

# **Review of the Australia Awards Timor-Leste**

## **Final Report**

**November 2021**

## Abbreviations

AA	Australia Awards
AAS	Australia Awards Scholarships
AA-TL	Australia Awards Scholarships and Alumni Timor-Leste Program
CDRP	COVID-19 Development Response Plan
CSC	Civil Services Commission, GoTL
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFL	Distance and Flexible Learning
ELT	English Language Training
Embassy	Australian Embassy in Timor-Leste
EOPO	End of program outcomes
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
GoA	Government of Australia
GoTL	Government of Timor-Leste
GTF	Global Tracer Facility, DFAT (managed by ACER)
HCDF	Human Capital Development Fund
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
KII	Key informant interviews
KRQ	Key review question
LELI	Lorosa'e English Language Institute
LTO	Long-term outcomes
MC	Managing Contractor
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NCP	New Colombo Plan
PELT	Preliminary English Language Test
PDB	Pre-Departure Briefing
PGC	Post-graduate certificate
PGD	Post-graduate diploma
PWD	People with Disabilities
SAG	Scholarships Advisory Group
SCA	Short Course Awards
TL	Timor-Leste
TL3A	Timor-Leste Australia Alumni Association
WDPTL	Workforce Development Program Timor-Leste

# Acknowledgements

This review was commissioned and overseen by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Timor-Leste. Support for the review, including access to program data was provided by the Workforce Development Program Timor-Leste (WDPTL). The reviewer would like to thank the individuals and organisations who gave their time and insights during the review. The experiences and ideas shared were invaluable to the review. The work of the Timorese researcher who conducted some of the interviews in Tetun is also gratefully acknowledged.

## Table of Contents

Abbreviations.....	ii
Executive Summary.....	1
1. Introduction.....	5
1.1 Background.....	5
1.2 About the AAS in Timor-Leste .....	5
1.3 Key Review Questions.....	2
1.4 Methodology.....	2
2. Review findings .....	3
2.1 AA-TL relevance to Australia and Timor-Leste.....	3
2.2 Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the AA-TL.....	5
2.3 AA-TL effectiveness in meeting its objectives .....	6
2.4 Efficiency of AA-TL implementation .....	12
2.5 Gender, disability and social inclusion of the AA-TL .....	17
3 AAS program initiatives in other countries.....	20
3.1 Global Australia Awards Strategy 2021-2024.....	20
3.2 Reintegration plans .....	20
3.3 On-award enrichment/engagement.....	21
3.4 Alumni engagement .....	21
3.5 Collaboration with other donors .....	22
3.6 Short Course Awards .....	22
3.7 Distance and flexible learning .....	23
3.8 Privately funded scholarships.....	24
3.9 In-country scholarships.....	24
3.10 Partnership approach .....	25
4 Conclusions.....	25
Annex 1: Terms of reference for the Australia Awards Scholarships and Alumni Timor-Leste Program Review.....	27
Annex 2: Key review questions.....	30
Annex 3: Key reference documents .....	32
Annex 4: List of key informants consulted.....	34

# Executive Summary

## Background

The current Australia Awards Scholarships and Alumni Timor-Leste (AA-TL) program is delivered under the Australian government-funded Workforce Development Program Timor-Leste (WDPTL). Australia Awards Scholarships (AAS) are prestigious international awards offered by the Australian Government to the next generation of global leaders for development. Through study and research, recipients develop the skills and knowledge to drive change and help build enduring people-to-people links with Australia.

The AAS (and its predecessor scholarship programs) for Timorese to undertake tertiary study in Australia started in 2000. The number of AAS offered each year has fluctuated over that time with between 12-22 awards offered in the years between 2016 and 2021. The awards support long-term education in Australia at Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral levels, targeting priority human resource and development needs in Timor-Leste as aligned with the priorities of the Australian development program.

The current AA-TL are guided by the [Australia Awards Global Strategy 2016-2018](#) and implementation policies and systems for the Australia Awards. The *Global Strategy 2016-2018* specifies four long-term outcomes for the awards globally:

- Alumni are using their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development.
- Alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and partner countries.
- Effective, mutually advantageous partnerships between institutions and businesses in Australia and partner countries.
- Alumni view Australia, Australians and Australian expertise positively.

Reflecting broader Australian government support for Timor-Leste, the goal of the WDPTL has been updated to contributing to a 'Skilled workforce to support Timor-Leste's COVID-19 economic recovery'. The WDPTL End of Program Outcome (EOPO) relevant to the AA-TL is that 'Timorese women and men utilise their skills, knowledge, work experience or income.'

To assess the performance of the current AA-TL and inform the design of the next phase of the AA-TL due to begin implementation from July 2022, a review of the AA-TL was undertaken by an external evaluator between July to August 2021.

## Findings and recommendations

The AAS are highly valued in Timor-Leste. The review found that overall, the AA-TL is being efficiently managed across the scholarships cycle and achieving its intended results. Highlighted strengths of the program include the robust and transparent selection processes, the quality of education and positive study and living environment in Australia, the on-award support provided, the GEDSI approaches, and the extent of alumni engagement. The offering of the fully funded scholarships, the quality of education provided in Australia and the promotion of alumni activities and successes all contribute to positive public diplomacy for Australia. DFAT and its development investments in Australia also benefit from the ability to access and engage with alumni who are influential leaders within their sectors.

Nevertheless, the review identifies some areas where continuous improvement can be made and where the next phase of the AA-TL can build on the successes of the current program and learn from other successful initiatives undertaken by other countries offering Australia Awards. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the effectiveness and efficiency of the program. The AA-TL will need to continue to be flexible and adapt to the impact of the pandemic on the scholarships. In particular, the committed expenditure for the backlog of awardees still to complete their degree, and for candidates selected but not yet mobilised, means that significant adjustments may need to be made to award numbers of future intakes. This budget constraint may also affect funding availability for any new initiatives recommended for the next phase of the AA-TL.

The following information summarises the major findings and recommendations of the review.

### **To what extent is the current AA-TL program relevant to Australia and Timor-Leste?**

Finding 1: The provision of AAS to Timor-Leste is highly relevant to the development needs of Timor-Leste and well aligned with Australian government support to the nation, including the cross-cutting gender, disability and social inclusion imperatives.

Finding 2: There is strong demand in Timor-Leste for both undergraduate and masters level AAS, but demand for the newly introduced AAS for PGC/PGD study is still to be realised.

Finding 3: There is currently limited formal participation of Timorese stakeholders in determining the strategic direction of the AA-TL.

*Recommendation 1 That DFAT establish a Scholarships Advisory Group to inform the strategic direction of the AA-TL for future intakes.*

### **To what extent have other factors impacted the effectiveness of the program?**

Finding 4: The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected Timorese awardees in Australia, prevented the full mobilisation of the 2020 and 2021 intakes (and likely mobilisation of the 2022 intake) and impacted alumni knowledge/skill utilisation.

Finding 5: AA-TL implementation has been flexible and adaptive to emerging challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic response in Australia and Timor-Leste. Ongoing adaptations are likely to be necessary.

Finding 6: The committed expenditure for the backlog of Timorese to complete/commence their awards will need to be balanced with future AAS intakes and for commencement of additional AA-TL activities under the next phase of the AA-TL.

### **How effectively is the program being implemented to meet the long-term program objectives?**

Finding 7: The AA-TL has been effective overall in identifying and selecting Timorese able to complete their tertiary study in Australia.

Finding 8: The majority of recently returned alumni find work that is relevant to their new skills/knowledge.

*Recommendation 2: That AA-TL monitoring of alumni employment be strengthened and, as necessary, the Graduate Internship Program is continued and expanded and additional initiatives undertaken to support alumni find relevant work.*

Finding 9: The majority of alumni are in senior and/or influential positions in government, the private sector and civil society organisations.

Finding 10: The majority of alumni are using the skills and knowledge gained through their award in their workplace.

Finding 11: The alumni report some challenges in fully utilising the skills and knowledge gained from their award.

*Recommendation 3. That the AA-TL continue to undertake activities to enhance alumni skill and knowledge utilisation, especially for female and undergraduate alumni.*

Finding 13: Alumni maintain linkages with Australia through social friendships and, to a lesser extent, professional connections, although this decreases over time from award completion.

*Recommendation 4. That the AA-TL continue to actively support female award recipients to form, maintain and leverage linkages with Australians.*

Finding 14: The alumni view Australia, Australians, and Australian education highly positively.

Finding 15. The alumni have only to a limited extent facilitated partnerships between their organisation and an organisation in Australia.

*Recommendation 5. That the next phase of AA-TL explore ways to support alumni networks and to establish partnerships between Timor-Leste and Australian organisations.*

#### **How efficiently are key program activities and processes being implemented?**

Finding 16: Overall, AA-TL activities have been efficiently implemented throughout the scholarships cycle, with regular review to reflect the changing context and for continuous improvement.

Finding 17. The TL3A is becoming an increasingly active and well-organised association, but it is anticipated that it will continue to need financial support from DFAT for the next phase of the AA-TL.

#### **How systematically have efforts been made throughout the scholarship cycle to increase the equity of the program?**

Finding 18. There is now gender equality in the offer of AAS, and the AA-TL is continuing to take targeted measures to improve gender equality across all award outcomes.

Finding 19. The AA-TL initiatives to improve access to the AAS for people with disability is beginning to demonstrate results, although ongoing funding and activities will be needed to provide pathways to increase the proportion of people with disability being offered an award.

Finding 20. There has been only limited success from the AA-TL initiatives to increase the proportion of AAS offered to people from rural areas.

*Recommendation 6. That the AA-TL continues to strengthen the outreach to municipalities to increase the number of suitable applicants from rural areas and to consider other means to increase the pipeline of rural applicants who meet the English language criteria for the awards applications.*

#### **What are key lessons from other programs to inform the design of the next phase of the AA-TL? How can DFAT design the next phase of the AA-TL to maximise its relevance, equity, effectiveness and efficiency?**

Finding 21: The AA-TL can learn from successful initiatives undertaken by other countries/regions offering Australia Awards.

*Recommendation 7. That the next phase of the AA-TL adopts the End of Program Outcomes (EOPOs) of the DFAT Global AA Strategy 2021-2024 that support development and build partnerships and networks of influence. These EOPOs are that 'Alumni use their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development' and that 'Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries'.*

*Recommendation 8. That the AA-TL implement processes to effectively use reintegration plans throughout the scholarship cycle, in order to inform awardee selection of a relevant course to be undertaken in Australia, their on-award engagement opportunities and planning for returning home at the end of their award.*

*Recommendation 9. That the AA-TL encourage awardees to participate in on-award enrichment activities to enhance their understanding of Australia and to make professional linkages beyond their university. Consideration should be given in the next phase of the program to facilitating additional targeted professional development and on-award enrichment activities for the Timorese awardees.*

*Recommendation 10. That the next phase of the AA-TL includes demand-driven short course awards as a flexible approach to capacity building and building networks between Timor-Leste and Australia.*

*Recommendation 11. That the next phase of the AA-TL consider distance and flexible learning options once internet capacity has improved in Timor-Leste as it aligns with the new Global Strategic Framework.*

*Recommendation 12. That the next phase of the AA-TL pilot partnerships with the private sector to fund short course opportunities.*

*Recommendation 13. That the next phase of the AA-TL pilot an organisational partnership approach to target some of its education and training support.*



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Australia, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), works in partnership with the Government of Timor-Leste (GoTL) in support of the development of Timor-Leste. Australia is proud to have been Timor-Leste's primary development partner since independence.

The current Australia Awards Scholarships and Alumni Timor-Leste (AA-TL) program is delivered under the Australian government-funded Workforce Development Program Timor-Leste (WDPTL). A [Strategic Review of Workforce Development in Timor-Leste](#), including of the AA-TL, was conducted in 2018. Due to changes in the operating environment, including the impact of COVID-19, and to inform the design of the next program due to begin implementation from July 2022, an updated review of the AA-TL program was commissioned by the Australian Embassy in Timor-Leste. T

The purpose of this AA-TL review is to assess the performance of the current program and to propose recommendations for its next phase. As per the Terms of Reference (Annex 1), the review focused on answering seven key review questions about relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness and learning. Lessons learnt from the current program and successful features of other relevant Australia Awards programs in other countries are considered.

This report describes the key questions, methodology and key findings from the review and makes recommendations for consideration by DFAT. The review findings and recommendations may be used in any end of program reporting and to inform the development of an Investment Concept Note for the next phase of the AA-TL.

## 1.2 About the AAS in Timor-Leste

Australia Awards Scholarships (AAS) are prestigious international awards offered by the Australian Government to the next generation of global leaders for development. Through study and research, recipients develop the skills and knowledge to drive change and help build enduring people-to-people links with Australia. The goal of the Australia Awards is to 'support partner countries progress their development goals and have positive relationships with Australia that advance mutual interests.'

The AAS (and its predecessor scholarship programs) for Timorese to undertake tertiary study in Australia started in 2000. The number of AAS offered each year has fluctuated over that time with between 12-22 awards offered in the years between 2016 and 2021. The awards support long-term training in Australia at Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral levels, targeting priority human resource and development needs in Timor-Leste as aligned with the priorities of the Australian development program.<sup>1</sup>

The WDPTL commenced in early 2016, bringing together three previously separate programs, including Australia Awards. The WDPTL delivers full scholarship cycle support for the AAS, including post-award activities for the alumni and support for the Timor-Leste Australia Alumni Association (TL3A). In 2020, the goal of the WDPTL was updated from contributing towards a 'Skilled workforce for a prosperous Timor-Leste' to contributing to a 'Skilled workforce to support Timor-Leste's COVID-19 economic recovery'.

The AA-TL are guided by the [Australia Awards Global Strategy: Investing in the next generation of global leaders for development 2016-2018](#) and implementation policies and systems for the Australia Awards. The *Global Strategy* specifies four [long-term outcomes](#) (LTO) for the awards:

- Alumni are using their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development.
- Alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and partner countries.
- Alumni view Australia, Australians and Australian expertise positively.
- Effective, mutually advantageous partnerships between institutions and businesses in Australia and partner countries.

For the period July 2020-June 2022, the WDPTL End-of-Program Outcomes (EOPOs) were updated to align with the Australian government's *COVID-19 Development Response Plan for Timor-Leste 2020-2022* (CDRP) and the *Timor-Leste VIIIth Government's COVID-19 Plan* and rationalised to reflect the revised contract timeline. For July 2020-June 2022, to contribute towards the new goal, the WDPTL has four EOPOs<sup>2</sup>, of which EOPO4, that 'Timorese women and men utilise their skills, knowledge, work experience or income', is applicable to the AA-TL.

