

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



GOAL 4

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all

Context

Jamaica continues to make significant strides in creating and fostering an environment for world-class education and training. The holistic development and empowerment of all citizens have been the centre of development planning initiatives undertaken by the government. This is reflected in the provision of free public education to all citizens from the pre-primary to the secondary level. Education at the tertiary level is subsidized by the government for public institutions, whereas private higher education institutions operate independently. Major activities towards the sustainable development of the education and training sectors were advanced at the national level through the Ministry of Education and Youth (MOEY) National Education Strategic Plan (2011–2020), Vision 2030 Jamaica—National Development Plan, the Medium-Term Socio-Economic Policy Framework (MTF) 2018–2021, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The GOJ allocates one of the largest shares of the government budget to education signifying its commitment to building the human capital of the country. Financing for education is also supported with inputs from the private sector, International Development Partners (IDPs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community and faith-based organizations and households. Household contributions to education are made through the payment of auxiliary fees, cost-sharing at the tertiary level, and other payments for education-related inputs at all levels.

The review for the period 2018–2022 summarizes key achievements, issues and challenges concerning quality education.

Quality Education Highlights 2018–2022



School Enrolment

Consistently high enrolment is characteristic of the education system from early childhood to Grade 11

FIGURE 20: QUALITY EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS, 2018–2022

Jamaica's Human Development Index (HDI) value for 2019 was 0.734—this places the country in the high human development category—positioning it at 101 out of 189 countries and territories.⁴⁸ Data from the 2019 Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions (JSLC) revealed that the average years of schooling was 13.1 years. The adult literacy rate, which is a percentage of the population aged 15 years and over who can read and write stood at 88.1 per cent.

Discussion

Target 4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

Data from the 2020 Economic and Social Survey of Jamaica (ESSJ) revealed that an estimated 671 739 persons in the school age cohort (3–24 years old) were enrolled in educational institutions with the highest enrollment at the Primary and Secondary levels, 29.0 and 30.0 per cent, respectively. Overall, consistently high enrolment continued to be a characteristic of the education system among children 3–16 years, that is, early childhood through Grade 11. On the other hand, enrolment among the 17–24 years remained low. Data from the JSLC 2019 revealed high enrolment rates at over 95.0 per cent from the Early Childhood level through to Grade 11. It should be noted that while enrolment remains high, the need for competent/specialist teachers should be prioritized by the Ministry. Continuous training of educators is needed to ensure that students can compete in the global market. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators have been trained on numerous online platforms to ensure that they are adequately prepared to engage students.

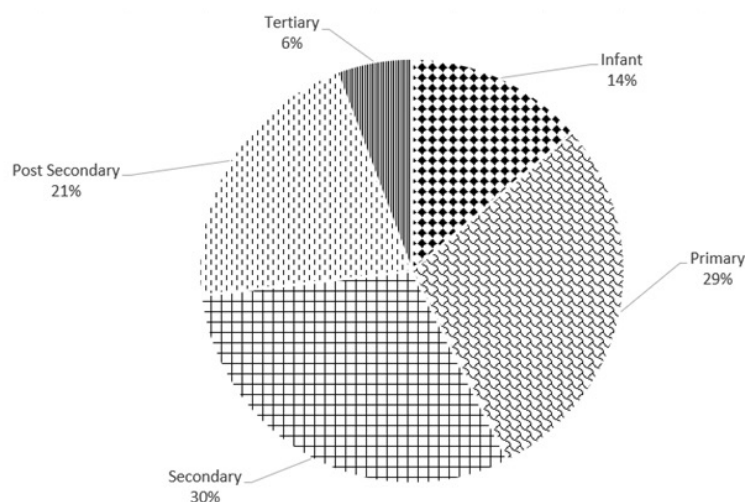


FIGURE 21: ENROLMENT BY EDUCATION LEVEL (3-24 YEARS) 2019/2020
Source: Ministry of Education and Youth

For Jamaica to offer world-class education and to prepare students for the 21st century, consideration must be given to the student to teacher ratio if the best possible outcomes are to be yielded. Data from the 2019 ESSJ revealed that the standard pupil-to-teacher ratio at the primary level was 35:1. Recognizing the need for closer attention to be provided to students by teachers, a directive from the Ministry of Education for primary schools to immediately begin reducing the pupil-teacher ratio to 25:1 was made in 2018.⁴⁹

48 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/JAM>: The Education index "is [the] average mean years of schooling (of adults) and expected years of schooling (of children), both expressed as an index obtained by scaling with the corresponding maxima"

49 Government Working to Achieve Teacher-Pupil Ratio of 1:25 – Ministry of Education and Youth (moey.gov.jm)

Despite high enrolment rates, children from lower-income households are more likely to not be enrolled at the secondary level. An indicator of this is the 7.7 per cent of children from the two lowest income quintiles aged 15–16 years who were not enrolled in secondary education compared with 0.0 per cent from the wealthiest quintile (JSLC 2022).

Students' performance is assessed based on several national examinations at various levels of the education system. The 2019/2020 administration of the *Grade One Individual Learning Profile (GOILP)* had 28 545 valid assessment records being submitted to the National Student Registration System. Disaggregated by sex, the data indicated that 14 415 students were males, 14 111 females and 19 students for which sex was not reported. The highest proficiency observed was Number Concepts, 80.0 per cent. On the other end, General Knowledge had the lowest level of proficiency, 58.0 per cent.

For the *Grade-4 Literacy Test and General Achievement in Numeracy (Grade Four Numeracy Test)*, mastery in the exams remained steady between 2015 and 2018 recording 85.0 per cent in 2015 and 81.0 per cent in 2018. Observation of the performance of boys and girls in literacy and numeracy exams revealed a gender disparity—mastery in both literacy and numeracy were higher for girls than boys over the four years. Performance in the literacy test showed a reduction in mastery performance for both males and females; there was a 2.2 percentage points decline by females relative to 4.4-percentage points decline for males. On the other hand, improvements were observed in numeracy performance; females improved by 1.7 percentage points compared with 2.7 percentage points for males. The national average for numeracy over the period improved by 2.0 percentage points. There has not been any significant change in performance by either sex; this suggests that the same pedagogical approach has remained in place and an examination of the curriculum is needed to improve students' performance/outcome.

