



Australian Government  
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# Mid-term review of the Access to Quality Education Program, Fiji

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## Acknowledgement

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# Context for the mid-term review

## Snapshot of the Fijian School System

The Fijian school system is framed by the Education Act and the policies of the Ministry of Education, Heritage, Culture, Youth and Sports. The system is characterised by an advanced public-private partnership, whereby most schools are privately (or community) owned and managed but publicly subsidised.

The division of labour between government and school owners is relatively clear. The establishment and daily operations of a school (e.g. land acquisition or lease, infrastructure and management) are the responsibility of school owners. The establishment of the basic curricula and of examinations are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, under the authority of the Permanent Secretary. The appointment, payment and professional development of teachers is a shared responsibility. However, of the 10,000 primary and secondary school teachers in Fiji, the vast majority are public servants.

There are over 700 primary schools in Fiji, close to 200 secondary schools and four teacher training institutes. In recent years there has been a large increase in the number of early childhood centres. There are now an estimated 600 early childhood centres and approximately 650 early childhood teachers. This emerging sub-sector is incrementally becoming formalised within the education sector, with the Ministry of Education aiming towards being able to subsidise the salaries of some early childhood teachers in the 2013 Budget.

Public funding for education in Fiji is under pressure. The education budget (around FJD250 million per year) has been declining as share of the national budget from around 19 per cent in 2008 to around 12 per cent in 2011. A disproportionate amount of the education budget is spent on salaries (around 80 to 85 per cent), with insufficient investment in school improvement and student engagement initiatives, in particular for those students most at risk of dropping out or of falling short of learning objectives. It is unlikely in the near future that the Fijian government will be able to afford, as a result of economic growth, to increase in a substantive way spending on education and there is limited space in the budget for reprioritisation of existing expenditure. As a consequence, Australian aid is a valuable supplement at this time.

Government-funded school grants are provided to assist schools to purchase learning materials and equipment. The grants are indexed and secondary schools are the major beneficiaries. Most schools in Fiji hold a fundraising event once a year to raise money needed to cover their annual operational costs. There is considerable variation in the amount of money schools raise which directly impacts on the quality of education services provided. Many of the schools in Fiji are affiliated with religious groups (primarily Catholic, Methodist, Sabha or Muslim) but not all.

Infrastructure and furniture in many primary schools is of poor quality, by both Fijian and Australian standards, due to underinvestment. The evidence from Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP) indicates that this is impacting negatively on student participation. The head

teachers and school managers of all those schools visited during the mid-term review said that they could never have generated through fundraising the quantum of money required for the capital upgrades that have been funded by Australia during phase 1 of AQEP. They also reported significant increases in attendance rates and teacher motivation following the upgrade of school facilities.

At all of the schools visited during the review, the ablution blocks prior to the infrastructure upgrade were either of poor quality or closed due to a failure to comply with government health standards. In all instances, there were reports that there was a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of students and teachers, for example one head teacher reported incidences of children urinating in the classroom because of the prohibitive state of the toilets, a situation that stopped after the toilets were refurbished.

Learning achievement in the early grades in Fiji is difficult to ascertain right now because the Ministry of Education, with approval from Cabinet, recently revised the national assessment system to focus on internal classroom based assessment and a new national standardised literacy and numeracy assessment for which there is insufficient trend data. The situation is probably mixed.

By some measures the Fijian education system is advancing. For instance Fiji is the only Melanesian country on track to fully achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDG2) by 2015 (universal primary education)<sup>1</sup> and for several years has been reporting that literacy rates amongst 15 to 24 year olds are approaching 100 per cent. However, an estimated 6000<sup>2</sup> Fijian children aged 6-14 years do not attend school each year (around 4 per cent of the relevant population group) and there are anecdotal reports of increasing school drop-out rates which suggests that there is an issue with student engagement that must be impacting upon learning achievement. Perhaps of most importance, the Ministry of Education and parents aspire to higher levels of quality and excellence in learning achievement than currently exists.

## Snapshot of Poverty in Fiji

According to AusAID research the World Bank poverty mapping completed in 2009, just over a third of the Fijian population lived in poverty. While there has been considerable improvement in reducing urban poverty over recent years (a decline from 35 in 2002 to 26 per cent in 2008), rural areas are showing no decline in poverty.

There is large sub-national variation in poverty. The Northern division is estimated to be the poorest (54 per cent), followed by the Western Division (40 per cent). In contrast, the Central division (23 per cent) is the least poor division, with much lower poverty incidence.

According to national accounts data, real per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measured in constant US\$ prices were virtually unchanged in Fiji between 2002 and 2008. By itself, this would imply that poverty did not reduce much in Fiji. However, economic growth diverged across regions, and the subnational poverty trends mirrored these patterns of economic growth. While urban sectors benefited from high growth in output, agricultural output has been decreasing in the last years. Consequently, most of the decline in poverty was largely driven by the growth of non-agricultural sectors in urban areas.

