

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES, SERVICE COMMISSIONS, STATUTORY AUTHORITIES (INCLUDING THE THA) IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR, TOWER D, INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2017

PRESENT

Mr. H. R. Ian Roach	Chairman
Miss Ramona Ramdial	Vice-Chairman
Ms. Khadijah Ameen	Member
Mrs. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus	Member
Mr. Nigel De Freitas	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Katharina Gokool	Parliamentary Intern

ABSENT

Mr. Faris Al-Rawi	Member [<i>Excused</i>]
Mr. Stuart Young	Member [<i>Excused</i>]
Mr. Darryl Smith	Member [<i>Excused</i>]

10.05 a.m.: *Meeting resumed.*

OFFICIALS OF THE TEACHING SERVICE COMMISSION

Dr. Fazal I. Ali	Chairman
Mrs. Elizabeth Crouch	Commissioner
Mr. Martel Waldron	Executive Director, HRM
Ms. Natasha Seecharan	Legal Adviser

OFFICIALS FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Mrs. Lenor Baptiste-Simmons	Permanent Secretary
Mrs. Sharon Ashman-John	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Mr. Ashram Deoraj	Director, School Supervision & Management Division
Mr. John Roopchan	Director, Curriculum Division
Ms. Kevar Williams	Director, HR
Ms. Margaret Lewis	Director, HR
Ms. Donnis Bourne	Director, HR

DIRECTOR OF PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

Ms. Anastasius V. Creed	Director of Personnel Administration
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Mr. Chairman: Once again, good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Fourteenth Meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (Including the THA). This morning's Committee hearing is to deal with the Teaching Service Commission and the Ministry of Education. This hearing is being convened for the enquiry into the efficiency and the effectiveness of the Teaching Service Commission. My name is H.R. Ian Roach, I am the Chairman and I am assisted by Vice Chair Ramona Ramdial, and the other members which I will invite to introduce themselves.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. I will now invite members of the Teaching Service Commission to introduce themselves, starting with the Chairperson.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: The other members include?

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: What about the DPA?

[Introductions made]

Ms. Creed: Chair, if I may, I also have two other representatives, Allison Hughes the Director of Corporate Services and Marcia Pile-O’Brady, Deputy DPA with the responsibility for the Teaching Service Commission.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Could we ask the Ministry of Education to identify themselves to the Committee?

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Just to remind you all the objective of this enquiry, one, is to evaluate the performance of the Commission in executing its mandate; two, to determine whether the resources, systems and procedures of the Teaching Service Commission are sufficient to allow it to operate efficiently; and three, to determine the challenges affecting the operations of the Commission and possible solutions for alleviating these challenges. The last occasion the Commission appeared before this Joint Select Committee to account for its execution of its mandate was February 27, 2015. Well, it was at the Tenth Parliament, certainly not the Eleventh.

I will now invite Dr. Ali, Chairman of the Teaching Service Commission, to give some opening remarks, brief.

Dr. Ali: Thank you, Chairman. The Teaching Service Commission and the Ministry of Education, we are pleased to appear before you here today, on the 22nd day of March in 2017 to appear before you as a witness. The Teaching Service Commission is presenting here today against knowledge of a Global Competitiveness Index 2016/2017 report in which the institutional pillars, the United Kingdom is ranked as 14, Barbados ranked as 44 and Trinidad and Tobago ranked 107. We are also using as a backdrop, Sen. Roach and hon. Members, that Caricom is at present writing an HR and development strategy and education strategy 2030, and we are also presenting against a background that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has developed a 2030 vision document for Trinidad and Tobago which lists service excellency as a priority by 2020.

And it is against these documents and the fact that we have just come out of an institutional strengthening project with Deloitte and consultants from Canada that we are here before you, and very briefly, Sen. Roach and hon. Members, what we would like to indicate to you, at the outset, is that we would like to start by stating, we envisage a future state for the Teaching Service Commission in which we decentralize the Teaching Service Commission in the seven educational districts and in Tobago, a total of eight locations to support stage and incremental delegation of authority to the seven educational districts and the Division for Education in Tobago.

Secondly, Sen. Roach, we envisage a modernization of the teaching service to include lifelong teacher education, progression and promotion linked to continuous lifelong higher education, career rebooting, a qualifications framework for progression, progression based on merit and competencies, performance reviews and performance goals, updated job descriptions, accountability and transparency in student performance, regularity and punctuality of teachers, compliance with school strategic plans, a duty of care, district goals and national priorities. And we

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understand that some of these tasks fall outside the mandate of the TSC and will demand cross-sector commitment and joint leadership resolve. Thank you for the opportunity to make these opening statements, Sen. Roach.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Dr. Ali. I will now call on the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Education, Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons, to make brief opening comments.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: The Teaching Service Commission and the Ministry of Education enjoy a collaborative working relationship. Meetings are held on a fortnightly and a monthly or at needs basis to clarify and provide support in the management of administrative matters. Also at the strategic level, meetings are held to ensure that there are timely interventions relevant to both policy and again administrative matters to improve the efficiency of the teaching service. A key strategy that has been proposed is the establishment of a selection board comprising members of both the Teaching Service Commission and the Ministry's officials, as well as retirees with relevant experience to expedite the conduct of interviews and thus filling of positions, again, at the administrative level, so both primary and secondary level.

We, again, look forward to continue working after listening to Mr. Ali and listening to what he has said in terms of the delegation of authority at the eight district levels and the new strategies that are being proposed and outlined, we will continue to work with TSC to ensure that these—again, that they are contextual. That it is not one size fits all across the board but that we look at what they are and we actually assess and we make—well, at least we adopt the strategies that will actually bear fruit. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Mrs. Simmons. The first question I would like to ask Dr. Ali, on the last occasion, you all appeared before the Tenth Parliament,

the Joint Select Committee, there was mention or there was—I would want to use the word undertaking—that the Public Service Regulations were being revised and it was supposed to be available, that is almost a year ago. What is the position with that today?

Dr. Ali: Hon. Members, I am happy to report to you that we have brought a complete regulation. It is finished. However, I would like to point out that while the commission was busy writing and finalizing these regulations, that we were actively involved with the Ministry of Public Admin in the institutional strengthening project. We found ourselves trying to create regulations based on a 1966 Education Act, an Act which does not even cover Early Childhood Care and Education; an Act that has many gaps. And in working with the Ministry of Public Administration and the consultants, we felt, although we completed the regulations, we would not send these regulations to the hon. Prime Minister. Instead, we have decided that we want to ask the Prime Minister and his Cabinet to look at a framework for a new Education Act and for the regulations to be developed in parallel with the new Act that will allow greater efficiency and management of the education system.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you kindly, Mr. Chairman and good morning once again. You said that the 1966 Education Act is outdated with too many gaps. Is that the only justification within your proposal for the formulation of a new Education Act?

Dr. Ali: No, hon. Minister. What you would find, hon. Minister, is that as we move the Government service from a personnel model of 1962, 1958, towards a more HR functionality, and we give to various Ministries greater HR capability, what you would find is that the central agencies of the state: the office of the CPO, the office of the DPA and the Commissions, they have remained the same size, but the demand

on the services has increased in 2017 so it creates a bottleneck. So what you will find, for example, Minister, is that a director of HR, let us say in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, would still be sending to the Public Service Commission, all the matters for promotions, transfers, secondments and so on. The delegation of that authority to these persons is something that we would like to see happen.

In terms of education, we would like to write an Education Act—to have an Education Act. If we attempted to send the regulations now, the regulations must work with the Act and therefore the regulations will be very backward looking to 1966. We want to create something for the Government that could take us from 2017 and into the future.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Mr. Chairman, what I was really interested in is you sharing the critical bases upon which this new Education Act will evolve. The rationale, you know, why not amend the 1966? Why a completely new Act? Within that context.

Dr. Ali: It is a very interesting question you asked and I am glad. In Trinidad and Tobago, what we are experiencing, when there is a general election and we have new governments, Ministries are collapsed into one sometimes, they are broken into more than one Ministry and therefore, the public service spends a lot of time creating the establishment. We have now a mega Ministry, Ministry of Education, that is overseeing everything from ECCE to Phd. Right. We are not sure what this new Education Act might look like. All we could do is propose a framework to work with the Chief Parliamentary Counsel in creating or even amending, as you suggest, the existing Education Act to be more encompassing and to deal with a future state of education.

We would like to see, for example, the seven educational districts, including the THA in Tobago, manage education for themselves and the commission has simply a monitoring role. The ultimate goal would be for a principal to run their

school, to oversee promotions and transfers and other things like that. But this is a—yes, Sen. Roach.

10.25 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Let me just interject here. You did say that the regulations were completed, right?

Dr. Ali: Yes, it is finished.

Mr. Chairman: Right. And it is not being made available?

Dr. Ali: Well, it could be made available.

Mr. Chairman: It has not been sent to the Prime Minister, you said?

Dr. Ali: Not at yet, no.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Chairman of this Commission, if you are saying that a new Education Act, you are hoping that a new Education Act would emerge, have you all engaged the various stakeholders with regard to that issue? Or is it a proposal from the Commission itself? Because it would seem to me that if the Commission has a point of view like that, the Commission has the authority to engage the stakeholders and place the proposal and then move from there.

But I am not getting a feel that there is solidity in what you are saying about the new Education Act. I am not getting that feel. Where exactly are we? Is it that there is a firm proposal for a new Education Act or is the Commission contemplating the amendment of the present Act? And if you are contemplating a new Education Act, have you engaged the stakeholders in consultation? Do you propose to engage the stakeholders in consultation? Because I cannot see the Commission arriving at such a position with all parties concerned having a say in the direction.

Dr. Ali: May I answer? Thank you. Thank you, Minister. The consultancy on institutional strengthening end on the 9th of March this year and the recommendations of the consultants went to Cabinet and we were informed by DPA

and the consultants that Cabinet had accepted the recommendations of the report.

When we look at what the future state of the government service is supposed to look like, then we have to be mindful that if we are moving towards that future state of all government services and the provision of services, then submitting the regulations as is would really be backward. What has happened, hon. Minister, is that public service sent their regulations and it was returned this year, in 2017. I would allow DPA to comment on that.

Mr. Chairman: But, sorry, before you go, the Public Service Regulations and the Teaching Service Commission Regulations, are they one and the same thing now? I know the Teaching Service Commission Regulations were adopted from the Public Service Teaching Commission, is that being rectified into two separate things, now?

Dr. Ali: Yes, hon. Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So let us address—so we were speaking, I do not know if I set you off wrong by speaking about the Public Service Regulations. We are speaking about the Teaching Service Commission Regulations. Is that what is prepared and ready at this point in time?

Dr. Ali: Yes, it is ready, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no. I am just Chairman. I am not Minister at all, please. I do not want that portfolio.

We would return to that shortly, right? I just want to ask the DPA, because what is quite striking this morning for me, when you all were introducing yourselves from the Ministry, two Permanent Secretaries in the Ministry of Education because it is a large portfolio being the Ministry of Education. They both seem to be acting. Is that correct?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes, Sir, we are acting.

Mr. Chairman: Now, who is responsible for that? Is it the DPA? Is that your area of——

Ms. Creed: The Public Service Commission.

Mr. Chairman: The Public Service Commission.

