

NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORK SRI LANKA



CABINET COMMITTEE TO PREPARE AND SUBMIT
THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORK TO THE PARLIAMENT

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Preface

The education sector in Sri Lanka has been severely impacted by the covid pandemic of 2020 and the subsequent economic crisis caused by the debt default in March 2021. Recognizing the urgent need for reforms in this sector to achieve economic stability and development, the Government formed a Cabinet Sub-Committee of ten members, chaired by the President and including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education, to formulate and implement a National Education Policy Framework (NEPF) for the next 25 years. The Cabinet of Ministers approved this proposal on April 24, 2023, and appointed a 25-member Expert Officials Committee to support the Cabinet Sub-Committee.

The draft of the National Education Policy Framework (2023-2033), - prepared by the Expert Officials Committee, proposes a comprehensive and visionary roadmap for transforming the education sector in the country. This Framework outlines the policy principles and statements that will serve as the basis for developing strategies and action plans to achieve quality, equity, and excellence in education. The NEPF aligns with the national development goals and the country's global commitments on education.

The draft of the National Education Policy Framework contains the policy principles for making a transformative change in the education sector, in line with the vision of "a fully developed Sri Lanka in the year 2048". However, due to the digitization processes with rapid technological advancements and the rapid changes in the labor market, it is impractical to make long-term policy predictions. Therefore, the time frame for this National Education Policy Framework is confined to the next 10-year period (2023–2033) allowing a possible review in the future. Nevertheless, it is imperative that any policy and reform that are expected in the education sector in the coming period in need to be made in accordance with this National Education Policy Framework.

Once approved by the Cabinet/ Parliament, the draft NEPF (2023-2033) will provide the directions and guidance for the implementation of education reforms during that period. The Cabinet of Ministers may decide to form an Implementation Team to help the Committee to develop an implementation strategy, prepare the required legislation and regulations, oversee implementation, and engage with the stakeholders. Such an Implementation Team shall consist of Heads of Agencies responsible for the implementation, and individuals skilled in education policy formulation, implementation, evaluation and drafting of regulations and legislation.

Executive Summary

Sri Lanka's Education system which is heavy on content and examination-driven selects a small percentage of students on to an academic path (8.9% admitted to universities in 2021 according to UGC) and leave the majority of students without any credentials to show for their learning. The examination system has been a cornerstone of education in Sri Lanka for decades and offers 50+ subjects for GCE O/L, and 60+ subjects for GCE A/L, but it is overburdened and plagued with delays. Changes that prioritize quality over quantity is an imperative in this education system.

Further, an unregulated private education industry has emerged responding to the gaps in education delivery in state schools and as a result the education system is heavily dependent on private contributions paid as tuition fees and contributions through school development societies. A powerful lobby has kept private investments in the higher education sector at bay resulting in the state's education spending being unduly tilted towards higher education (PERC, 2023).

Sri Lanka needs to transform its education sector with a sense of urgency.

A Policy Framework for Transformation

A transformation of education cannot be envisioned without an understanding of emerging technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI), Climate Change, and local and global socio-economic realities, and their impact on education.

With the advances in AI, a conservative future scenario is that "The structures and processes of schooling remain the same, but schooling is extended with more individualized learning and other new modes" (OECD 2022).

A more distant scenario is "Education takes place everywhere, anytime. Distinctions between formal and informal learning are no longer valid as society turns itself to the power of the machine" (OECD, 2022). By implication, Ministries and regulatory institutions, national examinations, and other modes of credentialling and existing education providers would not be relevant to learners anymore in such a highly futuristic scenario.

In addition to AI, Climate Change and uncertainties in the future direction of socio-economic conditions make it difficult to predict a future education scenario with accuracy.

Irrespective of the future education scenario that may unfold, Sri Lanka cannot move forward without deep and systemic changes to the structuring of the Sector. Previous efforts at reforming curricula, textbooks, teacher training, digitalization and other operational issues in education have not been sustained. A reason for their non-sustainability is that these reforms were not accompanied by larger systemic changes to the structure of the Sector. Therefore, any system change should lead to a sustainable transformation of the education system and prepare Sri Lankans to face an uncertain future knowledgeable, skilled and attitudinally advanced.

The policy statements in the NEPF are presented under the three policy domains of Teaching, Learning and Credentialling; Governance; and Investments and Resources; and provide a blueprint for drafting rules, regulations, or legislation needed for the transformation.

The National Education Policy Framework (NEPF) 2023-2033 aims to,

- Revisit rules of **Teaching, Learning, & Credentialling,**
- Redefine the actors and institutions in **Governance,** and
- Optimize **Investments and Resources,**

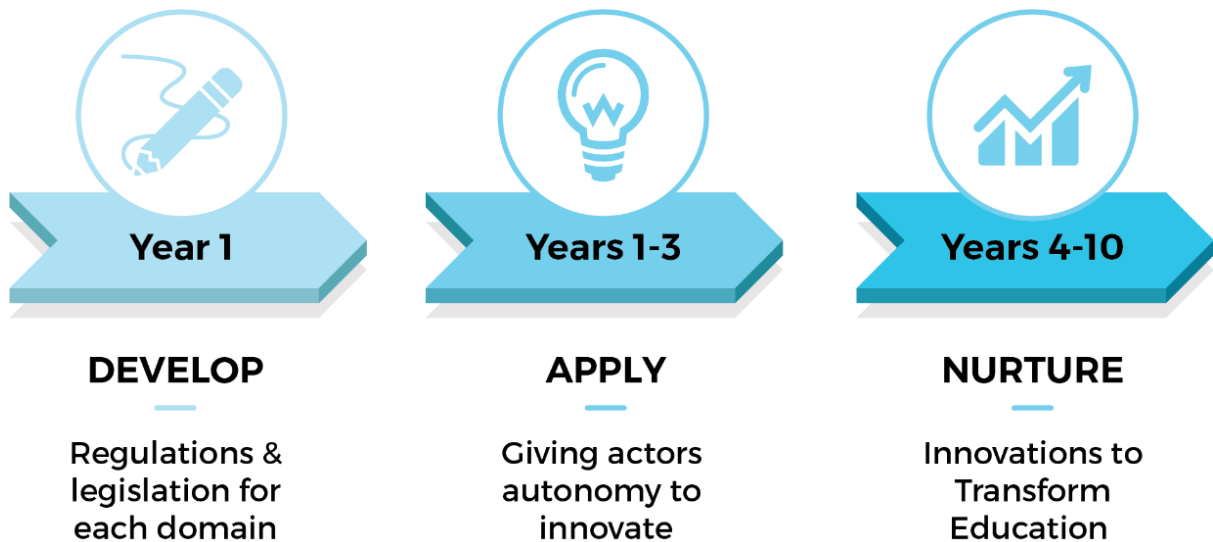
for a sustainable transformation of education in Sri Lanka.