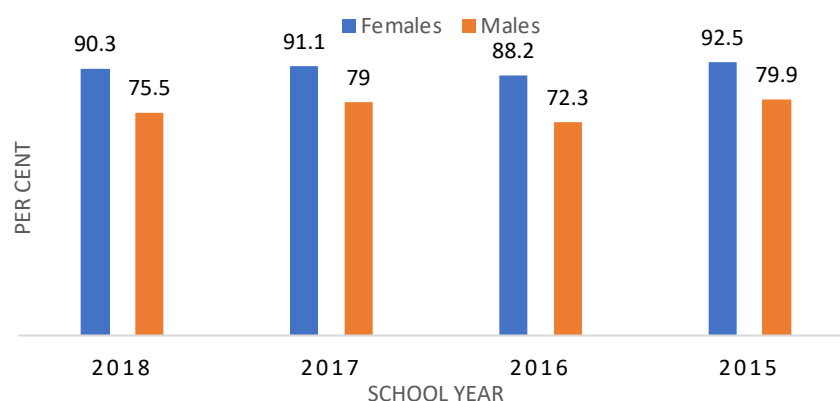


FIGURE 22 MASTERY IN GRADE 4 LITERACY TEST BY SEX (PER CENT), 2015–2018
SOURCE: JAMAICA EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION COMMISSION'S REPORT, 2021

In 2019, the *Primary Exit Profile (PEP)* which replaces the *Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT)* was introduced. The PEP places emphasis on the acquisition of 21st-century skills which include critical thinking, creativity, and communication. Of note, the number of students who sat the PEP examination in 2021, was 37 000, which represented a significant reduction of over 16 000 compared with the number of students who sat the GSAT 15 years ago. This signals the continuing reduction of the birth rate in Jamaica which must be considered as the education system implements its plans for the improvement of students' outcomes and school performance (NCE 2020). The impact extends beyond the education sector, as there are important implications for economic growth. With the onset of the pandemic and the accompanying fallouts and uncertainties, the birth rates have since fallen.

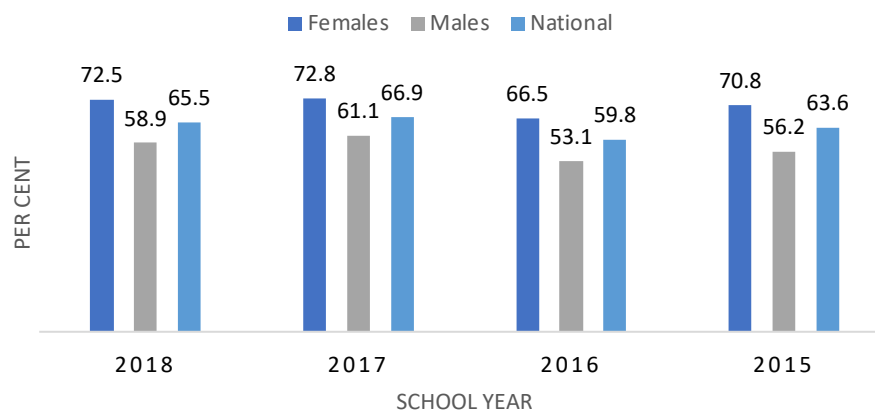


FIGURE 23: MASTERY IN GRADE 4 NUMERACY TEST BY SEX (PER CENT), 2015–2018
Source: Jamaica Education Transformation Commission's Report, 2021

The *Grade Nine Achievement Test (GNAT)* is offered to students at the end of grade 9 at All Age, Primary, and Junior High Schools for placement in Secondary schools. Students are tested in Language Arts and Mathematics. Since 2015, the mean score for Language Arts has remained under 70.0 per cent with 2019 recording the highest score of 68.0 per cent. Performance in Mathematics has always lagged behind Language Arts with the mean score remaining under 55.0 per cent; the lowest score was recorded in 2017, at 28.0 per cent.

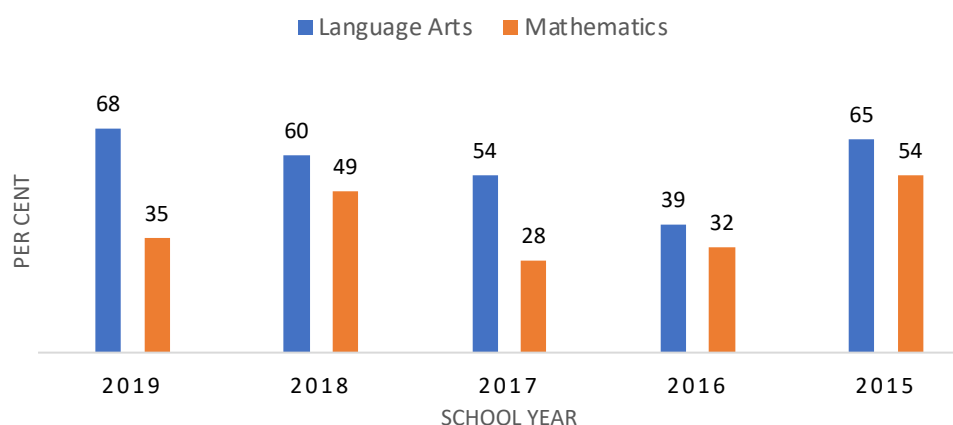


FIGURE 24: GRADE NINE ACHIEVEMENT TEST PERFORMANCE IN LANGUAGE ARTS AND MATHEMATICS (PER CENT), 2015–2019
Source: Jamaica Education Transformation Commission's Report, 2021