Ms. Creed: That is right. I can respond on behalf of the Public Service Commission, especially with regard to the Deputy Permanent Secretary. The Public Service Commission is in the process of completing a recent assessment for the Office of Deputy Permanent Secretary, which the outcome would be filling of offices as Deputy Permanent Secretary. So, it will entail persons who were acting, if they have been successful, being appointed, or new persons being appointed based on the assessment. That is with regard to the Deputy Permanent Secretary.

With regard to the Permanent Secretary, the Commission has put its mind to the filling of offices of Permanent Secretary and they are in the process of having that discussion to send that matter forward.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you, Chairman. Madam DPA, the assessment of the Deputy Permanent Secretaries, you said, has been completed.

Ms. Creed: No, I said it is in the process of being completed.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: In the process. How soon would that process be completed?

Ms. Creed: The Commission, we are awaiting an external agency, which has to provide the Commission with some additional information, the vetting, and we have been informed by national security we should be getting the vetting report by the end of March, after which the Commission would be able to finalize that whole process and fill the offices there, hoping to fill those offices no later than in April.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Excellent, so that those Deputy Permanent Secretaries who,

unfortunately may not be successful in the assessment, will revert to their substantive positions?

Ms. Creed: Well, it depends on how many persons are successful and how many offices are to be filled. So, the outcome of it, you know, I cannot speak to that right now because at the end of the day, if you have 40 vacant offices and only, let us say 20 persons were successful—I am just using random figures—you could only fill 20 offices. So, there may be instances where, if the Commission does not have a portfolio of everyone filling, you may have persons who will continue to act.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: And how many vacant positions of Deputy Permanent Secretaries are there?

Ms. Creed: I cannot answer that off the bat right now. I did not put my mind to that for this session.

Mr. Chairman: Miss Ramdial would like to ask a question.

Miss Ramdial: Good morning all. I want to delve a little bit into the operations of the TSC so I will ask Dr. Fazal Ali: What are the reasons for years of delay for interviews, appointments, upgrades for teachers, heads of departments, vice-principals, principals and school supervisors?

Dr. Ali: Okay, I will answer, Minister, but Sen. Roach just for the record, these are the completed regulations.

Mr. Chairman: For the purposes of these proceedings you could refer to me Member and Chairman. All right?

Dr. Ali: I would feel rather odd if I disrespect you like that.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no. It is not disrespect. It is just protocol. So you will be in good stead.

Dr. Ali: Okay. So the regulations are here, and on the matter of Permanent Secretaries, and as we are looking at service, hon. Minister Baptiste, you know we

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call ourselves the Teaching Service Commission, so it is a service and we are serving the children. This lofty Commission is serving children. I am coming to you.

Miss Ramdial: Sure, sure.

Dr. Ali: We are serving children. That is our final client. In 2014, we had three Permanent Secretaries over the 12 months; in 2015, we had seven Permanent Secretaries come into the Ministry of Education in 12 months.

Mr. Chairman: How many?

Dr. Ali: Seven. In 2016, we had six Permanent Secretaries come into the Ministry of Education, coming and going. I would go back and see the astonishment on your face. In 2014, we had Miss Daniel, Miss Simone Thorne and Natasha Barrow. In 2015, we had Miss Daniel, Angela Siew, Sandra Jones, Amradeen Ali, Jacqueline Johnson, Gillian Mc Intyre and Miss Natasha Barrow. In 2016, we had Mr. Amradeen Ali, Gillian Mc Intyre, Natasha Barrow, Jacqueline Johnson, Angela Sinaswee-Gervais, Lenore Baptiste-Simmons. In 2017, thank God, we have two who have been staying with us, Miss Lenor Baptiste-Simmons and Miss Angela Sinaswee-Gervais. This has really, honestly, members, disrupted the Commission in delivering. Because if you divide this by 12 months, the number of persons by 12 months, it is very difficult for the two Ministers to function with this type of movement.

Mr. Chairman: Definitely so. What accounts for that?

Dr. Ali: I will have to leave that to the DPA.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. We would really like to hear from her.

Ms. Creed: At this point in time?

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, yeah.

Ms. Creed: The Public Service Commission, for instance, we have had Permanent Secretaries who have retired. We have had persons who have left the public service.

We have had, with the realignment of Ministries and the portfolios, they have had the movement of Permanent Secretaries from one Ministry to other Ministries after discussions with the PS to the Prime Minister and the Commission. They have had discussions with regard to where maybe there may be better fits, how we could get Ministries and Departments to be able to operate better because the Commission, in fulfilling its mandate, decided to have discussions with stakeholders to ensure that we can have better fit in some instances, aside from the fact that the Constitution requires that any proposals from the Commission at that level has to go to the Prime Minister.

So, as a result of that we had some changes in the portfolios. The Commission is, at this point in time, hoping that there will be stability in Ministries and Departments and that is why we are looking at the filling of the offices so that there can be some stability in the Ministries and Departments at that level.

Dr. Ali: I return to the question of Senator Ramdial. Now, the 1962/1958 practice of persons simply walking off the pavement and submitting an application to the Ministry of Education has to stop. Because when you look at where we are, members, mathematics interviews, we are quite up to date. We are up to 2016. In the natural sciences, chemistry, physics and biology, we are doing 2014 and 2013; social studies, sociology, we are doing people who applied in 2013.

What is happening is people apply, their credentials are assessed, the PS will then write to the person and tell them they have been assessed as Teacher III, chemistry for secondary and then they are advised that the Commission will call them for an interview. The Commission will then call them for an interview and they will pass this interview. Let us say this happened in the year 2000. They got this letter from the Commission that they have passed the interview to be a Teacher III for chemistry, but the Ministry of Education has no vacancy for any chemistry

teacher in no school, and in some cases we might have someone with an excellent first-class chemistry degree but the board schools are unwilling to accept someone who is not of their faith.

Mr. Chairman: They are not willing to?

Dr. Ali: They will not be willing to accept someone who might not be of their persuasion.

Mr. Chairman: That is because of the Concordat?

Dr. Ali: Yes. So what has happened is, right now, hon. Members, the Teaching Service Commission, under the DPA, we have interviewed roughly 3,000. The exact figure is 2,810. That is the exact figure. Two thousand, eight hundred and ten people are on the order of merit list. These people are waiting to be placed in schools, but there are no vacancies.

We also have to understand, hon. Members, where I am calling for a new Education Act and a new method of recruitment. Hon. Minister, I am so glad that you are here because I really want to engage you on some thinking.

Mr. Chairman: But Dr. Ali, if I may. You have a merit list before you?

Dr. Ali: Yes. We have on the merit list 2,810 persons.

Mr. Chairman: Now, from my recollection a merit list is valid for two years or a year. Is that not so? So, if within that period of time those persons are not allocated or posted somewhere, that comes to naught.

Dr. Ali: That is correct, Sir. The list lasts three years, Sen. Roach.

Mr. Chairman: It lasts for three years now?

Dr. Ali: It is valid for three years.

Mr. Chairman: And those interviews were completed when?

Dr. Ali: I can tell at different points in time, for example, I can give you a good idea. It also depends on throughput from the universities operating on the island.

So, for example, hon. Members, you would find few people might do a degree in PE or in music. So there is always a shortage of persons leaving tertiary institutions to hold teaching positions in the system. So we are very up-to-date on this. But someone with a degree in sociology, they are so numerous. In sociology, we have only reached the people who applied in 2013 and we are now in 2017, because there is an oversupply from the tertiary institutions and the Ministry of Education cannot absorb it.

Miss Ramdial: All right, Dr. Ali, that is with respect to interviews for new teachers but what about upgrades, promotions, principals and vice-principals who have been acting for years, have applied for their promotions and upgrades? What are the problems associated with those operational issues?

Dr. Ali: Okay. Principals, deans and heads of departments, and so on, the last time in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that the position for deanship was—that would not be totally correct. We have two advertisements. One came out in 2013, for deans and heads of departments. That was before this Commission was sitting in the TSC. Right? One member of this Commission, the distinguished Mrs. Elizabeth Crouch, took home for days upon days and nights, and did a hand analysis of the schools without deans and heads of departments and colour-coded it. What we found, hon. Members, was that there was a one-to-one correlation between the absence of the middle management in the schools—the deans and heads of departments—and the violence in the schools. All the schools where there was no middle management, you have violence.

We, therefore, went to the Ministry, and on bended knees we asked them—and the DPA is here—we begged for a moratorium that all the persons who are qualified and acting in those positions for a period of time and they have the years of service and the qualification, let us interview them immediately and appoint them

to stabilize those schools and let us interview for those that are lacking. The moratorium was not accepted and the Ministry opted instead in 2016, under pressure, constant pressure from us to stabilize the schools, to advertise. So, the position for deanship and head of department has been advertised. People have been screened and shortlisted and the interviews will take place shortly.

Miss Ramdial: Just one more question. What about the issues with school supervisors, because I saw you had a number of vacancies for school supervisors also?

Dr. Ali: There are a number of officers on the delinked schedule and we are pressing ahead with interviews for SS I, SS II. But the terms and conditions of these delinked officers remain very contentious and it is something that needs addressing immediately.

You would also find that we sympathize with the Ministry of Education and the Permanent Secretaries there, because we have noticed that the executive management team of the hon. Minister, several of them are acting, some of the positions are vacant, and it is not making us feel comfortable that the Minister has the support that he needs to be effective. The both Ministers do not have the necessary executive management support to be very effective.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Dr. Ali. Ms. Creed, as DPA, what Dr. Ali just said in dealing with the middle management issue and not getting the immediate support from the Ministry in confirming persons on moratorium to act in middle management, what leverage do you have as DPA in dealing with these issues with the Teaching Service Commission? I am a bit confused with that.

Ms. Creed: The Teaching Service Commission, in conjunction with the administrative, including myself—there was a meeting with the Ministry of Education and in an attempt to find a short-term solution to the office of deans, we

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came up with a proposal and we were trying to work with the Ministry to see if that would have been an option. The Ministry in its wisdom felt it was better to advertise. At the end of the day, the DPA provides—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: If I may. Just one second. When you say the Ministry's wisdom, who makes that decision, is it the Minister or the Permanent Sec making these decisions?

Ms. Creed: Well, I would not be able to answer that. The PS would have to answer that at her level. I cannot.

Mr. Chairman: Who do you communicate with?

Ms. Creed: The DPA communicates with the PS and the staff of the Ministry. Right? We do not communicate to the Minister. As public officers, we communicate with each other. As the PS had indicated, we have been having frequent meetings finding out, between Service Commissions Department and the Ministry of Education, looking for solutions to see how quickly we could get things to do. I am assuming in the PS case she will approach her Minister. In my case, I would approach the Teaching Service Commission.

Dr. Ali: Sen. Roach, if I may, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: Could either one of the Acting Permanent Secretaries in the Ministry of Education address what has just been raised here by your colleague, Ms. Creed, the DPA, concerning the moratorium. Why you all did not accept that moratorium?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Hon. Chair, I would like to refer the question to one of my colleagues, the Director of HR, who would have been present at those meetings. Yes? Because I would not have been privy. What you are stating is 2015.

Mr. Chairman: You would not have been there.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes. So I can ask someone who has institutional memory

with respect to this matter.

Mr. Chairman: Could you identify yourself?

