



# Contracts for Review of Education System Wheatley Consultants Ltd.

Office of the Auditor General  
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## Introduction

1. In its effort to modernize the territory's educational system and bring it on par with international systems the Ministry of Education and Culture (the Ministry), engaged a number of Consultants to assist it in reviewing and effecting a sector wide upgrade of the territory's education system. This report reviews the outcomes of the consultancy contracts which were issued to Wheatley Consulting Limited for services related to development of the education system.

### Objective

2. The audit seeks to examine whether the objectives of the Ministry were achieved and the principles of value for money were applied in carrying out of the consultancy contracts.

### Scope and Methodology

3. The audit focused on examination of the Ministry of Education's consultancy contracts with Wheatley Consulting Ltd. The examination covered the period February 2008 to February 2011, except where stated otherwise, and included a review of files, reports and records of the Ministry and Department of Education. The examination also included interviews with the staff of those two offices and the National Curriculum Redesign Project Coordinator. Research was performed on the Middle State Association accreditation requirements and processes, and other relevant concepts as they relate to curriculum development and accreditation.

## Outputs and Outcomes

4. *The Consultancy has been instrumental in assisting the Ministry in advancing some of its goals including those related to accreditation and the curriculum, other areas stipulated under the contracts appear not to have been adequately supported by the Consultant.*

5. In February 2008, the Ministry engaged Wheatley Consulting Ltd. (the Consultant) on contract. The terms of reference detailed in the Description of the Consultancy stipulated that the engagement was to:

- a) develop and implement an academic credit system in the High Schools in the British Virgin Islands, as a first step in preparing the schools for accreditation of the Middle States Association Commission on Secondary Schools;
- b) reorganize the duties and responsibilities of the Principal and Assistant Principals of the Elmore Stoutt High School to include the duties and responsibilities for the new post of Deputy Principal;
- c) assist Miss Delores Kirk (Consultant) in reviewing and developing strategies for the implementation of the National Curriculum Redesign Project;
- d) provide leadership and guidance in the restructuring of the Ministry of Education and Culture to reduce duplication of duties and rationalize the inter and intra departmental use of resources; and

- e) assist with reviewing grade levels in the schools and the Reading Programme.

6. The initial contract was executed for a term of one year commencing 1 February 2008. The Consultant was issued three subsequent contracts on substantially the same terms, scope and cost.

### **Review of the Educational System**

7. The initial consultancy contract provided that Wheatley Consulting Ltd would be assisting Miss Delores Kirk in reviewing and developing strategies for the implementation of the National Curriculum Redesign Project. In addition, items d) and e) of the Wheatley Consultant's terms of reference provided an overlap with items ii. and v. of Petty Contract # 29/2007 issued to Miss Kirk.

8. There however appeared to be no significant ongoing collaboration between the two consultants. The Consultant's report stated that only four one-on-one meetings were held with Miss Kirk during the nine month overlapping period of the two consultancy contracts. In addition, both consultants and the Chief Education Officer attended various meetings called by the Permanent Secretary for monitoring and guiding the consultancies. The lack of direct collaboration, coordination and sharing between the consultants may have deprived the Ministry from achieving an improved product in terms of the education system review. The Consultancy with Delores Kirk ended in December 2009 without a final report or satisfactory outcome.

### **Accreditation of the High Schools**

9. The apparent primary focus of the Wheatley Consultancy was to initiate the process for the two major public secondary schools, Elmore Stoutt High School and Bregado Flax Educational Centre to become accredited. It was anticipated that accreditation would introduce internationally accepted uniform standards into the schools and make acceptance easier for local students who apply to higher educational institutions abroad. The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA) Accreditation Board was approach for this process. This institution is based in the United States and is currently undergoing a similar accreditation process with the H Lavity Stoutt Community College. xxx

10. The Consultant prepared and submitted accreditation applications for both secondary schools to the MSA in February 2010. Following the submissions, a MSA representative visited the territory in September 2010 and performed preliminary assessments to determine if the applications would be accepted. The applications were accepted and both schools commenced a self-evaluation process in preparation for the MSA evaluation team visit.