To address the low enrolment among the 17–24 cohort, the Sixth Form Pathways programme, inclusive of the Career Advancement Programme (CAP), was implemented to provide the opportunity for job market skills training or further education for students who would have otherwise completed their secondary education at Grade 11. The programme was first introduced in 2016 but was fully rolled out in October 2021. Students will be allowed to continue their education in one of three pathways (Traditional pathway, Technical pathway or General pathway), and it is anticipated that enrolment in post-secondary, tertiary or skills training institutions will improve. Students will graduate at the end of Grade 13 with the equivalent of an associate degree (CXC Associate Degree, Occupational Associate Degree) and a National School Leaving Certificate (NSLC). Provisions made under the programme will result in students being exposed to the requisite knowledge and skills needed for the world of work given that a component of the programme is executed in partnership with the HEART/NSTA Trust. The outcomes have the potential to positively impact the human capital development of the country.

Whilst this programme may have the potential to influence positive outcomes, it must be noted that mandating an additional two years in school without addressing structural issues and significantly improving the teaching methods and quality and the other elements of quality learning and social environment may not yield the intended results. There is therefore a need for a clear indication of an increase in the number of staff, expansion and or renovation of schools, improvement in resources and teaching materials, inter alia to support the successful execution of the programme.

Since the last VNR report, improvements have been observed in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) exam pass rates for English Language and Mathematics except for 2021 where reductions were observed in both subjects. The reductions in performance may be due to the physical closure of schools to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease. Looking at the number of students with passes in five or more subjects including Mathematics and English, the data shows increase for the English Language in 2019 and 2020; with 2021 recording the lowest pass rate. Fluctuations were observed in the pass rate for Mathematics, however, the lowest pass rate recorded was in 2021. The disruption in attendance at physical school due to the COVID-19 pandemic may be the reason for this reduction.

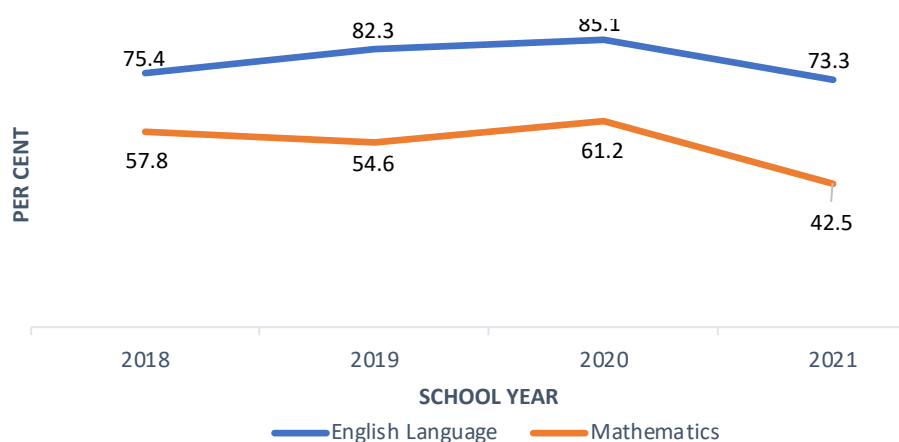


FIGURE 25: STUDENTS' CSEC PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND MATHEMATICS, 2018–2021

Source: Jamaica Education Transformation Commission's Report, 2021

TABLE 14: NUMBER OF STUDENTS PASSING 5 OR MORE SUBJECTS INCLUDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND OR MATHEMATICS 2018–2021

Year	Passing 5 or more subjects including Mathematics and English Language	Passing 5 or more subjects including English Language Only	Passing 5 or more subjects including Mathematics Only	Passing 5 or more subjects including Mathematics and/ or English Language
*2021	6 323	4 123	401	10 847
2020	10087	4 633	511	15 231
2019	9 234	4 235	392	13 861
2018	9 566	3 578	700	13 844

*Preliminary and last year Grade 11 enrolment was also used for some schools, hence enrolment is higher than the previous year noting that enrolment has been trending downwards based on the population.

*Note: Some students would have also sat and passed subjects in earlier grades or privately

Source: Ministry of Education and Youth

In addition to tuition-free education in state-run institutions, the government through several initiatives aimed at ensuring equitable and quality education provides nutritional support to students. The School Feeding Programme (SFP) was designed to assist in improving the nutritional status of students, promote regular school attendance, as well as enhance students' learning capacity. Students from the poorest households and those from rural areas were the main beneficiaries. Transportation support is also provided to students. Operations under the SFP were redesigned in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Food packages were distributed to children benefiting from the programme, an additional \$1.3 billion was provided to PATH beneficiaries by the government.⁵⁰

Reducing inequities and safeguarding the future of the nation's children have been the forefront of development planning, however, the effects of the COVID-19 restrictions highlight the imperfections in the system and demonstrate the difficulties experienced by the most vulnerable children. Based on reports from the MOEY as of May 2021, over 120 000 students had been absent from school or were not consistent in participating in school activities because of the pandemic. They were not engaged online, not watching the television programmes, not listening to radio sessions, not in contact with schools or dialogue with teachers as well as not going through their books. Targeted remedial programmes and support systems are therefore needed urgently to ensure that vulnerable children are not left behind.

While there have been general improvements in data collection in the education system over the years, the collection of sex-disaggregated data and the timely collection of data remain areas of concern.

50 <https://jis.gov.jm/6-9-billion-paid-in-cash-grants-to-path-beneficiaries/>

Target 4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

Since the last Voluntary National Review (VNR) in 2018, several programmes and initiatives have been undertaken with emphasis placed on achieving the desired educational outcomes which included improved students' performance at all levels of the system and improved access to social services for vulnerable students.

