PAAC

PARLIAMENT
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

EIGHTH REPORT OF THE

THE COMMITTEE ON

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS

SECOND SESSION OF THE 11TH PARLIAMENT

INQUIRY

Examination into the Ministry of Education with specific reference to Inventory Control, Internal Audit, Sub-Head 02 - Goods and Services, Sub-Head 03 - Minor Equipment Purchases, Sub-Head 04 - Current Transfers and Subsidies, Sub-Head 09 Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund.

Public Administration and Appropriations Committee

The Public Administration and Appropriations Committee (PAAC) is established by Standing Order 102 and 92 of the House of Representatives and the Senate respectively. The Committee is mandated to consider and report to Parliament on:

(a) *the budgetary expenditure of Government agencies to ensure that expenditure is embarked upon in accordance with parliamentary approval;*

(b) *the budgetary expenditure of Government agencies as it occurs and keeps Parliament informed of how the budget allocation is being implemented; and*

(c) *the administration of Government agencies to determine hindrances to their efficiency and to make recommendations to the Government for improvement of public administration.*

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Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George	Chairman
Dr. Lackram Bodoe	Vice-Chairman
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Mr. Clarence Rambharat	Member
Mr. Daniel Dookie	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Mr. Ronald Huggins	Member
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	Member
Ms. Jennifer Raffoul	Member

Committee Staff

The current staff members serving the Committee are:

Ms, Keiba Jacob	Secretary to the Committee
Ms. Sheranne Samuel	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Parliamentary Intern
Mr. Brian Lucio	Graduate Research Assistant

Publication

An electronic copy of this report can be found on the Parliament website using the following link:
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Contact Information

All correspondence should be addressed to:

The Secretary
Public Administration and Appropriations Committee
Office of the Parliament
Levels G-9, Tower D
The Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre
1A Wrightson Road, Port of Spain, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Tel: (868) 624-7275 Ext 2372, 2373; 2409 Fax: (868) 625-4672
Email: paac@ttparliament.org

Date Laid in HOR: Jan 12, 2018 **Date Laid in Senate: Jan 16, 2018**

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Members of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee

Ms. Nicole Olivierre
Member

Ms. Jennifer Raffoul
Member

Mr. Ronald Huggins
Member

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Public Administration and Appropriations Committee (PAAC) is established by Standing Order (S.O.) 102 and 92 of the House of Representatives and the Senate respectively. The Committee is mandated to consider and report to Parliament on:

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c) the administration of Government agencies to determine hindrances to their efficiency and to make recommendations to the Government for improvement of public administration.

This Report of the PAAC for the Second Session of the Eleventh Parliament contains the details of the examination of the Ministry of Education (MoE) on –

- Accountability and Transparency;
- Inventory Control;
- Internal Audit;
- Goods and Services;
- Minor Equipment Purchases;
- Current Transfers and Subsidies;
- Development Programme – Consolidated Fund; and
- Infrastructure Development Fund.

In undertaking this examination, the Committee looked at overarching issues such as Accountability and Transparency, Inventory Control and Internal Audit as well as specific Sub – Heads. The Committee employed two (2) mechanisms: written submissions and a Public Hearing. The Committee made a general call for written submissions from the Ministry and conducted a review and analysis of the written submissions. Subsequently, the Committee conducted a Public Hearing with the Ministry. A subsequent request for additional information was made.

The Committee has proposed recommendations related to the issues identified. Observations and recommendations are presented in chapter 2.

INTRODUCTION

THE COMMITTEE

The PAAC of the Eleventh Republican Parliament was established by the revised Standing Orders to:

- examine current public expenditure, thereby capturing the full budget cycle by providing Parliamentary oversight of the implementation of the budget; and
- conduct a real time examination of the expenditure by Ministries and Departments.

In the 11th Parliament the Members of the Committee were appointed by resolutions of the House of Representatives and the Senate at sittings held on Friday November 13, 2015 and Tuesday November 17, 2015 respectively. However, by a Resolution of the Senate passed on December 19, 2016, Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir was appointed in lieu of Ms. Melissa Ramkissoon. Additionally by a Resolution of the Senate passed on November 28, 2017, Mr. Ronald Huggins was appointed in lieu of Ms. Allyson Baksh and Ms. Jennifer Raffoul was appointed in lieu of Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir. Further by a Resolution of the House of Representatives passed on December 01, 2017, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine was appointed in lieu of Mr. Maxie Cuffie.

By virtue of S.O. 109(6) and 99(6) of the House of Representatives and the Senate respectively, the Chairman of the Committee is the Speaker. At its First Meeting held on January 27 2016, Dr. Lackram Bodoe was elected as the Vice-Chairman. Additionally, in order to exercise the powers granted to it by the Houses of Parliament, the Committee was required by the Standing Orders to establish a quorum. A quorum of three (3) Members, inclusive of the Chair or Vice-Chairman, with representatives from both Houses, was agreed to by the Committee at its First Meeting.

The Committee in the discharge of its Parliamentary Financial Oversight function of monitoring the implementation of the budget focused on the expenditure and internal control measures of the Ministry of Education as it relates for the following:

- Accountability and Transparency

- Inventory Control;
- Internal Audit;
- Accountability and Transparency;
- Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; and
- Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases.

The objective of the Committee's inquiry was to determine whether there was accountability, transparency and value for money in the use of public funds.

METHODOLOGY

Determination of the Committee's Work Programme

At an in-camera meeting of the Committee on Wednesday November 16, 2016, it was agreed that the Committee would commence an inquiry into the Ministry of Education.

Based on these discussions, the Committee identified two (2) possible approaches to conduct its examination:

- macro approach; and
- specific Sub-Heads of Expenditure.

Review of Documents

The Committee deliberated on the budget documents, namely:

i. The Draft Estimates of Expenditure
ii. The Ministry of Finance's Call Circular
iii. General Warrant

The Committee noted the total allocations for Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme - Consolidated Fund and the Infrastructure Development Fund for 2016 were as follows:

Sub-Head	Total – 2017
Goods and Services	$545,481,974
Minor Equipment Purchases	$2,176,000
Current Transfers and Subsidies	$1,699,885,336
Development Programme – Consolidated Fund	$362,510,000
Infrastructure Development Fund	$511,060,000

Current Transfers and Subsidies refers to the transfer of funds to Regional Bodies, Educational Institutions, Non-Profit Organisations, State Enterprises and Subsidies etc.

The Development Programme consists of the Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. This constitutes the Capital Expenditure component of the National Budget and is used by the Government as a strategic tool to effectively execute its policies and achieve its national development objectives. This expenditure is intended to fund projects and programmes which are investments geared collectively towards stimulating economic growth and achieving high human development.

- The Consolidated Fund refers to Direct Charges from the Consolidated Fund; and
- The Infrastructure Development Fund refers to a transfer from the allocation to the Ministry of Finance.

The Committee determined the examination would begin by a call for written responses to the MoE to questions posed by the Committee. Questions[1] were sent on March 22, 2017 and written responses were requested to be submitted by April 05, 2017. The written responses were received on April 10, 2017.

Implementation of the Work Programme

The Committee deliberated on the responses submitted by the Ministry and agreed to conduct a Public Hearing based on the content of the responses and current matters in the public domain.

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process outlines steps to be taken by the Committee when conducting an inquiry into an entity or issue. The following steps outlines the Inquiry process followed by the PAAC for the examination of the MoE:

i. Identification of entities to be examined;

   At a meeting held on Wednesday, November 30, 2016, the Committee agreed to examine the MoE.

ii. Preparation of Inquiry Proposal for the MoE. The Inquiry Proposal outlined:

    I. Description
    II. Background;
    III. Overview of Expenditure
    IV. Rationale/Objective of Inquiry; and

[1] Questions sent to the Ministries and Departments are included in **Appendix I**.

V. Proposed Questions.

iii. Consideration and approval of Inquiry Proposal by the Committee and when approved, questions were forwarded to the MoE for written responses on March 22, 2017. The responses were received on April 10, 2017.

iv. Production of an Issues Paper by the Secretariat for the Committee's consideration, based on the written responses received from the MoE. The Issues Paper identified and summarised any matters of concern in the responses provided by the Ministry.

v. Determination of the need for a Public Hearing[2] based on the analysis of written submissions. The relevant witnesses were invited to attend and provide evidence.

vi. Subsequent to the public hearing, additional information was requested from the MoE on Friday July 07, 2017. The responses were received on Friday August 11, 2017.

vii. Report Committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament upon conclusion of the inquiry.

viii. Receive Ministerial Responses. Review responses.

[2] Public Hearings are information gathering mechanisms and forms part of Parliament's oversight role. Hearings are conducted to examine the operations of Ministries and Departments. At such hearings, the Committee questions witnesses (persons concerned with the agency or issue under scrutiny) in order to obtain information to make valid findings and recommendations, which addresses issues and challenges.

ISSUES, OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Inventory Control

Written and oral evidence received by the Committee indicated that all of the Ministry's assets were not adequately tagged. A pilot project was started in 2008 but was never completed, due to the deliverables as understood by the contracted firm were not in keeping with the Ministry's security protocols and funding requirements. As such, the final payment was not made to the contractor and the data was not made available to the Ministry. In an effort to circumvent the aforementioned issues, the Accounting Officer informed the Committee that the IT Department was developing an electronic tagging system.

Additionally, the Ministry's Inventory Register was not being adequately maintained. The Ministry therefore depended on each school to properly maintain its registers. This approach was unfortunately later determined to be inaccurate by the Ministry's Internal Auditor. As a result, the Accounting Officer indicated that talks were expected to be held with the Internal Auditor to determine the best approach to treat with the Ministry's and school's Inventory Register.

Recommendations:

- ***The Ministry of Education should submit a report to the Parliament on the status of the electronic tagging system by March 14, 2018.***
- ***The Ministry of Education should submit a report to the Parliament on the status of the initiatives being undertaken to treat with the Inventory Registers at the Ministry and schools by March 14, 2018.***

2. Internal Audit

Written evidence indicated that the Ministry's Internal Audit Unit was inadequately staffed. The Unit comprised twenty-two (22) persons out of the established twenty-nine (29) positions. The Accounting Officer indicated that through the Service Commissions Department, attempts were being made to fill the vacancies within the unit.

Additionally, evidence received indicated that Internal Audit staff performed administrative roles. As a result, the staff assigned to the Internal Audit Unit have less time to focus on the auditing of systems and controls. To address this issue, the Ministry indicated that it intends to separate the Internal Audit from General Administration.

Recommendations

- ***The Ministry should submit a report to Parliament on the status of the initiatives being taken to fill the vacancies within the Internal Audit Units by March 14, 2018.***
- ***The Ministry should seek to separate the administrative duties from the Internal Audit Function and acquire the services of administrative staff to assist the Internal Audit Unit by March 14, 2018.***

3. Training

The Committee learnt that formal training was not provided for persons involved in Internal Audit nor Inventory Control. Evidence received by the Ministry indicated that there was no schedule for training but Internal Audit staff were sometimes trained in-house. The Accounting Officer gave the assurance that staff engaged in the Internal Audit and Inventory Control functions would be formally trained pending the acquisition of the adequate funding.

Recommendations

- ***The Accounting Officer should develop a training schedule for Internal Audit and Inventory Control staff and submit to the Committee, a Report on the Progress made in training internal audit and inventory control staff by March 14, 2018.***

4. Indebtedness to the National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited (MTS)

Oral evidence received by the Committee revealed that the Ministry of Education owes MTS substantial amounts of funds. The Ministry was not able to ascertain the exact amount of money owed to MTS but averaged the figure to be approximately ninety-nine million dollars ($99 million). The Accounting Officer gave the assurance that the issue was being dealt with but believed that a special Unit should be assigned the responsibility of debt management.

Recommendations:

- ***The Ministry of Education should establish a Unit or designate specific persons with the sole mandate to treat with all matters concerning the debt owed to MTS by March 14, 2018.***
- ***The Ministry of Education should submit a report to the Committee on the status of the payment of the debt owed to MTS by March 14, 2018.***

5. Understaffed Monitoring and Evaluation Unit[3]

The Ministry's Monitoring and Evaluation Unit consisted of only two (2) persons and was therefore understaffed. This severely hindered the Ministry's ability to adequately monitor and evaluate the Ministry's programmes and projects. The Ministry indicated that ideally, the Unit should comprise of eight (8) persons and therefore efforts were being made to recruit six (6) additional persons on contract for the Unit.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry should submit to Parliament a report on the progress made in the recruitment of the additional staff by March 14, 2018.***

6. Absence of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

The Ministry was not in possession of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework[4]. A clear framework is essential to guide monitoring and evaluation. The Accounting Officer indicated that the Ministry aimed to complete the framework by September 30, 2017.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry should submit to Parliament a status update on the completion of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework by March 14, 2018.***

[3] Monitoring is carried out in order to track progress and performance as a basis for decision-making at various steps in the process of an initiative or project. Evaluation, on the other hand is a more generalised assessment of data or experience to establish to what extent the initiative has achieved its goals or objectives.

[4] An M&E framework explains how the programme is supposed to work by laying out the components of the initiative and the order or the steps needed to achieve the desired results. A framework increases understanding of the programme's goals and objectives, defines the relationships between factors key to implementation, and articulates the internal and external elements that could affect the programme's success.

7. **Rental of Buildings**

During the examination of the Ministry, the Committee learnt that despite occupying a new building in Port of Spain, the Ministry was still occupying other buildings. Given the economic climate and the Ministry's need for funding, the funds used for rent could have been used more effectively and hence could've funded other priority areas.

The Accounting officer gave the assurance that the Ministry would vacate the Wrightson Road building by September 30, 2017. Additionally, the Ministry was still occupying various buildings at London Street and St. Clair to name a few. As a result, the Accounting Officer gave the assurance that the Ministry would investigate the rental of all buildings.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry should submit to Parliament, a status update on the vacation of the Ministry's buildings by March 14, 2018.***
- ***The Ministry should submit to Parliament, a report on the occupation of its offices at locations other than the Government Campus by March 14, 2018.***

8. **Noncompliance by Heads of Divisions**

The Committee learnt that the Ministry had difficulties with its Heads of Divisions not submitting monthly project reports in a timely manner to the Ministry of Planning and Development. To resolve this issue, the Accounting Officer implemented quarterly Heads of Divisions meetings to remind the Heads of Divisions of this request. Despite this attempt, the Accounting Officer lamented that she saw little improvement and assured that the situation would be monitored.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry of Education should submit to the Committee a status update on the timely submission of the Ministry's monthly reports to the Ministry of Planning and Development by March 14, 2018.***

9. Vacancies

There were two thousand, eight hundred and twenty-one (2,821) contract positions at the Ministry. Of which, one thousand, four hundred and sixty (1,460), accounting for approximately 48% of contract positions were vacant. Additional evidence received attributed the following reasons for the substantial amount of vacancies:

- Shortage of persons with the requisite combination of qualifications and experience;
- Dis-continuation of programmes by the Ministry; and
- Budgetary constraints that restricted the Ministry's ability to filling contract positions that were absolutely necessary for the day to day functioning.
- The assistance of the Public and Teaching Service Commissions were requested to fill positions on the permanent establishment of the Ministry.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry should submit a report to the Parliament on the status of the initiatives being taken to fill the contract vacancies within the Ministry by March 14, 2018.***

10. Decrease in Funding for the Faculty of Medical Sciences

The subsidy to Mt. Hope Students was reduced by $19.5 million in fiscal year 2017. The Ministry indicated that the decrease resulted in the Faculty of Medical Sciences operating at a loss. Staff cost was the major cost factor, and immediate reduction in faculty staff was not possible, as they were needed for the next few years to support the student population that is already in the system.

According to the Ministry, there were two possible solutions to the problem i.e. increased direct cost to the current and future student body, and the sourcing of full fee paying non-regional students as a revenue opportunity. Unfortunately, both solutions may result in a reduction in the enrolment of local students. Additional evidence indicated that discussions on the solutions are preliminary and require comprehensive research.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry should submit a status report to the Committee on the solution for the Faculty of Medical Sciences by March 14, 2018.***

11. **Construction of Early Childhood Care and Education Centres (ECCE)**

The Ministry was allocated $40 million to construct/complete Early Childhood Care and Education Centres. The Ministry indicated that four ECCE Centres in highest demographic demand were expected to be completed in the 2017 fiscal year; and continue the construction of a fifth. These were:

1) Egypt Oasis ECCE – 99% completed
2) Marabella ECCE – 98% completed
3) Wallerfield ECCE – 98% completed
4) Springvale SDMS ECCE – 98% completed
5) Belle Vue ECCE – 11% (construction to continue in fiscal 2017 with completion carded for fiscal 2018).

Additionally, the Ministry indicated that it will settle the final accounts owing for the St. Sylvans, Chinapoo and Cunjal ECCE Centres by the end of fiscal year 2017.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry should submit a status report to the Committee on the following:***
  - ***Progress made in completing the four (4) ECCE Centres by March 14, 2018.***
  - ***Contruction of the Belle Vue ECCE by March 14, 2018.***
  - ***Payment of the final accounts for the St. Sylvans, Chinapoo and Cunjal ECCE Centres by March 14, 2018.***

12. No Allocation for the Construction of Secondary Schools

The students of Parvati Girls' Hindu College, Shiva Boys' Hindu College and Siparia East Secondary were being temporarily housed at alternative locations pending the completion of their respective schools since 2000 (Parvati Girls' and Shiva Boys') and 2004 (Siparia East).

Additional evidence indicated that the Parvati Girls' Hindu College and the Shiva Boys' Hindu College were 72% and 74% completed whereas the Siparia East Secondary was 48% completed. In total, the Ministry requested $317,705,487.00 for the completion of the schools. However, due to financial constraints, allocations were not made.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry of Education should liaise with the Ministry of Finance in an effort to find the appropriate funding to complete these schools and report to the Committee on the progress made in allocating funding for these schools by March 14, 2018.***

13. Placement of Returning Scholars

The Committee noted that many returning scholars, especially in the field of medicine were having difficulties in obtaining internships. Completion of internships are mandatory for medical graduates to become eligible for House Officer positions. However, due to the fact that House Officer is a public hospital position, graduates were encouraged by other parties to not undertake the internship to become a House Officer. Additionally, contract positions in the Private Sector are very limited. Therefore, returning graduates sometimes opt to apply for a deferral of obligatory service to pursue a specialty (obstetrics, gynecology, pediatrics).

Additional evidence indicated that as at July 27th 2017, approximately ninety-two (92) scholars reported to the Scholarship and Advanced Training Division (SATD) and nineteen (19) requested deferral of obligatory service or have had such requests approved. The Ministry of Health reported that one hundred and eight (108) scholars were placed as interns, so far this year, inclusive of those whom had deferred in previous years.

The Ministry assured that at the end of August 2017, the SATD would have contacted the remaining eighty-five (85) scholars who are yet to report in.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry of Health should submit a status report to the Committee on the placement of all medical graduates by March 14, 2018.***
- ***The Ministry of Education should submit a status report to the Committee on the placement of all returning graduates (excluding medical graduates) by March 14, 2018.***

14. Funds Recovered via Breach of Scholarship Obligations

The Committee learnt that as at June, 30 2017, the Ministry recovered $3 million of funds owed by scholarship recipients who were in breach of their obligations. As at July 26, 2017, one hundred and forty-four (144) persons were in breach of their obligations.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry of Education should submit a status report to the Committee on the recovery of all funds due to breach of scholarship obligations by March 14, 2018.***

15. Late Payment of Scholarship Allowances

Evidence submitted to the Committee indicated that there were instances in which scholarship recipients based overseas received their monthly allowances late. This resulted in added financial stress and hardship to students. The Accounting Officer indicated that in an effort to alleviate this situation, the Ministry was considering paying scholarship recipients three months' allowances in advance.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry of Education should submit a report to the Parliament on whether the practice of paying scholarship recipients based overseas three***

months' worth of allowances in advance had commenced and whether this practice is sustainable by March 14, 2018.

16. International Fine Cocoa Innovation Centre

In the course of the Committee's inquiry, it was learnt that the Ministry was allocated $4.5 million towards the building of the International Fine Cocoa Innovation Centre. The Centre was intended to be a transformational project aimed at modernising the Cocoa Industry in Trinidad and Tobago. However, the Accounting Officer indicated that Cabinet approval for the project was yet to be obtained as the Cabinet Note was not finalised. Additionally, the Accounting Officer could not determine when the Cabinet Note would be forwarded to Cabinet for approval.

Recommendation:

- ***The Ministry of Education should submit the Note to Cabinet for approval by January 31, 2018 and thereafter submit an update to Parliament on the status of the Cabinet Note by March 14, 2018.***

CONCLUSION

During the Second Session of the Eleventh Parliament, the PAAC conducted an examination into the Ministry of Education with specific reference to Inventory Control, Internal Audit, Sub - Head 02 - Goods and Services, Sub - Head 03 - Minor Equipment Purchases, Head 04 - Current Transfers and Subsidies, Sub – Head 09 Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. During the course of the examination which comprised of written submissions and a Public Hearing, the Committee discovered a number of issues such as weak Inventory Control and Internal Audit systems, significant indebtedness to the National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited (MTS), understaffed Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, absence of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, noncompliance by Heads of Divisions, over one thousand (1000) vacancies, late payment of scholarship allowances.

The Committee is of the view that the adoption of its proposed recommendations would lead to greater accountability, transparency and value for money in the use of public funds and eagerly awaits the receipt of the Ministry's responses. The Committee fully intends to continuously monitor the implementation of the recommendations proposed in its Report.

This Committee respectfully submits this Report for the consideration of the Parliament.

Sgd.
Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George
Chairman

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Member

Sgd.
Ms. Jennifer Rafoul
Member

APPENDIX I

Questions submitted to Ministry of Education

Inventory Control

i. The Acquisition of Materials and Motor Vehicles

Questions:

1. What procedure regarding inventory control is currently being followed by the Ministry?
2. How does the Ministry ensure that proper procedure is always followed?
3. What measures are currently employed by the Ministry to ensure that value for money is always achieved during the process?

ii. Proper maintenance of the Inventory Register

Questions:

1. Who is responsible for the updating of the Inventory registry?
2. Are the persons in this department sufficiently skilled to undertake this task?
3. How often is the register checked for accuracy to ensure information listed is up to date?
4. Are the recommendations of the Auditor General's Department taken into consideration?
5. Have errors in the register been detected by the Accounting Officer in the past? If yes, provide details on the errors detected and how they were treated with.
6. Is the register updated in time for submission to the Auditor General Department?
7. What efforts are being made by the Ministry to ensure that the information presented in the inventory register is always accurate?
8. Does the Ministry have sufficient personnel to deal with the maintenance of the inventory register? Are assigned personnel properly trained?

iii. Tagging of the Ministry's Inventory

Questions:

1. Are all items in the Ministry currently tagged?

2. What is used to tag these items?
3. How often are checks made to ensure that all items are properly tagged?
4. How long does this process take?
5. What problems are encountered by the administration department when tagging equipment, etc.?
6. Has the tagging of items helped the Ministry with the maintenance of the inventory register?

iv. Safeguarding Assets

Questions:

1. How does the Ministry ensure the security of all assets? How effective is the system used?
2. How are the State's materials and equipment stored?
3. Are sensitive materials securely stored? Provide details.
4. On average, how much is spent per year by the Ministry to replace equipment?

v. Omission of entries in the Register

Questions:

1. For the period 2011 - 2015, how often did the Auditor General's Department identify instances of omission at your Ministry?
2. What items have been omitted from the registry? What was the nature of these omissions? Why were the items omitted from the registry?
3. What steps have been taken to ensure that these mistakes do not recur?

vi. The disposal of obsolete machinery and equipment (also Motor Vehicles)

Questions:

1. In light of the proposed proclamation of the procurement legislation, what measures, if any, have been taken by your Ministry in preparation?
2. How often does the Ministry perform checks for obsolete equipment?

vii. No Policy for the Acquisition of Motor Vehicles

Questions:

1. In light of the proposed proclamation of the procurement legislation, what measures, if any, have been taken by your Ministry in preparation?
2. What guidelines are currently being used by the Ministry to guide the process for the acquisition of motor vehicles? What is the source of the authority?
3. Have these guidelines proven to be efficient and transparent thus far? Provide details/examples.
4. What problems have been experienced with the employment of these guidelines? Provide details.