The Sub-Sectors of education consist of Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education, and Tertiary Education (including Higher Education and Vocational Education). The broader transformations envisaged are common to all Sub-Sectors, but policy statements are delineated by Sub-Sector as needed.

Transformation Process

If Sri Lanka is to successfully transform education within 10 years, the required rules, regulations, legislation, and a determination of related performance measures must be in place within a year after the approval of the National Education Policy Framework (2023-2033). Priority shall be given to the establishment of Provincial Boards of Education with autonomy.

As regulations and legislation are developed, they shall be applied immediately giving autonomy to the newly defined actors and institutions to experiment, learn, and innovate to meet performance expectations with a healthy spirit of competition among them during years 1-4 of implementation.



Years 4 - 10 shall be the period for nurturing innovations to transform education.

The National Education Policy Framework (2023-2033) shall be the guiding document for any future reforms in the sector.

Assistance from local and international experts shall be sought to develop the required regulations and legislation based on the policy principles and statements delineated in the document.

It is envisaged that funding for this transformation will be obtained largely through the redeployment of existing resources, leveraging of additional resources through partnerships with non-state entities, and private contributions. Additional investments will be required but those should be deployed within the priorities identified in the NEPF.

POLICY STRATEGY

GOAL

Sustainably enhance the Access, Quality, Relevance and Digital Transformation of the education system through systemic changes to the Teaching, Learning and Credentialing; Governance; and Investments and Resources domains to expedite economic and social development.

KEY OBJECTIVES

Creating citizens who are productive, innovative, and informed with a civic consciousness

Sri Lanka increasingly attractive as an education hub

Equal opportunity for digital learning and digital literacy for all children

Reduce population of unskilled labour to 10% of the workforce

Access to education assured for all children irrespective of race, ethnicity, caste, religion, nationality, language, income, or disability

Education system is continuously evaluated and updated rapidly to ensure global competitiveness

Teaching and learning processes are interactive, engaging, holistic, and digitally enabled

KEY CHALLENGES

Key actors and institutions in the education sector do not work cohesively but in silos

Examination-driven teaching and learning process stifles creativity and innovation

No multiple progression pathways with cross-linkages across key education sectors

Prevalence of the digital divide and digital inequality across Sri Lanka

Investments are not deployed to areas with the highest impact/outcomes and the return on investments not monitored or measured

Key Transformations Envisaged

Below table highlights the key transformations envisaged through the policy statements referred in the NEPF. They are organized by domain and colour-coded by Sub-Sectors of education as per legend.

Legend

Early Childhood Education
General Education
Tertiary Education (Higher + Vocational)
Across all sectors of education

Table 1 - Summary of Key Expected Transformations

<i>Domain</i>	<i>Expected Transformation</i>	<i>Policy Statement</i>
Teaching, Learning and Credentialing	1. "Religions and Values" subject allowing students to learn about all religions for increased harmony in society	6.4
	2. Choice of education in the English medium in any school	6.2
	3. All students are proficient in the two national languages, English, numeracy and digital literacy appropriate to stage of education	6.1
	4. Blended Learning, STEAM, Mindfulness Learning, and other 21 st century approaches incorporated into all classrooms	6.8
	5. All students to make aware on artificial intelligence, climate change, sustainable development and other emerging global priorities	6.9 & 6.11
	6. Entrepreneurship, financial literacy and other functional skills through curricular or co-curricular activities	6.10
	7. National curricula and assessments at all levels in Education standardized against suitable international benchmarks	6.12 & 6.22

<i>Domain</i>	<i>Expected Transformation</i>	<i>Policy Statement</i>
	8. Standards and curricula in skills development in major sectors of the economy developed by relevant Skills Councils	6.13
	9. Combination of subjects in either academic and/or skills tracks with multiple pathways of progression along professional or vocational paths	6.18
	10. 12+ Years of Education with Completion Certificates at the end of Year 11 and Year 12+ capturing the full extent of their learning.	6.16 & 6.17
	11. Less weightage placed on final examinations and increased emphasis on project-based assessments	6.6 & 6.17
	12. Re-entry at any point and transfers across programmes	6.19
	13. Mandatory career guidance at key stages	6.21
	14. Mechanism for articulation and transfer between international and local qualifications	6.23
	15. Inclusive learning approaches facilitated to benefit students with special needs	6.25
	16. Accelerated learning processes facilitated to address the needs of high achieving students	6.26
	17. Teaching profession transformed to attract qualified individuals by introducing Certification and Rewarding mechanism and a National Council for Teachers, and readjustment of teacher remuneration	6.27
	18. Teachers and educators continuously trained and their capacity built for delivering enhanced services	6.28
	19. Internships and apprenticeships across all stages of education	6.29 (1)(c)
	20. Artificial intelligence, among other technologies as teaching and learning tools	6.29 (2)
	21. Opportunities created for teachers through international linkages to foster global exposure exchanges, and collaborations	6.29 (3)

<i>Domain</i>	<i>Expected Transformation</i>	<i>Policy Statement</i>
Governance	22. The Ministry of Education freed from administration to focus on policy direction	7.1 & 7.3
	23. Three bodies to advise the Minister for Education; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The National Advisory Committee for Education that will replace the National Education Commission - The Expert Committee for the Integration of ICT in Education - The Directorate of Provincial Education Authorities 	7.4
	24. Provincial Boards of Education to establish new colleges and universities in accordance with national standards.	7.4
	25. All schools shall be Provincial Schools. National Schools will cease to exist	7.5
	26. Education Development Boards to be established at Divisional level with autonomy for administration and education development in their jurisdictions	7.5
	27. National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development absorbed into the National Institute of Education ending the coordination problems in the sector	7.6
	28. Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission to be transformed into the National Skills Commission with a mandate to unify the existing state vocational training providers	7.7
	29. The University Grants Commission shall be transformed into the National Higher Education Commission with responsibility for both state and non-state institutions	7.8
	30. All education providers shall have autonomy within the guidelines set by the national and provincial authorities	7.4 & 7.10
	31. Accountability through an Annual Report by the Minister on national education outcomes	7.1
32. National Quality Assurance & Accreditation	7.9	

