

# Restructuring the current Preschool Department of the Vanuatu Ministry of Education



This document provides alternative strategies of refocusing the current Preschool Department in order to meet the challenges of the next five years 2013- 2016

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## **Restructuring of the Preschool Ministry of Education Unit**

### **Purpose:**

This document intends to outline recommendations to establish a revamped early childhood care and education unit in the Ministry of Education in order to effectively implement the strategic vision and policies for ECCE from 2013 to 2017.

### **Background**

In the 1980's preschool was not part of the government agenda but in 1990 they included a position for a National Preschool Coordinator. During this period the curriculum was written by the Pri Skul Asosiesen Blong Vanuatu (PSBABV). However no training was provided at this time.

This department has had a very successful journey and through donor grants and government support has been able to develop materials, write learning standards, have a curriculum, hire Provincial Coordinators and also create an excellent policy titled " Early Childhood Care and Education" (2010) which addresses all the areas that make up a quality ECCE program.

It is important to note that ECCE is not available to all children in Vanuatu. According to the 2011 Ministry of Education statistics survey there are approximately 543 preschools in Vanuatu. There has been an increase in enrolment but it is important to note that a large percentage of children ages 4-5 do not attend preschool. There are several reasons for this:

- Lack of community support to establish a Kindy
- Lack of available resources and materials
- Inability to pay fees
- Distance and isolation
- Lack of understanding of the importance of ECCE by parents and communities

The government encourages communities to take ownership for ECCE and give approximately 14 million to ECCE to cover salaries, some training and materials. The estimated cost to educate a child in ECCE is about 12,000 VT (Ministry of Education Early Child Care and Education Policy2010).

### **Kindy Teachers**

Many Kindy teachers are poorly motivated due to issues of salary, support and poor working conditions. A significant number of teachers do not have enough resources, the provincial coordinators do not visit or monitor their work due to lack of travel funds, and they need constant refresher courses and training.

Training of ECCE teachers should continue to be localized and all teachers must eventually have certification in child development, play based learning, health and safety issues, child protection,

observation and assessment of children's learning, differentiating instruction for children with special needs, and skills to engage parents in a shared leadership model. There also has to be intensive training and or mentoring on how to support children with language development and communication (literacy) and numeracy. Teachers also need a strong foundation on how to teach multi grades. This is extremely difficult for most teachers and unless some guidance is provided children will suffer due to lack of consistent learning objectives.

It is advised that the first two years a strong emphasis be placed in at least three provinces ( Torba, Sanma, and Penama) and continue to maintain the rest of the program in other provinces while at the same time intensifying support for three provinces. This will assist in documenting lesson learned. This focused approach will support the Ministry to focus on training, instructional practice, standards, and a holistic play based approach to learning. This is an urgent call to ensure that children who are being taught in Kindy schools have the best qualified staff possible.

The policy now must be implemented and deliverables met. This is an almost impossible task with all the barriers and challenges to establish a quality Kindy for example:

- There are no travel funds for Provincial Coordinators to monitor and observe teachers and children
- Key teachers work full time and can only support the central office and Kindy teachers when there is a donor project
- There are vast differences in teachers qualifications, knowledge and skills around ECCE
- Teachers salaries vary greatly
- Some parents cannot afford fees
- There is a need for each Kindy to have a set of materials and resources at all times
- There is a lack of coordination among Kindy and primary teachers
- There are no funds for refresher courses
- Parent Committees are varied in terms of engagement, participation and support of Kindy's
- There are children in primary who have not gone through preschool and this greatly affects the ability of the primary teacher to cope with children who have and who have not attended preschool
- There is no suitable furniture for children

A policy review will take place in 2014 therefore there are two years left to fully implement a set of quality recommendations but unless the preschool department within the Ministry itself is reorganized it will be difficult to meet this goals. The government of Vanuatu needs to review its funding model and maybe initially share the ECCE costs by releasing Key teachers full time in particular in rural and disadvantaged areas.

The current curriculum and available resources need to be reviewed and updated to ensure they meet the international standards of quality, they provide a strong transition to primary schools, they support literacy and numeracy and they help teachers with planned and appropriate developmental activities

and goals for all Kindy children. This curriculum must also include suggestions on how to manage multi age Kindy's so that teachers are able to manage the variance in children's ages.

