VANUATU EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2030
Independent Appraisal Report

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Disclaimer

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# Contents

**Executive Summary** ........................................................................................................................................ 4  
**Recommendation of endorsement** ..................................................................................................................... 8  
**List of Acronyms** ........................................................................................................................................... 9  
**Context** ......................................................................................................................................................... 10  
**Preparation of the VETSS and consultative process** .......................................................................................... 11  
  - **Process** ..................................................................................................................................................... 11  
  - **Consultation** ............................................................................................................................................... 12  
  - **Technical Assistance and Capacity Development** ....................................................................................... 12  
**Evidence-based Education Sector Analysis** ........................................................................................................ 12  
  - **The Education and Training Sector Analysis and the main issues of the system** .......................................... 12  
  - **Summary of the ETSA in the VETSS** .......................................................................................................... 14  
**Relevance of policies and programmes** ............................................................................................................ 15  
  - **Overview** .................................................................................................................................................. 15  
  - **Access** ...................................................................................................................................................... 16  
  - **Quality** .................................................................................................................................................... 17  
  - **Management** ............................................................................................................................................ 19  
**Monitoring and Evaluation Framework** ........................................................................................................... 21  
  - **Monitoring arrangements** .......................................................................................................................... 21  
  - **Results framework** ...................................................................................................................................... 22  
  - **Indicators and data sources** ....................................................................................................................... 22  
  - **Baselines and Targets** .............................................................................................................................. 25  
**Risks and Feasibility** ........................................................................................................................................... 26  
  - **Risks** .......................................................................................................................................................... 26  
  - **Feasibility** .................................................................................................................................................. 27  
**Simulations, costs and financing** ....................................................................................................................... 28  
  - **Costing model** ............................................................................................................................................. 28  
  - **Costs** .......................................................................................................................................................... 29  
  - **Hypotheses and targets** .................................................................................................................................. 30  
  - **Financing and financing gap** ....................................................................................................................... 31
Executive Summary

The present report presents the findings of the independent appraisal of the Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategic plan (VETSS), following the GPE - UNESCO IIEP Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal. The recommendations made throughout the report are compiled at the end of this summary, and organised by importance and urgency to address.

The final VETSS is the result of a long process initiated in 2017 with the formal establishment of the Local Education Group and the development of the Education and Training Sector Analysis (ETSA). This process appears to have been new for the country, as for many in the Pacific region: while there was already an education strategy for the period 2007-2016, it appears that it was not grounded in the same levels of evidence, consultation and technical work as the present plan.

The ETSA constitutes the evidence base for the design of the plan, identifying the main issues in the system, including in terms of relatively low access in ECE and secondary, low efficiency in primary (partly due to high repetition), inequities in terms of access and learning, in particular between the French and English streams, and needs for institutional capacity strengthening. The ETSA appears comprehensive, and to be well owned by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET).

Based on the findings of the ETSA, the MoET led a consultative process to develop the VETSS, including all ministry directorates, as well as a wide range of stakeholders (including provincial governments representatives, women groups, youth groups, local NGOs, primary and secondary school headmasters, community members, councils of chiefs) in all provinces. All development partners and CSOs consulted applauded the consultative nature of the VETSS development.

The VETSS is organised along three strategic pillars, in line with 2009 Education Road Map, the Interim VETSS (2017-18), and the 2018-2020 Corporate Plan. Each pillar is unpacked into Outcomes, Strategies and Activities. Clear linkages are made throughout the document between the issues identified in the ETSA and the pillars, as well as specific challenges to be addressed by each of the strategies, which results in a strong, well justified policy design, although an explicit and visual Theory of Change could facilitate the reader’s overall comprehension of the plan, and help identify some minor logical and structural inconsistencies.

Equity is a main concern addressed under the Access pillar, including through the removal of financial barriers identified as bottleneck for disadvantaged populations, but is also a focus under the Quality pillar, to ensure all population groups benefit from the specific policies to improve learning outcomes. These strategies include the strengthening, support and professional development of the teaching force, reviews of curricula as well as support to school leaders and to School Based Management. Efficiency is also adequately addressed, including through the elimination of grade repetition, the development of an infrastructure maintenance policy, a revision of the school grants policy and overall institutional strengthening of the MoET.

New monitoring arrangements are being developed for the VETSS, notably through the introduction of Joint Sector reviews, previously absent in the monitoring and coordination arrangements of the sector. Additional quarterly and monthly reporting from departments and schools are also suggested, although these might constitute an unnecessary burden on the already strained ministry capacity.
The Result Framework, which provides indicators for each of the outcomes, strategies and activities, appears as the weakest point of the VETSS. A number of those indicators are not SMART, and will constitute a challenge for the MoET to monitor during the implementation of the VETSS. A number of standard indicators (such as repetition rate, NER, GER, Completion rates, exam success rates) are absent from the Result Framework, making it difficult to monitor the process in addressing the issues identified in the ETSA. The new indicators developed instead are generally overly complicated, unspecific, and lack a baseline. The MoET is however aware of these issues and have identified a process, with international technical assistance support, to address them.

The risks to the successful implementation of the VETSS are well identified, grouped under four main areas of Institutional Capacity and Constraints; Environmental Vulnerability; COVID-19 and Pandemic Risks; and Government Finance and Donor Commitment Risks. The MoET is to be commended for including a consideration of the latest pandemic, as well as for including in the VETSS a strong Disaster Risk Reduction and Management component. Nevertheless, the low institutional capacity, in part linked to the small size of the MoET, and the dependency on and volatility of external support will remain risks to be closely monitored and addressed during the VETSS implementation.

The costing model and the implementation plan of the VETSS are in fact integrated in a 10-year costed action plan. Much effort has been put into costing each of the 130 activities of the plan, and identifying timelines, responsible actors, and the share of the costs that could be covered by the MoET or remain unfunded. As such, this integrated costed action plan is likely to be very helpful for the MoET to annual plans and budgets, although the introduction of Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks by the Ministry of Finance could also help medium-term planning.