<i>Domain</i>	<i>Expected Transformation</i>	<i>Policy Statement</i>
	mechanism established to enable unified quality assurance and accreditation across all sectors	
Investments and Resources	33. Participation of non-state partners including public-private partnerships facilitated in all sectors	8.1
	34. Provisions for Early Childhood Education optimized through partnerships	8.2
	35. Financing Government schools through funding based on enrolment, existing facilities and performance. Special provisions for schools catering to disadvantaged and vulnerable children/communities	8.3
	36. Financing tertiary education in state institutions through three components - Government funding, student contributions, and other funds generated by the institution	8.4
	37. A period of three years for the transition from line-item based funding to enrolment-based funding in tertiary education	8.4
	38. Students receiving Government grants and Government-backed loans have a choice of enrollment in state or non-state tertiary education institutions	8.4 (2) & 8.5
	39. Limits to ownership by foreign investors in higher education and skills development removed	8.10
	40. Incentive schemes for investors to establish universities and vocational training centers in unutilized and underutilized facilities on lease	8.11
	41. Competitive funding and/or incentives for education institutions for research, innovations in teaching, digital transformation, partnerships with industry and international linkages	8.12

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1. Introduction

The Education Sector is a key driver of human capital development, which has a direct impact on Sri Lanka's economic performance and resilience. The Government is committed to undertaking urgent reforms in this Sector to enhance the quality and relevance of education for various social and economic outcomes. A well-educated workforce can perform complex tasks, innovate, and cope with changing socio-economic and environmental challenges. It can also contribute to the advancement of technology, science, sustainability and future-oriented thinking. Therefore, the Government aims to achieve a gradual but steady transformation of the entire education system of the country to become more globally competitive.

Sri Lanka's education system has many achievements, such as universal access, high literacy rates, and gender parity. However, it also faces bottlenecks that limit its potential for development. For instance, it has low participation in higher education, high emigration of skilled workers, and a sense of entitlement among learners. These issues stem from an outdated and inflexible education system that does not cultivate creativity, competencies, and employability. Sri Lanka needs to transform its curriculum, teaching, and evaluation methods to foster holistic and lifelong learning.

Sri Lanka's education system needs a comprehensive reform in light of the recent economic downturn. The country's development and resilience depend on the capacity of its people and workers to cope with emerging challenges in a creative and critical way. To achieve this, the national education system has to move away from its rigid structure and embrace a more flexible and innovative approach that fosters 21st century skills and competencies, aligned with Vision 2048.

The following text is a draft of the National Education Policy Framework 2023-2033, which represents the Vision 2048 of building a fair, inclusive, holistic, integrated and streamlined education system that will foster and enable diverse individuals and shape them into intelligent, hardworking and civic minded citizens.

2. Applicability and Scope

The Policy Framework is based on the comprehensive body of work produced by the Presidential Task Force on Sri Lanka's Education Affairs in 2020 and is informed by the report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Expanding Higher Education Opportunities and the brief reports submitted by the five Core Groups of the Expert Officials Committee appointed to assist the Cabinet Sub-Committee to formulate the National Education Policy Framework (NEPF).

This Framework outlines the existing challenges (Annex 1), the policy goals, objectives, policy principles and statements to overcome them. The Framework aims to provide a clear and coherent direction for the policy implementation and evaluation. The Framework is intended to be a living document that can be updated and revised as needed.

This Policy Framework consists of policy principles and statements which are essential components of a National Policy Document. They are organized along the following three domains defined below.

- 1) **Teaching, Learning and Credentialing** domain captures changes to the Rules, Procedures and Processes concerning the same.
- 2) **Governance** domain captures the enhanced and coordinated framework of Actors and Institutions.
- 3) **Investments and Resources** domain captures the re-alignment and optimization of financial and other Resources.

These policy domains are essential for capturing the issues and solutions, and necessary for achieving the desired outcomes in their entirety. They form a coherent and comprehensive framework that covers all the relevant aspects of the Education Sector.

3. Policy Goal

The overall goal of the National Education Policy Framework (2023-2033) is to sustainably enhance the Access, Quality, Relevance and Digital Transformation of the education system through systemic changes to the Teaching, Learning & Credentialing; Governance; and Investments & Resources domains to expedite economic and social development.

4. Policy Objectives

Access

- Paths of education progression available to all according to the choice and unique capabilities of each.
- Access to paths of progression is assured for all children irrespective of race, ethnicity, caste, religion, nationality, language, income, or disability.
- Inclusivity in access includes equality of opportunity for digital learning and digital literacy for all children.

Quality

- Education system leads to citizens who are productive, innovative, and informed with a civic consciousness.
- Citizens are prepared for an uncertain future in the social, economic, biological, and physical environment, including climate change.
- Sri Lanka is increasingly attractive as an education hub for foreign students, education providers and educators.
- Sri Lankan education is competitive and keeps up to date with global standards and trends of the 21st century.
- The education system is continuously evaluated and updated rapidly to ensure competitiveness and to give our students the best chance to shine on a global scale.



Relevance

- Sri Lankan society is shaped by the national goals of education.
- Population of unskilled labour reduced to 10% or less, satisfying the country's economic and social needs.
- Sri Lanka meets globally recognized skills and competency standards to attract foreign investors.

Digital Transformation

- Digital tools such as digitalized content, artificial intelligence, digital platform and virtual modes of teaching and learning are used increasingly to enable collaboration, communication among learners and educators, and accommodate varied learning styles and abilities to ensure an inclusive education.
- Teaching and learning processes are interactive, engaging, holistic, and digitally enabled.
- Data analytics and artificial intelligence are used to monitor, assess and improve learning outcomes and processes as appropriate.
- Education is self-directed, personalized, more engaging, connected and data-driven through digitalization.
- Students are digitally literate and have the skills to keep up with the changing demands and opportunities of the digital era.

