

# Teacher education in Samoa

## Epenesa Esera

### Background

Pre-service teacher training started in Samoa in 1939 with the establishment of the Primary Teachers College and since then has undergone several major expansions. A Secondary Teachers College opened in 1978, funded by Australia, and there was heavy dependence on foreign aid to assist with course development, resources, lecturers and teaching staff. The two colleges combined in 1990 as the Western Samoa Teachers College (WSTC), and then in 1997 WSTC officially merged into the National University of Samoa (NUS) and became the Faculty of Education (FOE). By this time, teacher training staff were mainly locally recruited Samoans who had a mixture of local and overseas training.

The 1997 merger with the NUS had all the hallmarks of raising benchmarks/standards for teacher training: academic rigour and academic prowess; attracting a better quality intake of students; and value-added education qualifications. The NUS, itself a young university (established 1984), welcomed the experienced and long-standing educational institution under its auspices.

In 2005 and 2010, the FOE underwent external and internal reviews that have had major implications for programme/course restructuring.

### Developments under the Faculty of Education

The FOE offers courses in Human Development, Teaching and Learning, Measurement and Evaluation, Curriculum Studies and School-based Research as well as in the specialised areas of Special Needs Education and Early Childhood Education. The Teacher Education Department covers the school curriculum in both primary and secondary schools, focusing on pedagogy including teaching practice. The Expressive and Practical Arts Department offers courses in Food and Textile Technology, Health and Physical Education, Music, Performing Arts and Visual Art. To maximise human and fixed resources, the faculties have needed to share expertise, so that FOE students majoring in Computer Studies and Design Technology enrol in courses serviced by the Faculty of Science and those in Agricultural Science enrol in courses run by the Faculty of Applied Science.

The FOE runs four programmes: (1) the one-year Foundation programme (ten courses and eight to graduate), in which students with a Pacific Secondary School Certificate aggregate total of eighteen in their three best subjects and English are eligible to

enrol; (2) the two-year Diploma in Education (sixteen courses) for both primary and secondary students leading into (3) the one-year Bachelor's degree (eight courses); and (4) a one-year Graduate Diploma in Education (eight courses) for those with an undergraduate degree interested in pursuing teaching as a career.

The Faculty was tasked in April 2012 with looking at the possibility of offering a Master of Education and, the proposal having been approved by the Senate, it is envisaged that this will start in 2013. There will be teaching across faculties similar to the Master of Samoan Studies offered by the Centre of Samoan Studies. Candidates would be expected to complete a Postgraduate Diploma in the first year and then the MA programme.

### Staffing

Teaching staff are recruited based on student enrolment. The number of FOE staff has increased slightly, averaging nine per department and including one or two volunteers from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and United States Peace Corps. Currently these volunteers teach science and music respectively.

Staff qualifications upgrading is part of the NUS professional development plan and Strategic Plan 2011–2020. In 2012, there were 28 staff, two with PhDs, three PhD candidates, eleven MAs, six MA candidates, five BAs and one Certificate. It is envisaged that all staff will have attained a master's qualification by 2015, and the NUS is also encouraging staff to pursue PhD qualifications.

The key areas for which volunteer staff are recruited are the sciences, special needs and expressive art courses (music, visual arts and performing arts). Their input enables local staff to pursue higher degrees and the development of course material and, perhaps more importantly, increase academic discourse with lecturers who have similar interests and areas of studies. Through information technology (IT), the collaborative nature of utilising overseas staff has brought a wealth of expertise that has been extremely positive. The Faculty is now working on a website to provide students, staff and parents with access to relevant and continuously updated information.

### Relations with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESCC)

Until the merger of WSTC with the NUS, teacher training had been under the auspices of the Department of Education (now referred to as the MESCC). During that period, very strong links were forged and cemented. These are being maintained and developed through

quarterly meetings between the FOE and MESC. The main purpose is to create partnerships of transparency and communication so that teacher training is a collaborative effort.

The faculty also has a Curriculum Advisory Committee that meets once or twice a year. One of its main functions is to ensure that its programmes meet the needs of the MESC and the community it serves as well as building relationships, particularly if these involve conducting research in the schools.

The FOE also worked closely with the MESC on designing the Professional Standards for Graduate Teachers (part of Education Sector Project 2), the National Teacher Development Framework (which was trialled in 2011) and the Aptitude Test Items (2012) to replace the Year 8 National Examinations.

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Photo: Commonwealth Secretariat

*School improvement: children in Papua New Guinea (see right)*