The operational feasibility and financial affordability of the VETSS are undermined by presumably over-ambitious targets in terms of the elimination of Out-of-School children and the universalisation of school grants from ECE to senior secondary schools. Very rapid increases in enrolments in the very first years (or year) of the VETSS, especially in secondary, with no elasticity in the Teacher-Pupil Ratio, translate in substantial needs for teacher training and recruitment, and school constructions, as well as a steep increase in the teacher remuneration. In addition, the provision of school grants to all schools to cover these increased number of students results in the school grants policy representing up to 77% of the VETSS activities total costs. The ambition of universalisation of senior secondary by 2025 is likely to prove unachievable in the current context, but a revision of the targets and the updating of the baselines in light of recent progress in terms of enrolment is likely to lead to much more sustainable financial needs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key recommendations** to be addressed as a priority (before full endorsement)</th>
<th>Para.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➔ Revise all indicators in order to simplify and streamline them, ensuring that they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound(^1). Each indicator should include only one measurement (where possible and relevant disaggregated on one or two inequity dimensions of interest).</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Utilize standardised education indicators wherever possible, with priority given to those used in the ETSA and required as part of SDG 4 reporting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Ensure that when all indicators are revised baselines are included, and that new targets are also devised, based on the new indicator and informed by the baseline and the expected available funding.</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<th>Recommendations* to strengthen the VETSS (by the first Joint Sector Review)</th>
<th>Para.</th>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Revise the targets (and/or indicator) related to increase of access to education at the different levels. A more linear increase could be envisaged for the first years, and/or differentiated targets for each education level (recognizing in particular that senior secondary enrolments are likely to occur later, when larger proportions of cohorts complete junior secondary, and senior secondary school grants are introduced).</td>
<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Revise the targets which drive the increase in teacher hiring and remuneration, namely the enrolment increases (especially at senior secondary level) and/or the Pupil-Teacher Ratios, to ensure short- and medium-term financial sustainability of the plan.</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<th>Recommendations to address during the implementation of the ESSP</th>
<th>Para.</th>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Ensure that the capacity development needs identified by the MoET, in particular regarding the VETSS costing and M&amp;E framework are effectively addressed.</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Support the data collection of VEMIS to estimate the impact of the recent crises and update the plan’s baselines and targets accordingly.</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>➔ Conduct the analysis of the PILNA data to complement the description of learning achievement with useful international comparisons.</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>➔ When applicable, include references to measurable indicators in the ETSA in the “Challenge to be addressed” sections, this will provide an even closer connection with the content of the ETSA and help identify the key indicators to include in the M&amp;E framework.</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>➔ Include a comprehensive theory change that explicitly links a limited number of key activities, to strategies to outcomes to the high-level pillar results.</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Review detail of proposed activities to ensure that all are aligned to related strategies and intended outcomes, and are located under the most appropriate pillar.</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>➔ Ensure, during the implementation of the VETSS, that the revision of the school grant formula is based on the strongest possible evidence base, in order to efficiently address barriers to education.</td>
<td>27</td>
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\(^1\) Designing a Results Framework for Achieving Results: A How-to Guide. World Bank, 2012
| ➔ | Review and optimize the sequencing and prioritisation of the acts, policies, and plans that are to be developed/reviewed and implemented. | 28 |
| ➔ | Review lists of activities to avoid duplication and any inconsistencies, e.g. activities relating to teacher standards and codes of conduct. | 29 |
| ➔ | Ensure that activities under VETSS Outcome “Improved learning outcomes across all year groups” are designed and implemented to address identified inequities in learning outcomes. | 30 |
| ➔ | Review and rearrange the strategies under the first two outcomes of the Management pillar, potentially with one outcome focussing on the support to school level planning and the other focussing on devolution from central to province. | 33 |
| ➔ | Activities supporting the use of EMIS data should be informed by stakeholders’ and decision-makers’ data needs as well as some strategic direction over what type of decisions should be made based on the newly available data, e.g. targeting school resources to areas with lower levels. | 36 |
| ➔ | Reconsider the cost-benefit of comprehensive quarterly reviews; an alternative may be lighter but more thematically focussed reviews of challenging areas at the annual mid-point of action plan implementation. | 37 |
| ➔ | Clarify the members and organisational location of the VETSS Monitoring Team, especially in relation to the M&E unit of PPD, as well as the expected process for their development of the consolidated annual performance report. | 38 |
| ➔ | Clarify the process of the Joint Sector Review, and the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry and its partners/LEG within it. | 38 |
| ➔ | Reconsider the proposed monthly reporting from school to central level, and prioritise the efficient use of school level data at the planned annual reviews. | 39 |
| ➔ | Include a Risk Assessment Matrix, with rated risks and mitigation measures. | 48 |
| ➔ | Ensure that the MFAT-DFAT joint support program (as well as all other DPs’ support) is well aligned with the VETSS to limit additional burden on the MoET and support the achievement of the VETSS objectives; and consider consolidating the VETSS, MFAT-DFAT joint support program and PacREF activities into a unified Action Plan to facilitate sequencing and coordination. | 51 |
| ➔ | Ensure that the LEG meetings are adequately formalised and utilised for VETSS and partners coordination, alignment, and the identification and addressing of issues as they arise during implementation. | 52 |
| ➔ | Assess the capacity of the MoET to train and recruit additional teachers and to build new schools and classrooms once the enrolment targets are adjusted. | 54 |
| ➔ | Encourage and work with Ministry of Finance to develop Medium Term Expenditure Frameworks, which will improve the quality of projections of available resources and facilitate realistic medium-term planning. | 66 |
| ➔ | Encourage development partners to make multi-year commitments, and at a minimum provide funding projections, to support medium-term planning. | 67 |
| ➔ | Revise the targets for the provision of the school grants, in particular in senior secondary. | 71 |
Recommendation of endorsement

Based on the present review, it is the appraisal team’s conclusion that the VETSS 2020-2030 is a well prepared and comprehensive strategic plan for the Education and Training sector of Vanuatu, resulting from a highly participative government-led process. Recognizing that the issues highlighted above should not hinder the initial implementation of the VETSS and that a clear plan has already been agreed upon to address the streamlining and standardizing of the Result Framework in particular, and subject to this plan being effectively carried out, the team recommends that the Local Education Group endorses the VETSS 2020-2030 as the sector’s strategic roadmap for all stakeholders to align to.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>Coronavirus Disease 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>CTT</td>
<td>Core Technical Team (MoET)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFAT</td>
<td>Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</td>
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<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Development Partner</td>
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<td>DRR</td>
<td>Disaster Risk Reduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRRM</td>
<td>Disaster Risk Reduction and Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECCE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Care and Education</td>
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<td>ECE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
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<td>EMIS</td>
<td>Education Management Information System</td>
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<td>ESP</td>
<td>Education Sector Plan</td>
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<td>ESPDG</td>
<td>Education Sector Plan Development Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESSP</td>
<td>Education Sector Strategic Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>ETS</td>
<td>Education and Training Sector Analysis</td>
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<td>GER</td>
<td>Gross Enrolment Ratio</td>
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<td>GPE</td>
<td>Global Partnership for Education</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communications Technology</td>
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<td>IIEP</td>
<td>International Institute for Education Planning</td>
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<td>JSR</td>
<td>Joint Sector Review</td>
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<td>LEG</td>
<td>Local Education Group</td>
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<td>MFAT</td>
<td>New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade</td>
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<td>MoET</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Training</td>
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<td>NER</td>
<td>Net Enrolment Rate</td>
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<td>NSDP</td>
<td>National Strategic Development Plan</td>
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<td>NTDP</td>
<td>National Teacher Development Plan</td>
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<td>OOSC</td>
<td>Out-of-School Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>PILNA</td>
<td>Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment</td>
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<td>PPD</td>
<td>Policy and Planning Division (MoET)</td>
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<td>PSET</td>
<td>Post-School Education and Training sector</td>
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<td>PTR</td>
<td>Pupil-Teacher Ratio</td>
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<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
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<td>SIPS</td>
<td>School Improvement Plan</td>
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<td>TA</td>
<td>Technical Assistance</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Education, Science and Training Organisation</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>VAST</td>
<td>Vanuatu Standardized Test of Achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>VEMIS</td>
<td>Vanuatu Education Management Information System</td>
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<tr>
<td>VETSS</td>
<td>Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategic plan</td>
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The present appraisal report presents the finding of the appraisal of the Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategic plan 2020-2030, more commonly referred to as VETSS.

The appraisal report was prepared remotely between February and May 2020 by the appraisal team, composed of Luc Gacougnolle, Dr Seu’ula Johansson-Fua and Daniel Kelly.

The appraisal followed the GPE–UNESCO IIEP Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal and involved a desk review of key documents and consultations with major stakeholders in the process through teleconferences (cf. Annex I for the complete list of those consulted).

The desk review examined chiefly the VETSS, and its Result Framework and Costing Model, but also included:

- The 2018 Education and Training Sector Analysis
- The OPEN VEMIS Policy
- The Barriers to Education report
- The statistical digest report 2016 – 2018
- The 2017-2018 Interim Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategy
- The Ministry of Education and Training Corporate Plan 2018 - 2020
- The Urban School Study report
- Vanuatu 2030: The People's Plan (National Sustainable Development Plan 2016 to 2030)

While applying the methodology promoted by the GPE – UNESCO IIEP Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal, the team endeavoured to take account of the particular context of Vanuatu as a small island country, including in terms of its geographical setup, the small size of its population and institutions, and their lack of experience in GPE processes of Education Sector Analyses and Plans.

The external appraisal team wishes to express their gratitude to all who contributed to the report for their time and openness in engaging with and supporting the appraisal process.
Preparation of the VETSS and consultative process

Process

1. The Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategic plan (VETSS) 2020-2030 in its current form is the result of a planning process initiated in 2017, when the MoET started undertaking the Education and Training Situation Analysis (ETSA), with support from the Global Partnership for Education’s (GPE) Education Sector Plan Development Grant (ESPDG). This process appears to have been new for the country, as for many in the Pacific region. While there was already an education strategy for the period 2007-2016, it appears that it was not grounded in the same levels of evidence, consultation and technical work as the present plan.