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<sup>1</sup> 2011 Pacific Regional MDG Tracking Report

<sup>2</sup> 2011 Pacific Regional MDG Tracking Report

Poverty in Fiji is driven by multiple factors. Poverty varies considerably by household and individual characteristics. Of these characteristics, old age, number of children, education and employment of household-heads have particularly strong links to poverty. Households with no education or with primary education are most vulnerable. For example, urban households with heads with secondary education on average consume 31 per cent more than households whose heads completed less than secondary education.

## Snapshot of Bilateral Relations

Fiji faces a somewhat uncertain future after the military takeover of the elected civilian government in December 2006. This was the fourth coup in Fiji in 20 years. Australia has called for Fiji's return to democracy and elections are tentatively planned for 2014.

At the official level, relationships between AusAID and the Ministry of Education are positive. The main impact of the 2006 coup has been on the focus of Australia's education assistance in Fiji. It has shifted away from support for national reforms led by the Ministry of Education (which characterised past assistance) in favour (although not exclusively) of direct support to primary schools. In particular, current assistance is focused on the overall improvement of the 25 per cent of primary schools in Fiji that are accessible to the most disadvantaged children in both rural and urban areas. The explicit goal of this phase of Australian education assistance, as outlined in Australia's Memorandum of Understanding with the Fijian Government, is to improve the ability of children from very poor communities, including children with disabilities, to access a quality school education.

## Access to Quality Education Program

The main means by which Australia supports the Fijian school system is through the AQEP. AQEP is a \$50 million Australian aid initiative being implemented between 2011 and 2016.

The design of AQEP split the program into two phases. Phase 1 (August 2011– June 2013) is intended to address barriers that stop children from fully participating in primary school and to develop system-wide improvements for better education outcomes. The second phase (July 2013– June 2016) is intended to provide a larger-scale education quality program, informed by Phase 1 analysis and lessons, and using increased funding announced in November 2011. In reality, both phases are inextricably linked.

It is a requirement of the contract between AusAID and the AQEP managing agent that a review of phase 1 be undertaken to inform a decision on the continuation of the program into phase 2. This report presents the findings of that review.

# Review Methodology

The mid-term review was undertaken in November 2012, approximately 14.5 months into program implementation. It involved two weeks of field work in Fiji, including school visits and interviews of a wide array of AQEP partners (refer to Attachment A), and two weeks of desk work to review key documents and prepare the mid-term review report.

The review was undertaken by Charlotte Blundell, a Senior Education Specialist in AusAID's Pacific Division. Charlotte had not been involved in the design or implementation of AQEP so was able to provide independent advice to AusAID Suva Post on the program and future options for AusAID support to the education sector in Fiji. Charlotte's academic background is psychology (psychometrics and cognitive development) and international development. She undertook the review in close consultation with Padric Harm, AusAID Senior Program Officer.

The review was rapid and light-touch (refer to Terms of Reference prepared by AusAID Suva Post at Attachment B). This was because there had been a technical advisory group mission in March 2012 and recent consideration of AQEP performance to determine how best to allocate additional funding that resulted from a determination of the Australian Government to increase bilateral aid to Fiji.

## Précis of Findings

Overall, AQEP has made good progress in the first stages of implementation and has established a positive reputation. Headline achievements include:

- > Responsiveness to changes requested by AusAID, in particular related to the objective and design of component 1;
- > Development of an evidence-based targeting strategy to guide the selection of schools that will receive grants and infrastructure upgrades during phase 2;
- > Rapid and coordinated assistance to those schools impacted by two floods in the west of Fiji earlier in 2012, including 44 school renovations and disbursement of a school levy of FJD90 per child<sup>3</sup> to nine flood-affected schools;
- > The completion of infrastructure upgrades at over 50 primary schools (including some flood affected schools) which has benefitted over 7,500 students and led to immediate improvements in student participation and teacher motivation;
- > Design and development of an innovative school monitoring and information system scheduled for roll-out in early 2013 that is expected to improve data quality and reporting and reduce paper work;
- > Commencement of a disability-inclusive education pilot project, including training of select teachers at Hilton Special School; and
- > Establishment of positive relationships with key stakeholders.

The program is at risk however of not being able to reliably measure its impact at its conclusion for several reasons:

- > Aspects of the program design are still being determined;
- > The program logic is not as well articulated following the changes to component 1 and the decision to support infrastructure upgrades in over 50 primary schools before the targeting strategy was finished and socialised with key partners; and
- > The evaluation strategy and quantifiable performance targets are not clear.

The main recommendations of the mid-term review are that the program should be extended into phase 2 but that the design of activities under component 1 and 3 of AQEP, and the means by which the impact of AQEP will be assessed, should be finalised by June 2013, before phase 2 commences.

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<sup>3</sup> It was not clear during the review why the school levy was \$90 per child. If the school grants under component 1 of AQEP are calculated on this basis, the school grants will be unsustainably large.