5. Policy Principles

The policy principles are presented in terms of the three domains that have a distinct and comprehensive role in defining and shaping education.

Teaching, Learning and Credentialing

Teaching, learning, and credentialing processes shall ensure a seamless array of education and training opportunities for all learners to reduce the unskilled population, improve employability of those credentialled, and foster innovation and creativity, for a diverse and dynamic human capital resource pool in the country.

Governance

Actors and institutions with a stake in the Sector, both state and non-state, shall be identified and their roles and functions clearly defined allowing for autonomy based on the principle of subsidiarity, ensuring alignment with national standards to minimize top-down decision-making and avoid institutions acting in silos.

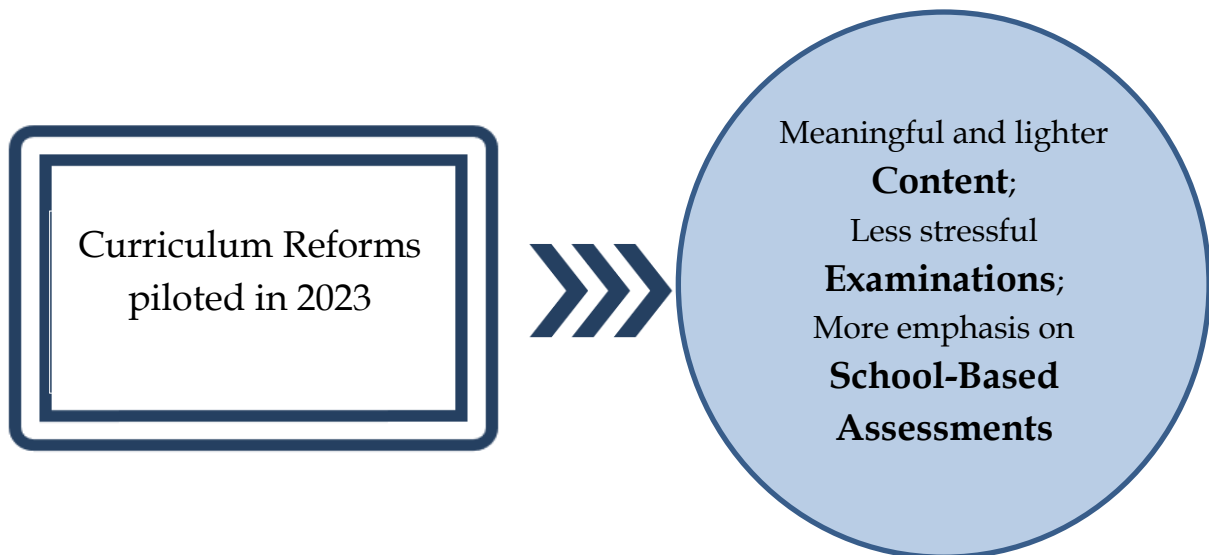
Investments and Resources

Resources for education, public or private, shall be harnessed and optimized to provide pathways of learning for all education seekers, and public funding for education shall prioritize General Education while the ability to pay will not be an obstacle for early childhood education and 12+ years of schooling in its entirety including extra-curricular activities.

6. Policy Statements | Teaching, Learning and Credentialing

Curricula and Learning

- 6.1 All students shall demonstrate minimum proficiency (to be determined) in the two national languages (Sinhala and Tamil), the link language (English), numeracy and digital literacy at the end of Primary, Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary stages of education.
- 6.2 Medium of instruction in General Education shall be reviewed and modified to enable education completely or partially in the English medium in any school as a priority.
- 6.3 All children shall have the opportunity to learn through the curriculum about Sri Lanka's rich history, culture, values, its ethnic and religious diversity, and inculcate a Sri Lankan identity and a sense of their place in the world as proud citizens.
- 6.4 Religious education shall focus on making students aware of core aspects of all religions and values in addition to learning about students' professed religion through a 'Religions and Values' subject.
- 6.5 Learning Goals;
 - Pre-school learning goals shall be structured under six key learning areas which include aesthetics and creative activities; discovery of the world; language and literacy; motor skills development; numeracy; and social and emotional development.
 - Primary and Secondary Education shall meet minimum standards specified by International Standard Classification of Education
 - Tertiary Education shall be as per learning outcomes in Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF)
- 6.6 Curricular Reforms piloted in 2023 will be further improved to make content, lighter and more meaningful, examinations less stressful, and School-Based Assessment more valid.



- 6.7 Skills electives will be available at Senior Secondary level (Years 10-11) and a skills track at Upper Secondary (Years 12+)
- 6.8 Progressive teaching and learning approaches such as Blended Learning, STEAM, Mindfulness Learning, and other 21st century approaches shall be incorporated into all classrooms as overarching principles.
- 6.9 Each student in all levels of education shall have the opportunity to be aware of data literacy, artificial intelligence and its societal impacts and privacy, security, fairness, accountability, and transparency issues in data use, as appropriate for each level, ensuring that students are informed users.
- 6.10 Each student in all levels of education shall have the opportunity to inculcate entrepreneurship, financial literacy, volunteerism, and other functional skills and attitudes through curricular or co-curricular activities.
- 6.11 Areas of global priorities such as environmental protection, sustainable development, climate change adaptation, and risk management shall be integrated into streams of learning.
- 6.12 National curricula at all levels of education shall be standardized against suitable international benchmarks.
- 6.13 Standards and curricula in skills development in major sectors of the economy shall be developed by relevant Skills Councils.

Assessment and Progression

6.14 Students shall have a diversity of options to achieve learning outcomes expected at each of the four stages of School Education:

- Primary (Years 1-5; Ages 5-10) - Basic life skills
- Junior Secondary (Years 6-9; Ages 10-14) - Foundation for life
- Senior Secondary I (Years 10-11; Ages 14-16) - Foundation for career readiness
- Senior Secondary II (Year 12+; Ages 16-18) - Foundation for academic, vocational, and professional life

Note: Senior Secondary I and Senior Secondary II stages, respectively, are popularly known as GCE O/L and GCE A/L stages.