Given the changes in AA-TL EOPOs over time, and to inform the design of the next phase of the program, this review report assesses the effectiveness of achievement of the AA-TL outcomes based on the long-term outcomes of the *Global Strategy 2016-2018* and of the WDPTL EOPO 4 .

### 1.3 Key Review Questions

The review was guided by the following key review questions (with sub-questions listed in Annex 2):

1. To what extent is the current AA-TL program relevant to Australia and Timor-Leste?
2. How effectively is the current program being implemented to meet the long-term program objectives?
3. To what extent have other factors impacted the effectiveness of the program?
4. How systematically have efforts been made throughout the scholarship cycle to increase the equity of the program?
5. How efficiently are key program activities and processes being implemented?
6. What are key lessons from other programs to inform the design of the next phase of the AA-TL?
7. How can DFAT design the next phase of the AA-TL to maximise its relevance, equity, effectiveness and efficiency?

### 1.4 Methodology

The review was conducted over 16 days between June to August 2021 by an external reviewer, with extensive experience conducting monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) on AAS programs, and who is familiar with the development context in Timor-Leste. Annex A contains the Terms of Reference for the review. This review is largely utilitarian focused to "improve" and to inform the development of the Investment Concept Note for the next phase of the AA-TL.

The review used a mixed-method approach and multiple data sources to provide more valid and reliable findings. This included a review of the documents in Annex 3 and synthesis of data on the development context and implementation of the AA-TL, and data provided by the WDPTL on scholarship targeting, applications received, awards offered, degree completion and post-award outcomes. Key informant interviews were conducted with sixteen stakeholders identified by the DFAT Post (as listed in Annex 4) as having knowledge of the AA-TL to gain stakeholder perspectives on the current program and how it could be made more relevant, effective and efficient. Three of these semi-structured interviews were conducted in Tetun by a Timorese researcher. Interviews were also conducted with managers of five other AAS programs in the Indo-Pacific region (in Cambodia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Vietnam) to identify other AAS approaches and best practice that may be relevant for use in Timor-Leste.

As with any rapid review, there are several limitations to be noted. Within the time available for the review only a restricted number of stakeholders were able to be consulted. Although senior persons in a range of key stakeholder organisations were consulted, there may be some positive bias in their perspectives of the AA-TL. The review was also reliant on the primary quantitative data collected by and reported by the WDPTL. The reviewer was not able to verify this data from the original sources. Much of the evidence is based on data from 2020, but it is noted where this has been significantly impacted by COVID-19, or where the results differ substantively from recent years (2015-2021). The reviewer made final judgements on the key findings and recommendations contained in this report.

## 2. Review findings

### 2.1 AA-TL relevance to Australia and Timor-Leste

#### 2.1.1 Overall relevance

As Australia's 2017 [Foreign Policy White Paper](#) highlights, a strong and prosperous Timor-Leste is of fundamental importance to Australia. Guided by its [Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030](#), Timor-Leste aspires to reach a middle-income status, eradicate extreme poverty, and diversify its economy by 2030. Timor-Leste has the highest multidimensional poverty rate (46 per cent) in Southeast Asia and ranks 131 out of 189 on the Human Development Index. The voices and needs of women, girls and persons with a disability continue to be deprioritised in decision-making and service delivery.

Australia and Timor-Leste's development strategies have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally Australia is building the capacity of partner countries to support COVID-19 responses and long-term health security, stability and economic recovery. In 2020, Australia and Timor-Leste signed a *COVID-19 Development Response Plan (CDRP) 2020-2022* with Australia committing to development support in response to COVID-19 impacts. The WDPTL now sits under the 'economic recovery', pillar of the CDRP. The CDRP confirms that 'our Australia Awards Scholarships and short courses will be tailored to the COVID-19 context, and offered to talented Timorese students, along with support to alumni, to build a pipeline of highly qualified and respected professionals and leaders, crucial to Timor-Leste's development'.

Alignment with Australia's development, economic and public diplomacy priorities, including cross-cutting priorities of gender, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) is one of the principles of the Australia Awards *Global Strategy* and its implementation through the AA-TL.

**Finding 1: The provision of AAS to Timor-Leste is highly relevant to the development needs of Timor-Leste and well aligned with Australian government support to the nation, including the cross-cutting gender, disability and social inclusion imperatives.**

#### 2.1.2 Award targeting

The Australian Embassy in Timor-Leste is responsible for the strategic direction of the AA-TL. Although the Australia Awards are a global program, the DFAT Embassy in Dili has the flexibility to identify priorities for the AA-TL that best meet the needs of Timor-Leste. To do this, DFAT consults with Timorese stakeholders to determine the priority levels and fields of study for the awards. These priorities are reviewed annually and inform the information provided to applicants and awardee selection. With limited labour market information, it is a challenge to ensure that the awards reflect development and labour market priorities for tertiary trained graduates.

##### **Target candidates**

The AAS are open to applicants from the public, private and CSO sectors. Offering awards to all sectors is relevant to development in Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste's future depends on not only growing its economy but more importantly on developing a diversified non-oil economy that is not overwhelmingly dependent on the public sector (ADB, 2015). Whilst the private sector provides employment to only 5 percent of the workforce, it is crucial to the development of a greater range of economic activities that will generate jobs and income for an increasing number of young Timorese. The development of the workforce in CSOs is also important for addressing cross-cutting priorities. In addition to mainstreamed GEDSI, targeted activities are undertaken to increase access and outcomes for women, people with disabilities and Timorese from rural areas.

##### **Level of study**

For the 2021 intake there were 13 scholarships awarded (7F, 6M). Of these, three of the awards were for undergraduate and ten for master's level study. The selection process for the 2022 intake is still underway with the number of awards to be offered still to be determined.

The undergraduate awards were reintroduced for the 2020 intake, having been ceased since the 2016 intake (apart from an undergraduate award for people with a disability). The 2018 Strategic Review found that, although this shift away from undergraduate awards reduced the expenditure required per scholarship (given the shorter time spent in Australia), it was not a popular policy shift in Timor-Leste. The Strategic Review found that there was widespread demand for a more balanced mix of undergraduate, postgraduate, and short-course scholarships. There are a range of perspectives on the offering of undergraduate awards. The persons consulted by the Strategic Review considered that good foundational university qualifications, including the attendant soft skills and exposure to a different world view, were such a priority for Timor-Leste that AAS should focus on undergraduate qualifications. There is also a perspective to give younger people with high potential an opportunity for quality undergraduate education while they are young and motivated, and that postgraduate awards are providing for Timorese who have already benefited from tertiary education (many of whom overseas on an earlier scholarship).

Arguments for post-graduate awards are that the applicants have proven academic ability, typically stronger EL skills and have a proven capacity to apply themselves at study and in the workplace. They also provide access to quality postgraduate training that is not readily available in Timor-Leste. Postgraduate degrees are less costly per award being of shorter length (not including PhDs). The program has offered awards for PhD study for suitable candidates.

From the 2020 intake, the AA-TL introduced one-year Postgraduate Certificate (PGC)/Postgraduate Diploma (PGD) awards for permanent public servants. It was anticipated that this would broaden the applicant pool and attract applications from people who are not able to be away from their role/home for more than one year, particularly women from their families. The one-year degrees (compared to a two-year Masters) also mean that within the same budget, more people can benefit from an AAS.

The merits of the recent changes to award offerings need further analysis. Of the eligible and compliant applications, there was growing interest in the undergraduate awards, with double the number of applications for the 2022 intake compared to the 2021 intake (equally attracting female applicants – 60% for both years). There was still very little interest in the PGC/PGD awards, with no applications for the 2022 intake, down from only 2 for the 2021 intake. It is not clear what the reasons are for the lack of interest in this level of award, and this should be explored further by the WDPTL.

**Finding 2: There is strong demand in Timor-Leste for both undergraduate and masters level AAS, but demand for the newly introduced AAS for PGC/PGD study is still to be realised.**

Given the small numbers of undergraduate alumni, their post-award employment, skill utilisation and contribution to development in Timor-Leste compared to postgraduate alumni remains to be assessed. As undergraduate awards are relatively costly, and given anticipated budget constraints, it is proposed that undergraduate awards continue to only be offered in limited numbers for at least the first few years of the next phase of the program.

### **Field of study**

The fields of study undertaken by the AAS have remained largely the same over the past 6 years, with education and training, health, private sector development, agriculture and rural development, infrastructure and community development being the common areas.

Given the broad-ranging needs (across all sectors) for Timorese with a postgraduate qualification, there were no priority areas of study specified at the postgraduate level for the 2022 intake. To reflect critical skills needed for COVID-19 response at undergraduate level these awards were targeted to nutrition, disability and economics as priority areas of study. With reference to the design of the next phase of the AA-TL, it is noted that the working DFAT *Global AA Strategy 2021-2024* indicates that global investment in Australia Awards will focus in three priority areas of COVID-19 development response: health security; stability; and economic recovery.

#### **2.1.3 Scholarship advisory support**

Prior to 2019, the WDPTL had a multi-sectoral Scholarships Management Group to assist with setting the direction for the AA-TL. Since it ceased formal operation, in the absence of formal guidance, DFAT/WDPTL have relied on more informal consultations with key stakeholders in determining the strategic direction of the awards. Stakeholders from key Timorese government agencies have

however continued to participate in the selection process of the awards, pre-departure preparation of awardees, return home ceremonies and alumni functions.

**Finding 3: There is currently limited formal participation of Timorese stakeholders in determining the strategic direction of the AA-TL.**

The AA-TL workplan for 2020 included establishing a Scholarships Advisory Group (SAG). This was deferred in agreement with DFAT due to time constraints. An Advisory Group including Timorese stakeholders would enhance the relevance of the scholarships awarded to development in Timor-Leste and ownership of award outcomes. Such a new group should have clear terms of reference outlining the advisory (rather than award management) responsibilities of the group. It would be requested to provide evidence-based guidance on priorities for knowledge and skills development that would help guide decisions on the targeting of awards (for example by level and field of study). This would include representatives from the government, private and CSO sectors. Where possible, the sector representatives would be AAS alumni who are familiar with the purpose of the AAS, and of the experiences faced by Timorese on-award in Australia and on their return to Timor-Leste.

There would also be value in also strengthening AA-TL collaboration with the Human Capital Development Fund (HCDF) to ensure that the AAS fit into the government's plans and priorities for tertiary trained Timorese and complement the education and training provided by the large HCDF scholarships program.

**It is recommended that DFAT establish a Scholarships Advisory Group to inform the strategic direction of the AA-TL for future intakes. (Rec. 1)**

## **2.2 Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the AA-TL**

The main factor impacting the effectiveness of the AA-TL has been the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 remains a serious health risk, with a high number of infections and the Delta variant detected in Timor-Leste.<sup>3</sup> The pandemic has had a significant (and continuing) impact on Timor-Leste, and on implementation of the AA-TL throughout the scholarships cycle.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic: nine 2020 intake (6F, 3M) and thirteen provisional candidates (7F, 6M) for the 2021 intake deferred their mobilisation; four awardees returned home before completing their degrees and their awards have been suspended until they are able to resume their awards. Awardees in Australia reported the challenges of studying under lock-down; likely leading to an increase in unit failures and the need for program extensions

Alumni who completed their studies in 2020 were asked about the extent to which COVID-19 pandemic affected their return home and job searching. Unsurprisingly, most of this cohort (80%) noted COVID-19 as having a great or medium impact on the end of their study and return home. They described these impacts as: struggling with understanding course content and communicating with teaching staff when delivery mode changed to online learning; limitations on field work, data collection and laboratory experiments affecting research projects; financial impacts from situations such as reduced work hours while in Australia, having to pay for quarantine on return to Timor-Leste if they were not comfortable staying in the government quarantine facility; and stress from the uncertainty surrounding arrangements for returning to Timor-Leste.

The impacts of COVID-19 have also been strongly felt across employed alumni, with the majority (94%) of this cohort noting COVID-19 as having a great or medium effect on them in the workplace. The most common impacts reported include decline in service delivery; reduced work hours and/or not delivering to full capacity; cancellation of projects and activities due to travel restrictions; and difficulties with work-from-home arrangements which affected productivity. The two unemployed alumni both noted a lack of suitable jobs being available.

**Finding 4: The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected Timorese awardees in Australia, prevented the full mobilisation of the 2020 and 2021 intakes (and likely mobilisation of the 2022 intake) and impacted alumni knowledge/skill utilisation.**

The WDPTL response to emerging COVID-19 challenges, working closely with the Embassy, reflected flexibility and adaptation throughout the scholarships cycle including that: adapted English language testing, through an online mock IELTS; the ELT for people with disabilities and public servants moved online; support for the awardees not able to return to Timor-Leste; travel and event



restrictions decreased the implementation of award activities (such as the institution roadshows) and alumni events.

**Finding 5: AA-TL implementation has been flexible and adaptive to emerging challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic response in Australia and Timor-Leste. Ongoing adaptations are likely to be necessary.**

AA-TL implementation to reflect anticipated ongoing COVID-19 restrictions to travel and face-face learning should consider:

- How to conduct IELTS testing without local testers
- Increased pastoral support for awardees (and their families) still in Australia
- Facilitation of remote learning for awardees wishing to continue/complete their qualifications
- The conduct of short courses / professional development opportunities for Timorese who have been selected for an award but who have not been able to mobilise to Australia
- Enhanced support for alumni not able to find work on their return home
- The possibility of AAS candidates who have not yet mobilised participating in TL3A activities
- Targeted plans for alumni to support Timorese facing increased economic and other challenges.

The committed expenditure for the backlog of awardees still to complete their degree and of candidates selected but not yet mobilised (for the 2020 and 2021, and possibly 2022 intakes) means that significant adjustments are likely to be needed to the number of students for the 2023 intake and likely several successive intakes. This budget constraint will also affect the funding availability for any new initiatives under the next phase of the AA-TL.

**Finding 6: The committed expenditure for the backlog of Timorese to complete/commence their awards will need to be balanced against for future AAS intakes and for commencement of additional AA-TL activities under the next phase of the AA-TL.**

## 2.3 AA-TL effectiveness in meeting its objectives

This section looks at how effectively the AA-TL is meeting the WDPTL EOPO that 'Timorese women and men utilise their skills, knowledge, work experience or income', as well as the four long-term outcomes of the global Australia Awards.

### 2.3.1 Alumni are using their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development (Global AA Strategy LTO 1 and WDPTL EOPO 4)

Australia Awards offers a suite of quality education, training and professional development opportunities and access to networks to assist alumni to make a tangible difference to their country's development. A total of 96 people (47F/48M/10) were awarded AAS between 2016-2021.