Following this, AusAID should try to avoid using AQEP as a flexible or sector-wide facility. AQEP is fundamentally an aid project with a formidable objective of improving access to quality primary education for disadvantaged children. With the exception of responding to emergencies, the addition of new activities, particularly those requiring a focus that is beyond the target schools, risks conflating program logic and diffusing efforts towards the achievement of AQEP's primary objective, as outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding between the governments.

# Key recommendations and observations

The mid-term review made two major recommendations.

## Recommendation 1 - that AusAID should extend support for AQEP.

There is evidence that AQEP is already having a positive impact on primary schooling in Fiji (refer Section 3) consistent with its primary objective. But more time is needed to establish whether the gains in phase 1 reflect a novelty effect or evidence of real change. AQEP certainly has the potential, over time, to be an important showcase of good practice in the delivery of education aid in the Pacific because of the favourable enabling environment<sup>4</sup>. As well, the extension of the program is supported by the Fijian education community, including both the Ministry of Education and teachers. Phase 2 should have a duration of at least 3-4 years. This is sufficient time for three cycles of school grants to be disbursed and spent by target schools, which will provide a proper evidence base for an impact assessment. Not extending AQEP into phase 2 and/or not allowing sufficient time for multiple cycles of school grant disbursement will waste a majority of the investment made during phase 1 and could have other unintended negative impacts.

## Recommendation 2 - that the design of the activities under component 1 and 3 of AQEP, and the means by which the overall impact of AQEP will be assessed, should be finalised by June 2013, before phase 2 commences.

AQEP should not be planned on an annual basis. It is not a budget support program. The planning for each phase should be done in advance and informed by lessons from previous phases. There is no good reason that the activities and budget for all three components of AQEP should not to be planned and agreed by June 2013, in advance of phase 2 commencing. Any subsequent changes should then be adaptive, in response to extenuating circumstances or evidence. Related to this, the means by which the impact of AQEP will be assessed must be finalised before phase 2 commences. It is imperative that the results of AQEP be captured so that AusAID can fulfil its reporting responsibilities and so that policy dialogue between the Fijian and Australian governments is evidence-based. Regarding the measurement of impact, it is suggested that AQEP sub-contract to an education assessment organisation the evaluation of the impact of the component 1 grants, leaving the core Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team to focus on the impact assessment of component 2 and 3, as well as monitoring, qualitative assessment, the collection of lessons and reporting.

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<sup>4</sup> Relative to other school systems in Melanesia, the Fiji system is well led and the education workforce more skilled.

The following observations informed these recommendations.

## Component 1: Increasing access to quality education

### Design issues

AQEP is yet to disburse any school grants under this component so it was not possible to review the contribution of it to school improvement or student participation in school. The reason for the delay in distributing grants under this component is a redesign of this component instigated by AusAID.

When AQEP was first conceived, the grants under component 1 were going to be given directly to poor households to assist them to overcome any financial barriers they faced in sending their children to primary school. They were described as social protection grants. The focus on social protection was prompted by the 2006 coups and compounded by the effects of the global financial crisis, which had an immediate and negative impact on the Fijian economy and on household income and increased reports of children dropping out of school because of the cost (both direct and indirect) to parents.

During the first year of AQEP implementation however, AusAID's Pacific Lead Education Specialist recommended that the social protection grants should be given to schools rather than to parents. It was suggested that the grants could then be used to address the financial barriers impeding student's access, as well as their engagement and learning, through a combination of individualised strategies and school-wide improvements.

Following consideration of international literature, the findings of a technical advisory group mission and in-country consultation, the AQEP Program Coordination Committee decided to adopt this recommendation and adjust the targeting of component 1 grants, and the means by which they are disbursed.

Since this decision was taken earlier in 2012, considerable effort has gone into redesigning this component, in particular into developing the procedures that will guide the effective and efficient use of these funds by schools.

As is consistent with international good practice, schools will be given considerable flexibility to decide how to spend the component 1 grants. However, to ensure the achievement of AQEP's primary objective it will be important (as AQEP plans to do) to encourage schools to invest in both student-focused strategies that target those children not accessing school or most at risk of dropping out or of underperforming, and whole-of-school improvement.

It is also important that AQEP communicates to schools (head teachers and boards of management) how the success or failure of the grants will be judged. It is suggested that this be based on the degree of improvement in student participation and completion rates and learning achievement, measured via an independent evaluation.

Of note, the probability that the grants will have a positive impact on primary schooling in Fiji has been vastly increased by the decision to expand the budget for this component and to provide target schools with a steady stream of grants over a 3-4 year period. This is a fortuitous outcome of the Australian Government's decision to increase bilateral aid to Fiji.

## Targeting strategy

Formidable effort has gone towards selecting the primary schools that will receive AQEP component 1 grants. The approach taken by AQEP is not the same as the differential resourcing model that is used by the Ministry of Education. AQEP has drawn on World Bank poverty mapping and primary data on urban poverty in Fiji to inform its targeting strategy. There were mixed views expressed during the mid-term review about AQEP's approach to targeting schools but most criticism was limited and related to the targeting of schools in year 1 and 2 for infrastructure upgrades (component 2 grants). Moving forwards, further communication with the Ministry of Education to explain the differences between component 1 and 2 grants and why there is variation in targeting of the different grants would be valuable.

