further support. Initially the focus will be at the primary level, however, Mobile ECCE officers (MEOs) will be encouraged to participate in training and cluster discussions to foster a greater understanding of 'bottom up' ways of thinking and working. Local

¹⁰ This will draw on principles from CLA's [Adaptive Leadership Framework](#) and Harvard University's [Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation toolkit](#) contextualised for Vanuatu. It will also draw on learning from DFAT's MIKTA EIE [iXc Adaptive Leadership Pilot](#) with Santo school leaders ([Opportunity2Change](#)).

¹¹ A new MoET Education Sector Plan is currently under development with support from the Global Partnership for Education.

solutions that relate to ECCE or transition from Primary to Junior Secondary will also be supported if that is an agreed priority for the Primary school and can lead to improved learning outcomes.

Examples include:

- Innovative approaches to leadership development for principals, teacher professional development, to improve literacy and or numeracy outcomes, the language transition to English or French, and the development of local learning support materials;
- Increased community engagement to support children's education and improve the accountability of schools (including making the best use of school grants); and
- Strategies to promote child safeguarding and inclusion, e.g. support for children with a disability, encouraging boys to stay in school and providing safe environments for girls to learn.

Based on the selected innovation and group of schools, the support from SBM Unit and the PEO may take different forms. This may include support for face to face mentoring of principals and teachers, targeted workshops and training, access to technical expertise at the provincial and national level and learning materials to support the innovation. Where possible, opportunities to collaborate and learn from other initiatives such as the Vanuatu Skills Partnership, Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC), Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) activities and the University of the South Pacific (USP) will be identified and built into the management and the support activities.

9 How will the approach be monitored and evaluated?

Timebound and realistic targets related to the educational outcomes of the innovation will be agreed by all stakeholders as part of the agreement with selected schools. Monitoring will focus on identifying good practice, creating an evidence base for what works and sharing learning at the school, provincial and national level. MoET officers will be used to monitor progress at individual schools and across the group of schools. This will include SICOs at the provincial level, who will be involved from the beginning to ensure a thorough understanding of the innovation, what is being targeted for improvement and what the indicators of success might look like. The Policy and Planning Unit will also oversee the analysis of data, findings and implications for their planning and policy purposes including for the broader Ministry reporting to Government.

Over time success will also be reflected in the level of policy influence at the national level (based on lessons learned and the successful outcomes at the school level) and the replication of good practice by other schools and provinces.

Where necessary and agreed with MoET, local external Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) expertise will be engaged to work with and support MoET officers to monitor progress of the education innovation at the school(s) level. The MEL approach will include development and use of a Communications Plan that documents positive change through concise reporting, storytelling, case studies, social media etc.

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Table 3: Year 6 TG development 2020

Elements	TGs Development	TG Quality Assurance
Writing	In-house contract writers contracted to CDU	Task Group Lead writers Task Group
Illustration	Outsource	Outsource editing
Content editing	In-house & Outsource	
Copy editing	Outsource	
Layout	In-house	
Printing	Outsource	CDU
Distribution	In-house	CDU

Annex 1

School Zone/Cluster Selection – Expression of Interest (Template)

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Selection Process

MoET, through Provincial Education Offices, is looking to support primary school zones or clusters that have identified or implemented innovative solutions to their own education challenges. If your school has a solution to a school challenge that you would like to work closely with your PEO on, please complete Part A. Or, if your school has already implemented an innovative solution to improve student learning and would like to share this with other schools, please complete Part B.

A: School Challenge (1 to 2 pages)

1. Outline one challenge that your school or school zone is facing that is affecting student learning.
2. What are some of the causes of the challenge?
3. How have you engaged the school community to find solutions to the challenges?
4. What steps will you take to address this challenge over the next 12 months? (e.g. collaboration, introduce new way of working, use of local resources)
5. What are the potential opportunities and or constraints to solving this challenge?

Selection Criteria

Understanding of local challenge and its cause	40%
Willingness to work collaboratively	30%
Potential to work locally and use of local resources	30%

B: School Solution/Innovation

1. Outline a successful solution or innovation to an education challenge that you have implemented in your school to improve student learning.
2. What were the causes of the challenge?
3. Who did you work with to address the solution?
4. What steps did you take to address this challenge?
5. How did you know you were successful in solving the challenge?

