COMMENTS ON THE 2027 NATIONAL BUDGET

HEADS 09, 49, 66 AND 80: EDUCATION, SKILLS, SCIENCE AND THE TEACHING SERVICE

SUBMITTED TO THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF ZAMBIA

BY

JESUIT CENTRE FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

NOVEMBER 2026

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR)
Plot 3813 Martin Mwamba Road, Olympia Park
P.O. Box 37774, Lusaka 10101, Zambia
Tel: +260 211 290410
Fax: +260 211 290759
admin@jctr.org.zm

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. PREAMBLE 3
2. SUMMARY 3
3. CONTEXT: FREE EDUCATION AND THE DEMAND IT HAS CREATED 4
3.1 The JCTR perspective 4
3.2 Enrolment has outpaced the inputs 6
3.3 The Teaching Service Commission's mandate 8
4. OVERVIEW OF THE 2027 ALLOCATIONS 9
4.1 The education sector: Heads 80 and 49 9
4.2 The Teaching Service Commission: Head 09 12
4.3 The Ministry of Technology and Science: Head 66 13
5. ADEQUACY AND RAMIFICATIONS FOR SET TARGETS 15
5.1 Teachers: the binding constraint 15
5.2 The Commission's capacity to appoint, inspect and hear appeals 16
5.3 Classrooms, school grants and learning materials 18
5.4 Skills and higher education 19
5.5 Science, technology and innovation 19
6. EVIDENCE FROM JCTR'S WORK 20
7. ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS 21
8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VARIATIONS 23
8.1 Head 80: Ministry of Education 23
8.2 Head 49: Ministry of Skills and Higher Education 24
8.3 Head 66: Ministry of Technology and Science 25
8.4 Head 09: Teaching Service Commission 26
9. CONCLUSION 27
ANNEX: EDUCATION SECTOR STATISTICS 27

1. PREAMBLE

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) is a faith-based research, education and advocacy centre established in 1988. Guided by its vision of "a just Zambian society guided by faith, where everyone enjoys the fullness of life", JCTR works with Government, Parliament and communities on social and economic justice. It regards the national budget as the most important economic policy instrument for reducing poverty and has analysed and commented on it for many years.

On Friday, 6th November 2026, the Minister of Finance and National Planning, Hon. Dr Situmbeko Musokotwane, MP, presented the proposed 2027 National Budget to Parliament under the theme "Grow Zambia: From Stabilisation to Unlocking Opportunities, Creating Jobs and Improving Livelihoods for All". The Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the financial year 1st January to 31st December 2027 total K284.8 billion.

By letter reference NAS/11/19/13 Conf of 7th November 2026, the Office of the Clerk of the National Assembly invited JCTR to comment on the 2027 allocations to the education sector. This memorandum covers four Heads: Head 80, the Ministry of Education; Head 49, the newly created Ministry of Skills and Higher Education; Head 66, the Ministry of Technology and Science; and Head 09, the Teaching Service Commission. In line with the invitation, it sets out (i) an overview of the allocations, (ii) their adequacy and ramifications for meeting set targets, (iii) their alignment with national and international commitments, and (iv) recommended variations. It draws on the 2027 Estimates (Yellow Book), the 2027-2029 Medium Term Budget Plan (Green Paper), the 2027 Budget Address, the Ministry of Education's 2025 Education Statistics Bulletin, JCTR's June 2026 budget proposals and October 2026 submission on the Green Paper, JCTR's analysis of the Auditor General's reports, and community evidence gathered under JCTR's LIFT programme.

2. SUMMARY

The education function is allocated K38.2 billion in 2027, up from K33.0 billion in 2026, and its share of the national budget rises from 13.1 percent to 13.4 percent. Of this, Head 80 receives K30.9 billion and Head 49 K5.4 billion. JCTR welcomes the growth, the large increases for curriculum materials, school grants, school feeding, student loans and university infrastructure, and the restoration of the Teaching Service Commission's funding above the Green Paper ceiling.

The sector nevertheless remains below the international benchmarks of 15 to 20 percent of the budget and 4 to 6 percent of GDP, and the budget does not keep pace with the demand that free education has created.

The weakest point is teachers, in quality as well as numbers. Enrolment from early childhood education to Grade 12 has risen by 36 percent since 2021, to 6.83 million learners in 2025, and learners per teacher have climbed from 37 in 2022 to 43 in 2025. The Ministry of Education recorded no government recruitment between 2024 and 2025 and 7,981 teachers leaving the profession in 2025. In 2020 more than a third of primary teachers lacked the diploma now required to teach, and an estimated 98.5 percent of Zambian children cannot read and understand a simple text by the age of 10. The 2027 Budget Address states a recruitment number for health workers but not for teachers, and the Teaching Service Commission, which must appoint every teacher, has no recruitment indicator and a 26.4 percent cut to the inspections that police delegated appointments. Elsewhere, primary and secondary school infrastructure falls while only 78 of 248 targeted secondary schools were under construction by mid-2026; the Keeping Girls in School programme is cut by 60 percent; TEVET bursaries are frozen at K1.4 million for a target of 104,200 learners; and the whole of the Technology and Innovation increase under Head 66 is a single transfer to the Radiation Protection Authority, while research and ICT development are cut.

JCTR therefore recommends, among other things, that Government states and funds a 2027 teacher recruitment target at least equal to annual attrition; that the Teaching Service Commission's inspections budget is restored and recruitment funded; that part of the university infrastructure allocation goes to rehabilitating existing universities; that TEVET bursaries are raised; and that research and innovation funding is linked to clear outputs. The detailed variations are in section 8.

3. CONTEXT: FREE EDUCATION AND THE DEMAND IT HAS CREATED

3.1 The JCTR perspective

Before turning to the allocations, it is important to understand the chain of effects that the Free Education Policy has set off within the education system. The policy has significantly increased access to education, resulting in higher enrolment and, consequently, higher demand for educational services. More learners require more classrooms and learning space, more teachers

and auxiliary staff, and adequate teaching and learning materials, especially now that the revised 2023 curriculum is being implemented (Figure 1).

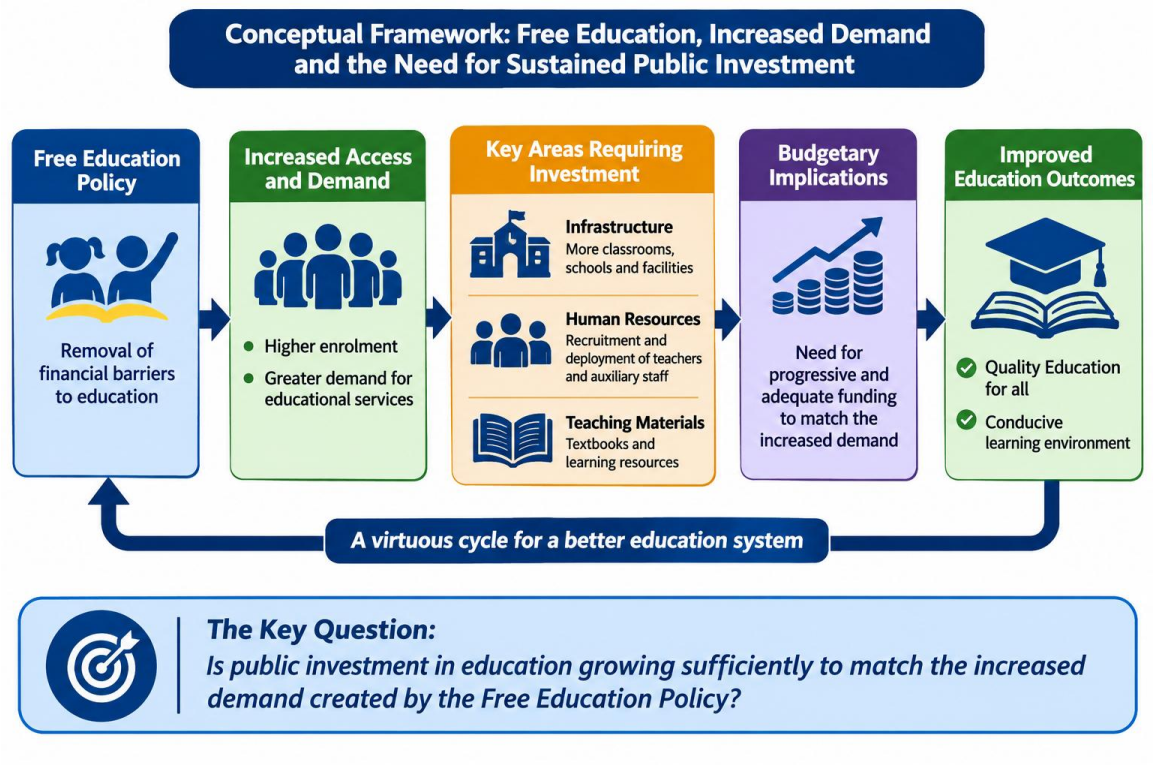


Figure 1: Free education, increased demand and the need for sustained public investment

Source: JCTR illustration.