Related to this, in hindsight it may have been preferable not to have undertaken infrastructure upgrades at schools that will not receive component 1 grants, either at all or until much later on in phase 2. Like all development programs, goodwill is an essential aspect of success. The approach taken to start infrastructure upgrades before the targeting strategy was finalised (whilst driven by budget pressures) carries the risk that the goodwill established in year 1 will be eroded by a gap in further assistance. It also undermines the targeting strategy and presents challenges for the impact assessment of AQEP and the communication of program logic.

The final list of schools that will receive component 1 and 2 grants needs to be finalised before the end of phase 1<sup>5</sup> so that there is sufficient time available for school improvement plans to be prepared, funds to be distributed and spent, and impact to be assessed. Similarly, the work plan of infrastructure upgrades needs to be finalised, with a focus on clustering to allow for efficiency of monitoring and a reduction in cost if materials for more than one school in a cluster can be transported simultaneously. Related to all of this content is the need to finalise the total budget for phase 2, as there are important trade-off decisions to be made between the volume of the component 1 grants and the budget envelope available for infrastructure upgrades.

## Assessing school improvement

The component 1 grants are being provided for a dual purpose, to increase the participation in primary school of students from poor households (by removing financial barriers which are presumed to be impeding participation) and to improve the overall quality of education in target schools. Measuring whether or not the grants have served this dual purpose should be the key focus of the impact evaluation of AQEP.

For reasons of time, simplicity and cost, the evaluation of the impact of the component 1 grants should probably be based primarily on quantifiable proxy measures. It certainly isn't expected that within 3-4 years all children in the target schools will be completing primary school having met or exceeded all of the learning objectives of the curriculum. What should be expected however are signs of progress in this direction that represent improvements on the current situation.

It is suggested that at a minimum, the proxy measures that be evaluated in the target schools before the school grants are distributed and at the end of phase 2 include:

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<sup>5</sup> The list of schools to be assisted under the remainder of the program has been finalised and was endorsed by the PCC on 6 Dec 2012, several weeks after this review was completed.

- > Early grade enrolment, attendance and completion rates (if possible disaggregated by gender, household income, location and student's developmental status) – this would be the main means of assessing whether the grants have had a demonstrable impact on student participation, particularly amongst students facing greater disadvantage due to poverty or disability.
- > Early grade de-coding skills - both accuracy and speed<sup>6</sup> - (disaggregated by gender, household income, location and student's developmental status) this would be the main means of assessing whether the grants have translated into improvements in the quality of education. If in establishing the baseline it is found that early grade de-coding skills are already approaching 100 per cent, then written text comprehension should replace this measure. The reason that a measure of early grade reading skills is suggested as the main proxy measure of quality is because reading skills are an important predictor of future learning achievement and de-coding is the main challenge facing beginner readers in the Pacific<sup>7</sup> and an important predictor of good and poor readers.

In addition, as the AQEP M&E strategy has started to outline, gathering qualitative information about school culture, leadership, school management and perceptions of change would also help the Program Coordinating Committee (PCC) to understand the extent to which the school grants and school improvement plan activities are impacting student engagement and learning.

It is suggested that AQEP sub-contract to an education assessment organisation the evaluation of the impact of the component 1 grants, leaving the core M&E team to focus on assessing the impact of component 2 and 3 activities, as well as leading monitoring, qualitative assessment, collection of lessons learned and reporting. This suggestion is intended to be pragmatic and is not a criticism of the M&E team. Hence, capturing results and lessons is of vital importance to AusAID so that the agency can meet its reporting responsibilities and access evidence to inform policy dialogue. There is no doubt that at this juncture there is a high degree of risk of underinvestment in the assessment of AQEP's impact which needs to be addressed as a matter of priority.

It is noted that to properly evaluate AQEP's achievements, primary data collection is needed to supplement what is available from Literacy and Numeracy Assessments (LANA) and Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) and that an array of instruments have been identified by the M&E team for use. The mid-term review recommends consideration of a simple instrument to measure learning assessment, such as a modified version of the test used by Pratham in India. It is suggested that if a sub-contractor is appointed to undertake the impact evaluation of the school grants component, then the design of the evaluation and collection of baseline data needs to be completed before the end of phase 1 of AQEP and/or before any of the activities agreed in school improvement plans commence.

## Component 2: Improving School Facilities – infrastructure upgrades

Much progress has been made in relation to component 2 of AQEP. Over 50 primary schools, many that have not been renovated since they were built 70 years ago and some that were damaged by floods in the early part of 2012, have benefited from substantial infrastructure upgrades. The results of the upgrades were very evident during site visits, not only in terms of

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<sup>6</sup> Consider a simple instrument similar to that used by Pratham in India.