#### ***Award completion<sup>4</sup>***

As of March 2021, a total of 338 (142 women/196 men) alumni have completed their studies in Australia (some of whom have had multiple awards). Between 2016 and 2020, 101 Timorese (51F, 50M), including 2 men with disability, successfully completed an Australia Awards scholarship. Close to half (47%) of these alumni completed undergraduate degrees, with the remaining 53% completing postgraduate degrees. Of note, all four alumni who completed postdoctoral (PhD) studies are male. The Timorese AAS have a high completion rate. Of the 43 awards commenced between 2016 and 2018, only one student has withdrawn from their scholarship (a 97.7% completion rate). This compares with [the global percentage](#) of 97.5%. It is noted that completion rates for the 2019 to 2021 intakes are distorted due to the impact of COVID-19 on continuing awardees.

Only three Timorese students have withdrawn from their awards since 2016 (two before and one whilst on-award). All cited reasons for promotional opportunities and to extend their influence in Timor-Leste. The WDPTL report that the number of course changes and extensions (which add to award length/cost) has reduced since improvements to the course counselling provided to shortlisted candidates before they submit their placement application to universities. Between 2016 to 2019 (before the COVID impact), nine Timorese were approved course extensions (6 for academic and 3 for personal reasons). There is, however, the opportunity to improve course counselling so that awardees are recommended courses that are appropriate for their academic abilities and career

interests to avoid a negative experience to awardees from the need for an extension, changing course as well as the administrative burden.

**Finding 7: The AA-TL has been effective overall in identifying and selecting Timorese able to complete their tertiary study in Australia.**

### ***Employment<sup>5</sup>***

Awardees need to find relevant employment to be able to utilise their skills/knowledge. The 2020 ORIMA Survey of all AAS awardees in Australia found that of the 18 Timorese students close to completing their studies within the next nine months: 39% had work arrangements in place (29% returning to the same employer (although maybe different job), 12% to a different organisation); 28% no arrangement in place but already looking for a job; and 33 % with no arrangement in place. The 2020 WDPTL Reintegration Survey recommended that final year awardees be provided with information on job opportunities rather than waiting until the reintegration workshop in Timor-Leste.

The WDPTL track the current employment of alumni. As of 30 July 2021, 312 (124 women/188 men) or 92% of AAS alumni are employed (above the program target of 90%). Only one of the 15 students who returned in 2020 were unemployed when they completed the reintegration survey in April 2021. Of the 31 employed respondents in the 2021 Reintegration Survey, 97% reported that they are employed in a role relevant to the skills and knowledge they gained in Australia, either to a great extent (68%) or a medium extent (29%). It is noted that one stakeholder interviewed by the review stated that some alumni take the first job offered, even if not in their specialist field, to provide an income for their families.

**Finding 8: The majority of recently returned alumni find work that is relevant to their new skills/knowledge.**

Of the 89%<sup>6</sup> of the 285 alumni (40% women) who are currently employed as of June 2020, 49% work in government, 31 % donor programs, 19% private or self-employed and 1% in CSOs. The alumni who stated a preference to work in the public sector considered that this was an opportunity to directly use their academic knowledge and participate in the government's plans for development. Alumni respondents preferring to work in the private sector stated that the sector offered more flexibility and opportunities to innovate. This validates the decision for the AA-TL to continue to offer awards to from across the various employment sectors in Timor-Leste.

The 2020 Reintegration Survey found that there were some gender differences in alumni employment with more female respondents working in international agencies (56%) than male respondents (44%), and more male respondents are working in the government sector (44%) than the female respondents (33%). More alumni with undergraduate degrees are working in the private sector (17%) than those with postgraduate degrees (7%) more alumni with postgraduate degrees are working in the government sector (48%) than those with undergraduate degrees (28%). Of the six unemployed alumni, all had active prospects to find relevant work.

**It is recommended that AA-TL monitoring of alumni employment be strengthened and, as necessary, the Graduate Internship Program expanded and additional initiatives undertaken to support alumni find relevant work** if the COVID-19 pandemic continues to negatively affect the economy and job opportunities. (Rec. 2)

Alumni experience of living and studying in Australia contributes to their understanding of Australia's development objectives and working in a high-performance organisation. AAS alumni are therefore in strong demand in DFAT funded programs in Timor-Leste. The 2021 Reintegration Survey found that the majority of employed respondents (61%) are employed by foreign governments/ donors, international agencies/ development projects. A clear overall trend is emerging of decreasing employment of alumni in the public sector and increasing employment in the international sector. The employment of alumni in this sector was contested by some of the stakeholders interviewed as part of the review. Their perspective was that Timorese government and other organisations are not able to compete in recruiting alumni (due to the lower salaries they can offer) and thereby 'miss out' on benefitting from Timorese alumni skills and knowledge.

### ***Influential roles***

Of all alumni since 2002, 68% are in influential and decision-making roles (including those in senior roles/positions of power)<sup>7</sup>. Female alumni (63%) are less likely to be in such roles than men (72%). This points to the need for the program to continue to do more to support female alumni in furthering their careers after their return to Timor-Leste. In 2019, 15 alumni were working in the executive arm of Government: three as ministers (Foreign Affairs, Public Works, and Education); one as Secretary of State for Equality and Inclusion and the remainder are working in advisory positions across a range of areas. Another alumnus is a parliamentarian. As of August 2021, 7 alumni (3F, 4M) are working in the executive arm of government.

A lower proportion (60%) of more recently graduated alumni are in influential roles (65% F, 56% M) compared to alumni who have returned more than three years previously. This is not surprising given a few alumni are still looking for work, or have returned to the same role and are awaiting the opportunity for promotion etc. Also, not unexpectedly a higher proportion of postgraduate alumni (79%) are in the category of influence (83% F, 72% M) compared to undergraduates (55%, with no gender difference).

### **Finding 9: The majority of alumni are in senior and/or influential positions in government, the private sector and civil society organisations**

The list of alumni in influential roles is shared with the Australian Embassy in Dili (and its investments in Timor-Leste) who use the contacts for formal and informal development and diplomacy purposes. Of the Timorese respondents (28F, 32M) to the 2020 GTF Alumni Tracer Survey (GTF Survey), 18% maintained contact (8% F, 26% M) with the local embassy (compared with 12% globally). The WDPTL also use the list to invite influential alumni to public diplomacy activities and to headline events where specific expertise/knowledge is required.<sup>8</sup> Establishing a rapport with the alumni can be easier because they speak better English and have an understanding of Australia and Australians. It is noted, however, that not all alumni wish for their connection to Australia to be leveraged, and that some use their experience to be better negotiators in promoting the interests of their organisation.

### ***Skill utilisation***

There is significant evidence of AAS alumni being able to capitalise on their increased skills and experience on return to Timor-Leste. A higher proportion of Timorese respondents of GTF Survey reported using their new skills/knowledge to a strong extent compared with the AAS alumni globally. Of the Timorese respondents: 66% stated the new skills/knowledge were used to improve their organisation (59%F, 66%M) compared with 59% globally; 33% to improve their local communities (45%F, 24%M) compared with 36% globally; and 53% used their skills/knowledge at a national level (46%F, 59%M) compared with 42% globally. The survey also found that that 69% of the Timorese respondents strongly agreed that they had passed on the skills/knowledge gained in their award (56%F, 69%M), compared with the 57% globally.

### **Finding 10: The majority of alumni are using the new skills and knowledge gained through their award in their workplace.**

The majority of respondents of the 2021 Reintegration Survey are experiencing increases in their salary (85%) (of which 39%F, 61%M), promoted to a higher rank (79%), greater policy-making responsibilities (78%) (of which 40%F, 60%M), more financial responsibilities in their work (66%) and increased staff supervision (52%) compared with before their studies. Almost all alumni also reported that they had experienced positive personal and/or professional change as a result of the award. The alumni reported not only changes in their professional and technical skills but also their soft skills such as leadership skills, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, critical thinking, writing and research skills, teamwork, communication, planning and coordination. This was validated by the 2019 GTF Timor-Leste Case Study on Disability and Development ( GTF Case Study). The 16 Timorese alumni in the study had gained 'soft' skills such as communication, advocacy, networking. They also had gained 'hard' skills such as clinical skills, policy development, strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, cross-sectoral coordination, applied research skills in GEDSI and English language.



### ***Factors affecting skill utilisation***

The 2020 Reintegration Survey found that 73% of the respondents reported one or more challenges in skills utilisation. These related to finding relevant work (42%), difficulty in adjusting to new work and people (29%), political or system-level challenges (18%) and communication and time management issues (11%). Alumni who had been back in Timor-Leste for two years were more likely to mention challenges concerning political or systemic level challenges and time management constraints, whereas challenges in finding relevant jobs were mentioned by the majority of the newly returned alumni. One interviewed stakeholder reported that the political affiliations of alumni can affect their employment prospects and career progressions in the government sector. Alumnus reported that *“people are not welcoming new ideas”, “as a Timorese woman, I feel that working with some of my male colleagues was a big challenge since they perceived that a woman should not perform better than a man”* and that *“government bureaucracy leads to a lack of sustainability and maintenance”*. The GTF Timor-Leste Case Study also found that some alumni cited a lack of adequate funding and resources limited their ability to utilise their new skills.

#### **Finding 11: Alumni report some challenges in fully utilising the skills and knowledge gained from their award.**

The WDPTL try to mitigate constraints to skill utilisation by selecting candidates to undertake study in areas where there are strong employment prospects, reintegration workshops, offering targeted recruitment support to alumni and through the Graduate Internship Program. The GoTL Civil Services Commission is given a list of returning graduates each year. A more structured approach could be used to facilitate alumni employment, placement on their return and skill/knowledge utilisation.

**It is recommended that the AA-TL continue to undertake activities to enhance alumni skill and knowledge utilisation, especially for female and undergraduate alumni. (Rec. 3)**

### ***Contribution to development***

A range of evidence, including from GTF Tracer Survey as outlined above, indicates that the AAS alumni are using their skills and knowledge to contribute to the development of Timor-Leste. The 2021 WDPTL Reintegration Survey respondents cited a wide range of examples of their contributions to development in Timor-Leste. These included through policy development, strategic planning and review, M&E, media and communications, project management, research and business development. Examples of alumni contributions to development in Timor-Leste are cited in the ‘Success Stories’ published by DFAT. In 2020 some AAS alumni played pivotal roles in the GoTL COVID-19 response. One alumnus, the Director of National Laboratory at HNGV, was responsible for all PCR testing and result, the PHD Health program team lead supported the Ministry of Health response team and front-line workers to combat COVID-19 and the 2019 Alumni of the Year, working at the National Hospital Department of Surgery redirected his award prize to provide training for frontline COVID-19 health professionals at 7 health centres in Dili.

As further examples, the GTF Case Study found that the alumni have made contributions to Timor-Leste in the disability sector at an individual and structural level through for example: disability advocacy and policy development; improvements in clinical and professional allied health services; education, training and community outreach programs; mentoring and capacity building. One of the WDPTL outcomes is for the program to contribute to improved policy and systems for workforce development. The AAS contribute to this through the role an alumnus plays to improve public policy as Civil Service Commissioner and another alumnus who is currently seconded as a part-time adviser with SEFOPE advising the SOS and Director General on workforce policy issues.

#### **Finding 12: The alumni are using the skills and knowledge gained during their award to their organisation, community and national development in Timor-Leste**

The AAS alumni are also mobilising their skills/knowledge and other resources outside of work to support community development. Alumni are using DFAT-funded Small Grants and undertaking activities through the TL3A sector groups for community development, some with a particular emphasis on reaching young people and communities in rural locations.<sup>9</sup> In 2020, the TL3A members contributed practically to the COVID-19 response, purchasing goods (hygiene buckets, water tanks, personal protective equipment) and conducting a television talk show highlighting the needs of vulnerable groups. They also undertook activities to support victims of the devastating floods in April 2021.<sup>10</sup>

The alumni also conducted seminars with a GEDSI perspective, including between 2018-2020 on: people with disabilities accessing education and essential services; the prevalence of infectious diseases in animals and potential transmissibility to humans; making the environment matter; information communication technology; the role of foreign direct investment in trade and technology; and domestic violence in Timor-Leste.

### 2.3.2 Alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and partner countries (Global AA Strategy LTO 2<sup>11</sup>)

Australia Awards provide an opportunity for awardees to establish relationships, networks and professional links with Australia, its people and organisations. Maintaining these links following their award enhances ongoing cooperation with Australia. The Timorese alumni, particularly those who are recently returned, report maintaining personal and professional networks with each other and with Australians they met on award. The 2021 WDPTL Reintegration Survey found that of the recently returned respondents, 82% reported that they maintained links with individuals/organisations in Australia (excluding other awardees from Timor-Leste) met whilst on award. Not surprisingly, the percentage of all the Timorese alumni who maintain connections with Australia is lower than this figure (and this is consistent with trends for AAS alumni globally).<sup>12</sup>

The GTF Tracer Survey, found that the Timorese respondents had maintained frequent contact (often/always) with: university academics/lecturers (9%); Australian students (7%); AA alumni from other countries (29%); individuals in Australian businesses, professional associations and/or organisations working in their field (15%). Female alumni maintain a lower rate of contact with Australians than the male alumni. The reasons for this should be explored further and if necessary, initiatives undertaken to encourage and support the female alumni to maintain these contacts.

**Finding 13: Alumni maintain linkages with Australia through social friendships and, to a lesser extent, professional connections, although this decreases over time from award completion.**

Further data is needed on the extent to which these connections are more of a personal than a professional nature. However, the Timorese alumni report maintaining contact with friends from the same course, both Australian and other international students, for ongoing sharing of knowledge in their respective disciplines and related employment. Likewise, the alumni reported linkages with former lecturers and supervisors at Australian institutions to get further information for their professional development, for getting feedback on their work and undertaking further research. One alumnus reported that his supervising professor was an Australian health specialist who also worked on a project in Timor-Leste involving doctors, optometrists and nurses from across Australia, which meant he had ongoing linkages to improve the quality of his work.

**It is recommended that the AA-TL continue to actively support female award recipients to form, maintain and leverage linkages with Australians. (Rec. 4)**

It is noted that through enhanced on-award enrichment activities, there is potential for the scope of these relationships to be expanded beyond individual-individual contacts to a broader range of work/professional development and community organisations. This is explored further in Section 4.9.