2. To steer the planning process and comply with GPE expectations when applying for the ESPDG, the MoET created for the first time a Local Education Group (LEG), including all key education stakeholders. A former Education Partner Group (EPG) existed previously, created in 2006 by the MoET, and served as the coordinating tool for MoET, demonstrating commitment to the Paris Declaration. The LEG, chaired by the Minister of Education and Training himself, illustrates the leadership of the MoET in the whole planning process. Unfortunately, it seems that the LEG has, in recent times, been dominated by the GPE membership and processes agenda, and has had less of its coordination function. The MoET is currently working on redefining the purpose of the LEG to make sure it fulfils this core coordinating role. The VESP steering committee, composed of the MoET, DFAT as the Lead Coordinating Agency, Save the Children (ESPIG Grant Agent) and UNICEF (ESPDG Grant Agent), is directly connected to the LEG.

3. The ETSA was conducted in 2017 by the MoET, with some technical assistance (cf. below). To that end, a Core Technical Team (CTT) was created, which was leading the data collection and consultations, assisted by the technical assistance, and reporting directly to the Director of Planning.

4. A series of workshops were then held to identify the priorities of the VETSS and prepare the policy design. Unfortunately, the consulting firm which was contracted to support the MoET in the development of the VETSS and guide them through the process failed to communicate the good practices and expectations of a sound Education Sector Plan (ESP), in particular in terms of costing. While the process of developing the VETSS led to a good content of policies and strategies, with a strong emphasis on equity, quality and management, the plan needed some restructuring to facilitate its understanding and implementation, and was missing a costing. Contractual disagreement between the consulting firm and UNICEF (as a grant agent for the GPE ESPDG) resulted in the firm discontinuing its support, leaving the MoET to finalise the VETSS on their own. Eventually, an international consultant was mobilized to support the restructuring and costing of the plan. Additional workshops were held with the staff from the various directorates, to review the activities, restructure the plan in a more impact-oriented manner and calculate the unit costs and expected resources and needs in the different areas of the plan.

5. All stakeholders consulted during the appraisal recognized and lauded the high level of leadership of the MoET, and of ownership of the whole process, from the ETSA to the final VETSS. The data collection, consultation and policy design appear to have been led by the CTT with only limited support from the external technical assistance. A Steering Committee was also created, chaired by the MoET Director of Planning and including the grant agent (UNICEF) and Local Coordinating Agency (DFAT). In addition, the
MoET Senior Management Team, which brings together all the MoET directors and is chaired by the Director General, was regularly briefed during the process and provided direction when decisions were to be made. It is important to note that this leadership from the MoET is particularly laudable in the context of limited human resources in the ministry, with staff needing to work after-hours and over weekends to develop the VETSS while maintaining the normal operation of the ministry.

Consultation

6. As stated above, the process of development of the VETSS appears to have been very consultative. On the government side, all MoET directors were involved through the Senior Management Team meetings, and their staff participated in workshops to develop the strategies of the plan. Regional consultations were held during the development of the ETSA, to collect data and crosscheck data from EMIS, and during the preparation of the VETSS, to share results from the ETSA and to seek input into the policies and strategies. Provincial consultations were thus held in all 6 provincial centres, and included provincial governments representatives, women groups, youth groups, local NGOs, primary and secondary school headmasters, community members, councils of chiefs, etc. Churches, which operate a significant proportion of the schools in the country, were also consulted at the national and sub-national level.

7. All development partners and CSOs consulted applauded the consultative nature of the VETSS development. These partners were consulted throughout the process and recognized the consideration given to their comments and suggestions at various stages.

Technical Assistance and Capacity Development

8. The MoET was supported in the preparation of the ETSA and the VETSS by international technical assistance (TA), initially through a consulting firm which accompanied the MoET through the development of the ETSA and the first draft of the VETSS. Unfortunately, it appears that the firm refused to help develop missing pieces of this first draft, in particular the costing of the plan, which it did not consider part of the contract. This resulted in the termination of said contract and their support, and in the MOET being left to themselves to address identified areas of improvement in the VETSS. Eventually, an individual consultant was mobilized to support the MoET in the most technical aspects of the plan’s costing and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

9. Despite being supported by international TA, the MoET CTT appears to have worked mostly independently in developing the ETSA and VETSS, organising themselves into different sections of the sector to collect data, conducting consultation and technical workshops, and writing the document. With the Policy and Planning Division (PPD) having been recently strengthened, and a number of the new planning officers having newly graduated from university, the whole process appears to have been a great learning-by-doing capacity development experience. On the more technical aspects of the plan’s costing and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, time constraints resulted in only the MoET officers directly involved in the work to be familiar with the tools. However, the MoET has already identified the need for further capacity development of the whole PPD on these aspects, in order for them to take full ownership of these tools, and for technical officers in planning and finance divisions to make the most of them in
their daily work. The Director of PPD mentioned being very satisfied with the professional development of his staff that resulted from the development of the VETSS.

➔ **Recommendation:** Ensure that the capacity development needs identified by the MoET, in particular regarding the VETSS costing and M&E framework are effectively addressed.

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**Evidence-based Education Sector Analysis**

**The Education and Training Sector Analysis and the main issues of the system**

10. As explained above, the preparation of the VETSS was informed by the preparation of the ETSA in 2018. The work of the CTT was supported by the Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Analysis and Planning project through a contract by UNICEF to Coffey International Development. The ETSA is a well-built report which provides a comprehensive view on the education and training system. It focuses on key themes: National Context; Enrolment, Retention, and Out of School Children; Cost and Financing and Cross-Cutting Issues (Gender Equity and Inclusion in Education, VEMIS, Communication, Disaster Management and Climate Change), before providing more detailed analysis on the three main education levels: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), School Sector (Primary and Secondary Education) and Post-School Education and Training (PSET) Sector. The data for enrolment at ECCE, Primary and Secondary level, as well as learning outcomes, are presented at various disaggregated levels including male and female and urban and rural locations.

11. The ETSA addresses key issues in relation to physical access to education including infrastructure and school facilities; meeting school fees, distance to travel and poor roads to schools; parental support for education and in particular favour of boys over girls’ education during times of hardship. The GER and NER figures given for the primary and secondary sectors concurs with the analysis of inefficiency in the system. The GER and the NER are presented over a three-year period, disaggregated for boys and girls as well as per province. Further to this, the retention rates are also presented indicating a large proportion of students leaving school before completion.

12. The ETSA also further identifies key issues that affect access to achievement at primary and secondary level. In particular, the quality of teachers, with a significant number of underqualified and unqualified teachers with an estimated 40% of teachers in primary school with no qualifications beyond secondary school, while 88% of the teachers in secondary schools are defined as under-qualified. The issue of teacher qualification is further compounded with lack of clarity around teacher recruitment and placements. The ETSA presents data on Student-Teacher Ratio as well as projected attrition rate of teachers for the next 10 years (to 2030); both sets of data suggest to the need for the finalization of the draft teacher recruitment and posting policy (2016) and the draft National Teacher Development Plan (2018). The geography and the linguistic diversity of Vanuatu will require a policy on teacher recruitment that is context specific.

13. The ETSA also addresses issues related to internal efficiency in the system. This includes the GER for primary that is well over 100% indicating overage and/or underage children at this level. At Secondary
level, NER is only 44% indicating that large proportion of children have been pushed out of the system between primary and secondary school level. At secondary level, the gender gap in favour of girls appears to be widening, in 2015 secondary GER for girls was 52% compared to 50%, in 2018 the GERs were 51% and 45% respectively.

14. The ETSA also presents data on the retention rate by class levels and by year with dataset from 2015 to 2018. The data presented indicates the drop in retention rates as students’ progress from primary to secondary and further drop between junior and senior secondary.

15. While the Summary of the ETSA presents data at macro level for student ‘participation’ by way of presenting rate of survival for primary and secondary, there is minimal presentation of data on student’s achievement level. The data on student achievement level ascertained from the Vanuatu Standardized Test of Achievement (VANSTA) gives a ‘voice’ to student’s experiences and participation in the system. While the data is available and the analysis had been carried out, it is worthwhile to highlight the level of student achievement and ‘participation’ in the system.

16. It is important to note that there appears to be some issues with the reliability of VEMIS figures. The Urban School Study, for instance, noticed discrepancies in the order of 15% between VEMIS data and the enrolment figures collected based on a survey in urban schools (16% in primary enrolment, 14% in secondary schools’ enrolment). This issue is of particular importance, because VEMIS data is not only used for planning and monitoring, but also for the allocation of the school grants. The MoET is however conscious of the issue, and the VETSS appropriately includes activities to strengthen VEMIS, including data collection, data verification and cleaning, as well as dissemination and feedback to schools and communities to improve accountability and quality assurance. Besides, the inclusion of students’ performance and unique identifier into EMIS will allow for stronger analysis and monitoring in the future.