Internal Audit

i. Staffing of Internal Audit Units

Questions:

1. Is there an Internal Audit Unit in the Ministry?
2. How many persons are in this unit?
3. How many audit positions are on the Establishment? Provide details.
4. Is the Accounting Officer satisfied with the work being produced by this unit?
5. Is the Unit adequately staffed? If no, what is being done about this issue?
6. How many persons in this unit are qualified to perform internal audits?
7. Are internal auditing staff periodically trained to ensure compliance with updated International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing?

i. The absence of a separate body for internal audit units to report to (conflict of interest)

Questions:

1. What happens after an Internal Audit Report is submitted to the Accounting Officer?
2. Is the Internal Audit Department allowed to perform an unbiased investigation?

3. What hurdles have been experienced thus far due to the line of responsibility currently in place?
4. Is there compliance with the recommendations of the Internal Auditor? Provide evidence of this.

ii. Efficiency of Internal Audit checks on specific areas

Questions:

1. Does the Ministry have a framework for executing internal audits?
2. How often are routine checks of the Ministry's activities performed by internal auditors?
3. Does the Internal Auditor's work programme cover all areas of the Ministry's functions?
    i. If yes, provide evidence.
    ii. If no, why are certain areas not considered in the Internal Auditor's work programme?
4. At what point during the financial year is an internal audit performed?
5. The Auditor General identified a lack of Internal Audit control as a pervasive issue, as there was no evidence of this function. Are there still instances of no audits being performed? If yes, why?
6. What impediments have Internal Auditors experienced?
7. Is the Accounting Officer aware of this deficiency in the oversight operations of the Ministry?
8. What systems have been implemented to address issues identified by the Internal Auditor?
9. In what ways has the Ministry's Internal Audit Unit contributed to improvements in the performance of the Ministry?
10. What is the Ministry's policy on providing Internal Auditors with all supporting documents and records of transactions for audit?
11. Has a Charter of Internal Audit work been prepared for fiscal year 2017? If yes, has it been reviewed by the Accounting Officer? If yes, please provide evidence of this.

12. Is there a need to improve the Ministry's internal control system? If yes, what measures will be implemented to improve the Ministry's internal control system?
13. What will be done to ensure the Internal Audit work programme covers all aspects of the Ministry's functions?

iii. Internal Audit Unit performing other administrative functions

Questions:

1. What are the job titles of the persons currently employed in the Internal Audit Unit?
2. Is the internal audit staff required to perform other administrative duties? If yes, how does this affect the internal audit function?
3. When are they allowed to execute duties pertaining to the internal audit function?

iv. Absence of a Defined Role for Internal Audit

Questions:

1. What problems have been encountered by the Ministry due to the absence of a defined role of the Internal Auditor in the Exchequer and Audit Act?
2. What mechanisms have been employed to work around these issues?
3. What advice would the Accounting Officer have for the Ministry of Finance when drafting an official Internal Audit definition?

Accountability

Questions:

1. In relation to allocations to the Ministry, how does the Accounting Officer (AO) ensure there is an appropriate framework in place to provide him/her with the required accountability to Parliament?
2. What is the process used by the Accounting Officer to measure outcomes, evaluate performance and demonstrate value for money?
3. How does the Accounting Officer test whether projects and programmes are feasible and provide value for money at the start and throughout their life?

4. How does the Accounting Officer determine whether the framework for accountability, transparency and value for money at the Ministry is working/applied?
5. Are there systems in place to measure whether this framework is reliable and efficient?
6. What is process for dealing with failure or underperformance in programmes and projects?
7. How does the Accounting Officer provide meaningful oversight of state enterprises, statutory bodies and other agencies receiving funding from the Ministry?
8. How does the Accounting Officer ensure accountability and value for money, transparency in satellite centres and Divisions of the Ministry?
9. Is there a framework governing conflict of interest? Describe the framework.
10. What measures are used to address conflicts of interest once identified?
11. What strategies are being employed to ensure there is efficiency and efficacy in expenditure of the allocation to the Ministry?
12. Given the current economic climate, has any consideration been given to the employment of measures to eliminate waste and unnecessary expenditure and to increase revenue collection?

Issues Arising from Recurrent Expenditure Allocation

Sub-Head: Goods and Services - $545,481,974

001 General Administration

Sub-Item: 01 Travelling and Subsistence

2016 Revised	2017	Variation
$12,500,000	$10,000,000	($2,500,000)

Questions:

1. How would this decrease in allocation affect the Ministry?
2. Provide a detailed list of the positions/posts which receive travelling allowances?
3. What measures have been put in place to ensure that the Ministry carries out regular reviews and checks in order to assess and manage these funds?
4. What good practices exist, regarding the financing of this sub item?
5. What challenges exist, regarding the financing of this sub item?

6. How often are Internal Audit reports produced to ensure transparency and accountability?

Sub-Item: 16 Contract Employment

2016 Revised	**2017**	**Variation**
$145,000,000	$107,500,000	($37,500,000)

Questions:

1. The allocation for Contract Employment decreased by 26% in fiscal year 2017. How will the decrease in allocation affect the Ministry?
2. How many contract positions exist at the Ministry?
3. How many contract vacancies exist at Ministry?
4. How many are expected to be filled during this fiscal year?
5. Describe the recruitment and selection process, including the criteria used to hire persons on Contract Employment.
6. Is there a performance management system in place? If yes, how often is this applied?
7. When was the last performance management appraisal conducted?

Sub-Item: 22-Short Term Employment

2016 Revised	**2017**	**Variation**
$39,250,000	$15,000,000	($24,250,000)

Questions:

1. What changes are anticipated in fiscal year 2017 regarding Short-Term Employment?
2. What has been the impact of the decrease in allocation for the Ministry?
3. What type of work or service is provided by short-term employees at the Ministry?
4. Are any persons hired on a short-term arrangement in excess of six (6) months?
5. Are there persons currently employed on a short–term contract who were previously employed on a three (3) year contract?
6. Describe the recruitment and selection process, including the criteria used to hire persons on Short-term Employment.
7. Is there a performance assessment system in place? If yes, how often is this done?

8. When was the last performance assessment conducted?
9. How does the Permanent Secretary ensure value for money regarding short-term employment?

Sub-Item: 23 Fees

2016 Revised	**2017**	**Variation**
$44,000,000	$25,000,000	($19,000,000)

Questions:

1. What types of fees are paid from this sub-item?
2. How has the decrease in allocation for this sub-item impacted the Ministry?
3. Are there policies regarding this sub-item? If yes, provide details.
4. What are the limits for this sub-item? Please provide details.
5. Provide a breakdown of the fees paid for fiscal year 2016?
6. Are there outstanding fees for fiscal year 2016?
7. How does the PS oversee the dissemination of funds for this sub-item?
8. Are there any measures in place to guarantee accountability and transparency with regards to this sub-item?
9. What measures have been put in place to ensure that the PS carries out regular reviews and checks with which to assess and manage these funds? Provide details.
10. Are checks and balances carried out by the PS? Provide details.
11. What challenges and good practices exist, related to the financing of this sub-item?
12. How often are internal audit reports for items relevant to this sub-item produced to ensure that there is some evidence of transparency and accountability? Provide a copy of report.
13. Have any strategies been implemented to assess the Ministry's expenditure and the potential to reduce the cost related to this expenditure?

Sub-Item: 28- Other Contracted Services

2016 Revised	**2017**	**Variation**
$60,000,000	$35,000,000	($25,000,000)

Questions:

1. The allocation for Other Contracted Services decreased by 42% in fiscal year 2017. How will this decrease affect the Ministry?
2. Provide a detailed breakdown of the services to be procured in fiscal year 2017.
3. What is the procurement policy for obtaining goods and services under this sub-item?
4. What is the role of the Internal Auditor in monitoring expenditure for this sub-item?
5. Are Internal Audit reports produced to ensure there is evidence of transparency and accountability under this sub-item?
6. Are there appropriate mechanisms to monitor expenditure under this sub-item Other Contracted Services? If yes, provide a copy of the mechanisms for monitoring expenditure.

Sub-Item: 37- Janitorial Services

2016 Revised	**2017**	**Variation**
$90,825,150	$68,462,650	($22,362,500)

Questions:

1. Is there a recruitment and selection process for Janitorial Services? If yes, provide a breakdown of this process.
2. How does the Ministry evaluate and benchmark its service provider(s)' performance against other similar service providers in areas such as transaction cost and practices and procedures?
3. Explain the process to approve Janitorial Services for payment.
4. Please provide a list of all contract agreements with each service provider, the period of each agreement and the total expenditure incurred by the Ministry.
5. Are there any services provided without a contractual agreement?
6. Is someone assigned to monitor the performance of Janitorial Service providers?
7. What measures have been implemented to ensure that the Ministry carries out regular reviews and quality checks with which to assess and manage the performance of service providers?
8. Is information discussed with the provider and used to improve standards and performance in a timely manner? If yes, please provide a sample of this evaluation.

9. Is there a performance management system in place for service providers? If yes, how often is this done? When last was it done?

Sub-Item 43- Security Services

2016 Revised	2017	Variation
$154,500,000	$117,599,294	($36,900,706)

Questions:

1. How are the security service providers contracted?
2. The allocation for Security Services decreased by 24% in fiscal year 2017. How will this decrease affect schools around the country?
3. Please provide a list of all contract agreements with each security service provider, the period of each agreement and the total expenditure incurred by the Ministry.
4. Explain the process used to approve services for payment.
5. Are there plans by the Ministry to implement additional security measures within schools?
6. Does the Ministry evaluate and benchmark its service provider(s) performance against other providers in areas such as transaction cost and practices and procedures? If yes, provide an example.
7. Are there any services provided without a contractual agreement?
8. Is someone assigned to monitor the performance of Janitorial Service providers?
9. What measures have been implemented to ensure that the Ministry carries out regular reviews and quality checks with which to assess and manage the performance of service providers?
10. Is information discussed with the provider and used to improve standards and performance in a timely manner? If yes, please provide a sample of this evaluation.
11. Is there a performance management system in place for service providers? If yes, how often is this done? When last was it done?

008 Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre

Sub-Item: 12 Materials and Supplies

2016 Revised	2017	Variation
$3,000,000	$1,000,000	($2,000,000)

Questions:

1. How will this decrease in allocation affect the Centre?
2. Provide a list of all the items used and the total cost of each item for the period 2015 - 2016.
3. Does the Centre have an inventory control system? Please provide relevant documentation of such.
4. What is the method of procurement used to acquire Materials and Supplies? Can proper documentation be provided?
5. Who are the suppliers/providers of the items purchased under this sub-item?
6. What is the process used to recruit and select suppliers/providers of services under this sub item?
7. What is the system used for the payment of these suppliers/providers under this sub-item?
8. What oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure that there is value for money, accountability and transparency as regards this sub-item? Provide the relevant documentation.

010 General Administration (TEST)

Sub-Item: 16 Contract Employment

2016 Revised	**2017**	**Variation**
$8,000,000	$6,800,000	($1,200,000)

Questions:

1. How would this decrease in allocation affect the Ministry in this fiscal year?
2. How many contract positions exist at the Ministry relevant to this item?
3. How many contract vacancies exist at TEST?
4. How many are expected to be filled during this fiscal year?
5. Describe the recruitment and selection process, including the criteria used to hire persons on Contract Employment.
6. Is there a performance management system in place? If yes, how often is this done?
7. When was the last performance management appraisal conducted?

Sub-Item: 62 Promotions, Publicity and Printing

2016 Revised	2017	Variation
$996,000	$600,000	($396,000)

Questions:

1. What guidelines exist to ensure that the message from the Ministry is consistent and reaches its target audience?
2. How will the decrease in the allocation of 33% affect the Ministry's performance and achievement its mission in fiscal year 2017?
3. What challenges and good practices exist, related to the financing of this sub item?
4. How is the return on investment on the promotions, publicity and printing evaluated? Is the Division satisfied with the return on investment? Provide details.
5. How often are the following items printed and updated and what is the total cost of each item as at November 30, 2016:
   a. manuals, forms, brochures;
   b. advertisements in the newspapers, television and the international publications?
6. How will the manuals and brochures printed and published benefit the Ministry?
7. Are Outreach Programmes conducted? How often are they conducted? What is the estimated cost per Outreach Programme? What is the nature/format of these outreach programmes?
8. Is there a system in place for the creation, upgrade and maintenance of websites?
9. To what extent does the Ministry utilise Social Media? Is the money spent on Social Media based on reach? How is effectiveness determined?
10. What measures have been put in place to ensure that the Ministry carries out regular reviews and quality checks with which to assess and manage the performance of service providers for promotion, publicity and printing? Provide a detailed breakdown.
11. Will this information be discussed with the service providers to improve standards and performance in a timely manner? Please provide evidence of this.

016 Scholarships and Advanced Training Division

Sub-Item: 16 Contract Employment

2016 Revised	2017	Variation
$18,000,000	$17,000,000	($1,000,000)

Questions:

1. How would this decrease in allocation affect the Ministry in this fiscal year?
2. How many contract positions exist at the Ministry relevant to this Division?
3. How many contract vacancies exist in the Scholarships and Advanced Training Division?
4. How many are expected to be filled during this fiscal year?
5. Describe the recruitment and selection process, including the criteria used to hire persons on Contract Employment.
6. Is there a performance management system in place? If yes, how often is this done?
7. When was the last performance management appraisal conducted?

03 Minor Equipment Purchases- $2,176,000

2016 Revised	2017	Variation
$2,000,000	$1,000,000	($1,000,000)

Sub-item: 04 - Other Minor Equipment

Questions:

1. What equipment are anticipated to be purchased for fiscal year 2017?
2. How does the Department plan to oversee and account for the use of these funds under this sub-item?
3. Are Internal Audit reports produced to ensure there is evidence of transparency and accountability?
4. What measures are in place to guarantee value for money, accountability and transparency under these sub-items?

Sub-Head 04 Current Transfers and Subsidies - $1,699,885,336

001 Regional Bodies

2015 Actual	2016 Estimate	2016 Revised	2017
$9,829,561	$11,275,121	-	$10,000,000

- 01 Caribbean Examination Council

Questions:

1. Why was no allocation utilsed in fiscal year 2016 for this sub-item?
2. What accounted for the re-introduction of allocation to this sub-item in fiscal year 2017?

006 Educational Institutions

- 09 Grants to Assisted Primary Schools (School Equipment and Upkeep of School Premises)

2016 Revised	2017	Variation
$62,300,000	$38,500,000	($23,800,000)

Questions:

1. The allocation for Grants to Assisted primary Schools decreased by 38% in fiscal year 2017. How would this decrease in allocation affect schools with regards to school equipment and upkeep of school premises in fiscal year 2017?

- 24 Grants to Government Secondary Schools – Education Programme

2016 Revised	2017	Variation
$103,100,000	$93,000,000	($10,100,000)

Questions:

1. The allocation for Grants to Government Secondary Schools decreased by 10% in fiscal year 2017. How would this decrease in allocation affect schools with regards to Education Programme in fiscal year 2017?

- 27 Textbook Rental/Management Unit – Primary Schools

2016 Revised	2017	Variation
$2,000,000	$5,000,000	$3,000,000

Questions:

1. The allocation for Textbook Rental/Management Unit – Primary Schools increased by 10% in fiscal year 2017. How would this increase in allocation affect schools with regards to their textbooks in fiscal year 2017?

Current Transfers and Subsidies	2016 Revised	2017	Variation
35 Direct University Services – Current	**$675,047,100**	**$652,250,000**	**($22,797,100)**
38 Council of Legal Education	**$30,036,000**	**$20,000,000**	**($10,036,000)**
44 Subsidies Mt. Hope Students	**$39,512,000**	**$20,000,000**	**($19,512,000)**
48 University of Trinidad and Tobago	**$332,772,000**	**$225,000,000**	**($107,772,000)**
49 Laventille Technology and Continuing Education Centre	**$25,684,600**	**$15,000,000**	**($10,684,600)**
54 M I C Craft Programmes	**$18,857,350**	**$13,000,000**	**($5,587,350)**

Questions:

1. What effects would these reductions in allocations have on the students enrolled in these institutions and benefit from the sub-items stated above?
2. How would these reductions affect the performance of the Institutions stated above?

09 Development Programme Consolidated Fund - $362,510,000

004 Social Infrastructure - $241,570,000

04 Education

D. Vocational and Technical

- **001 Establishment of Diego Martin HYPE Centre**

Questions:

1. What oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure that there is value for money, accountability and transparency for this project?
2. Provide the following details for this project in the 2017 financial year:
    a. Contract terms;

b. Project start date;
c. Total cost;
d. Total cost to date;
e. Project expected completion date;
f. Percentage of the project completed to date;
g. Initial cost and the current revised cost; and
h. Project outcomes.

3. What is the Ministry's role in preventing, detecting and investigating fraud within this project?

G. Educational Services

- **002 Scholarships – President's Medal and Non Advanced Level Examinations**
- **004 National/ Additional Scholarships based on Level Examinations**
- **009 Post Graduate Scholarship**

Questions:

1. What are the criteria used to determine students eligible for scholarships?
2. Are there systems in place to ensure effective compliance, proper management of funds and adequate performance? If yes, provide a detailed description.
3. What mechanisms are in place to ensure the timely placement of scholarship recipients in Ministries and Departments in accordance with contract terms?
4. What percentage of recipients return to Trinidad and Tobago in fulfillment of their scholarship obligations?
5. Of this percentage, how many are employed with government agencies and departments in fulfillment of their scholarship obligations?
6. Are mechanisms in place to ensure scholarship recipients comply with scholarship requirements?
7. For the period 2006 – 2016, how much funds have been recovered from scholarship recipients who have failed to fulfill their scholarship obligations?
8. What measures are in place to ensure timely releases of funds to scholarship recipients?
9. What oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure that there is value for money, accountability and transparency for these sub-items?

10. Provide the following details for the categories of Scholarships in the 2017 financial year:
    a. Contract terms and agreements;
    b. Total cost of each; and
    c. Systems in place to ensure compliance.
11. What is the Ministry's role in preventing, detecting and investigating fraud within these scholarships?
12. How does the Ministry assess the effectiveness of these Scholarships upon completion? What are the returns?
13. What systems are in place to ensure there is proper usage of funds for these scholarships?
14. Are there systems in place to match course of study with national development requests?

J. Science, Technology and Applied Arts

- **016 Establishment of a COSTAATT Campus in Chaguanas**
- **027 Establishment of a National Science Centre**

Questions:

1. Briefly explain the benefits of these projects to citizens?
2. Are there systems in place to ensure effective compliance, proper management of assets and adequate performance for these projects? If yes, provide a detailed description.
3. What oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure that there is value for money, accountability and transparency for these projects?
4. Provide the following details for this project in the 2017 financial year:
    a. Contract terms;
    b. Project start date;
    c. Total cost;
    d. Total cost to date;
    e. Project expected completion date;
    f. Percentage of the project completed to date;
    g. Initial cost and the current revised cost; and
    h. Project outcomes.

5. What is the Ministry's role in preventing, detecting and investigating fraud within these projects?
6. What systems are in place to ensure there is proper usage of funds for these projects?

005 Multi-Sectoral and Other Services - $112,940,000

06 General Public Services

1. **Administrative Services**

    031 Seamless Education System Project - $5,500,000

Questions:

1. Provide details based on the following:
    a. Project Description;
    b. The project start date;
    c. Total estimated cost of the project;
    d. Total cost of the project to date;
    e. Project expected completion date.
2. What are the benefits of this project to the Education System of Trinidad and Tobago?
3. What are the functions and structure for this project?
4. What systems are in place to ensure there are effective compliance and proper management of funds? Please provide details of these systems.
5. What oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure that there is value for money, accountability and transparency with respect to this project descriptions and respective transactions?
6. What is the Ministry's role in preventing, detecting and investigating fraud?

F. Public Buildings

- **027 Building of the International Fine Cocoa Innovation Centre - $4,500,000**

Questions:

1. Provide details based on the following:
    a. Project Description;
    b. The project start date;
    c. Total estimated cost of the project;
    d. Total cost of the project to date;

    e. Project expected completion date
2. How will this project benefit the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago?
3. What oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure that there is value for money, accountability and transparency with respect to this project descriptions and respective transactions?
4. What is the Ministry's role in preventing, detecting and investigating fraud?

Infrastructure Development Fund - $511,060,000

General Question

1. Provide a list of transfers and virements made throughout the Ministry of Education for the fiscal year 2016?

004 Social Infrastructure

04 Education

A. Pre-Primary 001 Early Childhood Care and Education

2015 Actual	2016 Estimate	2016 Revised	2017	Variation
$57,075,110	$ 40,000,000	$3,000,000	$40,000,000	$37,000,000

Questions:

1. Provide the following details for this project in the 2017 financial year:
    a. Project description;
    b. Contract terms;
    c. Project start date;
    d. Total cost;
    e. Total cost to date;
    f. Project expected completion date;
    g. Project outcomes.
2. How would this increase in allocation affect Early Childhood Care Centres across Trinidad and Tobago?
3. What accounted for the significant decrease in the revised allocation in fiscal year 2016?
4. How will the allocation received for this project be utilised?

5. How does the allocation meet the needs of the Ministry and contribute to the improvement of its performance?
6. Are there systems in place to ensure effective compliance, proper management of assets and adequate performance? If yes, provide a detailed description.
7. What oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure that there is value for money, accountability and transparency for these sub-items?
8. What is the Ministry's role in preventing, detecting and investigating fraud in this project?
9. What systems are in place to ensure there is proper usage of funds for this project?

B. Primary

- **121 Procurement of Furniture and Equipment**

Questions:

1. What are the benefits of the expenditure under this sub-item?
2. How does the Permanent Secretary oversee and account for the allocation of these funds?
3. How does the Permanent Secretary assess the effectiveness of this service?
4. Please provide a detailed breakdown of all schools receiving furniture and equipment for the fiscal year 2016.
5. Are there systems to ensure effective compliance, proper management of assets and adequate performance? If yes, provide a detailed description.
6. What is the Ministry's role in preventing, detecting and investigating fraud in these services?
7. What systems are in place to ensure there is proper usage of funds?

C. Secondary

The following projects received no allocations for fiscal year 2017:

332 Procurement of Furniture and Equipment

339 Construction of Lakshmi Girls' Hindu School

342 Construction of Shiva Boys' Hindu College

344 Construction of Parvati Girls' Hindu College

348 Construction of the Siparia East Secondary

385 Construction of Holy Name Convent – Point Fortin

Questions:

1. What impact would the non-allocation received for these projects in fiscal year 2017 have on the students attending these schools?

J. Science, Technology and Applied Arts

- 041 UTT Main Campus Tamana E-Teck Park Wallerfield

2016 Estimate	2016 Revised	2017	Variation
$ 100,000,000	$6,112,000	$120,000,000	$113,888,000

1. Provide the following details for this project in the 2017 financial year:
    1. Project description;
    2. Contract terms;
    3. Project start date;
    4. Total cost;
    5. Total cost to date;
    6. Project expected completion date;
    7. Percentage of the project completed to date;
    8. Initial cost and the current revised cost; and
    9. Project outcomes.
2. Are there systems in place to ensure effective compliance, proper management of assets and adequate performance? If yes, provide a detailed description.
3. What oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure that there is value for money, accountability and transparency for this project?
4. Are internal policies and procedures reviewed and revised to reflect current practice?
5. What is the Ministry's role in preventing, detecting and investigating fraud in these projects?
6. How does the PS assess the effectiveness of the internal audit function?
7. What systems are in place to ensure there is proper usage of funds for these projects?