### 2.3.3 Alumni view Australia, Australians, and Australian expertise positively (Global AA Strategy LTO 4)

The Australia Awards are highly regarded in the government and other sectors in Timor-Leste. The awards are in high demand as evidenced by the number of applications, including those that repeatedly apply for an award. The 2020 ORIMA Survey found that the top three factors that influenced Timorese students to take up an AAS were that the: education received will help contribute to their country's development (88%); good universities, research facilities and other educational resources available in Australia (63%); education received will help them to do their job better (38%).

Awardees reported a highly positive experience in Australia. In the 2021 WDPTL Reintegration Survey, all respondents noted they were either satisfied to a great extent (88%) or to a medium extent (12%). Many respondents described their time in Australia as "life-changing", and noted they felt motivated, gained new knowledge and appreciated being able to study at high-quality universities.

This high level of satisfaction was triangulated by the GTF Tracer Survey, where 100% of the Timorese alumni indicated their experience of Australia as a country and Australian education was positive. There were some gender differences, with female alumni less likely to report strong positive perspectives than the male alumni. For example, 81% of males reporting they strongly agreed that their experience was positive compared to 56% of the females. Almost all respondents (97% indicated their experience with the Australian people was positive (37% F, 68% M). The survey also found that 96% of the Timorese ongoing awardees would recommend Australia as a good place to visit, 97% as a good place to study, 96% would recommend others to apply for an AAS, and 90% agreed that their AAS experience has helped them to better understand Australian culture. All the alumni agreed / strongly agreed with the statement 'The Australian Government supports my country'.

**Finding 14: The alumni view Australia, Australians, and Australian education highly positively.**

The GTF Case Study also found that the alumni held strong, positive views of Australia and Australians. Alumni recognised the quality teaching and learning they received in Australia compared to other countries, which has enhanced their academic experience. In addition, alumni benefited from exposure to the high standard of Australian expertise in the disability sector which has strengthened their attitudes and practices towards disability-inclusive treatment and care. Cultural and social aspects of their time in Australia, through interactions with Australians and support from their universities, have also contributed to a positive experience for alumni while on award.

The high regard with which the alumni view Australia positively is also demonstrated through the high extent to which alumni: continue to maintain contact with the Australian individuals and their universities; choose to work in Australian development projects; and actively support the TL3A.

**2.3.4 Effective, mutually advantageous partnerships between institutions and businesses in Australia and partner countries (Global AA Strategy LTO 3)**

Although a Long-Term Outcome of the Global AA Strategy, supporting alumni to establish partnerships between their organisation in Timor-Leste and an institution/business in Australia has not been an explicit objective of the AA-TL to date (as most directly related to the Australia Awards Fellowships). The program has therefore not included targeted activities to foster such partnerships<sup>13</sup>.

Nevertheless, there is some (limited) evidence that the AAS have led to linkages between Timorese and Australian organisations. The GTF Case Study found evidence of professional and institutional partnerships formed, employment with Australian organisations after award and contributions to New Colombo Plan partnerships. An example of this was the formal partnership in the disability sector developed between an Australian university and Timorese partner organisations which was facilitated by an alumnus. The GTF Case Study report does however note challenges to organisational cooperation and partnerships that include that poor internet services limit opportunities to remain connected and the English language barrier for senior Timorese other than the AAS alumni.

The GTF Tracer Survey found that 57% of the Timorese respondents indicated that they have developed a partnership with Australians or Australian organisations since returning from award. The extent to which represented organisational partnerships would need to be verified. Of those alumni who have not yet made a partnership with Australians, 100% indicate that they would like to develop such a professional link. This indicates potential demand for support to be given to fostering organisational level partnerships under the new program

**Finding 15: The alumni have only to a limited extent facilitated partnerships between their organisation and an organisation in Australia.**

If this *Global Strategy 2016-2018* objective is to be realised in Timor-Leste, **it is recommended that the next phase of AA-TL explore ways to support alumni establish partnerships between Timor-Leste and Australian organisations.** (Rec. 5). This could be fostered through the offer of short courses at an organisational level (see section 4.5). To increase the incidence of organisational linkages, consideration could be given to the new program including expertise with partnership brokering to leverage existing individual linkages, the conduct of targeted short courses to facilitate ongoing linkages between Australian training institutions and key Timorese government and private sector organisations.

## 2.4 Efficiency of AA-TL implementation

Globally, the Australia Awards, including those in Timor-Leste, are managed according to the Australia [Awards Scholarships Policy Handbook](#) (January 2021). To a large extent, there are global systems (such as OASIS), prescribed activities and scheduled timeframes - including for application closing, placement, mobilisation - to be met by implementing partners. The Australia Awards, under the WDPTL, are currently implemented by Managing Contractor, the Palladium Group.

Overall the AA-TL appear to be efficiently managed, according to the global AA guidelines. The WDPTL 2020 Annual Report indicates that overall the AAS activities for 2020 are on track against the approved workplan, aside from unavoidable disruptions due to COVID-19 and some selection panel disruptions for the 2021 intake. The stakeholders interviewed as part of this review had only minor suggestions for implementation improvement. When asked what can be learned from other donor scholarships, the stakeholders typically responded that the AA-TL were exemplars for other programs – particularly in the areas of rigorous transparent selection, support for women and people with disability and alumni engagement. Successive annual reporting shows that there has been a consistent reflection on program performance and efforts at continuous improvement towards the better achievement of AAS outcomes.

**Finding 16: Overall, AA-TL activities have been efficiently implemented throughout the scholarships cycle, with regular review to reflect any changing context and for continuous improvement.**

### 2.4.1 Promotion and applications

The WDPTL undertake a broad promotional campaign across a range of media (letters, brochures, radio/TV advertisements, Australia Awards and DFAT websites/Facebook and alumni mailing lists). The campaign is targeted at groups in 13 municipalities: Government Ministries, NGOs, training centres, Disabled Peoples' Organisations, Women's Associations, and churches.

The number of applications submitted has increased from 149 for the 2017 intake to 282 for the 2021 intake. The number of eligible and compliant applications has however remained more constant, being 145 for both the 2017 and 2021 intakes. That over half of the 2021 intake applications were ineligible represents an inefficient use of WDPTL time in processing (and potentially negative impact on applicants and positive perceptions of the award), so consideration should be given to the better targeting of communications around application compliance and eligibility. This could include for example a pre-screening tool that was used before applicants take the time to fill out a complete application on OASIS.

There has been an increasingly high proportion of applicants who apply more than once for an award (20% in 2014, 31% in 2019 and 46% for the 2022 intake. This represents an inefficient use of program resources, as well as a burden on applicants. Ways to manage applicant expectations need to be considered for future promotion rounds.

### 2.4.2 Selection

The AA-TL awardee selection is merit-based and transparent and follows the guidance in the DFAT Scholarship Handbook. Many of the stakeholders interviewed for this review commented on the rigour of the AAS selection processes and how it was/should be a model for other scholarship programs in Timor-Leste. Despite the COVID-19 challenges, the program was able to maintain the process overall for the 2021 intake. The selection process was delayed however due to a breach of the code of conduct by a GoTL interview panel representative. The *WDPTL Selection Report for the 2021 intake* recommended that:

- sufficient staff are available for eligibility and compliant checking. It is noted that the ability to temporarily utilise staff resources from other WDPTL programs will not be available for future intakes
- To maximise selection panel knowledge at the interview stage, the program will appoint AAS alumni for the government, private and civil society sector representatives.
- The AA-TL have expertise in assessing relative academic competency of applications from a wide variety of academic backgrounds, each with their own – sometimes multiple – grading systems.
- To maximise the influence of the program, preference should be given to those who have not had an AAS before.

It is noted that the [New Zealand government scholarships](#) for Pacific countries include psychometric /abstract reasoning testing to assess applicant aptitude for overseas study. Applicants can be any age, but it is preferred that they are 39 years or younger when they commence their scholarship. Should there be any significant increase to the number of AAS offered for undergraduate study, and the associated risk of high failure rates, such assessments may need to be considered further by the program.

#### 2.4.3 English language testing and preparation

English language ability is a key barrier for Timorese applicants to access the AAS. This is particularly for applicants from rural areas and people with disabilities, who do not have as much access to preparatory ELT. For entrance to Australian universities, awardees must meet minimum English language abilities as assessed through the IELTS test. For most universities/courses in Australia, awardees need to score a minimum 6.5 overall in IELTS, and 6.0 for undergraduate degrees.

As part of the selection, shortlisted candidates sit a Preliminary English Language Test (PELT), conducted at the Lorosa'e English Language Institute (LELI) in Dili to determine their English language proficiency. The test focused on four categories: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Of the 113 candidates that sat the PELT for the 2021 intake, only 76% passed. Lower pass rates were achieved for the 2022 intake.

In 2020, short-course ELT was provided to help female public servants to improve individual's English skills to enable them to apply for jobs and AAS. The WDPTL is currently administering a survey to assess what has changed for participants as a result of the training and hear about their experiences during the training. A similar course was provided for people with disabilities (discussed further in section 3.2 below) opportunities. Based on candidate feedback, the WDPTL *Selection Report for the 2021 Intake*, proposed that the IELTS preparation period be extended from 30 to 40 hours.

For the 2019 and 2020 intakes, 51% of the awardees were provided with ELT in Australia. The 2020 ORIMA Survey found that 88% of the Timorese new AAS arrivals to Australia felt that their English language skills were sufficient for undertaking their course of study in Australia. Whilst it may be more cost-efficient for additional ELT to be conducted in Timor-Leste rather than Australia, it was considered that the benefits for the Timorese to adapt to the new environment in Australia before commencing their academic study and the superior English language skills developed through being immersed in the language, outweighed these costs.

#### 2.4.4 Pre-departure briefing

Following a five-day session for academic input with LELI, a three-day pre-departure briefing (PDB) is held by the WDPTL to help awardees prepare for living and studying in Australia. This PDB includes advice from recently returned alumni as to how to cope with and seek support for challenges the awardees may experience. A farewell reception attended by the Australian Ambassador to Timor-Leste is also hosted for departing awardees. The 2020 ORIMA Survey found that 100% of the Timorese new AAS arrivals to Australia were satisfied with their preparation for coming to Australia and also stated that the information provided in the PDB, Australia Awards guidebook and DVD reflected the experiences they encountered when living in Australia.

#### 2.4.5 On-award support and engagement

Australian tertiary institutions have primary responsibility for the academic and pastoral care of AAS awardees while they are in Australia. As part of this, they provide on-arrival welcome and orientation to all scholarship students and, on request, provide other support that awardees may need during their time at the university. The university is also responsible for monitoring awardee academic progress, updating OASIS and advising WDPTL/Posts of any necessary award variations.

The AA-TL continues to monitor awardee well-being and academic progress through email/virtual contact with awardees and through course progress updates on OASIS. The program used to conduct monitoring visits to support awardees, but these ceased in September 2016 due to budget restrictions and improved technologies for communication with the awardees in Australia. The monitoring visits have been replaced by online surveys.



For ongoing connections and networks between alumni and Australia, it is important that awardees first establish a positive perception of Australia and develop linkages while they are on award. The 2020 ORIMA Survey found that the perceptions of Timorese new arrivals were generally less positive compared to those of new arrivals from other countries in finding it easy to make friends with other people whilst in Australia. The perceptions of Timorese ongoing students were in line with those of other ongoing students with 90% finding the study experience in Australia to be positive and 83% finding it easy to make friends with other students. The Timorese survey respondents were 100% satisfied with approaching teachers and other staff, 93% satisfied with understanding or using English.

AAS awardees are able to bring their families to Australia. The cost must be met however by the awardee from their stipend, or through the awardees or their partner undertaking employment while in Australia. Of the 13 AAS (8F, 5M) on award in 2021, only one is accompanied by their family.

#### 2.4.6 Reintegration

As recognised in the DFAT *Australia Global Alumni Engagement Strategy 2016–2020* and the AA-TL *Reintegration & Alumni Engagement Strategy: Australia Awards Scholarships* (March 2016), effective reintegration when awardees return to Timor-Leste, is a critical element for achieving program outcomes. The reintegration processes for AAS returnees have been continually strengthened over the life of the program. The AA-TL contact awardees in their final semester to check on progress, return dates and employment plans.

The AA-TL offer a two-day Reintegration Workshop to returning awardees within the first few weeks of arriving back in the country. These workshops provide information to help alumni: make the (reverse 'culture shock') adjustment to being back in their home country; find work/re-enter the workforce; make connections with other alumni; and understand how they can most effectively use their new skills and knowledge in the workplace. Alumni are also offered one to one employment counselling and job placement by a local employment agency. Participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the PDB - 95% of participants strongly agreed that the 2020 reintegration workshop was delivered at the appropriate level, the content was useful, and the topics were interesting.

The 2020 ORIMA Survey found that 72% of the Timorese students about to complete their awards wanted help with job opportunities (compared with 58% globally). However, only half of the returning scholars (11M/19F) participated in the 2020 reintegration workshops<sup>14</sup>. The other returning alumni declined to participate as they already had employment on return and did not feel that they required the services in the workshop, although indicated that they would join the TL3A and attend its activities. The program should continue to look at ways to make the reintegration workshops relevant/attractive to returning alumni, and if attendance remains low, to consider other ways to support and engage with alumni who are returning to previous employment.

#### 2.4.7 The Australia Alumni Association in Timor-Leste<sup>15</sup>

The WDPTL *Timor-Leste Australia Alumni Engagement Strategy 2017 – 2019* guides the program's engagement with alumni such as through reintegration workshops, showcase seminars, small grants, professional development, the graduate internship program, social/network events. Australia's engagement with alumni is now primarily through the TL3A. The TL3A was established in 2017 with formal ratification in 2019. Its vision is to have a diverse alumni community that becomes a dynamic, open, innovative platform, to connect and foster alumni contribution for a better Timor-Leste. All AAS alumni automatically become general members of the DFAT global alumni network and of the TL3A. Timorese who have studied in Australia under other than an AAS (for example privately funded or through an HCDF scholarship) are eligible to become associate members of the TL3A.

To support the association, the WDPTL provides premises, funding for a TL3A secretariat staff person (co-located with the WDPTL) and financial support for TL3A managed activities. The TL3A Secretariat Coordinator supports the update of the AA-TL alumni database, conduct of some program MEL activities and communication with alumni. The AA-TL report that the TL3A is becoming an increasingly active and well-organised association, that the governance structure is sound, with the Board functioning well and providing strong oversight and ownership of the work of TL3A.