6.15 Pre-Primary Education shall enable students to be ready for the Primary stage of education in school.

6.16 All Students shall have the opportunity to complete Senior Secondary Education on time and enter Tertiary Education or Training by Age 18.

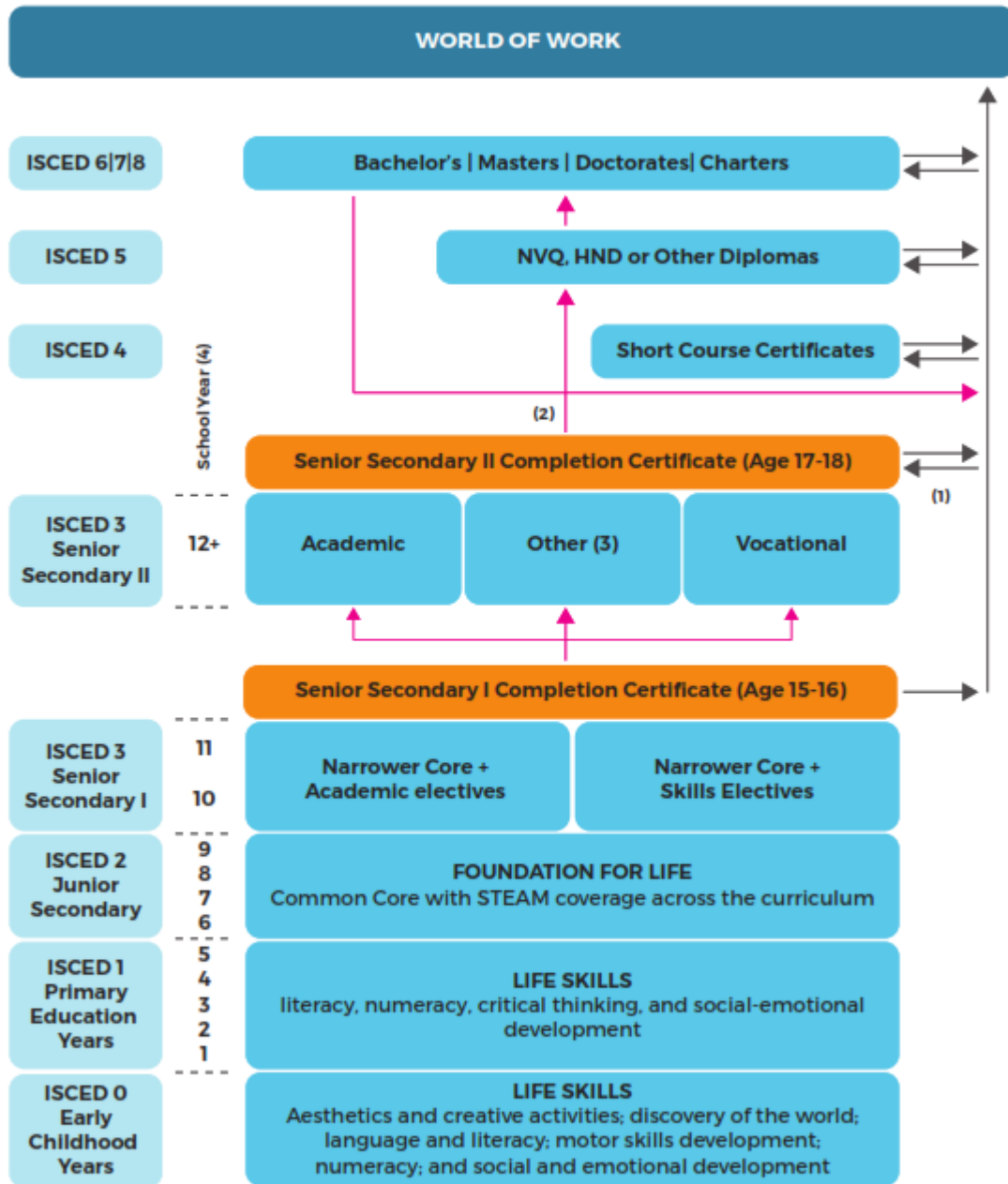
To ensure that:

- **Mandatory School Completion Certificates at Grades 11 and 12+:** All students completing Year 11 or Year 12+ will be awarded a Completion Certificate capturing the full extent of their learning at school during those years.
- **No delays in moving from “Year 11 to Year 12+” or “12+ to Tertiary Education”:** All students will be promoted based on their Completion Certificates without having to wait for the results of national examinations (O/L and A/L).
- **Mandatory Minimum Proficiency:** Minimum proficiency in Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital Literacy and completion of school-based curricular, co-curricular and extra- curricular assignments are mandatory for receiving a Completion Certificate.
- All students will be promoted based on their Completion Certificates without having to wait for the results of national examinations (O/L and A/L).

- GCE O/L and GCE A/L or NVQ qualifications may be obtained by students depending on their further education and training aspirations.
 - Results of GCE O/L may be used by School Boards to allow students to change tracks/streams in GCE A/L, or admit students from other School Board jurisdictions.
 - **Legally Mandated Timeframes for National Examinations/Assessments;** National Authorities awarding GCE O/L and GCE A/L examination results and NVQ certificates, or School Boards awarding Completion Certificates shall be legally mandated to conduct exams/assessments and release results by specified dates.
 - Students who proceed to Senior Secondary-II will have the option to follow academic, vocational or mixed streams and receive a Completion Certificate at age 18.
- 6.17 Those who leave school after Senior Secondary-I shall have the opportunity for re-entry to further education and training through a Senior Secondary-II completion certificate equivalent. Less weightage shall be placed on final, summative examinations such as GCE O/L and GCE A/L by making them optional. Increased emphasis will be placed on formative assessment of projects, assignments and portfolios of co-curricular or extra-curricular work to be captured through Completion Certificates.
- 6.18 To ensure a more holistic and well-rounded education, selection of a combination of subjects in either academic and/or skills tracks shall be available to all students in Secondary Education, allowing for multiple pathways of progression along Professional or Vocational paths (Figure 1).
- 6.19 Provisions for re-entry at any point and transfers across programmes shall be articulated by the National Higher Education Commission and/or the National Skills Commission enabling upskilling and reskilling (Figure 1).
- 6.20 Assessments shall be designed to serve the needs of all learners, not just a small percentage who would pursue an Academic path.
- 6.21 Students and their parents/guardians shall be provided with mandatory career guidance regarding Tertiary Education and career pathways at key stages in their Schooling Education, with guidance counselors equipped with training and qualifications to provide assessments, inputs, and guidance including options in skills development based on student's interests, skills, and capacities.