Selection Criteria

Understanding of local challenge and its cause	40%
Use of local resources and engagement of stakeholders	30%
Evidence of success	30%

Annex 2

Draft Implementation Plan to encourage innovation at the school and provincial level

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Steps	Activity	Who	Timing
1	Socialisation of concept and process with Provincial Education Offices. Interested PEOs given Expression of Interest forms 2 Provinces selected by MoET based on responses.	SBM ¹² /MoET present to all PEOs	July/August
2	SIO professional development – School Improvement Planning Training introduces ‘Bottom up’ way of thinking and working	SBM with SIOs and Provincial Trainers Comms (video)	September
3	As follow on from SIP training, SIOs meets with zone or cluster 2 times: first to introduce ‘Bottom up’ way of thinking and working’ and MoET focus on quality/ student learning. Zones encouraged to put forward proposals of approaches to their own solutions to challenges that can improve learning. Second meeting is to share challenges and discuss innovations with motivated school zones.	PEO/SIO facilitate Zone Cluster meeting (2 times) SIO with School leaders Comms (video)	September/October
4	PEOs and SIOs discuss school proposals and SIP plans, local innovation solutions to be shared.	PEOs/SIOs/SBM	October
5	MoET panel select the zone or cluster to receive targeted support to implement innovation.	PEO/SBM/MoET	October/November
6	Development of detailed agreement with the selected zones, including implementation plan, targets, partnerships, roles and responsibilities and co-contribution.	SBM/SIO with school zone cluster	February
7	SBM/PEO/SIO/SICOs meet to discuss implementation responsibilities and monitoring	SBM/PEO/SIO/SICOs	February
8	PEO/SIOs support schools implement plan over school year through regular engagement	All areas of MoET depending on solution, & VESP II	March to November 2020
9	MoET (SICOs and PPU) monitor progress, provide quick feedback and document changes. VESP II support as required.	PPU, SICOs	March to November 2020
10	Using M&E data, VESP II supports MoET to learn and communicate good practice internally and to public audience.	MoET and VESP II Comms, PPU	March to November 2020

¹² SBM will be supported by senior VESP II local officers – the School Leadership Program Officer and Provincial Education Quality and Access Officer.

Annex 3

Risks and mitigation strategies

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Below is a list of potential risks and mitigation strategies to be implemented.

Potential Risks	Mitigation Strategies
No interest at PEO and or school level	Adequate consultation upfront will provide an opportunity to identify any issues with the approach that might stop provinces/schools from applying
Political interference	All steps in the process will be fully transparent and clearly documented
Disruption caused by National election in March 2020	The selection of school zones will be completed by February. Strong and positive communication at all levels will seek to minimise any disruptions.
Difficulty in establishing an agreements that have clear purpose or targets	Ensure SIOs promote focus of improved learning and provide adequate support to SIOs to facilitate the process and set realistic targets.
Too many small requests for support that cannot be managed by MoET	As much as possible, choose school partners and groups with common challenges so that they work collaboratively together
Raised expectations around support and roll out	Messaging will state only 2-3 school zones will receive additional support initially to assess whether targeted, locally led support has the potential to improve learning outcomes. If successful, further rollout to be considered.
Principal and Teacher turn over	Support will be provided over the calendar year
Fraud and misappropriation of funds	Use Provincial Finance Officers experience with receiving VESP funds. Promote zero tolerance in training. Ensure that any transfer of funds has appropriate fiduciary risk processes in place and clear accountabilities.
Logistical challenges of monitoring progress at the school level	Support SIOs to carry out monitoring using simple templates and where necessary use external support.
SIOs lack capacity to facilitate schools to find local solutions to local problems	Provide adequate training for SIOs and select the school group on the basis of the SIOs' ability and commitment to facilitate the process longer term.
Natural disaster	Support will remain flexible and adapt to changes in priorities at the local level
Schools request money for work that should be covered in their budget	The agreement with schools will promote co-contributions where appropriate (especially from school grants) and only provide funds where absolutely necessary to incentivise change or enable processes and activities that directly support change.