APPENDIX II

The Inquiry Process

<u>The Inquiry Process</u>

The Inquiry Process outlines steps to be taken by the Committee when conducting an inquiry into an entity or issue. The following steps outlines the Inquiry process followed by the PAAC:

ix. Identification of entity to be examined;

x. Preparation of Inquiry Proposal for the selected entity. The Inquiry Proposal outlines:

    VI. Description

    VII. Background;

    VIII. Overview of Expenditure

    IX. Rationale/Objective of Inquiry; and

    X. Proposed Questions.

xi. Consideration and approval of Inquiry Proposals by the Committee and when approved, questions are forwarded to the entity for written responses;

xii. Issue of requests for written comment from the public are made via Parliament's website, social media accounts, newspaper and advertisements;

xiii. Preparation of an Issues Paper by the Secretariat for the Committee's consideration, based on written responses received from the entities. The Issues Paper identifies and summarises any matters of concern in the responses provided by the entity or received from stakeholders and the general public;

xiv. Review of the responses provided and the Issues Paper by the Committee;

xv. Conduct of a site visit to obtain a first-hand perspective of the implementation of a project (optional);

xvi. Determination of the need for a Public Hearing based on the analysis of written submissions and the site visit (if required). If there is need for a public hearing, the relevant witnesses will be invited to attend and provide evidence. There is usually no need to examine the entity in public if:

xvii. the Committee believes the issues have little public interest; or

xviii. the Committee believes that the written responses provided are sufficient and no further explanation is necessary.

xix. Issue of written request to the entity for further details should the Committee require any additional information after the public hearing.

xx. Report Committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament upon conclusion of the inquiry.

APPENDIX III

Minutes of Meetings

THE PUBLIC ADMINSTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE – SECOND SESSION, ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH MEETING HELD ON MONDAY JULY 03, 2017 AT 1:42 P.M.
IN THE LEVEL 2 MEETING ROOM AND THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR, TOWER D, OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, 1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN.

Present were:

Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George	-	Chairman
Dr. Lackram Bodoe	-	Vice-Chairman
Mr. Maxie Cuffie	-	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	-	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	-	Member
Mrs. Allyson Baksh	-	Member
Mr. Clarence Rambharat	-	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob	-	Secretary
Ms. Sheranne Samuel	-	Assistant Secretary
Mr. Brian Lucio	-	Parliamentary Intern

Absent were:

Ms. Nicole Olivierre	-	Member (Excused)
Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir	-	Member (Excused)
Mr. Daniel Dookie	-	Member (Excused)

<u>COMMENCEMENT</u>

1.1 At 1:42 p.m. the Chairman called the meeting to order.

1.2 The Chairman indicated that Ms. Nicole Olivierre, Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir and Mr. Daniel Dookie asked to be excused from the meeting.

<u>EXAMINATION OF MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-FOURTH MEETING</u>

2.1 The Committee examined the Minutes of the Twenty-fourth (24th) meeting held on Monday June 05, 2017.

2.2 The following correction was made:

- Item 6.5 (vii), page 4: ‘s’ was inserted at the end of the of the word ‘relation’.

2.3 There being no further omissions or corrections, the Minutes as amended were confirmed on a motion moved by Mr. Wade Mark and seconded by Dr. Lackram Bodoe.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-FOURTH MEETING

3.1 As per item 3.3, the Chairman advised Members that the submission in response to the Committee’s request for additional information from the Tobago House of Assembly was received on June 08, 2017 and would be circulated to Members.

3.2 As per item 4.1, the Chairman informed Members that the draft Report on the System of Internal Audit in the Public Service would be re-circulated for Members’ consideration.

3.3 As per item 5.1, the Chairman explained the reason for the rescheduling of the 25th meeting of the Committee. A Member raised a concern about what can be done to minimise the interruptions to the Committee’s Work Programme and the need for rescheduled meetings. The Chairman advised that the matter could be raised at the level of the Business Committee.

3.4 As per item 9.2, the Chairman informed Members that additional questions were dispatched to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs on Wednesday June 07, 2017. The deadline for submission was Thursday June 22, 2017. The Ministry requested an extension to July 05, 2017.

COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

4.1 The Chairman advised Members that the next entity left in the current Work Programme was the Judiciary, however, the Committee only received its submission on the morning of the meeting (July 03, 2017). The Committee decided that there would be no public hearing on July 12, 2017.

4.2 The Committee discussed the avenues available for follow-up. It was agreed that the review/follow-up of other entities would be done early in September. It was also agreed that meetings would resume on September 06, 2017.

4.3 During the recess Members agreed to review the four (4) outstanding Reports. These Reports would be approved and circulated for Members’ signature at the first meeting to be held in September.

4.4 It was agreed that the Secretariat would collaborate with the Chairman to determine the proposed Work Programme for the Third Session.

PRE-HEARING DISCUSSION - EXAMINATION OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017

5.1 The Chairman invited Members to review the Issues Papers on the Ministry of Education.

5.2 The Chairman reminded Members of the areas of examination assigned to each Member. Members then proceeded to discuss the approach to be taken for the examination.

5.3 There being no further business for discussion in camera, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 2:33 p.m., to be reconvened in public.

EXAMINATION OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017

6.1 The Chairman called the public meeting to order at 2:43 p.m., in the J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor.

6.2 The following officials joined the meeting:

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Mrs. Angela Sinaswee- Gervais	-	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Ms. Shoba Jaisir	-	Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Ms. Geeta Maharaj	-	Director of Finance
Ms. Anjanie Samaroo	-	Auditor III
Ms. Lisa Henry-David	-	Director of Educational Planning
Ms. Wanti Chadee	-	Programme & Project Manager
Mr. Dipnarine Mungal	-	Director of Finance
Ms. Ingrid Kemchand	-	Director of Curriculum (Ag.)
Dr. Gaynelle Holdip	-	Manager, Scholarships and
Advanced		Training Division

6.3 The Chairman welcomed officials, members of the media and the public.

6.4 The Chairman outlined the mandate of the Committee and the purpose of the hearing. Introductions were then exchanged.

6.5 The following issues arose from the examination of the Ministry of Education:

Accountability and Transparency

i. The mechanisms which constitute the Ministry's framework of accountability;

ii. The ways in which Key Performance Indicators are determined, measured, monitored and evaluated;
iii. The composition and duties of the Ministry's Monitoring and Evaluation Unit;
iv. The plans to increase the capacity of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit;
v. The status of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework;
vi. The instances in which the Open Tender System is used as opposed to the Three Quote System;
vii. The selection of contractors and service providers under the Three Quote System;
viii. The efficiency and transparency of the Three Quote System,
ix. The reporting relationship between the Accounting Officer and the Education Facilities Company Limited (EFCL);
x. The instances of underperforming contractors;
xi. The reprioritisation of funds to critical areas;
xii. The anticipated savings following the reprioritisation of funds;
xiii. The properties still being rented by the Ministry;
xiv. The systems in place to ensure timely reporting by Heads of Divisions;
xv. The value of the Ministry's assets;
xvi. The security firms employed by the Ministry and the cost to the Ministry;
xvii. The employment of Amalgamated Security Services Limited during examination periods; and
xviii. The Ministry's $99 million indebtedness to the National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited.

<u>Inventory Control</u>

i. The turnover of staff involved in Inventory Control;
ii. The training of staff involved in Inventory Control;
iii. The proper safeguarding of the Ministry's assets following the Ministry's relocation from St. Clair to St. Vincent Street;
iv. The lack of an electronic tagging system;
v. The non-tagging of inventory at various offices;
vi. The personnel capacity of the Inventory Unit;
vii. The mechanisms in place to ensure proper management of assets at Early Childhood Care and Education Centres, Primary Schools and Secondary Schools;
viii. The Accounting Officer's satisfaction with the level of Inventory Control staffing; and
ix. The procedure followed to access materials and equipment.

Internal Audit

i. The inadequate staffing of the Internal Audit Unit;
ii. The training of staff involved in the Internal Audit Function;
iii. The auditing of Primary and Secondary Schools; and
iv. The instances of Internal Audit staff performing General Administration duties.

Goods and Services

i. The relationship between the Curriculum Development Division and National Sporting Competitions;
ii. The status of the Ministry's reprioritisation to meet the deficit under Sub-item 23, Fees.

Minor Equipment Purchases

i. The prioritisation of the purchasing of equipment given financial constraints; and
ii. The use of funds granted during the mid-year review.

Development Programme - Consolidated Fund

i. The auditing of scholarships;
ii. The number of medical scholarship recipients who are not placed;
iii. The consideration being given to unplaced medical scholarship winners;
iv. The factors hindering the placement of scholarship recipients;
v. The reasons for scholarship recipients being unable to access funds and the efforts being made to ensure that this does not reoccur;
vi. The status and rationale of the School Improvement Project;
vii. The status and rationale for the Educational Advancement Project;
viii. The status of the International Fine Cocoa Innovation Centre;
ix. The status of the Seamless Education System Project; and
x. The number of Permanent Secretaries assigned to the Ministry.

Infrastructure Development Fund

i. The status of the four (4) Early Childhood Care and Education Centres under construction;
ii. The status of the construction of Shiva Boys' Hindu College, Parvati Girls' Hindu College and Siparia East Secondary;

iii. The current accommodation for the students of Shiva Boys' Hindu College, Parvati Girls' Hindu College and Siparia East Secondary;
iv. The period of time in which students have been housed at alternative locations;

6.6 The Chairman thanked officials for attending and they were excused.

[Please see the verbatim notes for the detailed oral submission of the witnesses]

SUSPENSION

7.1 At 6:28 p.m., the Chairman suspended the *public* meeting to resume *in camera* for a post-hearing discussion *w*ith Members only.

RESUMPTION

8.1 At 6:31 p.m. the Chairman resumed the meeting *in camera*.

POST-HEARING DISCUSSION

9.1 The Chairman sought Members' views on the public hearing. The Committee expressed concern about the size of the Ministry and the lack of internal control systems.

9.2 The Committee agreed that additional questions would be sent to the Ministry of Education. [**Please see Appendix 1**]

ADJOURNMENT

10.1 There being no other business, the Chairman thanked Members for their work during the session and the meeting was adjourned to **Wednesday September 06, 2017 at 1:30 p.m**.

10.2 The adjournment was taken at 6:49 p.m.

We certify that these Minutes are true and correct.

CHAIRMAN

SECRETARY

August 02, 2017

APPENDIX 1

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REQUESTED FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Accountability and Transparency

I. Since the Ministry's relocation to St. Vincent Street, provide the value of savings made on the following:
   a. electricity;
   b. telephone;
   c. internet;
   d. security;
   e. janitorial; and
   f. rental of property.

II. Provide a breakdown of the areas of responsibility for each Permanent Secretary and Deputy Permanent Secretary assigned to the Ministry of Education?

III. How are KPIs monitored and evaluated?

IV. In the Ministry's transfer of funds to critical areas and the reduction of expenditure in non-essential areas, how are critical and non-essential areas determined?

Inventory Control

V. Provide a copies of the Ministry's Inventory Registers as they relate to the following:
   a. Furniture and Furnishings;
   b. Minor Equipment;
   c. Stores;
   d. Stock Book Ledger;
   e. Consumables Ledger; and
   f. Motor Vehicles.

VI. How often are the registers checked?

VII. Are all motor vehicles documented in the Vehicle Register?

VIII. Are all motor vehicles labelled with an official Ministry logo?

IX. Have there been instances in which discrepancies in the Inventory Register were not treated with after it was identified? If yes, why did this occur and what action was taken by the Accounting Officer to address this issue?

X. Has the Ministry considered using contract employees to treat with the rotation of staff on the Establishment?

XI. Provide details on the size and composition of the Inventory Control Unit (e.g. public officers, contract officers, temporary officers, etc.).

XII. How often does the Ministry intend to carry out checks to ensure that all items are properly tagged?

XIII. Provide reasons why the tagging project was not completed.

XIV. Are more technological forms of tagging being explored?

XV. How does the Ministry intend to overcome the difficulty of items not having barcodes or serial numbers?

XVI. Are there plans to replace equipment in fiscal 2017? List the items replaced in fiscal 2016.

XVII. On average, how much is spent per year by the Ministry to replace equipment?

XVIII. Have there been security breaches in the past? Provide examples and how the matter was dealt with.

XIX. Is there a procedure followed to access material and equipment stored?

XX. When was the last check for obsolete machinery conducted?

XXI. Do schools perform their own checks or is it done by Ministry officials?

XXII. How many persons are assigned to the Asset Management Unit? Have staff received the requisite training for this new Unit?

XXIII. Does the Ministry intend to follow the guidelines as set out by the Ministry of Finance with respect to Procurement?

XXIV. What progress has the Ministry made in the establishment of a Procurement Unit?

XXV. With respect to the acquisition and management of motor vehicles:
   a. Is the three quote system or open tender system used?
   b. Describe the relationship between the Mechanical Services Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Ministry of Education.
   c. What is the size of the Ministry's fleet?
   d. Are vehicles maintained for longevity? How long has the Ministry been in possession of the vehicles?

XXVI. Provide clarification on the purchase of the two (2) vehicles (X-Trail) mentioned in your submission.

XXVII. What is the cost incurred by the Ministry for security?

Internal Audit

XXVIII. Provide a breakdown of the staff complement at the Ministry.

XXIX. Provide details on the size and composition of the Internal Audit Unit (e.g. public officers, contract officers, temporary officers, etc.).

XXX. When was the last request sent to the Service Commissions Department to fill vacancies within this unit?

XXXI. Provide details on the qualifications of the Auditor.

XXXII. Will training be provided to staff to engage in more operational and investigative audits?

XXXIII. How long has the lack of funding hindered the training of staff involved in Internal Audit?

XXXIV. According to the Ministry's submission, "Recommendations are not implemented".
   a. Who is responsible for implementing the recommendations?
   b. Was any action taken to rectify this issue?
   c. Has the Ministry considered instituting penalties for the non-implementation of recommendations?

XXXV. What measures have been put in place to ensure queries are not disregarded by Auditees and that corrective actions are implemented after follow-up of audits?

XXXVI. What measures are expected to be implemented to treat with the auditing of school inventory?

XXXVII. How many officers are assigned to carry out audits of schools?

XXXVIII. Which functions are not covered under the current rotation of audits?

XXXIX. For the planned increase in technical staff, how many of these positions will be filled in fiscal year 2017?

XL. Will the planned increase in technical staff be sufficient (numbers) for the size and needs of the Ministry?

XLI. Are there plans to sensitise management and staff in general, of the roles and functions of internal audit?

Sub - Head 02 - Goods and Services
<u>001 General Administration</u>
<u>Sub Item: 01 Travelling and Subsistence</u>

XLII. According to the Ministry's response, it was stated that "the majority of claims are inaccurate due to using wrong mileage and incorrect knowledge of what can be claimed for":
   a. Is the Ministry able to distinguish whether the inaccurate claims are as a result of human error or are intentional?
   b. What strategies are being developed to treat with the issues of inaccurate claims due to the use of wrong mileage and incorrect knowledge of what can be claimed for?
   c. What measures have been put in place to ensure claims are submitted on time?

<u>001 General Administration</u>
<u>Sub Item: 16 Contract Employment</u>

XLIII. According to the Ministry's response, it was stated that "there are two thousand, eight hundred and twenty-one (2,821) contract positions at the Ministry. Of said positions, one thousand, four hundred and sixty (1,460) are vacant".

a. How long have these positions been vacant?
b. Page 8 of the Ministry's submission states that, "the reduction in the Contract Employment Vote limits the Ministry's ability to pay the contract staff currently employed". How does the Ministry intend to pay its contract staff?
c. Why are there so many vacant contract positions at the Ministry? How are the vacancies affecting the Ministry's delivery of services?

<u>001 General Administration</u>
<u>Sub-Item: 22- Short-Term Employment</u>

XLIV. According to the Ministry's response, it was stated that "At the beginning of fiscal year 2017 the number of persons employed on a short term basis increased due to the fact that the Ministry of Education has not received the necessary approvals for contract positions that have expired".

a. What mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that Cabinet approval is obtainined prior to the expiration of contracts?
b. Taking into consideration that the persons on short-term would be familiar with the respective positions, would these persons be absorbed or granted the opportunity for longer term contracts?
c. Will the positions be advertised both internally and externally?
d. If there are one thousand, four hundred and sixty (1,460) vacancies, why are persons hired on short-term arrangements?

<u>001 General Administration</u>
<u>Sub Item: 28 Other Contracted Services</u>

XLV. How severe will the decrease in the allocation for this sub-item impact the payment for school transport, Ministry of Education website services, and the construction of a vault to ensure the integrity of examinations?

XLVI. Who is the main supplier of school transport services?

XLVII. Has the re-prioritising of allocations from other sub-heads begun in order to identify savings to facilitate transfers into this vote – Other Contracted Services? Which areas have been identified to date?

XLVIII. With regard to letters sent to the Internal Audit Division indicating that measures have been taken to comply with Financial Regulations. Have there been instances in which queries from the Internal Audit Division were not complied with?

<u>010 General Administration (TEST)</u>
<u>Sub Item: 16 Contract Employment</u>

XLIX. According to the Ministry's response, it was stated that "there are one hundred and seventy-three (173) contract positions at the Ministry and one hundred and thirteen (113) vacancies:

a. What efforts are being made to address the staff shortage at TEST?

010 General Administration (TEST)
Sub Item: 62 Promotions, Publicity and Printing

L. Is the Accounting Officer satisfied with the alternative arrangements made for promotions, publicity and printing?
LI. Has any attempt been made to air the Ministry's programmes on the Parliament Channel?
LII. Given the decrease in allocation, has the Ministry considered using social media as a more affordable alternative?

016 Scholarships and Advanced Training Division
Sub Item: 16 Contract Employment

LIII. What categories of staff are hired on contract at the Scholarships and Advanced Training Division?

Sub Head 04- Current Transfers and Subsidies
006 Educational Institutions
Sub Item: 09 Grants to Assisted Primary Schools (School Equipment and Upkeep of School Premises)
Development Programme Consolidated Fund

LIV. Has the re-prioritising of allocations from other sub-heads in order to identify savings to facilitate transfers into this vote begun?
LV. Which areas were identified? How much has been allocated to date?
LVI. What is the estimated allocation required for 2017?

006 Educational Institutions
Sub Item 35 Direct University Services – Current
Sub Item 44 Subsidies Mt. Hope Students

LVII. According to the Ministry's submission, there are two solutions to the faculty operating at a loss, that is, increase the direct cost to the current and future student body, and the sourcing of full fee paying non-regional students as a revenue opportunity:
   a. Is the Ministry the only source of funding for the Faculty of Medical Sciences?
   b. Was a study conducted to ascertain the ideal way forward for the Ministry?
   c. Where has the Ministry reached in determining the best solution to the problem?
   d. What are the expected repercussions of the decision?
   e. How is GATE funding applied in terms of the operating cost at the faculty?

006 Educational Institutions
Sub Item 48 University of Trinidad and Tobago

LVIII. Will the decrease in this sub-item affect the student body? If yes, in what way?

LIX. Excluding the accumulated cash reserves, what initiatives has UTT put in place to compensate for the reduced budgetary allocations?

LX. Why is the University allowed to maintain such a large cash reserve?

LXI. What is the funding arrangement or agreement for UTT?

LXII. How is GATE funding applied in terms of the operating cost at UTT?

Sub-Head: 09 Development Programme - Consolidated Fund

LXIII. What is the total value of the Ministry's Consolidated Fund allocation spent to date?

004 Social Infrastructure
Sub Item: 04 Education
D. Vocational and Technical
001 Establishment of a Diego Martin HYPE Centre

LXIV. The Ministry's submission indicated that 30% of the project was completed:
a. As no cost has been incurred thus far, what does the 30% include?
b. How is the project 30% completed and no contract has been awarded to date?

LXV. When is the project expected to be completed given that the expected completion date of March 2017 has since past?

004 Social Infrastructure
Sub Item: 04 Education
G. Educational Services
002 Scholarships – President's Medal and Non Advanced Level Examinations
004 National/Additional Scholarships based on Level Examinations
009 Post Graduate Scholarship

LXVI. How many scholars are currently employed?

LXVII. What is the number of medical scholarship recipients who have not been placed?

LXVIII. What is the total number of scholarship recipients who are in breach of their obligations?

004 Social Infrastructure
Sub Item: 04 Education
J. Science Technology and Applied Arts
016 Establishment of a COSTAATT Campus in Chaguanas

LXIX. Has the campus been inspected to determine the level of compliance with the Operational Health and Safety Act (OSHA)? If yes, what were the findings of that investigation?

LXX. Is the campus disability friendly?

005 Multi-Sectoral and Other Services

06 General Public Services

A. Administrative Services

031 Seamless Education System Project

LXXI. Will the Education Advancement Project get its own sub-item?
LXXII. Has a contractor been identified?
LXXIII. How successful was the Seamless Education Project?
LXXIV. How was success determined? Were the objectives achieved?
LXXV. What was the total amount of funds expended on the Seamless Education System Project?

037 School Improvement Project – Laventille Community

LXXVI. Provide details on the accumulated expenditure to date for this project.
LXXVII. Provide the list of fourteen (14) schools for which contracts have been issued to date.
LXXVIII. Provide a list of the fourteen (14) contractors who were issued contracts to date.
LXXIX. Of the nine (9) other schools for which tenders are still to be issued, provide the timeframe for the issuing of these tenders and the names of the schools.

06 General Public Services

F. Public Buildings

027 Building of International Fine Cocoa Innovation Centre

LXXX. How are funds allocated in the absence of Cabinet approval?
LXXXI. Why approval for this project was not sought prior to funds being allocated?

Infrastructure Development Fund

LXXXII. What is the total value of the Ministry's Infrastructure Development Fund allocation spent to date?

Virement from Project No. 041- UTT Main Campus Tamana E-Teck Park, Wallerfield

LXXXIII. What was the rationale behind the virement of funds from the UTT Main Campus Tamana E-Teck Park, Wallerfield?
LXXXIV. How was the decision made to carry out this virement?
LXXXV. Provide the updated report on the UTT Main Campus Tamana E-Teck Park, Wallerfield.
LXXXVI. Provide a list of the schools under the following:

a. **Project Group B: Primary**

Project No. 120: Improvement/Refurbishment/Extensions to Primary Schools

Project No. 121: Procurement of Furniture and Equipment

b. **Project Group C: Secondary**

Project No. 331: Improvement/Refurbishment/Extensions to Secondary Schools
Project No. 322: Procurement of Furniture and Equipment

c. **Project Group E: Special Education**

Project No. 514: Repairs and Maintenance of Special Schools.

004 Social Infrastructure
04 Education
B. Pre-Primary
001 Early Childhood Care and Education

LXXXVII. The Ministry indicated on page 86 of its submission that "the allocation for 2017 does not meet the needs of the Ministry of Education".

a. Was this project considered for virement when the Ministry last conducted a transfer/virement exercise?
b. Does the Ministry intend to complete the thirteen (13) additional ECCE Centres? If yes, how and when?
c. Provide a list (names) of the 13 additional ECCE Centres at varying stages of completion.

LXXXVIII. Provide a status update on all ECCE Centres.

004 Social Infrastructure
04 Education

B. Primary
399 Construction of Siparia/Union Presbyterian
413 Arima Hindu Primary

89. How much has been spent to date on the Siparia/Union Presbyterian Primary School?
90. When is the expected completion date for the Siparia/Union Presbyterian Primary School?
91. What percentage of the Arima Hindu Primary School has been completed to date?

C. Secondary
342 Construction of Shiva Boys' Hindu College
344 Construction of Parvati Girls' Hindu College
348 Construction of Siparia East Secondary

92. With respect to the Shiva Boys' Hindu College, Parvati Girls' Hindu College and Siparia East Secondary:
    a. What is the status of construction of each school?
    b. Where are students currently housed?
    c. How long have the students been housed at the temporary location?
    d. Were allocations requested to complete the schools? If yes, how much was requested for each school?
93. What is the current status of the Arima Government Primary School?