Ms. Williams: Good morning again, Kevan Williams, Director HR, with responsibility for secondary schools.

Mr. Chairman: Is your mike on?

Ms. Williams: Yes, it is.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Ms. Williams: With responsibility for secondary schools, the teaching staff in secondary schools. The positions of deans were advertised by circular memorandum 15th of February, 2016. This was done to ensure that there was a fair and transparent process in the filling of the vacancies. The DPA did write by memo dated 31st of May, 2016. This is after the circular would have gone out for the position of dean, to have persons—I would just indicate some of the new policy that they would have indicated. The new policy:

The above-mentioned officers can apply at any time.

This refers all the administrative positions in primary and secondary schools.

The above-mentioned officers can apply at any time to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education for a transfer from his/her substantive school to any other school where a similar vacancy exists.

The Commission will no longer require that the officer apply for transfer only when the office has been advertised and be subjected to an interview to determine their suitability for transfer.

And there are seven points on this new policy. I would not read the entire policy.

The Ministry at that time felt—and this is substantiated by our data when we went out to the schools, that there have been—since the last set of promotions took place in 2013—there have been some informal arrangements taking place at the

schools, which HR would not have been informed of. In this instance, to ensure that persons who are genuinely senior and not just appoint persons who were performing the duties and would not have gone through the requisite process, that the best process at that time would be to advertise the position to ensure transparency and fairness and that all persons who are eligible for the post, that they be considered and that the vacancies be filled accordingly.

Mr. Chairman: Let me ask you a question. From experience, right, where you have in a school somebody is acting as head of a department or dean, does the principal have that authority to make that ad hoc appointment?

Ms. Williams: Those appointments should be made on the basis of a seniority listing.

Mr. Chairman: No, first of all, Miss, does the principal have that authority?

Ms. Williams: To—

Mr. Chairman:—make ad hoc appointments?

Ms. Williams: No.

Mr. Chairman: No, he does not. Because I know the issue that arises from that after is the fact that the person will be there for a year, two years acting and then not paid for it and request pay.

Ms. Williams: Right, and request pay.

Mr. Chairman: So that is where the problem comes.

Ms. Williams: Yes, and in some of those instances, the person most senior may not be the person who would have been put up to act.

Mr. Chairman: As well?

Ms. Williams: Yeah.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, thank you.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Chairman, permit me. But would not such a situation

develop precisely because of the lack of action on the part of the Ministry? Because a principal would have a situation on his or her hands, where there is a need for a dean or head of department would make that request to the Ministry and there is no feedback to the principal and, therefore, the principal invariably would act out of frustration and would identify the most senior person within the school environment, not necessarily the most senior person on the seniority list? Because the principal has a school to run and has to ensure the violence that the Chairman of the Commission spoke about, that all of us as parents and as citizens we are concerned about the violence in the schools. So that, from where I sit, the Ministry has to be a little more proactive and to address issued on a more timely basis.

I know for a fact, and I know there are all kinds of issues, legitimate issues. But the bottom line is that those schools, those positions, are not being filled on a timely basis. That is the bottom line. And the Ministry has to improve on its level of efficiency in meeting and treating with this situation. We cannot have our children in the schools behaving as they are behaving.

Mrs. Crouch: Chairman, I would like to respond very deeply to what our Minister is saying, because of the violence in schools, that this Commission is not only interested in filling these positions as a matter of urgency but we also want to get involved in the types of questions that are asked of the persons who apply to be deans, because to be a dean it is not just simply a question of promotion. You have to be able to care for children. Do you care about children? Do you have an understanding of their psychosocial needs? Are you going to be positive in what you do with them? Your job is not to suspend or be punitive. So this Commission is very, very interested in the kinds of interview questions that are asked of the persons who will be applying. So that the country puts forward a cadre of caring, thoughtful, responsive individuals.

We are very pained when we see those videos of children rolling around on the ground. Where is the dean? Who is looking after them? A school is a community. And these deans are supposed to be a particular type of person. And so we are looking at the interview questions, so that the selection is not only about having an academic qualification. Thank you.

Mr. De Freitas: Good morning. I just wanted to add to that. I am glad you raised that point, because I was listening as the discourse was taking place and I am hearing the word “seniority” being thrown about, and I was wondering in my head why it is that we are still using seniority as a method of promoting individuals when qualification is, as you rightly stated, something that is more important? I thought that seniority might have been a better way or a faster way to appoint people to positions, reducing time. But we are now hearing that that is not even the case with seniority.

I do not know how it works, so I would like an explanation as to why we are still using seniority because in my head, I am thinking that there is a list of individuals who are there in the establishment, seniority being that you have been there for a while and, therefore, if you need to appoint someone, it is a matter of going through whatever processes you have for promotion and putting them into the position.

So I am not understanding why, under seniority, it is taking so long, when that does not even take into account qualifications. So I do take your point whereby you really need to find out if the person is qualified for that position as a dean or middle management. So can I get an explanation from, I guess somebody on the panel as to why we are still using seniority, as opposed to strict qualification when you can put it out there in advertisement and get someone coming in?

Dr. Ali: Outdated regulations, I am glad to hear you say that, Sen. Roach, and

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therefore that is why the Commission is calling for a new Act and accompanying regulations.

But I want to answer Sen. De Freitas. At the meeting where we proposed to both hon. Ministers of Education to do this moratorium; it was on the 24th of February, 2016. Mrs. Crouch told both Ministers that promotion is one thing but to promote somebody does not make them a leader. Principals need training to become leaders and risk takers. So we have been trying to embrace the idea of merit, rather than seniority—Sen. De Freitas, merit, rather than seniority—and we are hoping that we are able to groom people into leadership positions. People need training to become leaders, to be great leaders of schools.

When you look at a head of department, hon. Members, a head of department in mathematics must be a master teacher. When you go to Fr. Lai-Fook in St. Mary's College and he takes out 2015 Cape Unit II past papers, he has worked out every problem using algebraic solutions, a solution in geometry, a solution in matrices and he can solve the single problem in four different ways and he has worked them out. Even when they get distinction and I ask him: How did the boys do this year Fr. Lai Fook? He would say to me: “If it was up to me I would fail all of them.” These are master teachers. Not everybody could become a head of a department. You have to supervise, oversee all the internal assessments, the IAs and the SBAs that go to CXC.

I want to point out something before I leave this issue, Sen. Roach. It is distressing to this Commission—and I am giving you just a little insight. I am looking at 2015, the period 2009 to 2015. Right?

10.55 a.m.

In one school, I have 44.7 per cent of the children, not one pass. In another school—I do not want to call the names of the schools—I have 47 per cent of the children, not one pass; 31 per cent, not one pass. I can call this school because the

figures here from 2009 to 2015 is 0000—

Mr. Chairman: Try—

Mr. Ali: You do not want me to call it?

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, I prefer you not to.

Mr. Ali:—which means you have 100 per cent pass rate. And as we go through from 2009 to 2015, this other school here, a 56.3 per cent failure rate, that is no pass, you know, not in one subject; 30.6 per cent; 27.3 per cent; 22 per cent; 43 per cent failure rate. That is not one pass.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Ali?

Mr. Ali: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I would appreciate if you can probably share that with the Committee, not now but we would arrange to have it here. Could you just take a question concerning what you are discussing here with member Ameen?

Miss Ameen: Dr. Ali, I am listening to you and it seems that while the grass is growing the horse is starving. We complain about the inefficiencies, we complain that the children are not passing CXC and their exams, and the fact is that many of those children do not have teachers. They go through their entire time in school without teachers, without deans, and then we criticize, we look at the statistics and criticize. While I know Commissioner Mrs. Crouch indicated that you are reviewing the questions that would be asked and the criteria for appointing deans, the fact is that in many schools, teachers perform these services voluntarily because of some ability or leadership skills that their colleagues and their principals would have recognized. They, of course, may be the ones who would be recommended by the principal to serve in these positions and to be given the opportunity to be confirmed. I am sure that was part of the rationale for asking for the moratorium. Years continue to pass while deliberations take place with regard to determining what question to

ask, and our children are being failed by every one of us in this room because we are deliberating on what question to ask. There are many teachers who are frustrated by the system and, at some point, we have to put a stop to it.

When I hear the concerns being expressed, I am thinking about the end result. Dr. Ali indicated that the end result is that we serve the children, and the Teaching Service Commission is failing the children. Those pass rates, those failure rates are a clear indication of that. I want to ask if any new consideration or recommendation could come from you with regard to, perhaps—while you are waiting for consultation to review the Act, I endorse your recommendation to review that 1966 Act and I understand why. I am asking if the recommendation for a moratorium comes again, the people who are in this room will be in a position to reconsider that, so that these vacancies—even if the persons who are appointed are not the ideal person, it is better to have half a bread than no bread at all. As we are, our children are starving because of lack of bread.

Mr. Ali: Sen. Ameen, I want to clear up one issue. The persons who the commission was going to look at for this moratorium, we were not going to bypass any regulation. They would have to be suitably qualified, have the years of experience and meet all of the criteria of the State to hold that position. So some of them are suitably qualified, well qualified, fit for the position and have the years of experience, and they were going to be interviewed. It was not going to be an adhocacy, it was not going to be ad hoc. They were going to be interviewed and go through the rigour of an interview and then if they pass the interview, we would appoint them to stabilize the schools. The commission is not in charge of the schools and so the commission itself is not failing the children, but we feel deeply when we look at the pass rates in certain education districts. Right?

The other problem, Sen. Roach and members, is that we are greatly distressed

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that the irregularity and the punctuality of officers is horrendous. I told hon. Ministers, in my last meeting with them, I believe that the children are ringing the bell. I do not know who is starting school in the morning, because when I look at these figures, we have here in in St. George East, 12 people in excess of 2,000 minutes late. We have in the eastern district, other people. In one district at the secondary level, North-Eastern District, we have 49 officers persistently irregular and unpunctual. In South-Eastern 17; in St. George East, 34 of them persistently irregular and unpunctual. We have been writing and asking for the necessary action against these officers, Sen. Roach, to be taken.

Mr. Chairman: You write to the Ministry of Education?

Mr. Ali: Permanent Secretary.

Mr. Chairman: The Permanent Secs.

Mr. Ali: We have written on numerous occasions. What the Commission has decided, after seeking guidance with counsel, is that the regulation says, when the Commission becomes aware. Well, we are very aware and, therefore, we are moving towards having these officers on this file here discipline for irregularity and unpunctuality because the children, Sen. Ameen, are suffering. Parents are bathing their children in the morning, plaiting their hair, sending them in a taxi and sending them to school, but I do not know who is ringing the bell.

Mr. Chairman: What you are saying is that you have realized from the regulations that the Teaching Service Commission has the authority, once it becomes aware of the delinquency, to take action directly?

Mr. Ali: Yes. Sen. Roach, I would allow Senior Legal to comment on it.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Seecharan: Well, the Constitution vests the power of discipline in the Commissions. I know there are some administration arrangements between the

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Ministry and the Commission, but just like under the Public Service Commission where IOs can directly appointed, we have advised the Teaching Service Commission that they can directly appoint the IOs as well, because they cannot turn a blind eye when they have this level of statistics.

Mr. Chairman: The investigating officer you are speaking of, right?

