

Improving Learning

Australia Awards Global Strategy Evaluation and Performance Report

Evaluation Report

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this evaluation report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government.

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ACRONYMS

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AIP	Aid Investment Plan
APG	Aid Programming Guide
APPR	Aid Program Performance Report
AQC	Aid Quality Check
DFAT	Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
LTA	Long-term award
LTO	Long-term Outcome
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEF	Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework
OASIS	Online Australia Awards Scholarship Information System
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
REAP	Re-entry Action Plan
SCB	Scholarships and Alumni Branch

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australia Awards global investment is Australia's largest single aid investment, but until 2016, there was no overarching strategy to set a direction that would guide decisions made at individual country and regional levels, or provide a common framework against which individual programs could report. The *Australia Awards Global Strategy: Investing in the next generation of global leaders for development 2016-18* (DFAT, 2017b) ("the Strategy") was the first attempt to address this situation. It was supported by the *Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework* (DFAT, 2017c) ("the MEF"), which provided high-level guidance on the monitoring and evaluation of Australia Awards to meet Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) requirements.

Prior to their introduction, posts had operated with a high degree of autonomy within certain centrally determined policies and guidelines. This was reflected in the diversity of approaches adopted, and in the difficulty of monitoring and evaluating the global investment. The Strategy and MEF were intended to bring about a transformational change. In the literature on change, there is a strong consensus on the importance of developing a shared picture, or 'vision' of what the result will look like.

The evaluation identified two overarching roles for the Strategy and MEF:

1. to help country/regional programs adopt a strategic and globally consistent approach to Australia Awards investments, with decisions and activities reflecting Australia's foreign policy objectives, principles and priorities; and
2. to provide a framework against which the progress and effectiveness of the global Australia Awards investment can be monitored, to provide the information needed for high-level decision making.

The evaluation found some evidence to suggest that the two documents have had some impact on country/regional investment planning and/or reporting. However, the Strategy and MEF have not improved global consistency, or facilitated the provision of information that could provide a global picture of performance.

Key findings

The Strategy has laid the foundations for change

Although the evaluation identified some fundamental issues that need to be addressed, it also found evidence that the Strategy has started the process of change. Importantly, country/regional programs acknowledge the need for a global strategy, and the relatively low-key introduction of the Strategy, and the high degree of flexibility associated with its application, have enabled posts to grow accustomed to its existence. The importance of this should not be underestimated given the degree of autonomy that existed prior to this.

In the main, individual investments are attempting to put its key messages into practice. In particular, there are indications of effort invested in determining the alignment of Australia Awards investments with the needs and agreed priorities of partner countries; alignment of some selection criteria and short course topics with these priorities; and a strong focus on gender equity and

disability. The Strategy also appears to have been instrumental in prompting new thinking about modalities.

There are fundamental issues that need to be addressed

The Strategy has not established a clear vision of what the Australia Awards should be

The introduction of the Strategy has brought several points of tension to the surface, related to the fundamental questions, 'What are the Australia Awards?' 'What are they really supposed to achieve?' and 'Who should they be for?' These questions must be resolved before any attempt is made to develop the next iteration. Although it has not painted a picture compelling enough to align perspectives, the Strategy has created a frame of reference within which it becomes possible to articulate and discuss the hard questions associated with this investment. Without this, it would be difficult to identify, debate and ultimately address issues that could otherwise undermine the investment over time.

The program logic is flawed

Posts are using the current long-term outcomes (LTOs) as quasi reporting goals, yet the Theory of Change and program logic do not provide a clear, logical and user-friendly line of sight to these outcomes. There are also difficulties in the application of the Strategy's principles. At the same time, although attempting to introduce a global approach, the Strategy gives individual investments considerable latitude in how they will engage - leaving it to them to decide which LTOs they should prioritise (or perhaps pursue at all).

Rather than trying to 'fix' the program logic, an alternative would be to develop a strategic framework incorporating a global aim, supported by a set of goals and objectives. The next iteration of the Strategy could identify these at a high level, without specifying the steps an individual investment should take (unlike the approach adopted in the MEF). This would set the global direction reflected in the vision, provide clear guidance on where individual programs should be aiming, while giving posts the flexibility to decide how they will achieve these objectives within their own contexts.

There is no global picture of performance and no way of achieving this through the current system

The Aid Quality Check (AQC) reporting requirements do not lend themselves to the reporting of Australia Awards data that is meaningful and useful. However, even if this problem were to be resolved, the MEF has not enabled the collection of the valid, robust, comparable data that is needed to monitor progress and inform decisions about the global investment. The evaluation has identified issues with reporting outputs in four critical areas: data relevance (i.e. a tendency to focus on process not outcomes); data timeliness (i.e. use of lag/outdated data); data coherence (i.e. lacking comparability, standardisation and consistency); and data interpretability (i.e. limited/no supporting documentation to understand representativeness/accuracy of results).

In achieving these objectives, there is a balance to be struck between:

- a prescriptive MEF that specifies the statistical standards and technical specifications of each data collection, the types of measures and indicators; and the reporting outputs required by the funding body (such is the case with Commonwealth Department of Education and Training reporting requirements of universities); and

- a flexible MEF that describes a set of broader expectations around building an appropriate and proportional M&E approach that can demonstrate progress towards achieving the long-term outcomes in the Strategy.

The key to finding this balance lies in being very clear about exactly what information the global investment actually needs, and making this a requirement for inclusion in investment designs and associated M&E activity.

In order to ensure that this information gets to those who need it in a useable format and in a timely fashion, some changes will need to be made to the current reporting arrangements. These might include: mandated Australia Awards content for APPRs, and for each section of Australia Awards AQC; alignment of AQC timing. If AQCs are unable to provide some of the information needed, this should be collected in another way. This does not have to become a further imposition on posts, but could provide a basis for the sharing of information and insights that posts feel is currently missing.

There is an over-reliance on written documents as a means of changing thinking and behaviour

In the implementation of the Strategy and MEF, there appears to have been an over-reliance on the power of handbooks, guidelines and supplementary guidelines to shift mind-sets and initiate new behaviours. This is a high-risk approach. Effective change management relies on people having opportunities to think their way out of existing behaviours and into others. This is more likely to occur as part of facilitated group interactions, where participants can reflect on different perspectives and see that their input has been taken into consideration in the determination of outcomes.

Many of the current documents are not user-friendly. They contain a detailed mix of high-level guidance and detailed bureaucratic requirements, referenced to more general DFAT documents that the reader must source themselves. As the Australia Awards is only one of a range of commitments at post, it is not surprising that the evaluation found that managing contractors and locally engaged staff were more likely to be familiar with their content.

The current thrust of the Strategy is sound

The evaluation was intended to review the Strategy and MEF documents with a view to making recommendations regarding the ways in which they could be 'refreshed.' It was not asked to consider whether the general approach adopted was in fact the best one. However, some DFAT stakeholders suggested that the Australia Awards needed to shift direction - that the focus be long-term awards similar to Chevening or Fulbright scholarships, and available only for 'the best and brightest'. This was partly in response to concerns that some country/regional programs were placing a greater emphasis on equity considerations than merit in the selection of long-term scholarship recipients, and/or inappropriately branding in-country training programs that were not of the calibre expected of an Australia Award.

