



STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Civil Service 2019-2021 Annual Reports



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Acronyms

CLP	-	Certificate Level Programme
CSCIU	-	Civil Service Reform Implementation Unit
HRMIS	-	Human Resource Management Information System
MCS	-	Ministry of Civil Service
OMRS	-	Open Merit Recruitment Selection System
SCFAD	-	Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
SDGs	-	Sustainable Development Goals
SO	-	Standing Order
TC	-	Tropical Cyclone

Chairperson's Foreword

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (SCFAD) hereby submits to Parliament the Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Civil Service 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Annual Reports.

The Ministry of Civil Service's primary responsibility is to provide guidance for consistent implementation of the central regulations governing hiring, evaluation, promotion, compensation, training and discipline of public employees in line with Government's guidelines. To improve the overall standard of performance in the civil service, the Ministry provides various training and career development opportunities that are open to all civil servants, including courses on leadership, governance, project management and human resources.

This reporting period was greatly influenced by the restrictions imposed by the COVID19 pandemic.

I wish to extend my gratitude to the Permanent Secretary, Mr. Parmesh Chand and his staff for their timely assistance in this inquiry.

I take this opportunity to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for compiling this bipartisan report and the Secretariat for their invaluable support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this report to Parliament.



Hon. Viliame Naupoto
Chairperson

Recommendations

To further enhance MCS's operational efficiency and financial performance, the Committee recommends the following:

- 1.0 That the Ministry ensures that Civil servants working in rural and maritime areas have access to the information on scholarships on offer and other training opportunities as and when they become available. This should ensure that civil servants working in rural and maritime areas are given equal opportunities (*refer to paragraph 3.3.1*).
- 2.0 That the Ministry provide holistic data on the types of complaints of all the twenty-seven (27) Ministries in its future reports (*refer to paragraph 3.2.3.1.3*).
- 3.0 That the Ministry must ensure that vacancies be filled as soon as practicable and the need to vigorously review the OMRS policy (*refer to paragraph 3.3.3*).

1.0 Committee Remit and Composition

Pursuant to Standing Order 109(2)(e) the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence is mandated to look into matters related to Fiji's relations with other countries, development aid, foreign direct investment, oversight of the military and relations with multi-lateral organizations. The members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence are as follows:



Hon. Viliame Naupoto
Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Deputy Chairperson
Deputy Speaker of Parliament
Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs



Hon. Jovesa Vocea
Member
Assistant Minister for Rural, Maritime Development
and Disaster Management



Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu
Member
Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Heritage and Arts



Hon. Rinesh Sharma
Member

1.1 Committee Secretariat Team

Supporting the Committee in its work is a group of dedicated Parliament Officer serving as the Committee Secretariat. These officers are appointed and delegated by the Secretary-General to Parliament in accordance with Standing Order 15(3)(i). The Secretariat team is made up of the following Parliament officers:

- Mrs. Susana Korovou – Senior Committee Clerk
- Ms. Marica Tuisoso – Senior Committee Clerk
- Ms. Kinisimere Vuibua – Graduate Intern

2.0 Background and Terms of Reference

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (the Committee'), was referred the Ministry of Civil Service 2020-2021 Annual Report ('Annual Report') on 02 September 2024. The referral of the Annual Report was done in accordance with SO 38(2), whereby the Committee was assigned to investigate the contents of the report and provide a report to Parliament at a future Sitting. This report is outside the usual mandate of the Committee, but the referral was made to help ease the workload of the other Standing Committees.

2.1 Procedure and Program

Written Evidence Received

In accordance with Standing Order 112(1)(c), the Committee exercised its powers and requested for a written response from the Ministry of Civil Service.

The Committee had drafted questions which were sent to the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Civil Service for its response. A summary of the written response is provided in a later part of this report, under the heading 'Committee's Deliberation and Analysis' and copies of the written submission can be obtained from the online appendices of this report, which can be accessed from the Parliament website: www.parliament.gov.fj

3.0 Committee Deliberation and Analysis

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This is a review of the Ministry of Civil Service Annual Reports for the years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.

3.1.2 The Ministry of Civil Service's role is to support Government Civil Service reforms through capacity building and enhancing the overall capability of the Civil Service and provide policy advice to Ministries in relation to the responsibilities of Permanent Secretaries pursuant to section 127 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. Additionally, the Ministry provides secretariat and administrative support to the Public Service Commission (PSC), including the recruitment and administration of Medical Officers.