Ms. Seecharan: Yes, sorry. Investigating officers.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, thank you very much. The Permanent Secretary, what is the Ministry doing about this particular problem?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Is it possible for me to ask the officer with respect to industrial relations, the Director, to give you the statistics, because again the response, listening to the chairperson, Mr. Ali—

Mr. Chairman: I want to know a policy. What is the policy being implemented to deal with it?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Well, the policy with respect to industrial relations has been that the Ministry of Education has to follow through in terms of ensuring that the principals—the principals have to record the number of late minutes. They have to write to the officer. There is a procedure. Many times the information reaches the Ministry of Education and we are ready to take action, we have to go back into the records to ensure that each step is recorded. That the person is written to, the person responds at least three times before we can take action.

Mr. Chairman: If I may stop you here. Now, unfortunately, when I am looking at the persons who are appearing before this Joint Select Committee this morning, I notice the Teaching Service Commission came with their legal person, Ms. Seecharan, who just addressed us. One of the first things I noticed was there was no legal person from your Ministry, and I wanted to know why was that, because a lot of what we are dealing with thus far has to do with operations, discipline, punctuality

and all of that—service being provided efficiently to the very same students we are interested in, and we are supposed to be looking after. Your legal department plays a critical role in a lot of what we are speaking about here now. Why is such a person not before us?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Because we had four persons, I had brought the person who specifically liaises with the legal department, the Director of HR. I am sorry.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, but that was not good enough. You need to have the legal person here, because just like I am hearing the number of persons that pass through that Ministry in terms of PSs, I want to believe from my experience dealing with matters at the Teaching Service Commission that the legal department as well also has that fluidity in terms of—I do not want to use—I mean that rapid turnover, and hence not being able to either accumulate the competency, the institutional efficiency by the rapid turnover in the Ministry, and that has to be a problem. And that problem has been going on for as long as I have been in contact or have been dealing with matters concerning the Teaching Service Commission. So what is being done about that?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: I know with respect to the IR, I looked at the questions and I felt that the person—well, we have the director here—at least we have the director on board who liaises with the HR—and I felt that at that point I could have brought the Director of HR to respond.

In terms of the fluidity, the Ministry of Education, we are now trying to get a director for the legal department. We have two Legal Officers II at the Ministry, and because of the merger we lost some officers, again, persons who were on contract and also with the public service. They had to return to their substantive positions and, again, institutional memory, we have lost that. At this time, we are trying to increase the number of legal officers but we only have two legal officers—well two

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Legal Officers II and one and we are now going out again to advertise for some of the senior positions. They are all contract positions.

Mrs. Ramdial: So could you give us a timeline as to how soon these officers will be brought on board?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: It has been shortlisted. Because we advertised, we have shortlisted and we are ready to go out for interviews. So I am hoping by the end of well April, mid-April, that we will have somebody selected.

Miss Ameen: PS, through you, Mr. Chair, there is one Deputy PS in this Ministry?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: No.

Miss Ameen: How many?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: I have three, three Deputy Permanent Secretary positions.

Miss Ameen: So all the issues relating from early childhood to tertiary education now fall within this one Ministry?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: That is correct.

Miss Ameen: The issues that have been identified, some of them go before your time. I was wondering, with regard to the fact that this Ministry of Education is now what you call a “super Ministry” and you have several Deputy PSs, if the responsibilities of the Ministry has been split and assigned specifically to Deputy PSs or if you just share according to—

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: No, no. This, I brought the HR. This is the Deputy Permanent Secretary with responsibility for HR matters from the ECCE to tertiary. We also have Deputy Permanent Secretary with respect to infrastructure and general administration and we have one with respect to IT and strategic management. So we have split the portfolios. The portfolios are split.

Miss Ameen: Thank you, appreciated.

Mrs. Ramdial: All right. So I want to move on a little bit. You wanted to ask?

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Chair, thank you kindly, Chairman. To the Permanent Secretary, I am not too sure that I am clear in terms of the high levels of absenteeism and irregularity the Chairman of the Teaching Service Commission mentioned. I heard you say that even if the principals submit the information, at some point in time you have to go back into the records to determine whether or not proper procedures were followed. It goes back to the question: What is the policy in place? Is a principal advised via a policy document that you speak to a teacher at least on three occasions, then you follow that up with a warning letter in writing? How many such warning letters are to be issued?

When the principal is submitting the report to the Ministry, is there not a standardized approach so the principal will know I have to attach the copies of warning letters, I also have to document in the report the dates on which I would have verbally spoken to the teacher? If that is so, how come at the ending when the investigation is to be launched, the Ministry still has to go back and verify? I am a bit puzzled by that because if the policy procedures are followed then the Director of HR would have the full breadth of information before her in order to take the necessary action. I am a bit confused. If there are clear guidelines then why is—is it that the principals are not following the guidelines?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: In many instances, we went through the data and in many instances while we have in the records the figures, because on a monthly basis punctuality and regularity, the figures come to the Ministry and it is recorded. However, when we check with the schools, in many instances, that procedure that you outlined is not being adhered to. But to elaborate further, I have the DSS with responsibility for punctuality and regularity who will elaborate further.

Mr. Deoraj: Good morning, Chairman and members, and I appreciate the question, and given your background. Progressive discipline is what is followed from the

beginning to the end starting with counselling, first warning—first verbal warning, first written warning, second written warning and then it is referred to the Permanent Secretary for onward transmission to the Teaching Service Commission for action. We have compiled files on over 300 persons, at present, who have gone beyond, what we call persistently unpunctuality.

I would just like to draw a little bit of background in terms of the principals. A lot of them had not been trained properly in following the progressive discipline model to the letter and that has now been rectified. We have captured data showing from the trigger that is set by the Teaching Service Commission of 180 minutes per annum late for teachers. It is interesting that the actual trigger set by the Teaching Service Commission really only appeared in the Magazine called *TSC Speaks*. It really did not come in a memo to the Ministry of Education stating that this was the exact trigger for disciplinary action to be taken against any member of the teaching service for unpunctuality. In fact, I have never seen that memo.

But having given that, the fact that the TSC can set the bar, given that their remit is discipline, the Ministry of Education has been following that trigger and we have now captured, to a large extent, the number of persons who would have abused their punctuality by being tardy on X amount occasions per month amounting to what we would now want to follow the discipline process, and those who have reached level five, which would be onward transmission and report to the Permanent Secretary for the TSC, over 300 persons would now face the Teaching Service Commission for unpunctuality.

In terms of irregularity, well we know that the process for that is very simple. Where the teachers have exhausted their 14 days vocational leave, any leave after that not covered by any other type of leave would necessarily be without pay, because you have exhausted your 14.

In the case of sick leave where you go over your 14 days, it would now fall into the realm of extended sick leave, and the recognition that it must be signed by a DMO or a public health officer in a hospital or so to be accepted. Even so, the Permanent Secretary will still have the discretion whether to grant the extended sick leave dependent on the quantum and the regularity. If it persists, if you see somebody taking extended sick leave over a number of years or too regularly, what we will do is refer that person to the Ministry of Health to get a tribunal together to determine that person's suitability for performance of their duty, and that would then go to perhaps retire somebody in the public interest and so on. But in terms of unpunctuality, we as a Ministry have been very serious in pursuing those persons who have been habitually unpunctual, and we are hoping that those files get to the commission and actionable in the shortest possible time.

Mr. Chairman: There is a problem I can perceive immediately from what you are saying. Given the efficiency of collecting that data, that information, you realize that it is a system and we have problems along that system. Because at the end of the day when that information reaches the Teaching Service Commission it has to be prosecuted. If you are labouring with two legal officers in the Ministry of Education who I believe are charged with prosecuting those matters for the Teaching Service Commission, you really have a problem. That is one that has been identified.

The second thing is, can there be some proactive means of remedying this from the level of engaging TTUTA—the union for the teachers—in terms of getting them on the same page to take responsibility and engage their members in a more proactive way stemming that problem? Because in Trinidad we are always looking for remedies as opposed to being proactive to stop it from happening or curtail it earlier in its transgression or is about to be transgressed. Could you respond to that for me please?

Mr. Deoraj: Yes, Chairman, I would love to respond to that. With regard to TTUTA, we meet TTUTA on a regular basis and TTUTA has spoken to their members in terms of continuous dialogue in addressing the whole unpunctuality issue. The main point that you raised and which I have a lot to say about it in terms of if we look at the Public Service Regulations which we adopted, under the Public Service Regulations you have the delegated authority to have the one-man tribunal. So for our civil servants, for example, you can have that. That is something I think that the Ministry has raised in the past and should be pursuing the delegated authority in the Teaching Service, so all unpunctuality matters can be quickly dealt with in-house with the Ministry of Education.

We have persons who have been trained who can act as judges, prosecutors or defenders, and really it is fairly a straightforward exercise when dealing with unpunctuality, simply because the officer who have been persistently unpunctual would have signed a monthly return verifying that this is the amount of minutes late and times late per month. At the end of the accumulation of that, given the triggers and going through the progressive discipline process, at the end of it there can only really be only one outcome, because it has been verified by yourself as the person who is the officer who would have accumulated X amount of minutes and have signed to that monthly.

Mr. Chairman: Well, Mr. Deoraj, thanks for what you have just said. I always wondered why it is the Commission never used more often—my experience, I have never seen them used it at all—the one-man tribunal thing where it eliminates the presence of attorneys, which we could add length to things that can be done in a very shorter space of time for matters that are not as controversial like, as you say, delinquency. So that would be a matter for the policy of the Teaching Service Commission, why have they not engaged that? To me it saves resources and it saves

time. So, I would like to hear from them on that basis.

Mr. Ali: We wanted to move towards the one-man tribunal and we looked at a number of difficulties, Sen. Roach. One of the problems was that, as you all know, public officers in a certain rank do not sign the book.

Mr. Chairman: I do not know that.

Hon. Member: Range 45.

Mr. Chairman: Principal.

Mr. Ali: Principals. And to be quite open, if the teachers are seeing that the principal is not at the school, how do we structure these one-man tribunals in the schools?

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no. Dr. Ali, the one-man tribunal has to do at the level of the disciplinary process, not in the schools themselves.

Mr. Ali: We were looking at—in regional consideration of it, we were looking at doing it at a district level and how to do some of these tribunals, but we have not delegated that authority as yet, because we are still looking at all of the complexities of it. But what I am hearing from you, Sen. Roach, I want to point out that although the matters we have discussed so far seem to be delinked, they are not.

When you look, Sen. Roach, at the schools without the deans and the middle management, Mrs. Primus, with the absence of deans and heads of departments, and you look at the schools with the violence and you look at the schools with the horrendous failure rates and you look at the absenteeism, it is almost a one-to-one mapping. In Port of Spain and environs, in 2015, we have a total 15,863 minutes late. That is primary. In secondary, the figure is 472,400 minutes late across North Eastern, South-Eastern, St. Patrick, St. George, Port of Spain, Caroni and Victoria. I also want to point out, Ms. Ameen that for the CAPE, in 2016, 266 candidates got no subjects. When we looked at the data from 2010 to 2016 over a six-year period,

we are seeing, hon. Members, the number of students—

Mr. Chairman: Dr. Ali, let me interject here with some of the concerns coming from other members here. What we are interested in is what is being done about it. The data is one thing, stats is one thing, it gives information, but what are you doing with what you have before you?

