

MINISTRY OF TOURISM CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Response to the Eight Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2021.

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts seeks to provide a response to the following:

2. Training

Accounting staff lacked adequate training across the public sector. There was a need for training at MDAs as follows:

- *MTCA: in its written submission dated July 15, 2022 the MTCA acknowledged that some accounting staff were not formally trained in the preparation of the Statements of Receipts and Disbursements. To address this, the MTCA explained that training in public sector accounting procedures was being planned for November 2022 in collaboration with the Public Service Academy. (page 19 refers)*

Observation:

- i. *The need for training is a recurring issue that is tied to compliance with financial directives as highlighted at issue 1 of this report. When staff do not have adequate training, the likelihood of accounts not being prepared in accordance with established practices and statutory requirements is greater.*

Recommendation:

- i. *The Director of Surveys – “.....the MTCA.....should report to Parliament on the following by January 31, 2023:*
 - a. *The training initiatives conducted and the topics covered as at September 30, 2022;*
 - b. *The number and proportion of accounting staff who received training;*
 - c. *Whether the training was conducted in-house, by the Public Service Academy or by another entity; and*
 - d. *The timeline for the implementation of training courses if no training has been conducted to date.*

MTCA Response:

(i)(a) The training initiatives conducted and the topics covered as at September 30, 2022.

As at September 30, 2022, the following training initiatives were conducted:

- Pension and Leave (P & L) Training

- Internal Audit Training in areas identified hereunder:
 - Strategic Leadership: The Essential Skills for Becoming a Highly Effective Auditor
 - Cybersecurity in an Unsecure World
 - Root Cause Analysis Tools & Techniques
 - Reputational Risk – The Auditor’s Role
 - Fraud Detection, Deterrence & Incident Response for Internal Auditors

(i)(b) The number and proportion of accounting staff who received training.

- Four (4) officers, approximately one third of the MTCA’s accounting personnel, received Pension and Leave training.
- Along with two (2) officers from the Internal Audit Unit, one (1) officer from the Accounting Unit also received Internal Audit training.

(i)(c) Whether the training was conducted in-house, by the Public Service Academy or by another entity.

- Pension and Leave training was conducted via an online workshop by the Personnel Department Office of the Chief Personnel Officer.
- Internal Audit training was conducted externally by the Institute of Internal Auditors of Trinidad and Tobago (IIATT).

(i)(d) The timeline for the implementation of training courses if no training has been conducted to date.

- All relevant Accounting personnel are expected to be trained in the role and function of Public Service Accounting Procedures in compliance with stipulated Financial Regulation. The first phase of training has been scheduled for January 24th 2023 and will be followed by a second phase in May 2023.

3. Administering Government Pandemic Relief Grants

The administering of pandemic-related government grants needs to be examined for compliance, efficiency and effectiveness. During its examination of the Report of the Auditor General for FY 2021, the Committee took careful note of issues highlighted with respect to the administering of pandemic-related government grants. Numerous inconsistencies were seen in the procedures followed for the distribution of the various grants. This resulted, for example, in losses of funds due to erroneous payments to ineligible persons, or to duplicate payments to persons not eligible for more than one (1) grant.

Observation:

- i. *In 2021, in its previously mentioned 2nd Report on an examination of the Report of the Auditor General for YR 2020, the Committee expressed the view that, with respect to the administering of pandemic relief grants, “the discrepancies noted in recordkeeping and the apparent internal audit and monitoring shortcomings could have created conditions for irregular practices to develop and flourish”. In the third (3rd) Session, Twelfth (12th) Parliament, the Committee will therefore conduct an examination of the concerns raised in the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2021 with specific reference to administering of government grants.*

MTCA Response:

The MTCA acknowledges the observations made by the Committee that, with respect to the administering of pandemic relief grants, “the discrepancies noted in recordkeeping...could have created conditions for irregular practices to develop and flourish.” The MTCA therefore commits to continuing in its efforts to ensure that the administering of government grants by its Grants Secretariat is conducted in an efficient and effective manner through use of the following measures:

- Assignment of an experienced senior officer, Cultural Officer II, to the Grants Secretariat in April 2021 to assist in knowledge transfer following the realignment of Ministries; and
- On-going efforts to design an updated system for general grant administration that will be sufficiently robust to meet emergency grant distribution in the future, if ever required.