17. The sector analysis of the Vanuatu student enrolment, retention and out of school were conducted using data sets from 2015 – 2018. Although there has been near 18 months lapse since the completion of the sector analysis, it is unlikely that there have been any significant changes in the trend for enrolment, retention and out of school data results for 2019.

18. However, the devastation caused by Cyclone Harold and the impact of the COVID-19 will have an impact on the enrolment, retention and out of school data for 2020. As the ETSA data showed a drop in enrolment in 2016 after cyclone Pam, it is likely that similar patterns may also be observed in the aftermath of Cyclone Harold and the economic impact of COVID-19.

✈️ Recommendation: Support the data collection of VEMIS to estimate the impact of the recent crises and update the plan’s baselines and targets accordingly.

Summary of the ETSA in the VETSS

19. The VETSS builds on a summary of the ETSA, which follows the same structure: the context of the country and its education system, the latest trends in participation (Net and Gross Enrolment Rates), retention and out-of-school children, and cross-cutting issues, followed by a more detailed review of each sub-sector. In addition, the overview of the sector offers a summary of the findings of the “Barriers to
education” report, developed in 2018. Finally, it provides more detailed data and analysis on domestic funding, learning outcomes and inequities.

20. Overall, this overview of the sector provides a solid basis for the development of the policies. Key contextual challenges (geographical location and distribution, vulnerability to natural disasters, small but fast-growing population…) are well identified, as are the challenges associated with the reduction of out-of-school students and the expected increase of enrolment. The review of the cross-cutting issues offers a rare and welcome insight into qualitative aspects of inclusion, data management, communication and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). The summary of the “Barriers to education” report provides useful micro beneficiary-level information on the challenges of bringing and keeping children and youth in school. The equity aspects are examined in terms of participation and learning achievements, as well as learning environment (learning materials, teachers, infrastructure), along several dimensions (gender, region, French/English school system). A good overview of the learning achievement is given based on results from the national exams as well as from a pilot Year 4 and Year 6 literacy and numeracy sample test. Unfortunately, the results of the PILNA were not available to be used in the VETSS.

⇒ Recommendation: Conduct the analysis of the PILNA data to complement the description of learning achievement with useful international comparisons.

Relevance of policies and programmes

Overview

21. The VETSS is aligned to the Vanuatu National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP), specifically Pillar 1 – Society, Goal 2: Quality Education - An inclusive, equitable and quality education system with life-long learning for all and its four policy objectives. The content and structure of the VETSS is based on the three broad areas of: Access; Quality; and Management that were introduced during the design of the Vanuatu Education Road Map in 2009 and continued into the Interim VETSS (2017-18), and the Corporate Plan (2018-20). The three broad areas are articulated in terms of three “Strategic Pillars”

   a. Access\(^2\): Increase equitable ACCESS to education for all people at all levels of education of Vanuatu
   b. Quality: Improve the QUALITY of education
   c. Management: Improve planning, fiscal and financial MANAGEMENT

22. The three pillars provide a clear and concise overarching structure in addition to continuity with previous strategic documents. The three pillars, are unpacked along the following structures: Key Pillars -> VETSS Outcomes -> Strategies -> Key Activities. Key issues identified in the ETSA are clearly grouped under each of the three pillars, along with one or two policy and strategy responses.

\(^2\) Sometimes labelled as “Access and Equity”
Furthermore, when strategies are presented, they are accompanied by a short section linking the strategy back to the ETSA, “Challenge to be addressed”, and a section outlining the rationale for the strategy. These sections help to make explicit the coherence between the ETSA and the VETSS while also outlining the logic behind the choice of strategies. This connection (between ETSA and VETSS) would be strengthened even further by adding references to measurable indicators of the challenges identified in the ETSA.

➔ Recommendation: When applicable, include references to measurable indicators in the ETSA in the “Challenge to be addressed” sections, this will provide an even closer connection with the content of the ETSA and help identify the key indicators to include in the M&E framework.

23. Much effort has gone into making connections between the various structural levels; however, they are presented in separate tables e.g. Table 1 connects pillars to strategies, Table 2 outcomes to strategies. An overarching Theory of Change would help articulate how the four structural levels (or at least the first three: Pillars to Strategies) are linked and it would also help in updating and completing the M&E framework (see below for more details). Its preparation may also help in identifying some of the few illogical connections within the current results structure - e.g. reducing the number of OOSC children and eliminating repetition are currently pitched as strategies to achieve the outcome “Enhanced community engagement to support schools’ access and disaster mitigation”. The VETSS document would also benefit from including section headers or restatement of the goals and outcomes before the related strategies are presented in 3.2 Program descriptions. Similarly, the coding system connecting pillars, outcomes, and strategies which was introduced in the Result Framework could also be used in the text of the VETSS to help future readers and those responsible for plan implementation orient themselves and more easily see the connections across the various levels.

➔ Recommendation: Include a comprehensive theory change that explicitly links a limited number of key activities, to strategies to outcomes to the high-level pillar results.

Access

24. The Strategic Pillar of Access has three underlying VETSS outcomes:

a. Increased and equitable access opportunities for children to attend schools
b. School infrastructure and associated assets meet relevant standards to support student access
c. Enhanced community engagement to support schools’ access and disaster mitigation

Each outcome has between two and four strategies (total of ten), each of which corresponds to a key issue identified in the ETSA. There is, in general, a good logical connection between the issue to be addressed and the proposed strategies, however more information could be provided on the scale and precise nature of the issue to be addressed and how the proposed strategy and activities are expected to address it. For example, it is not clear how the activity “Inclusive Education Policy reviewed and implemented” will be undertaken in order to adequately and efficiently address the key issue identified “Limited inclusive education”. What is the scale of the challenge? What will the nature of the review be, how will the policy be implemented? In contrast the ETSA (page 61) proposes a number of concrete
activities that could be costed and planned for in relation to Inclusive education. Similarly, one of the key activities to reduce out of school numbers is “Data on Out of School Children monitored closely, with effective mitigation strategies adopted to rapidly ensure all children have equitable access to quality education” with no further explanation of what these effective mitigation strategies might be.

25. In general, the outcomes and strategies are well organized in a logical structure, however in a limited number of cases there is a lack of consistency between outcomes, strategies, and activities. For example under outcome “Enhanced community engagement to support schools access and disaster mitigation”, strategy 8 aims to address the identified challenge that not all schools are disaster proof and the proposed strategy indicator measures the percentage of schools that incorporate DRRM activities into their SIPS. However, none of the proposed activities are at school level nor explicitly address school-based planning. In other instances, there are inconsistencies between the planned activities in the narrative and those in the related tables e.g. under Strategy 3 the rationale for the strategy states “On-going maintenance of existing infrastructure is a priority and the most cost-effective approach rather than investing in expensive new infrastructure.” In contrast, the table of key activities below emphasizes building new infrastructure rather than investing in maintenance which states “Build infrastructure facilities for schools, including facilities for arts, science labs, & library”.

26. A number of key activities under the Activity Area “Monitoring equitable access to quality education” explicitly refer to learning assessment, and the use of assessment results to inform teaching practices. It would appear that these activities would make more logical sense under the pillar of quality. Similarly, a number of strategies relating to infrastructure standards and management may make more sense under the pillar of management.

⇒ Recommendation: Review detail of proposed activities to ensure that all are aligned to related strategies and intended outcomes, and are located under the most appropriate pillar.

27. The issue of equity within the VETSS is primarily addressed under the Strategic Pillar of Access, with dedicated strategies relating to inclusive education and enhanced monitoring of disaggregated data. In addition, certain activities have an explicit equity focus e.g. “Revise the school grant formula to be equity-based.” More specification of the current levels and causes of inequity in access to different levels of education, or key education resources, across child level characteristics e.g. location, household wealth, language of instruction, gender etc. and how the proposed strategies/activities will seek to address these and contribute to more equitable outcomes could be included. As mentioned above, this could be addressed by adding key data points from the ETSA to the existing “Challenge to be addressed” sections. In terms of implementation, school grants represent the largest recurrent expenditure of the MoET, outside of salaries, and thus their disbursement and any alteration to it represent one of MoET’s greatest levers to affect the equity of access to education in Vanuatu.
Recommendation: Ensure, during the implementation of the VETSS, that the revision of the school grant formula is based on the strongest possible evidence base, in order to efficiently address barriers to education.