It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to conduct a detailed consideration of alternative strategies involving changes of such magnitude. However, the evaluation team believes that the general thrust of the current Strategy is sound, and that a move in a new direction would have far reaching, and potentially negative, implications for relationships with posts and possibly with partner governments.

The Australia Awards brand is powerful and there are real benefits to grouping different kinds of awards under one banner. However, there could be value in differentiating the long-term scholarships more clearly from other modalities.

Next steps

To be effective, Mintzberg (1987, p.17) argues a strategy must become ‘a shared perspective’ so that, ‘through their intentions and/or by their actions...individuals [are] united by their thoughts and/or behaviour’. For the vision to become a reality, Kim (2016) observes that two other requirements must be met: underpinning values and beliefs must be in alignment with those of the vision; and structures and systems (policies, guidelines, reporting processes) must be designed to actively facilitate behaviours aligned with the vision. Actions with the highest leverage are those that focus directly on achieving a shared vision and aligning mental models.

Using this model as a frame of reference, the evaluation identified five key areas where new thinking and associated action has the highest potential to bring about desired changes in behaviour:

1. Investment in developing a shared vision of what the Australia Awards are, and what they are not, that can be encapsulated in a concise, compelling Strategy document.
2. Discussion about the differing perspectives about Australia Awards that currently exist within DFAT, with a view to aligning values and beliefs.
3. Design of a new strategic framework involving clear, achievable goals and objectives.
4. Revision of all Australia Awards support resources to ensure they clearly align with the agreed vision and the introduction of new mechanisms to facilitate interpretation and implementation at post.
5. Introduction of a standardised data framework and associated reporting mechanisms to inform decision making re the global Australia Awards investment.

Recommendations

1. Reaffirm the general intention of the Australia Awards as a tool for building relationships while assisting partner governments to pursue development priorities. Capture these symbiotic purposes in an overarching aim that makes the primary purpose clear.

2. Define the question of who the Australia Awards should be for, and which award modalities will be incorporated under the Australia Awards brand, using the process as a tool to build consensus.

3. Set and communicate direction through a Strategy document that:

- articulates a clear picture of what the Australia Awards are and what they are not.
- incorporates a strategic framework involving the aim, a small set of high level goals and associated objectives and a set of reworked guiding principles to inform decision making at every level of the investment.

4. Review modalities, examining the way in which each of them can best contribute to the achievement of the Australia Awards goals and objectives. This could include, but is not limited to the following options:

- maintaining a range of modalities under the Australia Awards brand, but clearly

distinguishing long-term awards as those aimed at developing global leaders and carrying the most prestige;

- clarifying selection criteria for each modality, considering the potential to have different emphases on *leadership*, *merit* and *equity*, in light of the new Australia Awards goals and objectives;
- maintaining flexibility, by not defining specific modalities within the new Strategy itself.

5. Develop requirements and guidelines that support a balance between global consistency and local flexibility by requiring:

- all investments be designed against the global aim, goals and objectives, allowing individual investments to determine which objectives are most pertinent to their contexts and the best ways to achieve these.
- all investments to report against a small set of identified global measures which contribute to a global picture of performance. Indicate an optional set of measures that can be used by individual investments to inform country specific decision making and contextualise their reporting.

6. Commission a review of monitoring and evaluation data to identify critical information that needs to be reported about the global investment, both through the AQC process and, where required, through a customised Australia Awards process.

7. Review and revise all support materials to ensure they are genuinely aligned with, and further clarify, each aspect of the revised Strategy.

8. Build DFAT staff capacity for strategic decision making within the Australia Awards through a staggered two year training program.

9. Develop more effective mechanisms to engage staff across posts so that they share ideas, learn from one another, and explore challenging issues associated with the Strategy, e.g. through regional forums, regular newsletters.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Providing the opportunity for individuals from developing countries to undertake tertiary education has been part of Australia's aid programs and foreign policy since the 1950's. Since that time, Australian scholarships have become a highly valued feature, and indeed, a fixture, of Australia's relationships with many of its partner countries.

The Australia Awards global investment is Australia's largest single aid investment, but until 2016, there was no overarching strategy to set a direction that would guide decisions made at individual country and regional levels, or provide a common framework against which individual programs could report. The *Australia Awards Global Strategy: Investing in the next generation of global leaders for development 2016-18* (DFAT, 2016b) ("the Strategy") was the first attempt to address this. It was supported by the *Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework* (2017c) ("the MEF"), which provided high-level guidance on the monitoring and evaluation of Australia Awards to meet DFAT requirements¹.

Prior to their introduction, posts had operated with a high degree of autonomy within certain centrally determined policies and guidelines. This was reflected in the diversity of approaches adopted, and in the difficulty of monitoring and evaluating the global investment. The Strategy and MEF were intended to bring about a transformational change. The literature on change points to the importance of developing a shared picture, or 'vision' of what the result will look like. To be effective, Mintzberg (1987) argues a strategy must become 'a shared perspective' so that, 'through their intentions and/or by their actions...individuals [are] united by their thoughts and/or behaviour'. For the vision to become a reality, Kim (2016) argues that two other requirements must be met: underpinning values and beliefs must be in alignment with those of the vision, and structures and systems (e.g. policies, guidelines, reporting processes) must be designed to actively facilitate behaviours aligned with the vision.

Given their ground-breaking nature, it was intended that the Strategy and MEF would be reviewed at the end of 2018 to:

- gather and assess lessons on how well country/regional programs have aligned and implemented their investments to the Strategy and MEF;
- make recommendations for future policy priorities that would inform the refresh of global policies for 2019 onwards, and
- provide the basis for a refresh of the Strategy and MEF documents themselves.

An independent evaluation was undertaken for DFAT by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), from September 2018 to February 2019.

¹ An earlier version of the MEF was released in 2015, prior to the development and release of the Strategy which is built on the MEF's program logic. Minor moderations to the MEF itself were made to align with the Strategy.

1.2. The evaluation

Although the Strategy outlined five purposes, these refer mainly to the intentions of the document itself, and are largely self-fulfilled. The central question for the evaluation concerned whether the Strategy and MEF were having any impact on decision making and activity at country/regional level or globally. The evaluation therefore used the (retrospective) aims of the Strategy and MEF as outlined in the Request for Quotation as reference points, with a focus on the aspects highlighted in Box 1.1.

Box 1.1 The aims of the Strategy and MEF

The Strategy was intended to:

- clearly articulate why DFAT invests in Australia Awards;
- set out **a unifying goal and key outcomes**;
- provide a **principled approach** to Australia Awards investment decisions and **ensure consistency across the Awards**; and
- give DFAT the authority to **pursue innovation and opportunity** in the design and delivery of the Awards to ensure that award modalities best address DFAT's development, economic and public diplomacy objectives.

