

Press Release:

Ministry of Education Hands Over ‘Classroom without Walls’ Aptus device to TRR

Aptus or the ‘Classroom without Walls’ is a small mobile wireless device developed by the Commonwealth of Learning. It is of very low power and can be charged from any standard USB charger. Importantly, it does not require any connectivity and operates on an integrated wireless router that enables teachers and students access to rich educational digital materials.

On Tuesday the 7th of April 2015, the Minister of Education, Honorable Bob Loughman, , handed over twenty(20) of these devices to the Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulator (TRR) as part of the Government’s Universal Access Policy (UAP) Programs currently being implemented by TRR. This handing over ceremony was witnessed and attended by Mr. George J Maeltoka, the PEO – Higher Education, and Vanuatu’s Commonwealth of Learning (COL) Focal point contact person, and the Executive Officer to Ministry of Education’s Director General’s Office, Mr. Yoan Mariasua.

This mobile device will provide schools, teachers, students and parents in Vanuatu with opportunities that include:

- Accessing digital resources and a library without the need for a physical library; as in the tradition schooling system.
- Access to rich educational content without the need for connecting to the internet: such as Wikipedia for schools containing 6000 articles, Khan Academy videos covering topics relevant to learners in primary or secondary schools, and a whole library of free e-books will also be made available.
- Enriching teachers knowledge in specific syllabus areas that teachers may not yet be aware of, as well as topics on technology.
- Modules, own cloud, Wikipedia Search provided by the device can provide greater participation in teaching and learning - teacher and students, as well as reaching personal level-making; making learning a fun and flexible experience.
- Content of curriculum topics that is internationally recognized.
- Creation of local content that suits school, students or teachers educational needs.

The availability of these devices is the result of a long and very close working relationship between the COL and the Vanuatu government through the Ministry of Education. Hosted by the Government of Canada, and headquartered in Vancouver, Canada, the Commonwealth of Learning is the world’s only intergovernmental organization solely concerned with the promotion and development of distance education and open learning.

In conjunction with the Government’s UAP and the recent devastating impact of Cyclone PAM on school infrastructure around the country, this set of devices will be in dire need to assist urgent restoration of learning resources; as many schools were severely destroyed during the cyclone. In addition, under UAP the Vanuatu Government through the Ministry of Education has aspired to develop the learning capacity of all Ni-Vanuatu children by improving their literacy and numeracy capability through use of ICT.

“I believe that through these Aptus devices, schools and students will not be disadvantaged and come to realize the usefulness and usage of these devices,” said Minister Bob Loughman. He added that Vanuatu will be among other African countries and Island states that have benefitted from this Aptus device. The devices have been configured to suit our country context, as it makes use of low-cost, commercially available devices and the latest technologies to deliver a

high impact solution for learners and educators struggling to operate in ‘unconnected’ environments – locations where access to grid power and the internet is limited or unavailable.

“My vision is for this device can establish the notion that teaching and learning does not necessarily carried out within a four walls of the classroom, but using ICT to meet students' expectations and learning needs, said Minister Bob Loughman. “Literacy and numeracy can be addressed through such a device since it appeals to individual learner and the learner manages it rather than the teacher”.

The proposed strategy is to train teachers and students on how to use the device and upload the contents on remote storage or tablets, laptops, local school server for daily accessibility.

Minister Bob Loughman acknowledged the support that the Ministry of Education has been receiving from the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) and from TRR in connecting schools through the Government’s UAP.

In response, TRR’s Consumer and Corporate Affairs Manager, Ms. Dalsie Baniala stressed that the occasion marks an important milestone of the UAP projects being undertaken by TRR, as the implementer of Government’s UAP. TRR considers this additional step forward in meeting its implementation plan timeframes under UAP as an important one. With this additional step forward comes additional challenges said Ms. Baniala, but these challenges can be addressed amicably and appropriately with the Ministry of Education’s collaboration and support to fulfilling and meeting the Government’s UAP objectives.

TRR is currently implementing three ICT programs; two of which are primarily targeting schools and one targeting small businesses. Fifteen (15) schools were selected under the Computer Lab and Internet community Center (CLICC) program and Seven (7) schools under the Tablets for Students (TFS) program. The Aptus devices will be used at a number of these schools for students and teachers use. The functionality presented in the COL Aptus Classroom without Wall device will be replicated and used across all schools under both programs.