These demands carry budgetary consequences. As more children enter school, Government must progressively increase investment so that the capacity of the system keeps pace with access. Failing to do so places pressure on existing facilities, raises pupil-teacher ratios and constrains the supply of learning materials, which in turn affects the quality of education. The success of free education should therefore be measured not only by the number of children enrolled but by the quality of education they receive and the conditions in which they learn. The central question for this memorandum is whether public investment in education is growing sufficiently and progressively to match the demand created by the policy.

Education is not merely a social service; it is an investment in human capital, productivity, growth and national development. The evidence on free education is encouraging. A SOUTHMOD study by Sihubwa and Bowa (2023) estimates that the policy raised school enrolment by 8.4 percent in 2021 and 12.4 percent in 2022, reduced the poverty rate by 3.7 percentage points, from 38.8 to

35.1 percent, and narrowed inequality, with the largest gains in female-headed households. The same study finds that the policy requires significant and sustained public spending. Protecting those gains means funding the system that delivers them.

3.2 Enrolment has outpaced the inputs

The Ministry of Education's 2025 Education Statistics Bulletin shows the scale of the change. Between 2021 and 2025 enrolment from early childhood education to Grade 12 rose by 36.0 percent, from 5.03 million to 6.83 million learners. Early childhood enrolment more than doubled, from 336,434 to 706,049, and Grade 12 enrolment rose by 55 percent. The number of teachers rose by 33.5 percent over the same period, but almost all of that gain came in 2022, when 30,496 teachers were recruited in a single drive (Table 1 and Figure 2). Since 2022 enrolment has grown by 23.4 percent and the teaching force by 6.6 percent, so learners per teacher have climbed back from 37 to 43.

Table 1: Learners and teachers in all schools, 2021-2025

Year	Learners (ECE to Grade 12)	Teachers	Learners per teacher
2021	5,025,614	119,587	42.0
2022	5,538,681	149,804	37.0
2023	5,936,505	154,304	38.5
2024	6,527,980	159,444	40.9
2025	6,833,236	159,708	42.8
Change 2021-2025	+36.0%	+33.5%	

Source: Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Bulletin 2025, Tables 2.1 and 5.1 (all running agencies). Learners per teacher computed by JCTR.

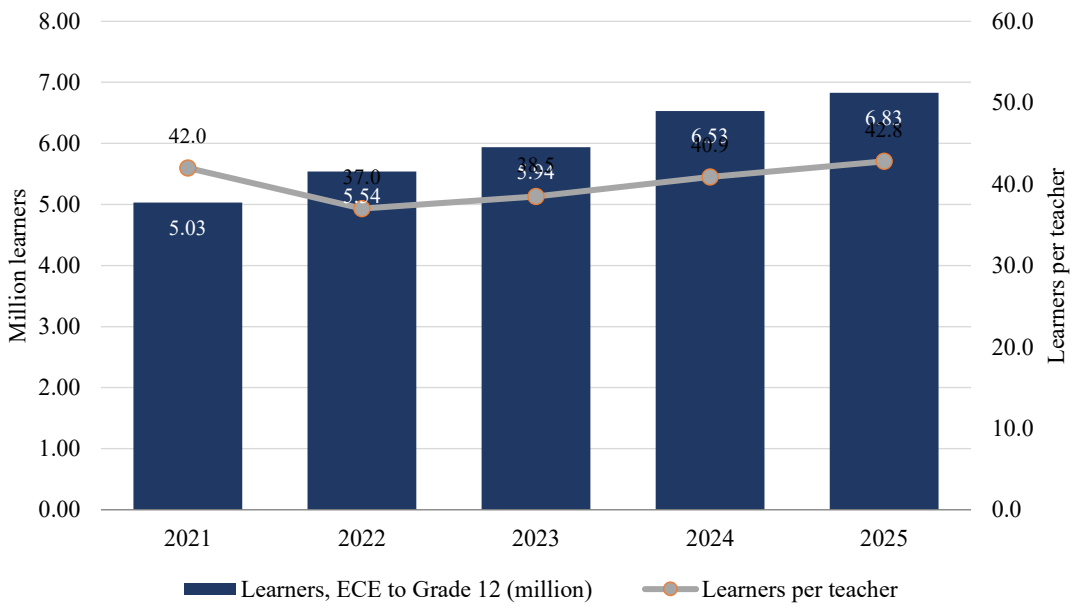


Figure 2: Learners and learners per teacher, 2021-2025

Source: Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Bulletin 2025. Learners per teacher computed by JCTR.

The Bulletin records that there was no government recruitment between 2024 and 2025: the number of primary teachers fell by 272 while primary enrolment rose by almost 206,000. In 2025 alone 7,981 teachers left the profession, 2,187 through resignation and 1,304 through retirement. The 2,000-teacher intake for 2025, delayed by a human resource audit and completed only in 2026, replaces about a quarter of one year's losses, and the 3,500 for 2026 less than half. The 2027 Budget Address reports that 41,917 teachers have been recruited since 2022. In April 2026 the Minister of Education announced a drive of between 30,000 and 40,000 teachers in 2027, but the Budget Address does not state a 2027 teacher number, although it does for health workers (3,125).

Averages also hide wide gaps. In 2025 the primary pupil-teacher ratio was 46:1 nationally, ranging from 40:1 in Western Province to 53:1 on the Copperbelt, and there were 69 primary learners for every classroom. UNICEF Innocenti's study of the 2022 recruitment found that before that drive a quarter of districts had primary ratios above 80:1 and one in ten rural schools exceeded 114:1, and that only 37 percent of teachers in rural schools were women, against 78 percent in urban schools. In some schools the ratio still exceeds 100:1, as JCTR's community evidence confirms (section 6).

Numbers are only part of the problem. UNICEF Innocenti's Data Must Speak analysis of the 2020 school census found that 38 percent of primary teachers held a certificate or lower as their highest

professional qualification, 50 percent a diploma and only 11 percent a degree. Since a three-year diploma is now the minimum for primary teaching, more than a third of primary teachers did not meet it. Schools with more diploma-holders performed slightly better in Grade 7 mathematics and English, and schools with fewer learners per teacher did better too; in that sample, rural schools averaged 68 learners per teacher against 41 in urban schools. The same research cites Ministry assessments showing that about one teacher in five is routinely absent and fewer than 40 percent routinely prepare lesson plans. Women make up about 40 percent of teachers but only 23 percent of head teachers.

The results show in learning. An estimated 98.5 percent of Zambian children cannot read and understand a simple text by the age of 10, and in 2020 the average Grade 7 examination score was 48.1 percent in English and 48.6 percent in mathematics. No current national breakdown of teachers by qualification or salary scale is published: neither the 2024 nor the 2025 Education Statistics Bulletin includes one, although the annual school census collects it.

3.3 The Teaching Service Commission's mandate

Every teacher who is a public officer enters, moves through and leaves the profession under the authority of the Teaching Service Commission. Article 223 of the Constitution establishes the Teaching Service, and Article 224 requires the Commission to constitute offices in it and to appoint, confirm, promote and hear appeals from its officers. The Service Commissions Act No. 10 of 2016 sets out its further functions and how it works (Table 2).