3.2 Summary of the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Performance and Achievements

A summary of achievements for the periods under review are listed below:

3.2.1 Policy and Innovation Division

This Division is responsible for providing policy advice to Ministries ensuring alignment and consistency with legislation, regulations, policies and guidelines. Table 1 shows the achievements for the years under review:

	2019-2020	2020-2021
No. of Policy Advice on Human Resource Policy	113	158
Legal opinion on General Orders (GO) sections	Reviewed the hotel accommodation rates as per GO 2011 -as per approved Cabinet decision on March 2020	Unspecified
Development of Research Papers	2 – Leave and Relocation Allowance of the GO and Customer Care and Service Delivery	2 – Sick Leave, Annual Leave and other Leaves offered to civil servants

Table 1: MCS's achievements for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021

Given the high staff turnover, the MCS during the years under review considered the need for retention in the Civil Service. The approval for re-engagement of civil servants over the age of 55 is vested upon the Minister responsible for Civil Service in accordance with Regulation 14 of the Civil Service (General) (Amendment) Regulation 1999. Table 2 shows a summary of requests for re-engagement submitted by Ministries and Departments:

Ministry	2019-2020		2020-2021	
	No. of Request Approved	Request Declined	No. of Request Approved	Request Declined
Ministry of Health & Medical Services	20	-	69	-
Ministry of iTaukei Affairs	-	-	1	1
Office of the Prime Minister	-	-	3	1
Ministry of Agriculture	1	1	1	-
Ministry of Education, Heritage & Arts	-	-	1	-
Office of the President	-	-	1	-
Ministry of Fisheries	1	-	-	-
Ministry of Waterways	1	-	-	-
Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism	3	-	-	-
Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services	2	-	-	-
TOTAL	28	1	76	2

Table 2: No. of Requests for Re-engagement of Civil Servants over 55 years

3.2.1.1 Civil Service Coordination and Implementation Unit

This Unit is responsible for monitoring and advising Ministries on strategies for effective implementation of policies, identification of strategies to address scarce skills and managing the implementation and development of the Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS). Table 3 shows the list of achievements for both periods under review:

Achievements	2019-2020	2020-2021
OMRS Audits	Two cycles of audits were undertaken with the results as follows; 70% of the Ministries demonstrated excellent progress with 30% scoring above and 90% for compliance.	This was put on hold due to COVID-19 pandemic. 30% of the Ministries demonstrated excellent progress with 30% scoring above 90% for compliance to the OMRS guidelines.
Job Evaluation Leadership Team (JELT)	Evaluated and moderated a total of 66 positions from 12 Ministries and Departments.	Evaluated and moderated a total of 66 positions from 12 Ministries and Departments.
Approval to Recruit Process	Unreported	Facilitated ARP for approximately 500 positions.

Table 3: Number of Achievements for Civil Service Coordination and Implementation Unit

3.2.1.2 Executive Support and Secretariat Services

This Unit is responsible for efficient secretariat service to PSC, to manage contracts for all Permanent Secretaries including leave, and undertakes executive support for Permanent Secretary for MCS.

3.2.1.3 Procedural Review Process (PRP)

The PSC administers the PRP which is an appeal mechanism for recruitment processes for appointments to substantive vacancies in civil service. Table 4 provides a summary of the total number of appeal applications considered for the years under review:

	2019-2020	2020-2021
Appeal Applications Received	112	105
Appeals unsuccessful	66	22
Appeals upheld	35	69
Appeals ineligible	5	2
Appeal withdrawn	4	-
Vacancies re-advertised/withdrawn	2	12

Table 4: Total Number of Appeal Applications for the years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021

3.2.2 Training Division

This Division works closely with Ministries, Development Partners and other stakeholders to build the capacity of civil servants. Table 5 shows the number of training courses that have been facilitated within the Division and outlines the number of civil servants trained:

Training Modules	2019-2020		2020-2021	
	No. of Sessions	No. Trained	No. of Sessions	No. Trained
Open Merit Recruitment and Selection Training	20	619	18	414
Investigators Officers Training	15	476	12	224
Refresher – Investigators officers Training	-	-	2	28
Effective Job Application and Job Interview Skills Training	15	521	20	243
Exceptional Customer Service Training	1	30	2	61
Effective Performance Management	-	-	21	489
Developing Individual Work Plan	-	-	20	405
Interim Performance Management	-	-	1	10
Leadership Development Program	4	80	-	-
TOTAL	55	1,726	96	1,874

Table 5: Number of Training Courses facilitated in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021

3.2.2.1 Scholarships

The Committee noted that in 2019-2020, MCS received 13 study area opportunities, and 13 scholarships were awarded. In the 2020-2021 reporting period, out of the 34 scholarships awarded, 15 were offered by development partners.

The Committee noted that for the period under review there was an increase in the number of applications received for the Certificate Level Programmes (CLP). The Ministry informed the Committee that there were on-going discussions with development partners to increase CLP to meet the increase in demand.

The Committee enquired whether the dissemination of information on scholarship offers reached civil servants working in rural and maritime areas. According to the Ministry, the scholarship offers are disseminated via email blasts through Govnet to all ministries and departments. Focal points in each ministry are encouraged to obtain nominations from all divisions, including rural and maritime areas. Applications are then sent from each ministry's training focal points to the Ministry of Civil Service.

Some development partners require online applications, followed by a hard copy to MCS. Plans are in place to allow applications through the HRMIS portal. The Committee recommends that the Ministry ensures that Civil servants working in rural and maritime areas have access to the information on scholarships on offer and other training opportunities as and when they become available. This should ensure that civil servants working in rural and maritime areas are given equal opportunities.

The Committee was informed that due to the "No Jab, No Job" policy that was implemented, 320 civil servants (85 males and 235 females) were terminated for non-vaccination. The re-employment of these 320 civil servants should they re-apply will be in accordance with the open merit recruitment and selection guidelines. The Ministry of Civil Service has re-employed its sole affected officer through this process.

The Committee was informed that all vacant positions across ministries due to non-vaccination were advertised and filled. Terminated officers were given the opportunity to reapply for positions under Open Merit and Recruitment Guidelines. A policy change was announced in 2023 when Cabinet approved amendments to the Health & Safety (General Workplace Conditions) Regulations 2023. The 2023 policy change allowed former civil servants who were terminated due to the "No Jab, No Job" policy to apply for vacant positions. There was no immediate reinstatement for those previously terminated.

3.2.2.2 Short Term Training

Table 6 shows the number of short-term training offered to civil servants by development partners:

Development Partners	2019-2020		2020-2021	
	Scholarship Offered	No. of Applications Received	Scholarship Offered	No. of Applications Received
Government of India -ITEC	10	104	28	40
Government of India - PMTC	-		1	1
Government of Japan (JICA)	22		39	81
Government of Republic of Singapore (Singapore Cooperation Programme Training Award (SCPTA))	12		11	21
Government of Korea -KOICA	21		5	8
The People's Republic of China	2			
Embassy of the United States of America	-		-	1
Government of Malaysia-MTCP	-	-	4	4
Korea Foundation (KF)	-	-	1	1
Government of Korea-KRC Korean Rural Society	-	-	1	1
Singapore/Turkish Cooperation Coordination Agency	-	-	1	1
The People's Republic of China	-	-	32	62
Republic of Indonesia	-	-	1	3
UNESCAP	-	-	1	1
United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)	-	-	1	1
Total	67	104	127	226

Table 6: Total Number of Short-Term Training Offered for the years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021

3.2.3 Business Management Services

This Unit coordinates the corporate services responsibilities of MCS, including human resources administration, customer complaints and managing the Ministry's properties.

3.2.3.1 Human Resources

3.2.3.1.1 Managing the Staff Establishment

The Committee noted that in the 2019-2020 financial year, the Ministry had staff establishment of 49 positions of which 10 were vacant whilst in 2020-2021, staff establishment reduced to 40 positions of which 3 were vacant. In 2019-2020, 43%

of the Ministry's workforce were women and in 2020-2021, 49% of the Ministry's workforce were women.

3.2.3.1.2 Learning and Development (L&D)

During the 2019-2020 financial year, 17 staff attended training facilitated by MCS Training Division whilst 50 attended training in 2020-2021.