- 6.22 National Assessments shall be standardized against suitable international benchmarks.
- 6.23 Articulation and transfer between international and local qualifications shall be expedited to facilitate smooth progression for any student across the education sector from early childhood to higher education.
- 6.24 Rates of retention, completion and time to complete at Education Institutions shall be comparable with international standards.
- 6.25 Inclusive learning approaches shall be facilitated and supported to benefit students with special needs and in special circumstances.
- 6.26 Accelerated learning processes shall be introduced and facilitated to address the needs of high achieving students.

A NEW PROGRESSION PATHWAY TO REDUCE THE UNSKILLED POPULATION AND OFFER A SEAMLESS ARRAY OF EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL (FIGURE 1)



- (1) Re-entry to ISCED 3 level at any stage through GCE A/L equivalent to be defined.
- (2) Entry into any track is possible with top-up credentials as needed.
- (3) Other streams may include Foundation for higher education programs or other skills qualifications.
- (4) The start of the 1-13 School Year span may be adjusted according to future circumstances.

Abbreviations: FT-Full time; NVQ-National vocational Qualification; PT: Part-Time

Teacher/ Educator Development

- 6.27 The teaching profession in Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary Education shall be transformed into a profession of choice by establishing;
- A National Teacher Certification System (NTCS) to enhance teachers' professional quality.
 - A process to recognize and reward eminent teachers and principals.
 - Attractive service credits for serving in disadvantaged or remote communities.
 - Evaluation and readjustment of teacher remuneration structure in accordance with the emerging professional conditions
 - A National Council of Teachers (NCT) as the mechanism to receive teacher inputs into decision-making and professionalization of teaching services as in other recognized professions.
- 6.28 Teachers and educators in all Sub-Sectors of education shall be continuously trained and their capacity built for delivering enhanced services:
- Using inclusive approaches for teaching and catering to those with special needs.
 - Promoting social and emotional development through a safe enabling environment.
 - Integrating issues related to sustainable development, climate change, and other relevant national and global priorities in their teaching.
 - Integrating technology into education, using a variety of tools and platforms aiming to enhance the learning experiences of students and improving student engagement, and using other innovative teaching methods.
 - Following guidelines and regulations on ethical use of data and technology tools such as artificial intelligence, issues in data use such as privacy, security, fairness, accountability, and transparency

Partnerships

- 6.29 Partnerships with the industry shall be encouraged for state or non-state institutions to supplement state support. Some of the areas for partnerships are as follows;
- 1) **Teaching and Research** in emerging areas of national and global importance by collaborating in developing;

- a. New curricula or programs for sustainable and climate-friendly entrepreneurship, mechanisms for volunteering, and new material for teaching.
 - b. Competency standards, curricular, and teachers qualified in skills.
 - c. Internships and apprenticeships in Secondary Education, Higher Education, and Skills Development, offering students hands-on experience in real-world applications.
 - d. Appropriate models and entities including companies, centers, and hubs for accessing necessary resources, industry/ business practices and industry personnel as lecturers.
- 2) **Digital Transformation of Education** by incorporating artificial intelligence, among other technologies as teaching and learning tools for personalized and inclusive learning, Developing facilities for virtual learning and Virtual Universities, and other adaptations to changing learning needs.
- 3) **International Linkages** to foster global exposure and collaborations on national and global priorities, facilitate exchange programs and attract fee-paying international students for cross-fertilization.

7. Policy Statements | Governance

- 7.1 **The Minister for Education** shall be responsible for formulating policies and programmes, monitoring and evaluating their implementation, coordinating with Provincial Authorities to ensure Provincial plans are consistent with national policy, standardizing and regulating teacher and other related education services, and facilitating student welfare and safety.

The Minister for Education shall report annually to the Parliament and the public on National Education Outcomes in terms of Access, Quality and Relevance, by Education Sub-Sector, key regulatory or administrative institutions.

- 7.2 **The Minister for Education shall be advised by;**

- **A National Advisory Committee for Education** composed of distinguished educators with expertise and experience in Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education, appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers and published in a Gazette, shall counsel and guide the Minister for Education. This Advisory Committee will replace the current National Education Commission (NEC).
- **An Expert Committee for the Integration of ICT in Education** consisting of industry experts shall be established to develop and monitor the implementation of the Technology Integration Strategy across all Sub-Sectors of education and administration.
- **A Directorate of Provincial Education Authorities**, consisting of Provincial representative/s appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers, shall advise the Minister of Education to plan, execute and evaluate education initiatives and projects at Provincial level.

- 7.3 **The Ministry of Education** shall consist of the following divisions for an efficient and coordinated operation;

- Policy Research and Formulation
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Inspectorate for Quality Assurance and Control
- Provincial Affairs Coordination
- Digital Transformation and Data Management

7.4 **Provincial Boards of Education** shall be established in the each of the nine Provinces, with autonomy within national standards to ensure education policies and practices are tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of different provinces. The Provincial Boards of Education may establish new colleges and universities in accordance with national standards.

7.5 **Education Development Boards** shall be established through a scientific school mapping exercise, at appropriate level/levels below Provincial Boards of Education for the development of quality of education and efficient education administration. Each Education Development Board may consist of **Clusters of Schools** with scientifically determined number of schools and student population, taking into account the geographical proximity, to make up the jurisdictions of each Cluster of Schools. One or more such Boards may be established within an administrative jurisdiction.

The types, number, jurisdiction and boundaries of the Boards of Education shall be determined and Gazetted by the Minister for Education in consultation with Provincial Authorities such that each Board has a sufficient number of schools to ensure that all children have access to suitable paths of education progression (*Figure 1*)

A suitable cadre for each cluster and regulations for teacher transfers shall be established to ensure each cluster has a sufficient number of teachers.

All schools shall be Provincial Schools. National Schools will cease to exist.