General Questions

94. Under what vote does the preparation for e-testing fall? How much was allocated for fiscal year 2017?
95. Provide an update on the Ministry's status of readiness for the implementation of e-testing.
96. Provide details on how long it takes before National Test results are made available.

APPENDIX III

Attendance

The following Committee Members were present at the meeting:

- Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George - Chairman
- Dr. Lackram Bodoe - Vice-Chairman
- Mr. Maxie Cuffie - Member
- Mr. Wade Mark - Member
- Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy - Member
- Ms. Allyson Baksh - Member
- Ms. Nicole Olivierre - Member

Witnesses who appeared:

Ministry of Education

- Mrs. Angela Sinaswee- Gervais - Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- Ms. Shoba Jaisir - Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- Ms. Geeta Maharaj - Director of Finance
- Ms. Anjanie Samaroo - Auditor III
- Ms. Lisa Henry-David - Director of Educational Planning
- Ms. Wanti Chadee - Programme & Project Manager
- Mr. Dipnarine Mungal - Director of Finance
- Ms. Ingrid Kemchand - Director of Curriculum (Ag.)
- Dr. Gaynelle Holdip - Manager, Scholarships and Advanced Training Division

APPENDIX IV

Verbatim

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE FIFTEENTH PUBLIC MEETING OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE, HELD IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR, (IN PUBLIC), OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, TOWER D, THE PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON MONDAY, JULY 03, 2017, AT 2.40 P.M.

PRESENT

Mrs. Bridgid Annisette-George	Chairman
Dr. Lackram Bodoe	Vice-Chairman
Mr. Maxie Cuffie	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member
Mrs. Allyson Baksh	Member
Mr. Clarence Rambharat	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Miss Keiba Jacobs	Secretary
Miss Sheranne Samuel	Assistant Secretary

ABSENT

Mr. Daniel Dookie	Member
Miss Nicole Olivierre	Member
Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir	Member
Miss Melissa Ramkissoon	Member

OFFICIALS FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Ms. Angela Sinaswee- Gervais	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Ms. Shoba Jaisir	Acting Deputy Permanent Secretary
Ms. Geeta Maharaj	Director of Finance
Ms. Anjanie Samaroo	Auditor III
Ms. Lisa Henry-David	Director of Educational Planning
Ms. Wanti Chadee	Programme & Project Management
Mr. Dipnarine Mungal	Director of Finance
Ms. Ingrid Kemchand	Acting Director of Curriculum

Dr. Gaynelle Holdip	Manager, Scholarships and Advanced Training Division

Madam Chairman: Good afternoon, and welcome to the officials of the Ministry of Education, welcome to the members of the media and the public to the Fifteenth public hearing of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee. The Committee on Public Administration and Appropriations has a mandate to consider and report to the House on:

(a) the budgetary expenditure of Government agencies to ensure that expenditure is embarked upon in accordance with parliamentary approval;

(b) the budgetary expenditure of Government agencies as it occurs and keeps Parliament informed of how the budget allocation is being implemented; and

(c) the administration of Government agencies to determine hindrances to their efficiency and to make recommendations to the Government for improvement of public administration.

The purpose of the Fifteenth public meeting of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee for the Eleventh Parliament is to seek further information on the 2017 expenditure and internal controls of the Ministry of Education as it pertains to the following: accountability and transparency, inventory control, internal audit, subhead 02, goods and services; subhead 03, minor equipment purchases; subhead 04, current transfers and subsidies; subhead 09, Development Programme Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. The Committee is desirous of hearing from the accounting officer and other key officials of the Ministry of Education to discover the challenges being faced and determine possible solutions to these challenges. The role of the Committee is to assist the Ministry to achieve efficient delivery of services, while ensuring that expenditure is embarked upon in accordance with parliamentary approval.

This meeting is being held in public and will be broadcast live on the Parliament's Channel 11, radio 105.5 FM, and the Parliament's YouTube channel *ParlView*. I will now invite the representatives of the Ministry of Education to introduce themselves, and, thereafter, the members of the Committee will introduce themselves. Madam PS.

[*Officials of the Ministry of Education introduce themselves*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, and I will ask the members commencing on my furthest right.

[*Members of the Committee introduce themselves*]

Madam Chairman: Madam PS, I will invite you to make a brief opening statement if you wish.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Thank you very much, Madam Chairperson. Madam Chairperson, Vice-Chairman, and distinguished members of the PAAC, the Ministry of Education's original budgetary allocation for fiscal 2017 amounted to a total of $5.8 billion, which was a net decrease of $452.8 million when compared to $6.2 billion for fiscal 2016. In view of this overall decrease and declining revenue earnings, the Ministry sought to curtail its activities in keeping with the funds provided and to use innovative means to utilize areas of savings, prioritize projects and programmes, and to look inwards at the areas with the potential to derive revenue earnings. However, despite this, the Ministry recognized that additional funding was required in order to successfully implement its programme for fiscal 2017. So we made various requests and we were given some additional funding in the mid-year review.

So we ended up with a total of $108.5 million was redirected to the Ministry of Education to facilitate continued financing in certain areas, and I can list out, broadly, the areas. We got some additional funds for other minor equipment, ICT in education. Three of our agencies received some additional funding, the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago, the National Schools Dietary Services Limited, and YTEPP, Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme. We also received some additional funding for Servol Junior Life Centres, Servol ECCE Centres, Servol Hi-Tech and Advanced Skills Training Programme, and Servol Human Development and Skills Training Programme. So, basically, we are trying to fit our activities within the funding we have received for 2017.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, Madam PS, and just arising out of your statement that just piqued my interest in terms of the net decrease in allocation and you were trying ways to fit yourself, you had indicated you tried innovative ways for savings and for revenue generation, and I just wanted to find out a bit about what steps you would have taken with respect to revenue generation.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Well, when we look at our revenue generation, basically, it is not very much. It is really what we get from fees for exams. There is a registration fee for persons interested in entering the Teaching Service, and we have some minor—some fees that we received probably from ECIAF. We may get some other fees elsewhere. So that we try to see how we could increase that but we really have not been very successful in increasing it, because it depends on, as I say, how many persons registering and how many persons are registering for exams. So we looked to see what we can do there, but I do not believe we have been very successful in increasing our revenue over the years. We have also been able to get some revenue from refunds from scholars. Those scholars who may have breached their contracts, they are required to refund what would have been expended to them, so we do get some funds from that area. And maybe overpayment, but that is not revenue per se, but whatever overpayments that we were able to get back from the persons that goes in a different fund.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, basically, therefore, when it comes to revenue generation, could I therefore say that the bulk of what you have got, if at all, would have been really from the fees or the refunds from breaches?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. So that was a bit of the fixed Agenda, it arose from your statement, but in the submission there is a response where you all indicated that the Ministry is guided by the Exchequer and Audit Act and the Ministry of Finance and Comptroller of Accounts directives in ensuring that it has established and maintained an appropriate framework, and, therefore, I just wanted you to share a bit with the Committee, what, therefore, in actuality your framework looks like so that one could come independently to this kind of conclusion that the framework of accountability that exists accords with the directives of the Ministry of Finance and Comptroller of Accounts, and with the Exchequer and Audit Act?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: We would have, of course, our internal audit unit which will deal with looking at our internal controls, and, as I said, we have an established internal audit unit. They are required to oversee our systems, raise issues when they conduct their audits, bring it to the attention of the Permanent Secretary, who will then take action as necessary. If it needs to go further, let us say, looks like fraud, which we are not the ones to determine if it is, we would go on to pass it to the police service to treat with it as that kind of issue.

So we have put in place—we have our internal audit, we have different registers, asset registers, where we can review to ensure that we are on track with your inventory. We also have registers where we would deal with all our assets, as I said, all our assets, the actual system within the accounting unit to make sure we have our balances, and all our checks and balances and all the controls necessary. So, as far as we see it, we have the accounting unit set up in accordance with the regulations, and we have our internal unit being responsible for overseeing our systems and bring to attention any issues that might come up.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. All right. In terms of measuring for your outcomes and evaluating your performance, and also measuring, demonstrating that, you know, you operate in terms of value for money, in your response you spoke about key performance indicators being set prior to the commencement of any project, could you say, one, who sets these key development, key performance indicators?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The owner of the project who would come up with the project in the first place is required to set these indicators, which, of course, would be considered by the Permanent Secretary, and there will be agreement on what would be those performance indicators before the project gets going. And we measure our performance by those indicators, whether they are meeting it, whether we are falling short, what might need to be done to get us back on track if we are falling short. So the project owners, in the first place, would be responsible for developing those indicators and measuring to see if we are on track with that.

Madam Chairman: So the project owner would not be the Ministry of Education?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Within the Ministry of Education, we may have projects coming from different divisions, and there will be someone like to project lead in that division who would have that responsibility.

Madam Chairman: And the monitoring and evaluation of these indicators would be done by whom, the project owners, you, as the accounting officer; how is that done?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: In conjunction, I would say, because they would be able to tell me, given the reports, exactly where we are at and we measure it against. Now, we have a Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, quite small I would admit, but whatever systems it requires we can call on them to assist us with monitoring and evaluating those projects, but, basically, it would be the project owner, whichever relevant Deputy Permanent Secretary that might have responsibility for that section and the Permanent Secretary.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And, therefore, what then does your Monitoring and Evaluation Unit do on a regular basis if it is only called in when it is required?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Well, at this point in time we might have two persons, if so many, we have a Head. So, because of the limited number of personnel we really have been trying to do our monitoring—well, the project owners would be doing their monitoring and evaluation pretty much on their own, and, as I say, call her in if it is necessary. Lisa, could you share any further information on that, please?

Ms. Henry-David: The M&E Unit would also provide training for different divisions personnel so that they will be able to do their monitoring and evaluation, help them to set their performance indicators, and so on. And they have done rapid assessments for certain projects, and they continue to provide support throughout the Ministry.

Madam Chairman: All right. But, no, you said the unit is only comprised of two persons, are there any plans to expand this unit?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The unit should really be about eight persons and we are planning, I am being informed, that we are going through a process to recruit around six persons to beef up that unit.

Madam Chairman: So that would be the permanent establishment, the eight persons?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, on contract.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. What you have also indicated is that in terms of demonstrating value for money you use bonding suppliers, you use a three-quote system, do you utilize the open tender system at all?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: In certain circumstances, yes. Yes, in certain circumstances, yes, we do, for example, like we have to purchase laptops so we are going out to open tender through Central Tenders Board. We are in the process of trying to get contractors for janitorial and security, so we will be going out to open tender for those. Basically, because of the size, the quantum, because if it is under $1 million we may decide to go select, but once it is over the $2 million, certainly, we have to go to CTB.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So that you have a sort of monetary ceiling to determine whether you go open or whether you use the three-quote system, and, therefore, how are the suppliers or contractors selected for the three-quote system?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Generally, we would have a listing of—well, it depends on what it is we are trying to acquire. So we may have had, over the years, persons who would have been involved in providing that service, so we could go with three, right. Generally, it falls under general administration, that is the area, basically, so they would do their research and come up with about three persons in the field, in that particular area, who we can go and ask. We go straight to them and ask for a quotation. We would be very clear on what we require, so all three parties will be told exactly what we require and for them to submit a quote.

Madam Chairman: And are you satisfied that that is an efficient and transparent process from your experience?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Depending on what the goods or service might be, so, for example, if we are looking at stationery you tend to go to somewhere that you would have had experience with over the years. But if it is a new item, something that we would not have had the experience before, you may choose to go out and just ask for more than—we could ask for more than three, but we need to have at least three to be able to do an evaluation. And we would have an evaluation done within the Ministry to determine who would offer the service. Usually we go with the lowest quote but experience, service over the period of time, that kind of thing, recognition in the area, we would look at all of those matters before we decide on which one we are going with.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. Any other member of the Committee wishes to ask a question? Okay, and I just had, again, another area of interest, and this is, again, concerning your process for demonstrating value for money and evaluating performances, and so on, you made a distinction between, as you said, general administration and construction projects, and you said that the construction projects, the procurement method is usually utilized through EFCL, and, therefore, I wanted to know what was therefore the reporting relationship between the EFCL and you, as the accounting officer, or the oversight mechanisms that exist between you, because it will still be you as the accounting officer being the one responsible, how do you exercise oversight, reporting, and the whole delegation process?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I am going to use an example, work through with an example, so we have, for example, a school that we need to have some repairs done, we have a division called Education Facilities Planning and Procurement Division (EFPPD), they would do an initial scope of the works and we would request EFCL to do a proper scope and cost. So we will indicate exactly, so if it electrical works need to be done, you have to fix a bathroom door, that kind of thing, EFCL will then—they have a list of approved contractors. They would probably have them in that area, so if it is a school in Bamboo Village they would probably look for contractors within that area. They will send out their tenders. They would get—no, they would scope into the works first—yes? Sorry. Sorry about that. Works will be scoped by EFCL first. They will send in the bill of quantities back to the Ministry. The Ministry has a quantity surveyor who would review the bill of quantity submitted by EFCL, determine whether it seems reasonable or not, and put up to the PS or the Deputy PS, according to the figure, for approval of what these costs for these works should be. That information is sent back to EFCL who would then use that to send out invitations for tenders to contractors in the area, and whichever one, I guess, comes in with the figure that is within the figure we determine for them, that contractor would get the award. When the work is done, EFCL has its own process where they have to go through to determine whether the works were done to satisfaction. They would send in that information to us with an invoice. We would go through and make sure we are satisfied with the works done before it can go forward for payment.

Madam Chairman: So your satisfaction with the work is that just limited to whatever report may have been submitted by EFCL? Or do you of yourself, meaning your Ministry, conduct any sort of site visits of the works?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: In that division called the FPPD, we have Engineering Assistants, who, in the first place, would go out to see the schools and see what works are required and that is how the process would start. So when is this point of the invoice coming in, our EAs can go back out and determine whether the work was done as requested and done to standard, and then it is submitted for approval.

Madam Chairman: All right, thank you. Now, we were just talking about your Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, which is just two persons, and in your submission you had indicated that the Ministry was in the process of developing a monitoring and evaluation framework, which is to ensure that value for money exists in all your procurement practices, could you say how far this framework has been developed?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Madam Chair, I think we are just at a point of a draft which I have not had an opportunity to go through as yet, so we are still at the pretty initial stages in that.

Madam Chairman: Right. And do you have a sort of time frame, could we say by fiscal, start of fiscal 2017, 2018, you would have an approved monitoring and evaluation framework?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I would like to say that, but I cannot say that with 100 per cent certainty, but that is what we would aim for. So that by next fiscal we should have something in place.

Madam Chairman: Yeah. But would that not help in the absence of having a fully established monitoring and evaluation—

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, Ma'am, it would help, but, at this point, as I say, it seems to be at the point quite early in the process so I—and we really only have, two, three months—three months before the end of the financial year. So I am really hoping that we can bring it forward, accelerate that process and get something in place for new financial.

Madam Chairman: Okay, and I will just ask one other question on this so that I can engage my other colleagues in the conversation. In your submission you had spoken about the whole sort of oversight of projects, and one of the points that were made is if the Ministry was dissatisfied with the rollout of a project, the project would be terminated, and I am curious to find out what were the instances; if you could give some examples of instances when projects were terminated and the basis on which they were terminated.

3.10 p.m.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Madam Chair, I will admit since I have been in the Ministry, other than some construction projects that were terminated even before for lack of performance, offhand I cannot come up with a particular project. What I am being informed is that it is only those schools under construction that we may have had terminations.

Madam Chairman: Your submission is dated April10, 2017, so I expected the response would be of some sort of recent applicability.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The projects that I know of, those construction projects, I think the terminations would have been done through EFCL, but prior to, let us say, this fiscal, because I think most of those things were terminated prior to this fiscal.

Madam Chairman: In this current fiscal there would not have been any experience with underperforming contractors, where you would have had to take any sort of corrective action resulting in termination, would that be correct?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: That would be correct.

Madam Chairman: Apart from that, would you all have had any experiences with underperforming contractors and how would you have dealt with that within this fiscal?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The contractors are really hired through EFCL. The contract is not with the Ministry of Education. So EFCL would be liaising with us closely on any contractor whose performance might not be as desired. But for this fiscal, I am being informed that none was actually terminated. EFCL would be expected to have full discussions with the contractors and see how best they can bring it up to scratch or show some improvement, but for this fiscal what I am informed we have not, not to my knowledge.

Madam Chairman: In terms of just one general question about your budget. I know as you had said you got some money in the mid-year review, but to specific areas. Throughout your submission there are references to having to reprioritize to allow for moneys to be allocated to other areas. Could you, at this stage, give us some insight with respect to areas where moneys have been taken from and redirected to other areas?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I know some votes we were short—and I am putting it mildly—but we were quite short in some votes so we had to do some shifting. So, for example, we were short in a particular vote called "Short-Term Employment", we had to do some transferring from maybe "Contract Employment" as well as rental. Now, we may have had some savings in rentals because of the move to the new building, so we would anticipate that we do not need to pay rental for some of those buildings for the entire financial year. So we had to do some shifting from rental, maybe some shifting from "Contract Employment", because we do not have positions so we had to go the way of short periods of employment to get the job done.

We may have some issues coming up between now and the end of the financial year; some votes are short—Janitorial and Security. So we are really at the point where we had a discussion this morning about looking within to see where we can transfer funds to meet the expenditure that we expect before the end of the financial year, because we know Janitorial and Security we really cannot afford not to pay our bills. The schools need the security.

While we may have had a reduction with the different locations and we do not need security there, but we have more and more schools that we have to provide security for. We have unfinished construction that is being vandalized so we have to provide security for those schools. So we anticipate that we will be short and will have to find money somewhere within the Ministry.

Mr. Mark: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I would like to follow up from where the Chairman left off, and that has to do, Madam Permanent Secretary, with the recent relocation of the Ministry, and given the stringent budgetary constraints that you now find yourself and the Ministry, and as you said, you have to find innovative means of surviving in many respects, could you share with us what kind of anticipated savings you envisaged over the period that you had been relocated, and maybe the end of the fiscal year, September30th, as it relates to rentals and the leasing of private properties that the Ministry would have had to engage, the cost for security and janitorial, maintenance, telephone charges, the rationalization of the number of vehicles and vehicle maintenance, electricity bills and even stationery? Because with you being centralized in one major location at this time, St. Vincent and Edward Streets, maybe you can tell us what kind of savings, cost cutting, reduction in wastage or waste that you anticipate the Ministry would experience between the time that you moved into your new premises to the end of the fiscal year? Any anticipation in terms of savings in value terms in a quantitative way.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Mr. Mark, I would not have actual figures here today. I may have some, but not all. But, certainly, we anticipated savings with electricity because we had several buildings that we were renting. We are now in one location with one electricity bill. The Ministry of Education now is two former Ministries. The Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training was located in Tower C. We would have some savings with security and janitorial there. We did not pay electricity bill at that location so it is not going to be reflected as a savings, per se but, certainly, with the other locations.

We have formally given up four of those buildings that we rented, so we should be seeing the savings, but sorry I do not have the exact figures, but we can get that to you if you so desire. So we would have saved in the rental and electricity for those buildings. Likewise, security because we would not need to have security there; janitorial as well as telephone.

With respect to vehicles, as I said, two different Ministries, so we have merged the fleet. So we did not have to purchase, as far as I am aware, any vehicles this year and I do not know that we should be thinking of purchasing any for next financial unless something drastic happens. So we should be saving in that regard because we would probably not need any further vehicles at least for a year or two.

The stationery, I cannot say off hand if we have seen savings per se, because I do not have the figure, but we anticipate that we should have savings because we are now in one central location. We do not have to be printing everything and I having to send it. We could probably use intranet, that kind of new, new system. So that we should see a decrease, but I think I need to wait a little bit and see how that actually plays out.

Mr. Cuffie: PS, you said you moved out of four buildings, could you advise how many buildings you still remain in and what is the timeframe for evacuating those buildings?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: We are renting a building at the end of Wrightson Road. We anticipate that we should be out of there by the end of September. We have to give three months' notice. I think the notice has been given. We will be out of there; we are handing over keys to Property Management by July 31st for those three. We are already out, but we are doing the tidying of the building to give it back in the order it is supposed to be in.

So that right now, other than district offices that we have in the districts within Port of Spain, the Ministry of Education is located in the towers—Tower A and Tower B—and Wrightson Road. We still have on London Street. It was called the Ibis building I think, where we have for storage. So our vehicles are also parked there and we have filing secondary storage at London Street.

Mr. Cuffie: So I can take it that you have evacuated the former headquarters in St. Clair?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Persons are out of the former headquarters in St. Clair. Persons have moved out of St. Clair. We have a building that has been cleared, Acon building. That has been cleared—files, desks, equipment— everything has been cleared from that and we are in the process of heading to the other buildings on that compound. Your question was specific to St. Clair. So one building is completely clear and we are looking at the rest.

Mr. Cuffie: You still retain the keys for the buildings?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, we do.

Madam Chairman: PS, in this area, has any system been put in place for the timely reporting by your heads of division with respect to their projects and programmes? Because in your submission you had pointed out that heads of divisions are required to report on a monthly basis, verbally and in writing, to their line supervisors, but there was a difficulty with heads of divisions complying, and there is a statement that, "There is, however, a need to put systems in place to ensure the heads report in a timely manner". Has anything been done regarding this?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The Ministry has put in place a heads of division meeting that we are supposed to have every quarter which, of course, is the occasion when we remind what is expected of our heads of division. The last meeting would have been in May. Unfortunately, I was not at it, but I know we have been trying to impress on the heads, particularly the ones with projects, to please submit the report because it is quite a task to get the information when we require it and we have to go to them.

I have not seen much of an improvement. I do not know if my managers are seeing improvement with the reporting, but, as I said, we were due to have another meeting and I will raise it again that we need to send in these things monthly, at least by the end of the first week in the next month, and get some monthly reports so that we can have the information in a more real-time fashion.

We are required to do a monthly status report to the Ministry of Planning and Development; that with the construction programme. I guess because that is a requirement and it is for the Ministry of Planning and Development, we get that information through EFCL, and they do send their monthly reports. But, internally, we have to work a little harder on that one.

Mr. Mark: Madam Permanent Secretary, could you share with us what is the value of the asset base of the Ministry of Education? Has any work been done in quantifying the value of the asset base of the Ministry of Education?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Mr.Mark, I will admit that we have had some difficulty getting that together because we were so scattered in different locations. Since we have moved, we have an inventory of what we own for each location as well as St. Clair. Whether we have a figure or not, I am not aware that we have a figure of the value of all our assets, but we have a listing of all the assets that we have.

Mr. Mark: I observe that in your submission as it relates to safeguarding your assets, you did indicate to us that one of the things that you have done to enhance your security to safeguard these very assets, is to employ additional private security, and that is in the form of a security firm. Would you care to share with us what is the name of the security firm and the cost of the extra security that the Ministry has do address in this instance?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: We have several security firms employed; some dealing with the schools, some dealing with the Ministry's offices. So to say which particular one we have might have dealing with our assets, I do not think I am in a position to say that, but we have a listing of the different security firms that we have employed.

We have, as I said before, for the ECCE centres, we have for primary schools, secondary schools, special schools and the Ministry's offices. So the security firms for the Ministry's offices would have SWAT and MTS, at a monthly cost—SWAT is a little over $25,000 and MTS is $319,126.50. So we are looking at an annual cost for MTS of $3,829,518 and for SWAT we have $301,320 per year for the Ministry's head office and we have the breakdown for the primary schools, secondary schools and ECCE centres.

Mr. Mark: I was dealing with, for instance, in the Ministry you have to safeguard very sensitive material, scripts inclusive. I just wanted to ask in that context where you have to safeguard sensitive materials, inclusive of scripts, you did submit that you had to engage extra private security to ensure that there is no unauthorized access to these sensitive material, including scripts. That is the private security company I was referring to. If you could tell us the name of this company and what it has cost the Ministry of Education to employ that same company.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I am informed that we employ Amalgamated during the exam period to secure and transport our sensitive exam scripts, et cetera. So they are brought on specifically for that period when we have those kinds of documents.