<sup>7</sup> Based on Early Grade Reading Assessments undertaken by the World Bank in Tonga, Vanuatu and PNG last year.

more attractive and functional school facilities, but also in terms of student participation and teacher motivation. For example, amongst the schools visited during the mid-term review there was evidence of:

- > reduced student absenteeism (for instance around 25 per cent of students were absent from Nuku primary in week 6 of term 4 in 2011 (before the infrastructure upgrade) and less than 2 per cent were absent in week 6 of term 4 in 2012 (after the infrastructure upgrade);
- > increased teacher motivation and time spent preparing lessons after school;
- > increased enrolments (for instance kindergarten enrolments increased by 35 per cent at Nausori primary school after the upgrade of the Early Childhood Education centre (ECE);
- > greater community engagement and attendance of parents at school events such as parent-teacher nights;
- > increased school revenue which is being reinvested in levy relief programs, computer labs, learning materials and sporting equipment for the students; and
- > improved children's hygiene and safety.

All of the quality assurance procedures and contracting arrangements related to component 2 appeared sound. The procedures manual governing component 2 is thorough and appears sound. All head teachers reported generally positive experiences of working with the AQEP advisers and sub-contractors. The one attempt at fraud identified during phase 1 appears to have been quickly and appropriately handled. Issues of conflict of interest also appear to have been well managed but in one instance a potential conflict of interest between an AQEP staff member and sub-contractor had not been identified to the AusAID program manager but should have been.

The only concerning issue observed in relation to component 2 relates to the scale of the infrastructure upgrades. (Note: the other issue, which was the decision to start this component before the AQEP targeting strategy was finished, has been previously discussed under component 1).

The decision was taken in the design to upgrade the facilities of target schools to national standards. In many instances this involves comprehensive renovation of facilities and expenditure of upwards of FJD100, 000 per school. This goes well beyond maintenance to major capital works. Whilst positive impacts are already evident, there is a fundamental question of value for money that should be evaluated at the end of AQEP to inform future policy and investment. In particular, some analysis of the variation in the attendance of students and teachers before and after the infrastructure upgrades is critical. This would enable both the costs of poor school facilities and the benefits of good school facilities to be considered by policy-makers.

Related, the mid-term review observed wide variation in the per student cost of the infrastructure upgrades that was the result of variation in school population size. This raises an important policy question about the efficiency of the distribution of component 2 grants and the weighting that is applied to student population in the targeting strategy. The mid-term review did not draw a conclusion on this issue but raises the value for money of the component 2 grants as an important policy issue worthy of further discussion between the program partners.

## Component 3: MoE Support

### School Information Management System

The main achievement under component 3 during phase 1 has been the development of the new School Information Management System (SIMS). The Ministry of Education spoke highly of the technical assistance that had been supplied to them and SPBEA declared the open system a breakthrough for the Pacific.

Whilst only implementation will reveal the full benefits of the new open system, it is expected to significantly improve data quality, to reduce paperwork for head teachers and to provide (for the first time) real-time tailored reports to all system users, from the Permanent Secretary to individual classroom teachers.

It is acknowledged by the Ministry of Education that those schools without access to the internet will not benefit from the new system to the same extent as those with internet access, however even an efficiency gain for half of the primary schools in Fiji will be a tremendous return.

The major risk at implementation related to SIMS is the limited in-house technical IT capacity within the Ministry of Education. Given public sector salary caps, it will be difficult for the Ministry to address this issue short-term so it would be worthwhile, though not sustainable, for AQEP to fund 1-3 IT specialists to support SIMS users in the first few years of implementation. This would increase the probability that the benefits of the new system would be identifiable, providing the evidence-base to support a bid by the Permanent Secretary for additional resources.

### Alternative Approach to Component 3

There was less evidence during the mid-term review of the impact of other component 3 activities, including the leadership training, disability inclusion strategy, workshops and LANA review. This could be an issue of the scope of the mid-term review and focus of interviews. However, the activity-based and annualised approach to supporting the Ministry of Education does diffuse/fragment component 3 results and so it is suggested that the PCC consider the alternative approach, of agreeing on a small number of key reforms to be supported, with a 3-4 year package of assistance scoped and agreed before the start of phase 2.

If this were agreed by the partners, then depending upon budget constraints and the views of the Ministry of Education, it is suggested that the top priority for support in addition to implementation of SIMS and the disability inclusion strategy is the national learning assessment system.

### Rationale for focusing on learning assessment

The change to Fiji's national assessment system is an important reform. There is a sizeable body of empirical research showing a strong link between formative classroom assessment activities and better student learning outcomes, particularly by students that are not achieving desirable results, if these types of assessment activities are implemented and used correctly. Based on consultations during the mid-term review, it is evident that despite considerable goodwill, teachers are struggling with the change to CBA. Also, that operating costs of schools have been negatively impacted, that the dissemination and use of assessment information is not yet contributing to any substantive improvements in teaching and learning and that the Examinations and Assessment Unit, whilst well led, is under unsustainable pressure.

It would be a tremendous loss to the quality of teaching and learning in Fiji to have this reform stagnate or fail. Given that the reform is relatively recent, it is highly likely that these teething issues could be remedied with further consultation and investment in teachers, as well as in the effective dissemination and use of assessment information.