Dr. Ali: What we are doing now?

Miss Ameen: Chair, if I may just add to that. I want us to be careful because you are saying that the schools with the highest levels of irregularity and unpunctuality are the ones that have more violence. The violence in the school is not necessarily as a result of the absenteeism because many teachers absent themselves because they are at risk. There are many teachers who may sign in and leave or go late because they are afraid of the violence in the schools, so one feeds into the other. So let us not be conclusive about that as if it is one way alone.

I join the Chairman in indicating that I am anxious to hear your recommendations or what recommendations have you put forward to the Ministry, and then in turn we could ask the Permanent Secretary, if she could, give us an indication as to what are the things that hinder those recommendations from being implemented. So I really want us to get solution oriented at this time.

11.30 a.m.

Dr. Ali: Yes, I agree with you. We have written to the Ministry several times about this persistent irregularity and unpunctuality among the officers, and therefore seeing the inaction and seeing the poor performance of the students, we have decided, as I said at the opening here, that we are going to initiate the appointment of investigative officers to pull together the information on these delinquent teachers.

I would like my Executive Director, Mr. Martel Waldron, to point out to the members how many occasions we wrote about persistent irregularity and

unpunctuality. We wrote to the Ministry about it. We were hoping that they would initiate the procedure, possibly under Regulation 90, because that as you know, Mr. Chairman, is the normal procedure. We were waiting for the trigger to come from the PS. But in writing and hoping to get the trigger, we were not getting the trigger.

Mr. Chairman: Dr. Ali, what seems to be coming out of here is almost like a table tennis game. This to and fro, who is supposed to do this, who is supposed to do that, who is supposed to do this, who is supposed to do that, and up to now we have not really been satisfied with anything in terms of solutions to the problem that you all are speaking about. You all are just saying this is what it is, this person is supposed to be this, this person is supposed to be that, I mean, it just sounds like—I do not know. This is what is going on here.

Dr. Ali: We are selecting persons to be IOs to investigate the list of persons who have bad regularity and punctuality.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Mr. Chairman, I would like to pose a specific question to the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Education, by asking whether or not there is a system in place to flag teachers who have exhausted or exceeded their sick leave or casual leave eligibility?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes, member Primus-Baptiste, as with all systems the Ministry is flagged. The information comes to the Ministry, the information also goes to the district offices. The principal keeps a tally of the days as recorded. The information goes through the School Supervision Division at the district, it comes to the Ministry and it is flagged. Then the Ministry takes action.

Most of the time it will be classified, “Leave without pay”“, and then they begin to look at this person, if this is perennial in terms of whether they are regular in terms of attendance. It is being flagged. We even had a system in place where we had the office of CEO and the DSS looking at the data and actually going into

schools to make sure that people are aware that this person is irregular, and whatever systems are in place to ensure that persons become regular, that we are actually treating with the issue of regularity and punctuality.

Mr. Chairman: Miss Creed, as the DPA, you have a privileged position being the DPA, probably not an envious position, but you can oversee a number of the platforms in terms of the public service. You are a very key person in terms of bringing linkages.

You have heard this morning since you are sitting here, probably I would hope most of which you all have probably been aware of already. Yes?

Ms. Creed: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: I am disturbed, I am unhappy, and I am sure I am not speaking of my own feelings here. I am sure my other members share the same sentiments. What is coming out here is total dysfunction and chaos. That is what it seems to be, dysfunction and chaos in a significant aspect of our public service. Almost every morning we are hearing a number of things with the schools in terms of the behaviour and all the other issues that are being brought before us here this morning. They are not new.

As the DPA who has been there, and I think unlike the PSs who have been changing frequently, you have been there for some time I want to believe, three years. Could you give us some semblance of comfort of what is being piloted, prioritized by the Teaching Service Commission or what has been suggested to the Ministry to deal with things that are critical in a prioritized way, in a short-term, medium-term and a long-term perspective? Nothing is clear, where that is concerned, to me, for this morning.

Ms. Creed: Chair, two issues that are a priority to the Commission and that have been the matters that have been placed before the Commission for consideration is,

one, dealing with the indiscipline in the schools. Although it is delegated, it is still the responsibility that lies with us and that is why the Commission was advised that we should appoint the investigating officers and get the matters going immediately. That has been one approach.

The other approach is attempting to fill all the offices, especially at the senior levels in the Ministry. The offices have been advertised in cases. First of all, I have to tell you one of the issues that I have at Service Commissions Department is that the secretariat that supports the Teaching Service Commission comprises seven human resource advisors, and it is their responsibility to monitor and to support the Commission for approximately 17,000 teachers. I want to start there.

The Public Management Consulting Division normally has a nice ratio that they use, which is like 100 to 150 persons to an officer. So I do not have to do the maths for you if I tell you I have 7 HR officers and the rest are clerical support in that unit. So one of the things that we have been attempting to do is to support the Commission as much as possible, but with limited resources. Because we had limited resources, we had discussions with the Commission and the Commission decided we would focus on the persons—this was the Commission's policy—we are to focus on filling deans, vice-principals, principals, et cetera, but it is the same seven officers we have on board that have to provide the support for the interviews, set up all the administrative work that has to be done.

So at Service Commissions Department, yes, we have had some achievements which were sent to you, and that is one of the things that we have looked at very critically in seeing how fast we could fill those offices to provide the permanent staff in those Ministries and Departments. The practice in the past had been that we would advertise per school. I had a discussion with the team from the Teaching Service Commission and the Commission, and a recommendation that we start to advertise

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by district. If you have to advertise, principal, St. Mary's, that is a whole process. Then principal, Holy Name Convent, that is a whole process. Principal, St. Joseph Convent, the time line, the resources we do not have.

So the recommendation that came from the Service Commissions Department is let us advertise in districts. When the persons come for an interview we make it clear to them, we are advertising for the district of St. George West, asking them to indicate—please indicate at the level of the interview—you do not know if you are successful or not—where you are not interested in. So I am not interested in working in this particular school; I do not want my name on the list for this particular school. A system like that has also been recommended to be put into place from our side, so that at least the interviews could move faster. We are also looking to see how quickly we could get the disciplinary matters moving.

The Legal Officer, Service Commissions Department also wanted to come into the discussion with regard to the disciplinary matters, if she may, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Before we turn on to her, I am very glad to hear what you said, that you all have moved from the specific schools to the district. That certainly is a better use of resources, so that is something positive and something to be commended.

Ms. Seecharan: Chair, the Commission has been advised that they could directly appoint the investigating officers, and actually previously it was done through the Ministry. It is the first time actually that we are hearing they have all these IR procedures that they go through before. If you look at the procedure in the Commission's regulations—because remember the Constitution has vested them with these functions and then the regulations prescribe the procedure that we follow. Those IR procedures are not there. So once it is a clear breach of the code and you are going to invoke the disciplinary process, they can proceed to do it. I do not know internally—I am hearing what the Ministry's administrative procedures are in terms

of IR and what they think they need to follow first.

So I think maybe in order to expedite, we will have to have some discussions in terms of at what point they are going to invoke. Then she is also saying that they classify the leave as leave without pay. So if you are classifying the person's absence, then we will not be able to take disciplinary action. I think we need to have, coming out of today, maybe some discussion to rectify those things.

Mr. Chairman: Based on what you are saying, the problem remains with the Ministry of having a very efficient legal department, a very well-staffed legal department, and two attorneys to deal with the large number of disciplinary matters is certainly not cutting it. It really cannot. They too will want to leave, because I am sure they will be overly burdened. I am sure that is an incentive to leave. It has to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Is it a problem in attracting and keeping them because of a lack of proper remuneration or because of the burden of the work involved?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: I am thinking it is both, in the sense that they are contract positions. Most persons are looking for tenure. Most persons are looking for tenure; they are contract positions within the service. As you said, the work; right now the matters beyond the IR is that we have contractors for physical projects, we have quite a number. Then we have a number of matters before the court that we have to address. So it is a heavy workload, because it is a really large Ministry.

Miss Ramdial: I just wanted to ask about the UTT teachers who are coming out of UTT every year and they are unable to get upgrades. What are the issues with the UTT teachers versus teachers trained in other tertiary institutions?

Dr. Ali: What I would like to say, as I answer, is that there is really not a mass chaos, but there is need for affirmative action on irregularity and unpunctuality. We have to take decisive action on this, because it affects the performance of the

students. I would not say we are in chaos, but we need action on these things.

One of the things the Commission did—I am going to answer your question, member—because of the public service, we could not get the full use of the IRIS platform. The Commission embarked on using open source technology, Google Maps to do a geographic mapping of all the schools in Trinidad and Tobago, primary and secondary. I am sure you have used Google Maps. When you google a school, you see the little orange blob comes up. From that we were uploading data into that system, so we would know the student and teacher ratio and the number of people appointed, who are not appointed, who are acting and so on. So that is one very positive thing that we are doing.

On the UTT matter—when the UTT degrees were created and people went to UTT and did their degree and completed, they would send their degree to the Ministry of Education and that transcript and the degree would go to Mr. John Roopchan, who is here today, and he will do the assessment of that degree. All degrees, whether they are from UWI or wherever, are assessed and then they write a letter to the PS of Ministry of Education saying that John has completed a degree in chemistry, is assessed, Teacher II chemistry, and can teach up to CAPE syllabus or up to Form 5. They make very clear statements, very briefly, where the person can go and how far.

What happened when the UTT degrees were assessed, the Ministry of Education found that, for example, the geography degree from UTT was missing 14 courses that would allow such a person to teach the CAPE syllabus. I have here a complete list of all of the missing courses in each of the degrees. So history was missing seven, geography was missing 14, sociology missing three, agricultural science missing 12.

Miss Ramdial: Dr. Ali, just to cut you across. So we would have known this for

quite some time. What is UTT, from your recommendation, doing about this gap that exists?

Dr. Ali: I had to recuse myself from any discussion on that at the Commission. When the meetings were held, I would excuse myself, because at that time I was holding the office of the provost of UTT.

Now what was done at UTT—because the people would come to me and complain to me as their provost by the hundreds—we mounted a bridging programme to fill these gaps and we agreed with the Ministry of Education, Curriculum Division and the persons at Alexandra Street at that time, that these were the gaps for these people to be upgraded up to Teacher III. We mounted those programmes. The graduates were informed, they attended the bridging programme, so they now have the prerequisite content, and as fast as they complete the bridging, they are upgraded. The Ministry of Education, Miss Keva, would send the list of persons who have finished the bridging and they would be upgraded.

Mr. De Freitas: Thank you for the information that you have given. I am starting to get a clearer picture as to what is happening. It seems that the Service Commission is taking a more analytical approach in terms of dealing with some of the issues with regard to the schools right up to the tertiary level.

What I am starting to figure out is that there are some huge, huge breakdowns in the entire system. So I am hearing from you that there are gaps in the degrees at UTT, but there are vacancies in the schools, which mean that the schools need teachers, and then I am hearing that you have interviewed 2,810 individuals, none of whom can be put into the vacancies because they have degrees in a different science than you needed.