Longstanding issues of the early childhood sector remain, including overcrowding in some schools, the majority of teachers lacking the minimum required qualification of a diploma from a teacher-training institution as well as the sector being grossly underfunded. Additionally, there are unregistered institutions with limited facilities conducive to teaching and learning. However, in furtherance of the systemic qualitative improvements, the MOEY in 2018 adopted a K–13 Strategy⁵¹ to cater to the 0–18 years population in school. The programme provides age-appropriate interventions starting with early intervention and stimulation, pre-education and development at age three months to three-plus years and the rationalization of Early Childhood Institutions (ECIs) and engagement of trained teachers (Early Childhood). Education at the early childhood level is compulsory and is offered by community-operated Basic Schools, Public Infant Schools and Infant Departments as well as in Kindergarten Departments of Private Preparatory Schools. The main focus at this level is the readiness of children to enter primary school.⁵² Noteworthy, universal enrolment is registered at the early childhood level (3–5 years age group) for both girls and boys.⁵³

The early childhood rationalization process that involves the merging of clusters of Basic Schools as well as subsuming some into infant departments of primary schools seeks to improve efficiency and ensure effective learning environments for children as well as ensuring that early childhood institutions (ECIs) are compliant with regulations governing the sector. The process also seeks to ensure that more children will have access to trained teachers in established certified Government-operated infant schools or departments. As of 2020, the rate of ECI compliance with regulations was at a record high, with 94.8 per cent of ECIs island-wide applying for a Certificate of Registration; 16 ECIs received certificates during the year for a total of 271 certified institutions island-wide; a permit to operate was issued to 26 ECIs, bringing the total number of permits issued to ECIs in operation to 2 248.⁵⁴ The Early Childhood Commission (ECC) is doubling efforts to ensure that other ECIs are compliant with the stipulations of the sector.

At the early childhood level, parenting education and support were strengthened by the Early Childhood Development Commission through the establishment of 75 Parent Places with 48 being certified by the National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC). In 2021, some 100 parents were targeted by the commission for training to assist parents in developing the skills they need to raise and protect their children, while encouraging a collaborative effort between home and school,⁵⁵ to improve development outcomes for children.

Under the *Effective preventive health care for 0–6-year-olds*, the Child Health and Development Passport⁵⁶ was

51 Strategic interventions targeting Kindergarten (Early Childhood) to Grades 13 (Secondary education).

52 Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions (JSLC) 2018.

53 JSLC 2019.

54 Economic and Social Survey Jamaica 2020.

55 <https://jis.gov.jm/features/npsc-expands-reach-to-parents/>

56 The Child Health and Development Passport was introduced into the health-care system as the primary tool for the monitoring and risk screening of all children from birth to age 17.

redesigned following an evaluation of its effectiveness and implementation. Work carried out by the commission also included early and effective screening, diagnosis and intervention for at-risk children and households. An important outcome was the evaluation of the Jamaica School Readiness Assessment for four-year-olds (also referred to as the Age 4 Assessment) and a sustainability plan developed, which includes a Monitoring and Evaluation framework for annual assessment and dissemination of results.

Target 4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

In recent years, concerted efforts have been made by the country to ensure that all Jamaicans irrespective of their socio-economic background have equal access to affordable and quality education and training opportunities. The Students' Loan Bureau (SLB) continued to support tertiary education through its revolving fund, which provides loans to qualified Jamaican students for tuition at local and overseas tertiary institutions approved by the MOEY. Grants are also made by the Bureau to loan beneficiaries who require additional support. For the 2019/2020 Academic Year, the Bureau received 13 601 applications of which, 98.6 per cent were approved. Loan amounts of over \$4.0 billion were disbursed, an increase of 26.4 per cent. The increase in loan amount is linked to the government's priority to ensure that more Jamaicans especially the most vulnerable can access funding to pursue tertiary education. Efforts have also been made to extend the period for starting repayment from six months to 14 months.

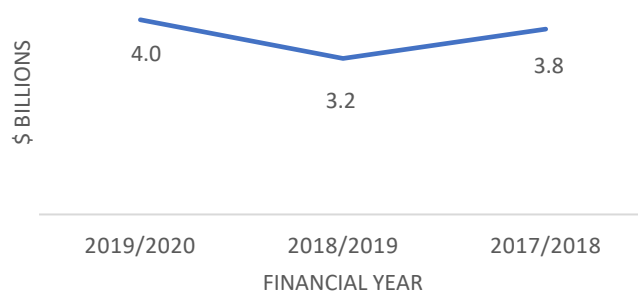


FIGURE 26 LOAN AMOUNT DISBURSED BY THE STUDENTS LOAN BUREAU, IN \$ BILLION
SOURCE: ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SURVEY JAMAICA 2020

Over the last five years, there has been a reduction in interest rates from 12.0 per cent to 4.0 per cent, for some loans.⁵⁷ Data regarding quintile access to the Bureau were unavailable, however, data from the JSLC 2019 revealed that some 4.5 per cent of individuals from the poorest quintile were enrolled in a tertiary institution, compared with 34.3 per cent from the wealthiest quintile. Currently, at the upper levels of the education system (17 years and over), there is a disproportionate under-representation of males, participants from the poorest quintiles and those from rural areas. Data from the 2019 JSLC revealed that 13.7 per cent of males 19–24 years were enrolled in an educational/training institution compared with 19.2 per cent of females.

To address this issue, there is a need to revisit the structure of the curriculum, specifically how boys and girls are taught and make the appropriate changes to facilitate greater engagement of males in the education system, particularly at the

57 <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20190307/budgetdebate2019-slb-rate-cuts-four-policy-changes-borrowers>

tertiary level. Consideration should be given to an immediate thrust for specialist teachers trained to identify and address the learning challenges experienced by students. In 2019, the GOJ responded to the financial challenges of enrolling in higher education by ensuring that individuals employed by registered charities would benefit from 10.0 per cent of their loan balance forgiven for each year that they were employed full time to a charitable organization. The data suggests, however, that more needs to be done to ensure that the most vulnerable members of society are provided with adequate opportunities to pursue tertiary education.