Australia is a world-leader in learning assessment and is well placed to support Fiji with this reform. In addition, the greatest benefits of formative assessment accrue to students with lower learning achievement. These same students are generally those disadvantaged due to poverty, disability or under-development in their early years. They are the same students AQEP is targeting. In addition, the previous Fiji Education Sector Program (FESP) supported the development of the new assessment policy so continuing support through AQEP would build upon past Australian assistance.



# Future Australian support for education in Fiji

In the Terms of Reference for the mid-term review, AusAID Suva post asked for an opinion on longer term Australian engagement in education in Fiji. The headline conclusions reached were that:

1. The Fiji education system is well led and advancing. In most of the domains of education, from school autonomy to learning assessment, Fiji is ahead of other Melanesian countries. In addition, many of the policies that are in place are as mature as those guiding the best education systems in the world.
2. While little benchmarking of learning achievement in Fiji with other countries has been done, it is expected that the results of such comparison would show Fiji a long way from the world leaders in terms of international education rankings. This suggests two things:
  - that considerable opportunity remains to help students derive more from their schooling; and
  - that there are inefficiencies in the education system that are hindering the country from reaping the full social and economic benefits of investment by parents, the government and community/religious groups in children's education.
3. Given a weak economic outlook for Fiji and amidst increasing poverty levels, there is an ongoing role for Australia to provide supplementary funding to Fijian schools and the Ministry of Education, as both are underfunded.
4. There are opportunities for improvement at all levels of the education system in Fiji; however there is value for money in Australia focusing on the foundations of the system, particularly on early childhood development and primary schooling, as well as on the most disadvantaged children.
5. Into the future, AusAID Suva post should consider continuing the school grants and expanding the number of target primary schools and expanding support for quality early childhood programs that target the most disadvantaged infants and children in Fiji. In addition, long term support for learning assessment and the use of assessment information in policy making would return dividends.
6. Supporting other national reforms such as curriculum development should not be ruled out if there is budget available. Systemic change is the ultimate goal. However, the rule of thumb should be to prioritise investment in reforms or strategies that are having or will have the most direct impact on student participation and learning, including through better quality of teaching and improved school leadership and culture.
7. There is a critical need for AusAID to have access to long term trend data on school readiness and learning achievement of students in the early grades. The current national assessment system doesn't provide this information. This information is needed to enable measurement of

the impact of Australian education assistance, to monitor education trends and to make evidence-based investment decisions. Even if AusAID is focused on higher levels of the school system, information on the quality of the foundations will always be useful. A discussion on this issue with the Ministry of Education before future phases of assistance are designed would be valuable, to consider options, including perhaps a longitudinal study that is jointly funded by AusAID and the Ministry but sub-contracted to an expert organisation (university or assessment centre) and which continues for at least 10 years, indifferent to the phasing of future Australian education assistance. This would focus on tracking trends in school readiness and early grade reading and numeracy achievement.

## Attachment A

### Final Meeting Schedule for the Mid-Term Review Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP) Fiji Mid-Term Review: Meeting Schedule Tuesday 6th – Thursday 15th 2012

Time	Meeting	Location	Comments
<b>Tuesday 6 November</b>			
9.00am – 12.30pm	AusAID briefing	Australian High Commission, 37 Princes Rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Tim Gill (First Secretary)</li> <li>&gt; Padric Harm (Senior Program Manager Education)</li> </ul>
2.30 – 3.30pm	Courtesy Call - Ministry of Education (MoE)	Ministry of Education, Waisomo House (TVET conference room), Level 1, Thurston Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Apisalome Movono (Deputy Secretary Administration and Finance) and MoE senior staff</li> <li>&gt;</li> </ul>
3.30 – 4.30pm	AQEP Team Leader and AQEP Senior Program Manager	Level 2, Quality House, Gorrie Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Dr Priscilla Puamau (Team Leader)</li> <li>&gt; Jemima Reeves (Senior Program Manager)</li> </ul>
<b>Wednesday 7 November</b>			
9.00 – 10.00am	Ministry of Education – Permanent Secretary	Top floor, Senikau House, Gordon Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Dr Brij Lal (MoE Permanent Secretary)</li> </ul>
10.15 – 11.15am	AQEP Core Team	Level 2, Quality House, Gorrie Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Dr Priscilla Puamau (Team Leader)</li> <li>&gt; Jemima Reeves (Senior Program Manager)</li> <li>&gt; Jeffrey Ing (School Infrastructure Specialist)</li> <li>&gt; Bianca Murray (Social Protection Specialist)</li> <li>&gt; Dr Alan Parkes (Database Specialist)</li> <li>&gt; Mereoni Daveta (Disability Inclusion Coordinator)</li> <li>&gt; Semiti Temo (M&amp;E Database Coordinator)</li> <li>&gt; Jone Naisau (Senior School Community Coordinator Management)</li> <li>&gt; Josateki Naisoro (Senior School Community Coordinator Data)</li> <li>&gt; Sowane Puamau (Infrastructure Coordinator)</li> </ul>