The most significant issue affecting TL3A is sustainability, as it is solely funded by the Australian Government. Without this funding, the association would be unlikely to continue its activities in their current form. Exploring options, including membership fees, for additional sources of funding will be a key consideration in 2021 and beyond. However, plans to introduce membership fees were put on hold to allow more time to introduce the idea to alumni to mitigate discouragement of participation. Given the small number of alumni (and economic situation) it is unlikely that an association will be a financially self-sustaining alumni association during the next period of the AA-TL. Nevertheless, given the growing strength of the association, it fulfils an important role in alumni-led engagement – between alumni, with the AA-TL program and DFAT, and with the broader community.

**Finding 17: The TL3A is becoming an increasingly active and well-organised association, but it is anticipated that it will continue to need financial support from DFAT for the next phase of the AA-TL.**

The TL3A plays an important role in assisting alumni to use their skills and experience to contribute to development in Timor-Leste. The association has now established seven sectoral groups to address development challenges in Timor-Leste – health, education, infrastructure, development, agriculture, cross-cutting and communications. These sectoral groups also form an opportunity for important coalition-building of alumni from different intakes, universities in Australia and working in various Timorese organisations.

#### 2.4.8 Alumni activities<sup>16</sup>

The AA-TL, largely through TL3A, organise a range of celebration and professional development activities, as well as promotional events to showcase ongoing alumni capacity to benefit communities and contribute to national conversations on important development issues. In 2020, these events included an annual Alumni Welcome Home Dinner and Alumni of the Year Award. In an Alumni Showcase Series alumni presented their research findings to an invited audience of relevant experts, opinion formers and other interested stakeholders. For example, one showcase was on women's sexual and reproductive health delivered by alumni with a Master of International Public Health and a Master of Health and International Development.

All of the 2021 WDPTL Reintegration Survey respondents reported they are aware of TL3A, with 94% percent of them reporting that they have participated in one or more alumni events: reintegration workshops (58%), alumni of the year gala dinner (52%), networking events (36%), alumni sectoral activities (36%), annual general meeting (30%), showcase seminars (21%), small grant program (15%), women in leadership workshops (6%). For the most part, respondents found that the activities they participated in were useful and/or relevant to a great extent (55%) or a medium extent (24%). The network events, reintegration workshops and alumni of the year events rated as less useful/relevant compared with the women in leadership workshops, small grants, showcase seminars and alumni sectoral activities.

The WDPTL 2020 Reintegration Survey respondents stated that they participated in the activities as a way to *“stay connected to share knowledge and experience for the development of Timor-Leste”*. Others thought it was *“great to have a group of academic people with a vision and mission”*. Some alumni were less interested in participating in alumni activities. For example, one alumnus *“did not participate regularly, depending on the interests”*, suggesting that if there were activities that were more appealing to their interests, they would have been more involved.

Overall, the percentage of respondents who reported participating in alumni activities has increased each year, from 58% in 2018 to 94% in 2021. The number of alumni completing training courses or professional development is lower than the 80% target. The program didn't run alumni professional development courses in 2020, as alumni sectoral groups were focused on COVID-19 responses.

It is noted that the Alumni Engagement Strategy should be refreshed to reflect the current status of the TL3A, and the broader AA-TL alumni engagement being undertaken.

#### 2.4.9 Graduate Internship Program

The Graduate Internship Program (GIP) provides returning AAS alumni with work placements in organisations relevant to their area of study. The program helps alumni to give back to Timor-Leste and to build their networks and future career path. The GIP included broader placement beyond the public service including DFAT implementing partners and local universities. The GIP was introduced for internships with public sector employers in 2012. It concluded in 2015 due to budget constraints. The GIP was reactivated in late 2021 (for public and private sector employers), in recognition of the challenging job market for recently returned alumni and unemployment issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In total 10 internships have been funded since 2015. From January 2021, the GIP supported 5-month internship placements to six newly return alumni (3F, 3M). They were placed at three host organisations – the Partnership for Human Development, Conservation International Timor-Leste and the WDPTL Office. The 2021 GIP has already resulted in one intern securing a permanent contract and the two others have had their contracts extended.<sup>17</sup>

#### 2.4.10 Small Grants

The AA-TL funded Small Grants support alumni to undertake research in their field, conduct community development activities, or participate in leadership/professional development activities. The Small Grants further develop alumni skills/knowledge by applying them in the Timorese context while making a worthwhile contribution to the community. There have been 7 grant rounds since its introduction in 2015. A total of 30 alumni (18F, 12M) have been given grants with total funds of USD 110,962. Examples of small grants awarded in late 2019 included for two female alumni to deliver a nutrition gardening project and establish a women's nutrition group focused on school feeding programs and a male alumnus who developed a non-discriminatory language brochure and booklet for people with disabilities. In 2020, the Small Grants guidelines were amended to address COVID-19 and economic recovery. Three of the grants awarded in 2020 are still on hold due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. An activity on COVID-19 prevention and hygiene water for consumption for people with disabilities in rural areas is planned for 2021.

#### 2.4.11 Public diplomacy

Promotion of the Australia Awards is one of the principles of the *Global Strategy*. The AA-TL has actively promoted the AAS as prestigious awards, the achievements of alumni and stories of their contribution to development in Timor-Leste. The AA-TL's public diplomacy content is largely presented through the Embassy Facebook page, the AA-TL website and by enhanced coverage across broadcast and print media. The AA-TL has actively used social media to promote the availability of the AAS and alumni success stories. At June 2021, the AAS website, had over 18,652 visitors over the past twelve months, with its most popular pages being how to apply (28%) and scholarships available (16%). From January to July 2021, the AA-TL posted 28 stories, with 21,869 reactions and 1,498 shares. Other media and communication activities are conducted through the TL3A Facebook posts (with 2,258 followers)

The Australia Awards Showcase Series aims to promote information sharing and facilitate collaborative action. Examples of the contribution of alumni to Timor-Leste have been profiled in a video of 17 alumni celebrating 17 years of scholarships in Timor-Leste aired at [the 2018 Welcome Home dinner](#), and the profiles of alumni on the Timor-Leste pages of the [Australia Awards website](#) and via the Australian Embassy in Timor-Leste's Facebook page. TL3A members have also appeared in talk shows - for example discussing the future of [Timor-Leste's Non-Petroleum Economy](#), and on the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable communities, including for people with disabilities.

For developing content, it is noted that the Philippines found that 99% of all engagements and link clicks came from people interacting with the ads from their mobile phones and that posts that had moving images had more link clicks compared to those that were static.



#### 2.4.12 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

The AA-TL is guided by the [Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework \(2017\)](#), and the [DFAT M&E Standards](#). The WDPTL *MEL Plan* (2021-2022) outlines key AA-TL MEL activities that include:

- Maintenance of an alumni database containing award and post-award employment data
- An annual alumni reintegration survey to gain understanding and evidence on the experiences of recently returned AAS alumni on return to Timor-Leste after studying in Australia<sup>18</sup>.
- Participant feedback from training, pre-departure and reintegration events
- Monitoring of scholarship cycle and alumni activities (including through global DFAT OASIS reporting on awardee progress/completion)
- Preparation of case studies on alumni contributions to development in Timor-Leste
- Six-monthly reflection and learning dialogues
- Synthesis of findings into reporting (disaggregated by gender, disability and location).

The 2020 M&E House stocktake found that the WDPTL (including the AA-TL) met 13 of the 15 DFAT criteria for system quality, with no criteria scoring below the DFAT standard. It is noted that the AA-TL theory of change and EOPOs is still embedded as a component within the WDPTL. These will need to be updated in the design of the next phase of the AA-TL.

It would also be advantageous for the AA-TL to have greater visibility of the activities/initiatives and the outcomes/results of other AAS countries to benchmark and target results in TL. It is proposed that this be followed up by DFAT in Timor-Leste with the Australia Awards section in Canberra.

### 2.5 Gender, disability and social inclusion of the AA-TL

Equity of access is one of the core principles of the *Global Strategy 2016-2018*. The AA-TL support Australia's cross-cutting development priorities, particularly the empowerment of women and girls and disability-inclusive development. As described above, the AA-TL has actively mainstreamed and targeted inclusion (for women, people with disabilities and people from rural areas) throughout all stages of the scholarships cycle. The AA-TL have a twin track approach to addressing gender inequalities and social inclusion by targeting specific areas of inequality and mainstreaming gender, disability, and social inclusion across all areas of the program.

The 2017 WDPTL *Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy* recognises that scholarships are overwhelmingly awarded to people who already have significant social capital, having had educational, ELT and employment advantages. This is particularly the case for applicants for postgraduate study who have already had the benefit of undergraduate study. In the 2020 intake, many of the applicants had already undertaken undergraduate studies overseas, for example in Indonesia, the Philippines, Australia, USA, and Portugal. Fourteen of the 20 awardees in the 2020 intake had completed their undergraduate study overseas. In the 2021 intake, 11 out of the 13 awardees had completed their high school and undergraduate studies overseas.

Overall, the 2018 Strategic Review found that the AA-TL's work to include women and marginalised people has been strong and continues to be strengthened. The WDPTL *2020 Annual Report* cautions however that given the systemic disadvantages faced by people with disabilities and people from rural locations, increasing the pathways for these target groups to access AAS take time to deliver results.

#### 2.5.1 Gender

Timor-Leste is a patriarchal society with strong cultural, social and gender norms and practices. The nation ranks at 111 out of 187 countries on the UN Gender Inequality Index, indicating high levels of gender inequality. Men have higher levels of literacy, education and employment than women. The paid labour force is also significantly divided by gender, and men generally have higher income, more opportunities, and fewer barriers to paid work than women. Girls have lower rates of completing higher levels of education (secondary and tertiary).

In accord with the 2016 DFAT [Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy](#), the AA-TL undertake steps throughout the scholarships cycle to promote gender equality, to reduced disparities in access to education experienced by women in Timor-Leste. This has achieved demonstrable success over recent years. Whilst there is still a lower proportion of eligible and compliant applications from females (44% for the 2021 intake) but this has increased significantly since the 27% for the 2017 and 35% for the 2018 intakes. For the first time, slightly more females than males were made provisional award offers for the 2020 and 2021 intakes (for the 2021 intake, 7F,6M).

There seems to also have been a rebalancing of gender-normed fields of study. For the awards offered between 2016 to 2021, more women (22%) than men (11%) undertook management and commerce, and more men (36%) than women undertook science and culture (27%) courses. However the proportion of female and male awardees was similar in engineering and health (a previously male-centric field of study) and in education (previously a female-centric field of study). Of the 75 Timorese who completed their AAS between 2015 to 2020, just over half were female. Only males (2) completed a PhD, but equal numbers of males and females completed Masters' degrees (forty in all).

The AA-TL has broadened their award offerings to increase access to the AAS. The AA-TL now offer undergraduate awards to provide more access for female candidates who have not had the opportunity to undertake tertiary study. Awards are also offered for PGC and PGD study for permanent public servants, as a shorter course opportunity for women who are not able to take an extended period away from their families. Although overall the percentage of eligible and compliant applications from females did not increase for the 2021 intake, 60% of these applications for undergraduate level study were from females. However, as indicated above, there has been little interest in the PGC/PGD awards, from females or males.

As shown above, there are gendered differences in alumni outcomes, for example, that female alumni are working in different employment sectors and report greater difficulty in finding employment utilising their skills/knowledge and progressing their careers. The AA-TL has tried to mitigate this, through for example: ensuring the promotion of female alumni achievements; encouragement of gender-focused alumni activities; providing women in leadership training for female alumni and female public servants; and providing an opportunity for five on-award female scholars to join an online career planning session examining barriers to women's progression in the workplace and the need for effective collaboration between men and women to achieve gender equality in the workplace.

**Finding 18: There is now gender equality in the offer of AAS, and the AA-TL is continuing to take targeted measures to improve gender equality across all award outcomes.**

The AA-TL should continue to monitor gender disparities in skill utilisation and ongoing engagement with Australia and undertake appropriate initiatives to support female alumni. This may for example include awardee and alumni mentoring, that has been found effective (for example in Cambodia) especially for undergraduates entering the workforce and for females who experience gender-based challenges to skill utilisation and career progression.

### 2.5.2 Disability

People with disabilities are amongst the most marginalised in Timor-Leste, with limited access to healthcare, education and employment. According to the [2016 Demographic and Health Survey](#), 15% of the population aged five years and older reported difficulty in at least one domain of functioning. Women with a disability in Timor-Leste face more barriers due to the intersection of disadvantages associated with their gender and disability.

DFAT's [Development for All 2015-2020 Strategy](#) aims to ensure that people with disability are included in and benefit equally from Australia's development assistance. This commitment is reflected in the Australia Awards, which take a person-centred approach to providing disability inclusive support. In recent years, the AA-TL has taken a targeted approach for disability inclusion throughout the scholarships cycle. The AAS information encourages applications from people with a disability to apply for a scholarship in any field at undergraduate or postgraduate level. Initiatives to improve inclusion of people with disabilities throughout the scholarships cycle, including: modifying the WDPTL offices for greater access for people with physical disabilities; targeted promotion; providing a targeted scholarship to an applicant with a permanent disability for study at undergraduate level (and reducing the English language proficiency and work experience requirements for application for this award); an

Equity and Access Fund to support people with disabilities to participate fully in applying for AAS; a global AAS 'reasonable adjustment' policy for people with disabilities to live and study in Australia.<sup>19</sup>

As part of a longer-term plan to build a broader pipeline of qualified, confident, and interested AAS applicants with disabilities, in 2020, the AA-TL trialled a three-month course for academic English at LELI for 16 people with disabilities (8F, 8M). Due to COVID-19, the course moved online, but even with technical support course attendance was not as effective. However only two of the participants went on to apply for an AAS. The ELT did however have other positive outcomes including participants gaining employment, promotion, and increased confidence in use of English language. A follow-up academic English language short course for 15 people with disabilities commenced in December 2020 and a further short course for a new intake of 11 people with people with disabilities started online in February 2021.

Despite these initiatives, applications from people with a disability are still low, with only 9 applications (3F, 6M) for the 2022 intake. The success of providing ELT as a pipeline for increased applications from people with disabilities needs to be carefully monitored, and analysis undertaken as to what amount of ELT needs to be provided so that applicants can reach the English standard for AAS application (for a targeted/untargeted award).

It is noted that people with disability face considerable challenges in completing the various stages of the application, and adjustments may need to be made to the process to accommodate this, for example some people with sight disabilities need more time to read, understand and write. One stakeholder noted that there is no facilitation of sign language for people with hearing & speaking deficiencies, and no facilitation for people with eyes deficiencies. LELI also advised that they do not have the local expertise (or all the necessary teaching and learning equipment) to support ELT training for people with certain disabilities, including those with severe sight or hearing impairment. This impacts the program's ability to include all people with disabilities equally in AAS pathways.