The government is committed to addressing the current challenge of access to tertiary education by strategically addressing the issue of 35.0 per cent of the average 40 000 Grade 11 students transitioning to a Sixth Form Pathways programme, by mandating that students pursue an additional two years in an educational institution or a skills training programme. This is in keeping with the goal to “foster a system for ALL students to exit the secondary level with the knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes which will have them ready for the world of work or to access tertiary level education.”⁵⁸

The finalization of the merger of the National Youth Service and the Jamaican Foundation for Lifelong Learning with the HEART/NSTA Trust in 2019, and the subsequent rebranding to the HEART NSTA/Trust, provided the opportunity for more Jamaicans to access skills training, improving certification and targeting of unattached youth through the National Service Corps Programme (NSCP) and offering valuable work experience through the Hope Summer Work Programme and other programmes. Since the merger, there has been an increase in the enrolment and certification of individuals pursuing training. Total enrolment for the training period 2019/2020 was 141 748 participants. This represents an achievement of 95.3 per cent of the planned enrolment and a 171 per cent increase in the total enrolment over the previous year. Of the total enrolment, 60.0 per cent were females. While enrolment to the HEART NSTA/Trust has generally been good, there is a need to diversify programme offerings; increase the number of locations, especially in the rural areas; timely provision of certificates to students upon programme completion and the monitoring and evaluation of programmes.

A critical determinant of enrolment at the tertiary level is affordability. Based on data from the Economic and Social Survey Jamaica (2020), enrolment at tertiary institutions was estimated at 38 562 students, a reduction of 26.0 per cent relative to the previous year.⁵⁹ This reduction may be attributed to the global and associated restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic that resulted in a loss of income and restrictions on face-to-face teaching and learning. While there has been an increase in the number of scholarships being offered to pursue tertiary studies, the utilization and access to these scholarships are limited because many students are not aware them. There is a need to both raise awareness and increase the provision of scholarships and/or tuition support for students from low-income households⁶⁰

To maximize labour market outcomes, there is a need to raise awareness of the labour market demands to inform programme choices to alleviate the issues of loan repayment in the context of limited employment opportunities. Focused interventions are needed to ensure that education at mainly the secondary and tertiary levels are responding to the needs of the youth and their realities, and the overall economy.

58 <https://moey.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/APSE-CAP-Factsheet.pdf>

59 <https://mof.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/Public-Expenditure-Review-of-the-Education-Sector-in-Jamaica-2.pdf>

60 <https://mof.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/Public-Expenditure-Review-of-the-Education-Sector-in-Jamaica-2.pdf>

Target 4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship

Several programmes have been developed and/or supported by the government to engage youth and adults in developing relevant skills through vocational and entrepreneurial training. Most programmes target youth; however, some institutions offer training to citizens irrespective of their age. During the 2019/2020 financial year, some 68 482 (59.0 per cent female) youth were trained through the HEART/NSTA Trust. Total youth certification for the period was 23 680, of which 62.0 per cent were females. Through the different programmes, individuals are provided with on-the-job training; training in digitization and document management; agriculture, agro-processing, leadership, social skills, environmental awareness and a healthy lifestyle; among others. Despite the high enrolment at the Trust, challenges remain with the rate of certification, attributed to failed assessments, dropouts, and absenteeism. A report tabled in the Parliament by the Auditor General's Department in September 2020 found that HEART, up to June 2020, achieved a certification rate of 45.0 per cent.

While efforts have been made to increase the proportion of youth with requisite information and communications technology (ICT) skills by equipping laboratories in schools with computers and other devices, the pandemic has highlighted the major issues of access and ownership of devices needed to participate in online teaching and learning among teachers and students. A major issue observed is the prohibitive cost associated with owning a laptop or desktop computer, particularly among the most vulnerable population. Through the efforts of government, the private sector, international development partners and others, many children and educators were provided with devices to continue with online teaching and learning. One of the positive consequences of the pandemic has been the increase in the number of households and students with computer devices. However, with the ownership/access to a device came the reality that many were not technologically literate, as well as many of the communities across the island, were without internet connectivity.

Data from the JSLC 2018 revealed that ownership of a working computer was reported by 38.4 per cent of households. The same report also indicated that of households with a working computer, a laptop was the most prevalent device and only 64.9 per cent of households had internet access. This suggests that the internet access that individuals have is from mobile broadband networks via handsets. To fully exploit the benefits and potentials of ICTs, there is a need to build human resource capacity and improve supporting infrastructure.

Target 4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

Both sexes in Jamaica have equal access to education at all levels of the system. The data show that there is almost equal enrolment between the sexes among the 3–16 years age group. However, the data indicate a reduction in general enrolment and between the sexes in the older cohorts. Enrolment among persons aged 17–24 years has remained low which suggests that interventions are needed to ensure that individuals continue education and training by targeting males. Over the years, the JSLC series reveal that in the 17–24 years age group, more females were enrolled in an educational institution or skills training facility. The government's response to this is the complete rollout of the Sixth Form Pathways Programme aimed at extending secondary schooling by two years. The new Sixth Form Pathways Programme is currently being facilitated in all secondary schools along with 24 private and 10 public tertiary institutions.

While enrolment overall has remained high, the challenges experienced by students of the special needs community are to be addressed. Many schools do not have appropriately trained educators, infrastructure or resources in place to create an enabling and inclusive environment for persons with disabilities (PWDs). Other issues affecting PWDs include the

limited number of specialized institutions to treat specific disabilities and the prohibitive cost of accessing these services. If we are to leave no one behind, then the issues affecting the PWDs should be given greater priority. Recognizing the rights and valuable contributions of PWDs, as well as part of the government's thrust towards a more inclusive society, the Disabilities Act (2014) took effect in February 2022. The Act makes provisions to safeguard and enhance the welfare of persons with disabilities across Jamaica.⁶¹

The Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH)⁶² continues to support the most vulnerable households. Educational support is provided to students at all levels of the education system. Students who are beneficiaries of the programme are supported through the provision of books, transportation, and nutrition. Support under PATH includes Post-Secondary (Education) Grants and Tertiary (Education) Grant, the transportation subsidy and the School Feeding Programme.