7.6 **National Institute of Education (NIE)** shall be responsible for developing curricula, standards and providing quality teacher education and professional development of personnel, in line with accepted international standards in General Education which includes Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education.

The National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development shall be absorbed into the NIE as the division responsible for Early Childhood Education ending the coordination problems among relevant agencies.

7.7 **National Skills Commission (NSC)** will replace the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) as a rebranded authority for Skills Development. NSC shall be responsible for planning, coordination and development of the Skills Sector in state and non-state institutions across

National and Provincial levels; conducting annual labour market mapping; taking steps to unify the existing public sector vocational training providers as a system of colleges with linkages to the university system; establishing Skills Councils and delegating functions to them as they are established.

- 7.8 **National Higher Education Commission (NHEC)** will replace the University Grants Commission and shall be responsible for the coordination of higher education adhering to national policies and maintenance of academic standards in all degree and degree equivalent credentials issued by Higher Educational Institutions, whether State, Non-State, National and Provincial.

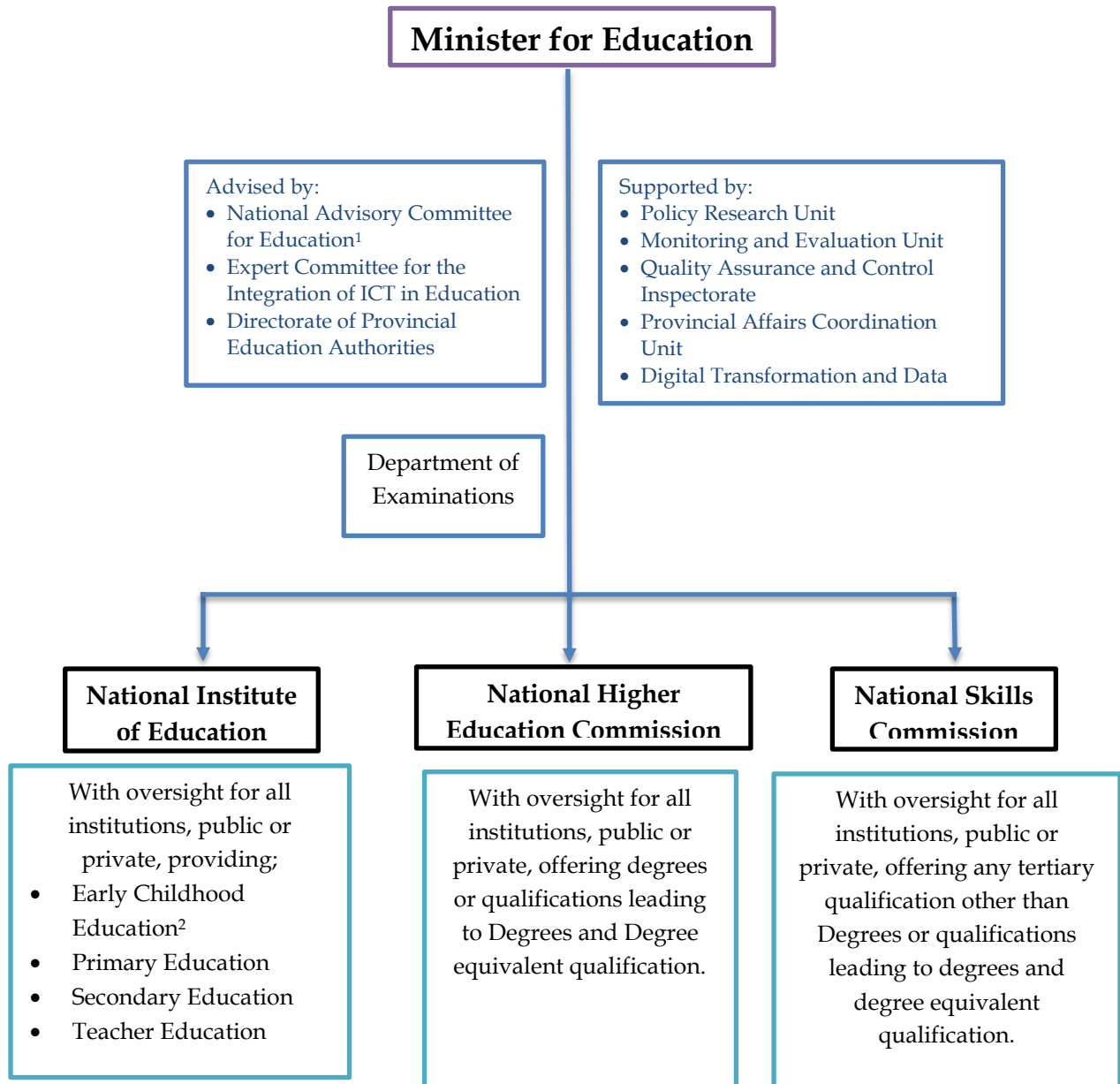
NHEC shall establish **University Councils** as policy making bodies of the universities fostering a positive academic atmosphere beyond administrative, financial and monitoring functions.

NHEC shall coordinate the streamlining of the visa processes for foreign students and establishing a mechanism for them to be employed in Sri Lanka after graduation.

Establishment of new universities shall be done under the Provincial Councils. Existing degree awarding institutes shall become **Provincial Universities** under a new law.

- 7.9 **Quality Assurance and Accreditation mechanism** shall be established for Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary Education, Higher Education, and Skills Development in both State and Non-State Education Institutions at national level to maintain consistent quality standards.
- 7.10 **All Education Providers** shall have autonomy within the guidelines set by the national and Provincial Authorities, and School Boards where relevant, in administration, finance, human resource management and selection of students.

Indicative Governance Structure (Figure 2)



Note 1: The National Education Commission Act (Act No. 19 of 1991) shall be repealed, and the functions redefined and incorporated into the Ministry of Education as the National Advisory Committee for Education.

Note 2: The National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development shall be a part of the National Institute of Education to resolve the lack of role definition in the regulation and supervision of Early Childhood Education.