Mr. Mark: Could you share with us what is the cost?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Unfortunately, I do not have that figure here, but we can provide it.

Mr. Rambharat: PS, earlier you had mentioned that you were sending out a tender for janitorial and security services. What is the current indebtedness of the Ministry to MTS?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I am being advised that we are owing—MTS is claiming that we are owing them $99 million over the period 2000 to present, still to be verified.

Mr. Rambharat: So is MTS required to compete for janitorial and security contracts?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The plan is go out to open tender. So they compete, I guess, like any other firm who might be interested in getting that particular contract, but we would have to deal with that $99 million, which is, as I said, yet to be verified because it is over quite a period. I am getting the sense from the Ministry we are having some difficulty verifying that $99 million.

Mr. Rambharat: Is there a policy shift? Was MTS not set up as a specialized company for security and maintenance for schools? Has there been a policy shift for the preference for MTS.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Ms. Henry-David has some additional information that she would share which would give us an explanation why we reached where we reached with MTS.

Ms. Henry-David: In terms of whether MTS is required to compete, over the past years from, I think, 1977 come forward, we would have had a couple of loans from the World Bank and from the IDB, and part of the loan conditionalities required us to go out to tender for security and maintenance services for the schools that would have been built under those programmes, and that is why we have some schools that do not have an MTS service for janitorial and for security.

Mr. Rambharat: And to facilitate that, was there a change in Government policy where MTS was established to be the provider of security and maintenance services to schools? Was there a change in the Government policy?

Ms. Henry-David: As far as I am aware, we would have gone to Cabinet whenever we go out to tender for those services.

Dr. Bodoe: Just to follow up, Madam PS, with regard to the statement that you made of the debt of $99 million and that the Ministry may have some difficulty in verifying this debt. Could you shed some more light on that? Are there systems in place that are supposed to kick in to verify this debt? Why would you find yourself in such a position?

Mr. Mungal: The current ones are not a problem to verify. The ones that are going back, going back as far as 2000 are the problem to verify; finding the records and then going through the records, it is a lot of records to go through. There is a lot of paper they are claiming from back those years.

Dr. Bodoe: But the point I am trying to make then, would there not have been some process in place that should have kicked in to ensure that this did not go back that far without verification?

Mr. Mungal: Yes, there was supposed to be a process in place; however, it is taking time to go through the records and it takes a lot of manpower to do it.

Dr. Bodoe: Madam PS, what assurance then can you give to the public? It is taxpayers' money involved here. I find this difficult to understand. What assurance can you give to the public that this is going to be corrected going forward, that we would not end up in a situation like that?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Now, we are treating with current bills that are easily verifiable, so we are not adding to it. We are fairly up-to-date, if I might say so myself, with our monthly payments. But the sense I have got from the Ministry is we are talking about years, and we really need to get probably a unit or manpower put aside to deal specifically with this exercise.

Now, we have it on the books. The records are there, so it is really a matter, as I said, of going through, getting staff to work on that specifically while we treat with the current as we are going along. So I would hope that we would be in a position to, at least, verify some, if not all, and we will be making a request, as fast as we verify, to Finance, to see if we could get the funding to meet the debt.

Mr. Cuffie: I wanted to raise some issues with the manner of inventory control. Based on your submissions, it states that, "The persons tasked with updating the registers are adequately trained, but training is needed due to high staff turnover". What would contribute to the staff turnover at the Ministry that would need such constant training?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The persons we are speaking of to do this inventory control are clerical officers who, when acting opportunities come up, needless to say, they would be taking up the acting opportunities. So we have a lot of people who are acting and therefore moving out of that section that would be responsible for inventory control. We have very little, if any, control over that because we are looking at clerical officers who, if the person is eligible for acting, we cannot stand in the person's way. So we cannot say we are keeping the officers because the person is experienced in inventory control, if they have an opportunity to move on and out of the section. So we tend to have a quick turnover of staffing there. You know, if you have somebody experienced you could obviously do a better job, it would be a little easier for you, but when we have new persons coming ever so often it slows down the process.

Mr. Cuffie: The reason I am asking that is because you say here that you need to have a lot of training, and in response to the question on internal auditing your submission states that, "Over the past years the volume of work and the necessity to meet statutory timelines have militated against training. Most of the staff were recently appointed and would be sent to relevant workshops pending the availability of funds."

So if you are having training issues in terms of funding with your internal audit staff, and you need constant training for the inventory register, how are you ensuring, one, that you have the proper internal audit staff to meet your demand and that your inventory register is kept up-to-date?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The issue with internal audit—remember they are public service positions so we have to depend on the Public Service Commission to send staff.

Mr. Cuffie: I am really asking about the training, how you are able to do it.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: So most we can do, because of the shortage, is in-house training. We really have not been able, to my knowledge, to send anyone anywhere to do any training in internal audit. So it is a matter of the internal audit staff training its own staff. With respect to persons in inventory, we have tried to put together an asset management unit with a Clerk IV, my understanding, who is experienced in the public service, to try to get staff together to do, again, internal training for inventory control. In fact, I know we did not get sufficient money to be sending anybody anywhere that would cost substantial amounts of money, for either inventory control or internal audit.

3.40 p.m.

Mr. Cuffie: And the real question I wanted to ask is that, you have just made a big move from St. Clair to St. Vincent Street. You moved assets, you have moved records and, as the accounting officer, how confident are you that you have managed to move all the Ministry's assets from St. Clair to St. Vincent Street and that you can account for all the Ministry's assets?

Now, I am taking into consideration that I personally had to ensure that there was security guard in St. Clair and the office, I think, for a period was left unattended. So, how do you, I can give you the details, how can you ensure that you have transferred all your assets from St. Clair to Vincent Street?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I was going to say Minister, member, Mr. Cuffie, we moved people first and then we had persons go and do the asset register to make sure we are aware of what assets we had, and that was done over a period of time. I am not aware that we left St. Clair, I am not aware that we left unsecured because I know we left equipment and furniture and stuff there. So if that happened I am sorry it would be for a very short period, but, as far as I am aware, we had watchmen and security at St. Clair.

We have since done a proper inventory of all our assets from St. Clair, as well as those other buildings that we spoke about. We have moved a substantial amount to storage, and we have a record of that. I know that was done relatively recently, so we should be getting that document shortly. Our storage turned out to be old Couva West Secondary School. So, we have moved furniture, equipment from St. Clair Acon building to Couva.

So, we have a list of—when we left St. Clair what we had in St. Clair and we have a list of what we would have moved to Couva and to wherever else we may have sent it for storage. Anywhere else? Tradezone, sorry. So we have some in Tradezone and we have some in Couva.

Mr. Cuffie: Now, based on your submission, the tagging exercise begun in 2008, but was never completed. Right? And you are now working with the IT department to complete the tagging exercise. So how confident are you that you have all your assets, if you have not completed the tagging exercise, and you have not done a register of all your assets?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The tagging exercise, as we said, could be done where we have bar codes and that of serial numbers and all of that. The exercise I am referring to since we moved which is last year to this year, really and truly were people going up there and manually, physically writing out, sorry for putting it as bluntly as that, how many chairs we have; what kind of chairs; how many desks we have; how many fans we have; how many filing cabinets, two drawers, three drawers, five drawers. It was not an IT assisted inventory done since the move. So that I know IT has an inventory about the IT equipment and they have that by serial number and everything down. But to say we are talking desks and chair and stuff, furniture and furnishing, that was done very much manually.

Mr. Cuffie: No. I am just going with your submission here. It says that you are working with the IT department to tag all inventory items. So I understand the manual tagging, but you are working with IT so that there will be electronic tagging, I assume, of all the items. So what you are saying is that has not really—

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: That exercise has not been completed. No.

Mr. Cuffie: Okay. Can you explain why the process started in 2008 and it has never been completed or gotten off the ground?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Personally, Sir, I cannot say because I literally joined Ministry of Education last year. So we are going back with persons who might have been—this would have been collated where persons may have been in the Ministry going back to 2008, and I think I can safely say none of us. Lisa, I do know if Lisa may—[*Crosstalk*] Oh gosh, okay. Maybe you could share that with the Committee.

Ms. Henry-David: There was a firm that was hired that would have started the process. It is quite possible that somewhere along the line in terms of their deliverables and arrangements for payments something fell apart towards the end of their contract. But I cannot, in all honestly, I am not in a position to give you any details on what happened. I can say that they would have started the process back then.

Mr. Cuffie: Okay. Well, could you get back to us in writing on what exactly happened there with the firm, because 2008 to now, you are dealing with the Ministry's assets. It is a long time for the project not to be completed. I want to move on to the safeguarding of assets and—

Madam Chairman: Member, if you permit me, sorry, to do you this. I just want to get some clarification about tagging and inventory when we are talking about the register that has me a little confused from what I have been hearing. Okay? What I understood, PS, and you will tell me if I am incorrect. With the move you would have manually created a register of your assets. Has there been any tagging? We are not talking electronically, because you could tag manually by putting a sticker or whatever. Have you historically tagged any of your assets?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Based on discussions with staff—

Madam Chairman: Yeah.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais:—I would say yes, whether it was a 100 per cent completed exercise, I am not in a position to say.

Madam Chairman: Right. But this would have been a manual system?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Right? Whether it is a stamp—

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes.

Madam Chairman:—a sticker or whatever.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes.

Madam Chairman: The project that fell through was an electronic system or a manual system?

Dr. Holdip: It might have been a hybrid because they would have come manually and applied sticky tags onto the furniture, but they would have stored the information electronically.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So it was still manual tagging?

Dr. Holdip: Yes.

Madam Chairman: All right. You have now a project for doing it electronically, electronic tagging, what you are working with the IT department. What is that?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: IT is supposed to be doing, as you say, an inventory. I guess it will be logged.

Madam Chairman: No. We are not talking about logging of that. Right? We are talking about the tagging.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Right. All the IT equipment has been tagged. Right? But as I say, IT was focusing on the assets, the IT assets.

Madam Chairman: Right?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: They were not dealing with, as far as I am aware, and I do not know—

Madam Chairman: Across the board.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais:—across the board with desk and fan and chairs and all of that.

Madam Chairman: Yes. Okay. Good.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: They were dealing specifically with the desktops, the UPS, the laptops the minor equipment and as well the photocopier and the fax machines, those things—

Madam Chairman: Right.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais:—the printers, but not desks and chairs and fans.

Madam Chairman: All right. So even with what IT department has done this might just be really a manual tagging too?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: My understanding, I would say, yes.

Madam Chairman: Manual. Okay. Now you may have register done electronically, means that you may have it somewhere in a soft copy.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes.

Madam Chairman: You do not have any system of electronic tagging which means, for instance, let us say, there is a bar code that could be scanned or, you know, like some libraries there is not any visual tag, but if you pass through a field it would send off an alarm. You have nothing like that?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Nothing like what you have just explained there about sending off any alarm.

Madam Chairman: Right. But you have no electronic system of tagging.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: When it was two separate Ministries, there was an electronic tagging done of the IT equipment in the Ministry of Tertiary Education. I cannot say with any certainty whether that exercise may have started and just not been completed with the original Ministry of Education to make a distinction, but we are now one Ministry so we have to work on it across the board, but there was for—

Madam Chairman: So there was partially. But, as far as you are concerned, in the main it does not exist.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: In the main, I would say it does not exist.

Madam Chairman: All right. But there is an admission that you all have difficulties when items are purchased and they are not tagged in any form. Okay?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes.

Madam Chairman: All items that are purchased are entered into a register?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Including your consumables?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: We had some difficulties with that before, but it, certainly, has been corrected.

Madam Chairman: It has been corrected.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Are these registers checked?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes. They were checked by audit.

Madam Chairman: But you have a difficulty with audit. And I am not going into audit. I mean, when one reads your submission, you have difficulty with audit.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Spread thinly.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So what, I guess, excites me about the submission, I cannot see audit being a backup for your inventory register or for your lack of tagging because of the real difficulties you have with audit. Okay? So that to say internal audit, it does not seem to me to be giving me any sort of comfort where there seems to be a deficiency with the inventories, there seems, and this is meaning the registers, there seems to be difficulty in the checking of the registers because you have cited a high rotation of staff. So that even when you feel that there is a discrepancy in the inventory register and it is pointed out, the staff to come back and check, it may not exist.

Then there seems to be and I do not want to say no tagging, there seems to be challenges with tagging all told. So that it comes back to the question: how then can one be satisfied that the Ministry knows, and we are not talking now the schools, we are just talking about the Ministry, what assets exist and that could say, okay yeah, we supposed to have 10 chairs, but these are the 10 chairs, because you could have 10 chairs, and when you count you count 10. But the 10 that are entered in the inventory are not the 10 that you are watching there. What then controls you have that can satisfy the listening public that the assets are secured and safeguarded?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Secured and safeguarded might be a little easier to answer to because we have security in place for that. However, it I accept that I know the inventory was done as a result of the move, but to say with a 100 per cent certainty that, as you say, the 10 chairs and the six desks we have now—

Madam Chairman: Yeah.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais:—would have been the 10 chairs and six desks that we acquired in 20—

Madam Chairman: Yeah. Okay.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I cannot say that with a 100 per cent certainty.

Madam Chairman: All right. So, okay. So let us say then, let us understand, you can say that as of the move you have a reliable inventory of what you had as of the move. You cannot say whether that related to what you should have had before. Okay. Going forward from the move, have you during the move been able to tag the items that you have recorded in your inventory register?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I am being reminded that we did not move into the building with a lot of the furniture that we had. Most of the furniture has gone into storage. So, we know what we had and what we moved, whether they gone Tradezone or whether they have gone to Couva.

Madam Chairman: Right.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The building was outfitted so we did not need to bring in, but the equipment, yes.

Madam Chairman: All right. But the question remains: What is in Tradezone or what is in Couva which, according to your inventory, should be this. Have you tagged them? So that you could say these are the 10 chairs.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: My understanding is we have not tagged it, we have a description of the items, as I say, one might be saying a green chair, high back, red chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: We really do not have all the items tagged, and it is certainly something we have to work on. We did have to move in a bit of a short period of time. So we will have to do that as the next step now that we have moved from one spot to the other.

Madam Chairman: All right. And what you have in the new building, are they tagged?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes. The work stations are tagged, the equipment tagged, because what we have, what we brought would be things like—

Madam Chairman: No. The new things you told me in the new building it came outfitted. Are these tagged?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes. They are tagged.

Madam Chairman: Are these all entered into the relevant inventory registers?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: So, all right. So going forward you should be pretty okay.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: With what we have. Yes.

Madam Chairman: So you have a cut-off date going forward?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes.

Madam Chairman: All right. Now what I wanted to ask you, okay, sorry, I intervened. So, Member Cuffie, I will let you go back to where you were. I am sorry. Thank you.

Mr. Cuffie: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair, I just wanted to go back to the safeguarding of assets, and you said that you have vaults equipped with cameras and when exams scripts arrive, the floor is restricted to authorized staff and that you have some confidence in the integrity of examination system. All right? Now, there were two newspaper reports that seemed to question that. There was an issue in 2008 where it was reported that CAPE exams, it led to the postponement of exams in Trinidad and Tobago, five people were charged with an offence and they were given community service.

Now, in 2017, there were also allegations of examinations being leaked that is in May/June this year, it is in the newspapers, the test schools were published and the Ministry understood to investigate the matter. Now, I am trying to square what you have here in terms of the stringent security controls for your assets and the fact that there been incidences where the exams were leaked. Have you confirmed—well, in the case of 2008, charges were filed and people were found guilty. In terms of 2017, what is the latest on the incident?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I am not in a position right now to give any information on those allegations. Sorry, Sir.

Mr. Cuffie: Okay.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Because I have not received any formal report and, therefore, I am not in a position to share.

Mr. Cuffie: Well, 2008 was reported and dealt with by the police. 2017 was in the newspaper—

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Sorry, Sir.

Mr. Cuffie:—2017 is just this year.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: So, we have not—

Mr. Cuffie: May/June and it was in the newspapers.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: No. But I have not gotten any report.

Mr. Cuffie: Okay.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais:—on it, Sir. And I am being reminded that as a result of the 2008, we put those stringent measures in place.

Mr. Cuffie: Okay. So could you get back to us on the 2017?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: On the 2017? Yes, Sir.

Mr. Cuffie: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member Mark. Yes.

Mr. Mark: Madam Chair, I just—yeah, I just wanted to ask the Permanent Secretary if she can share with us the composition, the size of the inventory unit of the Ministry of Education. How many personnel do you have in that unit and could make available to the Chairman or to the Secretary a copy of your register, the current register, if you could make a copy available of that register in terms of your current inventory. And could you tell us what is the current size of your unit and whether that unit is adequate to deal with your assets? Because your Ministry, you know, have a lot of assets and because of the need to keep track of your assets, you need to have people regularly checking your register. I have seen in your submission you said it is done on an annual basis. Do you think that that is adequate given the value, the volume and the size of your asset base? Could you share with us your thoughts on it?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The size of the unit we have in the Ministry dealing with assets, is headed by an AO V, we have a Clerk IV, we have assistance from an OJT at this point in time and we have six handymen who would be actually responsible for going and checking and recording the assets. I will admit it does not seem to be sufficient given the size of the Ministry, however, the schools have their own asset registers. What I am speaking of here is very specific, well the head office. So even for the head office, I think, we need to look at that structure, but the schools have their own asset registers and they are responsible, the Clerk III is responsible for maintaining those registers in the schools. So, we would have the Clerk IIIs in the secondary schools and the district—who is for primary schools? Correct. Yes. The primary schools are responsible for their assets—register, sorry.

Mr. Mark: All right. Would you want to share with us what is the structure that you have in existence at the levels of the primary school, the secondary school for ensuring that there is proper inventory taken and registers established? What is the situation there at the primary and secondary and even our Early Childhood Centres?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The secondary schools are said to have the Clerk IIIs who would be responsible for the maintenance of the asset registers. The primary schools we have over the last few years been employing Business Operations Assistants who would be at the primary schools and that would be part of their duties to maintain a register in the primary schools.

The centres, now the centres, I believe, there are administrators and ECCE teachers in these centres who they would have to take this responsibility. Those centres would not have a Clerk III or a Business Operations Assistant, but they are much smaller centres. So the administrators responsible for those centres will have to take up that responsibility, but in the secondary schools, Clerk IIIs and in the primary schools the BOAs.

Mr. Mark: Madam PS, are you satisfied with the level of staffing at both the Ministry of Education and when you go to your Early Childhood Centres, primary and secondary school levels? Are you happy, are you satisfied or comfortable with the level of staffing? So that you can be properly assured in your mind and in the Ministry's mind that kind of attention that is required for your inventory control is, in fact, being effected, you know, in a proper way, you know, given the asset base of the Ministry of Education. Are you satisfied? Are you comfortable? Or do you think that there is need for some improvement in those areas?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I would say there is need for improvements, because I am thinking of discussions I have had with audit where we are saying over the years we are still having issues with those inventory registers. So I will accept, I will admit, that we need to do so some more where getting those inventories in the schools re concerned. I am not comfortable that one Clerk III might be able to do that as efficiently and as effectively as we would like it to be done.

Madam Chairman: Member Baksh.

Miss Baksh: Thank you, Madam Chair. These questions are just a follow up to member Cuffie's and member Mark's questions as it relates to safeguarding assets. Is there a procedure followed to access materials and equipment stored and who has the authorization to access sensitive materials?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: When it comes to the sensitive material, it is so sensitive that I am not even sure I can give you that answer actually. But when we are talking consumables there is a requisition that each unit is required to complete. It is supposed to be on a monthly basis, but guess if you have little emergency you could do it outside of your normal monthly basis. The head of the division is supposed to sign off on that requisition sheet, it goes generally to admin. We have storekeepers for stores who would be responsible for saying what has been issued from stores and making sure that our inventory is up to mark.

Miss Baksh: Okay. The Ministry acknowledges that there have been security breaches, as

Member Cuffie mentioned. All right? Can you tell me how we plan to move forward with this? How we are going to treat with this in the future if it does happen again?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I do not know that I actually acknowledged that there was a breach. I know we have allegations of a breach which we are investigating. So until I am sure there really has been a breach, what we have done, as I say, there are certain floors with sensitive material that it is not, it is restricted to persons treating with those material. Right? So we have them on a particular floor, we have the vault, we have the cameras installed so that we can see who might be entering in certain areas, and we have a key pad where they have to enter a numeric code which, I could tell you I do not even have. So that we have put as best as we can systems in place to secure those highly sensitive documents, and I am yet to receive the reports of those allegations.

Miss Baksh: Are you planning to receive them any time in the near future?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I am waiting.

Miss Baksh: How long have we been waiting; since—?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: You see, that is why I did not want say that we accepted that there were any breaches, they are simply allegations. I came back out from leave and we were hearing about allegations, but I have not received a report yet. I know with SEA results coming out tomorrow and exams basically you would say finished, we should be getting that report within the month.

Miss Baksh: Are there any plans to replace the equipment in fiscal 2017 and can you briefly state the items replaced in fiscal 2016?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: If you need a listing, I will have to provide that for you, because I cannot say offhand what we may have replaced over that period. But I can say we probably replaced some printers and that kind of thing because remember they have a lifespan. But I would want to provide that information, if you do not mind, Madam Chair.

Miss Baksh: All right. And also on average how much is spent per year by the Ministry to replace equipment?

4.10 p.m.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I have been informed it is not much, but I would prefer to give you an actual figure looking back over the last couple of years.

Miss Baksh: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: I want to say, Madam PS, I much prefer that response than the one that was given in the submission. Member Cuffie.

Mr. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted to get on to the part of your submissions where you noted that the absence of a separate body for internal audit to report to. Now, it says that:

> Ministry of staff, principals and others are not obligated to furnish information and answer questions, so the following hurdles had been experienced by the Ministry:
>
> System policy changes are not communicated to the internal audit and very rarely documented;
>
> Recommendations are not implemented;
>
> Queries are disregarded by the audit team;

After 10 years of auditing, inventories in schools are not accurate.
Now as the accounting officer, how do you plan to treat with this?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: It was brought to my attention when we were doing this report that we really have been having issues with persons responding, so it is a matter of impressing on them and probably sending out some circulars that we need to take this seriously and to respond to the queries. While there might not be a legal obligation, to me there is a moral obligation to provide the information as requested. The issue with the registers, that is why I was saying earlier, I am not particularly satisfied or comfortable, given that I am seeing that over 10 years we are doing registers and still we are not getting it right. Clearly, we have to look at the systems. Other than staffing, we have to look at the systems where those registers are concerned. So my intention is to work with my general admin, as well as with audit, just to get the idea what are the issues, and see what systems we can put in place to correct some of those. But I would need to hold discussions with our Heads and I can press on them the need to respond to the audit queries; whether they like it or not, we have to.

Mr. Cuffie: I would like to believe, and you can ask your Deputy PS, whoever if this is accurate, I would like to believe that the role of the accounting officer and the Permanent Secretary has to be more than moral suasion if the—you are talking here, there are Public Service Regulations and if officers are disregarding circulars, if they are disregarding instructions, I think we have to go beyond mere moral suasion. And if after 10 years we cannot even get inventories from schools it speaks to a breakdown in terms of the Ministry and in terms of its executing its mandate across the entire Ministry. And we cannot assume that this is simply a matter of moral suasion, there must be some way as an accounting officer that we can take effect on all the recommendations, and because—so if I am to believe this submission, after this exercise, we can make recommendations, we can make suggestions, and the Ministry of Education can just disregard it and continue as though nothing happened.

Madam Chairman: I would like to say if this Committee makes some recommendations, we will certainly have to take it on. The intention is to send out circulars so that persons would be informed, or instructed, if you use that word, that when we have queries you are required to respond to those queries. I cannot say, with any level of certainty, whether that may have been issued before, but, certainly, we will have to issue it now, given this report. The registers in the school, I am not saying that are not registers, but I am not comfortable that they are accurate. That is my concern, that is, how accurate these registers actually are based on the discussions with our auditors. So we need, as I say, to put something else in place to see. It is not that they do not have the registers, it is how accurate the registers are.