The present staffing structure has been in place for some time and with all the changes in funding, policies, and research on ECCE it is important to review the department to ensure it has the capacity to implement the changes needed to have a quality ECCE programme in Vanuatu.

### **A Regional Approach to Strengthen and Support Early Childhood Education and Care in the Ministry of Education**

The importance of ECCE is now recognized as a critical support for young children. Vanuatu focuses mostly on children ages 3 to five but with all the recent research it is crucial that the groundwork also be laid for children ages 0 to 3 and an integrated approach to children from ages 0 to 6 be the main vision for the future of early childhood care and education.

The period before birth is essential for maternal care, early identification of special needs children, stimulation and nutrition needs, parental support and health prevention. Investing in ECCE plays a direct role in the future of a country and in reducing poverty. In particular for the vision of Vanuatu which states that it wants "Healthy, Happy, and Wealthy Citizens" then ECCE should be the core of that vision.

It is unlikely that Vanuatu will be able to reduce poverty, child mortality, nutrition services, and infant stimulation if it does not invest and provide leadership in the creation of a safety net for parents and young children.

The Ministry of Education in Vanuatu has an excellent early childhood care and education policy which needs to be translated into action and results. This can only happen if the right environment is in place to support the implementation of this policy. Strategies for coordinating, monitoring, achieving results and implementation of specific goals cannot take place until some fundamental changes are in place.

The first call to action is to have a Ministry of Education department that can implement all the required measures needed for parents, community, children, teachers, donors, and other to see viable and strong results and impact on children's lives.

The current department is understaffed with just one National Preschool coordinator overseeing policy and program implementation and quality assurance across six provinces. The coordinator has six Provincial Coordinators who report to the local PEO and to the Provincial Preschool Coordinator. The six Provincial Coordinators have a variety of skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. A complete review of their role, qualifications, and skills needs to take place. Some of the Provincial Coordinators have not grown with their role and current expectations. This is a leadership role which requires strong commitment to upgrading existing knowledge and skills, strong technical expertise, willingness to travel

and support teachers on a regular basis and a passion for ECCE. It is recommended that these positions be reviewed and also restructured to support and lead the ECCE activities.

In the provinces there are also Key Teachers, who are teaching on a daily basis. The role of the Key teacher is probably one of the most important elements in the sustainability of ECCE. The Key teachers raise funds to meet monthly to discuss challenges, successes, and to review and upgrade a kit that was given to them for training of Kindy teachers. The Key teachers should be the first cadre of leaders who are trained in ECCE so they in turn can be role models for other teachers.

These Key teachers should be released and given a stipend so that for the next five years they can support the training of Kindy teachers, mentor the Kindy teachers, meet with parents, engage in a strong parental outreach, provide parental workshops, and engage in any other activities required to provide strong leadership in the provinces.

The Ministry of Education would focus on upgrading the skills of these key teachers, mentoring them, and ensuring that they are the key leaders of ECCE in all communities. This would provide a cadre of qualified people that in the next five years will be committed to working with parents, Kindy teachers, and their own professional growth. Key teachers would be the role models and mentors who would commit to their continual professional development.

Key teachers can provide on professional practice, undertake action research, and support instructional leadership. There are approximately 56 Key teachers and the government should commit to releasing them full time and supporting them to be the ECCE leaders in the provinces. This government contribution would greatly enhance and enrich the existing ECCE programme and support the government to lead, coordinate and integrate all ECCE initiatives. Key teachers would form clusters of interested Kindy teachers also to meet with and begin to plan for succession and career movement.

Key teachers can establish clusters made up of parents, Kindy teachers and community members who wish to be involved in the enhancement of ECCE in their zone and focus sharing knowledge, lessons learnt, and share needs and challenges as well as successes. These clusters can become a group of learning communities that share expectations, skills and knowledge with each other.

