

PRESS RELEASE

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1st Survey of ICTs in Schools: 4% Computer Literacy and 6% Internet Access

MoE, OGCIO and TRR Team Up to Identify School Needs in Information and Communications Technologies

The first-ever survey of the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in the Vanuatu schools has shown that only about six percent of schools have access to the Internet and four percent of students are computer literate. The estimated number of students per computer in the schools is 205, placing Vanuatu in the 4th percentile of all countries rated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The Ministry of Education (MoE), the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO), and the Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulator (TRR) teamed up to study this important issue, and found that while some schools are making significant progress, many more need substantial work. According to Jessy Dick, Director-General of the MoE, “Three distinct groups of schools were found. The first group was a small number of schools with computer labs used by the students. This group had high average computer literacy – about 71 percent -- and was composed entirely of secondary schools, or combined secondary-primary schools. Most of these schools were in or near Port Vila or Luganville. The second group was made up of schools with a few computers used exclusively by teachers and administrators. This group had very low student computer literacy. The third group had no computers or Internet access, and had virtually no computer literacy or competence.”

According to Fred Samuel, the Government Chief Information Officer, “The survey also showed that the two most important obstacles to increased usage of ICTs in the school are poor or no electrical power, and lack of teachers and support staff trained in ICTs.”

No schools were found in the survey which have fully integrated computing devices into the classrooms, although this is just getting underway in teaching music and some other courses in the Central School at Port Vila. No tablets were found in the schools, instead desktop computers and a few laptops were the norm. The six percent figure of schools with Internet access placed Vanuatu in the 14th percentile of countries reporting to the ITU on this measure. Education officials surveyed overwhelmingly (over 94 percent) agreed that up until recently, ICTs had been given “low” or “very low” priority in their school districts.

The worst-off province in terms of ICT access was Torba, in which it was estimated that no schoolchildren have access to ICTs and only two percent of schools have Internet access, used by teachers and administrators.

According to Jessy Dick of the MoE, “The survey indicates that a key factor in improving computer literacy in the schools is introducing computer labs. This ties in well with our planned strategy to create computer labs in more schools, with these labs also doubling as community learning, Internet and ICT-access points.”

The survey was conducted in January during a meeting of principals and provincial education officers from around the country at MoE headquarters. CIO Samuel, Deputy Chairman of the National ICT Development Committee, noted that “This was an initial survey of a relatively small sample of principals and officials, and hence the information must be considered preliminary. But it does give an indication of the magnitude of the issue. It shows that the National ICT Development Committee was right in selecting education as a high priority sector to address immediately.”

Concluded Jessy Dick of the MoE, “It is clear that there is a lot of work to do for Vanuatu to catch up with world-class standards in this area, which involve high computer literacy, high access to ICTs and the Internet, and tablets or computers integrated into normal classroom learning. But measuring and acknowledging the extent of the need is the first step toward addressing the issue. We are committed to integrating the careful measurement of progress on this issue into our on-going management information system, and we are committed to improving the learning environment for our children.”

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