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**Higher Education Report: [Mauritius]**

UNESCO National Commission in alliance with the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology and the Higher Education Commission

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**Abstract**

Mauritius, a small island state about 1,700km off the Southeast coast of Africa, has experienced unprecedented growth in its Higher Education sector. In line with the Government's strategy to expand the island's enrolment of international students through the offer of quality higher education, several strategic actions were taken. One such significant action was the enactment of a Higher Education Act, which resulted in creating the Higher Education Commission and the Quality Assurance Authority. These national regulatory bodies of the HE sector are geared towards bringing a responsive, inclusive, resilient and sustainable higher education system to meet the emerging needs for lasting social, environmental and economic transformation. This document summarises the higher education landscape of Mauritius, the current challenges, and the future strategic directions.

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**Acronyms**

COL – Commonwealth of Learning

FTES – Free Tertiary Education Scheme

GTER – Gross Tertiary Enrolment Rate

HE – Higher Education

HE Act – Higher Education Act

HEC – Higher Education Commission

HEIs – Higher Education Institutions

MGI – Mahatma Gandhi Institute

MIE – Mauritius Institute of Education

MoE, TE, S&T – Ministry of Education, Tertiary education, science and technology

NCTVS – National Credit Value and Transfer System

ODL- Open Distance Learning

OUM – Open University of Mauritius

PFI – Publicly Funded Institution

PHEIs – Private Higher Education Institutions

QAA – Quality Assurance Authority

SADC – Southern African Development Countries

TEC – Tertiary Education Commission

UDM – Université des Mascareignes

UoM – University of Mauritius

UTM – University of Technology

## 1.0 Presentation

This report was prepared by the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, in collaboration with the Higher Education Commission (HEC) for the World Higher Education Conference 2022. It provides an overall picture of the higher education landscape of Mauritius and future trends of Higher Education. The information presented here is gathered from reports produced by the HEC.

## 2.0 Current situation of higher education

### 2.1 Historical enrolment and graduation rates

Located 1,700 km off the southeast coast of Africa, Mauritius is an island state of about 1.3 million inhabitants. Since it acceded to independence in 1968, the island has made significant progress in Higher Education.

Over the years, the Mauritian government has taken comprehensive measures to enhance the Higher Education system, aiming at increasing enrolment, equity of access and ensuring the quality of education. To achieve universal schooling, the Government of Mauritius provided free education to its citizen from pre-primary to secondary levels in the early 1970s. In 2019, the Government came forward with the free tertiary education scheme. Through this scheme, access to higher education was widened further. The government paid for the tuition fees for any citizen who wishes to study for a first certificate, first diploma, or a first degree in any public Higher education institution.

Drawing from the HEC participation report 2020<sup>1</sup>, it may be noted that the Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio (GTER)<sup>2</sup> has varied between 47% to 50 % during the last ten years, attaining a peak of 50.7% in 2012 and after that hovering around 47%. The GTER indicates the participation level of Mauritian students in tertiary education.

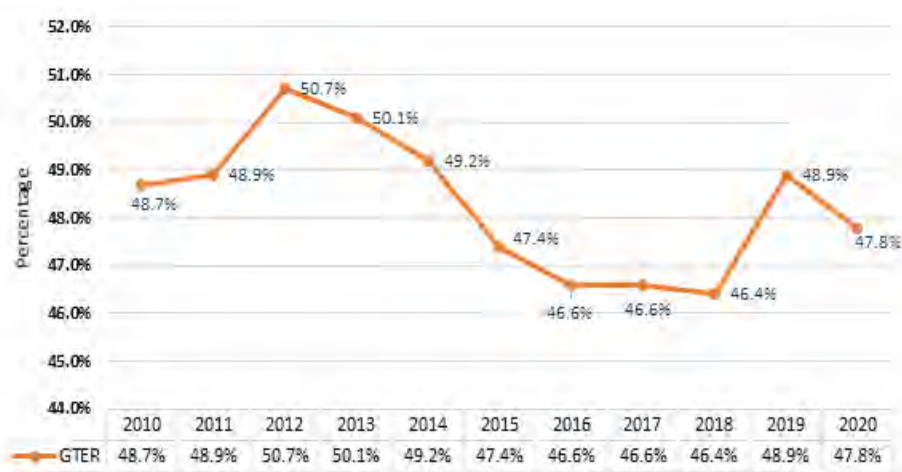


Figure 1: Evolution of Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio, 2010-2020