Table 2: The mandate of the Teaching Service Commission

Provision	What it requires of the Commission
Constitution, Article 223	The Teaching Service is a distinct service. Teachers who are public officers belong to it, not to the Civil Service.
Constitution, Article 224(2)	Constitute offices; appoint, confirm, promote and hear appeals from officers of the Teaching Service; perform other prescribed functions.
Constitution, Article 216	Be subject only to the Constitution and the law; be independent; be non-partisan and impartial.
Constitution, Articles 238 and 239	Be self-accounting and adequately funded each financial year to perform its functions effectively; its expenses are a charge on the Consolidated Fund.
Service Commissions Act, s. 10(1)(a)–(e)	Second, transfer, re-grade and separate teachers; authorise withholding or suspension of salary; hear complaints and appeals from decisions of Government institutions.
Service Commissions Act, s. 10(1)(f)–(i)	With the Teaching Council, set a code of ethics; set human resource standards; monitor compliance by institutions exercising delegated functions; impose sanctions, including withdrawal of delegated functions.
Service Commissions Act, ss. 31–34	The President's power to appoint is exercised by the Commission on the President's behalf; Responsible Officers and human resource management committees (with a union representative and two external members) decide delegated cases under the Commission's oversight; dissatisfied officers may appeal to the Commission.

Source: Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act No. 2 of 2016; Service Commissions Act No. 10 of 2016.

Two features of this design matter for the budget. The Commission is the constitutional gatekeeper of entry into the teaching profession, so a recruitment drive is only as fast and as fair as the Commission's capacity to process it. And the 2016 Act built a decentralised system in which most decisions are taken by Responsible Officers and committees, while the Commission sets standards, inspects compliance, hears appeals and withdraws delegated powers from institutions that abuse them. That system only works if the Commission has the means to inspect.

4. OVERVIEW OF THE 2027 ALLOCATIONS

4.1 The education sector: Heads 80 and 49

The 2027 Budget Address allocates K38.2 billion, or 13.4 percent of the Budget, to the education function, up from K33.0 billion and 13.1 percent in 2026. This includes K3.2 billion for education infrastructure, K2.8 billion for school operations under the Free Education Policy, K1.9 billion for

higher education loans and scholarships, and K1.0 billion for school feeding. The two main education Heads account for most of it: the Ministry of Education (Head 80) receives K30.9 billion and the Ministry of Skills and Higher Education (Head 49) K5.4 billion, with the balance in education spending under other Heads. Table 3 and Figure 3 show how the main levels of education share the function allocation.

Table 3: Distribution of allocations to selected education programmes, 2026-2027

Programme	2026 (K)	Share 2026	2027 (K)	Share 2027	Change in share (pp)
Early Childhood Education	885,014,910	2.68%	794,059,236	2.08%	−0.60
Primary Education	13,713,809,631	41.52%	14,858,805,259	38.90%	−2.62
Secondary Education	10,696,928,512	32.38%	13,863,719,356	36.30%	+3.92
University Education	2,845,369,708	8.61%	4,483,010,128	11.74%	+3.13

Source: Yellow Book 2026 and 2027, Heads 80 and 49; 2027 Budget Address. Shares are of the education function allocation (K33.0 billion in 2026; K38.2 billion in 2027). University Education moved from Head 80 to Head 49 in 2027.

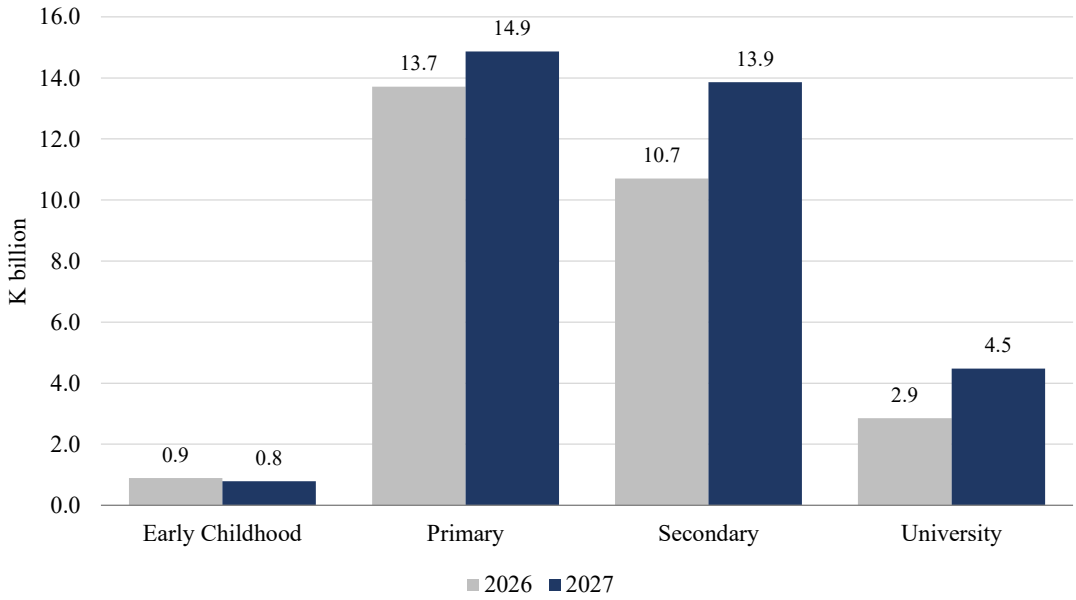


Figure 3: Allocations to the main levels of education, 2026 and 2027 (K billion)

Source: Yellow Book 2026 and 2027, Heads 80 and 49.

Early Childhood Education remains the smallest programme. Its share falls from 2.68 to 2.08 percent and its allocation by 10.3 percent, to K794.1 million, against UNICEF's recommended 10 percent of the education budget. Service delivery has nevertheless grown fast: 706,049 children

were recorded in early childhood education as at June 2026, more than twice the target of 300,000, and the 2027 target of one million is attainable if funding keeps pace. The allocation for ECE infrastructure falls from K188.5 million to K88.8 million, which JCTR attributes to the role the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) has played in building ECE classrooms.

Primary Education receives the largest allocation, rising to K14.9 billion, but its share falls by 2.62 percentage points to 38.9 percent. The infrastructure line falls from K69.9 million to K45.1 million, which JCTR again attributes to CDF financing of classrooms, most visibly the 1x3 classroom blocks.

Secondary Education rises by 29.6 percent to K13.9 billion, lifting its share from 32.38 to 36.30 percent. JCTR notes a new allocation of K200 million for secondary school feeding, targeting 1,432,247 learners in 2027 against 645,808 reached by June 2026. Funding for the Keeping Girls in School (KGS) programme falls by 60.2 percent, from K492.1 million to K196.0 million, which JCTR attributes to the scaling down of donor funding. The gains made through KGS should be sustained rather than cut this sharply.

University Education, now under Head 49, records the largest increase: 57.6 percent, to K4.5 billion, raising its share from 8.61 to 11.74 percent. University infrastructure rises by 146.7 percent, from K600 million to K1.48 billion, including provision to begin six specialised provincial universities, and student loans and scholarships rise from K1.36 billion to K1.95 billion for a target of 54,000 students. The Skills Development programme, transferred from Head 66, receives K852.7 million, compared with K531.9 million under Head 66 in 2026, mainly through a K459.1 million Skills Development Fund.

Other notable lines are summarised in Table 4. School grants and curriculum materials rise sharply, while school infrastructure falls.

Table 4: Selected Head 80 lines, 2025-2027 (K million)

Line	2025	2026	2027	Change 2026-27
School grants – primary	430.00	470.24	620.24	+31.9%
School grants – secondary	70.05	71.07	91.07	+28.1%
Curriculum and materials – primary	2.14	142.09	256.33	+80.4%
Curriculum and materials – secondary	1.63	0.96	225.93	+23,508%
Infrastructure – primary		69.90	45.10	−35.5%
Infrastructure – secondary		1,430.00	1,350.00	−5.6%
Keeping Girls in School		492.10	195.98	−60.2%

Source: Yellow Book 2026 and 2027, Head 80. Infrastructure and KGS figures for 2025 not shown.