The MEF was to provide a means of:

- **assessing the alignment** of the global Australia Awards with the strategic investment priorities and aid program strategic tests;
- **measuring progress** towards the Australia Awards' immediate and long-term outcomes; and
- **identifying and sharing lessons and examples of good practice.**

Given the relatively short time since the release of the Strategy and MEF, and that the majority of country/regional programs already had pre-existing investment designs in place, the evaluation adopted a formative approach, and identified indicators that suggested a shift in thinking and/or behaviour that could be attributed, at least in part, to the Strategy and MEF. A set of evaluation questions was developed in consultation with members of DFAT's Scholarships and Alumni Branch (SCB). These focused on two kinds of impacts – those at individual investment level and those related to the global investment (See Table 1.1). It was not assumed that changes at local level would necessarily lead to global changes.

In summary, the evaluation methodology comprised four complementary approaches:

1. A review of the broad context within which the Australia Awards investment operates and the logistics around that operation;
2. A desk analysis of relevant DFAT policy and procedural documents and over 300 documents provided by SCB, posts and their managing contractors (e.g. Aid Investment Plans, Investment Designs, Aid Quality Checks);
3. A workshop involving a cross-section of Canberra-based DFAT personnel, including members of SCB and representatives from DFAT desks and thematic areas; and

4. A series of phone interviews with DFAT personnel and managing contractors involved in 14 country/regional programs of different sizes and geographical locations, and collectively responsible for about 90 percent of scholarships allocated in 2017-18.

See Appendix A for more detail of stakeholders who contributed to the evaluation.

Table 1.1: Key evaluation questions

Focus area	Key questions
Design and content of Strategy, MEF and support resources	<p>How well do the Strategy, MEF and support documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflect broader government priorities and principles, and help users at country/regional level translate these into practice in regard to the Australia Awards? • ensure consistency where it matters, while allowing individual programs the flexibility to utilise Australia Awards to meet local needs and priorities and to introduce innovations? • align internally?
Country/regional impact	<p>To what extent are the Strategy and MEF influencing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the adoption of a strategic approach to investment design? • decision-making about key aspects of the Australia Awards process (e.g. investment design, selection of awardees, qualifications and modalities)? • the adoption of a common language and reference points for discussing, designing, monitoring and reporting on Australia Awards?
Global impact	<p>To what extent is the Strategy facilitating the emergence of a unifying vision of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what the Australia Awards are and what they are not? • what Australia's investment is intended to achieve, regardless of the country context? • the principles that should inform decision making, and the ways in which these should be applied? • the scope within which it is appropriate to operate within individual contexts?

1.3. Report structure

- Section 2 considers the design of the Strategy and MEF, and the potential for design features to influence uptake and application;
- Section 3 presents key findings on impact at country and regional level;
- Section 4 presents key findings on impact globally; and
- Section 5 presents the evaluation conclusions and recommendations.

2. THE STRATEGY AND MEF: DESIGN

The extent to which posts engage, with and apply, the Strategy and MEF will be influenced by the design and content of these documents, and by the support resources made available to support their interpretation. Therefore, a detailed analysis of these documents was undertaken to identify apparent strengths and potential issues. This informed the subsequent desk review of country/regional program documentation, and the questions asked during the consultations. This section provides a commentary on key aspects of the initial analysis phase.

2.1. Australia Awards in the broader context

The Strategy cannot be viewed as a stand-alone document setting direction for a stand-alone investment. The Australia Awards is only one, albeit significant, investment within Australia's broader aid and diplomacy context, providing *one tool* amongst many that can be used to further Australia's goals.

In seeking to influence the design and implementation of Australia Awards country/regional investments, the Strategy must act as a bridge between these investments and relevant government policies, principles and priorities. DFAT's 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper* ("the White Paper") encapsulates these at the highest level. Amongst other areas of focus, it stresses that, 'Australia cannot impose its views or will overseas so 'our ability to protect and advance our interests rests on the quality of our engagement with the world'. The White Paper draws attention to:

- the continuing importance of aid provision, focused on agreed priority areas 'that reflect mutual advantage';
- the need to develop a stronger nation brand;
- the need to deliver more opportunities for Australian businesses globally;
- the high priority Australia places on approaches that facilitate the empowerment of women and advance the rights of women, girls and people with a disability; and
- the increasing importance of 'soft power' (DFAT, 2017c).

The White Paper defines 'soft power' as 'the ability to influence the behaviour and thinking of others through the power of attraction and ideas' (ibid. p.109), and makes a direct link between soft power and the educational opportunities.

Our commitment to education, training and research exchanges will remain central to Australia's soft power. These exchanges build influence, and strengthen people-to-people links and mutual understanding (ibid, p.111).

The hosting of 'some of the best and brightest from the Indo-Pacific and beyond' is identified as a key area of leverage (ibid).

2.2. The elements of the Strategy

Although released after the Strategy, the main messages of the White Paper can be identified in earlier DFAT documents, and these are in turn reflected in the elements of Strategy, as discussed below.

The Strategy's framework has four major elements: a goal, four Long-term Outcomes, five underpinning principles and four modalities (see Appendix B for a summary diagram).

The Goal. The Australia Awards goal statement has two distinct parts, related to development (aid) and relationships (soft power).

Goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Partner countries progress their development goals and have positive relationships with Australia that advance mutual interests

These two parts are jointly included in the one goal. This suggests they are of equal importance, but does not make the nature of the connection clear. Most of the Australia Awards investment is categorised as 'official development assistance' (ODA), the OECD's key measure of donor effort. This raises some questions, a critical requirement of ODA being that it be, 'administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective'².

It is generally accepted in the change literature that a goal statement needs to be dynamic and compelling and has an important role to play in focusing attention and effort. The choice of the verbs '*progress*' and '*have*' lessens the impact of the Strategy's goal, making it read more like a description of activity.

Long-term Outcomes. Although objectives are usually considered part of DFAT's approach to program logic, and would normally serve as stepping stones between the Goal and the Long-term Outcomes, the Strategy has no objectives, relying on the four Long-term Outcomes (LTOs) to provide more detail on what is expected from the Australia Awards.

LTO1	LTO 2	LTO 3	LTO 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Alumni are using their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and partner countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Effective mutually advantageous partnerships between institutions and businesses in Australia and partner countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Alumni view Australia, Australians and Australian expertise positively

An analysis of the connection between the LTOs and Goal raises some fundamental issues with the underpinning program logic.

- There is a direct connection between LTO 1 and part 1 of the Goal, but there is leap from the LTOs to part two, in which partner countries have positive relationships with Australia. This

² <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/officialdevelopmentassistancedefinitionandcoverage.htm>

appears to assume that alumni who have a positive view of Australians (LTO 4) will reach positions of influence where they can ‘contribute to cooperation’ (LTO 2).

- There are no references in the Strategy (or the MEF) to using the Australia Awards to engage with partner governments – yet this would appear to be an aspect of some importance to building relationships that advance mutual interest. This appears to be a significant gap in the program logic.
- While LTO 4 is concerned with how alumni feel about Australia and Australians, it might be more effective to focus on how the Australia Awards influence the views of a range of stakeholders who might be important for current and future interactions with the countries concerned. This may include members of partner governments, alumni, and the large numbers of unsuccessful applicants.
- Three of the LTOs focus on alumni. LTO 3 is the exception. Although it is possible to make a connection to both parts of the Goal, once again it requires a conceptual leap, particularly as this area has not previously been seen as part of Australia Awards core business.

