



SOLOMON ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN
RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND FLEXIBLE LEARNING
POLICY STATEMENT

AND

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

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List of abbreviations

DEFL	Distance Education and Flexible Learning
MEHRD	Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development
SICHE	Solomon Islands College of Higher Education
SIG	Solomon Islands Government
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UPNG	University of Papua New Guinea
USP	University of the South Pacific

Glossary

Distance education is an institutional approach to organising teaching and learning where the learners are not usually in the presence of the teachers. Instead, educational communication between teachers and learners is through different media, including text, audio and video, using technologies like printing, the internet, broadcasting and telephony

For distance education to be effective, learners need to develop skills to study independently and manage their own learning, and teachers need to develop skills to teach through educational resources and learning networks

Distance education is usually contrasted with **face-to-face education** where teachers and learners are in the same place for lectures, tutorials or demonstrations. However, in practice, quality distance education programmes also include different kinds of face-to-face contact to support learners for example through intensive 'summer' schools or through networks of local tutors. Programmes that combine periods of face to face study with distance education are frequently described as **blended learning** programmes.

Flexible learning is an institutional approach to organising teaching and learning in order to remove barriers that can limit people's access to education, which can include physical, financial, psychological or social barriers.

Flexible learning involves institutional change to offer learners more choice and convenience, and more personalised services to meet individual needs, for example through changes to

- **Admissions criteria** for entry to a programme or institution
- **Academic regulations** to allow students to complete a programme at different stages or over different time periods, and to combine studies from different programmes and providers
- **Course content** by providing a choice of course options within a programme
- **Media** by presenting courses in alternative ways to suit different learning styles or to help students with disabilities
- **Technology** by using a variety of delivery channels to avoid excluding some learners who do not have access to a particular technology, like TV or internet
- **Place and time of study** to make programmes accessible to a wider range of learners
- **Student support**, by providing a range of ways for students to get support and guidance.

Distance education and flexible learning are complementary approaches. Distance education is a common approach to making programmes *more flexible* in order to widen access by removing barriers to learning. Flexible learning approaches help more *distance learning* students succeed when their studies have to compete with other demands on their time at work or in the home.

1. Summary and vision

- 1.1 This policy aims to achieve a situation where distance education and flexible learning are part of the normal work of every education and training provider in Solomon Islands. The vision in this policy is that all Solomon Islands education and training providers, and those advising them, should consider distance education and flexible learning approaches when they are planning and designing new programmes;
- 1.2 The reason for this policy is that distance education and flexible learning can help providers to expand access to learning opportunities, achieve more efficient and effective use of existing and new educational resources and support learner-centred approaches to education and training;
- 1.3 Implementing distance education and flexible learning involves major change for many education and training providers. The strategic framework takes account of this by prioritising teacher education and post-basic education for an initial phase of activity from 2010-2012;
- 1.4 Giving priority to teacher education and post-basic education will help to achieve maximum impact for the policy by concentrating effort on unmet needs and building on activities that are already planned and funded. This initial focus should help to ensure that most teachers and communities in Solomon Islands quickly gain some experience of distance education and flexible learning approaches, either as teachers or learners. A second phase of activity from 2012-2015 will build on this awareness and the capacity that has been developed, to support distance education and flexible learning approaches in all areas of the National Education Action Plan.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this statement is:
 - To **guide** the general education policy development of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) and other ministries and agencies with respect to the appropriate use of distance education methods, and the adoption of flexible learning approaches.
 - To **inform** key stakeholders about the guiding principles underpinning the development and use of distance education and the adoption of flexible learning approaches.
 - To **promote and encourage** in appropriate circumstances the use of distance education for education and training, and the adoption of flexible learning approaches.
 - To **provide strategic direction** for the successive Educational Strategic Frameworks, National Education Action Plans, and Provincial Education Action Plans.

- Through its strategic framework (see Annex 1) this policy **serves as a benchmark** that will guide and assist in monitoring the work plans, operations and strategic relationships of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development over the six years 2010-2015.

3. Authority

- 3.1 The following legislations provide the underpinning authority for the Solomon Islands policy on Distance Education and Flexible Learning (DEFL):
- The Education Act (1978)
 - The Constitution (Amendment) Act (1982)
 - The Solomon Islands College of Higher Education Act (1984, as amended 1987)
- 3.2 Other important current guiding policy documents and strategic frameworks include the following:
- Government of the Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2005) *Education for Living: Policy on Technical, Vocational Education and Training*, 2005.
 - Government of the Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2007) *Education Strategic Framework 2007-2015*, June 2007.
 - Government of the Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2008) *National Teacher Education and Development Policy Statement*, June 2008.
 - Government of the Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2010) *National Teacher Education and Development Plan*, May 2010.
 - Government of the Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2009) *Policy Statement and Guidelines for Tertiary Education in Solomon Islands*, February 2010
 - Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, *Policy statement and guidelines for Basic Education in Solomon Islands*, November 2009
 - Government of the Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2009) *National Education Action Plan 2010-2012 of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development*, April 2010

4. Application

- 4.1 The policy applies to all ministries, and to all educational and training bodies, providing or responsible for the provision of, education and training in the Solomon Islands, and to all education and training programmes or courses using distance education and/or flexible learning;
- 4.2 This policy covers all sub-sectors of education including early childhood, primary, secondary, TVET and tertiary education and includes all formal and non-formal educational provision.