Source: HEC Participation report 2020

<sup>1</sup> Participation in Tertiary Education 2020, [https://www.hec.mu/pdf\\_downloads/rpldivision/Participation2020.pdf](https://www.hec.mu/pdf_downloads/rpldivision/Participation2020.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Gross Enrolment Rate at the tertiary level (GTER) is defined as the number of students enrolled in tertiary education (ISCED level 5 to 8), regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the theoretical age group for that level of education, that is the five-year age group following official secondary school graduation age (taken in the case of Mauritius as 20 to 24 years)

## 2.2 Overall Participation in Higher Education in 2020

The UNESCO report Continental overview: Bridging continental strategy for Africa and Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Africa, published in January 2021, highlights that Mauritius, with an enrolment rate of 40.6%, has increased its access to Higher Education more than any other country in Sub-Saharan Africa. Students' enrolments are classified into three broad categories: public, private, and Overseas. Students can join a Publicly-Funded Institution (PFI), register with a Private Higher Educational Institution (PHEI) or engage in self-study with an overseas awarding body through distance education and open learning. Alternatively, students can opt to travel and pursue their studies overseas. The Mauritian public higher education system provides for both face to face as well as an open distance learning mode.

Total Higher education enrolment in 2020 was 48,568 and was distributed as follows: 41,451 (85%) students were undertaking their studies locally, out of whom 25,882 were registered in PFIs, 11,102 in PHEIs and 4,467 were engaged in self-study.