Madam Chairman: Member Cuffie has ushered us into internal audits. I will take Mrs. Webster-Roy with a few questions then I will take Member Mark. Thank you.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam PS, I am following on from what you just said, what definite immediate action would you take to ensure that the inventories at schools are reconciled?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: My intention is to discuss with our auditor and see what suggestions we could come up it and issue some instructions on how we will proceed going forward. I have not had the discussions yet, as I say, I just came back out from leave, so we plan to have those discussions soon and issue something so that we could get it right come new financial for sure. It will take some time, schools are closed—will be closed from next week, for that matter, so that we would have to make sure we put something out so that come new school year, which is not the new financial year, but new school year, that we can see how we can show an improvement in inventory control in the school.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Okay. And the same for internal audit, what immediate definite actions you will take to improve internal audit?

Madam Chairman: The issue with internal audit and the staff shortage is that we cannot hire people to put in internal audit, we have to depend on Service Commission to fill the positions. So we are very short staffed. We have persons going on vacation, I mean, I cannot deny persons going on vacation. So until we get the positions filled through the Service Commission, I have very little control over the staffing of the unit. When the two Ministries joined up, we were able—the Ministry of Education original internal unit, we acquired about four—we acquired four positions but we only had two of those positions filled. So, basically, the internal audit was only increased by two, whereas you ended up joining up two Ministries. So we have been plugging with HR to try and get, again and again, over and over, to impress on Service Commission if we could get our auditing assistant positions filled, because we tend to have more of those, we have eight vacant—

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Without acting?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Sorry?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Eight vacant without any acting incumbent?

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: Without any actors.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Okay.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Well, we have who would be acting in higher positions, but we have one Auditor III, one Auditor II and four Auditors I, with a Ministry the size of the Ministry of Education, but we have eight Auditing Assistants.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: How long have these positions been vacant?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I am being told more than two years.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: More than two years.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: When last did you follow up with Service Commission to have them filled?

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: Now, we would raise it with HR, and HR would be responsible for making the requests to the Service Commission. I did not get that information when the last request would have been sent to the Service Commission, but since I have been in the Ministry I have been hearing about our staff shortages in internal audit and bringing it to the attention of HR for them to raise it with the Service Commission.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: In the interim, do you intend to have acting?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Some of them are acting but when we have someone acting in the higher position we need to get a body in the lower position, and we still need to get that individual from the Commission.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Okay. Is there any ongoing training programme or a schedule of training programmes available for staff who are interested in pursuing internal auditing at the Ministry or persons in the junior positions where they could be able to get the skills to move up, not only within the Ministry but maybe within the service?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: We have not been able to send, as I said earlier, to send them on any external training, so that what you are doing really is training on the job. We train you internally.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: So you have a schedule of training internally?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: We do not have a specific schedule, for example, like two days a week or three days a month, we do not have it like that, but it is a matter of on-the-job training and showing improvements how to do the audits a little more efficiently. So it is the responsibility of the senior officers to assist the junior officers almost on a daily basis, but it is not a structured, you come off the job and you go into training; not like that.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Okay. In light of the shortage in staff, how often are audits conducted and what types of audits?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Anjanie, can you share. Ms. Samaroo would—

Ms. Samaroo: Right. So we conduct audits on a daily basis. We have a monthly head office audits that we assign six teams, at least six teams to do head office audits. For the schools, we have been working with six teams also to audit the Government Secondary Schools, but on a daily basis we have pension and leave, contract gratuity files, salary, arrears and increments. So we have all those things to do, but on a daily basis the statutory audits, that is the pension and leave, salary, arrears, contract gratuity, and previous years' vouchers, that is a daily basis.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: So you noted that on a daily basis, pension and leave records would be audited, so all your pension and leave records across the Ministry—

Ms. Samaroo: Whatever is sent to us we—

Mrs. Webster-Roy:—up to date?

Ms. Samaroo: Yes. We will assign it to officers within possibly a two-week period, we will get it done and send it back. That will go for arrears, contract gratuities, previous year's vouchers. The school audits, we go twice a week for the month, and head office is one monthly per team. We work in teams so nobody—so the learning process would go on and the training will happen.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: So for the last three months at least 90 per cent of schools would have been audited.

Ms. Samaroo: The last three months we have been doing—this week we would have completed 85 secondary schools in one area of auditing, cafeteria and school fund raising accounts. In January to February, we did inventory and inventory control, Vote Book.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Okay, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member Mark.

Mr. Mark: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Before I pose my question, Madam Permanent Secretary, could you share with this Committee what is the size of your establishment, the overall size in terms of permanent, contract, as well as those who might be described as temporary in the overall establishment of the Ministry of Education? Do you have those figures with you?

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: Unfortunately, no. I did not walk with them so I really do not have them available, but I can get that information to you certainly.

Mr. Mark: Yeah. Madam Chairman, through you, I am just following up on the internal audit function, and you know this audit function is very critical in providing continuous review of the effectiveness of risk management control and even the governance processes as we seek to promote accountability and greater transparency. Now, in a Ministry with a budget of $5.8 billion, it is clear that the internal audit unit or function leaves a lot to be desired, and I just wanted to ask you, it appears to us, based on your submission, that the internal audit function is in a virtual "callaloo" with general administration. And one gets the impression, and you could clarify it for me, whether you have a separate independent internal audit unit, or whether your internal audit unit is part of your general administration? And you can clear that up for us. If it is such, what steps are being taken by the Permanent Secretary to ensure that you have a separate and independent internal audit function and what personal intervention you are taking as Permanent Secretary, accounting officer, to liaise with the Service Commission, DPA, to ensure that your internal audit unit is brought up to mark, up to speed in terms of staffing? Could you share with us your thoughts on this?

4.25 p.m.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The way I look at it I have an independent internal audit unit. As far as the estimates, you would see it appearing under the heading "General Administration and Finance Division", but it is an independent audit. The Auditor III heads that audit and she reports to the Permanent Secretary. I have not yet personally contacted the Service Commissions to try and get our staffing. I have been depending on HR to pursue it, because it is not something that started last year, to continue pursuing getting those positions filled.

It is getting—as I say, with the Ministries joined up and we now have this huge Ministry—it is getting more and more urgent that we at least fill our positions even if we have to consider looking at increasing the establishment. My first step would be to let us try and fill our vacant positions, see if that is going to make for better efficiency and, if not, then we go the other step which is probably trying to increase the establishment of the unit, which is a longer process.

So I am thinking, let us start with—we have positions that need to be filled—try and get the appropriate persons in those positions, do a re-evaluation and see is that sufficient given the size of the Ministry, if not then we are looking at a restructuring of the internal audit unit which, as I said, is a different process which could take a little longer. So I am really hoping for the shorter, which is fill the positions that we have. I can make a personal intervention seeing that we have been talking this, my understanding is, more than last year when I came in, and see where we are at with trying to get those positions filled. But it is, as far as I am seeing it, an independent internal audit unit.

Mr. Mark: So you are saying that the internal audit unit is completely separate and apart from your general administration and there is no confusion in terms of that unit?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Not the functioning of the unit, no. As I say, if you look in the estimates you might see it under the heading "General Administration and Finance", but they do not report to anyone in general administration nor in finance.

Mr. Mark: Could you also share with us, following up again from member Cuffie's intervention, what efforts are being made by the Ministry to provide these officers in the internal audit unit with some continuous programme of training and retraining, so that they can sharpen their skills in carrying out their functions, so critical, given the size of the Ministry and the value of its allocation?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Because as I say, we do not have enough to spare to send any external, we are really depending on the senior technical officers to do the training on the job. As Ms. Samaroo said, they go out in teams so you have that continuous training happening while the duty is being performed. To do otherwise we are going to limit ourselves further, because if we have to pull persons off, as I say, it is the same Auditors III, II and I would have to do training for the auditing assistants, and we really cannot afford to take those persons away from the programme.

As it is, we are trying very hard to see if we could make 100 per cent for our programme for the year, and we are having some issues with that so we have been pushing to see if we could get the audits done while the training is actually going on and not to have it separated so far.

Madam Chairman: PS, I just wanted, again for some clarification based on some questions member Mark asked. I understand you to say you have a separate unit, but I think what member Mark was asking when he asked "separate from general administration" is whether the audit personnel do general administration work too. I think that is the distinction, that their work is not limited to the audit function, but the audit staff is taken up doing the work of general administration.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I mean, you could correct me, but not the work of general administration. The internal audit would have to do its normal administrative type duties like return of personnel, sick leave, anything that is work of a normal unit. They would have that responsibility because they are a unit in the Ministry, but to say they are doing general administration work, I would say no.

Madam Chairman: All right. So let me ask something then—and this may be what is causing us a little confusion in our understanding and, therefore, you will have an opportunity to clear it up—in the submission, there was a statement to the effect that the Ministry intends to separate the internal audit from general administration, and that comes with other statements to the effect, "Yes, other routine duties such as return of personnel, attendance register updates, submission of application for leave", et cetera, is done. So you are saying now, it is only done by internal audit for internal audit and not for the general administration?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: For internal audit, as any other unit within the Ministry.

Madam Chairman: Okay. I think that is really what was not properly understood by us in the way the submission was given. So when one says that they are going to separate the internal audit from general administration, does that mean that one is going to take away from internal audit unit the administrative functions that relate to the internal audit unit?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: That cannot happen.

Madam Chairman: I would expect so from what you have just explained.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: That cannot happen because I would not have anybody else to do those functions for the internal audit unit. The thinking is, if we would get officers assigned to that unit who would deal with those clerical duties, it would free up the Auditor III, II from doing those kinds of duties. But without that, it is expected that the head of the unit, who is the Auditor III, will have those administrative duties to perform until we get some other arrangement in place.

Madam Chairman: All right. Therefore, when you get that other arrangement in place, that would be then general clerks being assigned to the audit unit?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: To do those duties, yes.

Madam Chairman: I think we now understand what you were asking. So, members, in the interest of time I suggest we go on to goods and services. I would invite member Rambharat to enter the discussion here please.

Mr. Rambharat: PS, I want to go back to your opening statement and just ask you a more fundamental question. You pointed to the reduction for this fiscal, so after the original reduction and the mid-year review, I think you were required to work with about $625 million less this year. Is there a significant duplication within the Ministry particularly in some of the entities that fall under the Ministry? So, for example, is there significant duplication and overlap when you look at UTT, COSTAATT, YTEPP, MIC, NESC, HYPE and Servol, and when you look at some which are not under Education like MiLAT, MYPART, and Civilian Conservation Corps, which fall in other Ministries? But is there significant duplication and overlap in the Ministry?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I would say that some of the agencies seem to be doing similar things. For example, we have COSTAATT, we have University of the West Indies that might be doing similar programmes. There is very little, I think, the Ministry could do with that because they have their own academic board and they decide what programmes they are doing.

When it comes to the institutions doing technical/vocational training you may also see some overlap in those areas. They are not doing exactly the same thing, but you may see some similarities. This might be an opportunity where we are forced to look at that more closely and see if we can do some rationalization because none of the agencies got the moneys that they wanted. They had to review their programmes and see which programmes they may have to, if it is not overly subscribed, see what they could probably stop doing for now. So it is an opportunity, I think, that we can look at all the TVITT programmes that our institutions are offering and see if there is any kind of rationalization that we can do with the TVITT. But as I say, coming to the University of the West Indies and the COSTAATT and the UTT, they have their own arrangements. As I say, I know UWI has its own academic board; they determine what programmes they are going to run. It is not as easy as it might be—I am not saying it will be, but it might be—to look at the agencies with TVITT programmes. But as I say, it is an opportunity. This has caused us to have to look at that quite seriously.

Mr. Rambharat: You are right now in your planning for next fiscal. So are you planning on the same allocation? Are you planning on what you got previous fiscal or are you planning on a reduced allocation for the next fiscal?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: We are looking at it very, very, very closely because our initial estimate was higher than last year. We have to be realistic, and we sat down and we had an exercise last week, and we are planning to continue this week to be looking at our estimates to see how close we can bring it to last year's figure, because we understand the financial constraints that the country is facing.

So where the institutions are concerned, they have also been mandated to review their estimates and look closely at what areas they can cut down, because we cannot go forward with the kind of requests that we have had. So we are in the process right now of reviewing our budget estimates, and the agencies have been asked to do the same.

Mr. Rambharat: Because when I look at "Goods and Services", I am seeing some big numbers and if you have multiple—I think I saw a figure of—if you have buildings across the country, not just Ministry of Education, if your agencies have buildings across the country, like COSTAATT, for example, has just—I do not know if they have opened the new campus in Chaguanas. Those things come—every building comes with an electricity cost, because I am not too sure if schools are turning off the lights as I believe the Cabinet required them to do. They come with electricity, they all come with security, they all come with small equipment needs, they all come with staffing needs.

When I look at goods and services in general I am seeing some numbers there that I am not sure if those numbers could be sustained over any lengthy period. I am wondering if in the context of what has happened this fiscal so far, serious attention is being given to Plan A, an increase; Plan B, what you have gotten this year; or Plan C, a reduction.

The other question I wanted to raise is in Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre. I was very surprised to see the reference to certain activities being impacted by the reduced allocation, and I see, "Support for the implementation of National Junior Panorama Competition, National Junior Soca Monarch, Chutney Monarch Carnival competition, secondary school volleyball, badminton, table tennis, primary schools football, cricket, netball, primary school track and field events. I was surprised. What is the link between the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre and support for this whole list of activities which have been said to be impacted?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Those matters fall under our Curriculum Development Division, which is located down at Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre. I will ask Ms. Ingrid Kemchand if she could go into a little more detail on those programmes.

4.40 p.m.

Ms. Kemchand: Hon. Member, can you clarify a little bit more the nature of your question? Aside from the beginning of the explanation in that the curriculum division administers these activities so that, and it is located at Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre so there is separate vote which is located there hence the allocation of the funds and the activities under the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre. So your question will be on that?

Mr. Rambharat: Well, your answer is ever more confusing. What is the connection between curriculum development and the National Secondary Schools' Volleyball competition?

Ms. Kemchand: Okay. So within the curriculum of the country lies supporting activities in the area of sport, in the area of culture that are complementary to the curriculum and supported by the officers of the curriculum division in terms of technical support and oversight for these activities.

So our officers, for instance, in the physical education and sport unit would be working with the associations that are responsible for each of these of sporting activities. Now, each of them if you take any one, for instance, volleyball there is an organization a national organization approved by Cabinet and this structure is approved by Cabinet that this organization would administer from the district level through to the national level, sporting activities, competitions, et cetera, to support the sport as it moves through.

The officers of the curriculum division work alongside those organizations and provide a measure of oversight and technical support to the administration of each of those organizations, in addition to which the Ministry of Education supports some of the financing of it.

Now there is a wide field of variability in that for each particular organization there are sponsors. So, for instance, for cricket you might find a higher level of sponsorship; for football, et cetera. So that the balance between funding from our sponsorship and funding from the part of the Ministry of Education varies for each of them.

Mr. Rambharat: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: All right. Any other member has any other question to ask on this area of Goods and Services? Okay. And therefore, if there are no further questions on Goods and Services, then might I suggest we go onto the Minor Equipment Purchases? And therefore, I call on member Baksh to be begin the conversation.

Miss Baksh: Thank you, Madam Chair. In your submission under Minor Equipment Purchases the following equipment is expected to be procured with the above allocation which is $1 million:

- the upgrade of ICT equipment;
- net working for occupation of new building;
- upgrade of ICT equipment and network primary schools;
- upgrade of information and communication equipment for networking for secondary schools;
- the Ministry of Education new building St. Vincent Street on gym equipment and vault; and
- wireless equipment, vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, et cetera.

Is $1 million allocation enough to procure all of the equipment detailed in your submission?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: No, Ma'am.

Miss Baksh: All right. But how is the Ministry prioritizing the procurement of these equipment?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Well, we would be looking at ones that need to change out first. There would be older equipment that we would need to look at first and we could phase in the change out of equipment.

There was reference to the gym and we had to prioritize and that is bit low on the priority list as this point in time. So, we are really looking at the critical items that we need to change and see how we could spread that money and maybe according to how critical some are, we may even have to look to move some money into the vote. But we are going to phase in these things depending on how critical the need is, and we only change when required and not do an across the board change because you may have bought all in, for example, 2008. We will look at the ones, of course, the ones are not working will have to change first and we will phase in the rest. But we would have some where we know we are not looking at this year at all.

Miss Baksh: All right. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member Cuffie.

Mr. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted to go back to the submissions on communications under the heading of Promotions, Publicity and Printing. Now you state here that you have not been able to produce newspaper advertisement because they are too costly, and that you have halted your productions because of the same reason, and outreach programmes are being conducted.

Now, if the intention is to reach students or even the general public, I have not seen the potential use of social media identified and I think it is a good thing that you are no longer able to afford traditional media, but is there any attempt being made to use social media to reach your stakeholders?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, Sir. We have been, in fact, while I am reading here where we have some good practices is the use of social media to publish announcements and advertisements previously published in print media. So we are cutting down cost in that and using social media for those purposes. And we have been using it to get our message, Ministry of Education's message across. So, we have been using social media, and I do not know that we have a choice, we will be doing it more in the future.

Mr. Cuffie: But even in terms of the advertisements and the documentaries which you are no longer able to produce, social media is also an avenue. So, I know the Ministry does have audio visual capacity at Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre, and I know you did have an audio-visual unit. So is that not in operation anymore or what is the issue there?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Because it is under Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre, I would like Ms. Kemchand to give us a little more information on that, please.

Ms. Kemchand: Hon. Members, it is a question that is a little bit complex in terms of, one, the facilities that fall under the functions of these units, as well as the staffing of them. I can venture to say and share with you that this is the 25th anniversary of Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre and no significant work has been done in several of the areas over that time, and several of the facilities including those in the media area are falling into disrepair at this point in time.

We do however, retain staff and there are several services which continue to work out of that area, given the limited staff and so on, including publications, including some media recordings and so on. A lot of the work of that unit though has functioned in terms of requests from the rest of the Ministry of Education to record events, to record things which can be broadly shared with the public like research symposia, best practices in schools, et cetera.

The unit has never been engaged in the kind of work that you are talking about, advertisements and that kind of thing, it has never been that function. It has been a function in support of the Curriculum Division and other units of the Ministry of Education. Did I answer your question?

Mr. Cuffie: Partly, but I—is it that you are saying that you have people employed, but no equipment for them to work with properly? Is that it?

Ms. Kemchand: It is both limited equipment and limited staff because some of the positions too have not been filled over time, so the staff has been diminishing as the years have gone by and positions not filled. So it is a dual case we are talking about.

Mr. Cuffie: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member Mark.

Mr. Mark: Yes. Madam Permanent Secretary, on the issue of the Scholarships and Advanced Training Division, we recognize that there is an item that deals with Associate Professional Programme, that is an item. And through this programme you seek to provide employment for national scholars who would have completed their course of study or who would have successfully completed their course of study, but who would not, at that time, be able to find substantive positions within the public sector.

Could you tell us, with the reduction in that allocation, how have you been managing that arrangement; and whether those persons who are seeking placement, you find a disconnect between their level of skills and competencies and the placement that you are able to allocate for those individuals? What has been the experience and what steps are being taken to rectify this conundrum that exists?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I would speak to part of your question and I would ask Dr. Holdip to go into a little more detail. We have a maximum about 400 that we can cater for, for placement, and we have been over the years managing within that for 400; yes, placement. We try our best to place persons in areas, Ministries, Departments suited to the skill they would have acquired. And I would say we are trying our best because we may not get it right all the time, but we have—we get requests from Ministries for persons with certain skill sets and we try to see how best we can place those persons there. Dr. Holdip, do you want to—could you elaborate a little more, please?

Dr. Holdip: Good afternoon, members, Chair, Vice-Chair, members. We have an allocation of about $17 million to fund the associated professionals not including the graduates of the medical studies areas. So those persons who do law, who do business, who do chemical and process engineering and those are, in fact, the areas of focus when it comes to the scholarships that people choose to do, those persons when they return after three years, five years and so on are placed when we can find positions for them.

In many cases, we have persons returning to the University of the West Indies because that is the place that welcomes them back and they act there as tutors, as support for undergraduates and so on. The persons who would have studied law, they continue to do their law certificates and when they come out we generally can find places for them with the AG's office, with the Solicitor General and places like that. We have very few people doing the business area and yet that is the area that we can find places in many Ministries and state sectors bodies in, but we are looking at the choice made by scholars.

So in effect it is necessary and it is mandated according to the policy that we place scholars in a place that will add to their competencies and skills, but we find an oversupply of certain professions where the number of places are limited, especially in the medical area and increasingly in the law area.

4.55 p.m.

Mr. Mark: Permanent Secretary, could you share with us what control does your Ministry have for the auditing of scholarships, secured or obtained by relatives of staff employed at the Ministry? What kind of system you have in place in terms of controls?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: There are scholarships that persons get on the basis of their results at CSEC and CAPE that is basically straight on results. We also have scholarships that we advertise and we go through—we have a Scholarship Selection Committee, we would come up with a framework, get that framework approved; we would use that framework to interview applicants, and they are selected; we make the recommendation for the selection to Cabinet, and Cabinet takes a decision. For the first two it has nothing—well, because it is done on the basis of results at exams, that is the basis, so we really cannot get into the parents and where the parents working, and that kind of thing.

Mr. Mark: All right.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The others that we advertise, the framework is very clear. If, according to the particular scholarship, we may say members of staff who have relatives, but I do not know that we do that, but we go through the criteria that would have been established, whether it is a scholarship that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is offering or whether it is a scholarship that is offered by another country. We have scholarships from Cuba. We have scholarships from OAS. We have Commonwealth, so it depends on the scholarship, but I am not aware, and I would ask Dr. Holdip, she could clarify it for us, if there is any audit, as you put it, for members of staff.

Mr. Mark: It is a matter that the public is concerned about and they would like to have some clarification.

Dr. Holdip: As the Permanent Secretary has intimated, you find that the CAPE scholars are selected on the basis of their results, and strictly on that basis. If it is that the public who would note that a number of CAPE scholars tend to have teachers as their parents, it may simply be the result of excellent training that they provide from very young in support of these persons. When it comes to the other kind of scholarships which are offered, let us say, at the basis of what Cuba has invited us to take up, or the Commonwealth Secretariat, as the Permanent Secretary said, there is an evaluation framework that is supplied to the public when the scholarships are advertised. So that persons applying know very clearly what they must supply and what experience they will go through. They provide an essay, for example, that indicates how they see their studies contributing in the future to the country, and they go through an interview by a committee set up and approved by the Cabinet that consists of a number of professionals. So there is very little chance that who your parent is will ensure that you will get the scholarship.

Mr. Mark: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Member Bodoe.

Dr. Bodoe: Thank you, Madam Chair. Still on the issue of scholarships and, through you, Madam PS, Dr. Holdip mentioned the issue with the excessive amount of medical graduates, and, in fact, we have reports of, you know, medical graduates being unable to secure jobs and so on. Does the Ministry liaise with the Ministry of Health, who would be the primary stakeholder in terms of any needs assessment to guide the scholarship winners in terms of which areas that they might want to take up their scholarships?

Dr. Holdip: The majority of the scholarships on offer are CAPE scholarships. Many of those who are able to access CAPE scholarships do so because they do excellent work in the science areas. They therefore already have in their minds what they wish to do at the undergraduate level, and so we do find that as many as 60 per cent of the scholars choose the medical area, straight MBBS at Mount Hope, or the Doctor of Medicine at American universities, a number of our open scholars choose to go to Ireland. We have no moral authority over what they choose to do. We do think that because they see a difference between demand and supply that more parents might influence their children to maybe think about a different career. As it is, once they choose to do their first degree, the MBBS, they return to us, they report to us, and we give them a letter to indicate that they have completed the first, you know, their scholarship, and they, hopefully, get to do their internship with the Ministry of Health, but we really have no influence over the undergraduates especially.