5. Background

- 5.1 The National Education Action Plan 2010-2012, and the associated longer-term Education Strategic Framework 2007-2015 provide the strategic direction for the development of distance education and flexible learning through these strategic goals:
- to achieve equitable access to education for all people in the Solomon Islands;
 - to improve the quality of education in the Solomon Islands;
 - to manage resources efficiently and effectively.

This policy is consistent with these strategic goals;

- 5.2 The National Education Action Plan 2010-2012 and the Education Strategic Framework 2007-2015, as well a number of the Policies and Strategic Frameworks developed over the past few years, such as those covering Teacher Education and Development, Tertiary Education, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), encourage the use of distance education and flexible learning. This policy provides a framework within which this can happen;
- 5.3 The strategic framework presented is based upon the issues and challenges identified by MEHRD in its various national plans.

6. Principles and Values

- 6.1 The policy on distance education and flexible learning is based on the vision, articulated in the Education Strategic Framework 2007-2015 (June 2007) that “all Solomon Islanders will develop as individuals and possess the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to earn a living and to live in harmony with others and the environment”;
- 6.2 The use of distance education and flexible learning in the Solomon Islands is based on two core values:
- **Accessibility, equity and inclusiveness:** Educational programmes should be planned and delivered with the needs and circumstances of learners in mind. Lifelong education, personal development, and skills development are basic human rights that should be accessible to all.
 - **Efficiency:** Educational outcomes should be maximised in relation to government expenditure Consumers have a right to expect that the services that they use are of high quality, appropriate for the purpose and provide value for money.

Providers should follow three principles when planning distance education and flexible learning initiatives:

- **Sustainability:** Initiatives should be based on careful cost analysis to ensure that programmes can be sustained as long as they are needed.

- **Equivalence:** A qualification that can be gained either by distance education or by face to face training should be taught and assessed to the same standards.
- **Quality:** There should be no distinction between equivalent qualifications achieved through study by flexible, distance or face-to-face teaching and learning.

7. Policy Objectives

- 7.1 These policy objectives result from the distance education and flexible learning principles and values. They support and enhance policy objectives and priorities in other government education plans, as well as ensuring the proper management, monitoring, and evaluation of DEFL against quality standards;
- 7.2 **Accessible, equal and inclusive:** The Solomon Islands Government proposes to use distance education and flexible learning to ensure that all citizens and residents of the Solomon Islands have more equal chances of access to education opportunities, irrespective of their age, gender, geographical location, race, religion, and physical ability;
- 7.3 **Quality assured:** The Solomon Islands Government (SIG) will seek to ensure that distance education and flexible learning programmes offered to citizens and residents of the Solomon Islands are of high quality through the following measures:
- all local providers of distance education and flexible learning programmes will be subject to appropriate regulatory frameworks;
 - to the extent possible, citizens and residents of the Solomon Islands are provided with adequate information that will enable them to make informed decisions about the qualifications offered by the different education providers. Based on a National Qualifications Framework (to be developed), the Government will explicitly say which providers deliver relevant, regulated and accredited courses which meet the formal requirements of the public service and which providers do not.
- 7.4 **Equivalent:** To ensure that distance education and flexible programmes are equivalent in status and quality to traditional modes of education and training, SIG will not permit providers to make distinctions between equivalent qualifications that are offered in Solomon Islands through distance education, flexible learning, face-to-face or by any other means;
- 7.5 **Learner-centred:** Education and training should meet the needs of the learners and provide appropriate learner support. To the extent consistent with operational and financial efficiency, the SIG requires providers to ensure that their educational and training programmes are designed, delivered and supported in ways that are learner-centred and take account of learners' work, social and family obligations, economic situation, previous educational achievements, current abilities and access to educational resources;
- 7.6 **Flexible:** In the design and delivery of educational and training programmes, providers should adopt appropriate learning methods that will reduce barriers

to education and training and provide learners with more choice. use flexible delivery to reduce barriers to access, understanding and successful completion of courses (increase quality and relevance); A blended learning approach will be central in the development and management of programmes;