3.2.3.1.3 Customer Call Centre

The Customer Care Call Centre (CCCC) was established to address grievances and receive feedback from the public about the quality of services provided by Ministries. MCS reported that in 2019-2020, the Ministry received 1,705 enquiries compared to 2,567 in 2020-2021 financial year.

The call centre operates from 8am to 12 midnight, 7 days a week, extending beyond Government working hours. This extended operation period was a key reason for outsourcing and also to gain a better understanding of call centre operations before implementing a long-term plan for an in-house call centre. The contract with Centrecom commenced in 2022. An agreement vetted by the Office of the Solicitor-General covers confidentiality of information in Section 9.7 of the agreement between the Ministry of Civil Service and Centrecom.

The Ministry of Civil Service pays for call centre services from its allocated budget under the Customer Care Centre.

The Committee notes that despite the 27 Ministries covered under the Government Feedback Call Centre, MCS had only reported on the two ministries that is, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations. The Committee is of the view that the Ministry provide holistic data on the types of complaints of all the 27 Ministries in its future reports.

3.2.4 Budget Utilization

3.2.4.1 MCS in 2019-2020 was allocated \$2.9 million with total utilization of \$2.5 million. During the 2020-2021 financial year, the Ministry was allocated a budget of \$2.9 million, of which \$2.07 million (69.24%) was utilized. Significant unutilized budget was noted in the Purchase of Goods and Services Budget. This was primarily due to COVID-19 restrictions such as travel bans and lockdowns which impacted the provision of face-to-face training.

3.3 Committee Findings

3.3.1 Retention of Talent

High turnover rates, especially among skilled professionals, pose a significant challenge. Competitive compensation and benefits packages offered by other sectors, including employment abroad, contribute to this issue. The Ministry is actively enhancing its strategies to retain skilled professionals by offering competitive career development opportunities and improving the overall work environment.

3.3.2 Budget Management

Resource management constraints limit the Ministry's ability to invest broadly in training, development, and recruitment. These limitations impact the overall delivery of services.

3.3.3 Recruitment Process

Certain phases of the recruitment procedures cause delays, leading to gaps in critical positions. The Ministry is continuously refining its recruitment processes to reduce delays and improve the efficiency of hiring, ensuring that critical positions are filled promptly. The Committee notes that the current recruitment practice under Open Merit Recruitment System negates succession plans in the Ministries. The Committee recommends that the Ministry must ensure that vacancies be filled as soon as practicable and the need to vigorously review the OMRS policy.

3.3.4 Policy Compliance

The Ministry is taking proactive measures to ensure compliance with all policies and fostering a culture of change. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive strategy involving improved communication, refined recruitment practices, better employee retention programs, technological modernization, and increased investment in training and development.

4.0 Sustainable Development Goals

4.1 Gender Equality in Parliamentary Scrutiny

- 4.1.1 Gender is a critical dimension in Parliamentary scrutiny. Standing Order 110(2) mandates Committees to ensure full consideration of the principle of gender equality, ensuring that impacts benefit both men and women equally.
- 4.1.2 The organizational structure, as reflected in the annual report, includes a total of 40 staff, with 3 vacant positions. Of the filled positions, 19 (55%) are held by women and 18 (45%) by men. The Committee noted that a significant number of women held managerial positions during the period under review. This is an encouraging trend.

4.2 Sustainable Development Goals Alignment


- 4.2.1 The Ministry of Civil Service has identified key elements of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16, Target 16.6, which focuses on transparent and accountable institutions.

5.0 Conclusion

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence has fulfilled its mandate approved by Parliament which was to investigate the contents of the Ministry of Civil Service 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Annual Reports and provide a report to Parliament. The Committee has conducted its review and formulated the findings with regard to the Ministry's performance.

The Committee report is bi-partisan and the key areas highlighted by the Committee in its recommendations would improve the overall performance of the Ministry in the future.

6.0 Committee Members' Signatures



Hon. Viliame Naupoto
Chairperson



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Deputy Chairperson



Hon. Jovesa Vocea
Member



Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu
Member



Hon. Rinesh Sharma
Member

7.0 Annexure

Published evidence

Written evidence, transcripts and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:

<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-foreign-affairs-and-defence/>