By economic classification, Head 80 remains dominated by salaries. Personal emoluments rise by K2.36 billion, or 10.9 percent, to K24.1 billion and now absorb 78.1 percent of the Head, while assets fall from K2.4 billion to K1.6 billion and goods and services from K737.2 million to K651.7 million.

4.2 The Teaching Service Commission: Head 09

Head 09 receives K23.5 million, up 2.7 percent on 2026 and about 3.3 percent less in real terms. JCTR welcomes the decision to fund the Commission well above the Green Paper ceiling of K18.4 million, which would have cut it by 19.7 percent. Within the Head, money moves from inspections to case processing: Human Resource Management Services rises by 18.0 percent while Teaching Service Standards and Inspections falls by 26.4 percent, and capital for the core programme falls from K1.90 million to K0.20 million (Table 5 and Figure 4). The Commission's K23.5 million is less than 0.1 percent of the K24.1 billion budgeted for teachers' and staff emoluments under Head 80.

Table 5: Head 09 by programme and sub-programme, 2025-2027 (K million)

Programme / sub-programme	2025	2026	2027	Change 2026-27
5520 Teaching Service Human Resource Management	14.04	14.61	14.19	−2.8%
Human Resource Management Services	7.79	7.76	9.15	+18.0%
Teaching Service Standards and Inspections	6.25	6.85	5.04	−26.4%
5599 Management and Support Services	8.09	8.26	9.30	+12.6%
Human Resources and Administration	7.16	7.18	8.52	+18.6%
Other support sub-programmes	0.93	1.09	0.79	−27.5%
Head total	**22.14**	**22.87**	**23.49**	**+2.7%**

Source: Yellow Book 2027, Head 09. Green Paper ceiling for 2027: K18.36 million. The real change uses inflation of 6.3 percent (October 2026).

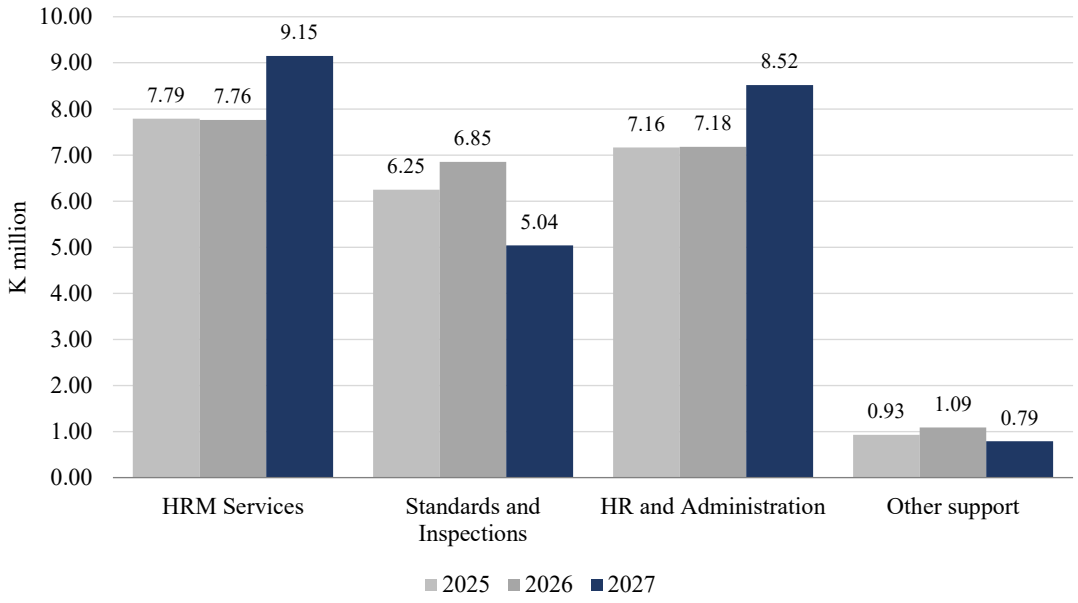


Figure 4: Head 09 sub-programmes, 2025-2027 (K million)

Source: Yellow Book 2027, Head 09.

4.3 The Ministry of Technology and Science: Head 66

The Ministry of Technology and Science is mandated to formulate and implement policies that promote the development and application of technology, science and communications for socio-economic development, and to regulate, license and supervise activities in these sectors. Its allocation falls from K1.37 billion in 2026 to K684.0 million in 2027. Most of that fall reflects the

transfer of Skills Development to Head 49, but excluding that programme, the Head still falls by 18.6 percent (Table 6 and Figure 5).

Table 6: Head 66 by programme, 2025-2027 (K million)

Programme	2025	2026	2027	Change 2026-27
2151 Science Research and Development	178.10	143.93	121.62	−15.5%
2152 ICT Development	228.60	566.78	304.14	−46.3%
2153 Skills Development (moved to Head 49)	516.12	531.93	–	–
2154 Technology and Innovation	58.51	68.71	191.71	+179.0%
2199 Management and Support Services	60.60	60.87	66.57	+9.4%
Head total	**1,041.93**	**1,372.22**	**684.03**	**−50.2%**

Source: Yellow Book 2027, Head 66.

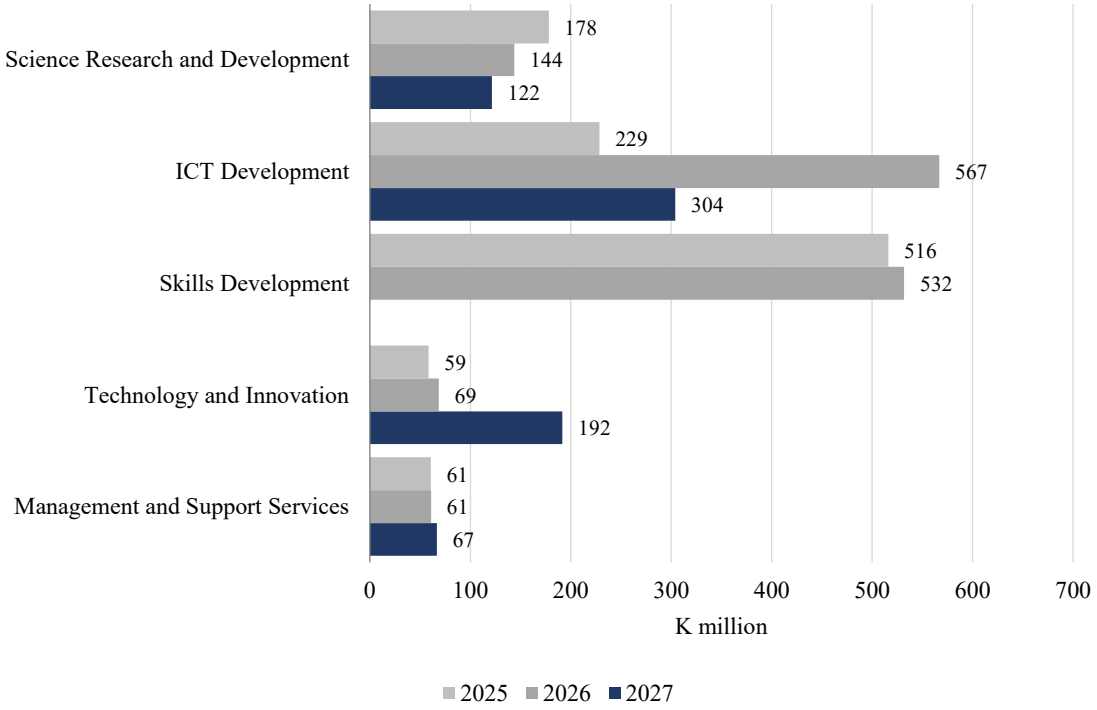


Figure 5: Head 66 allocations to programmes, 2025-2027 (K million)

Source: Yellow Book 2027, Head 66. Skills Development moved to Head 49 in 2027.