Quality

28. The Strategic Pillar of Quality has three VETSS outcomes:
   a. Enhanced MoET Policy Framework applied
   b. Improved learning outcomes across all year groups
   c. Teachers and school leaders engaged and support learning in schools

There are seven strategies to achieving the three intended outcomes which, as with the Access pillar, correspond to specific issues identified in the ETSA. The strategies and underlying activities, especially “Review and refine relevant MoET policy and strategy documents” represent an extensive list of topics and illustrate a willingness from MoET to critically reflect and improve upon their fundamental acts and policies. This is to be commended. The VETSS also clearly identifies a number of high priority policies which seem particularly relevant given the present education situation in Vanuatu, e.g. the National Education Policy, National Teacher Development Policy. More information could be provided on what the strategic directions, and the implications of these revisions and new policies/plans, are intended to be. Given the number of acts, policies, and plans identified to be developed/reviewed/implemented as part of VETSS, it may be beneficial to give further consideration to the sequencing and prioritisation within the VETSS strategy during the implementation phase.

Recommendation: Review and optimize the sequencing and prioritisation of the acts, policies, and plans that are to be developed/reviewed and implemented.

29. There appears to be some duplication and inconsistency among a limited number of proposed activities under the pillar of quality. For example, under strategy 17, it is unclear to what extent the activities “Setting standards for professional performance and ethical conduct”, “Continue to implement the Teaching Service Staff Manual and Principals and Teachers Minimum standards” and “Implement teachers code of conduct/ethics” are distinct. They appear to overlap to a significant degree. The latter two suggest that standards and codes of conduct already exist whereas the first suggests that such standards have yet to be established.

Recommendation: Review lists of activities to avoid duplication and any inconsistencies, e.g. activities relating to teacher standards and codes of conduct.
30. The ETSA outlines a number of dimensions of equity associated with significant gaps in learning outcomes: (i) geographical location, “There is considerable variation in the performance of each province. Torba and Tafea usually perform poorly in comparison to the other four provinces.”; (ii) sex, “There is a consistent variation in the performance of boys and girls, with girls out-performing the boys in both literacy and numeracy at both Year levels.”; and to a lesser degree location and language with rural and French speakers lagging behind at literacy in Year 6. However, none of these issues are explicitly addressed under the outcome “Improved learning outcomes across all year groups.”

➔ Recommendation: Ensure that activities under VETSS Outcome “Improved learning outcomes across all year groups” are designed and implemented to address identified inequities in learning outcomes.

31. As mentioned above, a number of activities under Strategy 2 refer to the measurement of learning and the use of that information to inform teaching and learning, and so would appear to be more aligned to the strategic pillar of Quality rather than Access (see Recommendation under paragraph 30 above)

32. It is important to note that the quality agenda of the VETSS is likely to be made challenging by the large number of unqualified teachers highlighted in the ETSA. Implementing a new curriculum and addressing pedagogical needs of a linguistically diverse population in often multi-level classes (particularly in the outer islands) is likely to prove testing for the implementation of the Pillar. While much needed strategies of professional development, training and capacity building for teachers are included, the logistics of carrying out these teaching force development strategies across a geographically spread country will probably be a challenge for the MoET’s capacity.

Management

33. The Strategic Pillar of Management has four VETSS outcomes:

   a. MoET strategic management processes implemented at the central and school level
   b. System of devolution applied
   c. MoET aligned to international and national strategies
   d. MoET using data and information to guide management and resource decisions

In order to achieve the four VETSS outcomes under the Management pillar, seven strategies are proposed, most of which are explicitly aligned to challenges identified in the ETSA. The distinction between the first two outcomes is not particularly clear especially as the proposed related activities address capacity and system functioning at central, provincial and school level. The table below outlines the degree of overlap between the two outcomes.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------

3 ETSA p.141
Table xx: Comparison of activities under two VETSS outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MoET strategic management processes implemented at the central and school level</th>
<th>System of devolution applied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Support schools to develop and implement their SIPs</td>
<td>Establish school support centres in other provinces and develop a policy for school support centres;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Conduct capacity building on planning, budgeting and reporting at provincial level</td>
<td>strengthen existing Provincial Education Boards in each province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Policies are considered in the planning and budgeting processes in order to be properly resourced</td>
<td>Develop and implement a Ministry Quality Management System Develop and implement continuous professional development and capacity building with Ministry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ **Recommendation:** Review and rearrange the strategies under the first two outcomes of the Management pillar, potentially with one outcome focussing on the support to school level planning and the other focussing on devolution from central to province.

34. Again, there are some examples of inconsistency between the narrative and activities listed. For example, the resource allocation model mentioned under Strategy 21 “A resource allocation model for provinces will be reviewed taking into consideration the volume of service delivery needs (number of schools, students, etc.), geography, logistics, etc.” is potentially a very significant activity in addressing identified inequities in resource allocation. However, it is not listed under the ten activities of the strategy.

35. As mentioned above, outcomes, strategies, and activities relating to system management e.g. Strategy 6 “Manage the implementation of the National School Infrastructure Development Plan (NSIDP) for existing schools and identify new schools in need” are probably more suited to the pillar of management rather than access. If a re-structuring is not desirable then it will be important during VETSS implementation to ensure that activities targeting the improvement of system management are co-ordinated and aligned with those aimed at managing the National School Infrastructure Development Plan.

36. The third outcome of “MoET aligned to international and national strategies” is supported by clear and highly relevant activities, as is the fourth outcome of “MoET using data and information to guide management and resource decisions”. The activities of the latter focus heavily on the specific platform currently being used for the EMIS in Vanuatu. It is clear that significant investment has been made in this platform and it is positive that the MoET is building on this work. However, it would be desirable to have an even greater emphasis on supporting the use of the data, e.g. what data might be used by whom and for what, rather than purely technical improvements. Connections could be made with other strategies within the VETSS outlining how an improved EMIS can contribute to better decision making in policy formulation, implementation, and central and decentralised decision making.
Recommendation: Activities supporting the use of EMIS data should be informed by stakeholders’ and decision-makers’ data needs as well as some strategic direction over what type of decisions should be made based on the newly available data, e.g. targeting school resources to areas with lower levels.
Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Monitoring arrangements

37. The VETSS outlines a number of monitoring and reporting processes through which routine monitoring of VETSS implementation is expected to take place. The action plan, incorporated into the costing model, is situated as the principle monitoring tool, complemented by the VETSS Results Framework. It is the intention that the Ministry will undertake a “Quarterly Structured Review” where indicators and progression on plan implementation are reviewed and any challenges identified, leading to an updated action plan with key activities identified and prioritized for the next quarter. This central quarterly review is to be preceded by similar reviews at departmental level, with the synthesis and priorities of these presented at the central quarterly review. In order for such regular reviews to occur, VETSS action plans will require quarterly targets for their performance indicators, however it is questionable whether such frequent and comprehensive reviews will significantly improve VETSS implementation rather than create an unnecessary and unproductive burden of reporting and frequent updating of action plans on limited ministerial staff time.

➔ Recommendation: Reconsider the cost-benefit of comprehensive quarterly reviews; an alternative may be lighter but more thematically focussed reviews of challenging areas at the annual mid-point of action plan implementation.

38. A Monitoring team will be established by the Ministry to oversee the implementation of the VETSS across regions and at central level. This team will review the monitoring reports produced and provide recommendations at the Quarterly Structured Meetings. However, it is not clear who would form this team and where they would sit within the broader ministry structure or how they differ from the M&E unit of PPD which the VETSS states “will be the main point of contact for the collection, analysis and distribution of information and data derived from the reports”. The monitoring team will also prepare a consolidated annual performance report to be discussed at an Annual Review, which is also referred to as a “joint sector review” (JSR) in the VETSS document. This annual review is expected to input into the following year’s action plan and budget, as well as the multi-year action plans. However, there are no further details on what the JSR would entail or the role, if any, of development partners or the LEG in any of the review processes. These details could be developed in JSR guidelines.