The GTF Case Study reported positive AAS outcomes in the disability sector. They found that given the small number of professionals working in the disability sector, all alumni working in this area are closely connected with each other. This creates a vibrant network of disability experts and advocates who are deeply committed to improving disability inclusive policies and services in Timor-Leste.

**Finding 19: The AA-TL initiatives to improve access to the AAS for people with disability is beginning to demonstrate results, although ongoing funding and activities will be needed to provide pathways to increase the proportion of people with disability being offered an award.**

### 2.5.3 Rural disadvantage

Most of Timor-Leste's population lives in rural areas (70%). Timor-Leste's topography, climate vulnerability, and poor infrastructure compound challenges in education, basic health services and employment opportunities. This means that Timor-Leste's young population in rural areas are not yet reaching its full potential. There is an intersectional impact with girls in rural areas having lower rates of completing higher levels of education (secondary and tertiary) than boys in rural areas.<sup>20</sup>

The AA-TL are continuing to explore and improve ways to increase access to the scholarships to people in rural areas. These have included: a targeted outreach promotion campaign (although rural visits were suspended due to COVID-19 but a briefing filmed for online promotion in rural areas was filmed as a temporary work around) and use of an Equity and Access Fund to provide funding for rural applicants to attend interviews and IELTS preparation and testing. Nevertheless, just 2% of applications for the 2021 intake were from people living/working in rural municipalities.

Of the 93 alumni completing their award between 2015 to 2021, 34 (37%) are from Dili (compared to 23% of the national population at the 2015 census), 18% from the municipality of Bacau (10% of the national population). The Ermera municipality is the most underrepresented with 1% of completed awards (compared to 11% of the population). Given work opportunities in the capital, 96% of these alumni are currently living in Dili. The extent to which alumni are using their incomes to support families in rural areas is not known (or indeed the extent to which awardees, like seasonal workers, send remittances home from Australia).

**Finding 20: There has been only limited success from the AA-TL initiatives to increase the proportion of AAS offered to people from rural areas.**

The AA-TL are therefore also exploring ways to spread the benefits from alumni skills and knowledge (and incomes) beyond Dili. This has included use of small grants in rural areas and TL3A sectoral group activities targeted for rural areas, such as in Liquisa.

**It is recommended that the AA-TL continues to strengthen the outreach to municipalities to increase application numbers from people in rural areas and to consider other means to increase the pipeline of rural applicants who meet the English language criteria for the awards applications. (Rec. 6)**

As English language ability is a major barrier to people from rural areas, consideration could be given to mechanisms such as providing ELT for rural applicants who are high achieving in other areas (delivered in a rural area or with financial support for rural applicants to live in Dili for the period of the training. This could perhaps be undertaken in cooperation with New Zealand MFAT who are also wanting to increase the proportion of their scholarship recipients from rural areas. The feasibility of such an initiative given budget constraints and structural barriers for rural Timorese would need careful value for money consideration. Alternatives may be to prioritise the awards for undergraduate study for people from rural areas or to offer short courses in rural areas.

### 3 AAS program initiatives in other countries

**Finding 21: As described below: The AA-TL can also learn from successful initiatives undertaken by other countries/regions offering Australia Awards.**

#### 3.1 Global Australia Awards Strategy 2021-2024

The draft DFAT *Global Australia Awards Strategy 2021-2024* sets the framework for a devolved ecosystem of the Australia Awards. It supports a balance between global consistency and local flexibility, with a timeframe of 2021-2024 to cover the immediate COVID-19 response and beyond. The Strategy recognises the opportunity to modernise, innovate and pilot new approaches. Australia Awards will continue a focus on scholarships to maintain its distinctive identity and prestige. Country and regional programs will however have scope to develop and pilot flexible delivery options tailored to the country context.

Whilst there will be additional flexibility for the Timor-Leste program, the overarching global outcomes of the Strategy will still be relevant to the next phase of the AA-TL. It is therefore **recommended that the next phase of the AA-TL adopt the EOPOs of the DFAT *Global AA Strategy 2021-2024* that support development and build partnerships and networks of influence. These are that ‘Alumni use their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development’ and that ‘Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries’ (Rec. 7).**

The next phase of the AA-TL should also take advantage of regional cooperation proposed under the *Global Strategy 2021-2024*, such as greater region-wide participation in alumni and thematic engagement across multiple countries, and working with local and global industry leaders to address common issues.

#### 3.2 Reintegration plans

For the AAS globally, reintegration plans made prior to the start of an award aim to help awardees focus on their longer-term aims, including for selection of the elective units and fieldwork/research, networks and linkages to be made whilst in Australia and how to apply their new skills and knowledge to drive change and contribute to the development outcomes of their home country. They are recommended as best practice to be completed as part of the selection and pre-award course counselling process, for awardees to talk with their university supervisors regarding study/research options and then updated towards the end of the award to guide job/career planning on return home.

Reintegration plans have in a limited way been used in the AA-TL, with shortlisted candidates asked to submit a supporting document on their post-award aspirations to help inform the course counselling provided. Timorese awardees are also asked to develop Career Plans midway through their scholarships to help inform their search for work on award completion. The reintegration/career plans are not actively utilised by Timorese awardees - the 2020 ORIMA Survey found that only 14% of the Timorese students expecting to return home had a reintegration plan in place.

Other countries, such as the Philippines, actively use reintegration plans throughout the scholarships cycle and highly value their use. It is noted that whilst they can be used as a monitoring tool, it is recognised that some awardees may change or not fulfil these plans for a range of valid reasons.

**It is recommended that the AA-TL implement processes to effectively use reintegration plans throughout the scholarship cycle in order to inform awardee selection of a relevant course to be undertaken in Australia, their on-award engagement opportunities and planning for returning home at the end of their award. (Rec. 8)**

### 3.3 On-award enrichment/engagement

The [Australia Awards Linkages Framework](#) outlines the role in achieving program outcomes of awardees during their time in Australia building relationships beyond their university studies with Australians and Australian organisations and businesses and to catalyse or enhance links between organisations. Implementation of the framework is articulated through the Australia Awards Linkages Guide for: [Enrichment support for delivery by partners and scholars](#).

Most Australian universities now actively provide enrichment activities to their scholarship/international students, including work experience opportunities. DFAT Canberra/State Offices also provide activities for awardees to participate in (e.g., on national celebration days, women's event etc). Managing Contractors of larger AAS programs have instituted On Award Enrichment Programs for their AAS countries/regions. The Philippines Australia Awards for example ensures that Filipino scholars have a positive experience of living and studying in Australia through activities on these themes: leadership and professional development, Australian society, and culture (including of indigenous Australia) and GEDSI. The 'enrichment' experiences of the Indonesian AAS program typically include experiential learning through volunteering, engagement in diplomatic and cultural activities and professional placements.

Given the limited engagement reported by the Timorese awardees, it is **recommended that the AA-TL encourage awardees to participate in on-award enrichment activities to enhance their understanding of Australia and to make professional linkages beyond their university. Consideration should be given in the next phase of the program to facilitating additional targeted on-award professional development enrichment activities for the Timorese awardees** (Rec. 9). In the context of a restricted budget, in the first instance, Timorese awardees should (continue to) be encouraged to embrace not just the academic but also the social, volunteer and professional development opportunities organised by their university and DFAT. This encouragement can take place through the academic/ course advisor, at the PDB, and through routine communications and information sharing with awardees.

The program could also consider providing supplementary grants for awardees to attend relevant accredited conferences, seminars, and workshops. To reduce the expense of organising activities for a small number of awardees spread over a number of states, where the Managing Contractor of the next phase of the AA-TL manages other AAS programs in other countries, they could be requested to include Timorese awardees in their activities. There may also be opportunity of partnering with Pacific country programs to collaborate on enrichment activities. This could include for example through DFAT's [Pacific Women Lead](#) initiative.

It is noted that whilst considered of positive value for the Indonesian AAS program<sup>21</sup>, their extensive on-enrichment program has recently been discontinued due to budget cuts. It will be important therefore to carefully monitor any targeted on-award enrichment activities for Timorese awardees to (including for example through structured reflections by the awardees on their experiences with video, pictures or documents) and regularly assessed for tangible outcomes and value for money.

### 3.4 Alumni engagement

Apart from Samoa, the other four AAS countries consulted as part of this review offer a similar range of activities to that offered in Timor-Leste, including the celebration of return alumni, alumni peer-peer networking events, opportunities for alumni to network with Australians, professional development opportunities, grants (including those targeted at GEDSI, innovation and COVID-19 response) and self-funded alumni collaboration in social-development activities. The four countries also each have an Australia alumni association. Given the number of awardees, the stage of the country's economic development, some of the associations are more independently managed than the TL3A, and alumni membership contributions mainly fund their operations. Also noted is the opportunity to encourage



alumni to connect with Australians in Timor-Leste through the Australian Volunteers Program and the New Colombo Plan. Male and female alumni could also be encouraged to participate in the activities of DFAT's [Pacific Women Lead](#) initiative.

### 3.5 Collaboration with other donors

The Australia Awards are a small proportion of the total number of scholarships for international study available in Timor-Leste. They are however highly valued for the quality of education in Australia, the allowances and on-award support provided and the opportunities offered to alumni.

The total number of scholarships provided for Timor-Leste citizens, and from which sources and at what level/fields of study, was not able to be ascertained. However, the Timorese Human HCDF has allocated significant funding for local and overseas scholarships at the tertiary level.<sup>22</sup> Given their role in capacity development and the scale of the HCDF scholarships, it is important that the HCDF are consulted when determining tertiary training needs gaps and priorities. The HCDF report for FY20/21 indicates that there are 1025 HCDF scholars currently studying (45% of whom are female)<sup>23</sup>. Of these awardees, funded through bilateral arrangements with ministries, 34% are from the Ministry of Education, 31% from the Ministry of Health and 14% from the UNTL. The majority of these scholars (64%) are overseas in 23 countries (many of which are English or Portuguese speaking). The highest proportion of the overseas scholars are in Indonesia (21%) and Portugal (14%). There have been over 100 HCDF scholarships awarded for study in Australia, the majority at Bachelor level and in a range of fields of study. Twelve scholars (1 F) are currently studying in Australia.<sup>24</sup>

The AA-TL actively engages with the New Zealand Embassy in Dili regarding the offer of tertiary scholarships in Timor-Leste. The Australian and the New Zealand government tertiary scholarships for Timor-Leste have similar objectives, are typically trying to attract from the same candidate pool, both use LELI for English language training, and face common challenges in attracting candidates from rural areas and with limited English language skills. There would be effectiveness and efficiencies in expanding harmonisation between the two programs. This could for example be in award promotion to rural municipalities and provision of ELT to target groups and in sharing costs for IELTS testing.

Other donors with specific scholarships for overseas studies allocated to Timor-Leste include the [Japanese](#), Portuguese, [Chinese](#) governments and the USA Fulbright Scholarships. Collaboration with other donors should be reinvigorated, through for example re-establishing a scholarship working group of donor programs.

### 3.6 Short Course Awards

Many of the other Asian AAS countries/regions, such as Cambodia, the Philippines and South Asia, offer targeted and effective Short Course Awards (SCA) as part of their offerings. These SCA are typically funded from the bilateral programs and managed by DFAT's overseas posts/their Managing Contractor. The SCA typically utilise Australian expertise to develop participants' skills and knowledge and help them build people-to-people and institutional links with Australia to drive change.<sup>25</sup>

The rationale for offering SCA is that they can be substantially more flexible and responsive than the longer-term AAS to addressing the skills gaps and needs of partner countries. SCA can be an opportunity for Post to provide targeted and demand-driven training, which is likely to be more appealing for partner government officials. They may also provide an opportunity for: female applicants (or people with a disability) or mid-senior career professionals who are unable to undertake long-term study abroad; people whose English language ability do not meet the entrance criteria for degree-level study in Australia; and for a larger number of people to be trained in Australia (or by an Australian institution in-country) in areas that complement the bilateral aid program.

Compared to longer-term awards, investment in SCA may provide an increased number of people benefitting from Australian training, being able to more quickly utilise their new knowledge and skills and from a cohort effect of students undertaking the same training at the same time.

**It is recommended that the next phase of the AA-TL include demand-driven short course awards as a flexible approach to capacity building and building networks between Timor-Leste and Australia. (Rec. 10)**

However, it is recognised that the long-term links to Australia and the transformational effect of individuals living and studying in another country that is created through long-term scholarships are likely to be greater than that generated by short-course participation. Ways to maximise linkages with Australia include training provision, by Australian institutions<sup>26</sup> and lecturers/trainers, providing recognised academic credit (to Australian Qualifications Framework standards) to participants who successfully complete the course requirements, conducting some/all of the course in Australia, inclusion of the SCA recipients in alumni activities.

The selection of short course topics would depend on demand-driven priorities under the bilateral aid program (and as aligned with Timor-Leste's development priorities), and not duplicate existing provision. Short courses could, for example, be used under the AA-TL to: support the training needs of a single or a range of targeted organisations working closely with DFAT programs; provide cross-sectoral generic skills training to targeted individuals/organisations (for example in GEDSI, leadership or project management or other Embassy priorities); flexibly respond to urgent/emerging training needs (e.g. for laboratory technicians in the COVID-19 pandemic); and to provide further professional development to alumni (or candidates waiting to take up their award).

There is considerable workload involved in organising short courses, particularly the logistics of travel (for awardees to Australia or trainer to Timor-Leste). The logistics of this during the COVID-19 pandemic would need to be considered carefully. It is therefore proposed that the offering of SCA be piloted first, conducted in TL, by an Australian training provider. The design for SCA would need to include comprehensive M&E to assess outcomes and value for money from the courses.

### 3.7 Distance and flexible learning

Under the *Australia Awards Global Strategy 2021-24*, Australia Awards will be more flexible and targeted, during COVID-19 and beyond, including through increasing access by opening Australian education to people who are unable to relocate to Australia for long periods of time. There will be scope for DFAT Posts to consider remote and hybrid delivery options that are appealing to recipients and pivot towards long- and short-term awards in-country and other investment in alumni when recipients cannot enter Australia. As a response to COVID-19, DFAT is already piloting allowing awardees who have returned home to their country and are in the last semester of study to complete their studies by remote learning. Only one of the three Timorese awardees eligible for such an online study arrangement is considering this approach. This modality has not yet been able to be implemented due to ongoing discussions between the university and DFAT Canberra, uncertainty regarding health cover and stipend arrangements.

