

Terms of Reference

Designing a School Examination Reform Project

Purpose of the Assignment

The purpose of this Technical Assistance is to contribute towards improved education quality in Nepal, through the design of the School Examination Reform Project. The project design will provide a clear roadmap for an examination reform process in Nepal including inputs and outputs, key milestones, scope, and the modality at different levels.

Background

Whilst equitable access to basic and secondary education has improved over the past few years and more girls and children from disadvantaged backgrounds are now enrolled in schools, there is increasing emphasis on the quality of education and improving children's learning outcomes. At the same time there is a clear acknowledgement of the need to enhance transparency and accountability in the education sector, and examination systems are a key area for reform efforts.

The school level education structure of Nepal is spread from grades 1-12. The first composition grades 1-5 is known as primary level, grades 6-8 as lower secondary level, grades 9-10 as secondary level and grades 11-12 as higher secondary level. The School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP 2009 - 2015) is implementing an integrated system of basic education (1-8 grade) and secondary education (9-12 grades). The evaluation system at those levels is administered by different institutions. A Continuous Assessment System (CAS) is in practice from Grades 1-7. Students' performance regarding different aspects are continuously observed and recorded and promotion is made on the basis of their performance on those aspects. Schools administer a paper and pencil test too at grades 1-3, but performance in this is not taken into account for grade promotion. In grades 4 and 5, a 50% weighting is given to continuous assessment and 50% to the paper and pencil test. (The Continuous Assessment System is planned to be expanded up to grade 7. In grades 6, 7 & 9 three tests are to be administered; they will have a weighting of 10%, 30% and 60% respectively).

A district level test is administered at the end of grade 8. The practice of the test administration varies from district to district. At the end of grade 10, the national level examination known as the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination is administered. The whole state is involved in its administration. Both written test and practical test are administered. The former carries 75% and the latter 25%. The examinations of grade 11 and 12 are also nationally administered. Examinees are given certificates that show the students' marks of both grades. Almost all the school level examinations have subjective test items.

Details of School Level Evaluation/Examination System:

S. No.	Level	Agency	Type
1	Basic level (Grade 1-3)	School	Continuous Assessment System
2	Basic level (Grade 4-5)	School	Continuous Assessment System (50%) Paper & Pencil Test (50%)
3	Basic level (Grade 6-7)	School	Continuous Assessment System (40%) Paper & Pencil Test (60%)
4	Basic level (Grade 8)	District	Continuous Assessment System (40%) Paper & Pencil Test (60%)
5	Secondary Level (Grade 9)	School	Paper & Pencil Test (100%)
6	Secondary Level (Grade 10) (SLC)	OCE	Paper & Pencil Test (100%) (in some subjects 25-50% practical test)
7	Higher Secondary level (Grade 11-12)	Higher Secondary Education Board	Paper Pencil Test (100%) (in some subjects 25-50% practical test)

School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination for assessment of students at grade 10 has been in practice in Nepal since 1934¹. Over time, there have been changes to the contents and management of the SLC examination. At present the SLC examinations are administered centrally by the Office of the Controller of Examinations (OCE), a constituent organization within the Ministry of Education. Currently, the SLC examination covers exams across 8 subjects in the curriculum. The total pass mark is 32 out of 100 for each subjects and grades are awarded in the following pattern: distinction (80% of marks or above), first division (60%- 79.99%), and second division (45%- 59.99%), and third division (32%- 44.99%). Students who cannot pass in all the subjects at the first attempt may still get a chance to retake after 3-4 months, if they pass 6 out of 8 subjects including English, Maths and Nepali².

The SLC is perceived as the "iron gate" as it is the main gateway examination at the end of compulsory education. Questions have been raised regarding its relevance, reliability and validity in being an efficient measure of student's learning³. Issues with test administration⁴ and the validity⁵ of the test items and the limited number of questions in the item bank tend to support the practice of rote learning for the majority of students in grades nine and ten.

The recent NASA Report⁶ produced the following major findings:

- There are great differences in achievement between the students, schools, districts, and developmental regions.

¹ Mathema, Bista. 2005. Study on Students Performance in SLC. Kathmandu: MoES, ESAT

² NILE. 2012. SLC English Examination. United Kingdom: British Council

³ Wagley. 2010. SLC Syndrome: Impact of the Results. The Himalayan Times (2010.07.05)

⁴ Issues with test administration include the security of papers, variable invigilation practice, marking subjectivity, lack of anonymity in marking.

⁵ Issues linked to validity include too few test items/questions, questions linked to text book content not curriculum knowledge, sample questions and answer booklets on sale and printed in national newspapers.

⁶ Metsämuuronen, J. & Kafle, B. (2013) MoE

- The students in institutional schools perform well. Within the community schools, there is a wide range in average student achievement. The difference between the low and high performing community schools is remarkable.
- Students are apt in tasks related to memorization and recall, but are not effective in skills requiring application or ability at a higher cognitive level.
- The low educational and social background is directly and strictly related to low results.
- Achievement level still depends on caste/ethnicity as well as on the home language of the student.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Office of the Controller of Examinations (OCE) are committed to the introduction of a new model for the suite of examinations that will be a clear departure from the current system, as set out in the SSRP (2009-2015).