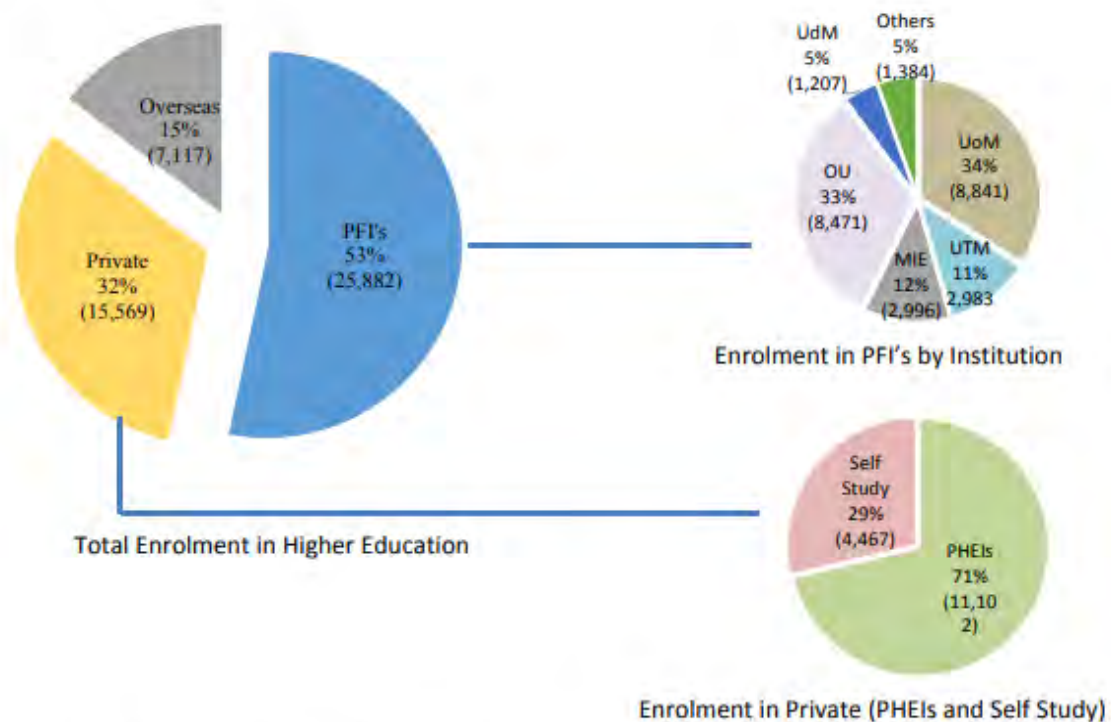


Figure 2: Distribution of Higher Education enrolment by source, 2020

Source: HEC Participation report 2020

## 2.3 Quantity and types of higher education institutions

The Higher Education Landscape in Mauritius comprises ten publicly funded Higher Education Institutions, with four having university status. These are namely the University of Mauritius (UoM), the University of Technology Mauritius (UTM), the Open University of Mauritius (OU) and the Université des Mascareignes (UDM).

Other leading institutions like Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) and Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) offer specific targeted programmes. MIE is predominantly involved with in-service teacher training and education. Its primary function is to improve the quality and

qualifications of the teaching force spanning from pre-primary to the secondary level. MGI was established as a joint venture between the Governments of Mauritius and India. It is responsible for running courses in performing arts, fine arts and cultural studies. In addition, Polytechnics Mauritius, which was created in 2017, runs training programmes to serve the emerging needs of Mauritius for a qualified and technically skilled human resource at the mid-professional level.

The sector further supports private players; some 44 private institutions operate in Mauritius through different arrangements. These institutions are at various stages of development with significant variation in their academic programmes, student numbers, infrastructural and physical facilities, amongst others. The private Higher Education Institutions comprise institutions with awarding powers, International Branch Campuses, and institutions with franchises with awarding bodies based either locally or overseas. As of 2020, four Institutions had awarding powers, namely the Amity Institute of Higher Education (Diploma, Bachelor Degree and Masters), Charles Telfair Company Ltd Trading as Charles Telfair Institute (Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor Degree), JSS Academy of Higher Education and Research (Mauritius) Ltd (Bachelor Degree and Master Degree) and Rushmore Ltd (Diploma). There were also two International Branch Campuses operating in Mauritius, namely the Middlesex International (Mauritius) Ltd, UK and the Greenwich Albany Ltd trading as Greenwich University, Pakistan (Mauritius Branch Campus).

The Mauritian HE sector offers a wide array of programmes. Some 750 programmes, ranging from Certificate to PhD, are available locally, which cater for the need of different categories of learners. The public institutions provide some 455 programmes and private/distance education providers about 300 Programmes. These programmes englobe a wide diversity of fields and are delivered either on a full-time, part-time or flexible distance learning mode basis.

#### **2.4 Legal and institutional framework of higher education**

The Higher Education Act (2017) was promulgated in January 2020 to provide a reformed, modern, and forward-looking legislative framework for the higher education sector in Mauritius. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the Quality Assurance Authority (QAA) became operational soon after that. These two institutions are tasked with ensuring the sustainability, reliance and quality assurance of higher education in Mauritius. The promotion of the Mauritian higher education sector is done jointly by the Mauritius Higher Education Desk, operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and the Economic Development Board, as part of its strategy for the export of services.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) is the regulatory body for Higher Education and operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and technology. The objects of Commission are to:

- a. monitor and oversee the higher education sector;
- b. ensure –
  - the availability of adequate human resources, physical infrastructure and other material resources;
  - the rationalisation of teaching programmes in public higher education institutions; and
  - the planning and implementation of research in higher education institutions;
- c. promote the development of higher education, academic research and training facilities through equity of access, high-quality learning and research outcomes, the efficient use of national resources and innovation;

- d. foster the achievement of international standards of scholarship through a diversity of teaching and research;
- e. identify and enhance good practices in higher education;
- f. support and facilitate the implementation of the national higher education strategy of the Government; and
- g. support the development of cultural life.