To ensure that inequalities are reduced, transportation subsidies are provided to students irrespective of socioeconomic background for those living in/or attending schools in the Kingston Metropolitan Area through the state-run bus transport company. A similar system was rolled out in rural areas, through the rural bus system, targeting beneficiaries of PATH and other needy students. While the rural bus system does not benefit all students, it demonstrates efforts being made by the government to ensure that the most vulnerable students have access to education with plans to expand the service to all students.

Since the last report, no major disparities were observed in enrolment across the different regions (Rural Areas, Other Urban Centres-OUC and the Greater Kingston Metropolitan Areas-GKMA) by age groups. Similar to enrolment across the different regions, no major disparities were recorded for the 3–16 age group. However, the data indicated a corresponding increase in enrolment with age, for persons in the GKMA. In the area of certification, findings from the JSLC 2019 indicated that the largest proportion of respondents with academic qualifications was from the GKMA, 47.5 per cent, followed by OUC, 42.1 per cent, and Rural Areas, 31.9 per cent. The data also showed that the wealthiest quintile had a larger proportion of individuals (58.6 per cent) with subject passes/academic achievement⁶³ compared with individuals from the poorest quintile, 23.1 per cent. To address this disparity, the government has introduced several programmes to encourage individuals in rural areas to continue their educational pursuits or engage in vocational/skills training.

The National Unattached Youth programme aims to improve livelihood through skill development and training of unattached youth. The programme targets youth, ages 17–30 years, across the island. Total enrolment under the NUYP was 10 752 youth, while certification totalled 2 775 youth. By sex, enrolment was 30.4 per cent male and 69.6 per cent female. Of the total percentage of enrolled males and females, 19.8 per cent of males and 28.4 per cent of females were certified. Though several programmes support unattached youth, there is a need for monitoring and follow-up to determine the outcomes of trainees concerning labour market participation once they have completed their tenure under these programmes, and to evaluate the overall performance of the programme.

61 <https://jis.gov.jm/disabilities-act-to-take-effect-february-14-2022/>

62 The Programme of Advancement through Health and Education (PATH) is a conditional cash transfer (CCT) programme. It provides cash transfers to poor families, who are subject to comply with conditions that promote the development of the human capital of their members. Retrieved from: <https://socialprotection.org/discover/publications/programme-advancement-through-health-and-education-path-jamaica>

63 Subject passes/academic achievement include: school leaving certificates, Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC), degrees, professional qualifications and training certificates.

Target 4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, and achieve literacy and numeracy

Jamaica has made significant strides in improving literacy and numeracy. The adult literacy rate for Jamaica stands at 88.1 per cent (2014). Offered under the HEART/NSTA Trust, the High School Diploma Equivalency (HSDE) programme provides a 'second chance' for adult learners to strengthen their literacy and numeracy skills through three programme options—Basic (Grades 1–6); Intermediate (Grades 7–9) and Proficiency (Grades 10–11). In 2020, a total of 17 171 individuals were targeted for training under the HSDE programme. Actual enrolment was 18 489; some 17.0 per cent more than targeted. Certification was attained by 60.1 per cent.

There is a need for more current data on literacy and numeracy in Jamaica; the latest available data is from 2014. A proxy for the competence of individuals in literacy and numeracy in the Jamaican context is the performance in examinations such as English Language and Mathematics at the CSEC level. Substantial improvements have been recorded in the pass rates of students sitting terminal examinations at the secondary level since the last VNR report, particularly in the subject areas of Mathematics and English Language. For the 2017/2018 academic year, pass rates were 75.4 per cent and 57.8 per cent for English Language and Mathematics, respectively. Compared with the 2019/2020 academic year, pass rates for English Language and Mathematics were 86.4 per cent and 61.2 per cent, respectively. The restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted students' performance in these two areas with pass rates recorded at 73.3 per cent and 42.5 per cent for English Language and Mathematics, respectively.

Numeracy and literacy can also be looked at in the context of the academic achievement of individuals. The JSLC 2019 captures data on the academic achievement of persons 14 years and over. Individuals within the 20–24 years age group registered the largest proportion (60.7 per cent) of persons with passes, whereas individuals who were 60 years and over represented the lowest proportion (12.7 per cent).

Target 4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development.

The National Standards Curriculum (NSC) was designed to promote the development of 21st-century skills of communication, collaboration, creativity, and strategic and critical thinking. The 2019 administration of the Primary Exit Profile (PEP) which replaced the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) is a component of the NSC. The NSC spans primary and secondary levels, starting at grade one and ending at grade nine. Under the NSC, emphasis is being placed on project-based and problem-solving learning, with science, technology, engineering and mathematics/science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEM/STEAM) integrated at all levels.⁶⁴

Collaborative activities between the Jamaica Teaching Council and the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) Junior Environment Programme (NJEP) provided an opportunity for over 700 teachers at the Grades 4–6 level to be exposed to the Social Studies and Science objectives that relate to the environmental science in the National Standards Curriculum (NSC). Teachers were exposed to a 15-hour self-paced online training course titled, Planning and Delivering Environmental Topics in the National Standards Curriculum (NSC) Science and Social Studies Units. The NJEP

64 <https://jis.gov.jm/national-standards-curriculum-promotes-inclusive-learning-morris/>

was conceptualized in 2019 and designed to impart expert and updated information and resources on the thematic areas of the NSC related to the NEPA's mandate – to manage and protect Jamaica's land, wood, air and water.⁶⁵

Critical issues relating to sustainable development are also incorporated into the national curriculum as well as through programmes such as the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) and the implementation of the Family Life Education and the Citizenship Education Programme.⁶⁶

In 2019, the Ministry of Health (MOH) was rebranded as the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW) with a deliberate focus on healthy lifestyle practices and combating non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Subsequently, the Interim Guidelines for Beverages in Schools which applies to all schools up to and including the secondary level, which is under the remit of the MOEY were implemented. The Interim Guidelines for Beverages in Schools were introduced pending the completion of the National School Nutrition Policy (NSNP) and the National School Nutrition Standards (NSNS).