11. At the time of writing both schools, were in the "Self Study" phase of the process, and attempting to address concerns and shortcomings raised by MSA. Some of the areas in which shortcomings were indentified included but were not limited to:

- i. School facilities;
- ii. School improvement planning;
- iii. Assessment and evidence of student learning;

iv. Information resources and technology.

12. The schools are allowed a maximum of eight years to meet the necessary requirements after the application is submitted.

*Academic Credit System*

13. To facilitate the accreditation process the Consultant was required to develop and implement a uniform academic credit system in the high schools. The American education model uses a credit system whereby students have to earn a specified number of academic points or credits during their tenure at high school in order to satisfy requirements for graduation. In contrast, the BVI high schools students are assessed for graduation only at the senior levels, (fourth and fifth forms).

14. There is no indication that the Consultant has made any recommendations in this regard.

*Review of Grade Levels*

15. The Consultant was also required to assist with reviewing the grade levels in the schools. The Consultant's report recommended that the current nomenclatures (Stages 1 and 2, Classes 1 to 5 and Forms 1 to 5) be dispensed with and the United States grade nomenclature be adopted (Kindergarten and Grades 1 to 12). This would achieve an alignment with the US education system thus making it easier for school aged children to transfer between the two.

16. The report recommends the introduction of a Kindergarten for preschoolers followed by six years of primary education and six years of secondary education, resulting in a total of thirteen school years. The details of the proposed conversion are not discussed. It is therefore unclear whether this would mean dispensing with the current Primary Five exams in favour of automatic progression into the high schools or whether the intention would be to continue with the OECS syllabi currently used in the BVI education system or change to a format and syllabi which resembles that used in the U.S.

17. More detail, discussion and analysis are required of the academic benefits to be derived and the implications for the syllabus, systems and students.

**National Curriculum Redesign Project**

18. The National Curriculum Redesign Project (NCRP) was reviewed by consultant Delores Kirk who in July 2008 called for closure of the programme after she concluded that it was not meeting its objectives. One of the objectives of the Wheatley Consultancy was to assist with reviewing and developing strategies for implementation of NCRP. In doing this the Consultant reviewed the primary school curricula put forward by the Department of Education and together with the curricula developed by the NCRP. These were found to be similar and efforts were made to have both agencies harmonize the two versions. This resulted in revised curricula for Math and English that were implemented in the primary schools in September 2009.

19. The Consultant report does not contain any discussion of the improvements to, or expected outcomes from, the revised curriculum. Nor was there any information about the steps or processes used for implementation, (preparing schools, preparing teachers, informing parents etc.) or mention

made of provisions for follow up and monitoring of the implementation. Also not chronicled are issues, if any, arising from implementation and how these were addressed.

### **Other Outputs/Outcomes**

#### **Reorganisation and Restructuring Objective**

20. In keeping with the requirement to reorganize the duties of the principal and assistant principals for the purpose of creating the post of a Deputy Principal at the Elmore Stoutt High School, the Consultant submitted a suggested list of job duties for the four positions. These were accepted by the Chief Education Officer, developed into job descriptions and implemented in the Elmore Stoutt High School.

21. With respect to the restructuring of the Ministry and Department of Education and Culture the Consultant identified areas where resources could be shared to reduce duplication of duties. The areas proposed were the Human Resources Unit, Information Technology Unit and Finance and Planning Unit. The Chief Education Officer, when interviewed, expressed support for the recommendations and stated that the proposal may require that the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education merge to operate as one unit.

22. An organizational chart was also created showing the proposal. The reorganization would downsize the Ministry and Department. Some of the changes would however require amendments to current legislation to allow implementation. At the time of the audit the Minister had not taken action.

23. The Consultant's report does not comment on the apparent disconnect between the Department of Education and the National Curriculum Redesign Project. The NCRP office operates as a unit under the Ministry and appears to function, largely, without the input of the Department of Education. The unit initiated its pilot project within several of the public schools but there is no indication that the Department of Education, which is ultimately responsible for the content and composition of what students are taught in territory's education system, was an integral part of this process. At the minimum, any programme that is taken into the public schools should have the approval of the Department of Education. A structure needs to be put in place where the work and progress of the NCRP is reviewed by the Department of Education regularly and approved prior to the involvement of the schools. Consideration should be given to moving this office as a unit under the Department of Education to ensure that the lines of reporting, and areas of responsibility are clear.