So what I am saying is that the way this thing is supposed to work, as far as I understand, is that there is supposed to be circle or a feedback loop. So for example

you know what vacancies are in the country in regard to the schools. If you need 100 chemistry teachers, and that is fed into UTT or whatever system by which they go and get their degrees, so that if I want to be a teacher and I look on the Service Commission's website or the Ministry's website, I know that over the next five years there is a requirement for 100 chemistry teachers. Therefore, I may take the decision at my level to enter into a chemistry degree.

What is happening is that people want to be teachers, but they are going and doing courses that they want to do—chemistry, physics, geography, does not matter—and then finding out after that they have wasted six, seven, eight years because there are no jobs for geography or chemistry or whatever it is. So there is a breakdown in that feedback loop. They are supposed to get that information before they enter the degree, so that when they come out, they know that there is a job waiting.

My suggestion is that you fix that. That could be fixed. You do not need new regulations, you do not need a new Act. That is information feedback. You will start to see individuals funnelling into the correct degrees so that you can fill these vacancies.

Secondary to that, the 2,810 individuals that have been successfully interviewed, you have to give them an opportunity to either switch the degree, upgrade in some form or fashion, so they can start to fill those vacancies. The question I can ask you is: Who is the oldest individual that you have interviewed, not by age but in terms of time? What is that person doing now? I am sure they are not home waiting on you to call them, because a vacancy pops up in the particular degree they are in. But if you let them know that, listen, we do not need geography right now, but we need chemistry, you can then give them the ability to go and do an associate degree or another degree in the one that you need, so that they can enter

the teaching service. So you can engage them at that particular point. That is just dealing with that system in that way. Information getting at the front of the line as opposed to the end of the line.

The second thing that I want to say is I am not exactly sure in terms of dealing with the punctuality issue what is happening. How do you all capture that data? Is it still that when teachers come to school they write in a book that they arrived at this time, and then they sign off at the end of the month? Let me say this. If you are capturing that there is an issue with punctuality now, in other words when they sign in they are actually saying that they are coming late, they are doing that because there are probably no consequences.

When you start to implement these consequences, what happens? I arrive to school at 9.30 when I am supposed to arrive at 9.00, and I say I arrive at 9.00. Therefore, you need to change that system of capture. There is technology today that you can capture the teachers when they come in so that the flag goes off immediately when they cross that 180 trigger, and then that goes to the principal and then it goes through the system.

Mr. Chairman: Before anybody responds, there is I think Mr. John Roopchan, you are the Director of Curriculum? I think you should answer that question.

Mr. Roopchan: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to bring some light to the matter concerning qualifications for teaching and the nature of programmes that have been implemented in the school system. What I want to say is that when we assess candidates for teaching in schools in Trinidad and Tobago, we try to align their qualifications with the requirements for implementation of the school curriculum. The implementation of the school curriculum as in the case of people doing CAPE and CSEC programmes and things like that, there are certain modules and components that would require a certain qualification.

So when applicants are coming in with applications for teaching—and they can obtain that from a myriad of universities or tertiary providers across Trinidad and Tobago, and internationally now. There was a time in the past when we just had one or two institutions, and it was not a problem. So there was a standard, but now we have to interrogate the qualifications of every candidate to see to what extent their qualification aligns to the requirements for implementation of the school curriculum.

Miss Ramdial: Just to cut you across Mr. Roopchan. Mr. Ali said that there have been bridging gaps with the teachers from UTT doing the required courses so that they can be upgraded. The issue is we have UTT teachers who have done these specific courses to reach the grade, and yet still we have UTT teachers waiting six years and seven years to be upgraded, and that responsibility lies with the Ministry of Education. So what are we doing there?

Mr. Roopchan: If I may continue, the issue concerning the bridging programme was one that the Ministry of Education initiated, because we recognized back in 2012 or thereabouts—you would know that with the onset of the Teachers Training College and the bringing about of UTT that there were candidates who would have now been pursuing their programmes through UTT and they recognize that there were gaps, that they were not completing the exact content and pedagogy that we wanted for implementation of the primary school and lower secondary school curriculum, which was traditionally offered through the Teachers Training College of the past.

We met with the UTT in particular. When I say we, the Ministry of Education, and in particular, the Curriculum Planning and Development Division. The technical officers met and we went through and identified the gaps. The Ministry of Education had consolidation with UTT to bridge these gaps, fine.

Now the bridging of the gap was completed and a recommendation was sent forward with a listing of all the people who had successfully completed the bridging programme. Some of them have been—I would say most of them—have been upgraded to the Teacher I position, which is what the primary school teachers would have, coming out of the traditional training colleges. So the programme now was seen fit and meeting the requirements to teach, and they were given the Teacher I primary position.

Miss Ramdial: What about secondary school teachers and their upgrade?

Mr. Roopchan: For those who attended the secondary programme, they were not part of that bridging that we did back then. That bridging that was done in 2013 was for primary in particular, but we have continued to meet with UTT, and we have identified for secondary areas there are various subject areas that they offer there, programmes with specialization. So we have identified and the Chair there has pointed out that there are certain courses we saw that they were deficient with.

Now the completion of these courses, we have not limited it to UTT. We have identified when we review the qualifications of persons who may have fallen short in their qualifications to teach at the secondary level and be given the highest assessment, which is a Teacher III, we identify what courses they need to do and we recommend that they pursue these courses at UTT or any comparable tertiary institution provider. Some of them, UTT has been unable to bridge the requisite gap to this time, but this is why we have said that they can source it from any comparable tertiary level providers. In many instances, there are people who have completed and have been upgraded, but those who have not met the requirements, I suppose they would still be waiting.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Permit me please, Chairman, thank you kindly. Mr. Roopchan, for those teachers who have bridged the gap and have not been upgraded,

how do you propose to address such a situation? As a Minister, I received a complaint about two months ago of a teacher in that position, who had bridged the gap and her pay grade has not been upgraded. Can I advise her to send her matter to you to be addressed?

Mr. Roopchan: What I can say is that if you send her to me I will ascertain whether the qualifications have met the requirements and the matter would then be forwarded to HR for further action.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: I think she was part and parcel of those who came out at some point in time, because she did indicate in her letter that she was required to do some additional courses, which tells me she falls within the grouping to bridge the gap. So I certainly shall advise her to communicate with you.

Mr. Roopchan: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Roopchan, what is coming out of this, is it there is not a shortage of teachers per se in Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Roopchan: There is a shortage in certain areas. As pointed out earlier, there are some areas that we have a flux of teachers that are just too many. So people who might be applying to enter the teaching service at this point in time, let us just say in business studies, they would probably have to wait another four years because they get an interview, because there are so many teachers and applications as well, and there are no vacancies there. But there are other areas like physical education and the theatre arts and things like that where we are really undersubscribed, we do not have any teachers there.

Mr. Chairman: So how easy is it to do a conversion to accommodate the needs with the supply? How easy is it to make a sort of an adjustment?

Mr. Roopchan: Are you speaking of conversion of posts, Chair?

Mr. Chairman: No, from degrees, yes. If there is a shortage—because one of the

questions that was going to follow from here, this is why I am asking this, because it may not be necessary to ask that—if you have a shortage and we have a Caricom catchment of teachers, when do you go to reach outside to Caricom members to fill the shortage that we have here? That is why I am asking that as a prelude to that. So you answered adequately, I would not necessarily have to ask that question, but it is out. So could you respond please?

Mr. Roopchan: What I am aware of, even though we are in a shortage position at this point in time, we have been having discussion. The curriculum department of the Ministry of Education has been meeting with all tertiary providers in Trinidad and Tobago. We are aware that there are cohorts of teachers being trained through UTT, through USC right now who may be able to fill some of the vacancies in the not too distant future. So I am saying while we await that, I know that a meeting may be turned out shortly.

Miss Ameen: Mr. Roopchan, I wanted to ask. I did not get if you specifically, if UTT has fixed the problem. I know the bridging situation was a temporary measure, but have they fixed and corrected the curriculum to ensure that the courses being offered now cover the requirements of the Ministry? That is one.

Secondly, have you done or are you in a position to do—and this is for any member—an assessment to indicate the areas where there are requirements for teaching, so as to inform applicants before they go into the service? Because a number of members mentioned that that ought to be done. But have you been able or do you intend to undertake such an exercise, so that the people who are graduating will fill the needs that exist at present. So if those two questions could be addressed.

11.55 a.m.

Mr. Roopchan: Sure, Miss Ameen. The fixing of the problem—since our meeting with UTT with regard to the primary qualification and that 2013 bridging

that we did, their programme has been adjusted and it has been accepted. But I just want to alert you, too, that curriculum is normally reviewed both on the Ministry's side and the tertiary institution's side, you know, according to best practice every three to five years. And I think, UTT is right now revisiting theirs again. And in fact, as we speak here I know that one of my officers, she is meeting with representatives from UTT to ensure that there is alignment. So, we continue to engage our providers, and I am saying, wherever that happens and with any provider, we make ourselves available to ensure that we have that information sharing.

With regard to the assessment of vacancies, I know that we have in the past, I cannot say for within last year or so, but I know in the past I have been part of a team, before I became director, through the HR department that we will visit the tertiary institutions. We used to go to UTT and UWI to let them know what are the qualifications for teaching, what are the areas that we have, what are the areas that are depleted and to guide potential applicants as to, you know, how they can come into the service.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Ali—no, the Ministry of Education, Permanent Secretary, in your submissions you indicated that meetings, and I quote:

Meetings have been held at the strategic level with members of the TSC and the executives of the Ministry of Education.

I have three questions I would like to ask you. When was the last meetings held between the TSC and the Ministry of Education to discuss strategic policy matters concerning the management of human resources in the teaching service? Two:

what were the main issues discussed? And three: please provide information on relevant recommendations which emanated from those discussions?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: To the first question with respect to the meetings, the last meeting I have on record was held in December of 2016. And if we go to, under the same bullet two, we looked and we examined the policy guide and the transfer of teachers. We also, as I had earlier indicated, we had determined that we were going through with respect to the selection board in terms of expediting with respect to the filling of vacancies in the administrative areas. And one of the recommendations that flowed out of that, as I said, was the selection board and therefore, those various panels.

The expediting of the process for promotions in school and a new policy had, well on May 31, 2016, again, for the discussions with respect to the implementation of this new policy, and the guidelines include that officers to apply at any time to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education for a transfer from his or her substantive post to any school where a similar vacancy existed. So that the Ministry would have been able—the officer must give specific reasons for the request, and the TSC would no longer require that that officer apply only for a transfer only when the office has been advertised and be subject to an interview.

The other matter was the recommendations for promotion for all senior qualified teachers. Yes? Right. So, we had looked at the selection board in terms of expediting these matters.

Mr. Chairman: Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons, again, could you tell us what is the policy concerning schools being differently abled friendly at this point in time? What is the Government's policy concerning that?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Which way? Now, all our schools a decision was taken, I am trying to recall the year, that all new schools, as well as those that could have been retrofitted that they would have been outfitted. We had started with the ECCE centres, even the new centres. We had outfitted in our users' briefs, we had identified the areas. We had rooms that were to be like padded rooms. We had identified bathrooms, the ramps; we had identified specialist areas in from the ECCE to primary. What had happened is that the Ministry had started constructing new schools, primary, and we are outfitting. So all of those schools were outfitted with those specialist rooms for special schools.