The four LTOs are presented as if they are of equal value. However, the MEF (2017c, p.6) notes that:

Every country or regional program will implement Australia Awards in a way that is tailored to the specific context and its relevant priorities. This may mean that individual outcomes are accorded greater or lesser priority, and receive greater or lesser allocation of resources.

This suggests a great deal of flexibility in practice. It also raises questions about the Strategy’s underpinning logic. Does this mean that the Goal can still be achieved if one or more LTOs are not, and does it matter in which order the LTOs are prioritised? A further design issue is that these are all presented as *long*-term outcomes, although evidence of impacts against LTOs 1, 3 and 4 may well be available in a relatively short timeframe. Both aspects have implications for monitoring and evaluation design and for global reporting (See Section 4).

Five principles. The application of the Strategy is to be informed by five principles, each of which has the potential to act as a powerful influence on the scope and emphasis of decisions made in-country.

Principle 1	Principle 2	Principle 3	Principle 4	Principle 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment with Australia’s development, economic and public diplomacy priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity of access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merit-based selection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value for money and evidence based decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the Australia Awards

The evaluation makes the following observations on each:

- Principles 2 and 3 most closely align with the concept of a ‘principle’ as a guiding rule reflecting values-based beliefs;
- Principle 1 reinforces a message from the Priorities section of the Strategy, but when expressed as a principle it focuses attention on the importance of *Australia’s* development, economic and public diplomacy priorities, without reference to those of the partner country. This appears to be at odds with other Strategy/MEF references related to working with partner countries to identify agreed priorities;

- The two aspects of Principle 4 relate to decisions – emphasising the importance of ‘a decision maker’ taking evidence and value for money into account. However, the explanation that accompanies this principle does not refer directly to ‘value for money’ as a general principle, but discusses *working with the most effective partners* and *increasing consolidation*;
- Principle 5 focuses on marketing the Australia Awards themselves, and as such raises questions about what constitutes a ‘principle’. A more appropriate principle might be ‘Promote Australian values’ or ‘Foster mutual understanding’.

Four modalities. The Strategy also specifies four modalities that can be used to achieve the desired outcomes. Country/regional programs decide on which modalities will be most effective to achieve different purposes, and determine the budget allocation for each.

Modality 1: Australia Awards Scholarships	Modality 2: Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships	Modality 3: Australia Awards Fellowships	Modality 4: Australia Awards Short term Awards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholarships for study in Australia (long-term awards) • Awardees undertake tertiary study at an Australian university or TAFE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholarships for study on the Pacific • Awardees undertake tertiary study at selected institutions in Pacific countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fellowships (in Australia) • Open competitive grants for Australian organisations to host cohorts of awardees (usually midcareer professionals) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short Courses (in Australia or a partner country) • Targeted programs of intensive training leading to some form of certification. Undertaken by cohorts of awardees

All modalities lead to some form of accreditation. Although this can range from a short course certificate to a PhD, all are referred to as ‘Australia Awards’. There are significant differences between the requirements associated with each. Notably, the most stringent selection criteria apply to Long-term awards. These awards are more expensive than scholarships to undertake qualifications at a Pacific university, and cost up to three times more than short courses³.

The Strategy, and many other DFAT documents, routinely describe the Australia Awards as ‘prestigious’ without defining what this means. Are they prestigious because they are awarded only to the best and brightest, or are they prestigious in the sense that they are highly valued by a partner government and within the awardees’ communities? These are important questions left unresolved within the Strategy.

A further issue relevant to modalities is that the Strategy’s title seems to suggest that all awardees will become global leaders. However, in the Strategy itself, there is no discussion of what constitutes ‘leadership’, or any indication of how this might be interpreted. Leadership qualities are articulated in information about interview questions in the *Australia Awards Scholarships Assessment and Selection Guide* (DFAT, 2017a). However, in most country/regional application of selection materials, the only references identified by this evaluation are stock phrases in introductory paragraphs.

More pragmatically, the current selection of modalities does not appear to be keeping pace with developments within the Australia Awards. Fellowships are under review and are not currently being

³ Another difference is that while SCB is responsible for the policy for the Australia Awards Scholarships, Fellowships and Short-term Awards, Pacific posts are responsible for the policy and funding of the Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships.

offered, and individual investments are exploring variations on the modalities described, notably split courses involving some study in-country and options involving some online study. If flexibility is to be maintained, and innovation encouraged, it may be expedient to remove specified modalities from the Strategy itself.

2.3. Applying the elements in practice

The Goal, LTOs and principles are the framework for decision-making at country/regional level. Decision makers need to apply them in concert. However, there is little indication in the Strategy or MEF of how this should be done. This is a potential barrier to uptake of, and alignment with, the Strategy and leads to questions such as:

- Is there a 'right' balance between a focus on equity of access and selection by merit?
- Should value for money be prioritised over the selection of modality?
- Should resources be invested in actively achieving LTO 3 or is it a by-product?

Section 3 discusses the ways in which country/regional decision makers have addressed questions such as these.

2.4. The MEF

The Strategy (DFAT, 2016b, p.23) states that:

The Australia Awards portfolio will be assessed against the Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. The Framework will: (i) assess the alignment of Australia Awards with the strategic investment priorities and aid program strategic tests, and (ii) measure progress towards Australia Awards' immediate and long-term outcomes.

The MEF program logic

The Strategy's Goal Statement and LTOs were identified through the program logic process that underpinned the development of the MEF. A DFAT publication (DFAT 2018c, p.1) describes program logic as:

...a thinking, planning and implementation tool that describes and diagrammatically represents how a project, programme or strategy intends to impact social, economic and political development in a given country, region or context.

Program logic describes the stepping stones between an activity and a desired change. It helps us to be clear about where we want to get, set out how we think we will get there and actively manage for that along the way. Later it helps us monitor, evaluate and report on progress.

The MEF provides a diagrammatic representation of the program logic that leads from actions to the achievement of the four LTOs and the Goal. As can be seen from Figure 2.1, the diagram is both complex and complicated.

The MEF program logic may have assisted the Strategy's developers in its design, but it does not present the underpinning Theory of Change in a way that is intuitive and easily accessible to those who were not directly involved in that thinking. The MEF document should support the interpretation, but it is not always easy to follow. For example:

Attention and effort is required to ensure that Output C is achieved (Awardees and Fellows build relationships with Australians, other awardees, and Australian organisations and businesses) as well as Output D (Institutions and businesses in Australia and partner countries undertake useful and relevant collaborations). Only in this case can Intermediate Outcome (ii) be achieved, with the relevant and useful networks and relationships thus laying the foundation for the achievement of Long-term Outcomes 2 and 4 (p.10).