Scope of Services to be provided

- 1) Rapid qualitative appraisal of the current school education assessment system in terms of its effectiveness in ensuring students learn effectively and achieve learning outcomes, and identify key issues associated with the current examination system.
- 2) Review and assess the feasibility of the school examination system reform agenda proposed in the School Sector Reform Plan 2009-2015 and its extension/amendments.
- 3) Systemic review of similar initiatives within the South Asia / South East Asia region with a focus on lessons learned.
- 4) Propose framework and scope for implementing examination and assessment reform agenda under SSRP, particularly:
 - Integration of Office of Controller of Examination (OCE) and Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB) and structure of the forthcoming organization responsible for managing public examinations at the central level.
 - Public examination system at national, regional and district levels
 - Certification system, including technical education stream at SLC level.
 - Administration issues.
 - Identification of international best practices and the possibility of replicating them in the Nepalese assessment system. Outline of a public communications strategy to support the implementation of the reforms.
 - The framework and scope will also identify government interventions for reforms under SSRP and technical assistances / consultancies for implementing the project and pilot programs for national replication.
 - An assessment of the capacity of key concerned organizations including human resources for the implementation of the reform at national, regional and district levels. This will also include discussions with educational faculties of major universities, particularly with Tribhuvan University, on change in competency demand of educational workforce examination reform may bring.
- 5) Review implication of examination reform in overall education system especially on quality of learning, and in demand and employment oriented Curriculum Development, pedagogical practices, Teacher Training, Materials Development and national economic benefit. The chosen project design needs to be cognisant of any activities being undertaken to develop any of these areas, so that they align (as much as is practically possible).

- 6) Assess structure of school examination / assessment system in the context of federal structure of the country.
- 7) Identify roles of different stakeholders including the Co-ordination Committee, the Technical Advisory group, and the British Council in implementing the examination reform process. Who are the enablers and who is to implement?
- 8) Identify impact on curriculum reform and pedagogical practices, including in-service training, as enablers to achieving enhanced student learning
- 9) Explore vertical linkage with Higher Education institutions and practices of examination and assessment.
- 10) The final output will be a project design for implementing school examination reform in Nepal. The project design will:
 - outline evidence of the need for examination reform following reviews and appraisal
 - appraise the options for what a reformed examination system could look like and recommend an option
 - appraise the options for a cost-effective roadmap to that reformed system
 - recommend one of those options and develop an outline project log frame
 - describe the commercial viability of the project by conducting a quick financial and economic feasibility analysis of the chosen design option
 - identify financial management procedures
 - implementation and management arrangement for the examination reform project, taking into account present capacity

It is expected that the output of the TA will serve as a design document for major reform for the Government of Nepal to implement using its own resources and those of development partners.

The consultant team will examine the scope of work in detail during the inception phase and may propose any necessary revision to the scope of work.

TA Deliverables

- **Inception Report** – Brief inception report to outline agreed scope of work.
- **Review and Appraisal Report** – To cover the current educational assessment system, the feasibility of the School Sector Reform Plan, and systemic review of similar initiatives within the region.
- **Draft Final Report** – In the form of Draft Project design document.
- **Final Report** – Final Project design document.

Consulting Inputs

The British Council will recruit following consultants for the TA:

Consultant	Summary Scope
Team Leader / School Examination Specialist (International)	Team Leadership, technical input in examination reform design and producing final output.
Financial Management Specialist (International)	Financial and economic analysis, propose financial management system.
Deputy Team Leader / School	Technical input in examination reform design, review

Examination Specialist (National)	of current systems, assist team leader in producing final output, especially curriculum design and pedagogical practices.
Institutional Specialist (National)	Institutional and capacity assessment of relevant institutions, provide inputs on institutional and capacity development issues.
Financial Management Specialist (National)	Assist in Financial and economic analysis, propose financial management system.

Team Leader and International Financial Management Expert have been recruited and were deployed for a short mission. They have produced inception report and draft review and appraisal report.

Methodology

The consultants will largely rely on secondary data sources (particularly review of relevant field and pilot project studies to date), but will hold discussions with various stakeholders in Kathmandu and selected districts to review the current situation and to appraise the reform plan.

Implementation Arrangement

Office of Controller of Examination will be implementing agency for the TA. A Technical Advisory group has been formed consisting of members from Ministry of Education and relevant line agencies including Department of Education, Office of Controller of Examination, Curriculum Development Centre, National Centre for Educational Development, the Higher Secondary Education Board, and the British Council. The British Council in addition will provide Technical Assistance for the project design by financing the recruitment of the international and national consultants proposed below as part of this ToR. The role of the technical advisory group would be to support implementation of the Technical Assistance (TA) providing technical inputs and guidance to the TA team. The members of the technical advisory group will provide information and coordinate TA activities concerning their respective agencies. Some of the members of technical advisory group will accompany TA team members for field visits.