On the other hand, the Quality Assurance Authority, Mauritius has been primarily assigned to conduct quality audits of Higher Education Institutions and the objects of the Authority include:

- a. to promote, maintain and enhance
  - quality assurance of higher education in line with international standards;
  - high-quality standards in higher education through appropriate quality assurance mechanisms;
- b. to enhance and identify good practices in higher education.

### 2.5 COVID 19 response

The disruptive impact of COVID 19 led to a rapid transformation of the higher education sector across the globe, and Mauritius is no exception. The pandemic caught the higher education system unprepared, and HEIs in Mauritius resorted to emergency remote teaching; it was uncharted territory for most of them. Mauritius went through two national lockdowns of a couple of months each in 2020 and 2021. National surveys<sup>3</sup> conducted during the national lockdowns and post-lockdown demonstrated that Higher Education Institutions in Mauritius exhibited high resilience, with institutions shifting to blended teaching mode.

The majority of the HEIs, 80.6% of them, opted for the blended model of teaching and learning, 9.7% of institutions were delivering their programmes entirely online, and 9.7% were still on the face-to-face mode of delivery. This survey was conducted in November 2021 before the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology decided to adopt full online teaching and learning mode in the institutions.



Chart showing transition from face-to-face to online/blended mode of teaching and learning

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.hec.mu/pdf\\_downloads/news/resilience\\_booklet\\_spread\\_low\\_website\\_14042021.pdf](https://www.hec.mu/pdf_downloads/news/resilience_booklet_spread_low_website_14042021.pdf)

With the shift to online learning, questions of lack of equity of access and the pedagogical challenges posed by flexible teaching and learning surfaced. This was accompanied by vivid brainstorming sessions on how best to harness available technology. The Ministry of Education, TE, S&T, and the Higher Education Commission conducted several working sessions to consult stakeholders on the best way forward and narrow them down to an agreed set of tools.

### **2.6 Promoting Research for Impact in Mauritius**

Research is one of the most distinguished and competitive strengths of universities worldwide, and in this era of perpetual change, it is difficult to envisage a university setting without research. Research is pivotal for transforming the Higher Education sector in Mauritius. It is even more critical in this present juncture where a culture of impact research needs to be developed.

Research, a key criterion to improve the international ranking of our Higher Education Institutions, is the much-needed engine to place Mauritius on the world map as a destination for higher education. To boost research in the Mauritian Higher Education sector, the Ministry of Education discussed and obtained an amount of MUR 50 million in the 2017/18 National Budget to set up a Research Fund. The Higher Education Commission administered the Research Fund. This budget was renewed in subsequent national budgets, though with decreasing quantum each time.

Since its inception in 2017/18, 15 schemes have been operationalised under the Research Fund. These schemes can be broadly classified as:

- Incentive-based schemes
- Capacity-building schemes
- Project-based Schemes

The Higher Education Commission has funded around 75 projects, and the total project value hovers around Rs 122 million. To ensure relevant and impactful research, the HEC deems it essential, as a funding body, to assess the potential outcome and impact of the study it sponsors on the economic, environmental, social, cultural and other fronts. As far as funding for research is concerned, the next chapter for HEC would be funding research for impact. Increasingly, the focus is shifting to the tangible benefits or changes that research generates for society, with research meaning much more than just the number of citations of a published work. This approach implements the Ministry's vision for rationalising resources; the impetus is to encourage researchers to collaborate while working on similar topics.

Demonstrating and attributing research impact requires advanced planning. In August 2021, researchers from HEIs were sensitised on the research for impact approach with a focus on planning research for impact. The results-based management approach, a hallmark of development projects, was introduced in the research context to demonstrate how outcomes and effects can be planned, identified, and measured. This was the first time that the HEC sensitised researchers from Mauritian HEIs on the concept of Research for Impact.