Science Research and Development falls by 15.5 percent, signalling lower priority for research in 2027, and ICT Development by K262.6 million, or 46.3 percent, reflecting reduced investment in digital infrastructure. Technology and Innovation is the only programme to grow, by 179.0 percent.

The detail shows, however, that the entire K123.0 million increase is a single transfer to the Radiation Protection Authority, which rises from K11.0 million to K134.0 million. Transfers to the National Technology Business Centre, the National Remote Sensing Centre and the Technology Development Fund are unchanged, the target for technologies commercialised stays at two, and the target for technology and innovation hubs falls from two to one. The increase is therefore not the push for technology incubation and innovation that the headline figure suggests.

5. ADEQUACY AND RAMIFICATIONS FOR SET TARGETS

Nominal allocations have risen. The test is whether the resources match the pressures created by free education and allow each institution to meet its targets.

5.1 Teachers: the binding constraint

High enrolment and overcrowding are the most visible effects of free education. Overcrowding undermines learning, and without proportional teacher recruitment and classroom expansion, wider access risks lowering quality. Teaching is also a service with significant natural attrition through retirement, death and moves into other sectors, so sustained annual recruitment is needed simply to stand still. The Ministry's own figure of 7,981 departures in 2025, most of them resignations and retirements, shows the scale of that need (Figure 6).

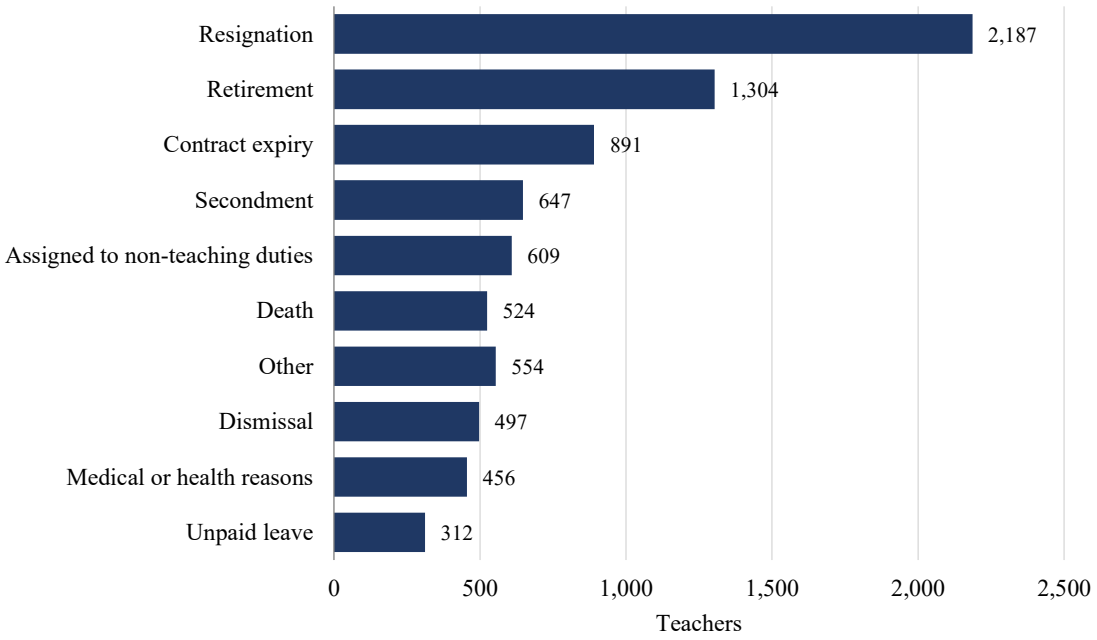


Figure 6: Teachers leaving the profession by reason, 2025

Source: Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Bulletin 2025, Table 5.6 (all schools, including early childhood education).

The Budget does not say how many teachers will be recruited in 2027. Personal emoluments under Head 80 rise by K2.36 billion and the Green Paper commits to "increased staffing in the education and health sectors", but no number is stated and no output indicator tracks it. The omission signals low priority and leaves Parliament unable to hold the Executive to the Minister's announced drive of 30,000 to 40,000 teachers. Whatever the number, it must be large enough at least to replace annual attrition, and it must reach rural schools, where shortages are worst.

5.2 The Commission's capacity to appoint, inspect and hear appeals

The Teaching Service Commission's largest task in 2027 does not appear in its budget. Neither the programme narrative nor the output table refers to recruitment, appointment or placement. The increase in Human Resource Management Services (K1.39 million) is the only line that could absorb the work of advertising, shortlisting, verifying qualifications and Teaching Council registration, appointing, placing and confirming tens of thousands of teachers. If the Commission cannot process the intake on time, schools bear the cost: teachers recruited but not placed, placed but not on the payroll, or appointed to urban schools while rural posts stay vacant. The 2022 drive offers lessons: UNICEF Innocenti found that applications through the Zambia Postal Services

Corporation, published scoring criteria and district human resource management committees made the process more transparent, and recommended that those committees be resourced and that payroll records be reconciled with actual placements. None of this is costed for 2027.

The Commission also plans to delegate more functions to Responsible Officers in 2027, yet the Standards and Inspections sub-programme that funds its duty to monitor and sanction them under section 10(1)(h) and (i) of the Act is cut by K1.81 million while the target of monitoring all 116 districts is unchanged. As recently as mid-2025 only 85 districts had been reached. Weak oversight has real costs. UNICEF Innocenti found informal transfers from rural to urban schools widespread despite the four-year tenure rule, and payroll records showing rural schools as fully staffed where only one teacher remained; the Auditor General found in 2014 that 60 percent of teachers were not working at the schools where they were paid. Placement also needs checking for fit: UNICEF Innocenti found primary-trained teachers teaching Grades 8 and 9 in combined schools, and secondary-trained teachers placed in lower primary, without the training for either.

Appeals are slipping too. The share of appeals settled within 30 days fell from 100 percent in mid-2025 to 65 percent in mid-2026, and disciplinary cases disposed of within 21 days stand at 63 percent (Table 7). The 2027 targets assume a recovery to 80 percent on appeals with no extra resources, in a year when a large intake will add appeals from unsuccessful applicants and placement disputes.

Table 7: Head 09 output targets and results, 2025-2027 (percent unless stated)

Indicator	2025 target	2025 actual*	2026 target	2026 actual*	2027 target
Officers confirmed	90	90	90	93	90
Appeals processed	75	75	75	65	75
Appeals settled within 30 days	100	100	75	65	80
Disciplinary cases disposed of within 21 days	65	65	65	63	65
Districts monitored (number)	116	85	116	116	116
Teachers appointed or placed	–	–	–	–	No indicator

*Source: Yellow Book 2026 and 2027, Head 09, Programme 5520. *Actuals as at 30th June of each year.*

5.3 Classrooms, school grants and learning materials

Although primary and secondary school grants increase, their nominal values remain inadequate to meet the day-to-day running costs of schools amid rising prices and growing enrolment. Spread across 4.69 million primary learners, the 2027 primary grant is about K132 per learner for the year.

The fall in infrastructure funding, from K69.9 million to K45.1 million for primary schools and from K1.43 billion to K1.35 billion for secondary schools, adds pressure at a time when secondary school construction is behind schedule: only 78 of the 248 secondary schools targeted were under construction as at June 2026. The Bulletin records 4,700 incomplete and 6,469 temporary primary classrooms and 69 learners per primary classroom. Reliance on CDF to fill the gap is reasonable but carries risk. JCTR's analysis of the Auditor General's reports shows that CDF carried K2.61 billion unspent into 2024 and that 2,982 desks procured through it were substandard (section 6). At Twaiteka Combined School in Kalulushi, the community reports too few classrooms, no laboratories and unhygienic toilets (section 6). Infrastructure also must not end with classrooms. Laboratories and libraries are critical, and every secondary school should have a fully stocked library: the Bulletin counts fewer than 50,000 physics and chemistry textbooks each for 1.43 million secondary learners.

