1. The education system at the end of the twentieth century: an overview

1.1 Major reforms and innovations introduced in the education system during the last ten years

(a) Legal Framework

Education at all levels is governed by the Education Act of 1996. Regulations related to the pre-primary sector have been effective as from May 1997.

Under regulation 37, Subsection (1), and (2) of the Education act of 1993, all children must attend primary school, failing which the responsible party is liable to a fine and imprisonment. Admission to a Government or aided primary school is granted to pupils at the age of 5 until they are less than 13.

(b) already given in report done in 1995

(c) Evaluation policies, methods and instruments

Evaluation policies are regulated by

(i) a national examining body - the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate which conducts all validated examinations including the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE), the Cambridge School Certificate (SC) and the Higher School Certificate (HSC), Technical and Vocational examinations, professional examinations for more than 50 examinations bodies, and other locally organised examinations.

(ii) internal examinations carried out at the end of the academic year for all other grades (primary and secondary)

(iii) a term report at the end of every term informing parents of the performance of their children and drawing attention to the weaknesses

(iv) tests (written and oral) are carried out in the classroom by individual teachers to monitor the progress of the students.
The main method is a written examination, oral tests, projects are other means which teachers have recourse to at times.

Primary inspectors ensure that work set is properly corrected and that units at knowledge taught are consolidated.

In the secondary sector, heads of department see to it that teachers give a minimum of written work which must be corrected.

(d) **Objectives and principal characteristics of current and forthcoming reforms**

Reforms at the preschool, primary and secondary levels will address the following issues:

- The abolition of ranking at the CPE and fierce competition at an early age with the concomitant introduction of a new framework of Education of Excellence for all;

- The introduction of a 9-year compulsory and fundamental education cycle;

- The adoption of the principle of regionalisation of secondary intake with provision of school of equal standards in each region;

- The elimination of streaming in schools;

- The bringing of Science and Technology at the forefront of our Education system;

- The employment of the child to become equipped with qualities important for society and the world of work.

In effect, the new system puts the interest of the child and the nation first, providing him/her to live in a plural society and eventually in a global world.

1.2 **Major achievements, both quantitative and qualitative, attained over the last ten years.**
1. Preprimary Education

In order to make preprimary education accessible to every child, specific measures have been taken along various lines. Children in the age group 4 to 5 receive a per capita grant. Additional Preprimary classes have been added to existing and new primary schools while the private sector is encouraged to set up its efforts to provide quality pre-primary education. Standards and guidelines have been developed to ensure that the physical environment of the school is pleasant to allow the child to develop fully, both physically, emotionally and mentally. Today 177 out of 278 primary schools have a preschool centre while 1,000 private preschools are registered with the Ministry.

Emphasis is placed on the right kind of training of preschool educators in programmes that, along with the necessary pedagogical skills, give them better insight into the psychology of children. The current Teacher's Certificate Course run by the MIE has been made accessible to all suitably qualified preschool teacher candidates and a proficiency course is being run for period of 2 years through Distance Education mode for those who do not yet qualify for TCC such that by 2003 (year) no under qualified teachers will be allowed to teach in this sub-sector.

The curriculum, centred around real-life experiences and exercises for children, has been designed/improved to help develop personal and social skills and contribute to their readiness for subsequent school-based learning.

Children's experiences at home contribute significantly to achievement. Parents and teachers are encouraged to work together to support children's learning: parents' involvement strengthens children's progress and confidence. To this end, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology cooperates with the Ministry of Health, Ministry for Women's Rights, Family Welfare and Child Development and with international and local non-governmental organisations to develop holistic, integrated and participatory preschool programs and facilities.

2. Primary Education
The infrastructure of about 25 schools has been improved with repairs, renovations and extensions. 12 new buildings have been put up.

The basic goal at this level is to ensure that all pupils attending primary schools will be able to acquire basic competencies while recognising, allowing and accommodating for diversity in their abilities, aptitudes and interests. To this end, the curriculum takes into account the balance between the knowledge and skills that can be imparted and the aptitudes of pupils at particular grades.

A Guideline for a National Curriculum Basic Education has been developed in terms of Objectives, Methods, Achievement levels and Evaluation according to grade level and subjects. This will not, however, deflect from present efforts to promote a degree of decentralisation of the curriculum, to allow for school specificities, based on inputs from teachers in the preparation of materials, monitoring of the effectiveness of newly introduced textbooks and continuous assessment of achievement levels of students.

Different learning capabilities demand the introduction of remediation strategies, but remediation can only take place after early detection of learning difficulties which may however differ among pupils in intensity. Various strategies/types of intervention are being developed to ensure that children acquire the basic knowledge and lifeskills to enter the world as active, independent and self-sufficient participants in society. Students who fall behind are streamed into remediation activities will be upgraded to catch up with the average ability group to continue to secondary schools. As for children with special needs, the services of psychologists are tapped while the curriculum will allow greater flexibility in practice and teaching methods for them.

Specific remedial components have been included in pre-service and school-based in-service training programs of teachers to make capable of providing early interventions and thereby avoid an accumulation of deficiencies, which is expected to reduce attrition rates.