➔ Recommendation: Clarify the members and organisational location of the VETSS Monitoring Team, especially in relation to the M&E unit of PPD, as well as the expected process for their development of the consolidated annual performance report.

➔ Recommendation: Clarify the process of the Joint Sector Review, and the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry and its partners/LEG within in it.

4 GPE has developed a number of resources to support effective JSRs which the MoET and the LEG may find of use: [https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/practical-guide-effective-joint-sector-reviews-education-sector](https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/practical-guide-effective-joint-sector-reviews-education-sector)
39. In addition to the quarterly and annual reports, it is expected that a consolidated monthly report will also be produced. This quarterly report will be the aggregation of reports produced at multiple levels starting at the school. School principals will be expected to complete a report on the third week of each month and submit it to the school improvement office. The school improvement office will review and submit to the provincial education office who will consolidate and produce an aggregated report for all schools in the province. This aggregated provincial monthly report will then be submitted to PPD who will combine the provincial reports with monthly reports of other directorates to produce a “MoET Monthly Report” which will be distributed to all directorates. The Reporting Framework for these reports, stated as being Annex 1 in the VETSS, was not present in the document so it is not possible to comment on the specific content of these reports. However, even if the report content is minimal, the proposed approach represents an extremely heavy and cumulatively time intense process for limited apparent gain. The monthly reporting is not aligned to the proposed reviews (quarterly and annual) and there is no articulation of how the monthly reports are expected to inform the formal review processes.

➔ Recommendation: Reconsider the proposed monthly reporting from school to central level, and prioritise the efficient use of school level data at the planned annual reviews.

Results framework

40. The VETSS Results Framework broadly follows the structure of the overall VETSS, i.e. Pillar→Outcome→Strategy→Activity. However, the grouping of Activity Areas is replaced by Domains in the results framework. The Overall worksheet provides a coding structure connecting the various levels; however, this coding structure is not currently used in the VETSS nor in the other worksheets of the Results Framework, limiting its utility. The worksheets Outcomes, Strategy, and Activities comprehensively present the results at each level as stipulated in the VETSS along with Indicator, Baseline, Baseline year, Target 2030, and Means of verification columns. There are no proposed indicators at the pillar level, which may be addressed as part of ensuring a coherent use of indicators across different levels (discussed below), however it is not a significant limitation especially in light of the other issues with the current results framework.

Indicators and data sources

41. The current formulation of indicators, across all results levels, presents a significant risk to the effective monitoring, and therefore effective implementation, of the VETSS. The indicators are generally overly complicated and lacking in specificity, often containing multiple possible metrics. Below is an example at each of the three results levels.
Examples of Outcome, Strategy, and Activity indicators lacking specificity and measurability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Increased and equitable access opportunities for children to attend schools % annual increase in demonstrable improvement in capacity within the Ministry of Education and Training, as reflected by Learning and Teaching Outcomes for all relevant pupil groups in school learning outcomes and achievement rate (literacy and numeracy VANSTA, PILNA, National Examination); and % annual reduction in the % of Out of School Children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Review and Implement National Education Language Policy with the view of improving teaching and learning in schools Validation demonstrates that Education Language Policy reviewed and implemented, with ongoing annual reviews to ensure fitness for purpose; and % of Learning and teaching outcomes that improve in relation to Language Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Setting standards for professional performance and ethical conduct Validation demonstrates that Standards established for professional performance and ethical conduct, and are implemented effectively, and % of Survey data reporting a statistically significant sample of professionals demonstrate strong understanding. Validation demonstrates that the standards are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

42. At the Outcome level (the highest level for which indicators exist) the result statement “Increased and equitable access opportunities for children to attend schools” would normally be accompanied by an indicator of access e.g. GER, completion rates, out-of-school rates etc. disaggregated by indicators of concern e.g. sex, disability status. However, the proposed indicator contains: i) a percentage annual increase in demonstrable improvement of capacity; ii) six different metrics of learning outcomes; and iii) \% annual reduction in the \% of Out of School Children. In its current formulation, this indicator, and the many others like it, are completely unmeasurable. In the present example, one (or two) specific access measure could be chosen, ideally disaggregated on one or two inequity dimensions.

43. At the activity level (the lowest level for which indicators exist) similar problems are evident. The activity “Setting standards for professional performance and ethical conduct” is relatively straightforward and an appropriate indicator may be a measure of the existence of approved standards. However, the proposed indicator suggests measuring and somehow combining: i) that standards are established; ii) that they are implemented effectively; iii) a \% of survey data reporting statistically significant sample of professionals demonstrate strong understanding; iv) that they are reviewed annually; v) and that this review ensures effectiveness.
**Recommendation**: Revise all indicators to simplify and streamline them, ensuring that they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound. Each indicator should include only one measurement (where possible and relevant disaggregated on one or two inequity dimensions of interest).

44. A related problem to that illustrated above is the complete absence of standardised education indicators in the results framework. This negatively impacts the measurability of the indicators but also creates an unnecessary additional reporting burden; the Ministry’s data systems are already regularly producing standardised education indicators, as evidenced by the ETSA. It also presents a disconnect between the problem identification (ETSA) and costing simulation (which uses standardised education indicators such as GER and PTR), and the performance monitoring of the VETSS which is currently using none of the standardised indicators analysed in the ETSA. In addition, this will create unnecessary duplication of effort as Ministry staff will have to report completely different indicators as part of SDG 4 (and potentially NSDP monitoring), going against the intention of strategy 22 “Align MoET to SDG 4 through the National Sustainable Development Plan.”

**Recommendation**: Utilize standardised education indicators wherever possible, with priority given to those used in the ETSA and required as part of SDG 4 reporting.

45. A further limiting factor of the present results framework is the lack of suitability of some of the proposed indicators in relation to the level of the result. See table below for an example of the case where the same indicator is being used to measure progress at outcome, strategy and activity levels simultaneously. In other instances, the indicator at a higher level is simply a rewording or aggregation of results at the lower level e.g. “% of schools eliminate grade repetition” is an indicator at activity level and “100% of schools eliminate grade repetition” is an indicator at strategy level. While the activity level indicator is a valid measurement of its achievement, the strategy level indicator should measure a more aggregated level of achievement of the objective, especially when a standardised indicator is easily identifiable (repletion rate or percentage of repeaters). As recommended above a comprehensive theory of change may help in identifying inconsistencies in the VETSS structure, similarly an explicit hierarchical results structure with indicators may help identify and address such inconsistencies in indicator formulation.

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5 Designing a Results Framework for Achieving Results: A How-to Guide. World Bank, 2012

6 Standardised, higher level indicators are generally a better measurement of the intended objective. In this case for instance, all schools reducing their grade repetition to 1% (% of schools eliminate grade repetition: 0%; national repetition rate: 1%) is preferable to 80% of the schools eliminating repetition but the others maintaining a 20% repetition rate (% of schools eliminate grade repetition: 80%; national repetition rate: 4%)
Example of same indicator used to measure progress at Outcome, Strategy and Activity levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Proposed indicator for all three levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased and equitable access opportunities for children to attend schools</td>
<td>Promote and mainstream Inclusive Education so that all children have equitable access to school.</td>
<td>Data on Out of School Children monitored closely, with effective mitigation strategies adopted to rapidly ensure all children have equitable access to quality education</td>
<td>% annual increase in demonstrable improvement in capacity within the Ministry of Education and Training, as reflected by Learning and Teaching Outcomes for all relevant pupil groups in school learning outcomes and achievement rate (literacy and numeracy VANSTA, PILNA, National Examination); and % of Out of School Children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendation**: Review the suitability of indicators in relation to the VETSS result levels and ensure that appropriate indicators are utilized at different levels of results.

