

## CURRICULUM REFORM IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The Government of Papua New Guinea (GoPNG) through the Department of Education (DoE) is reforming the education system. The reform began in 1994 and has as one of its key objectives:

To develop an education system to meet the needs of Papua New Guinea and its people, which will provide appropriately for the return of children to the village community, for formal employment, or for continuation to further education and training. (*National Education Plan*, 1996, p 2)

The key features of the education reform are:

- a new and more relevant curriculum which emphasises skills development and the use and maintenance of the local languages of the community
- nine years of universal basic education implemented nationally by the year 2004
- the establishment of community-based elementary schools (Elementary Prep to E2) that use the community vernacular as the main language of instruction
- converting community schools into primary schools for grades 3-8 and a gradual bridging to English as the language of instruction in the primary school, while maintaining use of the students' vernacular
- the doubling of access to grades 9 and 10 and quadrupling of access to grades 11 and 12.

The purpose of the education reform is to provide a relevant basic education for all young Papua New Guineans and at the same time provide specialist further education and training for those able to use it. The result of the education reform has brought about both the restructuring of the system and reform of the curriculum.

The intention is to phase out the old system and bring in the new over the ten-year period from 1994 to 2004. Some provinces have been phasing in the new system since 1994, while others still have a long way to go.

Structural reforms under the education reform involve:

- the creation of a foundation level of schooling with the establishment of separate elementary schools with three grade levels (EP, E1, E2), building on existing self-help schools such as Tok Ples Skuls
- the removal of Grades 1-2 from community schools and the addition of two 'top up' classes after Grade 6 from the high schools to create Grades 3-8 primary schools, thus providing for nine years of universal basic education
- the addition of Grades 11-12 in provincial high schools to create Grades 9-12 secondary schools.

Structural reform has progressed a long way. Already over one third of children start elementary school in their vernacular language, instead of English in Grade 1. There are now more than 3,600 elementary schools registered and over 150,000 students enrolled in Elementary Prep to grade 2. Over 70% of grade 6

students stay to grade 7 in comparison to less than 40% in 1992. Lower secondary enrolments have doubled since 1992 and upper secondary numbers have increased fourfold. (Planning, Facilitation and Monitoring Division figures, 2001).

The education reform redirects the school curriculum towards education for integral human development rather than for meeting workforce needs only. The result of this is called the *reform curriculum*. The reform curriculum aims to 'equip students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes for effective communication, resource development, social development and spiritual development' (*Philosophy of Education*, 1986, p 21).

The reform curriculum has to prepare adequately the majority of school leavers (up to 85%) to return to their communities and community-based subsistence and small-scale commercial enterprises, while at the same time support the other 15% of students who will find paid formal employment or enter tertiary education upon leaving school.

Curriculum reform has commenced:

- Elementary reform curriculum materials began development in 1993.
- a full set of the elementary curriculum materials was distributed to all elementary teachers in 2001.
- three new, outcomes-based elementary syllabuses for Elementary Prep to Grade 2 have been developed and approved by the Board of Studies.
- the first edition of lower primary (Grades 3-5) curriculum materials began development in 1995
- finalised edition 1 lower primary syllabuses and some support materials were distributed in 2000 by AusAID.
- Seven new, outcomes-based upper primary (Grades 6-8) reform syllabuses have been written and approved by the Board of Studies.