Since 2016, DFAT Samoa have offered ten awards per annum through their bilateral program funding for distance and flexible learning (DFL) at Australian universities. These awards are matched in number by the Government of Samoa. The awards have been very popular with mid/senior professionals who cannot leave their careers/families for overseas study. The DFL awardees reported that other benefits of the study mode included being able to immediately apply their studies to their work situation, and the opportunity to discuss (over the internet) topical concerns and solutions with course participants in Australia and other countries. Although engagement with Australia was less for the DFL awardees than for the AAS, the award did cover attendance at compulsory course components in Australia. Consideration was also given to supplementing the award with other in-Australia experience (such as conference attendance).

The challenges experienced by the Samoan DFL awardees included the need for high commitment to their studies, and flexibility by their employer to manage the work/study balance. As a result, completion rates are lower than for AAS, with at least one participant a year withdrawing/suspending their study. Of the 18 awards offered in 2017 and 2018, 11 completed their award and 7 withdrew/had their awards terminated. However, given the significantly lower cost of the award (tuition fee only), and the value to the awardee of the subject matter learned and connections made, this still represented value for money compared to full-time study in Australia. A 2020 review of the AA in Samoa recommended DFAT considering offering more on-line courses in light of the disruption to awardee mobilisation to Australia due to COVID-19.

Whilst DFL has been an overall positive experience in Samoa, the major constraint of expanded use of internet-based learning in Timor-Leste is access to and the quality of the internet. Timor-Leste ranks next to last out of 207 countries in the world<sup>27</sup>. Any serious consideration of the use of this technology as the principal learning platform would need to wait until there was at least high-quality

internet to designated 'learning centres'. Timorese stakeholders also reported the potential challenges of undertaking study at home with respect to the suitability of studying in crowded spaces, poor lighting and electricity provisions. Consideration of a DFL learning mode should therefore be deferred until improved internet access is available in Timor-Leste. A submarine internet cable connecting Timor to Australia's network was approved in 2020 but is yet to be implemented.<sup>28</sup>

**It is therefore recommended that the next phase of the AA-TL consider distance and flexible learning options once internet capacity has improved in Timor-Leste (Rec. 11)**

It is also noted that Indonesia offer a Split-Site Scholarship Program as a subset of the long term awards. The program involves 12 months of study at an Indonesian university, followed by 12 months at an Australian university, leading to the awarding of two master's degrees in one related field of study. As the Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e (UNTL) has a number of partnerships with Australian universities (e.g. [Victoria University](#), [Charles Darwin University](#), and the [Federation University](#)), awards for a split-site mode of study may be worth further exploration in the next phase of the program.

### 3.8 Privately funded scholarships

The 2018 Strategic Review recommended that the number of scholarships for study in Australia could be increased by exploring a range of co-funding, sponsorship and partnership arrangements. Whilst several Australia Awards programs have investigated possibilities for such expansion of funding source, the PNG program have demonstrated some success in private sector sponsorship of scholarships in support of the broader PNG-Australia Partnership. There has been significant interest from the PNG private sector for more collaboration, resulting in Steamships/Pacific Towing, Newcrest Mining, Santo Limited and ExxonMobil<sup>29</sup> sponsoring in-country and in Australia scholarships in the agribusiness, midwifery, nursing and maritime studies.

For PNG, this collaboration with the private sector has produced dividends in terms of the number of awards that can be offered by the program, increased education and training pathways for women and public diplomacy opportunities. The collaboration is guided by an *AAPNG Private Sector Partnerships and Engagement Strategy*. Lessons learned from the PNG experience is that it takes considerable time to realise such partnerships and that due diligence activities needs to be taken in the selection of companies and their practices to avoid reputational risk to DFAT. The governance and operational arrangements also need considerable negotiation particularly around awardee selection, awardee/alumni communications with and obligations to the company, branding and promotion. The financial obligations for the full length of the sponsored awards also need to be fully guaranteed to avoid financial risk to DFAT in having to assume responsibility for the awards.

In Timor-Leste, there may be opportunities to be explored, perhaps with companies working in the oil and gas, and infrastructure sector for co-sponsorship of scholarships. Any arrangement with the private sector would need to be carefully developed and managed, following DFAT's [Operational Framework](#) for Private Sector Engagement in Australia's Aid Program, and lessons learned from PNG's experience

Given the risks involved in co-sponsoring of scholarships, **it is recommended that the next phase of the AA-TL pilot partnerships with the private sector to fund short courses opportunities.** (Rec. 12). It would be helpful for the Managing Contractor of the next phase of the AA-TL to have expertise in partnership broking (both with the private sector and supporting alumni to develop organisational linkages between Timor-Leste and Australia.

It may also be possible for an agreement to be made with the HCDF for their scholarships funding for study in Australia be managed under a joint HCDF/Australia Awards banner. This could include for example in the co-funding of medicine degrees which would not normally be funded by AAS due to the length of time required.

### 3.9 In-country scholarships

Some AAS countries, such as PNG and Laos, also offer in-country scholarships to study at tertiary institutions, funded through their bilateral programs. This supports the provision of awards for undergraduate study for targeted disadvantaged groups. The offering of in-country scholarships to Timorese institutions was considered in 2014. It is understood that this proposal was not implemented due to budget limitations, including the challenges/costs of providing sufficient holistic support to the



tertiary institutions/government departments that would participate in management of the scholarships. Given the current COVID-19 budget constraints and the financial and human resources that would be needed to establish such a program, providing in-country scholarships is not recommended at this time.

### 3.10 Partnership approach

The majority of AA program interventions globally are targeted at the individual. Such contributions are expected to have an ongoing, multiplying and life-long effect on a far wider range of colleagues and contacts – than on individual participants alone. However, finding evidence for the broader organisational or sector impact arising from an individual's improved capacity and skills and knowledge, is particularly challenging.

In the Philippines, to complement an open category, a proportion of program funding is allocated to a targeted category for HRD support to partner organisations. The program provides scholarships and training to build hubs of capacity in specific organisations in order to provide a multiplier effect and lead to long term institutional change. This involves targeting organisations which have a clear and proactive enabling environment for skill utilisation, particularly for women and people with disability. A partnership agreement is signed that outlines the AAS and SCA awards that will be targeted to the organisation and the partners role in identifying and preparing a strong (and inclusive) pipeline of candidates, their on-award support and alumni placement and skill/knowledge use. The training provided is based on an organisation training needs assessment to address competency gaps.

To maximise the impact of cohorts of alumni that can work together to address specific development challenges, **it is recommended that the next phase of the AA-TL pilot an organisational partnership approach to target some of its education and training support.** (Rec. 13). Given the significantly smaller number of awards in Timor-Leste than in the Philippines, compounded by likely constraints on the number of AAS at least in the first few years of the new phase, it may not be viable to re-allocate some of the small number of awards for Timor-Leste to specific organisations. A pilot partnership approach could commence however with the provision to targeted organisations of short course awards and English language training for a pipeline of identified candidates with strong rural linkages. The targeted organisations would be identified by DFAT investments in Timor-Leste as ones where increased organisational capacity would enhance investment outcomes, and where the organisations have promising capacity to form and commit to such a partnership.

## 4 Conclusions

The review found that overall the AA-TL is performing strongly across the scholarships cycle. The AAS have high prestige in Timor-Leste. Quality applicants apply for an AAS. The program has achieved gender equality in the offer of awards and is gaining traction in the offer of awards to people with disabilities. Awardees are prepared well for living and studying in Australia. A high proportion of alumni complete their degrees in Australia. The alumni return to Timor-Leste with a highly positive perception of Australia, its education system and Australians. Alumni are supported to reintegrate to Timor-Leste and if needed to find employment. The alumni are sought out for employment, with the majority working in fields relevant to their studies. The majority use their skills and knowledge to contribute to their organisation and to the development of Timor-Leste. A high proportion of alumni are in influential positions across all sectors that maximise their potential impact on their country's development. With financial support, the TL3A is an increasingly active and well organised association. A range of activities support alumni to undertake professional development and to maintain and grow their social and professional networks, including with DFAT and its investment programs in Timor-Leste. The alumni work together outside of their workplaces to undertake support for the community.

Nevertheless, the findings of the review identify some areas for continuous improvement and adaptation to reflect the changing context for the provision of scholarships and for achieving expected outcomes. These include to:

- Establish a Scholarships Advisory Group
- Undertake analysis to better understand the demand for PGD/PGC awards
- Implement processes to effectively use reintegration plans throughout the scholarship cycle
- Strengthen the outreach to municipalities to increase eligible application numbers from people in rural areas

- Enhance support for awardees/candidates who have had their scholarships disrupted by the COVID-19
- Increase the monitoring of alumni employment and, as necessary, additional initiatives be undertaken to support alumni find relevant work
- Improve collaboration on scholarship matters with the HCDF, New Zealand MFAT and other scholarships donors.

The adoption of the EOPOs of the DFAT *Global AA Strategy 2021-2024* that support development and build partnerships and networks of influence are recommended for the next phase of the AA-TL. These outcomes are that 'Alumni use their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development' and that 'Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries'. Reflecting the country level flexibility enabled under the Strategy, a range of new activities have been recommended for consideration in the design of the next phase of the AA-TL, including:

- Support for alumni to establish partnerships between Timor-Leste and Australian organisations
- On-award professional development and enrichment activities
- Short course awards
- Piloting of private sector sponsorship of short courses
- A partnership approach, targeting awards to selected organisations

The next phase should also take advantage of other innovations proposed under the *Australia Awards Global Strategy 2021-2024*, such as greater region-wide participation such as alumni engagement and thematic engagement across multiple countries, working with respective local and global industry leaders to address common issue.

# Annex 1: Terms of reference for the Australia Awards Scholarships and Alumni Timor-Leste Program Review

## BACKGROUND

The Australia Awards Scholarships and Alumni Timor-Leste Program (AAS-TL) is currently delivered under the Workforce Development Program Timor-Leste (WDPTL), July 2014 – June 2022. The program delivers full scholarship cycle support for Australian government funded Australia Awards Scholarships (AAS) including support for post-award activities for alumni and alumni association.

A mid-term review (MTR) of the complete WDPTL program was conducted in 2018, including Australia awards scholarships and alumni, labour mobility and TVET support. Due to changes in the operating environment, including in Australia's preferred approach for implementing relevant regional and global programs, this review is no longer current, and an updated review of the AAS-TL program to inform a future program is required.

The Recommendations and concept note should also consider the strategic directions provided by Australia's Partnerships for Recovery policy and framework, the Timor-Leste COVID-19 Development Response Plan and the Government of Timor-Leste's (Go TL) Economic Recovery Plan.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the AAS-TL review is to assess the current program using existing monitoring and evaluation data, and additional key stakeholder interviews or surveys; conduct desktop research on other AAS programs across the Indo-Pacific region to determine current AAS best practice approaches; and to propose recommendations for a future AAS-TL program which builds on lessons learnt from the current program and successful features of other relevant AAS programs. The review will also produce a draft concept note as per the template (Attachment 1) and be guided by DFAT design quality standards. The concept note will be between 5-10 pages and will also include proposed objectives, proposed theory of change and some key indicators.

## SCOPE

All analysis, review and interviews would be conducted remotely and would not require travel or face-to-face meetings. The review can be conducted by more than one qualified reviewer. It is highly preferable that one of the reviewers has current knowledge of the Timor-Leste context and/or the Australia Awards program in Timor-Leste.

The analysis will be of existing monitoring and evaluation data from throughout the WDPTL program. This data will include quantitative and qualitative data, reports and reviews. The reviewer will need to conduct interviews or surveys of key stakeholders, by the most appropriate method determined by the reviewer. Stakeholders can include, but are not limited to, Government of Timor-Leste, Timor-Leste Industry bodies, the Timor-Leste Australia Alumni Association (TL3A), WDPTL staff and DFAT Canberra and Embassy staff.

The reviewer, in consultation with the Embassy, would choose up to five other AAS country programs within the Indo-Pacific region and conduct a desktop review of best practice features of the programs. This would include accessing AAS country program reviews and designs and may include follow up phone calls with AAS country programs.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions are to be agreed with the Embassy at the outset of the review.

## METHODS

Tasks	Timeframe	Responsible
<b>1. Set Review Plan</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In consultation with Embassy staff set the key review questions</li> <li>Develop a brief plan of how the review will be conducted</li> </ul>	1 day	Reviewer Embassy staff
<b>2. AAS – Timor-Leste document review</b> Review program M&E data to determine most successful features to inform future recommendations	3 days	Reviewer
<b>3. Key stakeholder interviews/surveys</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview selected key stakeholders to get a wider view of stakeholder requirements to determine if the current program meets these</li> <li>needs, or could adapt to better meet the needs</li> </ul>	2 days	Reviewer
<b>4. Desktop review of Indo-Pacific AAS programs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct a desktop review of up to 5 other AAS Indo-Pacific programs to identify best practice features that may be suitable for the Timor-Leste context to inform a future AAS -TL program</li> <li>This review may be followed up with phone interviews if required</li> </ul>	3 days	Reviewer

## DELIVERABLES

The dates and timeframes provided below are the latest dates for the deliverables. Deliverables can be finalised prior to the due dates, but note that approval of deliverables will not be given during July 2021.

Deliverables	Timeframe	Responsible	Finalised
<b>1. Review Plan</b>	As above	As above	30 June 2021
<b>Set of recommendations</b>  Develop a set of recommendations on the key features of a future AAS-TL program	2 days	Reviewer	9 August 2021
<b>Draft Concept Note</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft a Concept Note to DFAT requirements and in the concept note template</li> <li>Review and adjust the concept note based on Embassy feedback</li> </ul>	Up to 5 days	Reviewer  Embassy staff	Draft by 27 August 2021  Final by 10 September 2021

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The reviewer will have key responsibility for delivering all tasks, including being proactive in locating documents, organising interviews or surveys, setting interview times and arranging online logistics, if required. They have primary responsibility for reaching agreement on the review questions, all research and drafting of the recommendations and concept note, and for making adjustments based on feedback.

The Embassy will assist with organising access to other AAS country program staff, if required for access of documents or follow up interviews. The Embassy will also be responsible for providing feedback on the draft concept note.

WDPTL will have responsibility for supporting the reviewer with access to all program documentation required and for providing interviewer contact details. WDPTL will also have responsibility for any translation or interpreting that maybe required.

## **GOVERNANCE**

The Embassy will decide on the selection of the reviewer/s. The reviewer/s will report and work to the direction of Embassy staff for this task. The reviewer/s will not share the content of the final Recommendations or Draft concept note with WDPTL staff, or with any other individuals or entities including with Palladium International Pty Ltd.

The reviewer can request documents or assistance from WDPTL to enable their work on this review, including translations, interpreting, getting contact details or setting meetings. Reviewers must apply their own professional judgement and assessment to inform the proposed recommendations and concept note based on the contents of the review.