Sustainability is also being promoted through the Jamaica 4H Club. Training is provided to members aged 5–35 years in the areas of agriculture, agro-processing, leadership, social skills, environmental awareness, and a healthy lifestyle. The club has 91 218 registered members in over 1 100 clubs. By sex, registered club members were 39 259 males, 47 960 females, and 3 999 members who did not state. A total of 6 631 female members were between the ages 15 and 24 years compared with 5 543 males.

To promote a culture of peace and nonviolence, several activities have been executed under the USAID/ MoEY Partnership for Improved Safety and Security in School programme including:

- Uniformed Groups – The programme partnered with 21 organizations to support the establishment and/or strengthening of 635 uniformed groups in schools to provide structured intervention and support programmes for over 23 000 students.
- Three new groups were introduced in secondary schools Integrity Club in 30 schools, Trafficking in Persons Club in 11 schools, and Safety and Security Ambassadors Club in 17 schools.
- A behaviour change intervention programme was implemented in five primary schools.
- The procurement and distribution of over 800 hand-held metal detectors in several schools and the installation of 28 walk-through metal detectors.

Target 4.A Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

Investments in education infrastructure have been ongoing, particularly concerning creating an inclusive and enabling environment that is child and disability friendly. During the review period, allocation of \$1.4 billion to carry out expansion activities; electrical upgrading; construction of security fencing; upgrading of the ministry's facilities and making outstanding payments for infrastructure projects carried forward was advanced through the 2020/2021 Capital Projects. Improvements to facilities have been accelerated through the provision of additional classrooms to alleviate the shift

65 https://websitearchive2020.nepa.gov.jm/new/media_centre/press_releases/releases/2020/pr20200813-over_700_primary_school_teachers_educated_through_the_nepa_junior_environment_programme.php

66 MOEYI, Education Ministry Focuses on Resocialization at Grade 7, retrieved from <https://moey.gov.jm/education-ministry-focuses-resocialisation-grade-7>

system and overcrowding in schools. In fostering a more inclusive and disability-friendly environment, the government advanced plans to establish three special education diagnostic centres across the island. Through private placement, the Ministry provided financial support to 233 students who had to be placed in selected private special education facilities due to inadequate space in the public education system. A total of 665 students received tuition support in private special education institutions.

With the onset of the pandemic, some 550 special needs children benefited from support provided by the UNICEF to the MOEY Special Education Unit and Special Olympics Jamaica (SOJ). The students received adapted tablets (with specific approved content) and one-year data plans for educational purposes. In collaboration with the Early Childhood Commission (ECC), UNICEF supported the distribution of 1100 Play and Learn kits to children under age 6 in quarantined zones. In preparation for a safer return to school, UNICEF partnered with civil society specifically Food for the Poor, to improve access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and handwashing facilities for 20 000 children in 19 schools in high-risk COVID-19 areas.⁶⁷

Target 4. B By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships for developing countries in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training, and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programs in developed countries and other developing countries

The country continues to benefit from scholarship opportunities provided by several international partners. Scholarships were disbursed in several areas including industry and trade policy, theology and global ICT. The Government of the Republic of Korea provided scholarship opportunities for US\$300 000 (38.9 million).⁶⁸ The cooperation programme with the People's Republic of China (PRC) resulted in scholarships awarded to five persons for US\$215 529 (\$30.9 million) to pursue studies in the PRC in the areas of clinical medicine, and microbiology, mathematics education as well as safety science and engineering. The Government of the Republic of Cuba, under the Jamaica/Cuba Bilateral Scholarship Programme, awarded scholarships amounting to US\$381 920 (\$54.7 million) in the disciplines of medicine, general surgery, internal medicine, and nursing.⁶⁹

Approximately \$320 million has been spent on training 65 000 teachers since August 2020 (NCE 2021 Report).

The launch of the "Own Your Own Device Incentive Programme" provided over 24 000 vouchers to assist parents to provide a device for their children. Some 18 000 tablets and 12 000 desktop computers were distributed by the Ministry of Education and Youth to teachers and students, mainly at the primary level, at the early stages of the (Patterson 2020). Other device initiatives included the provision of 40 000 additional tablets/laptops to the poorest students in the upper primary Grades 4, 5 and 6 as well as public secondary schools have been provided with the funding to procure laptops for students in grades 10–13 who are beneficiaries of PATH.

Overall, there has been a general reduction in the amount awarded for scholarships and training through Official Development Assistance, in 2018 the amount was US\$4.2 million compared with US\$1.3 million in 2020. The reduction in amount may be as a result of the pandemic accounting for funds being diverted to other areas.

⁶⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/media/100321/file/Jamaica-2020-COAR.pdf>

⁶⁸ Economic and Social Survey Jamaica, 2018

⁶⁹ Economic and Social Survey Jamaica, 2018

Target 4. C By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states

In April 2020, a partnership with the UNICEF, National College for Educational Leadership and the MOEY was formed to create a virtual leadership course. The course provided school leaders with exposure to relevant technology and knowledge of various tools, resources, platforms and practices of leading remotely.