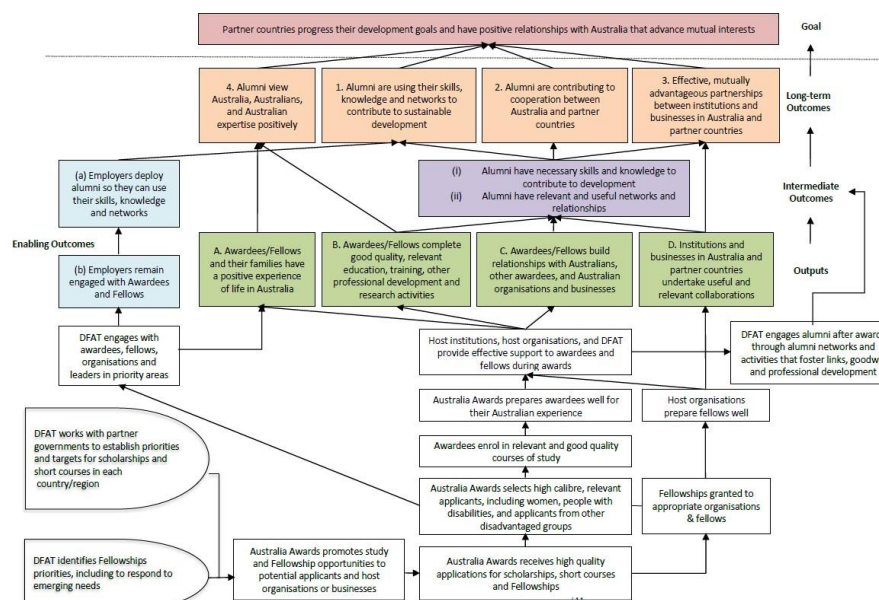


Figure 2.1 Australia Awards Global Strategy: MEF Program Logic (DFAT, 2017c, p.11)

The evaluation has found that closer analysis of the program logic itself does not make things clearer. A key issue is that most of the boxes leading to the LTOs relate to LTO 1 and LTO 4. The addition of multiple arrows is supposed to suggest that action in one area will somehow lead to LTO 2 and 3. However, these connections are built on assumptions not necessarily part of a solidly grounded program logic.

Other potential issues for users include:

- inconsistencies with the Strategy's principles, e.g. Principle 5 does not obviously align with the MEF box statement 'DFAT works with partner governments to establish priorities and targets for scholarships and short courses';
- a reliance on descriptors such as 'high-calibre' and 'quality' (with no clarification of what these might mean), but no direct reference to 'leadership' or 'merit'; and
- the idiosyncratic labelling/numbering system which makes it extremely difficult to reference specific parts of the MEF.

2.5. Support resources

Due to budget constraints, the Strategy was introduced without associated training to support its implementation and capacity building. For those seeking to implement it, the Strategy document itself provides limited guidance. This results in a strong emphasis on other elements of the package to provide the 'nuts and bolts' of how it could be done.

Versions of the *Australia Awards Scholarships Assessment and Selection Guide* and *The Australia Awards Policy Handbook* pre-dated the Strategy. They have been progressively upgraded since late 2016. However, the mix of requirements and advice they contain is not directly referenced to the Strategy. There are instances where ‘the rules’ do not appear to align with the Strategy’s key messages, and others where it appears the support documents are being used to try and enforce expectations that are not made clear in the Strategy or MEF. Each is extensively referenced to other generic DFAT documents, the expectation being that the user will follow each of these links to ensure that they are following correct procedure. There appear to be few ‘cheat sheets’, such as quick references with visuals, to assist in this process.

2.6. Observations

- The Strategy and MEF reflect the Australian government’s major foreign policy priorities. However, this appears to be asking the Australia Awards to carry a heavy burden. Somehow this single tool is expected to achieve multiple objectives, yet the Theory of Change and program logic do not provide a clear, logical and user-friendly line of sight to demonstrate how this might be done. This has an impact on time-poor users with little to no understanding of, or training in, how each piece fits together.
- Although attempting to introduce a global approach, the Strategy gives individual investments considerable latitude in how they will engage, even to the point of leaving it to them to decide which LTOs they should prioritise (or pursue at all).
- The Strategy is predicated on assumptions about *leadership*, *prestige* and *merit* that are not made explicit, but which are very important and have the potential to impact on all aspects of the Australia Awards.

From the analysis of the Strategy and MEF Desk Review, two overarching roles were identified. These documents should:

- help country/regional programs adopt a strategic and globally consistent approach to Australia Awards investments, with all decisions and activities reflecting Australia’s foreign policy objectives, principles and priorities; and
- provide a framework against which the progress and effectiveness of the global Australia Awards investment can be monitored, to provide the information needed for high-level decision making.

As part of its assessment of impact, the evaluation tested the extent to which the issues identified with the Strategy/MEF design had influenced thinking and behaviour in each of these areas. Findings are discussed in Sections 3 and 4.

3. COUNTRY/REGIONAL INVESTMENTS: THE STRATEGY AND MEF IN ACTION

The Desk Review observations outlined in Section 2 were tested in the field through:

- an analysis of country/regional Aid Investment Plans (AIPs), Australia Awards Investment Plans, Aid Program Performance Reports (APPRs), Aid Quality Checks (AQC), mid-term reviews and monitoring and evaluation documentation; and
- interviews with DFAT staff, locally engaged employees and managing contractors in country, and with DFAT staff and senior managing contractors in Australia.

3.1. Contextual factors influencing uptake and application

In understanding the impact of the Strategy, four contextual features need to be taken into consideration – the decision-making scope of individual posts; the pre-existence of investment designs; the outsourcing of responsibility for the design and implementation of M&E and the regular turnover of DFAT staff at post.

Australia Awards are currently offered in over 50 individual countries, through 28 individual country investments and two regional programs, each geographically and culturally different, and with their own political, social and economic challenges. DFAT staff in-country are responsible for decisions about how Australia Awards will contribute to assisting a partner country, the combination of modalities and the selection of awardees. This acknowledges that they are best placed to understand their respective country/regional responsibilities, context and needs.

Individual investments have different timeframes, ranging from three to twelve years, and vary significantly in size. In 2017-18, around 70 percent of awardees came from just 10 countries with Indonesia alone contributing almost 30 percent of the total. The size of the budget determines the nature and degree of planning, monitoring and reporting requirements. Those with budgets over \$3m are required to develop formal investment designs, incorporating investment-specific Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks. Reporting occurs through APPRs and AQCs. These reports are underpinned by a significant amount of monitoring and evaluation activity, most of which is undertaken by managing contractors. DFAT's *Monitoring and Evaluation Standards* (DFAT, 2017b) and accompanying *Good Practice Note* (DFAT, 2018d) provide detailed guidance on monitoring and evaluation systems, investment progress reporting, monitoring visits and evaluation products⁴.

The DFAT *Aid Programming Guide* (2018f) sets detailed minimum requirements for MEFs, with a requirement for the inclusion of data. When the MEF and Strategy were introduced, in 2015 and 2016 respectively, almost all individual Australia Awards investments were operating with pre-existing investment designs, most of which had some years to run. These plans had been developed in conjunction with the managing contractors employed by posts, who in turn may have employed specialist M&E sub-contractors to design MEFs to meet the DFAT specifications. It is a potentially

⁴ Additionally, the DFAT Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) assesses internal performance management systems, and evaluates the performance of the Australian aid program.

time consuming and costly task to conduct a complete redesign process, and it does not appear that any country/region elected to do so. However, after the release of the MEF and Strategy, the larger investments made various adjustments.