Time	Meeting	Location	Comments
11.30am – 12.30pm	UNICEF Pacific	3 <sup>rd</sup> floor, Fiji Development Bank building, Victoria Parade	> Simon Molendijk (School Improvement Specialist) > Iosefo Volau (Education Officer)
2.00 – 3.00pm	Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Assessment	5 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Vanua House	> Dr Richard Wah (Senior Educational Assessment Specialist) > Kitone Radrodoro (Senior HR Assistant)
3.30 – 4.30pm	Save the Children Fiji	25 Pender Street	> Robbie Gillespie (Programs Director) > Asilika Rainima (Assistant Manager Programs)
<b>Thursday 8 November</b>			
9.00 – 10.00am	Assets Monitoring Unit, MoE	Top floor, Quality House	> Saimoni Waibuta (Director, AMU) – Infrastructure component and School Planning/Financial Mgmt training)
10.15 – 11.15am	Human Resources Management Unit, MoE	1 <sup>st</sup> floor, Marela House	> Apao Solomone (Principal Education Officer HRM) – EMIS/SIMS+
11.30am – 12.30pm	Exams and Assessment Unit, MoE	Exams Section, Selbourne Street	> Kelera Taloga (Director Exams/Assessment)
2.00 – 3.00pm	Primary Section, MoE	Ground floor, Quality House	> Tomasi Raiyawa (Director Primary)
3.30 – 4.30pm	School Management Association of Fiji	103 Berry Road	> Govind Singh (National President – SMAF and Secretary General – Council of Pacific Educators)
<b>Friday 9 November</b>			
9.00 – 10.00am	AQEP – School Information Management Systems support	Level 2, Quality House	> Colin Connelly (AQEP Application Development Specialist)
10.15 – 11.15am	Fiji Head Teachers Association	Dudley Intermediate School, Toorak	> Neumi Vola (President FHTA and Head Teacher - Dudley Intermediate School) 9526897
2.00 – 4.00pm	Consultations with Head Teachers and Managers of Year 1 AQEP schools (Central division)	Level 2, Quality House, Gorrie Street	
<b>Monday 12 November</b>			
9.30 – 10.30am	School Visits (Suva/Nausori)	Dr Ram Lakhan Memorial School	
11:00am – 12:00pm		Nuku District School	
12:15 – 1:15pm		Nausori Primary School	

Time	Meeting	Location	Comments
2.30 – 3.30pm	AQEP Infrastructure Specialist	Level 2, Quality House	> Jeffrey Ing (School Infrastructure Specialist)
3.30 – 4.30pm	AQEP Social Protection Specialist	Level 2, Quality House	> Bianca Murray (Social Protection Specialist)
<b>Tuesday 13 November</b>			
<b>FIJI PUBLIC HOLIDAY – DIWALI</b>			
<b>Wednesday 14 November</b>			
9.00 – 10.00am	Hilton Special School	Waimanu Road	> Nanise Ravisa (Acting Head Teacher)
2.00 – 3.00pm	AusAID debrief	Australian High Commission, 37 Princes Rd	> Sarah Goulding (Counsellor) > Tim Gill (First Secretary) > Padric Harm (Senior Program Manager Education)
3.15 – 4.15pm	AQEP debrief	Level 2, Quality House, Gorrie Street	> Dr Priscilla Puamau (Team Leader) > Jemima Reeves (Senior Program Manager) > Jeffrey Ing (School Infrastructure Specialist) > Bianca Murray (Social Protection Specialist) > Dr Alan Parkes (Database Specialist) > Mereoni Daveta (Disability Inclusion Coordinator) > Semiti Temo (M&E Database Coordinator) > Jone Naisau (Senior School Community Coordinator Management) > Josateki Naisoro (Senior School Community Coordinator Data) > Sowane Puamau (Infrastructure Coordinator)
<b>Thursday 15 November</b>			
10:15 – 11:15am	School Visits (Nadi)	Vitogo District School	
11:45am – 12:45pm		Ami Chandra Memorial School	
1:00 – 2:00 pm	AusAID wrap-up session	Nadi	> Padric Harm (Senior Program Manager Education)

## Attachment B

### **Independent Mid-Term Review – 6 to 15 November 2012 Fiji Access to Quality Education Program 2011 – 2016 Terms of Reference**

#### **Purpose**

These Terms of Reference (TOR) provide guidance to the Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP) Mid-Term Review mission, which will provide an independent assessment of the effectiveness of AQEP implementation; and provide independent advice to AusAID Suva Post to inform its planning and programming of support to the education sector.

AQEP, which is a 5 year program over 2 phases, has funding approval for the first 2 years (Phase 1: August 2011-June 2013). The AusAID decision to exercise the option to extend AQEP for the next 3 year phase (2014-16) will be informed by the independent Mid-Term Review.

This Mid-Term Review will assess the following areas:

- > Ministry of Education (MoE) priorities and sectoral changes;
- > Relevance of the Program (especially Program Components) in achieving the Program Goal (including Program performance);
- > The efficiency and effectiveness of the Contractor's operations in relation to AQEP management and implementation; and
- > Any other matters relevant to the performance of Services including beneficiary satisfaction.