The scale-up of the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme to K1 billion and the K200 million for secondary school feeding are commendable steps. The KGS cut, by contrast, comes as 22,970 learner pregnancies were recorded in 2025 and only 17,239 readmissions, and risks reversing gains in girls' retention.

What raises learning is known, and it is cheap relative to buildings. The Ministry's Catch-Up programme, which groups learners in Grades 3 to 5 by level for an hour a day, raised the share of pupils able to read a simple text from 22 to 41 percent in its pilot and now runs in more than 4,400 public primary schools in eight provinces. Data Must Speak research in schools that perform better than their circumstances predict found stronger head teacher support for teaching, systems to track teacher and learner attendance, and more useful district support: 54.7 percent of teachers in those schools said visits by District Education Standards Officers had improved their teaching, against 42.6 percent in comparison schools. These are the things that standards, teacher education and school leadership lines in Head 80 pay for, and they deserve protection alongside capital spending.

5.4 Skills and higher education

Head 49 targets only one new trades training institute, the rehabilitation of one existing institute and the equipping of one in 2027. TEVET bursaries are held at K1.38 million, the same as in 2026, for a target of 104,200 TEVET learners, or about K13 per learner. The target for learners in open, distance and flexible learning has been cut to 6,000 after only 3,137 were enrolled against a target of 60,000 in 2025. This low level of ambition sits uneasily with the scale of youth unemployment: a 2022 skills landscape analysis for the Ministry of Education found that almost 40 percent of young men and 50 percent of young women are not in employment, education or training. Without more ambitious, measurable targets, it is hard to see how Government will close the infrastructure and access gaps in skills development.

University infrastructure absorbs most of the growth in higher education. Building six new provincial universities is a long-term commitment, while existing public universities face a backlog of rehabilitation and still depend on Government grants. Balancing new construction against rehabilitation would raise the return on the K1.48 billion allocated.

5.5 Science, technology and innovation

The degree of industrialisation in developed nations is closely linked to their investment in science and technology, while less developed countries invest less in research and development and innovate less as a result. Vision 2030 aspires to make science, technology and innovation central to Zambia's development, but also identifies the sector's underdevelopment, reflected in low spending as a share of GDP, few skilled personnel and few patent applications, as a major constraint. It commits to acquiring and upgrading infrastructure for science and technology training and research in academic institutions by 2030, which requires the rehabilitation of existing facilities, modern equipment and investment in researchers, not only new institutions.

The 2027 allocation moves the other way. Research funding falls by 15.5 percent, ICT development by 46.3 percent, and the apparent increase for technology and innovation is, as shown in section 4.3, a transfer to a regulator. Inadequate investment limits Zambia's capacity to develop home-grown solutions and to raise productivity, and leaves commitments to establish and operationalise technology and innovation hubs at risk of remaining unrealised. Digital readiness in schools is low: the Bulletin records about 53,000 ICT devices across 13,987 schools, roughly

one for every 129 learners, stable internet in 23 percent of schools and no power source at all in about 42 percent.

6. EVIDENCE FROM JCTR'S WORK

JCTR works with communities to monitor public services and to bring their priorities into the budget process. Their evidence, from rural Sinazongwe to peri-urban Kalulushi, shows that the gaps described above are felt most sharply where schools are already stretched.

Case study 1: Nkandabwe, Sinazongwe District

Under the LIFT programme supported by Norwegian Church Aid and DanChurchAid, JCTR has worked in Sinazongwe and Nkandabwe wards since July 2025. In the community submissions gathered for JCTR's June 2026 budget proposals, residents reported that Nkandabwe Secondary and Primary School has more than 750 pupils and only 10 teachers, a ratio of about 75 pupils to a teacher, with up to seven pupils sharing a desk and insufficient housing for teachers. The community asked for more teachers to be recruited and for teachers' houses to be built so that those posted to the school stay.

Case study 2: Twaiteka Combined School, Kalulushi District

In JCTR's community consultations in Twaiteka Ward for the June 2026 budget proposals, residents reported that Twaiteka Combined School does not have enough classroom space for its growing number of learners. It has no science or computer laboratory, so science and computer studies are taught without practical work; it has no wall fence; and its toilets are old and no longer hygienic. The community asked for a 1x4 classroom block, a science laboratory and a computer laboratory, a wall fence and flush toilets. None of these is identifiable in the 2027 Estimates, which reduce primary school infrastructure from K69.9 million to K45.1 million.

Case study 3: The Constituency Development Fund and school infrastructure

JCTR's March 2026 policy brief on the Auditor General's reports for 2022 to 2024 found that CDF carried K2.61 billion unspent into 2024, that only K321.9 million of K1.98 billion for community projects was spent in 2022, and that 2,982 desks procured through the Fund were substandard. CDF has built many classrooms, but its record shows that cuts to Ministry infrastructure lines cannot simply assume that the Fund will absorb the work on time and to standard.

Case study 4: JCTR's budget proposals and Green Paper submission
In June 2026 JCTR asked Government to strengthen teacher workforce planning through regular assessments of staffing needs and attrition, to fund the timely replacement of teachers who leave, and to deploy teachers equitably to underserved areas. In its October 2026 submission on the Green Paper, JCTR recorded that the 2027 ceiling for the Teaching Service Commission was 19.7 percent below 2026 and asked that commissions be funded as Article 238 requires. The Estimates have restored the Commission's funding in nominal terms, and JCTR welcomes this.

The Ministry's own data point the same way. In 2025 schools reported 28,794 permanent staff houses for 159,708 teachers, about one house for every five or six teachers. Housing is the non-financial incentive that UNICEF Innocenti found most likely to keep teachers in rural posts.

7. ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

Table 8 assesses the 2027 allocations against Zambia's long-term vision, its constitutional duties and the international benchmarks for education financing.

Table 8: Alignment of the 2027 allocations with national and international commitments

Commitment	What it requires	2027 position	Assessment
Vision 2030: pupil-teacher ratios	40:1 in basic and 25:1 in high school	Primary 46:1 and secondary 33:1 in 2025; no teacher recruitment target	Not aligned
Vision 2030: pupil-textbook ratio	1:1	Curriculum materials up 237 percent; ratio still 6.9 learners per book in primary and 24.7 in secondary	Partly aligned
Vision 2030: school access	75 percent of learners within 5 km of a school	School infrastructure lines cut; reliance on CDF	Not aligned
Vision 2030: science and technology	Acquire and upgrade science and research infrastructure by 2030	Research cut 15.5 percent; ICT development cut 46.3 percent	Not aligned
Incheon Declaration and SDG 4: share of budget	15 to 20 percent of public expenditure	13.4 percent	Not aligned
Incheon Declaration and SDG 4: share of GDP	4 to 6 percent of GDP	About 3.8 percent	Not aligned
SDG target 4.c	Substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers	No recruitment number; Commission's capacity to appoint and place not funded	Partly aligned
Constitution, Arts. 224, 238 and 265	Adequately fund the Commission to appoint, confirm, promote and hear appeals	Real cut of 3.3 percent; inspections cut 26.4 percent	Not aligned
National Development Plan: Improved Education and Skills Development	Access to quality, equitable and inclusive education; technical and vocational skills	Strong growth in feeding, grants and materials; skills targets low	Partly aligned

Source: JCTR analysis of Yellow Book 2027, Vision 2030, the Incheon Framework for Action and the Constitution.

Zambia's education allocation as a share of GDP has fallen from 4.4 percent in 2023 to 4.3 percent in 2024, 3.9 percent in 2025 and 3.6 percent in 2026, before rising slightly to an estimated 3.8 percent in 2027 (K38.2 billion against projected nominal GDP of about K1,003 billion). At 13.4 percent of the budget, the sector is also below the 15 to 20 percent range of the Incheon Framework and the commitment in the UPND 2021 manifesto to align education financing with global standards. The National Education Policy 2025 itself records that education's share of public

spending fell from 20 percent in 2015 to 10.4 percent in 2022. JCTR recognises the macro-fiscal constraints and high debt service, but progressive adjustment towards the benchmarks remains necessary (Figure 7).