In addition, all efforts are being made to change the CPE examination to become primarily a means for certification purposes and to fully operationalize the Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) Scheme in all grades and schools. Essential learning as well as desirable learning competencies have been incorporated in the primary curriculum.

Measures will be taken to encourage pupils to stay in their catchment areas. To encourage this, post-HSC regional scholarships at the University of Mauritius will be offered.
Teachers, Deputy Head Teachers, Head Teachers, Inspectors are continually following in-service courses to upgrade the quality of teaching and monitoring. Human resource development is one of the objectives which has allowed heads of secondary and primary schools to be trained in Management. A computer centre at the Ministry has helped the training of all grades of officers in the use of a computer.

3. Secondary Education

Because secondary education may be terminal for some students and constitute their preparation for the labor market and/or prepare students for entry into higher education, the Government wants to assure that every child will be able to complete Nine Year Schooling.

On-going improvements in the primary subsector are causing an increase in the demand for access to secondary schools. The number of state secondary schools has increased from 22 in 1990 to 34 in 2000 constructed to meet this demand at the same time, loans at a low interest rate have been given to the private secondary schools to improve their infrastructure so that existing disparities can be eliminated.

Regionalisation is in due course to be seen as one major answer to address the intense competition for access to the secondary education, and while the process cannot be rushed without proper planning, specific steps are being taken in the short term to implement this strategy.

Presently about fifteen percent of secondary students are ill-equipped to fully satisfy the traditional examination-based demands of the curriculum and drop out, especially as from Form III. Yet, all have specific abilities and aptitudes which if channelled in the right direction through differentiated curriculum options could enable them to complete secondary education. Efforts will be made to allow different potentials of these children to develop so that they can mature without feeling any inadequacy, and acquire the competencies for their personal, economic and social growth as part of this secondary schooling. The ministry has improved and expanded the Basic Secondary Schools (schools for the drop-outs) which link the practical with the academic aspects into State Secondary Schools (Vocational) SSSV - Government is considering setting up an Integrated Secondary School which will provide different learning approaches for these students. The private sector, has as from year 2001, taken one class of those who have not passed
CPE along the same lines as the SSS (V). About 2,500 students have been taken on board.

The curriculum of all secondary schools, will have diversified options not only in relation to the world of work, but also to encourage students to develop an affinity to their socio-cultural environment and their overall self-development. In addition, specific efforts are being made to strengthening the teaching and learning of Science, Mathematics and Technology.

4. The Tertiary Sector

Major developments are envisaged in this sub-sector to make it capable of fulfilling the educational, cultural and economic ambitions of the nation, one which is to extend Mauritian influence in the region.

To satisfy the unmet demand for participation in higher studies, all avenues are being explored, including the development of a system of Distance Education, to improve access to higher education for all Mauritians. Also, since the country aspires to play a major role in the region, access to higher education through joint education ventures have been initiated.

The achievement of the educational mission of the tertiary institutions require on the right kind of research and learning environment. Research has been given a major boost, along with the development of an effective peer review and publishing program.

Higher education can not divorced from the reality of the world of work. Every attempt is made to explore the potential for joint research and development, consultancy, contract initiatives, without neglecting the fostering of strong relationships between the tertiary and other education sectors.

Tertiary education in Mauritius are encouraged to develop mutually advantageous strategic alliances with international institutions and other overseas centres/oragnaisations. Among other things, this will facilitate the exchange of information, procedures and programs, as well as staff secondments and programs for staff development.

The University of Mauritius has undergone an expansion to allow the intake to grow by 50 % and a second university specialising in management and technology has been set up.
Society at large participates in the process of educational change.

Many private technical institutions have come up in the country to cater for the need to develop skills in technology. These are registered with the 'Industrial Training and Vocational Board' which looks into their programme.

1.3 Lessons learnt and major difficulties encountered

Many projects have been initiated to help overcome problems at school level: inclusion of ELC's and DLC's in the curriculum, the training of teachers, the introduction of CCE, the establishment of a system of monitoring school-based experience, etc.

While policies are defined by the Ministry, other educational institutions such as MIE or MES carry out the implementation, and inspectors look into the evaluation, teachers who are the principal actors do not feel that they have been party to any innovative move. There is much resistance on their part to carry out or trial new methods and new information. Unions very often support them rendering the situation more difficult.

In the field of education, team worked is not part of the culture. Some projects which had started in 1992 or 1993 have died, for example an Education Management Information System has not been set up in spite of the fact that the Ministry has a Statistics Division. The National Inspectorate, in spite of the work carried out by a consultant has not been set up.

In ten years, the Ministry of Education has had four Ministers and technicians have had to adjust to different requirements. Although the issues to be fundamentally addressed are the same, the order of priorities underwent change. Consequently the orientation of various projects has changed.

Main problems and challenges

The involvement of the community in the field of education has seen an increase of pressure on schools to perform 'better', so that Mauritius is now facing a problem of value related to institutions. There are 'star' schools
(primary and secondary) which attract and others considered low-achieving which people resent; parents find all means not to send their children to these low-achieving schools although the physical infrastructure may be good. Teachers need to be given some financial incentive to work in these schools. It is evident that mostly children from low-income families attend these schools. The social stigma around such schools is very strong.