### **2.7 Responsive Regulatory framework**

Quality is a crucial parameter for benchmarking the success of higher education institutions. A regulatory framework was implemented in 2005 by the ex-Tertiary Education Commission (ex-TEC). It provided guidelines for the establishment, registration, and accreditation of programmes, amongst others. The ex-TEC also implemented a Clinical Training Framework. The mandate of the Higher Education Commission under the HE Act is to promote high-quality



learning; HEC is currently preparing a new regulatory framework that will raise the quality and standards of higher education institutions and programmes.

The HEC's new regulatory approach encourages HEIs to be responsive to voluntary compliance to a series of Standards. This will be accompanied by an understanding of the institutional risks and severity of the proportionate sanctions, should there be non-compliance. The new regulatory framework is based on nine values-led Principles.

In addition, the HEC has developed 12 integrated Quality Standards with specific criteria that HEIs operating in Mauritius must meet. The Standards comprise a mix of input, process and outcome criteria. They address institutional, programme, students, and graduate outcomes, all interconnected but aim to ensure a sustainable and fulfilling student experience. The requirements to be under each Standard are:

- Governance
- Internal Quality Assurance
- Financial Sustainability
- Programme delivery, Design and Review
- Student Support
- Community Engagement

### **2.8 Supporting portability of qualifications**

The Ministry of Education, TE, S&T believes in "leaving no student behind". This principle has sprouted into the concept of pathways and alternative ways to education. With the view to facilitating the portability of qualifications and promoting the mobility of learners within the Mauritian knowledge hub, HEC has been mandated through the HE Act to harmonise the local practice in terms of credit allocation and align it with international norms. The development of the National Credit Value and Transfer system (NCVTS) is currently being spearheaded by the Higher Education Commission. It is expected to promote the mobility of students in the region, especially from the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

### **2.9 Funding of higher education**

Presently, the Higher Education Commission acts as the funding agency for the government, allocating funding to public HEIs based on the requirements of the institutions to balance their expenses. The provisions made for the recurrent budget in the 2021/2022 National Budget for the Higher Education Institutions amount to MUR 1,594.54m and is allocated as given hereunder:

Institutions	Government Grant 2021/2022 (MUR) (million)
University of Mauritius	615.8
University of Technology, Mauritius	70.2
Université des Mascareignes	125.9
Mahatma Gandhi Institute (Tertiary)	110.0
Rabindranath Tagore Institute (Tertiary)	2.7
Open University of Mauritius	10.0

Table 1 showing allocation of funds to Higher Education Institutions (Source: Higher Education Commission, 2020)

The Free Tertiary Education Scheme (FTES) provides free tuition fees in public Higher Education Institutions for Mauritian citizens. This policy measure, effective from 01 January 2019, applies to programmes up to the undergraduate level. The Scheme covers tuition fees for students of Mauritian Nationality enrolled in a recognised first award certificate, first diploma or first-degree programme on either full-time, part-time mode or distance/blended mode in publicly funded Higher Education Institution. Table 2 below gives a glimpse of the number of students who have benefitted from the FTES since its introduction.

Number of students who benefitted from FTES per Institution			
	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
University of Technology Mauritius	2,199	4,163	4,399
University of Mauritius	2,348	7,159	8,388
Mauritius Institute of Training and Development	1,075	180	686
Mauritius Institute of Education	382	860	1,188
Mahatma Gandhi Institute	26	-	
Open University	2,166	4,807	6,834
Fashion & Design Institute	44	177	251
Polytechnic Mauritius Ltd	-	960	795
Universite Des Mascareignes	-	1,946	1,985
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,240</b>	<b>20,252</b>	<b>24,526</b>

Table 2 showing the number of students who benefitted from FTES per institutions 2018 to 2021 (Source: Higher Education Commission, 2020)

It may be noted that the number of students benefitting from free tertiary education has increased almost three folds in the last three years.