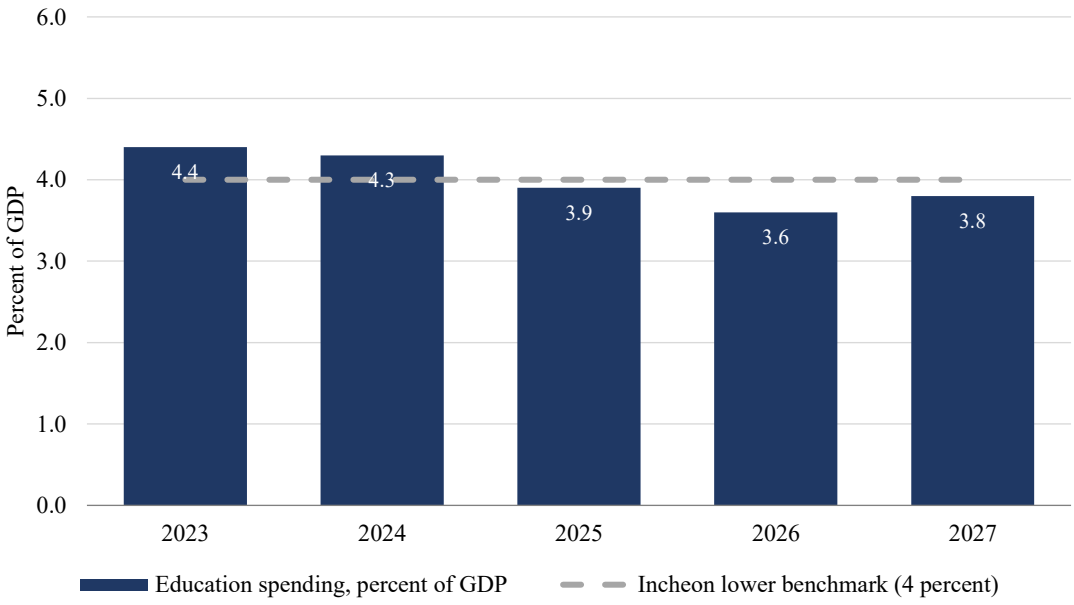


Figure 7: Education spending as a share of GDP, 2023-2027

Source: JCTR computation from national budgets; 2027 is an estimate (K38.2 billion against projected nominal GDP of about K1,003 billion).

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VARIATIONS

Under Standing Order 168(5) the Committee may recommend variations within a Head, while moves between Heads rest with the Expanded Planning and Budgeting Committee under Standing Order 169(3). JCTR recommends the following variations and policy adjustments to bridge the financing gap and maximise the impact of the 2027 education budget.

8.1 Head 80: Ministry of Education

1. Although varying allocations within the Ministry would be difficult, JCTR urges the Committee to recommend that the Minister of Finance and National Planning state and fund a 2027 teacher recruitment target that at least replaces those retiring or leaving the profession, which the Ministry recorded at 7,981 in 2025, and that the number be broken down by province and level and matched to the K2.36 billion increase in personal emoluments. Continued

recruitment is what will allow the system to match the surge in enrolment under the Free Education Policy.

2. Focus Ministry infrastructure funding on capital school projects, laboratories and libraries, while school expansion and classroom construction are financed through CDF, provided CDF projects meet Ministry standards and are tracked against the Ministry's infrastructure targets.
3. Complement the printing and distribution of curriculum textbooks with digital versions accessible on electronic devices, to reduce printing and distribution costs and widen access to learning materials.
4. Prioritise school feeding allocations for districts and constituencies most vulnerable to climate shocks such as El Niño.
5. Establish a predictable annual percentage increase in school grants to cushion schools against inflation and rising enrolment.
6. Reconsider the 60 percent cut to Keeping Girls in School and set out how the programme's gains will be sustained as donor funding falls.
7. Fund in-service upgrading so that primary teachers holding only a certificate reach the diploma minimum, protect the Catch-Up programme and standards officers' school visits, and publish teacher numbers by qualification, salary scale and level taught in each year's Education Statistics Bulletin.

8.2 Head 49: Ministry of Skills and Higher Education

8. Allocate at least 20 to 30 percent of the K1.48 billion university infrastructure line to the urgent rehabilitation of infrastructure at existing public universities. This would help attract international students, generate returns for Government and reduce the grants these universities receive. The remaining 70 to 80 percent should go to capital projects for the new provincial universities. Where possible, Government should consider upgrading existing institutions, such as Solwezi Trades Training Institute, into universities rather than building entirely new ones, and direct the savings to other priorities.
9. Raise the TEVET bursary line, frozen at K1.38 million, from within the K459.1 million Skills Development Fund, so that learners from low-income and marginalised households can access technical training, practical learning materials and start-up toolkits.

10. Set more ambitious and measurable targets for building, rehabilitating and equipping trades training institutes, and explain the cut in the open, distance and flexible learning target to 6,000.

8.3 Head 66: Ministry of Technology and Science

11. Prioritise and increase spending on research and development and on technology and innovation, with clear outputs and infrastructure targets, so that Zambia can develop home-grown solutions and compete in the global economy. The Committee should ask the Ministry to explain the K123.0 million increase to the Radiation Protection Authority and whether any of it supports innovation outputs.

12. Decentralise digital and technical infrastructure, prioritising capital investment in underserved rural and peri-urban districts, including affordable and reliable connectivity, community access points and appropriately equipped research and innovation facilities, guided by demonstrated gaps and need.

13. Align research and innovation funding with community needs, directing a meaningful share to practical, locally driven solutions such as climate-smart agriculture, food security, renewable energy and affordable community technologies, with communities, local authorities, training institutions and industry involved in setting research priorities.

14. Ensure that investments in ICT facilities, laboratories and communication towers are matched by provision for maintenance, qualified personnel, inspection and quality assurance, and publish the geographical distribution and intended beneficiaries of major investments.

15. Work with Head 49 to strengthen bursaries and other support for vulnerable TEVET students, since the TEVET function now sits under that Head.

8.4 Head 09: Teaching Service Commission

Table 9: Proposed variations to Head 09 (K million)

Line	2027 Estimate	Variation	Proposed	Purpose
Teaching Service Standards and Inspections	5.04	+1.81	6.85	Restore the 2026 level to inspect Responsible Officers and committees in all 116 districts during the 2027 intake
Human Resources and Administration (within Head)	8.52	−1.05	7.47	Hold the increase to about 4 percent; funds part of the inspections restoration
Human Resource Management Services (recruitment, placement and verification)	9.15	+4.00	13.15	Indicative provision for verification, appointment, placement and appeals in the 2027 intake, to be confirmed against a costed plan
Head total	**23.49**	**+4.76**	**28.25**	**Net additional K4.76 million from the Contingency Vote**

Source: JCTR proposals. The K4.76 million net addition is to be recommended to the Expanded Planning and Budgeting Committee from the Contingency Vote (K1.37 billion in 2027), and represents less than 0.4 percent of it.

In addition, JCTR recommends that the Committee:

16. Require the Commission to approve and publish the revised Teaching Service Regulations and the Guidelines and Procedures for Recruitment and Placement before the 2027 intake is advertised, together with the selection criteria and final placement lists.

17. Require 2027 output indicators on teachers appointed, the share placed in rural and hard-to-staff schools, the average time from appointment to payroll, inspections of human resource management committees completed, and sanctions imposed under section 10(1)(i) of the Act.

18. Ask the Commission to report the number of appeals and disciplinary cases pending and how it will meet its 2027 targets.

19. Confirm, before any further delegation, that human resource management committees are constituted as section 33(2) of the Act requires, including the union representative and two external members, and that district committees have the resources to screen the 2027 intake.

20. Require the Commission, with the Ministry of Education and the Public Service Management Division, to reconcile payroll pay points with actual school placements and to report on enforcement of the four-year rural tenure before the 2027 intake is posted.

21. Request that the Commission's annual report under Article 241(e) include provincial data on appointments, placements, appeals and disciplinary cases, so that the Committee can assess the 2027 intake in its 2028 scrutiny.