- 7.7 **Efficient:** SIG will focus on maximising educational output from expenditure with strategies such as, but not limited to:
- Utilising school and RTC classrooms as study centres for distance education and flexible learning programmes
 - Using distance education and flexible learning to support and enhance formal education programmes
 - Increasing the number of degree students studying by distance education and flexible learning rather than overseas or through full-time courses in Honiara and other provincial centres
 - Adapting existing programmes and materials to distance education and flexible learning wherever possible and forging partnerships with institutions that can [provide access to appropriate programmes and materials
- 7.8 **Sustainable:** Detailed and realistic project costing of DEFL initiatives is required at the planning stage to ensure that infrastructure and programmes can be sustained as long as they are needed. SIG will expect and support providers to take advantage of previous investment in facilities and human resources wherever possible;
- 7.9 **In partnership and through collaboration:** SIG will seek to enter into long-term partnerships with other bodies to provide the infrastructure necessary to deliver distance education and flexible learning programmes, and to deliver specific educational and training opportunities by distance education and flexible learning means to target populations. It will support and encourage providers to work in collaboratively and in partnerships;
- 7.10 **Capable:** SIG will ensure that there are persons within the government service adequately trained to support the development, delivery, and management of distance education and flexible learning;
- 7.11 **Coordinated:** SIG will ensure that Ministries collaborate together and with the National Human Resources Development and Training Council (to be established) to coordinate distance education and flexible learning across all sectors and ensure maximum, efficient usage of distance education and flexible learning infrastructures. To achieve this MEHRD will establish a Distance Education and Flexible Learning Advisory Committee to coordinate policy implementation (see paragraph 9.5).

8. Policy Priorities

- 8.1 Priorities for the delivery of distance education and flexible learning in Solomon Islands are indicated in the Strategic Framework for Distance Education and Flexible Learning, 2010-2015, including a first phase activity from 2010-2012. See Annex 1.

9. Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders

- 9.1 This Policy Statement recognizes that delivery of a national framework for distance education and flexible learning is necessarily collaborative, bringing together a range of organizations including government ministries, national educational bodies training centres, schools, education authorities, institutions of higher education, the national and local media and telecommunications providers;
- 9.2 The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development has overall responsibility for determining distance education and flexible learning policy. Several Divisions of the MEHRD have roles in relation to the development and delivery of distance education and flexible learning programmes and projects;
- 9.3 The Permanent Secretary of MEHRD supported by the Management and Co-ordination team have the role of co-ordinating all education policy advice and advising the Minister of Education and the SIG on education policy matters. The Permanent Secretary and/or Minister will endorse the policies;
- 9.4 Education authorities have a role both in identifying learning needs and in giving providers access to educational facilities and human resources to support distance education and flexible learning programmes;
- 9.5 A Distance Education and Flexible Learning Advisory Committee are established by MEHRD to direct the development of DEFL and provide advice and guidance. It comprises members from the Ministry, other Ministries, tertiary educational providers and the private sector. The Advisory Committee acts as the forum in which those interested in DEFL exchange views.

10. Approaches

- 10.1 The approach outlined in this Policy Statement and Strategic Framework for National Distance Education and Flexible Learning (see Annex 1) is intended to provide a framework for efficient and effective delivery of distance education and flexible learning programmes and to initiate projects to meet the identified priorities;
- 10.2 Distance education and flexible learning providers are encouraged to explore a range of methods, models and approaches to the delivery of distance education and flexible learning.

11. Evaluation and Benchmarking

- 11.1 All distance education and flexible learning programmes offered by national education providers and also gradually international education providers who offer courses in the Solomon Islands and of which students are funded by SIG shall be subject to an agreed regulatory framework designed to ensure that the programmes are of high quality and deliver value for money to consumers, including students, government and businesses;

- 11.2 Government departments and educational providers shall be encouraged to recognize qualifications that are accredited and regularly monitored through this regulatory framework (or National Qualifications Framework);
- 11.3 Arrangements will be set in place by the DEFL Advisory Committee to ensure that programmes are monitored and evaluated on a regular basis.

12. Financing

- 12.1 Having regard to the very different cost structures of distance education and flexible learning programmes, the MEHRD will establish and keep under review guidelines on the funding of distance education and flexible learning projects, and in particular on the operational period over which financial viability shall be judged;
- 12.2 Consistent with the principles of access and equity, DEFL programmes should be affordable to the vast majority of the target population. Equally, they must be affordable to government and providers. In designing any DEFL programme consideration must be given to the disposable income available to the target population, and to development partner and sponsor support, government subsidies, loans and deferred payments etc;
- 12.3 Distance education programmes have a different cost structure to conventional programmes for several reasons: they often involve much higher capital investment; they typically operate on larger scale; they use more casual and contract labour rather than direct teacher costs. It means that decisions on financing will be same as for other (face to face) education programmes and that the Government has to consider the 'value for money'-principle; what investments are made to create which impact?
- 12.4 MEHRD will seek to ensure that development, production, delivery and management facilities are shared, in order to maximize cost-efficiency; that distance education and flexible learning methods are used in areas where, other things being equal, there is a financial benefit in doing so; that other government ministries and agencies are encouraged and assisted to share such facilities; and that the facilities are well-managed and monitored to facilitate these goals.

13. Review

- 13.1 This policy statement will be reviewed and revised regularly to take account of evolving technologies and the strategic needs of those designing, developing and delivering distance education and flexible learning programmes. The first review will take place in 2012, prior to the development of the National Education Action Plan 2013-2015.