A vital element of the Higher Education Act (2017) is to set up an appropriate funding mechanism for allocating funds to public higher education institutions. In this regard, the Higher Education Commission is coming up with a new funding model, for the Ministry's approval, before implementing the same.

### **2.10 Quality Assurance for a modern higher education**

The pandemic brought about massive and unplanned changes in the teaching methods. Many HEIs resorted to various online means and techniques to ensure continuity of education. These measures, however, came at the cost of unmonitored quality assurance. To this end, the Quality Assurance Authority has developed quality assurance standards to guide HEIs into their transformations to the use of technology-enabled teaching and learning. This is an iterative process, and the QAA is continuously improving its guidelines, standards, and assessment methods to adapt to the latest global trends.

## **3.0 Current challenges in higher education**

### **3.1 Abiding to the new regulatory framework**

All the existing public HEIs were in existence before the current regulatory body (HEC). Since an Act of Parliament set up all the public HEIs, they all claim to be fully autonomous. They are resisting the need to have their programmes accredited by the regulatory body. Reasons for this quiet defiance includes their academic autonomy, the fact that the regulatory body previously used their academics to accredit the programmes of private HEIs, thereby giving them a sense of being experts and the lack of sufficient qualified staff at the HEC to accredit the existing 700+ programmes in the public HEIs.

### **3.2 Rationalisation of programmes and public resources**

The public HEIs currently have a large array of duplicating programmes. The Ministry sees this situation as unhealthy, especially for institutions funded from the same public funds. The same applies to HEIs demands for duplicating resources and facilities, despite four of them currently being located within a 10km radius. The HE Act made provisions for the HEC to develop a mechanism for harmonising programmes and rationalising resources. The aim is for the different HEIs to offer unique studies programmes, become experts in their respective sectors of operation, and attract a larger population of local and international students through the wide choice of programmes. The HEIs are currently also resisting the harmonisation process, claiming their autonomy and independence to offer any programme of study.

### **3.3 Higher Education Funding**

HEIs are continuously grappling for funding, and the tightening of government funding due to the COVID 19 pandemic can negatively impact the system. The need to invest in technological infrastructure, scalable digital platforms, and create differentiating learners' experiences will further increase the cost of higher education. Inefficiencies in higher education spending can drive significant inequalities. It is essential for resources must be used more efficiently, and a reassessment of budgetary allocations should also be considered.

### **3.4 A more adaptable workforce**

Ministry understands that higher education plays a crucial role in shaping the workforce of tomorrow. The HEC Strategic Plan 2022-2025 stipulates that "*Mauritius needs a workforce that is adaptable, knowledgeable, and innovative to support an increasing service and technology-oriented economy*". With the country's vision to be an education hub in the region, curriculum developers need to rethink whether courses should be relevant to the country's socio-economic needs or be broadened to address regional and global markets, contexts, and cultures. Covid 19 has ignited the need for lifelong learning to a new generation of learners, including a growing interest in shorter, more focussed learning pathways. In this context, the Ministry of Education,

Tertiary Education, Science and Technology has agreed that the Higher Education Commission (HEC) enters into a 3-year agreement with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to offer 1,000 scholarships yearly under the 'COL-Skills for Work Scholarships'. The first cohort of 1000 Mauritian learners completed their courses in September 2021. This is a crucial initiative to enable learners to acquire skills for work.

### **3.5 Data for higher education**

Higher education relies on information like enrolment trends and course success rates to improve offerings and student success rates. It provides means to help stakeholders such as the government and regulatory bodies to make data-driven decisions to benefit their community. The difficulty in collecting data for the Higher education sector the lack of institutional research departments in many of the HEIs is a concern for the sector.