9. CONCLUSION

The 2027 Budget reflects the difficult trade-offs imposed by high debt service, and the education sector again falls short of the international financing benchmarks set under the Incheon Declaration. Within those limits there are real gains: more for school feeding, school grants, curriculum materials, student loans and universities, and a restored budget for the Teaching Service Commission. But free education has brought 1.8 million more learners into schools since 2021, and the budget does not yet match that demand where it matters most. It states no number of teachers to be recruited, cuts the inspections that keep recruitment fair, reduces school infrastructure, freezes support for TEVET learners and lets research and digital investment fall. The variations proposed in this memorandum are modest. Taken together, they would let Parliament see whether the teachers, classrooms and skills that free education promises reach the learners who need them most.

ANNEX: EDUCATION SECTOR STATISTICS

This annex gathers figures from the Ministry of Education's Education Statistics Bulletin 2025 (ESB), UNICEF Innocenti's Teachers for All Zambia report (February 2025) and Data Must Speak research (2023 and 2024), and the 2027 Yellow Book, grouped by the Head to which they are most relevant.

Table A1: Teachers (Heads 09 and 80)

Indicator	Figure	Source
Teachers in all schools, 2025	159,708 (primary 116,587; secondary 43,121)	ESB 2025, Table 5.2
Teachers in government schools, 2025	143,210 (90 percent)	ESB 2025, Table 5.4
Change in teachers, 2024-2025	+264 overall; primary −272; no government recruitment	ESB 2025, Table 5.2
Teachers leaving the profession, 2025	7,981: resignation 2,187; retirement 1,304; contract expiry 891; secondment 647; death 524; dismissal 497; other 1,931	ESB 2025, Table 5.6
Pupil-teacher ratio, 2025	Primary 46:1 (40 to 53 by province); secondary 33:1 (21 to 40)	ESB 2025, Table 5.5
Public primary pupil-teacher ratio, 2020	67:1; 28 of 116 districts above 80:1; one in ten rural schools above 114:1	UNICEF Innocenti 2025
Teachers recruited	30,496 in 2022 (workforce +26 percent); 41,917 since 2022	UNICEF Innocenti 2025; Budget Address 2027
Teacher deficit	115,000 before 2022; about 80,000 after	UNICEF Innocenti 2025, citing Government
Women among teachers	37 percent in rural schools; 78 percent in urban schools	UNICEF Innocenti 2025
Rural and remote hardship allowance	20 and 25 percent of basic salary	UNICEF Innocenti 2025
Teachers not working where paid (2014)	60 percent	Auditor General, cited in UNICEF Innocenti 2025
Staff houses, 2025	38,665: 28,794 permanent; 7,070 temporary; 2,801 incomplete	ESB 2025, Table 7.4
Primary teachers by highest professional qualification, 2020	Certificate or lower 38 percent; diploma 50 percent; degree 11 percent; none 1.4 percent	UNICEF Innocenti, Data Must Speak 2023
Women among head teachers, 2020	23 percent (about 40 percent of teachers)	UNICEF Innocenti, Data Must Speak 2023
Teacher absenteeism; lesson planning	About 20 percent routinely absent; under 40 percent routinely prepare lesson plans	MoGE 2017, cited in Data Must Speak 2023

Table A2: Access, participation and completion (Head 80)

Indicator	Figure	Source
Schools, 2025	13,987 (11,728 primary; 2,259 secondary); community schools fell from 3,029 to 1,173 as they were upgraded	ESB 2025, Tables 1.1-1.3
Learners, ECE to Grade 12	6,833,236 in 2025; 5,025,614 in 2021 (+36.0 percent)	ESB 2025, Table 2.1
ECE enrolment	706,049 in 2025; 336,434 in 2021	ESB 2025, Table 13.2
Primary enrolment (Grades 1-7)	4,694,940	ESB 2025, Table 2.1
Secondary enrolment	1,432,247: Form 1 to Grade 9 703,893 (−6.3 percent in 2025); Grades 10-12 728,354 (+12.3 percent)	ESB 2025, Table 2.1
Gross enrolment rate	Primary 119.9 percent; secondary 70.4 percent	ESB 2025, Table 2.9
Net enrolment rate	Primary 90.5 percent; secondary 31.0 percent	ESB 2025, summary
Transition rate	Grade 7 to Form 1: 72.8 percent (84.0 in 2024); Grade 9 to 10: 75.2 percent	ESB 2025, Table 3.1
Completion rate	Grade 7: 105.4 percent; Grade 9: 68.7 percent; Grade 12: 49.6 percent	ESB 2025, Table 6.1
Out-of-school children	245,539 (girls 129,257)	ESB 2025, summary
Learner pregnancies and readmissions	22,970 pregnancies; 17,239 readmissions	ESB 2025, summary

Table A3: Quality and infrastructure (Head 80)

Indicator	Figure	Source
Pupil-book ratio	Primary 6.9 pupils per book; secondary 24.7	ESB 2025, summary
Pupil-classroom ratio	Primary 69; secondary 60	ESB 2025, summary
Daily contact hours	Primary 4.6; secondary 6.2	ESB 2025, summary
Primary classrooms	71,369 permanent; 4,700 incomplete; 6,469 temporary	ESB 2025, Table 7.2
Secondary classrooms	20,940 permanent; 1,234 incomplete; 2,889 temporary	ESB 2025, Table 7.3
Schools reporting no power source	5,812 of 13,987 (about 42 percent)	ESB 2025, Table 10.1
Children unable to read a simple text by age 10	98.5 percent	World Bank et al. 2022, cited in Data Must Speak 2024
Average Grade 7 examination score, 2020	English 48.1 percent; mathematics 48.6 percent	Data Must Speak 2024
Catch-Up programme	Reading of a simple text rose from 22 to 41 percent in the pilot; now in over 4,400 public primary schools	Data Must Speak 2024

Table A4: Skills and higher education (Head 49)

Indicator	Figure	Source
Grade 12 enrolment	216,974 in 2025: +19.5 percent on 2024 and +55 percent on 2021	ESB 2025, Table 2.1
Grade 9 candidates selected to Grade 10	206,248 of 285,518 (72.2 percent)	ESB 2025, Table 6.6
TEVET learners	72,298 in 2025 (target 80,000); 2027 target 104,200	Yellow Book 2026 and 2027
Open, distance and flexible learning	3,137 in 2025 (target 60,000); 2027 target 6,000	Yellow Book 2026 and 2027
TEVET bursaries	K1.38 million in 2026 and 2027	Yellow Book 2027, Heads 49 and 66
Student loans and scholarships	K1.95 billion for 54,000 students in 2027	Yellow Book 2027, Head 49
Young people not in employment, education or training	Almost 40 percent of young men; 50 percent of young women	Zambia Skills Landscape Analysis (2022)

Table A5: Digital and science readiness of schools (Head 66)

Indicator	Figure	Source
ICT devices in schools	53,001 (35,287 desktops; 11,358 laptops; 6,356 tablets): about 129 learners per device	ESB 2025, Table 8.1
Schools with stable internet	3,276 of 13,987 (23 percent)	ESB 2025, Table 8.4
Secondary physics and chemistry textbooks	44,029 and 47,278 for 1.43 million secondary learners	ESB 2025, Table 6.8
2027 targets under Head 66	30 communication towers; 25 towers upgraded from 2G to 4G; 2 more districts on optic fibre; 1 technology and innovation hub	Yellow Book 2027, Head 66

Notes on the data. Some Head 80 figures in the Yellow Book do not square with the Bulletin. The "2026 actual" of 706,049 children in early childhood education is the Bulletin's 2025 census total, and the secondary school feeding target of 1,432,247 is simply total secondary enrolment. The Yellow Book reports Grade 12 completion of 70 to 76 percent and Grade 9 completion of 40 percent, against the Bulletin's 49.6 and 68.7 percent, and a Grade 9 to 10 transition rate of 60 percent against the Bulletin's 75.2. The Committee may wish to ask the Ministry which series it uses to set targets.