**Baselines and Targets**

46. The combination of the issues identified above, i.e. unmeasurable new indicators and the lack of standardised indicators already produced by existing data sources, means that no baselines are provided in the current results framework, with all stating “To be undertaken in 2020”. Therefore, it is not possible to comment on the feasibility of the stated targets beyond the financial implications (discussed below). However, the targets are aligned with their relevant indicators and suffer from many of the same issues as the indicators. In some cases, the targets present even more significant challenges in terms of measurability. For example, the activity “Provide support and training to improve capacity and performance” has a target of:

“Demonstrable improvement in capacity within the Ministry of Education and Training, and in Learning and Teaching Outcomes: All groups of pupils within Vanuatu (including, but not limited to, women and girls, boys and men, those impacted by poverty, pupils with special educational needs, gifted and talented pupils, pupils in outlying areas, out of school pupils, and persons living with disabilities) are tracked within EMIS, and demonstrate strong progress and attainment, any deficits are to be identified promptly, and mitigated proactively. All pupil groups to improve attainment by a minimum of 10% annually. Where applicable, all demographics increase in school learning outcomes and achievement rate (literacy and numeracy VANSTA, PILNA, National Examination) by a minimum of 10% annually.”
This is clearly unmeasurable and very far removed from the relatively straight forward activity of providing training. As all indicators are revised and baselines calculated it will be necessary to revise all targets to ensure that they are based on the new indicator and are feasible in relation to the baseline and the expected available funding.

**Recommendation**: Ensure that when all indicators are revised baselines are included, and that new targets are also devised, based on the new indicator and informed by the baseline and the expected available funding.

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**Risks and Feasibility**

**Risks**

47. The VETSS includes a specific section on risk identification and management. These are grouped into four mains risk areas:

   a. Institutional Capacity and Constraints
   b. Environmental Vulnerability
   c. COVID-19 and Pandemic Risks
   d. Government Finance and Donor Commitment Risks

These different sections outline the types of risks that the VETSS faces in these domains, and refer to the corresponding parts of the VETSS which identify and recognize those risk, and includes strategies and activities in mitigation for those. These sections appear relevant, in the context of the low institutional capacity (associated with the small size of the country and of the ministry), the high vulnerability of the country to natural disasters (earthquakes, cyclones, volcanoes, etc.), and the financial vulnerability and dependency to external aid. In these regards, the VETSS contains a strong section on Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management, devotes a large number of activities to the strengthening of the MoET’s capacity, and explicitly addresses the need to diversify, and expand, domestic and external revenue generation. A recent update of this section allowed the inclusion of the pandemic risks, based on the on-going COVID-19 crisis, for which resources have already been dedicated to the coordination and response for the next two years. The risk assessment also recognises the interconnectivity of these risks, and in particular the potential upcoming decrease in external aid due to the financial impact of the pandemic on donor countries and reprioritisation of investments.

48. While this narrative description is informative and adequately highlights the main risks to the successful implementation of the VETSS, it would be useful for the VETSS to include a systematic, standard assessment of the risks within each area, including a double rating (typically Low, Medium, High) of each risk based on its likelihood of occurring and the severity of potential impact, and the planned mitigation measures (and possibly a second rating for the mitigated risk).

**Recommendation**: Include a Risk Assessment Matrix, with rated risks and mitigation measures.
Example of rating:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood of occurring</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Feasibility

49. The feasibility of the plan can be assessed against three main axes: the institutional capacity to coordinate the implementation and carry out the planned reforms, the operational capacity to implement the planned activities, and the financial capacity to fund the implementation. The financial aspects will be covered in the next section, which examines the projected costs and financial resources of the plan.

50. The institutional capacity is a recognised concern for the MoET, explicitly included in the risk assessment. This capacity constraint is in part due to and exacerbated by the small size of the MoET, which results in ministry officers needing to take various responsibilities. While human resources constraints are unlikely to significantly change in the medium term, the VETSS includes capacity development activities to the MoET and technical assistance to support its implementation. Nonetheless, the 130 activities of the VETSS might prove challenging to the limited capacity of the ministry. Even with some sequencing, the current Action Plan includes a minimum of 46 activities to be simultaneously implemented every year. This will be a strain on the limited MoET human resources, and a challenge in terms of coordination. Several stakeholders interviewed during the VETSS review consultations have expressed concerns about the capacity of the MoET to coordinate the VETSS, suggesting that a position may need to be created in the DG’s office to oversee its implementation. The Implementation Arrangement section of the VETSS refers to a planned internal capacity review supported by UNESCO, which should provide further details to challenges, opportunities and needs for strengthening.

➤ **Recommendation:** Ensure that planned capacity development activities are adequately sequenced and carried out, to allow the MoET to implement and coordinate the other activities.

➤ **Recommendation:** Ensure that the internal capacity review is carried out early on to identify and address necessary institutional strengthening needs.

51. The institutional capacity of the MoET will be further tested by two sizeable projects: the MFAT-DFAT joint support program for Secondary School, to be implemented over the next 10 years, and the activities requested by Vanuatu under the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF).

➤ **Recommendation:** Ensure that the MFAT-DFAT joint support program (as well as all other DPs’ support) is well aligned with the VETSS to limit additional burden on the MoET and support the achievement of the VETSS objectives; and consider consolidating the VETSS, MFAT-DFAT joint support program and PacREF activities into a unified Action Plan to facilitate sequencing and coordination.
52. Facing these multiple challenges, the MoET will need not only financial, but also technical and coordination support from its partners. The LEG, which emerged from the development of the ETSA and VETSS, will be an important platform to ensure adequate coordination and alignment of all actors.

Recommendation: Ensure that the LEG meetings are adequately formalised and utilised for VETSS and partners coordination, alignment, and the identification and addressing of issues as they arise during implementation.

53. The operational capacity of the MoET is also likely to be a constraint, in particular in light of the ambitious targets set for the increase of access to all levels of education, resulting, for instance, in considerable needs for new teacher recruitment and classroom and school constructions from the very beginning of the plan’s period (cf. below under the Simulations, costs and financing – hypotheses and targets section). However, as recommended below, the revision of these targets in light of recent progress and events is likely to lead to significantly lower needs for increasing the school infrastructure and teaching capacity.

Recommendation: Assess the capacity of the MoET to train and recruit additional teachers and to build new schools and classrooms once the enrolment projections are adjusted.

Simulations, costs and financing

Costing model

54. The VETSS is accompanied with a very detailed and comprehensive costing model, which projects the cost of each individual activity of the plan. The model is in fact contained within two separate files, to facilitate its manipulation: one file contains the main underlying assumptions (enrolment growth, number of teachers, number of schools…) and the aggregated costs and financing gaps, while the other details each activity within the VETSS. As such, this second file is in fact an integrated costed Action Plan, covering the whole duration of the VETSS. For each activity, this Action Plan identifies detailed timelines, responsible actors, unit and total costs, expected share of these costs to be funded within regular MoET budget and resulting funding gaps.

55. The MoET is to be applauded for the tremendous effort of applying a meticulous Action Plan approach and costing to a whole long-term strategic plan. This provides a very practical tool for the implementation of the plan and the preparation of the corporate plans and yearly plans and budgets, with clearly identified needs for additional funding.

56. As a consequence of this approach, is that the costing essentially focusses on the estimation of the cost of activities beyond the MoET’s current activities or “normal” operation, and is therefore not all-inclusive. To remedy this limitation, a specific costing of the teacher remuneration, which represents approximatively 77% of the MoET recurrent budget in 2017 (ETSA), complements the exercise. With all other VETSS expenditures costed and estimated beyond the projected increase of the MoET budget, the cost projections appear adequately comprehensive.
Costs

57. The costs of the VETSS are dominated by those of the “Access and Equity” Pillar, which represents 86% of the total costs in 2025, and 90% in 2030, with the other two pillars representing 2% (Management) and 8%-12% (Quality, cf. Figure below). The vast majority of the “Access and Equity” Pillar costs are associated with the “Increased and equitable access opportunities for children to attend schools” Outcome, and in particular the provision of the school grants, this single activity representing 77% of the total VETSS activities costs in 2030.

58. The other two outcomes which account for a sizeable share of the total VETSS costs are “School infrastructure and associated assets meet relevant standards to support student access” (in the Access and Equity pillar, with 10% of the total costs in 2025-2030) and “Improved learning outcomes across all year groups” (in the Quality pillar, with 7%-6% of the total costs in 2025-2030). The costs of the latter outcome are in fact driven by a single activity: “Develop and enact legislation for higher education including national university and other institutions”, which represents more than half of the Quality pillar costs over the period of the VETSS implementation.