8. Policy Statements | Investments and Resources

- 8.1 Participation of Non-State partners including Public-Private Partnerships shall be facilitated in all sectors.
- 8.2 Existing provisions for Early Childhood Education shall be optimized through partnerships and provisions shall be made to ensure access for economically disadvantaged families.
- 8.3 Financing of Primary and Secondary Education in Government schools shall be on a per-student basis with the per-student rate adjusted according to the state of existing facilities, performance of the school, and other criteria. A period of three years shall be allowed for the transition from present inputs-based funding. A higher per-student rate shall be applied to institutions catering to disadvantaged /vulnerable children or communities.
- 8.4 Financing for all Tertiary Education in State institutions shall consist of three components - Government grants, student contributions, and other income.
 - 1) Government grants shall be enrolment-based and performance-based according to a formula to be determined. These funds may include incentives to increase enrolments in subject's in-demand by the industry and for a transitional arrangement endorsed by the Industry Sector Skills Council.
 - 2) Student Contributions shall include Government grants, Government-backed loans, and out-of-pocket contributions. The distribution of each and the related formulae, including criteria for merit and ability to pay, to be determined.
 - 3) Other income secured by education institutions for research and commercialization projects shall be rewarded with additional finances through a dedicated fund.

A period of three years shall be allowed for the transition from line-item based funding to enrolment-based funding. 9

- 8.5 Public financing for Tertiary Education in Non-State institutions may consist of two components - Government grants and Government-backed loans for qualifying students, and rewards for research.
- 8.6 Government's support to students to meet the student contribution, for both State and Non-State institutions, will be determined based on each student's merit and ability to pay. Such support shall consist of Government grants and Government-backed loans.
- 8.7 All students who receive Government-backed loans for their Tertiary Education shall be informed of their terms of repayment.
- 8.8 The service obligation of students who receive Government grants shall be determined to ensure that the country receives value for the investment.
- 8.9 All institutions receiving public funds shall abide by diversity and other criteria of national importance. Such obligations shall be enforced through mandates and/or rewards.
- 8.10 Limits to ownership by foreign investors in Higher Education and Skills Development shall be removed with an investment threshold to attract high quality institutions.
- 8.11 Incentive schemes shall be formulated to facilitate investors to establish Universities and Vocational Training Centers in unutilized and underutilized facilities on lease.
- 8.12 Mechanism for awarding competitive grants and/or creating incentives for education institutions for (a) Fostering a culture of research (b) Innovations in teaching (c) Digital transformation of education (d) Partnerships with the industry and (e) International linkages shall be established.
- 8.13 Resources shall be facilitated and mobilized through partnerships for inclusive learning and accelerated learning.

- ENDS -

Key Challenges

Early Childhood Education

1. Lack of coordination among agencies: The responsibility for Early Childhood Education is distributed among the Ministry of Education, National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development (NSECD) in the Ministry Women and Child Affairs, and Provincial Authorities. In 2020, the National Management and Regulatory Committee (NMRC) was established in the Ministry of Education to bring these entities together, but coordination remains poor.
2. Lack of facility for legal enforcement: The NSECD has not been able to enforce the set standards due to lack of related legal provisions.
3. Inadequate focus on holistic nature of ECE: According to UNICEF, the focus of ECE should be on early cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional skills necessary for participation in school and society. Currently there is a misguided focus on achieving reading, writing and mathematics capabilities in pre-primary education.
4. Variability in quality due to multiplicity of actors: The provision of ECE services in Sri Lanka has been largely dependent on non-State resources with the majority of 19,000 plus ECE centers being run as non-state entities. Follow-up and oversight of these centers by provincial authorities is not consistent and compensation for early childhood teachers and caregivers is inadequate and highly variable across centers.
5. Inequalities in access and enrolment: There are considerable variations in access to ECE services, in particular for the poor in rural areas depriving them of benefits of ECE.
6. Children with special needs do not receive sufficient attention and have no access to inclusive and innovative learning approaches.

Primary and Secondary Education

1. Key actors and institutions in the education sector do not work cohesively but in silos.
2. Decision making is top-down suppressing engagement and innovation closer to the teaching and learning process.
3. National examinations are designed to select a small percent of students onto an academic path, with majority of students leaving the school system without anything to show for the years spent in school.
4. Examination-driven teaching and learning process stifles creativity or innovation.
5. Limitations in education for special needs students due to stringent education practices and limited access that facilitate a holistic education for them.
6. The share of public investments in general education have been decreasing as governments have prioritized responding to demands from the higher education sector. (See Public Sector Expenditure Report)
7. No multiple progression pathways with cross-linkages across key education sectors.
8. The categorizing of schools as National and Provincial has made a vast disparity attributing to varying facilities and resources.
9. Opening and naming schools based on race, language and religion has also contributed to ethnic, linguistic and religious disharmony in the society or at least remains as an obstacle to national unity.
10. Skewed distribution of types of subject stream for A/L offered in schools.
11. Absence of a formal system to transfer from school to vocational education leading to students leaving the school system and entering into employment without training.
12. Prevalence of the digital divide and digital inequality across Sri Lanka as highlighted during the learning loss during Covid-19.

13. Limited exposure to future-centric curriculums that integrate concepts like artificial intelligence, digital literacy, data science, and associated ethical considerations.
14. Access to tools and platforms available to city schools are not available in other areas, significantly decreasing the competitiveness of students from these schools.
15. Absence of career counselling and career guidance to guide the students to maximize their potential.
16. Lack of development of soft skills.
17. Lack of space for innovation interlinked with environmental factors, which prevent education catering to global needs related to sustainable development and climate action.
18. The non-integration of risks such as climate and disaster risk in general education, and solution driven approaches being generated through individual practical learning processes.
19. The teaching profession does not attract the most dedicated or knowledgeable personnel and eminent teachers in the system do not receive sufficient recognition.

Tertiary Education

(Includes Technical and Vocational Education and Higher Education)

1. Unattractiveness of the TVET sector for school leavers and increasing demand for degree status by students enrolled in the TVET sector.
2. Limitations related to focus on generating employment which is forward-thinking and addressing global issues.
3. Inconsistency in quality standards and control. Education and skills development are not aligned with economic demand or industry needs.
4. Public investment is entirely supply driven and input based and are not deployed to areas with the highest impact/outcomes with the return on investments not monitored or measured.
5. Limitations in considering key impacts on the employability and futuristic needs, taking into consideration global risks - i.e., civic literacy; climate crisis; financial literacy; entrepreneurial skills.