Much effort is being deployed to bridge the gap between these two categories of schools.

The CPE (last examination at the end of the primary cycle) acts as a stumbling block to the concept of overall education. Children undergo much stress because they have to score high marks to have access to the 'star' colleges. Parents and teachers concentrate all attention on academic performance and neglect the emotional and psychological development of the child.

A minimum of 30% of children come out of the system practically illiterate. The 9 to 11 year school may reduce this percentage by providing them with technical subject in the formal system.

The Ministry hopes to break this vicious circle by providing more colleges in region and by bringing diversity in the curriculum to allow the balance between the logic and aesthetic aspects.

The objectives of the curriculum are not well-defined to allow it to adjust quickly to changes in information and technology.

Attending primary school has been made compulsory; however, there are still cases of children who do not attend school for various reasons, one of them being that they do not have a birth certificate and procedures for the obtention of one is a long legal process. The Ministry of Educaiton is working closely with Ministry for Women's Rights and Family Welfare to remedy this situation.

2.1 Curriculum development, principles and assumptions

(a) The decision-making process
Decisions about curriculum issues are taken following new trends and weaknesses identified in pupils' achievement. While the policy is established by the Ministry of Education, the formulation is done by the Mauritius Institute of Education through the preparation of Curriculum Guidelines within a framework. The National Centre for Curriculum produces the learning material as well as teacher's guides. The evaluation is carried out through reactions and suggestions from all parties concerned.

(b) Curriculum planning and design

The basic assumptions and general principles of the existing curriculum are related to the fact that children attending school must develop skills and aptitudes to be able to be full integrated members of society. Hence, the primary curriculum ensures basic education, namely communication, numeracy and literacy while the secondary provides the general basis for training in specific skills as well as leads towards appropriate studies.

The different types of knowledge are selected along these lines and organised in an order of priority, taking into consideration the core knowledge-languages, maths, health and the peripheric which allows flexibility for artistic and aesthetic activities. Teachers are trained to integrate subjects to make teaching wholesome.

(c) Teaching and learning strategies

Various methods (including the communicative and spiral approaches) are used to strengthen the inter-relatedness between teaching and learning. Students are encouraged to do team work, to prepare projects; very often the physical lay out of the class is changed to adapt to interaction among students. Real-life situations are most of the time the starting point of lessons. Teachers are familiar with the concept of participative role of students, being trained during their pre-service and in-service courses.

(d) Assessment policies and instruments

Standards are fixed by grades approved at national level (A to E for pass and F being a failure or 1 - 6 (credit) and 7 - 8 (pass) and 9 (fail)), following the British system.
Standards at school level are set by the Ministry; however heads of schools have a margin of flexibility to increase or decrease; most tend to follow the same pattern as the national examinations.

Children who do not meet the standards are provided with some form of remedial education; a low percentage of parents ask for their ward to repeat in order to improve their results.

Schools normally have 39 school weeks (13 per term) and teaching periods vary from 30 to 40 minutes each.

2.2 Changing and adapting educational content

(a) With new social and technological at international and national level, the curriculum demands to be reviewed and adjusted. New elements are added.

(b) The Mauritius Examinations Syndicate draws attention to the weaknesses in the performance of students through their analysis of results of national examinations. This information is disseminated to all stakeholders who propose changes or adjustments in the content of the curriculum.

(c) New disciplines as well as new topics are worked out following crucial issues which have an impact on life in Mauritius, such as health, civic education, environment preservation, etc.

(d) Strategies are related to new educational trends which are adapted to the Mauritian context; the National Curriculum Centre has different panels for different disciplines to prepare materials. The material is trialled before being fully implemented.

(e) The curriculum material, in terms of educational content and methodologies used, has translated the concept of universal education into reality. All primary school children are provided freely with textbooks, thus ensuring equity in education.

Achievements, problems and solutions adopted; urgent issues ...

(f) New topics have been gradually introduced so that to-day the curriculum contains practically all the elements which allow the acquisition and
consolidation of attitudes and skills and which help shape the personality of individuals.

Information technology is being introduced in the lower classes of the primary cycle.

However, most of the learning is geared towards examinations and there is the tendency to neglect all non-examinable subjects. The emotional and psychological development although visible in the curriculum is not a concern in the classroom. Hence, all learning is mostly memorisation of facts for the scoring of high marks. Educational reforms will lay more emphasis on the creative and aesthetic aspects of education to ease out the competition at the end of the primary cycle, by having these subjects on the time table and by recruiting specialist teachers for the specific subjects. Music and art will become an essential part of the curriculum.

In the field of education, Mauritius has for quite long been facing a major problem: What language to be used and when? The fight has for long been between English and French and over the last ten years, Asian Languages have grown in importance. There is a demand for more contact hours in these languages.

The urgent issue being tackled is the unloading of the primary curriculum and the introduction of subjects which will bring the balance between the logical and the emotional intelligences.