As of September 2021, some 2 428 school leaders (27 cohorts) completed the course.⁷⁰ An Online and Blended Professional Development Initiative between the UNESCO and the MOEY was also implemented in August 2020. The initiative focused on equipping a cohort of 40 teachers and master teachers in Jamaica with the skills, up-to-date tools and resources to apply innovative teaching methods or adaptive pedagogies, to strengthen teachers' ability to respond to the current crisis, and to strengthen the resilience of Jamaica's education system to future shocks.⁷¹

The continued focus was also given to improving teaching and quality assurance through the professional development of more than 5 000 educators at the early childhood, primary and secondary levels. In the 2018/2019 academic year, the proportion of trained teachers was 79.0 per cent, 91.0 per cent and 81.0 per cent for early childhood, primary and secondary schools, respectively.

Lessons Learnt

The COVID 19 Pandemic created the opportunity to expand the provision of online learning and increase access to education across borders. Many Jamaican students enrolled in colleges and universities all over the world as many universities significantly reduced their fees and moved teaching and learning online.

The pandemic highlighted the challenges in accessing data for the education sector, especially data on children with disabilities. The National Learning Management System was fast-tracked to ensure that educators, administrators and students could interface on the same platform. The launch of the "Bridging the Gap – Child Find" Initiative during the summer of 2021 to complement the efforts of school-based teams to identify, locate and reengage approximately 120 000 students who could not be accounted for using any of the three established modalities of remote learning: online/ computer-aided, audiovisual or access to learning kits /printed materials.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that not enough focus was being placed on incorporating education technology in all schools. A greater focus is needed to ensure that schools are properly resourced with technology to improve teaching and learning. While this affected students across all socioeconomic backgrounds, it was recognized that students from low-income families and rural areas were most impacted. Many of those students did not possess the requisite resources needed to participate in online teaching and learning and were from areas with limited or no internet connectivity. To tackle this issue, government, along with the private sector, international development partners and other stakeholders, partnered to ensure that teachers and students were provided with devices, data and other resources to continue teaching and learning.

70 [https://www.unicef.org/media/107966/file/Virtual%20instructional%20leadership%20course%20\(Jamaica\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/107966/file/Virtual%20instructional%20leadership%20course%20(Jamaica).pdf)

71 <https://reliefweb.int/report/jamaica/teachers-training-online-and-blended-learning-skills-ensure-quality-education-during>

Way Forward

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and, in some cases, exacerbated the inequalities present in society. The economic and social progress made before the pandemic have been significantly impacted by learning loss due to the containment measures identified as a major concern for Jamaica. There is a need to address the disparities in access to, and participation in education by geography, sex and socioeconomic status. Though enrolment remains high across education levels and an increase in the number of individuals enrolled and certified in vocational and skills training, enrolment in higher education (tertiary) remains low, and there is a need to increase the participation of males and persons from low-income categories. Work continues in the area of policy development and revision of policies with several policies being advanced since 2018. Investments in education infrastructure and teacher training have also remained at the forefront of government priorities.

By May 2021, over 120 000 students had been absent from school or were not consistent in participating in school activities because of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, efforts by the ministry and the schools with the support of partners are making significant steps in finding and re-engaging these students to continue their education.

Major issues to be addressed for the sector going forward include:

- Learning loss and the erosion of basic academic skills due to lack of practice especially at the early childhood and primary levels. These years are critical in the development of children and, being out of school for almost two years without the guidance of trained educators challenged their educational development.
- The potential loss of earnings is expected over the long term. According to recent World Bank simulations, a 10-month school closure has put Jamaica at risk of losing 1.3 years in learning-adjusted years of schooling. This translates to an average annual earning loss per student of USD 1 099, which aggregates to a total lifetime earning loss of USD 5.5 billion – a third of Jamaica's annual GDP.⁷²
- Deterioration in the mental health and physical status of children and educators.
- Loss of protection from home and community-based violence.
- Disruption in apprenticeship schemes and other work-based related experience as technical and vocational training were negatively impacted.

The pandemic highlighted the inequities and gaps that existed and exist within the education system, particularly for vulnerable students. There is a need for urgency in bridging the gaps for the most vulnerable students and providing a more inclusive learning environment. Policies should be developed to offer a more inclusive approach to education, that is, both in-person and online. This is not a new approach but rather, continuing the modality that had been introduced when schools had been physically closed. There is also an opportunity to improve record management for schools, ensuring that there is documentation to support monitoring of the sector. Another opportunity is the ongoing capacity development of educators. The pandemic revealed that the level of capability and virtual literacy differed among

72 <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/commentary/20210826/mariko-kagoshima-thousands-jcan-children-are-lost-learning-they-need-our>

educators, particularly in rural areas and among the older educators in using different types of software and platforms for teaching and learning. Ensuring that all educators are trained can lead to the acceptance of e-learning.

Additionally, preparations for future shocks by building back better should be prioritized. The pandemic had a devastating impact on the education sector, and the country must not only recover but also use this experience to anticipate and prepare for future shocks. An important consideration for the future is ensuring that the learning loss is remedied including with after-school and summer school programmes. A deliberate focus on learning and tutoring programmes will help address the learning gap, particularly among the most vulnerable students. For the education sector to build back better, it requires holistic, sustainable and deliberate collaboration among stakeholders.

Resource Requirements

Protect the education budget: The COVID-19 pandemic has jeopardized the economy of countries and prompted cuts in budgets. To ensure the protection of the education sector and resilience in recovery, the budget must be protected to ensure gains made are not jeopardized and schools most in need are adequately supported. Given the loss of income for many households, individuals wishing to continue their education may not be able to do so. Government and private interests could provide incentives for students to remain in school through scholarships, grants, bursaries, as well as volunteering opportunities with a financial aid component.

Improve or construct infrastructure to support digital literacy: Many schools before the pandemic lacked the necessary infrastructure and internet capacity to support a robust digital literacy programme and were unable to respond to the need to transition to online learning.

Partnership – Government and international organizations must coordinate efforts to ensure continuity of learning and protect the domestic and international financing of education. Applying principles of redistributive justice, resources must be directed to those who have been hardest hit economically, socially and educationally.⁷³

73 https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/education_in_a_post-covid_world-nine_ideas_for_public_action.pdf