A high level Co-ordination Committee will be formed consisting of senior members from the same agencies present in the Technical Advisory group, to be chaired by the Secretary of Education. The committee and technical group will support the execution of this ToR with technical advice and the provision of counterpart staff time and furnished office space. The British Council will provide consultancy and project management services to action this ToR.

Draft Terms of Reference for National Consultants

Deputy Team Leader / School Examination Specialist (National)

The Deputy Team Leader will provide technical input in examination reform design, review of current systems and assist team leader in producing final output – specially the Reform Road Map (Action Plan) and the project design for implementation of that reform. More specifically, S/he will be responsible for:

1. Review the draft Review and Appraisal report and finalize the report. The specific point of the review shall be in terms of assessment of current educational system and feasibility of examination reform agenda in the School Sector Reform Plan.
2. Working with the Institutional Specialist, assist to propose framework for integration of Office of Controller of Examination (OCE) and Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB) to form an organization responsible for managing school level public examinations.
3. Propose framework for public examination system at national, regional and district levels and certification system including the ones for technical education stream at secondary level.
4. Review international best practices and assess possibility of replicating them in Nepalese Assessment System.
5. Prepare outline communications strategy to support the implementation of reforms.
6. Assist to identify required government reform initiatives and technical assistances for implementation of examination reform project.
7. Assist in brief capacity assessment of key stakeholder organizations.
8. Assist to review application of examination reform in overall education system from quality of learning, curriculum development, pedagogical practices to teacher training.
9. Assess structure of school examination / assessment system in the context of federal structure in the country.
10. Explore vertical linkage of new examination system with higher education institutions and practices of examination and assessment.
11. Identify roles of different stakeholders including the Co-ordination Committee, the Technical Advisory group, and the British Council in implementing the examination reform process.

Output / Deliverable:

Assist to produce the final report/ project design document with:

- Outline evidence of the need for examination reform following reviews and appraisal
- Appraise the options for what a reformed examination system could look like and recommend an option
- Appraise the options for a cost-effective roadmap to that reformed system
- Recommend one of those options and develop an outline project log frame
- Describe the commercial viability of the project by conducting a quick financial and economic feasibility analysis of the chosen design option

- Identify financial management procedures
- Implementation and management arrangement for the examination reform project, taking into account present capacity

Institutional Specialist (National)

The institutional Specialist will conduct institutional and capacity assessment of relevant institutions; provide inputs on institutional and capacity development issues. More specifically s/he will be responsible for:

1. Review the draft Review and Appraisal report and finalize the report. The specific point of the review shall be in terms of feasibility of examination reform agenda in the School Sector Reform Plan from the institutional and capacity assessment perspective.
2. Propose framework for integration of Office of Controller of Examination (OCE) and Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB) to form an organization responsible for managing school level public examinations.
3. Assist to propose framework for public examination system at national, regional and district levels.
4. Assess capacity of key concerned organizations including human resources for the implementation of the reform at national, regional and district levels.
5. Assist to review application of examination reform in overall education system from quality of learning, curriculum development, pedagogical practices to teacher training.
6. Assess structure of school examination / assessment system in the context of federal structure in the country.
7. Identify roles of different stakeholders including the Co-ordination Committee, the Technical Advisory group, and the British Council in implementing the examination reform process.

Output / Deliverable:

Assist to produce the final report/ project design document (providing inputs from Institutional Perspective) with:

- Outline evidence of the need for examination reform following reviews and appraisal
- Appraise the options for what a reformed examination system could look like and recommend an option
- Appraise the options for a cost-effective roadmap to that reformed system
- Recommend one of those options and develop an outline project log frame
- Describe the commercial viability of the project by conducting a quick financial and economic feasibility analysis of the chosen design option
- Identify financial management procedures
- Implementation and management arrangement for the examination reform project, taking into account present capacity

Financial Specialist (National)

The Financial Specialist will assist in Financial and economic analysis, and propose financial management system. More specifically S/he will be responsible for:

1. Review financial section of draft Review and Appraisal report and assist to finalize the report.

2. Assist to assess the financial and economic feasibility of the school examination system reform agenda proposed in the School Sector Reform Plan 2009-2015 and its extension/amendments.
3. Assist to propose framework for new examination system administration.
4. Assist to financially / economically appraise the reformed examination system and appraise cost effective road map to the reformed system.
5. Assist to describe the commercial viability of the project by conducting a quick financial and economic feasibility analysis of the chosen design option.
6. Assist to identify financial management procedures for examination reform project implementation.

Output / Deliverable:

Assist to produce the final report/ project design document (providing inputs from Financial Perspective) with:

- Outline evidence of the need for examination reform following reviews and appraisal
- Appraise the options for what a reformed examination system could look like and recommend an option
- Appraise the options for a cost-effective roadmap to that reformed system
- Recommend one of those options and develop an outline project log frame
- Describe the commercial viability of the project by conducting a quick financial and economic feasibility analysis of the chosen design option
- Identify financial management procedures
- Implementation and management arrangement for the examination reform project, taking into account present capacity