Kindy teachers need to be supported to:

- Teach multi grades
- Implement curriculum and play based learning effectively
- Work more effectively with families
- Develop skills to address challenging behavior
- Identify and support children who have special needs
- Understand the principles of child development
- Enhance their own vernacular language skills
- Know how to use resources and materials to enhance children's learning

The Ministry of Education needs to see this department not as a “stand alone” unit but as an integral part of everything the Ministry does. It should include the ECCE department in curriculum design, in the school improvement plans, in data collection, policy development and implementation, in parental outreach, and in special education initiatives. Without this new approach ECCE will continue to be a very successful initiative but with a lack of resources, power, and links to a child’s future learning. The Ministry has to harmonize teaching and learning and view children with a holistic approach so as to maximize and achieve educational goals.

A participatory approach that views ECCE as an important criterion for learning will support the Ministry and society with concerns about youth and retention, youth and employment, low literacy and numeracy levels, low academic achievement, and community engagement and understanding of the importance and value of education.

Ministry committees should always have an ECCE representative so that learning is seen as a continuum and a lifelong learning process. One or more generation of young children will be lost until government and civil society understand that young children are not “invisible” they are the foundation of our future and therefore must be an integral part of political leadership, community focus, and national investment.

The Ministry of Education should therefore rename the department and call it the **Early Childhood Care and Education Department** with the National Preschool Coordinator renamed as the **National ECCE Coordinator**. This ensures that the department responsibility is expanded to include all the various areas, stakeholders, and partners to focus on vulnerable young children and their parents. This title also aligns with all the ECCE international areas of focus and research.

The department should employ (on a contract basis) people who are competent and respected as leaders in the area of ECCE. These staff should have strong leadership, team building, and management and communication skills. They should all be experts in their specific areas of responsibility and commit to engage in lifelong learning.

This department should have two more staff to support the National ECCE Coordinator. One staff member should be responsible for overall curriculum and program quality, training and literacy and numeracy support. The second staff member should be responsible for monitoring and evaluation and support the data collection system used in the Ministry, ensure quality assurance standards of all Kindy’s monitor the Kindy’s , engage in the use of early identification and early readiness tools. . These two postings will enhance the focus and achievement of ECCE for the next five years. The two positions should be contract positions and ensure transition to other careers.

The National ECCE Coordinators role is to manage, supervise, engage with donors, influence policy, advocate for ECCE and ensure that all efforts are made to support Kindy’s in the field. The National ECCE Coordinator also manages budgets, reviews Kindy registration and adherence to safety and oversees staff engagement with the Kindy’s and parents. The National ECCE Coordinator develops a strategic plan to ensure that the vision and the goals of the ECCE policy are implemented and results reported on a yearly basis. The National Coordinator also ensure that any donor funds are used in the field and that a

strong system of accountability is in place to report results and challenges to donors on a quarterly or yearly basis. The National Coordinator takes a lead role in working with NGOs and donors to ensure the Ministry leadership is at the forefront of ECCE initiatives.

**The objective of the ECCE department should be to provide quality support and learning activities to all children ages 0 to 6 years of age. The focus should be on the following key areas which can only become a reality if more staff is hired and or the department is restructured to support the National ECCE Coordinator.**

Early years 0 to 3 years of age:

- Work with other government ministries, partners, donors, communities to ensure that parents and in particular mothers have prenatal support, nutrition and health prevention knowledge, understanding of the need for stimulation of young children and positive parenting skills. In particular work with fathers to help them understand their key role in parenting young children. Support the understanding and link of brain development and learning. Set up integrated services if possible as pilot models to ensure child survival and development.
- Prepare learning activity kits for parents and engage volunteers to train them on how to use them. The kits do not have to be costly and they should be focused on appropriate learning activities that parents can engage in with their children. Simply handing out a kit is not enough training and support should be provided. This kit should also link parents to Kindy's, schools and community health centres.
- Literacy and play groups should be established so parents can both learn and stimulate their children

3 to 6 years of age

- Quality programs, play groups, summer activities, and learning materials should be available to all children
- Early Identification of children should be a priority so that special needs children are not abandoned but support throughout their learning journey
- School readiness tools should be used to engage both parents and teachers to understand when a child is ready to enter Kindy
- Play based learning activities should be a priority for all children
- All ECCE facilities should be registered, licensed, monitored and visited on a yearly basis to ensure they meet Ministry standards
- A newsletter should go out two to three times a year with contributions from different Kindy teacher and the department to showcase lesson learned, share stories and activities to use in the classroom and celebrate the work of everyone engaged in ECCE
- Work closely with primary, special education, secondary, policy, school improvement, and grants units to ensure smooth transition for all children, integration of ECCE in all areas of the Ministry and understanding and support for ECCE