24. Although there is no discussion of the National Curriculum project placement in the restructure, the chart submitted by Wheatley Consulting includes a "Curriculum Coordinator" reporting to the Chief Education Officer.

#### **Reading Programme**

25. The Ministry has undertaken an initiative whereby several retired teachers have been engaged on contract to work in the primary schools to assist students with reading difficulties. A

general assessment of the reading proficiency of the students was administered by Caribbean Center for Teacher Training.

26. The Consultant was also required to assist with the reading programme. This aspect of the contract was not discussed in any of the consultancy's report.

### **Reports**

27. The Consultant has submitted two reports since commencement of the consultancy in 2007. The first in March 2010 and another in February 2011.

28. The March 2010 report is essentially an update of the status of the consultant's obligations under the contract for the three year period. The report is limited on details and omits any analysis, assessment or discussion to provide a full understanding of the issues, challenges, requirements, implications and expectations as they relate to the subject areas. It is possible that these issues were discussed comprehensively with officials within the Ministry or Department, the omission from the report precludes other relevant parties from obtaining a full understanding of the process through which recommendations were arrived at, and decisions were adopted.

29. The February 2011 report focuses entirely on the accreditation process. It outlines the requirements of the accreditation body and the areas that need to be addressed within the schools if they are to be successful in achieving this goal.

### **Cost**

30. Wheatley Consulting Ltd. contract was valued at \$96,000 per annum. This equates to \$8,000.00 per month. At 28 April 2011 the consultant had been paid \$320,000. This includes payment on the initial three contracts and for three months of the most recent agreement which was signed in February 2011 at the same terms and remuneration. It is clear that some of the objectives set out in the initial contract are no longer relevant, but these continue to be included in subsequent contracts.

### **Conclusion**

31. The consultancy has assisted the Department in advancing some important education goals. Chief among these is the initiation of the Accreditation process and implementation of an amended curriculum in the primary schools. In addition recommendations were made by the Consultant for reviewing the grade levels within the schools and for restructuring the Ministry and Department of Education. The accreditation objective appears to have become the primary focus of the Wheatley Consultancy in subsequent engagements.

32. While movement towards accreditation of the high schools is desirable, its placement on the Ministry's list of priorities is debatable as there are other issues that require more urgent attention. Some of these include the physical and social environment within the schools including but not limited to persistent overcrowding at ESHS, provision for remedial students in the system and the

relevancy of the curriculum. Failing to address the other issues creates challenges for a successful accreditation process.

33. The National Curriculum Redesign Project office appears to be functioning without direct input or guidance from the Department of Education which is ultimately responsible for the content of the schools' syllabi and curricula. There is an immediate need to provide definition, structure and timed outcomes for this office.

## **Recommendations**

- 1) The Ministry must develop a plan to address the known deficiencies in the secondary school systems. Some of these are deep-seated, but if sufficient progress can be made within the accreditation time frame it could result in a significant gain to the system.
- 2) To ensure sustainability of the accreditation process steps should be taken to identify and involve key persons within the two secondary schools that are being considered for accreditation who will assume the responsibility of ensuring that the MSA requirements are maintained and shortcomings addressed on a timely basis. These should be individuals other than the principals of the high schools.
- 3) Any subsequent contracts issued to the Consultant should be amended to remove objectives that have already been addressed. Reduction of the terms of reference may mean revisiting the contract sum unless other duties can be added so that full continued benefits can be achieved by the Department/Ministry.
- 4) If the objective is to secure a system which provides thirteen years of official education, then steps can be taken to regularize the preschool format by providing a curriculum and standards which can be carried forward as a part of the student's academic record.
- 5) Comprehensive reports are essential to provide the Ministry with sufficient information to support its decision making process. The Consultant's reports submitted to the Ministry should provide detailed discussion of the subject matter, including findings, assessments of the issues, implication, challenges and progress. Where recommendations are made, the report should detail the requirements for implementation and the expected outcomes.

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