Dr. Bodoe: Thank you, and I hear you, but is there any sort of guidance that is given? I understand that they have the right to choose, and so on, and I am not for one moment saying that you should try to take away that right, but is there any sort of guidance that is currently being offered or is being considered to guide these graduates? And, actually, I should have asked this question first, can you indicate the number of scholarship winners in the field of medicine who are currently on place? And, sorry, the reason I ask is because I know they have a three-month—they are allowed three months in which placement is allowed, and just correct me if I am wrong about this, and if they are not placed then they no longer have to meet their obligations to the State.

Dr. Holdip: I will not be able to give you a clear number at this point in time. We are aware that persons who graduated with their MBBS in 2016, some of them are still waiting to do their internship year, and because they cannot yet do it, they cannot register and be placed as doctors. We are presently in the process of receiving a whole number of those who are reporting in this year. We are looking, I think, at 148 persons coming back in to us for their internship—

Member: Scholarship winners.

Dr. Holdip: Yes, scholarship winners—open scholarship winners, additional scholars. Do remember that the cohort of graduates would be added to by those who were paid for by GATE, not just the scholars, so we are talking about several hundred persons graduating with their MBBS on a yearly basis from all the various sources. We also have, however, a slight misunderstanding. Generally, for all scholars we are expected to try and place them within three months of their completion and reporting in. Those who studied abroad have one month to come back in, so let us say we have four months after completion, except for the President Medal winners, we have six months to place them. The persons who are not placed within the three months must demonstrate evidence that they have attempted to find alternative work over an 18-month period, and it is only after the 18 months and the evidence that we must issue a no objection to their moving out of the local jurisdiction. Yes? Within 18 months they must seek a place locally, either in the public or the private sector. However, when it comes to the medical graduates, their choice of alternative places than the public health system is severely limited.

Dr. Bodoe: One more question. I am very concerned because in a field like medicine when you finish your medical degree if you do not go into an internship soon after then you are faced with certain challenges in terms of, you know, getting your knowledge into practice, and with this in regard has the Ministry been looking at any opportunities, for example, within the private sector for placing those graduates who are waiting beyond a certain period of time? Has any consideration been given to that?

Dr. Holdip: Well, we have very little authority over that. The new graduates must do their internship. After their internship then they can become eligible for house officer positions. The fact that there are local hospitals, they are not really encouraging persons who would have just done one year internship to become house officers, they prefer more experienced persons. So the areas of contract that is out there in the private hospitals, also very limited. So what we have seen is a number of scholars applying for, what we call deferral of obligatory service, because they are obligated to serve for as much as five years. We spend over $600,000 and sometimes up to $3 million on training these persons, and after the 18 months, or the deferral, they do get offers and they leave us to do specialty, obstetrics, gynaecology, you know, paediatrics, and we hope that they come back.

Dr. Bodoe: If I could just tie this in to just one more aspect, and this comes under transfers, Current Transfers and Subsidies, but it relates to the issue of subsidies to medical students, subsidies to Mount Hope students, and I note the decrease in the allocation. They have some $19 million-plus, Madam PS, and the follow-up to that question would be whether consideration—how is that going to affect in terms of the intake and whether consideration is being given now to having, you know, students from abroad, for example, who can pay to come to the medical school, non-nationals I am talking about?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: With the reduction it would affect the University of the West Indies operations because they depend on that, the subsidy. There would have been an agreement in the past that we would subsidize and, therefore, we really should be—this year we are trying to see if we could come back to the figure we are supposed to be giving them. So we are making a plug with budgets to organize that funding because it will affect the running of that faculty. The University of the West Indies can open their doors to anybody, anybody who is willing to apply and come to the University of the West Indies, it is not just for nationals. So if the university decides that, okay, to be able to make ends meet, let us put it that way, they will increase the intake of foreign students, it is up to them, but we will try and meet our obligation to them for the students that we are sending there.

Madam Chairman: Member Cuffie.

Mr. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Chair, are we still under Infrastructure Development Fund?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Cuffie: Okay. I wanted to ask about the Early Childhood Care and Education centres. Now, you say four are under—are still to be completed, could you identify those four centres that are still incomplete?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Ms. Henry-David will provide those details.

Ms. Henry-David: So the four that are under construction that we hope to finish would be Egypt/Oasis, Marabella, Wallerfield and Springvale SDMS.

Mr. Cuffie: Okay. And you have continuation of one, which is the one?

Ms. Henry-David: Belle Vue—that is Dibe, Long Circular, Belle Vue.

Mr. Cuffie: And payment of final accounts for three.

Ms. Henry-David: St. Sylvans, Chinapoo and Cunjal.

Mr. Cuffie: I know of at least one centre, I was trying to see whether it is under construction, nearing completion or continuation, that no work is going on, and that is the one at La Horquetta, and I am trying to understand what its status.

Ms. Henry-David: If you will indulge me I can check to see, but we have had a number of early childhood centres which were at varying stages of completion, but because of budgetary constraints, among other things, we have not been able to schedule the completion of all of them at the same time. So we have had to do some prioritizing, so we would have prioritized in view of those areas with the most demonstrated need.

Mr. Cuffie: Okay. No, that is fine, what I am trying to get is you listed those that are going to complete construction, and then continuation and payment of final accounts, right, so I assume that there are centres, like the one at La Horquetta, that are more or less complete that are not listed here, how many of those are there, and what is there status?

Ms. Henry-David: I think that that is something that we would have to provide a listing for you because it would be quite a number.

Mr. Cuffie: So that where the buildings are complete and—

Ms. Henry-David: Not necessarily complete but at varying stages of completion. So some may be as complete as 95 per cent, others may be 20, 30, 40 per cent complete in terms of that continuum for construction, and, as I said, because of the budgetary constraints we are unable to complete all of them so we have had to prioritize.

Mr. Cuffie: Okay, but they are not listed here in the—

Ms. Henry-David: No, they would not be because the five that are listed, the four for completion, the one for continuation, and the three for final accounts, those are the ones that we prioritized based on the funding that we were allocated for this fiscal.

Mr. Cuffie: Okay, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member Bodoe.

Dr. Bodoe: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam PS, if I may just ask a few questions with regard to the IDF, the Infrastructure Development Fund, and to note that the allocation for 2017 would have been $511 million, thereabout, can you indicate to this Committee what percentage of that amount has been spent so far for the fiscal year? Would you be in a position to give us that information?

5.10 p.m.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I believe we will have to provide that in writing for you, Sir. We are not in a position to give the total. We might have some information on certain areas but not across the board. So I crave your indulgence.

Dr. Bodoe: We will take that, but any rough estimates in terms of a percentage perhaps? Whilst I await that perhaps in the interest of time I could also ask, with regard to a list of virements that were made for fiscal 2016, I note from your submission a transfer of funds of some $93 million plus, which would have been moved from UTT main campus Tamana ETecK Park to various other projects. Can you explain the rationale for this virement, what would have been the reason and how it was—

Madam Chairman: I am sorry, I did not get the rest of the question.

Dr. Bodoe: The rationale for the virement and how was the decision made to carry out this virement?

Ms. Chadee: That is the transfer of approximately $26 million from the UTT Tamana project you are referring to?

Dr. Bodoe: My information here is some $93,888,285.

Ms. Chadee: So the UWI/Tamana project got an allocation of $120 million. UTT projected that they would have started to utilize that fund in June2017 because they had some alternative source of funds to take them to June. So the Ministry at the time in December was looking to source funding to do the December Vacation Repair Programme, and we were looking at utilizing $26 million from that vote and our plan was to go back at mid-year review to get the $26 million back into the UTT vote for use later on in the fiscal year, because the Vacation Repair Programme, the vote related to that we did not have the funding required.

Dr. Bodoe: So in view of that, could you indicate then whether any improvement, refurbishment, and extensions as listed for both primary and secondary schools, whether any work at all would have been done in the vacation?

Ms. Chadee: Yes; work would have been down, and we have a detailed listing which we could provide you.

Dr. Bodoe: Can you provide that for us, the schools and the work that was done?

Ms. Chadee: Yes, what was expended, what was the cost.

Dr. Bodoe: I would be most grateful. Again, I need to come back to the ECCE. Can I ask the status of the ECCE school in Debe Avenue in Avocat which falls within my constituency?

Ms. Henry-David: Can I please ask if you would come back to it?—I would need to check.

Dr. Bodoe: Sure, I would appreciate that. From the submission, I note that there are three projects which did not receive an allocation for fiscal 2017—that is, the construction of the Shiva Boys' Hindu College, Parvati Girls' Hindu College and the Siparia East Secondary. I also note from your submission that students will continue to be housed in inadequate conditions for a protracted period. With respect to these three projects, could you indicate perhaps in writing where these students are currently housed and how long they have been housed at the temporary location, or if you can tell us that now?

Ms. Henry-David: Parvati Girls' Hindu has been housed since circa 2000 at what was rebuilt as the new Debe Primary School, and over time some additional facilities may have been provided, but ostensibly they function from what was built as a primary school.

The Shiva Boys' Hindu College, they are in a building that was, I think, a theological college down in Penal, and as well they would have been provided with some additional facilities, but where both schools are housed they were not built for purpose.

Dr. Bodoe: Siparia East Secondary.

Ms. Henry-David: Siparia East continues to be housed at what was the Siparia Junior Secondary School.

Dr. Bodoe: Can you indicate the percentage, if I may, completion of each of these schools, how far along they are?

Ms. Henry-David: Shiva and Parvati are both at approximately 71 per cent completion, and the Siparia East about 30 per cent completion.

Dr. Bodoe: Can you explain why there was no allocation for 2017? Is it because there was no request made and or was it that the request was made and not facilitated by the Government?

Ms. Henry-David: Requests would have been made; however, due to financial constraints we were allocated what we were allocated.

Dr. Bodoe: Any idea going forward into the new financial year what is going to happen to these three schools? By way of answer, can you indicate what kind of funding would be required to complete each of these three?

Ms. Henry-David: We crave your indulgence for us to provide those answers in writing, so that we would be accurate in what we provide.

Dr. Bodoe: One final question. In terms of the utilization of facilities, I know some of these facilities may be incomplete, but the students at Siparia East Secondary, I am aware that the multipurpose hall is almost completed, and you said that the project is still a long way from completion. Is it possible or have you in the past given consideration to partially opening a facility, for example, at the multipurpose hall for the benefit of the students?

Ms. Henry-David: That has been done in very few instances that I can think of because of safety issues, and sometimes it is not so easy to hoard off an area from what is ostensibly a construction site. So I am not aware that we have been considering that in this instance.

Mr. Rambharat: I just have a question on—you made a submission dated December20, 2016 that deals with concerns related to inventory control. You have that submission before you?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I have a document; I am assuming that is the same document you are referring to.

Mr. Rambharat: I am just trying to follow the flow, just for my understanding. Now, there is a memo dated August23, 2013, and this is a request from Acting Clerk IV Office Manager Greg Cave Cooper. Do you have that?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Unfortunately, if it is an attachment, I do not have the attachment. So if you could tell me your concern, I will try and get that information to you.

Mr. Rambharat: Basically I am trying to follow. On August 23, 2013, the request is made—the memo lists some problems with the Toyota Fielder wagon PBZ 8172, and refers to three quotations submitted and there is a line at the end which says, "Please note that the Nissan X-Trail 2.5 limited is our vehicle of choice, should it meet with your approval". Then it follows with a memo dated September04, 2013, from the Director of Finance and Accounts to the Permanent Secretary which refers to that previous memo, identifies the three quotations, and the three quotations are from Neal & Massy Limited for an X-Trail, Classic Motors for a Honda CRV and Toyota for a Fortuner, and then recommends, "The recommended supplier of Classic Motors, though not the least expensive, but there is a lot of trunk space to accommodate the boxes of files and mails to be delivered". Then the remaining documents point to the purchase of the X-Trail, and not just one X-Trail, two— two X-Trails.

So it moves from a recommendation from the Director of Finance to the PS for the Honda CRV from Classic Motors to be purchased, even though it was not the lowest price and the justification is set out. But then from the remaining documents, I see from September30th, several notations on the file dealing with the acquisition of not one, but two X-Trails, closing with—well, a lot of things happened on September 30, 2013, it was a very busy day. There are a lot of notations on the file, and there is an invoice to Neal & Massy Automotive for the supply of two Nissan X-Trails. Then the invoice order is attached. I am not seeing a date on it. There is the documentation showing that the payment and cheque collection information, also dated September 30, 2013.

So I am just wondering from an inventory control, one, and just general accountability, how does one move from the approval of a Honda CRV with a justification, to the acquisition of two X-Trails? There is nothing before me which tells me how you went through that process.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Minister, I cannot say that what I would say now is with 100 per cent accuracy, because clearly I was not there at the time. But I know, sometimes depending on your funding you tend to go with a good vehicle that would serve purpose. So I am going to be making an assumption that the PS at the time considered that the X-Trail would serve the purpose and, given the funding, the cost of the CRV, which is 240 compared to 198, her approval was to purchase, well, not one, but two. So, we were able to stretch the money and get two, because I am seeing purchase of two X-Trails. The PS approved it as at the 16th of September to purchase two X-Trails.

Mr. Rambharat: With all due respect, I do not think it is convincing to say that given funding constraints, you decided not to buy the $240,000 CRV and instead buy two X-Trails at $400,000. I do not think that is convincing.

5.25 p.m.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I—putting myself in the shoes of the PS which might not be the right thing to say to do, I would say, if I had $400,000 and have a proposal to purchase one vehicle that is costing $240,000, but I can get two vehicles for the $400,000, I might decide to purchase the two vehicles. But as I say, I cannot say what was in the mind of the PS at the time, but she did approve, at the time, she approved the purchase of two X-Trails.

Mr. Rambharat: But then the justification for the CRV which was, the justification was that the recommended supplier is Classic Motors though not the least expensive, but there is a lot of trunk space to accommodate the amount of boxes of files and mails to be delivered. Because the rationale for changing out from the PAZ 8172 Fielder was that the vehicle was used for the distribution of mails and checks, and given the problems with that vehicle they needed a new vehicle, and the recommendation was for the X-Trail 2.5, but the director of finance in writing to the Permanent Secretary makes the case for the CRV which is more than the X-Trail, but less than the Fortuner in price. And then I would not say that availability of funds is an issue because, you know, two vehicles were purchased.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I cannot speak for the PS at the time, however, as I say, if it is to deliver mails and as you said, to deliver mails, I do not how that you require a vehicle with a massive amount of trunk space. You need a reliable vehicle to get you from point A to B, C and X. So, I would think that I would consider having a reliable vehicle, and if I can get two out of the money for the price of one, the needs, the overall needs of the Ministry must have been taken into account to decide that, okay, if we could get two vehicles with the price, well almost the price of one, and clearly we had the funding, because I am seeing all the approvals for it, the PS would have made a decision accordingly.

Mr. Rambharat: Well would you undertake to provide the clarification for the Committee?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Okay. I will try, but as I say, the PS who approved it at the time is no longer in the Ministry, and I will have to do a lot of digging to see if I could come up with a justification why we went with two X-Trails and not one Honda.

Mr. Rambharat: Would you, at least, I feel obligated because the document, I mean, if the documents were not placed before me, I would not have been in this position, but the documents—this has come before me based on a submission by you. You have submitted this before me.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes. And I have submit an approval—

Mr. Rambharat: So now you have put, on behalf of the Committee you have put me into the position of asking the question, and I understand that you were not personally in the Ministry at the time, but I feel constrained to ask for an explanation based on the paper trail that exists in the Ministry and the recollections of the persons who are still available, an explanation for what has been placed before the Committee.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I will try my best to provide that information to the Committee, Sir.

Madam Chairman: Just though, PS, might I ask following from that question, what are your funding levels to date? Because as you indicated for acquisition of vehicles, none. So there has been no expenditure to date?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: This here?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: No. We have not purchased.

Madam Chairman: And there are no plans to purchase?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: No, plans. Yes. None last year. Sorry.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And there are no plans to purchase for the balance of this fiscal year?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: We have no allocation to purchase motor vehicles for this year.

Madam Chairman: Okay. But almost I get the impression from your response that if you had money left, if you were in that position and you had money left at the end of the fiscal year regardless of what your justification was for acquiring, you would have acquired as many as you could. I think that is where it was going.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Well, I cannot say what was in the thinking—

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais:—but I could say now in 2017, if I had money in that Vote and I look at the fleet we have, I might be looking to use the money elsewhere.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So does the thinking then for that statement is that informed by, "if ah have de money ah going to spend all"? Because that is the impression the expenditure taking place on the 30th is as if, "ah have de money, let meh spend all".

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Well, the approval was not on the 30th, eh, if I recall it was earlier in September. The actual expenditure might have occurred on the 30th. As I say, I cannot assume to know what might have been the situation, there could have been other vehicles that might have been down and there might have been need for more than one vehicle and you are trying to maximize the amount of funds you have. I will do the research and try and provide an explanation, but I would not think it is just a matter of the 30th of September is coming and you spend all the money, because there would be other needs in the Ministry and you will try to see how you can maximize.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you. And just before I invite other members, I just want to ask two questions on Fees, this is 001 General Administration Sub-Item 23. In the submission there was a statement that the vote will be exhausted as of end of April 2017, and this would be fees for CXC, SEA, for the Continuous Assessment Component for the General Certificate of Education.

> The Vote will be exhausted as of the end of April of 2017, a reprioritizing of allocations from other Sub-Heads will have to be done to identify savings in order to facilitate transfers into this vote.

So what I am asking is, has that reprioritizing taken place? And from what votes would transfers have been done to ensure that your deficit in fees has been met?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The actual reprioritizing and looking for which vote might be able to—that has not occurred as yet.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Our DFA just came back out from leave, and as I say, we are in the process right now of looking at where we can get the money to meet the expenses before the end of this financial year.

Madam Chairman: What impact, if any, if you did not get to plug the deficit, what impact or consequences follow for these fees?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Unfortunately, I do not know that we have a choice, we have to find it, because we will be going into a new financial year with a commitment—it is only going to make us worse off next year. So, we really have to search high and low to locate funds from other votes, and that exercise we will start—because as I say, we are doing a review of the entire estimates right now—

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais:—so we will have to do our best to try and locate those funds—

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais:—so that it does not go over as a commitment to next year.

Madam Chairman: All right. You expect your process of identification to take roughly how long?

Mr. Mungal: It all depends on if a bill comes in we will look for the money for it, to cover that bill, because we do not want to move in plenty in there and the next thing we have somewhere else that needs again. So we will move in as we need, we will look to move in there. So if we have a bill in hand now, we will look for money to put in there.

Madam Chairman: All right. Okay. So then therefore, maybe what we would do is we will invite you all back before the commencement of the new fiscal for some sort of reporting on what has happened with reprioritizing the areas where you would have had this deficit where you had to fill. And under Minor Equipment Purchases in the mid-year review you had got some $60 million-plus more, and I believe earlier you all had said this was for ICT.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: It was for the purchase of laptops.

Madam Chairman: But this would only be for Forms 1 and 2. Am I correct?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Form 1, we have a slight, Form 1—where we will be—it is not going be as previously where—

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais:—the student gets, we are going to have—it is to purchase laptops and batteries actually—

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais:—and it will be a shared—equipment that will be shared in the schools, stored securely in the school. So, we are looking at Form 1 this coming academic year.

Madam Chairman: Okay. What I really wanted to find out and that is why I wanted the clarification, there is expected to be online examinations, so that will be CXC?

Official: Yes.

Madam Chairman: In terms of—and that is supposed to be 2018?

Official: 2018.

Madam Chairman: In terms of acquiring the equipment, because, I think it is something like about 18,000 students, in terms of acquiring the equipment for that exam, and in terms of say ensuring that your centres will be Wi-Fi ready and so on, would any of that funding have been in your allocation for fiscal 2017?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes. The preparation of the schools for the e-testing would have been factored in, whether we get—we factored it in our 2018 estimates.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: What we will get, I guess, we will see, but we plug it very hard—we had discussions to explained that we have to go e-testing so we really need the funding for that.

Madam Chairman: Yeah. But you are talking about fiscal 2018?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes.

Madam Chairman: But I am asking, if any of that was factored into fiscal 2017? What I am really trying to find out, if it would have come under this Minor Equipment Purchases Vote and whether it would have been affected by the deficit?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Not under the Minor Equipment Purchases Vote.

Madam Chairman: Any other vote?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes. We would have had it in another vote. I am sure it is not under the Minor Equipment Purchases Vote but I would get that information on which vote we would, but I am pretty sure we would have had a vote, but right now, sorry, it is not coming to mind.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. Okay. So if maybe you could therefore, PS, respond to that and let us know if that vote was impacted and how it affects your anticipated status for readiness for the e-testing in 2018? Okay? Thank you very much. Member Mark.

Mr. Mark: Thank you, Ma'am. Madam Chair, if you may indulge me or if I can indulge you for a few moments, I want to revert an earlier point made by Dr. Bodoe and it has to do with the internship. I wanted to ask the Permanent Secretary if you could share with us what are some of the factors that might be negatively impacting on those persons who have been on scholarships and they have been able to successfully navigate in terms of their medical degrees, but are unable to access that one-year training programme which is so vital for them to become house officers within the medical system? Do you have any idea as to how, what are the factors that might be inhibiting that progress or those persons' progress?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Well, the placement of our returning, well returning scholars, as well as those who would have done it on their own through GATE funding really is—to get a position as an intern, it is really under the Ministry of Health and the Regional Health Authorities.

Mr. Mark: Okay.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: We have little or no control over that.

Mr. Mark: Okay.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: We provide them information, how many scholars will be returning; we also provide them with the information how many persons under GATE funding will be returning, but the actual placement of an intern for that one year it is Ministry of Health and the RHAs, and beyond that the employment as a house officer is also in the hands of the Regional Health Authorities.

Mr. Mark: May I also ask, Madam Permanent Secretary, you spoke about getting, recovering rather, some $2.4 million from persons who may have breached their scholarship obligations. Could you tell us, for instance, how many persons who are involved here and what kind of scholarships would be involved?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Dr. Holdip, could you provide that information?

Dr. Holdip: Let me clarify that in—we are now up to $3 million as at the end of June 30th. Many of those persons are not necessarily in breach, they have simply chosen to repay. The number of persons who are in breach cannot be provided at this time because it is a continuous exercise.

I have a small breach unit and post-reporting monitoring unit that is constantly in touch with scholars who may not have reported in when they were supposed to do so, or who did not complete their obligatory service and left the country or left the placement that they were in without informing us.

5.40 p.m.

When we find them in terms of—we send out emails to them, we send out emails to their guarantors because the scholarship is a loan and a guarantor must sign, cosign with the scholar. Once they respond, once we find out and we have engaged other scholars to locate them and so on, we let them know what their options are, in terms of repayment. So we do have a number of persons and the majority of persons who choose to repay tend to be medical graduates.

Mr. Mark: Yeah, but could you not share with us as at the end of 2016, what was the number involved in terms of those who allegedly would have been in breach prior to you discussing with them options available?

Dr. Holdip: I would not be able to give you a figure of the number of persons in breach. We have over 38 persons who have repaid thus far for this year or who are in process of repayment this year, because when they do we sign a new agreement with them. But in terms of the number of persons who are actively in breach, I would not be able to give it to you right away.

Mr. Mark: You would not be able to say that, okay. Madam Chair, through you again, to the Permanent Secretary, I am not too clear the name of the programme or project. Some people call it the Laventille/Morvant project. Some people call it, I think, the School Improvement Project. I just wanted you to clarify for us, where is that project located in the Ministry of Education. Is it under the Development Programme? Is it under the Recurrent Expenditure? Is it under Infrastructure Development Programme and what is the size of the allocation? As well as, if you can give us an understanding of the successes and challenges faced by that programme.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I will have our project manager give you those details, basically answer most of the questions you have asked there. Ms. Chadee.

Ms. Chadee: The Laventille/Morvant project which is also called the School Improvement Project is allocated $31.5 million for fiscal year 2017. That allocation is being utilized to implement four main components which is, parenting and education; literacy/numeracy and teacher/training and development, promoting discipline in schools and infrastructure upgrade and esthetics at the school.