3.2. Understanding of, and application of, the Strategy

Finding 1: There are varying levels of awareness and understanding of the Strategy in country

The evaluation identified three distinct levels of understanding of the Strategy. Managing contractors in-country had the most detailed understanding, having been closely involved in adjusting existing designs, and in assisting posts to align AQC reporting requirements to the Strategy's LTOs. Long serving locally engaged staff members were likely to have a working knowledge of the Strategy and operational guidelines. In contrast, many of the Australian staff at post made comments such as, 'I am broadly familiar with the Strategy' or 'It is some time since I looked at it'. During interviews at four different posts, the Australian staff members repeatedly confused the Strategy with the *Australia Global Alumni Engagement Strategy* (2016a), despite interviewers going to some lengths to clarify the difference.

It should be noted that some of the Australian staff interviewed had only been in their current positions for a short time, and the majority had not been involved in the decision-making that informed their posts' investment designs. Most had not received a pre-deployment briefing on the Australia Awards or a handover briefing from their predecessor, and were more likely to have received information about the Australia Awards from locally engaged staff members and managing contractors. For most of this group, Australia Awards were only one aspect of their broader roles and responsibilities, and many suggested that competing priorities at post left them with limited time to work through the Strategy, MEF and other documents. There was, however, no obvious need to prioritise this activity. The investment designs were already in place, and managing contractors were responsible for day-to-day implementation. As one interviewee at post suggested, the Strategy and MEF were 'point in time' documents that only needed to be looked at 'as required' with the most likely time being during a new investment design process.

Consultations found that DFAT staff new to post had generally used the existing country investment design as their reference point, and had not checked it against the Strategy/MEF. Several initially observed that their country/region's investment design was aligned to the Strategy, and were surprised when interviewers pointed out the differences, which were often quite substantial.

Finding 2: There is general support for a highly flexible global strategy

Despite different levels of knowledge of the detail, most users acknowledged the need for a global strategy. Some locally engaged staff observed that they felt it had given them a structure within which to operate. The few Australian DFAT staff who had been in-country before and after its release described it as 'a useful document' that had helped them focus on outcomes and identify areas requiring greater structure emphasis. Several managing contractors referred to the Strategy and MEF as 'touchstones' or 'reference points'.

Whatever their knowledge of the Strategy and MEF, those interviewed identified the flexibility of the Strategy as its greatest strength. However, although no-one reported feeling constrained by any

aspect of the Strategy itself, a number of posts and managing contractors drew attention to recent changes to the *Australia Awards Scholarships Policy Handbook* (2017d) that they believed were going to reduce this flexibility, and impact adversely on their ability to provide equitable access for women and other disadvantaged groups.

Finding 3: No one has noticed, or remembers, the Goal

Feedback from interviewees, combined with an analysis of investment designs and Aid Quality Checks suggests that the Goal itself has made little impression. While only one program has a different overarching goal, the others appear to have inserted the Strategy's goal as a sort of placeholder. No respondents could recall (or approximate) its wording, and no-one referenced it when explaining what they were aiming to achieve within an individual investment.

Finding 4: The LTOs have been adopted, but not necessarily in their original form

Stakeholders have become accustomed to referring to the Strategy's LTOs, although DFAT Australian staff at post were more likely to refer to them using a shorthand referencing system (e.g. *'That's about sustainable development, or 'There's the one on soft power'*). This familiarity appears to be driven largely by the need to report on LTOs in the AQCs.

An analysis of ten county/regional Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plans that predated the Strategy found they had considered the global LTOs in different ways.

- One did not change its own existing LTOs, but tried to demonstrate alignment through a mapping process.
- One appears to have grafted the Strategy's Goal and LTOs onto its existing MEF without adjusting the existing program logic to show how these new LTOs would follow from action taken (and in the evaluator's opinion they do not).
- Several adopted the four LTOs, but added headings above each to clarify its emphasis, e.g. LTO 1 = *Development*; LTO 2 = *Politics/Influence*; LTO 3 = *Trade/economic*; LTO 4 = *Reputation*.
- Some changed the wording of an LTO to make it more specific, e.g. LTO 2 reworded as *'Australia has alumni in key sectors and positions'*.
- Some added a further LTO, e.g. *'Gender Scholarships and alumni activities have improved gender equality and women's empowerment'*.

LTO 3 appears to have been problematic for all. One program merged LTO 2 and 3, while another omitted it altogether. Perhaps taking their lead from the global MEF, individual MELs that retained LTO 3 had no identified inputs that might facilitate this outcome.

Finding 5: There is a need for an explicit focus on building relationships with partner governments

The desk review of the MEF identified various gaps in the underpinning program logic, perhaps the most significant being the lack of any reference to building strong relationships with partner governments. In subsequent discussions with posts, it became clear that they see engagement with partner governments as a vital aspect of the Australia Awards investment. This was reflected in the examples they included in their AQCs. For example, some posts were using consultation about

Australia Awards priorities to build closer links with individual government agencies, and one reported that the Australia Awards had been highly instrumental in efforts to re-build a damaged relationship. Interviewees also made comments such as, 'Our HOM⁵ is very supportive of Australia Awards', or 'Our Ambassador loves them'.

Finding 6: There are indications that the posts are thinking strategically about the Australia Awards investment

There was no baseline data available to inform a comparison, but the evaluation identified many examples of strategic thinking associated with each stage of the Australia Awards. Although it was not possible to establish cause and effect links back to the Strategy and MEF, these behaviours could be mapped to aspects of the Strategy and MEF. For example,

- The majority of posts were positioning the Australia Awards scholarships and short courses to support agreed country priorities. However, this was not always clearly referenced in scholarship selection criteria.
- All posts were investing in pre-award preparation, particularly for members of disadvantaged groups with English language needs.
- Some posts were actively facilitating reintegration/application of learning, but only a few had formalised this (e.g. through Re-entry Action Plans or REAPs). Several were working directly with a handful of (usually government).
- All posts were investing in maintaining connections with alumni, the majority relying on regular get-togethers and social media. A few had instituted interesting approaches such as the availability of small grants to help alumni implement new ideas.
- Very few posts were actively attempting to foster links between organisations, but some had been involved in assisting alumni who had established such connections.

(See Appendix C for a more comprehensive mapping of identified patterns of behaviour to the MEF).

Finding 7: There are issues around the interpretation of *merit based selection* and *equity of access*

Perhaps the most complex issues were identified in the interpretation and application of the principles, individually and collectively. Those around *merit based selection* and *equity of access* are symptoms of deeper philosophical issues, while the more pragmatic impacts relating to *value for money* were evident in decisions about the balance of modalities and ways of demonstrating efficiency.