The Embassy will give final approval of the deliverables. WDPTL will receive advise from the Embassy on the reviewers' progress against deliverables and will pay the reviewers for their work on this review according to agreed deliverables.

## **SCHEDULE**

The Review Plan should be finalised before 30 June 2021. Once the Review Plan has been approved the tasks there is some flexibility in the time schedule, allowing for availability of interviewees, programs to supply key documents and for the availability of the reviewers. Draft Recommendations are due to the Embassy by 9 August 2021 and the draft concept note is due to the Embassy by 27 August 2021 for the Embassy's feedback. The final draft concept note, incorporating feedback is due by 10 September 2021.

## Annex 2: Key review questions

### Key Review Question 1 - Relevance

To what extent is the current AA-TL relevant to Australia and Timor-Leste?

#### Sub-Questions:

- 1.1 How well is the program aligned with Australia's overarching aid policy, DFAT's public and economic diplomacy strategies Australia Awards global strategies?
- 1.2 How well is the program aligned with Australia's bilateral agreements with Timor-Leste, the COVID-19 Development Response Plan with Timor-Leste and with its other investments in Timor-Leste?
- 1.3 To what extent are key DFAT and Timor-Leste stakeholders contributing to the strategic direction and oversight of the program
- 1.4 Do the current objectives of the AA-TL align with workforce planning strategies in Timor-Leste?
- 1.5 Are the levels of education (mainly postgraduate), mode of study (on campus in Australia) and fields of education provided through the AA-TL most appropriate to contributing to economic and social development in Timor-Leste?

### Key Review Question 2 – Effectiveness

How effectively is the current program being implemented to meet the long-term program objectives?

#### Sub-Questions:

- 2.1 How effective are targeted approaches in ensuring a sufficient number of eligible applicants and successful candidates are sourced from priority cohorts to meet program targets?
- 2.2 Are the selection methods appropriate?
- 2.3 Are pre-departure activities providing adequate preparation for studying and living in Australia?
- 2.4 Are the Timorese scholars making linkages whilst in Australia? What more could be done?
- 2.5 Are scholars passing their course of study in Australia? How can learning outcomes be improved?
- 2.6 Are alumni effectively using the skills/knowledge/linkages gained whilst in Australia?
- 2.7 How satisfied are alumni with the support provided to them on return to Timor-Leste (reintegration)?
- 2.8 How effective is the Alumni Association, and the support provided to it by the MC?

### Key Review Question 3 – Effectiveness

To what extent have external factors impacted the effectiveness of the program?

#### Sub-Questions:

- 3.1 How has COVID-19 affected the AA-TL - in Timor-Leste and in Australia?

- 3.2 What other factors have contributed to, or constrained, achievement of the intended AA-TL outcomes?

#### **Key Review Question 4 - Equity**

How systematically have efforts been made throughout the scholarship cycle to increase the equity of the program?

##### **Sub-Questions:**

- 4.1 To what extent has the program benefited women, people with disabilities, and people from rural areas?
- 4.2 To what extent is English language a barrier to improving access to the scholarships and successful study in Australia?
- 4.3 How systematically have efforts been made throughout the scholarship cycle to increase the equity of the program? What challenges and opportunities are there?

#### **Key Review Question 5 - Efficiency**

How efficiently are key program activities and processes being implemented?

##### **Sub-Questions:**

- 5.1 How efficient are implementation arrangements across the scholarships cycle? How could these be improved?
- 5.2 How well is the AA-TL MEL system producing robust data which to manage the program and to communicate and assess the outputs, outcomes and longer-term impact of the program?

#### **Key Review Question 6- Learning**

What are key lessons to inform the design of the next phase of the AA-TL?

##### **Sub-Questions:**

- 6.1 What can be learned from the Australia Awards programs in other countries that may be applicable to the AA-TL?
- 6.2 Are there lessons that can be learned from other countries offering scholarships to Timor-Leste?

#### **Key Review Question 7 - Recommendations**

How can DFAT design the next phase of the AA-TL to maximise its relevance, equity, effectiveness and efficiency?

##### **Sub\_Questions:**

- 7.1 What should be the objectives for the next phase of the AA-TL?
- 7.2 What are the strengths to build on and opportunities to improve program outcomes?
- 7.3 Are there opportunities for working with other partners in financing the scholarships?
- 7.4 What adjustments need to be made to the program to reflect the on-going COVID-19 emergency?

## Annex 3: Key reference documents

- AES (2013). [Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations](#). Australian Evaluation Society
- ACER (2019). Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility [Timor-Leste Case Study](#): Disability and Development. November 2019
- ACER (2019). Australia Awards Global Strategy Evaluation and Performance Report - Evaluation Report. April 4. 2019
- DFAT (2016). Australia Awards Global Strategy - Investing in the next generation of global leaders for development 2016–2018
- DFAT (n.d.). [Australia Awards Linkages Good Practice Guide](#).
- DFAT (n.d.). [The Australia Awards Linkages Framework Overview](#).
- DFAT (n.d.) The Australia Awards Linkages Guide for: [Enrichment support for delivery partners and scholars](#)
- DFAT (n.d.). [Investment Design Quality Criteria](#)
- DFAT (2016). [Gender and Women's Empowerment Strategy](#) 2016
- DFAT (2017). [Monitoring and Evaluation Standards](#). April 2017
- DFAT (2017). [2017 Foreign Policy White Paper](#)
- DFAT (2017). [Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework](#). November 2017.
- DFAT (2017). [Timor-Leste Australia Alumni Engagement Strategy](#) 2017-2019. May 2018
- DFAT (2018). Timor-Leste [Workforce Development Strategic Review](#). May 2018
- DFAT (2020). Australian Government's development policy Partnerships for Recovery — Australia's COVID-19 Development Response
- DFAT (2020). [Timor-Leste COVID-19 Development Response Plan](#). October 2020.
- DFAT (2021). Australia Awards Global Strategy Investing in the next generation of global leaders for development 2021-2024 (NFC)
- DFAT (2021). [Australia Awards – Information for Intake](#) 2022
- DFAT (2021). Australia Awards Scholarships Survey. 2020 Timor Post Report – Dili. ORIMA
- DFAT (2021). Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility. Global Tracer Survey 2020. Timor-Leste Country Report
- Government of Timor-Leste (2011). [Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030](#)
- Government of Timor-Leste (2020). [COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan](#). August 2020.
- Government of Timor-Leste (2018). Demographic and Health Survey, 2016. General Directorate of Statistics, Ministry of Health and ICF. 2018.
- M&E House (2020). M&E House Stocktake of DFAT's bilateral investments in Timor-Leste
- United Nations (2018). Timor-Leste. National Human Development Report 2018. Planning the Opportunities for a Youthful Population



WDPTL (2016). WDPTL Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy. November 2016

WDPTL (). Annual Reports, 2019, 2020, 2021

WDPTL (). Alumni Reintegration Survey reports, 2016-2021

WDPTL (). Selection reports, 2018-2021 intakes

WDPTL (). Alumni engagement strategy review

WDPTL (). TL3A professional development survey - Summary of findings

WDPTL (). Summary of findings from survey on applicants' opinions of selection process for 2021 Intake

WDPTL (2021). Annual workplan, 2021

## Annex 4: List of key informants consulted

### Timor-Leste

Organisations, Names/Positions	
<b>Australian Embassy in Dili</b>	
Nick Cumpston, Counsellor (Timor-Leste)	
Emma Hanks, Second Secretary – Workforce Development (Timor-Leste)	
Cornelio de deus Gomes, DFAT Timor-Leste	
<b>DFAT Canberra</b>	
Rob McKelleher, Australia Awards, SEA Division	
Christine Bouchard, Assistant Director  Timor-Leste Section, Southeast Asia Maritime Branch   Southeast Asia Division	
<b>Government of Timor-Leste</b>	
Manuel Guimaraes, Advisor, Deputy Prime Minister dos Reis	
Vasco Viana, Ministry of Higher Education	
Hermenegildo da Silva, Coordinator of the Planning, Research, and Monitoring, Human Capital Development Fund	
Carmeneza Dos Santos Monteiro, Commissioner for Recruitment and Career Development at Civil Service Commission	
<b>Timor-Leste Australia Alumni Association (TL3A)</b>	
Marcia e Exposto, President, TL3A	
Herminia Martins, TL3A Secretariat Coordinator (co-located at WDPTL)	
<b>Other Timor-Leste organisations</b>	
Cesario da Silva, Executive Director, Associação Deficientes de Timor-Leste (ADTL)	
Mark Juba, Director; Tom Quinney, General Manager, LELI	
Gabrielle Isaak, Deputy Head of Mission, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Timor-Leste)	
<b>WDPTL</b>	
Imogen Wilson, Deputy Team Leader; Joantina Lu, Scholarship and Alumni Support Manager; Anacleto Varela, Scholarship Program Coordinator	

### AAS Posts

Organisation	Name/Position
Cambodia	Liz Adler, Second Secretary; Sothea Roth Hel Senior Program Manager,
PNG	Sioni Ruma, Education & Leadership – Australian Awards PNG and Lyn Bae
Philippines	Miguel Borromeo Senior Program Officer – Scholarships and Innovation; Milalin Javellana, Program Director of AAAEP-P

Organisation	Name/Position
Samoa	Arianne Stevenson, Program Manager
Vietnam	Brendon Brooker, Second Secretary; Minh Nga Le, Program Officer

## References/Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> The annual costs of the AAS depends on the number of new and continuing awards (and the level of study) as well as in-country costs. The estimation of annual costs has been affected by award suspensions due to COVID-19. Indicatively, based on awards since 2016, the average annual cost is an indicative \$4.0m per annum, of which \$2.7m (72%) is spent in Australia. In Timor costs (indicatively for FY 20/21) include for SAS (0.25m), Alumni (\$ 0.1m) and management/operating costs (\$0.85m). The average cost for a Bachelor degree is \$240k and for a Masters (coursework) is \$140k.

<sup>2</sup> The four WDPTL EOPOs are: The Government of Timor-Leste effectively manages Australian labour mobility schemes; Training institutions deliver accredited, high-quality training courses (for local and international work) in collaboration with industry. N.B. this EOPO is not applicable for July 2021-June 2022 due to the transitioning of TVET support to the APTC; The Government of Timor-Leste policies and plans prioritise activities and budgets to create effective employment pathways for Timorese women and men.; Timorese women and men utilise their skills, knowledge, work experience or income.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/destinations/asia/timor-leste>. [Accessed 3/9/21]

<sup>4</sup> WDPTL MEF IMO 5: Timorese women and men complete tertiary education in Australia

<sup>5</sup> WDPTL MEF Indicator 20: Proportion of AAS alumni in employment

<sup>6</sup> 11% either studying or working overseas, seeking employment or not seeking employment due to other responsibilities.

<sup>7</sup> Influential roles include, among others, Members of Parliament, Heads of Government agencies, Company Directorships, high profile advisory/advocacy roles.

<sup>8</sup> Engagement between alumni and the Embassy can be categorised at the levels of participants, resource persons, critical content provider and proponents.

<sup>9</sup> WDPTL MEF IMO 4: TL3A members support community development and high policy issues

<sup>10</sup> <https://twitter.com/ausambdili/status/1381483015281381377>

<sup>11</sup> And WDPTL MEF IO 6: Graduates and workers further develop skills and have relevant networks

<sup>12</sup> The most recent returned alumni 12-month were more likely to state that they had maintained links (94%) than the alumni from 24-month (71%), alumni from 36-month (82%) and alumni from 48-month (88%) cohorts. More men (63%) than women (37%) responded they had maintained links with alumni and Australia.

<sup>13</sup> The ACER evaluation of the Australia Awards Global Strategy in 2019 notes that this outcome has not been a major focus of many country programs, as not previously seen as part of core business of the awards.

<sup>14</sup> WDPTL M&E Framework EOPO5 Indicator 22: Number and proportion of alumni who participate in reintegration workshops/events

<sup>15</sup> WDPTL MEF IO 5: An active Timor-Leste3A network influences decision makers and advocates for improved systems and policy

<sup>16</sup> WDPTL MEF IO 5: An active Timor-Leste3A network influences decision makers and advocates for improved systems and policy

<sup>17</sup> WDPTL M&E Framework EOPO5 Indicator 25. Value (AUD), nature (sector/type) and number of participants (alumni and beneficiaries) of small grants and development activities implemented by alumni and Timor-Leste3A sectoral groups. The total value for the GIP was AUD \$23,865 in year

<sup>18</sup> The 2020 report included respondents who had completed their studies in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

<sup>19</sup> The support requirements are assessed individually, and could include for example purchase of mobility equipment, on campus accessible accommodation, purchase of assistive devices, and the costs of a carer

<sup>20</sup> CARE (2020). Timor-Leste Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-FINAL.pdf. [27 April 2020](#).

<sup>21</sup> Indonesian alumni reported increased and stronger links with Australians and Australian organisations; and more of the alumni viewed their scholarship experience and Australia and Australians in a positive light.

<sup>22</sup> The 2019 budget for the HCDF scholarships program was US\$8.2 million. [https://www.mof.gov.tl/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BB6\\_FDCH\\_Final-2\\_-in-English\\_13-Milloens.pdf](https://www.mof.gov.tl/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BB6_FDCH_Final-2_-in-English_13-Milloens.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Although a lower proportion (34%) of the scholars who are overseas are female

<sup>24</sup> Data provided by the HCDF, 13/8/21

<sup>25</sup> In 2021 for example, the South/South West Asia program offered 223 AAS and 258 SCA [Australia Awards Statistical Profile May 2021 \(dfat.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>26</sup> A requirement is typically that training is provided by Australian Registered Training providers and/or Australian tertiary institutions, as defined in the Higher Education Support Act, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> [Rank of Countries with Fastest \(and Slowest\) Internet in The World 2019 | Seasia.co. The internet speed in Timor-Leste is 0.45 compared with Australia 16.36 MBPS](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Timor-Leste's internet freedoms at risk - Opinion - The Jakarta Post](#). [Accessed 21/8/21].

<sup>29</sup> Steamships/Pacific Towing consortium sponsor Maritime Scholarships for in-country study for six women to build practical skills in the sector; Newcrest Mining funded 10 awardees to undertake a Diploma in General Nursing at the Lae School of Nursing; Santos Limited offer an annual full scholarship for a Papua New Guinean working in the resources sector to undertake post-graduate studies in Australia to build added capability in its oil and gas sector; ExxonMobil has funded scholarships for students living in PNG LNG Project areas to further their education in the fields of health or education through the Australia Awards – PNG LNG Scholarships program.