Under infrastructure upgrade, a total of $24.5 million was allocated for the 25 schools. However, two of the schools have to be rebuilt and that will be taken care of under the construction programme. So essentially we are upgrading 23 schools in terms of priority items like, electrical, plumbing, sewer system, roofing, whatever items are required in order to improve the school, to keep them operational and also to maintain some standards with respect to the various components in the infrastructure.

In terms of progress to date, we have, under infrastructure, two phases where we selected a scope of works for each of the schools to be done in Phase 1. All of Phase 1 scope was approved and handed over to EFCL to implement. Out of the phase 1 works, approximately 14 contracts have been awarded at 14 schools for Phase 1 works. And the remaining nine is in tendering, various stages of tendering procedures.

In terms of progress, approximately in Phase 1, eight are 100 per cent complete and the rest are at various stages of completion. They are progressing now at a faster rate because they have a lot more free time at the school now with exams and then just now school will be closed. So we expect that the Phase 1 work will be completed by mid-July. We also have approved Phase II works which is the total scope for the upgrade works that we saw when we visited the site. And those works are being handed over to EFCL to be implemented over the July/August period. So we expect that the full $24.5 million will be utilized for the improvement programme and all of the schools would have some amount of upgrade works.

Mr. Mark: Now, Permanent Secretary, the EFCL is responsible for dealing with this whole programme in terms of the upgrading process, in terms of selecting, the tendering process and the selection of contractors would come from the EFCL they would do that piece of work.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes.

Mr. Mark: And where these contractors would come from?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: EFCL has a list of prequalified contractors. Basically, we look for contractors in the area. So they would be using their prequalified list and go through the contractors in that area.

Mr. Mark: Madam Chair, may I also ask, I have also noted that we have had some very prominent visitors to Trinidad and Tobago and even some citizens from Trinidad and Tobago going into the community. Is that part of the programme itself or is that something outside of the programme? I remember some chap coming from Harvard University or Howard University and having some lecture up there. Is that part the programme?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The programme, as was explained by Ms. Chadee, that would not be part of it.

Mr. Mark: That would not be part of it. All right. Thank you.

Dr. Bodoe: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam PS, just a question on the Development Programme with regard to the Consolidated Fund where an allocation of $362,510,000. Can you indicate what percentage of that has been spent to date?

Ms. Chadee: In terms of expenditure for the entire allocation, that will consist of a number of different projects from various divisions and as such we do not have the accumulated figure of expenditure, so if we can provide you the details.

Dr. Bodoe: Yeah, that would be fine. And if I may just look and draw your attention to a project, which is a new project, education advancement project which is to commence officially in October, 2017. I see that is going to cost us $220million, overall. Can we perhaps have, maybe just an idea of what this project is about?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Our director of Education Planning will provide some more information on that. Hopefully, it will suffice.

Ms. Henry-David: Okay, so the EAP at the Education Advancement Programme is an IDB loan funded programme which is currently being negotiated under four components. One component has to do with infrastructure which deals with the construction of five early childhood centres in Tobago. Another component has to do with some research issues as well as providing communications for all the areas related to the project. A third area has to do with provision of quality education and the fourth area has to do with governance related issues. So that would include areas such as the Education Management Information System and some research on the technical vocational area. Earlier we were asked about the consolidation of programmes and so on, and that aspect would come under that component of the EAP.

Dr. Bodoe: Thank you. Can you indicate whether this project has been tendered out and whether a contractor has been identified?

Ms. Henry-David: No, we have not reached that stage as yet. As I said, this is an IDB loan programme, so we are at the point where we are trying to refine the different projects that are recommended for inclusion under the programme and we are in the midst of having discussions with the Ministry of Planning and Development to finalize the list of the programmes which will be included in that entire project.

Mr. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Chair. PS, I would like to direct you to page 58of your submissions on effective compliance dealing with the scholarship issue. Now, it outlines how the scholarships are awarded, how the payments are made, but having been exposed to the problems scholarship awardees endure as a result of the non-functioning of all the these things that you have mentioned here. Because even at the start of the last academic term, if I recall correctly, there were scholarship awardees going to the media, calling the Ministry saying that they were not getting access to their funds. So what I would like to hear from you is one, what caused the problem and two, what mechanisms have been put in place by the Ministry to ensure that this problem does not keep recurring? Because it has been happening over a long period of time.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I will ask Dr. Holdip to get into some of the details of what actually happened at that time and then we could talk about what we have put in place to avoid that in the future.

Dr. Holdip: The process requires compliance by the scholars themselves to supply us with transcripts that showed that they have maintained a 2.5 GPA at minimum, a status letter to show that they have registered or re-registered for the programme, a request if they have chosen to change their programme of study and they must wait for permission. Our recognition that they may have in fact been overpaid and therefore they must pay back that overpayment before we continue payment. Sometimes the contract time at which the scholar signs their scholarship agreement is one that does not allow us to begin the payment immediately. The major problem therefore lies with lack of staff sometimes who may not be there to continue the conversation with the scholar until we send another support officer or we become aware that this particular scholar has not been responded to in a timely fashion. But most of the times it has to do with the scholar not supplying what they need to supply to us in a timely manner.

If one scholar goes to the social media and goes to the newspapers and goes to the television, there is an occasion for people to believe it is a problem throughout the system. But in truth and in fact, we have improved. The majority of scholars are getting what they are supposed to get in a timely fashion. I must say that despite the fact that allocation is not where it used to be, we do get our releases for scholarships on a timely fashion and we try our best to make sure that they get their moneys on time.

Mr. Cuffie: Pardon me, Madam Chair. A lot of these calls come to me because the division used to be part of the Ministry of Public Administration before and sometimes you hear the cries of parents and they are unsure about the welfare of their children stuck in foreign jurisdictions. Sometimes they cannot get access to their apartments.

5.55 p.m.

I think when you are here in Trinidad and you have a scholar stuck in the UK, or the US, or some far-flung destination, we need to have some process where we minimize the level of hurt and discomfiture that attends to these nationals who are scholars, and I am not sure we have gotten to that point yet and I really would like to hear some kind— I know attempts were being made before, but we need to find some way to ensure that this does not keep recurring with our national scholars particular at the time some of them, it is winter and they are not sure of when they are getting their funding. What I see here from the Ministry does not address the problem, it does not recognize the problem, and I am still waiting to hear of a new initiative that would prevent that from happening on an annual basis.

Madam Chairman: Member, I just want to invite the PS because I believe in response to your question initially, that the PS had indicated Dr. Holdip would talk about what occurred and the PS will now address what new systems they are putting in place. So maybe we could invite the PS at this stage to make her contribution.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Now, we have been trying with the scholars abroad to try and pay three months allowances in one payment. So that it is not every month we have to go through this and they have to be worried. We try to pay three months in advance, well not in advance, three months together. So it turns out to be in advance for at least two months if we are paying it three months together. We are in putting that in place, we are hoping that it would avoid September coming with an issue because we are right now looking—well we had to do some movement of funds to be able to meet our payments so that we could make the payment up to the end of the financial year.

Hopefully, with your three months allowance in your hand at one time it would ease the pain by the time we get the next three months, but we are very cognizant of the fact that our scholars are out there, and just being out there is an issue and not being aware of when the funding is going to come. We accept that it will be very traumatic for them and we are trying our best with putting that system in place to see if we could avoid the pains, the extra pains of waiting for payments. I guess it is a work in progress and we may not get it right in one year, but we certainly would not like to have a recurrent of what happened last year.

Mr. Mark: Madam Chair, I would just be quick. Madam Permanent Secretary, your project officer, who just spoke, mentioned as I have it here, again in the school improvement programme she spoke, about 14 schools and 14 contracts being issued thus far. Could she provide in writing, through you, to the Chair, the names of those schools and could you submit the names of these 14 contractors? You also indicated that there are nine other schools and tenders to be issued, I do not know if you can indicate to us if there is a time frame for that, or whether, for instance, when you are submitting in writing the information that I have requested, that you can make that available because the work has to go on between July and August based on what has been submitted to us. So we would welcome that submission.

I saw, Madam Chair, a very excellent project called the International Fine Cocoa Innovation Centre involving some $4.5 million allocation, but it requires a Cabinet Note to be finalized and submitted. Could you tell us, for instance, if that Note has been finalized and submitted?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: The Note has been prepared, but it has not been finalized.

Mr. Mark: Well, given the fact that the financial year is coming to a close and this is a very important project, could you tell us when that Note will be submitted and whether when that Note is submitted funds will be released for this very important project?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I would not be able to say when the Note will be finalized for submission to Cabinet at this point in time. It was put forward and we are having discussion on it, so I cannot say yet.

Mr. Mark: Would you advise whether this project will die, or will it live?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: It will not die.

Mr. Mark: No, I am talking about for this fiscal year.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Funds were allocated that they can use for this year. We were looking to get additional funding and I am being reminded that we did not have Cabinet approval to use the funds, but we had funds allocated. So we will push to see if we could get the approval so that the funds that have been allocated can be utilized, and we could probably, I think we are even trying to get additional funds for the project for next fiscal.

Mr. Mark: And finally, Madam Chair, I noticed in the Infrastructure Development Fund where you had—I guess you vired, or transfer as it said, some $93.9 million from the UTT. Is it UTT?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, Sir.

Ms. Maharaj: That would be—

Mr. Mark: Yes, I think it is UTT—

Ms. Maharaj:—UTT allocation?

Mr. Mark: Yes.

Ms. Maharaj: UTT was allocated $120 million. We vired $26 million from that to the votes related to the vacation repair programme in order to do the December vacation repair. So the allocation under the UTT main campus will be $93 point million. I do not know the exact figure, but it is $93 million.

Mr. Mark: So that sum that has been allocated would go towards primary, secondary and special education?

Ms. Maharaj: The $93 million will remain on UTT Campus for their usage to September 30th, and the $26 million was transferred to do repairs at the primary, secondary and ECCEs.

Mr. Mark: Do you have an idea—could you provide us, Madam Permanent Secretary, with the schools that are going to benefit from this $26 million allocation under project B, primary; under project group C, secondary; and under project group E, special education; both repairs as well as furniture and equipment for—no, repairs and maintenance of special schools? And in case of the secondary, you have improvements/refurbishment as well as extensions both at the primary and secondary. Could we get the names of these schools?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, Sir, we can because this was utilized for the December 2016.

Mr. Mark: Oh, that was for 2016?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Mark: Yes, could you still give us the names?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, we can.

Mr. Mark: Thank you very much. Madam Chair, I am okay.

Mr. Rambharat: I just want to follow the question Dr. Bodoe raised on the Education Advancement Programme and I was looking at the notes, this is said to be a follow-up to the Seamless Education System Project. Now, the note also says that the seamless education project closed on December 2015. Now, the expenditure on that project, Seamless Education

System Project, the expenditure for fiscal 2015 was $126 million, and this new project is estimated to cost $220 million. I wanted to know what evaluation or what that Seamless Education System Project involved; what evaluation has been done on that project against the targets, or the objectives of the project; what was the total cost of the Seamless Education System Project which started in 2009; and what is the justification for this new project, the Education Advancement Project and the $220 million cost?

Ms. Henry-David: So starting somewhere in the middle, I will not be able to give you the total expenditure on the Seamless Education System Project at this time, so we will have to provide that response in writing. What evaluation would have been done? There would have been an evaluation report that was part of the project that was done close to the end of the project by external personnel who were contracted to carry out that exercise and, in the main, the project was supposed to encompass the construction of 50 Early Childhood Care and Education centres. I believe about 24 of them were actually completed. The project included the reworking of the curriculum and I think I would let the Director of Curriculum speak to that aspect of the project. There were also certain aspects of it included, institutional strengthening of various Divisions of the Ministry and in the main that part of the project did not happen at all.

We had in addition some projects related to provision of materials for training of persons in the new curriculum. We had the provision of steel band ensembles, as well as the other activities related to those ensembles or ensembles that would have been provided previously, so like tuning of the instruments and so on. There was a component that dealt with communications.

Mr. Rambharat: And are you able to say what that evaluation report said about the achievement of the objectives of that programme?

Ms. Henry-David: Well, as I said, in terms of the physical infrastructure part of it, that was just under 50 per cent. So the evaluation report would have recorded what the successes were and where the failures were. Within the programme a lot of the actually individual projects were discontinued or did not start at all, and those would be largely related to institutional strengthening. So there were supposed to have been persons working with different Divisions, and they were supposed to be having some measure of training, that did not take place. I would let Ms. Kemchand speak to the curriculum aspect of it so you can get an idea of what did and did not happen.

Ms. Kemchand: I am going to speak a little bit generally about the objectives of the review of the primary curriculum, and if there is any further questions you can always let me know because it is a massive thing. So I am trying to focus on what I think is significant. If I can just say in terms of evaluation that you are referring to, each of the components of this project under the Seamless Education System Project loan had individual measures of success and indicators and so on generated in conjunction with the bank, and each of those would have been measured towards the end of the project to ensure that continuity and levels of success were documented.

6.10 p.m.

So the review of the curriculum really focused on the primary and, just to take us back a little bit, the previous existing curriculum documents at the primary level had been generated between 1998 and 2004. So we were looking at datedness of the curriculum both in terms of content as well as, and more significantly I think at this point in time, in terms of pedagogy, in terms of teacher methodology, to treat with the demands of education at this particular juncture in time. So the review of the curriculum encompassed a comprehensive reworking of the curriculum focusing on nine subject areas. I do not know if you would like me to list those for you.

Mr. Rambharat: What I would like to know is in terms of what the Seamless Education System Project set out to do in relation to the curriculum aspect of it, has that been completed?

Ms. Kemchand: It has been completed in some parts and I will explain in detail to you. So the review of the curriculum, the production of the documents and it entailed actually 23 curriculum documents including guides and support documents; that was completed. Orientation of teachers to the use of the new curriculum which took place progressively from its introduction in September 2013 to the most recent and it was phased into the school. So on a yearly basis, the group of teachers at the primary level that would have been responsible for implementing the new curriculum at the new year level, starting in Infants 1, Infants 2 and Standard 1 in 2013, phased into the Standard 2 in the following year, phased into Standard 3 in the following year and we are currently at implementation in Standard 5. But those teachers were oriented to the new curriculum where that is concerned.

We have treated with the institutions that provide training of teachers on a longer term: the Bachelor of Education providers. Alignment of those programmes are in preparation of teachers for the primary with the requirements of the pedagogical shift that we are talking that moves from focus on knowledge and rote learning to deeper learnings and concept formation is a significant part of that. Almost complete, we have one institution that we are still in the process of helping them to align their programmes with it.

There are a couple of aspects still in terms of transitioning of the recording documents that teachers use to plan their schemes of work and so on. That is still in process because we have engaged our stakeholders over the last few years and trying to ensure that all our stakeholders, including the unions, including principals associations and so on are on board with what we are requiring teachers to do. That, too, is in progress. Has encountered some glitches as we have gone along but we continue to work at it.

Those are the broad areas under which that review functioned and I believe as I would have gone through, I would have mentioned levels of completeness. I need to say, too, that one of the major pieces of it was resourcing of all primary schools with manipulatives, consumables to focus on an activity focus for the students involving the nine subject areas. So for instance, in the area of Phys Ed, it would have been Phys Ed equipment, art and craft, art and craft equipment, that kind of thing. That was completed a couple of years ago as well.

Mr. Rambharat: Okay. Thank you. The second part related to the Education Advancement Project and the extent to which it is a continuation of this Seamless Education System Project.

Ms. Samaroo: So, as I said, one of the components for the EAP would be the construction of the early childhood centres in Tobago. That should have been a part of the original 50 that were supposed to have been done under the seamless, and the bank decided that they were no longer interested in funding any construction activities in Trinidad. But since Tobago did not benefit, they would continue that aspect of it. As I indicated, a lot of the institutional strengthening aspects were left out and there is the attempt to negotiate with the Ministry of Planning and Development at present to include some of that. That would have given support to the programmes that were done in the seamless.

In terms of early childhood as well, we focused on construction before so part of the focus of the EAP would be strengthening of systems to ensure quality and in Trinidad, and in the Tobago aspect of it would be orientations. Provision of information to the Tobago public to sell the concept of early childhood education in the sister isle. So that is a continuation there. At this time, we can provide more in writing.

Mr. Rambharat: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Dr. Bodoe. And I will just ask members, I know we could spend the whole night here with the discussion but having regard to the time, I would just make the point that all other questions can be sent in writing. Okay? Dr. Bodoe.

Dr. Bodoe: Thank you, Chair and I will keep that in mind. Just two questions. One is just a follow-up with regard to the Seamless Education System Project and the Education Advancement Project and that has to do with the issue of the national testing that is done in primary and secondary schools, and the question is: Has any assessment been done on these tests in terms of whether they provide value for the money that will be spent on these tests?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Ms. Kemchand will provide some information on that aspect, please.

Ms. Kemchand: There is tremendous value to be gained from testing at any level of the system and the data that that provides: levels of student performance, areas of weakness, areas of strength, which are all used to determine areas of further intervention. And over the last decade, that testing, the national test has been administered in our country; the data has been prolific and very, very well used by personnel of the Ministry of Education to plan for further interventions, areas of support that are required—

Dr. Bodoe: I am sorry to interrupt. Your answer is yes?

Ms. Kemchand: Yes.

Dr. Bodoe: Can you indicate how long it takes for the results of these tests to be made available to the schools?

Ms. Kemchand: The domain of that testing lies with the Division of Educational Research and Evaluation. Unfortunately, personnel is not represented on the team here and I would not want to venture into an answer in terms of months or so at this point but we can provide you—

Dr. Bodoe: Madam PS, perhaps we can have that answer in writing.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Certainly, we can get that information to you in writing.

Dr. Bodoe: And the second question really is just to go back to the Infrastructure Development Fund and under primary schools, I have noted—and perhaps, you could have this in writing. I have noted that in the 2017 allocation, there are several schools where there were no allocations: the Lengua Presbyterian School, the Monkey Town Government School, the Barrackpore ASJA School, the Febeau Government School and the Arima Hindu Primary School. The question is whether these schools have been completed? Would that be the reason why there was no allocation in 2017? Or if not, can we have a status on each these schools, perhaps in writing? Or if the question could be given as we speak.

Ms. Samaroo: So starting with the end first, Arima Hindu, I believe that one was started, it might be about 30 per cent complete. The other three that you have indicated. You have indicated Lengua Pres, that one was completed, we needed funds for final accounts. Could you just remind me?

Dr. Bodoe: Febeau.

Ms. Samaroo: Febeau was completed as well so any funds there would be for final accounts and Monkey Town Government was also completed and any funds there would be for final accounts.

Dr. Bodoe: A follow-up with regard to the Arima Hindu which is 30 per cent complete.

Ms. Samaroo: I think—do not quote me on that. I can check the percentage completion but that one definitely was not completed.

Dr. Bodoe: All right then. Any idea going forward how we can treat with this?

Ms. Samaroo: As the Ministry of Education, we would like to complete all of the schools that we have because we have an aging plant, at least 60 per cent of our schools are over 50 years old and need to be replaced. However, because of financial constraints, we have had to schedule, we have had to prioritize, and we would have to see if we can schedule Arima Hindu in next fiscal or the fiscal after that to ensure that it is completed and ensure the children are housed safely.

Dr. Bodoe: And just one last question, with regard to the Siparia Union Presbyterian Primary School, I know that $8 million was allocated in 2017, can you indicate how much has been spent and how close we are to completion of this school?

Madam Chairman: Member, could you take that in writing, please?

Dr. Bodoe: Sure.

Ms. Samaroo: Okay, we will do that one in writing.

Madam Chairman: That one will be provided in writing, please. Thank you. I just want, Madam PS, because I appreciate the time, I just want to find out about the UTT campus, the Tamana InTech Park. Earlier in the discussion, we had seen some $93 million had been vired. In terms of your submission, I have seen that in terms of the infrastructure, 97 per cent of the work has been completed and in terms of the building, 81 per cent. Okay? Somewhere in my mind, I thought that this park was supposed to open in June of this year. Am I correct in that?

Ms. Chadee: Chairman, the project itself, because of financial constraint, is scheduled to be completed in phases. The first phase for July and the second phase for the end of the year, 2017.

Madam Chairman: The calendar year?

Ms. Chadee: The calendar year. The percentage completion there is approximately 82 per cent right now and they are working towards that schedule based on the allocation. The $93 million you saw vired, that was for the last fiscal year. Because UTT had alternative sources of funds that they were utilizing and they did not utilize the allocation, so we took the opportunity to transfer that to an area where we needed it for a repair programme for the schools.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. I just want to understand what I am seeing here. This is in, I think, your appendix 16. If we look at infrastructure work, we have Cost of Contracts issued by UTT is $101 plus million, amount certified and paid to September 2016, $44 million. So is it that no payments have been made since September 2016?

Ms. Chadee: Okay. Within 2016, there was an issue regarding audit of the UTT, the project's account, and what had happened is that only $6.1 million was released on the account and when it was completed, UTT got other alternative funding to utilize—internal source of fund to utilize to September and that is why we did not utilize from the allocation from last fiscal year, and they continued to utilize from that alternative source this fiscal year and therefore, they will only be utilizing the allocation from—at the end of this month, they will be applying to utilize the current allocation.

Madam Chairman: So, in terms of the amount certified and paid to September 2016, okay, the payments after September 2016, those are the subject to the audit?

Ms. Chadee: No, it was before.

Madam Chairman: Excuse me?

Ms. Chadee: The payments before.

Madam Chairman: Before, so that all of those are subject to the audit are not being paid?

Ms. Chadee: Actually what had happened is that it was completed and the payments were made. However, they were not made from the allocation, they were made from an alternative source.

Madam Chairman: Yes, okay. And does that apply to also the Signature Complex building and the consultancy services?

Ms. Chadee: Yes, it applies to all of the entire project which include the Signature Complex building and the plant and the external works.

And I have an updated report which I could give to the Committee—

6.25 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Yes, please.

Ms. Chadee: And this report is to June2017.

Madam Chairman: All right, so that UTT, from its own other sources of funding, should be in money to make all certified payments?

Ms. Chadee: Yes, and they made those payments.

Madam Chairman: Okay, thank you very much, and we welcome that report.

Madam PS, the last question I have for you and it is a two-part: How many PSs and Deputy PSs are in the Ministry of Education?

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: Right now the establishment provides for two Permanent Secretaries and three Deputy Permanent Secretaries.

Madam Chairman: And are all the positions filled? Well, you are an Acting PS.

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: We have two Acting PSs and we have three Acting Deputy PSs.

Madam Chairman: Okay, thank you. And could you—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: I am sorry and one as recent as Friday has been assigned to the Ministry from July 10^{th}.

Madam Chairman: So you are back to two Acting PSs and two Acting Deputy PSs.

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: Acting Deputies and appointed Deputies.

Madam Chairman: From the 10th of July. Okay, could you, therefore, submit to the Committee and I would say in writing, the areas of responsibilities for the Acting PSs and the Acting Deputy PSs?

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, we can.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so I really want to thank the representatives of the Ministry of Education, Madam PS and your other supporting officials for the time that you spent here with us to enlighten us about the workings of the Ministry of Education under the various areas of this enquiry.

It is now 6.27 p.m., I want to also thank the members of the media who stayed with us and the members of the listening public. Usually PS, we ask for a closing statement but I would wish to waive that at this time, unless you really would like to make a closing statement.

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: It is not a closing statement. I got some information about the leak, the 2017 leak, and what I was informed is that it was only rumoured in the CXC mathematics and there were no leaks and that the Minister at the time and the CEO, the day after the rumours came out, had a press conference and indicated that based on their investigations there was a conclusion that there were no leaks. I would like to have that on the record. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. This meeting is therefore now suspended. I wish the PS and the other officials a safe journey home. Thank you very much. Pleasant evening.

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: Thank you very much for having us and thank you to my team and safe journey home to you too.

Madam Chairman: Thank you.

6.28 p.m.: *Meeting suspended.*