VETSS activities inclusive costs, by Pillar and Outcome

Source: VETSS Costing model

59. The VETSS thus presents, from a financial point of view, a heavy focus on Access and Equity, in particular through the stimulation of demand and removal of the financial barriers of education with the provision of school grants and the progression towards a fee free education, and through the construction of school infrastructure. In terms of quality, while 55% of the pillar’s costs are focused on higher education, another 25% are devoted to teacher development and support, 9% to curriculum (primary and secondary), and 7% to ICT.

60. In terms of education levels, the primary and secondary education each represent 39% of the total costs. These large shares are in part due to the costs of the school grants, to be delivered to the primary and secondary schools, are present.
Hypotheses and targets

61. As a large share of the total costs are associated with the school grants, they are largely driven by the enrolment projections over the period of the VETSS, and the targets of delivery of these school grants. Enrolments are projected in coherence with the Result Framework target of reducing the number of out-of-school children (OOSC), at all levels, by 50% every year. However, this target in itself poses a number of issues. The approach is a realistic way to project enrolment increase when there are few OOSC (i.e. a high NER), as it recognizes the increasing difficulty to reach the most vulnerable children, but when large numbers of children are still excluded from the system, it translates into great increases in enrolments in the first years, especially in junior and senior secondary. In the two levels combined, enrolments are projected to increase by 70% between 2019 and 2020; as the plan and its interventions are not implemented yet, it is uncertain whether such a great increase will have occurred, especially in the context of Cyclone Harold and the economic impact of COVID-19.

⇒ Recommendation: Revise the figures of the 2020 enrolments and estimates of Out-of-school children to adjust the projections based on the latest VEMIS data when available.

62. These projected rapid increases in enrolments have financial and operational consequences: the costing model/action plan thus predicts a 22% increase in teacher remuneration, 38% in school grants, as well as the construction of 200 new schools and the hiring of 700 new teachers all in the first year. This artificially inflates the funding gap in the first years and is likely to not be feasible with the current MoET construction and teacher training capacity.

63. Incidentally, projecting a reduction in the number of OOSC poses conceptual issues, as a number of the children projected to “return” to school may have never completed the previous education level.
(especially in upper secondary). In addition, the current enrolment projections ignore the planned progresses in reducing repetition.

64. The large total school grant costs are also driven by the progressive generalization of the school grants in ECE, primary and junior secondary schools through 2021, and their introduction in senior secondary in 2025. However, as these are meant to stimulate the demand for education and remove the financial barriers faced by the most vulnerable, one would expect the increases in enrolments (or reductions in OOSC numbers) to occur after the generalization/introduction of the school grants rather than to precede it.

➔ **Recommendation**: Revise the target (and/or indicator) related to increase of access to education. A more linear increase could be envisaged for the first years, and/or differentiated targets for each education level (recognizing in particular that senior secondary enrolments are likely to occur later, when larger proportions of cohorts complete junior secondary, and senior secondary school grants are introduced).

**Financing and financing gap**

65. The VETSS is to be financed from both domestic and external funding. Domestic resources to be allocated to the plan and to MoET regular operation are estimated by applying the same annual increase as the projected GDP growth. This equates to assuming that the national budget will remain at the same level in terms of percentage of GDP, and that the share of education in the national budget will remain constant. This latter share has indeed remained stable and at a relatively high level over the last few years, despite a small decrease of the MoET budget from 22%-26% I 2001-2015 to 19% in 2016-2017, due to the transfer of the national Scholarship Fund to the Department of Finance and Treasury.

66. Although the recent stability of the government budget share allocated to education gives relative confidence in these levels of domestic funding being maintained, the absence of a Medium Term Expenditure Framework for the government limits the reliability of the financial projections, even in the first couple of years of the VETSS. While this discussion goes beyond the education sector, the practice of Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks would significantly strengthen the medium-term planning capacity of the ministry.

➔ **Recommendation**: Encourage and work with Ministry of Finance to develop Medium Term Expenditure Frameworks, which will improve the quality of projections of available resources and facilitate realistic medium-term planning.

67. To complement the financing picture, planned external support was collected and estimated, although there appears to be very limited visibility outside of DFAT support, with no information on funding from other DPs beyond 2019. As a result, external funding was projected for the duration of the VETSS based on its 2019 level and similar annual growth as the domestic funding (i.e. based on the annual
GDP growth). While more precise estimations cannot be expected in the long term, two to five year commitments from DPs would help the MoET to better plan in the medium term.

➔ **Recommendation:** Encourage development partners to make multi-year commitments, and at a minimum provide funding projections, to support medium-term planning.

68. As explained above, the total funding gap for the MoET is in fact calculated in two separate components: the funding gap from recurrent expenditures, resulting from the increase in teacher remuneration associated with the enrolment increase; and the unfunded VETSS activities. This total domestic funding gap stabilises between USD 19.0 million and USD 19.7 million over 2025-2030, significantly above the expected level of external support (USD 6.3 - 7.3 million over the same period), and leaving a total financing gap of USD 8-8.8 million during the last 6 years of the plan. To put this in perspective, the total domestic funding gap represents approximately 50% of the projected MoET budget as soon as 2022 and for the rest of the duration of the VETSS (cf. Figure below).

**Domestic funding gap and projected external support as % of projected MoET budget**

![Graph showing domestic funding gap and projected external support as % of projected MoET budget]

*Source: VETSS Costing model*

69. As currently projected, the external support would only cover a small portion of the financing gap, equivalent to the domestic gap for teacher salary increase by 2030 (but close to double that level in 2023), although DPs’ support is unlikely to cover core recurrent expenditures such as teacher remuneration. In any case, large amounts of VETSS activities would also remain unfunded.

70. As for the total costs, a large proportion of the VETSS activities funding gap is associated with the provision of the school grants (69% over the duration of the plan), the costs of which are driven by the enrolment increase and the generalisation of the grants to all levels and all schools. The financial feasibility of the VETSS is thus largely dependent on the ambitions of the MoET in terms of enrolment increase and
provision of school grants. The uniform objective of reducing the number of OOSC by 50% every year for all school levels not only poses implementation issues in the short term, but also sustainability issues in the medium to long term. Net Enrolment Rates are assumed to reach 98% by 2022 for primary, by 2023 in ECE and by 2025 in secondary, including senior secondary, which is significantly more ambitious than the SDG targets. With total school enrolments increasing by 50% between 2019 and 2025 and secondary enrolments by 150% over the same period, the required increased in the remuneration of teachers will be overwhelming for the MoET budget, at least in the medium term. This is exacerbated by the fact that the plan does not allow for any elasticity in the Pupil-Teacher Ratio, which is expected to remain constant (at their average level over 2016 and 2018) despite the large and sudden increases in enrolments. While wanting to protect the students’ learning conditions by maintaining the PTR is understandable, these competing ambitions are not financially tenable for the MoET. The PTR could for instance be allowed to increase for a few years while the shock of increasing enrolments is absorbed by the system.

→ **Recommendation**: Revise the targets which drive the increase in teacher remuneration, namely the enrolment increases (especially at senior secondary level) and/or the Pupil-Teacher Ratios, to ensure short- and medium-term financial sustainability of the plan.

71. In addition, considering the substantial budgets to be allocated to the school grants policy, there will probably be a need to revise the ambition of covering all schools and students with the same level of support as today. The revision of the school grants policy could be the opportunity to make the policy not only more equitable but also better targeted, to remove economical barriers in the most disadvantaged areas while controlling its total budget. In line with the lower ambitions suggested above for senior secondary enrolment, a smaller proportion of senior secondary schools could in particular receive the school grants (summary estimations by the authors based on the VETSS costing model suggests that not providing school grants to senior secondary schools could reduce the VETSS activities funding gap by half for the period 2025-2030). The amounts to be provided could also be reviewed: the per pupil junior and secondary school grants appear to be four times higher than those of primary. While unit costs are generally higher in higher levels of education, international data (UIS) suggest that junior secondary unit costs are on average 2.1 times higher than those of primary. A review of the school grants amounts could ensure that the government is not planning to finance high school-level costs associated with the fact that those levels were mostly accessible to elites.

→ **Recommendation**: Revise the targets for the provision of the school grants, in particular in senior secondary, and review the per-pupil amounts.