Some DFAT staff saw *merit-based selection* as critical in regard to scholarships, particularly where partner governments had previously had high involvement in awardee selection. They reported that the Strategy had given them a formal mandate to resist undue pressure. However, despite the existence of global selection guidelines, a detailed comparison of selection criteria for long-term awards suggests that definitions of merit vary widely. For example,

⁵ Head of Mission

- In application material, some countries include detailed information on study categories aligned to agreed aid priorities, (and a few required applicants to describe how they intended to apply their new knowledge). Others appear to be operating an 'open' process, with 'merit' defined in terms of academic qualifications and IELTS⁶ 6.5.
- The role of 'leadership' in determining 'merit' is unclear. For example, one managing contractor acknowledged that those selected for Australia Awards to undertake in-country qualifications in areas such as mid-wifery and nursing, were not selected with any reference to their leadership potential, but because the country in question was desperately in need of trained nurses and midwives in the remote areas where these awardees lived.
- In some programs, the *equity of access* principle is also being applied to selection through a quota system for women and men, and/or through the lowering of the required IELTS score for those applying for, and receiving, an award.

Some of those consulted raised questions about where *equity of access* ends and *selection by merit* begins, and about whether 'equity' should be considered across the global investment, or only within each country context.

Finding 8. The Strategy has galvanised new thinking around modalities

For some country/regional investments, the long-term awards at Masters level remain the preferred modality, but there has been a dramatic rise in short courses over the last three years. Some posts are using the fact that they have increased numbers of Australia Awards for the same cost as an indicator of efficiency/effectiveness. In conjunction with an emphasis on innovation, the principle of *value for money* also appears to be driving close consideration of new or modified modalities for Long-term awards, such as split degrees and partial on-line learning. Interestingly, these new approaches all reduce or even eliminate time spent in Australia, and thus have the potential to reduce the achievement of LTO 4.

Although some Canberra-based staff questioned the role of short courses, posts were generally enthusiastic about them, reporting on their usefulness, particularly for addressing emerging development issues, and as a tool for immediate soft diplomacy. Women who might not be in a position to spend an extended time overseas, also benefitted from short courses and split courses. However, some acknowledged that short courses did not provide the same potential for the majority of alumni to build a picture of Australia, or develop significant relationships with Australians. This was a major concern for some interviewees, but was dismissed by others, who suggested that the importance of spending a lengthy time in Australia was exaggerated, particularly as awardees often spent much of their time with other students from their own countries.

Finding 9. There are disparate views about which modalities should be considered Australia Awards

All interviewees at post supported the range of modalities available (and were disappointed that fellowships were not currently part of the mix). However, some Canberra-based staff were concerned that the Australia Awards brand was losing its prestige and was no longer competitive

⁶ International English Language Testing System

with the offerings of other countries. Some wanted Australia Awards restricted to Long-term awards only, with a clear emphasis on attracting applicants of the highest calibre.

There were specific concerns about Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships because recipients were not always of the same academic calibre as those receiving Long-term awards for study in Australia, and because the link to Australia itself was often weak. One interviewee recounted an instance where an Australia Awards recipient who had studied in another Pacific country publicly thanked that country's government for giving him such a wonderful opportunity. The issue of the modalities that should be branded Australia Awards is a symptom of a deeper issue around beliefs about what constituted *merit*, and *high quality applicants*. Posts that were offering in-country scholarships for specific skill development were adamant that the Australia Awards branding was an important part of their success (See Box 3.1).

Box 3.1. When is an Australia Award not an Australia Award?

Several countries were offering Australia Awards for training in-country in priority areas of need (e.g. midwifery, nursing, teaching) that were part of broader aid-funded initiatives focused on health and education. In these countries, interviewees reported that the awardees and their communities placed a very high value on these awards.

In one of these countries, interviewees reported that awardees and their families were mindful of the importance of fulfilling the requirements regarding attendance and completion, and of the importance of putting their new skills and knowledge to work for the good of their communities. While the awardees had the ability to undertake the relevant training, this did not put them in the category of 'the best and brightest', and they had not been selected on the basis of their leadership potential. However, the interviewees from post did not see this as an issue, and believed these programs were doing exactly what the Australia Awards had always been intended to do.

They were concerned by indications they had been getting that Australia Awards might be redefined as 'a sort of Fulbright scholarship.' Which would rule out the course they had been offering. Then removal of the Australia Awards branding would undermine the high profile and associated goodwill that had been built up around these courses over a long period of time. They were also worried about the broader implications of shifting the focus of Australia Awards.

Finding 10. The Strategy has surfaced underlying points of tension

Ultimately the Strategy has an important role to play in aligning the values and beliefs that underpin thinking and action related to the Australia Awards. However, it became apparent that differences in values, beliefs and assumptions about the Australia Awards are influencing the way in which individual desks and posts interpret and apply the Strategy. These revolve around whether Australia Awards should:

- **primarily focus on the provision of aid to support development**, (as outlined in ODA requirements), or on soft power. While posts tended to reconcile these aspects, they were an issue of concern centrally.
- **be highly prestigious awards on the world stage, focusing on 'the best and brightest'** generally, (as per Fulbright or Chevening Scholarships), or whether they should be open to a diverse range of individuals, with competition only at country level, and with a particular emphasis on assisting those who might not have an opportunity otherwise;
- **encompass all current modalities under one brand name**, whether they should distinguish more clearly between levels of award or whether the brand should only be applied to Long-term awards (thus maintaining the prestige value that some felt was being undermined by current arrangements).

Several interviewees posed the fundamental question, ‘What *are* the Australia Awards?’ There were concerns about a perceived push to make the Australia Awards more prestigious. For example, one interviewee felt that aiming only at the top tier [was] ‘against the spirit of the Australia Awards’. However, another observed that efforts to be inclusive could be taken to a point where they undermined what the Australia Awards were supposed to be about.

We need to focus on the point of the program. It is not a general development activity. We do want to overcome barriers, but in trying to increase participation, it’s easy to lose sight of the strategic objectives.

The impact of these different perspectives could be seen in every aspect of the Australia Awards at country/regional level, particularly the selection of recipients for long-term awards. Generally, posts supported an equity-based approach, but this was putting them at odds with others, where there appears to be a move to increase the emphasis on ‘best and brightest’. A similar disconnect appeared to be developing over short courses. Posts were increasingly using these as tools for soft power, to deliver quick knowledge and skills wins and as a way of providing opportunities for individuals who were not able to undertake long-term study in Australia. However, although Canberra based staff were supportive of short courses in general, some did not want them branded as Australia Awards.

These are indicators of a fundamental problem with the current Australia Awards that has not been resolved by the Strategy. It has not provided a compelling vision of what the Australia Awards are, or of what they are not. If left unresolved, these issues will manifest in multiple different ways. In the short term this will lead to a lot of ‘fire fighting’ activity, but over time, is serious enough to undermine the global Australia Awards investment. As Kotter (1996) observes,

Shared vision prevents conflict and non-stop meetings, allowing people to work more autonomously while still working interdependently. Without a vision to guide decision making, every tiny decision can become an interminable debate.