### Parent and Community Outreach

- A parental and community outreach strategy should be part of the departments role
- Annual parental campaigns on ECCE should be implemented
- Parent Committees should be monitored to ensure they function according to their roles and responsibilities
- Parent –teacher meeting should be established at least twice a year besides the Open Day
- Parents should be offered at least three workshops a year on areas and topics related to self regulation, nutrition, health, immunization, hygiene, reading, storytelling, boys and reading and other interests they might have to both enhance their knowledge and strengthen their links to education and the early years.
- Develop a strong yearly communication plan

### Professional Staff Development

- The department should develop a strategic plan to certify all Kindy teachers in the next five years
- Decentralize training so it is cost effective and engage Key teachers in these initiatives
- Establish an ECCE resource centre in each province, short small but include books, materials , if possible a computer, TV and videos for Kindy teachers to visit and use
- Refresher courses should be offered at least twice a year
- The Code of Ethics should be made available to all teachers
- Teachers should be visited, monitored and given feedback on their performance
- Provincial coordinators and department staff should role model by ensuring a continued interest in lifelong learning, increasing their research skills, engaging in reflective practice and producing materials for Kindy teachers to use.

### Policy and Legislation

- Review and ensure all polices recommendations are implemented
- Show case evidence by publishing results
- Monitor data and ensure responses to any red flags
- Use data to improve ECCE
- Add policy indicators , measures and outcomes to help achieve all the objectives of the policy

### Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation

- The department should monitor Kindy's on a regular basis to provide support and be proactive if there are any issues
- Frequent visits to teachers is important and engaging in teacher observation is demanded to provide reflective feedback on their instructional practice both indoors and outdoors



- Monitoring of the Provincial Coordinators and Key teachers is also important to ensure their professional growth and commitment to ECCE
- Developing observation tools, report, engaging in quality assurance, monitoring centres is an important role for the department
- Monitoring children's learning is also vital to ensure no child is left behind and individual support is provided to children who are struggling
- Reviewing the Ministry's data collection process and identifying any successes and challenges is part of the Kindy improvement process
- Engaging in quality assurance visits to monitor infrastructure, hygiene standards, materials, safety and resources is needed to maintain high standards for learning
- Annual sampling and reporting on results of engaging in ECCE is important to highlight and showcase the work of ECCE professionals, engagement of parents and community and the Ministry's commitment to the early years.

The role of the Provincial Coordinators would change in order to support Key Teachers and the Clusters. They would also focus on supporting the central Ministry office with registration and licensing of Kindy's observation and monitoring of teachers and teachers interaction with children, supporting parental and community engagement, writing yearly reports, ensuring Kindy teachers have materials and resources needed and proactively ensuring that access to Kindy is available to all children. It is recommended that these positions be appraised and monitored to ensure that all Provincial Coordinators meet the quality standards of working in ECCE.

The key teachers would take a more proactive and engaging role in the field. They would mentor, train, coach, and reach out to parents and communities.

#### Key Teachers (role and responsibilities)

- Support all central initiatives
- Build capacity of Kindy teachers
- Team teach
- Mentor and coach Kindy teachers
- Support teachers on a daily basis and visit schools
- Support registration and regulations
- Reach out to parents and communities
- Respond quickly to local issues
- Maximize the scarce materials and resources provided to ECCE centres
- Organize with partners parenting workshops on pre natal care, nutrition, value of ECCE, involve parents in schools
- Support early identification of special needs children
- Support early readiness identification involving teachers and parents
- Support adult literacy circles
- Ensure policy implementation