Analytics in higher education can be transformative, altering the existing processes of administration, teaching, learning, academic work. With the current pandemic situation, analytics would lead to innovation in education, new ideas, activities that require a change in behaviour or processes. In this context, the Ministry of Education envisions a centralised data hub for the HE sector; this may be hosted at the HEC, with the data shared by the Ministry with the main regulatory bodies.

## **4.0 Future strategic directions**

### **4.1 National Higher Education Strategy**

The Mauritian Government envisions developing Mauritius into a Knowledge hub. As part of the process, it is recognised that several facets need to be looked into and coordinated for an effective output. The Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology is currently working on a National HE Strategy 2022-2027, considering the different elements required to transition into a higher education hub.

### **4.2 Towards a knowledge society**

The HEC Strategic Plan lays a strong foundation for the regulatory body to help transform Mauritius into a Regional Knowledge Hub. The HEC's first Strategic Plan 2022-2025<sup>4</sup> provides a roadmap for the next three years centred around the following 5 Key strategic themes:

- Responsiveness - Adopting a Responsive and Robust Regulatory Framework for Higher Education
- Relevance - Supporting Relevant Higher Education and Research
- Resilience - Strengthening the Resilience of the Higher Education System through Internationalization and enhanced Student Experience.
- Sustainability - Ensuring Effectiveness and Efficiency and the Financial Sustainability of the public Higher Education Sector.
- Engagement - Promoting Engagement, Partnership and Linkages in Higher Education

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.hec.mu/pdf\\_downloads/StrategicPlan/HEC\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_2022\\_2025.pdf](https://www.hec.mu/pdf_downloads/StrategicPlan/HEC_Strategic_Plan_2022_2025.pdf)

### 4.3 Internationalisation of Higher Education

The Government's commitment to supporting the internationalisation of higher education is reaffirmed in the 2021/22 Budget. The Ministry of Education, TE, S&T is currently setting up a Technical Committee with members from the public and private HEIs and other significant stakeholders to brainstorm and come forward with the best strategy for the internationalisation of the Mauritian HE sector. Additionally, the national budget incentivises internationalisation through measures such as 20 hours per week work permit for international students enrolled in a recognised educational institution in Mauritius and a 10-Year renewable Young Professional Occupation Permit upon graduation. Another key incentive is the exemption on income derived by a branch campus of an institution that ranks among the first 500 tertiary institutions worldwide for eight successive income years since the institution started its operations in Mauritius.

### 4.4 Transformative learning

It is imperative to support HEIs in developing innovative teaching and learning approaches with the support of Artificial Intelligence, blended mode delivery, and the increased use of technological interventions. Blended learning has gained momentum in 2020 and 2021 with the COVID 19 pandemic. Though HEIs are now transitioning back to face-to-face classes, the accessibility of blended courses will continue to dominate students' demand for such a mode of teaching. However, not all HEIs have the technological capability or trained personnel to deliver online programmes effectively and efficiently. The Ministry has tasked both the HEC and QAA to develop Guidelines for Open and Distance Learning (ODL). These guidelines should also cater to Technology-Enabled Learning strategies to assist HEIs to smoothen the transition to online teaching and learning and provide quality service to their students. Capacity building of academic staff in technology-enabled education has also been placed high on the agenda.

## 5.0 Conclusion

A systemic change of the Higher Education sector is required to meet current and future challenges. Spearheaded by the Ministry of Education, TE, S&T, the regulatory bodies have been mandated to bring about elements that will enable such transformation. Some of these enabling factors include:

1. The new regulatory framework that will raise the quality and standards of higher education provision;
2. A new Quality Assurance framework incorporating new modes of teaching, learning and assessment;
3. A new funding mechanism linked to the performance of institutions;
4. A technology-enabled strategy to assist the new method of course delivery;
5. Policies and guidelines for Open Distance learning (ODL) and Online e-education and learning (OEL);
6. Relevance and employability skills development; and
7. A research culture geared towards societal impacts and improvement.

We expect the higher education system to be more responsive, resilient and relevant to the needs of society.

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