We were working along, for example, with the School for the Blind and so on. We were outfitting those schools. Every year we would have put like, we would have had an allocation and we would have outfitted some of the schools and we would have been doing repairs. But we had a policy for special schools, that was when we had sufficient funds and our secondary schools were being outfitted. And if you look at the schools themselves, you would have seen ramps being built. We had elevators, for example, we built in Port of Spain the new primary schools, we had outfitted elevators and so on.

Mr. Chairman: But what may be helpful to us, if you can provide us in written form the number of schools that are yet to be outfitted, those that have been fitted and those that are to be outfitted, both secondary and primary.

Are you aware—I guess, just last week I was informed by a teacher that one of the government primary schools, Tranquility Government Primary School, is somewhat outfitted with access ramps, but there is a student attending that school at this point in time who is differently abled in a wheelchair and is unable to attend a number of her classes because of lack of proper access. Are you aware

of that?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: And that is the Tranquillity Primary?

Mr. Chairman: I think it is the secondary school. I think it is secondary.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Well, I know that there is a policy with respect to—what we would ask is that the teachers relocate to the floors, at least where possible, so that this child, over the time if this child is unable because Tranquillity would have been one of the schools—

Mr. Chairman: I think it is secondary because home-ec is not—

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: If it is secondary because the primary has the—but that school would have been one of those schools that would have been built many years ago and while there have been ongoing repairs, I know we would not have had, at that time, we would not have had for physically challenged, well, students, that they would not have outfitted it. But one of the policies had been that over the years that you follow this child who has that disability, whatever the disability is. So that if you are physically challenged, the teachers made arrangements to keep whatever classroom at a certain level that this child would have been able to have access.

Mr. Chairman: Well apparently that is not what is happening.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: And this is Tranquillity? Right.

Mr. Chairman: And that cannot be a short-term thing; that cannot be a long-term thing. That could only be short term.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: But again, you have to look at the space. For us to retrofit some of the schools, we do not have the land, so most of the time we try to place the child, well again, we will have to look at the policy in terms of placement of children with the various—into the schools where we actually have

the ramps and we have the elevators to provide the access. Because in Tranquility, again, the space constraints would not allow us to retrofit, because when you need—in most of the new schools we had gone for like primary five acres, secondary 10, so that we had that breadth with the curriculum, but also to ensure that we had physically challenged, the ramps, everything in place. So those older schools, it was a challenge, but again, I would look at it and see how we can best treat with it. Because I know even the elevators, because it is an old building, I do not know how we would then outfit.

Mr. Chairman: But when you are doing that, who do you take on board? Do you work with the Ministry of Planning and Development? Do you work with the Ministry of Health? I mean, right now there is no law governing the standardization of disabled facilities in terms of how the ramps are supposed to be—

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes.

Mr. Chairman:—the length and so forth?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: I mean, I go about because of my circumstances and I looked at a number of them. Look at the building that they just built there and opened on Queen's Park West, that would be Queen's Park East, the NIS building, NIB's new building—

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Chairman:—you have an access there right by, on the main street, the main thoroughfare, it is right next to a box I do not know if it is electricity or telephone. It is right next to the traffic light. I mean, it is impossible to have access to that. That is done without thought. So, there must be some policy there when people

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go about doing things like that to inform what are the proper things to be done, otherwise it is just wasting money again because that ought to be dug up. That would not be properly utilized for who it was meant to be service.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: I think what we had decided is that we were going to take a person with the disability and allow them to, at least, work along with us in terms of preparing the users and architects.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yeah? Because we had—when we were looking at the new construction, we did take into consideration the policies that were being, you know, we do liaise with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Service, we work with the Ministry of Health. But in terms of the—we worked with the engineers and the architects when we were doing. Right? But I understand that we needed also to look at, to utilize, at least to work along with someone who had, for example, is wheelchair bound that they would help us. But what was happening is, again, in specific areas like Port of Spain and San Fernando, space constraints meant that we—when we are doing new construction, we go more for the elevators rather than the ramps, things. And as you said, looked to see the bathrooms. We normally would utilize somebody who would fit to see the opening, should it be this, you know, the opening, the doors.

Mr. Chairman: Let me tell you something, it is not a guess game, you know, and you do not really have to revert only to somebody who is challenged, you know. There are engineering specifications.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: There are international bodies.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Well, that is what we—

Mr. Chairman: United States standardized—

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Right. Yes.

Mr. Chairman:—to show you what you need to do. And you have local bodies who can assist you with that information as well.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes. We have that. We have done that, but we have not been looking at new construction at this point. What we have been trying to do is to complete those that have been started, complete construction.

Mr. Chairman: But I certainly would like you to look into the issue I raised with Tranquility.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes. Your Tranquility.

Mr. Chairman:—the particular individual. There may be others like her.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: And it is at Tranquility.

Mr. Chairman: And it is at Tranquility Secondary School because, I think, it is the home-ec class. She is not able to access and some other classes as well. Mr. De Freitas.

Mr. De Freitas: I just wanted to ask one question. The Commission in your submission, the Commission, you also indicated that the Commission has also been working on finalizing the Teaching Service Commission delegation of powers order. So I just wanted to find out what is the status of that?

Dr. Ali: The delegation orders, we have done delegation orders for the completed regulations, but once we do a new Education Act with new regulations we will have revisit the delegation orders because they go hand in hand.

But in your previous contribution you made a very important point, as well as Sen. Roach mentioned the Caricom. And you are quite correct Sen. Roach because we are looking—if we are revising the 1966 Education Act, you will have

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to take into account the Act No. 26 of 1996 as amended in 2003 that allows for the free movement of university graduates, artistes, musicians, media workers, sports persons and other people under the CSME. So this is something very important that you touched upon, Sen. Roach.

Also, if you are revising the 1966 Act, we should look very carefully at the local school board regulations of 2000 to support decentralization and stage delegation and what these boards are doing at these schools.

Now, the other thing that was overlooked is that, for the first time since 1962, hon. members, this Commission sat in Tobago. The Commission went to Tobago and sat in Tobago, twice in Scarborough, honouring and recognizing the people of Tobago.

Also, in our management meetings with the division for education in Dutch Fort we recognized that at no time curriculum officers were appointed on the island of Tobago, and we set about getting that rectified. That has been a great achievement of the Commission to get those vacancies created and for curriculum officers to be interviewed and for persons to be placed in such positions in Tobago.

Mrs. Crouch: For the first time there is a curriculum coordinator. We found it quite shocking when we went to Tobago that there was this lack of curriculum coordinator, curriculum officer. We felt that a disservice had been done to the children there because the breadth of knowledge that the curriculum division brings, I think, had just bypassed them. They were very anxious to have these posts filled and identified. We spent a lot of time in Tobago getting a curriculum coordinator for the island for the first time, and we were amazed at the highly qualified people who were just there waiting to be put into those positions. And

we continue now to fill the post of curriculum officers, and as I said, Chair has indicated that this is a first. At no time before had this matter been addressed and I know we have the support of the administrators in Tobago now that this has been done.

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Creed, I think you want to say something.

Ms. Creed: Yes, Chair. To member De Freitas, the review of the Education Act does not impact totally on the delegation order and in discussions I am not sure if that was clear. The Commission would be looking to proceed with delegation, further delegation to the Ministry of Education in areas such as the one, and Tobago, in areas such as further temporary, acting, one-man tribunal, et cetera. So that is something that in the pipeline that would be sent out to the Prime Minister as soon as the Commission gives us the final sign-off which we expect to do very shortly.

Dr. Ali: I also want to add, since 1962 there has been no delegation to Tobago, THA. So, we are actively pursuing that. We are actively pursuing that and we have been sitting in Tobago. We have been keeping management meetings at Dutch Fort with the division for education, and the curriculum officers for Tobago we guide them how to create the necessary instruments to get the 12 offices created and advertised in 2015. The interviews started in November of 2016 and they will conclude early in April in 2017.

So, I must say we, the Teaching Service Commission has given a lot of attention. It is not enough. They need much more, but we have given attention to Tobago that was not given to it before in the independent history of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Miss Ramdial: All right. Just some quick questions. The TSC has been asking

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for more powers, that is, to monitor and manage teachers, and secondly, to determine teaching curriculum in specified areas in national development. Can you, Dr. Ali, justify the reasons for wanting these additional powers?

Dr. Ali: Yes. If you notice, hon. members, from our presentation today jointly with the Ministry of Education, as member De Freitas noticed, the TSC is providing great oversight over the entire system. We are looking right down to the students' performance, the irregularity, the punctuality of the officers. We are looking at the boards of the schools. We are looking at the CSME, and what our Prime Minister would have to agree with on movement of people under the CSME and the qualifications framework, the Caribbean CVQ and all of these things in different areas. This is not something far away. This future is now. And we would want, for example, to have greater authority to monitor regularity and punctuality.

When we develop our new google map, we roll out our new google map system that will work together with the IRIS platform of the Public Service Commission. We would want to embed inside of there a grade book so we would know the grades and the marks of the students and how they are performing. And we would have information on the regularity and the punctuality of the teachers.

We want to know, for example: what is the state of education in Victoria; how many principals are acting; how many are not appointed; how many teachers are missing in various curriculum areas? As the DPA indicated, it was her brilliant idea, when this Commission came into being that we should interview for the positions for a district rather than do it for a school. And so, if we got the additional powers, I think, working together with the Ministry of Education we could rectify a lot of the problems we are discussing here today.

Mr. De Freitas: I just wanted to, as you reminded me, with the interviewing by district to just raise one point. As much as interviewing by district may help you collate the resources, limited as they are, what I wanted to point out as you did mention that they all come for an interview, and at some point along the interview stage they will indicate what particular school they would be interested in. Just be mindful that what that might do is that you find, let us say if you have interviewees all wanting to go to one school, and if you have nine schools available then you are left with eight still without a principal or a vice-principal. So they would try to, you sort of create a sort of competition for particular schools which does not help you solve the original problem which is getting principals and vice-principals. You may want to look at interviewing everybody, and those that are successful you place them. If you give them the option, you are going to create that problem where, like I said, they will all want to go for particular schools.

Mrs. Crouch: I want to say something. I want to respond.

Ms. Creed: Your recommendation has been noted.

Mrs. Crouch: I would like to just respond to what the member is saying. I have been amazed at the extent to which there is legal challenge to every single thing that the Commission has to do. Indeed, if legal is not present we literally cannot make a decision about discipline or promotion or appointments. Judgments guide the way we operate now. I was amazed that somebody challenged age 46. A teacher wrote challenging that. I knew, I always accepted that once you are 45 that is it, you cannot be reemployed. This teacher said, I am 45 until I am 46, and that was a first.

So, I also want members of the Committee to understand that for

Commissioners like ourselves, we literally do not proceed with key decisions on anything unless Ms. Seecharan is there. And it is a very cobbling thing. What is the law? What is the judgment? Promotions, appointments, upgrades, there is a lawyer attached to every one of those situations.

Miss Ameen: Thank you, Chairman. One very quick question. I commend the decision to interview by district. And the districts were designed prior to 1990, and it worked where the regional corporations, the Ministries of Work and Transport, Education, all the Ministries had the same administrative areas by county. The boundaries, the county boundaries have changed. We now have regional corporations and the boundaries have changed. Has any consideration ever been given to change the administrative districts, because those counties do not exist anymore, geographically? They do not exist. They exist administratively in many Ministries. So, I just want to ask: if any the consideration has been given to changing the boundaries of the administrative districts to come in line with the current local government municipality boundaries? One. And if not, is it something that could be considered when you have reviews so that you would have alignment of all the services? Yes.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: I think I can respond.

