



## **Ministerial Statement**

To The House of Assembly

By

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Minister of Education

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Teacher Certification Bonded Loan

**Friday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

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**Mr Speaker,**

This morning I rise before you and my Honorable colleagues to share a new initiative that the Ministry is putting in place to support Bermudians pursuing a career in the teaching profession to become a qualified educator.

**Mr Speaker,**

There is no more noble profession than that of a teacher. Teaching is the only profession that teaches all other professions. As we continue on our path to education reform, reform must involve everything from the upgrade of facilities, provision for professional development of our educators, and revised system governance. This Government has committed to providing our children with a system that will allow them to realise their true potential.

**Mr Speaker**

The Government has always stated that financial means should not be a barrier to achieving one's educational goals. Since 2017, we have committed to ensuring that as much funding as possible has been provided for students pursuing higher education. From the \$300,000 annual grant to the Bermuda College that has helped almost 1,000 students to date, to how we have managed to maintain the 2021 scholarships and awards budget at the same 2020 level. Even in this COVID

era of forced austerity, we have made funding for Bermudians who seek to better themselves a priority.

**Mr Speaker,**

Today, I am pleased to inform my Honourable colleagues of yet another program designed to help Bermudians realise their educational dreams. In September 2021, the Ministry of Education will offer for the first time a 'Teacher's Certification Bonded Loan.' The purpose of this loan is to provide financial support to Bermudian residents who are enrolled in an approved and accredited distance-learning Teacher Certification Programme. Another one of the many steps in the right direction is to ensure opportunities exist for Bermudians to follow their dreams of becoming qualified teachers.

**Mr Speaker,**

Let me first share that as per the Bermuda Educators Council (BEC) Act 2002, a person is a qualified educator if they hold a university degree or an equivalent qualification granted by an institution recognised by the Council; and, they have successfully completed a course of initial training for teachers in schools at an institution recognised by the Council. In support of ensuring the public school system has qualified educators, **Mr Speaker**, a key outcome in Plan 2022 - Priority 3, Enhancing the Quality of Teaching Practice, is that 90% of teachers are certified in their assigned field. We are diligently working towards achieving that outcome.

**Mr Speaker,**

As a backdrop, every year, the public school system experiences shortages for various reasons of qualified teachers for specific subject areas. Some of the perennially difficult-to-fill teaching positions are in the subject areas of music, drama, physical education, mathematics, English, and foreign languages. To help fill these teaching positions, a BEC Exemption Committee legislated under the Bermuda Educators Council (BEC) Act 2002 provides recommendations to the Minister of Education for persons to be exempted from teaching these subjects at

schools. However, they do not hold the prerequisite teaching qualifications as stipulated in the Bermuda Educators Council Act.

**Mr Speaker,**

While exemptions are provided to persons to teach in the education system, we must have genuinely qualified educators. Therefore, persons who receive an exemption to teach in our schools must commit to pursuing a teaching certification within a specified time for the exemption status to continue. As a result, we have persons who have been granted exemptions to teach in the System and who are simultaneously pursuing their teaching certification.

**Mr Speaker,**

Currently, there are two University Teaching Certification Programmes that persons who live on Island commonly enrol in to undertake their teaching certification through distance learning. The Bermuda College, in Agreement with the University of the West Indies, provides a teaching certification programme (TCP) in Mathematics, English Language, Information Technology, Science, Modern Languages, History and Social Studies/Geography Education. The UK Sunderland University also offers a Teaching Certification distance learning programme in various subject specialisations, where persons apply directly to the University for enrollment. The teaching certification programme (TCP) broadly comprises undertaking subject-focused coursework leading towards a degree specialisation and participating in a 12-week teaching practicum assessed for successful passing. The teaching practicum, as I understand, refers to persons teaching children subject matter content in the classroom and demonstrating classroom leadership and management. This results in persons achieving a Teaching Certification and recognised as a qualified educator.

**Mr Speaker,**

The 12-week teaching practicum is considered a period of study, not employment, that parallels that of an overseas student who undertakes a teaching practicum programme. Therefore, during this period, exempted status persons are not remunerated. This has become financially challenging for persons enrolled in the

teaching certification programme who also have to uphold their household financial responsibilities while adhering to the teaching certification programme's deadline. Consequently, we have seen promising potential teachers opt to pursue employment elsewhere rather than finish their teaching certification. This year alone has seen 4 students, 3 of whom are male, in the UWI program, postpone their pursuit of a teaching certification due to this financial barrier.

**Mr Speaker,**

Since becoming the Minister of Education, I have personally seen promising teachers opt to postpone or give up on pursuing their qualification due to the inability to navigate this 12-week practicum with no income. To address this issue, last summer, I tasked the Board of Education to create new pathways to help enhance the recruitment and development of new teachers. In response, they developed a Teacher's Certification Bonded Loan career development policy that supports the Bermudianisation of teachers in the education system by providing limited financial assistance for career transferring professionals to become certified teachers. While this policy was initially developed to assist persons with exempted teaching status, let me be clear that this policy also covers anyone currently in the public school system interested in pursuing a teachers' certification.

**Mr Speaker,**

The loss of a salary while completing a 12-week teaching practicum has become a roadblock for persons who have decided to change professions and pursue a career in teaching. By affording a bonded loan to cover living expenses during these 12 weeks, persons will be able to focus on their teaching practicum experience and complete their teaching certification without significant financial impediment.

**Mr Speaker,**

The Teacher Certification Bonded Loan is valued at up to \$4,800 per month for 3 months. Applicants will be required to work for the Bermuda Public School System for a minimum of three years, during which the loan will be paid back through regular deductions from their salary. Applicants will be provided upfront with the

various options available for borrowing and repaying the loan to make an informed decision about how much they can reasonably afford to borrow.

**Mr Speaker,**

The Bonded Loan application process requires the applicant to:

- be a Bermudian,
- to reside locally,
- to be 25 years of age or older,
- already enrolled in an approved and accredited long-distance teaching certification programme
- Persons must be pursuing an area of study needed in the public school system,
- Agree to work in the Public School System for a minimum of 3 years upon receiving their certification, and
- They must also be able to effect a Bond signed by two Sureties.

The Teacher's Certification Bonded Loan Offering will come into effect in September 2021, and guidelines for applying for the Bonded Loan and the application form will be accessed on the Government's [www.forms.gov.bm](http://www.forms.gov.bm) website.

**Mr Speaker,**

In closing, let me emphasise that this initiative is to support our Bermudians who are committed to the education of our children and are pursuing a career in the teaching profession. Therefore, we encourage those currently exempted to teach in the public school system and anyone else in the BPSS seeking a Teachers' Certification who may need financial support during their 12-week practicum to take advantage of this initiative. We look forward to continuing efforts to support the Bermudianisation of teachers in the education system and ensuring all teachers are qualified educators.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**