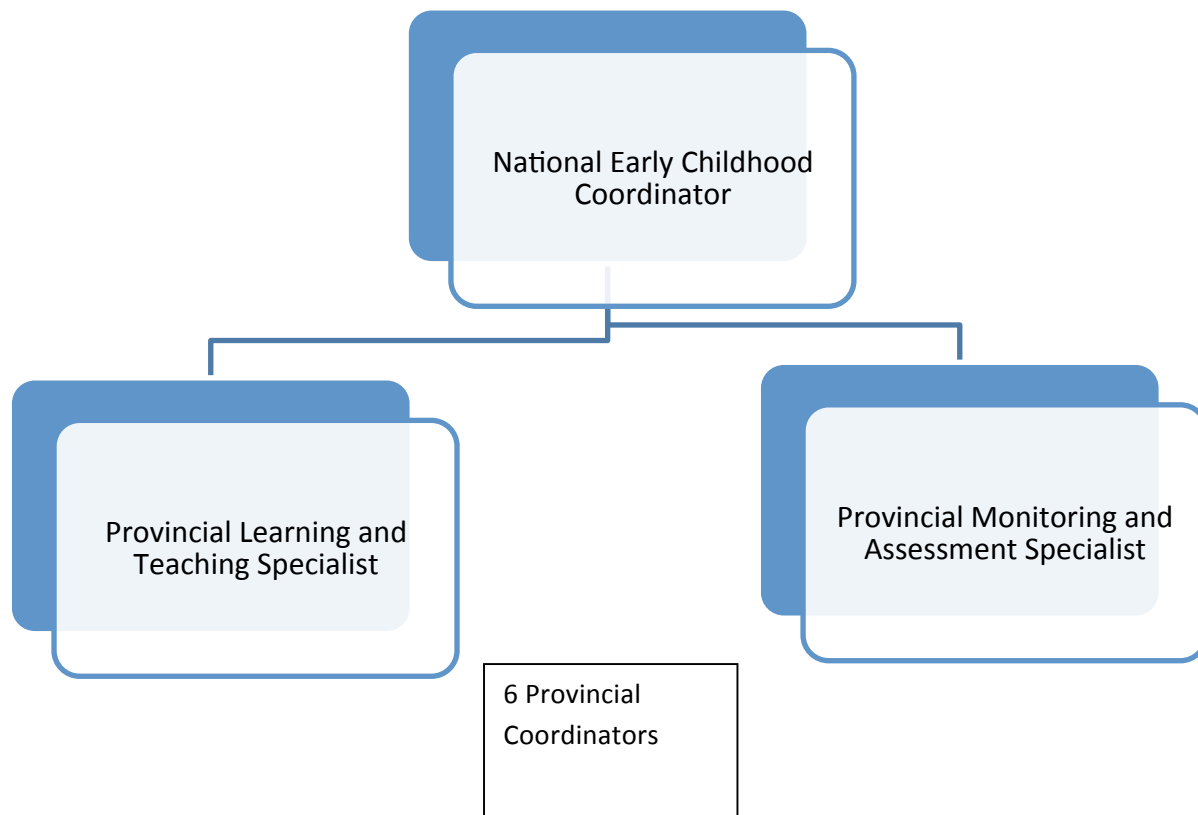
- Support understanding of curriculum goals and learning standards
- Work with health partners to integrate services for children 0 to 3 years of age
- Hold meetings between ECCE teachers and grade one, two and three teachers

Most of the above areas are addressed in the Early Childhood Care and Education Policy and some are not. It is evident from the list of actions that child development demands a holistic and integrated approach in all areas of growth: physical, mental, linguistic, emotional and social. It also ensures that children are healthy, well nourished, and live in a safe and clean environment.

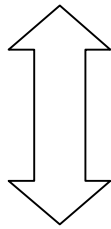
For any policy to be effective it demands that certain roles and responsibilities be assigned and described clearly so that accountability is highlighted and an action plan is in place. To achieve the targets specified in the policy and to meet donor expectations a detailed work plan, staffing, funds, and resources need to be attached to a policy. If this does not take place a policy is shelved instead of being translated into work that impacts children, parents, teachers, and communities in each province.

In these economic times results are not only required but demanded by most funding agencies. Most agencies want to see change taking place within the communities the governments serve and they also want sustainability. This can only take place if there are appropriate staff and funds to ensure that this happens. Basically a policy must become the groundswell for change and the evidence must be provided to ensure transparency and change in ECCE standards and quality.

The following diagram outlines the staffing of the MOE ECCE department:

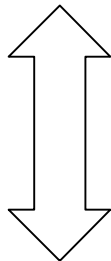


Key Teachers &  
Clusters (56)



**Two Provincial  
Coordinators**

**Two Provincial  
Coordinators**



**ECCE Clusters &  
Key Teachers**