Mr. Chairman: Ministry.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes, from the Ministry level because, again, with respect to the districts, the districts, again, established by the Ministry of Education and we would have looked at this a couple years ago and we would have aligned. But what we had done we had looked at it in terms of a geographic information system. So, once the new boundaries had been defined to local government, the Ministry would have then just been able to situate everything.

So we would have put everything in a map.

We would have also gone through, we had done a policy document with respect to the realignment and the rationalization, because again, with respect to education district within Trinidad—

Miss Ameen: Well those municipal boundaries—

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: So, yes.

Miss Ameen:—changed in 1990.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes. Yes. I know. But what I am saying, we would have looked at it over the time and we would have determined the policy, and once it goes into place we would have looked, we were waiting upon, once it had passed for the regional, the new boundaries, we would have been able to just work along with the new boundaries. Because again, it is placing our primary, secondary, ECCE and defining a new district.

Miss Ameen: Those boundaries were revised in 1990—

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: That is right.

Miss Ameen:—27 years ago.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: But remember local government—

Miss Ameen: So, I am asking if in those—

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: No.

Miss Ameen:—27 years, if there was ever any consideration to bring the administrative districts—

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: No.

Miss Ameen:—in line with the line municipal boundaries which came about in 1990?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes. But even in terms of our planning, the issues we

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have had over the years is that while we had administrative boundaries which are now referred to as our education districts, even in terms of our planning we would have been following, as you said, the EDs and the municipal boundaries. So we had to maintain those because, again, if you are looking at poverty, areas of poverty, looking at social development and all of that, we would have kept those boundaries for planning purposes. But for administrative or teaching, but what we had noted was that there were quite a lot of other Ministries that had varying boundaries, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and all the Ministries were waiting upon the new legislation, once—then we would move because we had to align all of our boundaries.

And even in listening, again, this is an aside to what was said before, going forward as a Ministry I will note to the Commission and they have looked at what you would call looking at the socio-economic, looking at what is happening, looking at what is happening with CSME and all of that, setting up a GIS system in terms of noting what are punctuality and regularity. And I would like them to understand the role that the Ministry is playing, that the Ministry is set up in such a way that research guides what we do, that we understand when you are looking at information and data—for example, if you are looking at local government or you are looking at what is happening in the economy or what is happening with the social, it helps us to work along as a team rather than the Commission stating that we would be doing such and such which borders on what the Ministry of Education is supposed to be doing.

So all I am saying, a plug for the Ministry of Education here that we work along and in alignment with the Ministry of Education as we have been doing—well, the Ministry of Education along with the Commission in ensuring that we,

at least, improve the overall teaching service because there are lines and there are boundaries at which we would not like us to cross, but that we work together collaboratively.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, PS. I hope your invitation has been taken up by the Teaching Service Commission who is your close neighbour right now. Ms. Creed.

Ms. Creed: Chairman, if I may? It really shows that when you have changes in leadership, because that, for instance, even the discussion with regard to doing interviews according to districts, the meeting that we had and I am now thinking to myself that the present PS would not have been there at the time that was discussed. So, you know, if all those things were discussed before, so I realize now that we now have to start all over as—we have been meeting and moving ahead; we have to re-establish again.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you for that. Ms. Creed, what I want to ask and we are coming to a close shortly, a closure shortly, is that, what has emanated from the discussions this morning is that it seems to be—and what is ironic as well is that the problem is about staffing, it is about deploying the resources, getting the best fit for this position, that position and so forth. But you yourself at the Teaching Service Commission and as the DPA your problem is understaffing as well. That is what is ironic. It is understaffing, if I hear correctly, and it is under-resources as well. So, how are we to deal with this? Because it certainly stands and it permeates everything that we have discussed about here. Because if you—yeah? Am I correct?

Ms. Creed: Yes. You are correct. And what we had done as a department as the Service Commissions Department in recognition of our limitations, we have

just planned with what the resources that we have. So, ideally if we would like to be able to do 100 things, we can only do 30, based on the resources, that is how we have—we have project ties and planned ahead what we could do, when we could do it with the resources that we have, be it persons, space, et cetera, funds, you know. So—

Mr. Chairman: So has your budget been cut significantly in this budget?

Ms. Creed: Yes. We have been—also we have felt the effect of the economy and what we have attempted to do is to do what we can do with the resources that we do have.

Mr. Chairman: But how has that impacted the significant—an impact that you need to make as a public service? I mean, it is one cutting, but how has that impacted significantly—that probably some overtures probably could be made to have something to address as an urgency because this is a critical area we are dealing with. This affects everything in our society because these are our future leaders, our future everything, police officers, doctors, nurses, the works.

12.25 p.m.

Ms. Creed: Well, the Commissions have come together and we have been having general discussions to see, even with the limited resources we have, if we could look at maybe one selection. We are looking at options under the circumstances, but I would agree with you that if we are provided with further resources in some areas that staffing and funds that would be able to assist us. Because, even the interviews that we speak about, we have to pay persons. But, for instance, lack of funds, we did some Skype interviews recently—so we are looking to find means and ways to get around the issues that we have as best as we can.

Mr. Chairman: And the last question from me is that the Concordat, that seems to

be a problem, is that being addressed among—I mean, the relevance of it, it came about in what? In 1960-something or even before that, the Concordat? It is not at that level?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: That was not—

Mr. Chairman: In the Ministry? Well, could you answer that for us? Could you shed some light? The ministerial—but, you all have an input in it in advising the Minister?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes, the Concordat of 1960, we have—well, last year, and I was not at the Ministry at the time, again, we would have had these consultations and one of the things was to look at the Concordat, and some recommendations were made and they have been put forward in a White Paper with respect to how we move forward with respect to the Concordat and the relationship with the boards of management.

Mr. Chairman: Miss Ramdial, you have a question?

Miss Ramdial: No.

Mr. Chairman: No? Okay, I would like to thank you all very much—I think Miss Ramdial has a question.

Miss Ramdial: Yes, just the last question and this is to the TSC. Your annual reports, there have been no submission for 2013, 2014 and 2015. Can you give us the reason why?

Dr. Ali: Yes, we have them ready. We have just some tidying up to do and we will submit them shortly. Just to close off on a ray of light, Sen. Roach, I want the members here to leave knowing, very quickly—very quickly, I will take one minute—

Mr. Chairman: Dr. Ali, I am going to invite you to make your closing remarks, you want to do that at this point in time?

Dr. Ali: Yes.

Miss Ameen: Chair, if he could just include—when you say shortly, if you could give like at the end of what month, or date, or year?

Dr. Ali: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, so you may do so now.

Dr. Ali: Thank you. Thank you, Sen. Roach. Principals secondary, we will be doing 17 schools, interviews confirmed for the third week of March this year; principal primary, vice-principal primary, senior teacher primary in Tobago, we will be doing those from the 15th—those were done from the 15th to the 17th March; vice principal secondary, offices advertised in 15, we will be doing 19 schools in April and May of this year; the curriculum officers of Tobago, that will be concluded by April, Madam, by 2017 of this year; dean secondary, advertised in 2016, interviews that will begin April 2017 to fill 260 vacancies—

Mr. Chairman: Dr. Ali, we have that information here.

Dr. Ali: Right. So, as you could see from the plan here, there is a work plan in order to staff the schools and support the education enterprise with the necessary staff.

Miss Ameen: Including dates and times?

Dr. Ali: So, we have dates and times, all being scheduled, officers are being informed, invited with letters and everything, so there is a work plan going forward.

Miss Ameen: The annual reports?

Dr. Ali: The annual reports, we are just tidying them up with statistics, all of this stuff, and you will be getting them.

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Creed, I will now invite you—

Miss Ameen: When?

Dr. Ali: I think you should be able to get at least two reports from us by April.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Okay, Ms. Creed can you—you would like to make some closing remarks?

Ms. Creed: If I may, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Sure.

Ms. Creed: To the member—to just clarify the member, I was just putting my mind to the reports, I would indicate by—the 2013 would be submitted in April, 2014/2015 no later than June, and the 2016 by August 2017.

Just to close, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to have us here for us to be able to share with the Committee. I once again want to be able to say that we just recently—we are in the process of—we just concluded our institutional strengthening exercise with the consultants who have identified a lot of areas—recommendations pertaining to governance, legislation, technology, et cetera, pertaining to the Service Commissions Department, and if it is that the Service Commissions Department as the secretariat to the four Commissions are provided, we would better be able to support the Commissions in their constitutional mandate. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. PS.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Once again, thank you for the opportunity to be here. We have listened and we have heard that institutional strengthening that is ongoing, that we would be able to benefit. And to the Teaching Service Commission, we would be able to benefit through that. We have noted also that a framework for the new Act, Education Act, has been defined, because in the Ministry we were looking at revision of the Act to include the areas that we know have been excluded, and this we are working on.

Again, we noted the whole issue with future state that was recognized, and the decentralization in terms of what is happening with our local government, and how

we can benefit from that. Also, again, we heard that we would be the one-man tribunal that by next month, I think, we would be able to get those things ongoing. At least we can start. Again, we heard about the initiation under Regulation 90(d), the investigating officer, that the Commission is going to take that on board and work along with the Ministry of Education with respect to regularity and punctuality. I was asked to look at Tranquility, and I would remember Tranquility Secondary with respect to the students having access and equality of treatment there with respect to the classes.

And, again, the Ministry, we are hoping to see the positions filled both at the administrative level in our schools as well as within the Ministry itself through the Commissions, the Service Commissions and, again, we are hopeful that we can actually impact and make our schools become a more peaceful place for our students.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Before I thank you all, I would just like to say that this morning's deliberations or exchanges, some of it has been encouraging, some of the initiatives have been taken by the Teaching Service Commission to deal with addressing some of what I consider chronic problems in the system, in the fact that they are challenged with lack of adequate resources, which is something not only the Teaching Service Commission, but most of the public service is challenged with now because of obvious economic challenges that are facing the country.

I am also encouraged by the fact that soon to have the new regulations which, to me, play a critical role in the affairs of the Teaching Service Commission. That is way too long outstanding, it needs to come to fruition at this point in time. I know that public servants—I know the challenge most times because they are not adequately resourced, and a lot is demanded of them. Certainly, on behalf of other members here, we would like to thank them for their services. We would like to thank the Teaching Service Commission for your contributions, and hopefully we

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can work as a team. We have listened to what you have said, and we hope in our report we will be able to reflect that and make suggestions that would be taken up and actioned as soon as possible in the circumstances, to make our system work better for all of us and our children.

So, on behalf of all the members here and myself, I would like to thank you for coming, and I would like to bring these proceedings—before I bring these proceedings to a close I would just like to—for the public purposes—say that the Third Report of an Enquiry into the SWRHA which focused on the human resources and equipment at the San Fernando General Hospital was presented in the Senate on March 14th and in the House of Representatives on March 15th 2015. The website is also available on the Parliament website www.ttparliament.org.

There being no further business, I would like to adjourn this hearing, and thank you very much. Good afternoon.

12.34 p.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*