#### **Background**

Since the 2006 coup, Australia has continued to support the ordinary people of Fiji by maintaining programs that improve their livelihoods and provide them with basic services. Consistent with Australian whole of government engagement in Fiji, the aid program is focused on mitigating the social and economic impacts of hardship on the ordinary people of Fiji, particularly the most vulnerable.

The Australian Aid Program has provided significant support to the Fiji education sector over the last decade, notably through the Fiji Education Sector Program, followed by a series of interim education projects with UNICEF, the Fiji Crippled Children's Society, and the Fiji Society for the Blind. AusAID's Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP), valued at up to AUD50 million over 2011-2016, mobilised in August 2011. This is a significant investment in Fiji's education sector, and the goal of the AQEP is to work in conjunction with MoE and other relevant stakeholders (including education and disability stakeholders) to improve the ability of children from very poor communities, including those with disabilities, to access a quality school education.

The AQEP objectives are:

- Component 1 To improve access to and participation in a quality school education
- Component 2 To improve school infrastructure in the poorest communities to ensure that facilities are adequate, safe and contribute to improved student learning outcomes

Component 3 To conduct targeted research and analysis on the systemic challenges to achieving improved student learning outcomes. This activity will include the provision of flexible support to MoE priorities.

The MoE is responsible for the administration and management of education policy and delivery of educational services. It provides the curriculum frameworks, policy guidelines and directions and qualified teaching personnel who support all schools in the delivery of education. The development of a national curriculum framework, learning arrangements and assessment, the provision of grants to schools, and the payment of teacher salaries are all mandated functions of MoE. It also has responsibility for:

- (i) the management of resource planning and policy development related to education and training,
- (ii) provision of program support to education and training institutions,
- (iii) regulation and recognition of education and training providers,
- (iv) accreditation of instructional programs, and
- (v) accounting for the resources allocated by government to the education system.

Key issues impacting on the MoE's capacity to deliver education services include: compulsory retirement of civil servants at 55 years resulting in a significant loss of experienced MoE personnel; adapting to new assessment methods imposed by the abolition of external exams; and significant drop-out rates (estimated at 15% for primary and 25% for secondary students).

On 30 November 2011, Australia's Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd announced that bilateral aid to Fiji would double to around AUD36 million by 2013-14 in response to increased concerns about poverty and the deteriorating economy in Fiji. This announcement highlighted that the increase would continue AusAID's bilateral focus on education and health, as well as provide assistance to people in poverty.

## Objective

The key objective of the AQEP Mid-Term Review will be to inform the AusAID decision to exercise the option to extend AQEP for the next 3 year phase.

## Scope

The Mid-Term Review will be required to assess the implementation of AQEP in a manner that meets the stated objectives and include consideration (where appropriate) of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, gender equality, monitoring and evaluation.

The Mid-Term Review will:

- > Review MoE priorities and needs;
- > Review overall Program performance and progress and provide advice on effective Program implementation, including strategic program directions, institutional arrangements, relevance, quality and feasibility of work programs and activities;
- > Review the effectiveness of Program management, reporting and monitoring arrangements and assess team dynamics and relationships with counterparts; and
- > Make recommendations on Program performance and relevance to inform the AQEP extension appraisal exercise.

The reviewer will be required to consult with the:

- > Ministry of Education
- > AQEP in-country program team (Managing Contractor: GRM International Pty Ltd)
- > AusAID Suva Post
- > Other education stakeholders as appropriate

### Independent Mid-Term Reviewer

The Mid-Term Review will be conducted by the AusAID Senior Education Specialist, Pacific Division (Charlotte Blundell). As the AusAID Senior Education Specialist had not been involved in the AQEP concept, design or program implementation phases, she has been assessed as meeting the criteria for independent reviewer.

### Evaluation Method

The Mid-Term Review will comprise of an in-country mission over 6 – 15 November 2012.

In undertaking the Mid-Term Review, the reviewer will:

- > Conduct a review of relevant documentation, including but not limited to documents included in the reference materials list below;
- > Consult with Suva Post on review methodology; how the specific questions listed in the “Scope” section will be addressed (in the context of the AusAID quality criteria), and identify key respondents;
- > Participate in key meetings and consultations with Ministry of Education staff, AQEP personnel, AusAID staff, key development partners and beneficiaries;
- > Conduct field visits to, and meet with school management committees and head teachers/principals of, selected beneficiary schools; and
- > Submit a draft report to AusAID Suva Post by 23 November 2012. The final report, incorporating AusAID comments, will be due by 7 December 2012.

### Reference Materials

Documentation to be provided by AusAID includes:

- > Fiji Country Program Strategy
- > AQEP Program Design Document
- > AQEP Annual Work Plans
- > AQEP 6 monthly progress reports
- > AQEP Scale Up concept paper
- > Poverty Mapping Reports/Analysis
- > Program Coordination Committee meeting papers/minute