3.3. Observations

- There is general support for the idea of a global strategy. Despite the patchiness of uptake and inconsistencies of interpretation, the relatively low key implementation of the Strategy appears to have made it possible for posts to become accustomed to its existence without having to make dramatic changes to their existing processes.
- However, the Strategy was intended to bring about changes that would lead to greater consistency. While country/regional MEFs have been revisited, and LTOs accommodated, (albeit with some alterations), there is little evidence of consistency in areas such as the selection of long-term awardees.
- The global MEF itself has had limited direct impact. Although this may be partly due to the pre-existence of MEFs for individual investments, issues with the program logic may be contributing to its lack of uptake.
- The introduction of the Strategy has brought several points of tension to the surface, the majority of which lead back to the fundamental questions, ‘What *are* the Australia Awards?’ The current Strategy has not made this clear. This question must be resolved before any attempt is made to develop the next iteration.

- The focus on 'leadership' is a particular area requiring further thinking. If it is critical for Australia Awards to focus on emerging leaders it should be a key criterion for the selection of recipients of each type of Australia Awards, but this does not appear to be the case. The nature and role of leadership in the Australia Awards needs to be teased out, and decisions made about whether leadership potential is a necessary criterion for all modalities.
- While some alumni might not be perceived as 'leaders', they can still contribute to the development of their countries, (and to the achievement of LTO 1). One way forward might be to focus on an applicant's potential to use their knowledge and skills and networks to influence people and activities in some way, i.e. to use their Australia Awards experience to make a difference that goes beyond the progression of their own careers.

4. TOWARDS A GLOBAL PICTURE OF THE AUSTRALIA AWARDS

The Strategy and MEF need to provide a framework against which the progress and effectiveness of the global Australia Awards investment can be monitored. In turn, this should provide the information needed for high-level decision-making. This section considers the impact to date, and identifies issues that may undermine the potential for improvement if not addressed.

4.1. DFAT reporting requirements

Finding 11. There is no universal mechanism whereby SCB can gather information in a standard format from all individual investments

A stated purpose of the MEF (p.4) is to ‘provide consistency and clarity about what information is required, when, and by whom’. There is a significant amount of M&E activity associated with the majority of individual Australia Awards investments. This is generally designed by M&E specialists, approved by posts and undertaken by managing contractors. Ideally, the MEF should (a) provide the scaffolding that focuses M&E attention on areas that lay the foundation for the achievement of the four long- term outcomes; and (b) ensure the provision of consistent, relevant, timely and easily accessible information for use by DFAT decision makers.

The information generated by M&E activity is fed into the DFAT system via standardised reporting mechanisms, the two main ones being APPRs and AQCs. These are concise documents that were not designed specifically for the Australia Awards. The high-level criteria against which reports are made (e.g. *relevance*, *effectiveness* in the AQC), do not align directly with the elements of the Strategy or MEF. However, SCB has issued supplementary guidelines on the kinds of Australia Awards reporting that could occur against each AQC heading (See DFAT, 2018e).

Country/regional Australia Awards investments do not all report in the same way, with the nature and depth of formal reporting requirements varying according to the size of the investment. Nor do they all report at the same time, some reporting by financial year and others by calendar year. Thus, SCB cannot gather information from all individual investments in the same formats and depth, or receive what is made available in a timely fashion. The evaluation identified a tendency amongst the AQCs reviewed to report by exception (e.g. describing individual case studies in detail) rather than providing an account of what is being achieved across the investment. Currently the timeframe for an ‘annual’ snapshot can range over 18 months or longer. It also appears that the SCB guidelines on how to align AQC reporting with the MEF have had little impact. However, enforcing these will not resolve the issues, which appear to be related to the MEF itself.

Finding 12. APPR reporting on Australia Awards is not proportional to the size of the investment

Although there is some variation across country/regional programs, the Australia Awards constitute Australia’s largest single aid investment, so it would be reasonable to assume that they would

receive coverage in APPRs⁷. However, at present, APPRs provide only very high-level descriptions of Australia Awards, and these vary considerably in content and emphasis. In the 22 APPRs reviewed, a word count found that, overall, just under 5,000 words relate directly to the Australia Awards investment, equating to less than five per cent of the total.

There was no standard approach to describing the performance of the Australia Awards investment. Like the AQC, content and emphasis varied considerably, with countries using different combinations of measures (e.g. awardee profile, relevance of awardees, employment outcomes, use/application of skills and knowledge and people-to-people links). In some cases these were accompanied by qualitative data providing individual examples of alumni achieving positive employment outcomes consistent with the Strategy.

Finding 13. Reporting in AQC lacks consistency and coherence

Up until the end of 2018, AQC provided an assessment across six criteria – *effectiveness, efficiency, gender equality, relevance, M&E and sustainability*, with open-field boxes to provide text responses and ratings scored against a matrix. While there are exceptions, the AQC for Australia Awards do not require a standard set of measures for the six areas.

An analysis of individual investment ratings in the 2017-18 AQC found that:

- across all criteria, 40 per cent of ratings are a '4' and 51 per cent at a '5';
- only two countries/regions receive a rating '6' against any criteria (both for *Relevance*, and one also for *Monitoring and Evaluation*); and
- only two countries receive a '3' – both for *Efficiency* and *Monitoring and Evaluation*.

The limited information reported in AQC appears to belie the considerable M&E effort occurring in some countries. It may also be providing a narrow interpretation of actual outcomes. Data sources across all AQC criteria appear to involve idiosyncratic combinations of:

- administrative data (OASIS⁸ database profile of applicants and awardees including demographics, progress on award etc.);
- survey data (pre-award, on-award and post-award/ alumni impact assessments / satisfaction ratings/employment outcomes);
- case study data (profiles of individuals/groups on-award and post-award/Global Tracer Facility); and
- activity data (events, participation data from host institutions, posts etc.).

A thematic analysis of the most recent Australia Awards AQC found that around two-thirds of the word count related to 'effectiveness'. In each case the measures could be related back to LTO 1, 2 or 4 (See Figure 3). However, there was no consistency in the measures used across investments.

⁷ APPRs are intended to provide an evidence-based assessment of progress against the Australian aid objectives set out in Aid Investment Plans (AIPs), and include agreed management actions.

⁸ Online Australia Awards Scholarships Information System

Data included diverse combinations of factors such as:

- *eligibility of applicants;*
- *preparedness of awardees;*
- *relevance of organisations and awardees;*
- *perception of Australia (on-award and after);*
- *satisfaction of awardees (on-award and after);*
- *employment outcomes; skills and knowledge utilisation; or*
- *participation in activities/events.*

There was little, if any, information on how any investment is tracking towards LTO 3.

Against the *effectiveness* criterion, one-third of the total word count was devoted to general descriptions and program management issues that had no direct relationship to any of the long-term outcomes.

In discussing the preparation of AQC, the *Aid Programming Guide* (DFAT, 2018f, pp.54-55) identifies two, often-observed ‘pitfalls’. (1) a tendency to look for the positives and downplay the negatives, rather than making objective judgments about performance based on progress against expected results; and (2) poorly identified objectives that undermine the delivery of strong results.

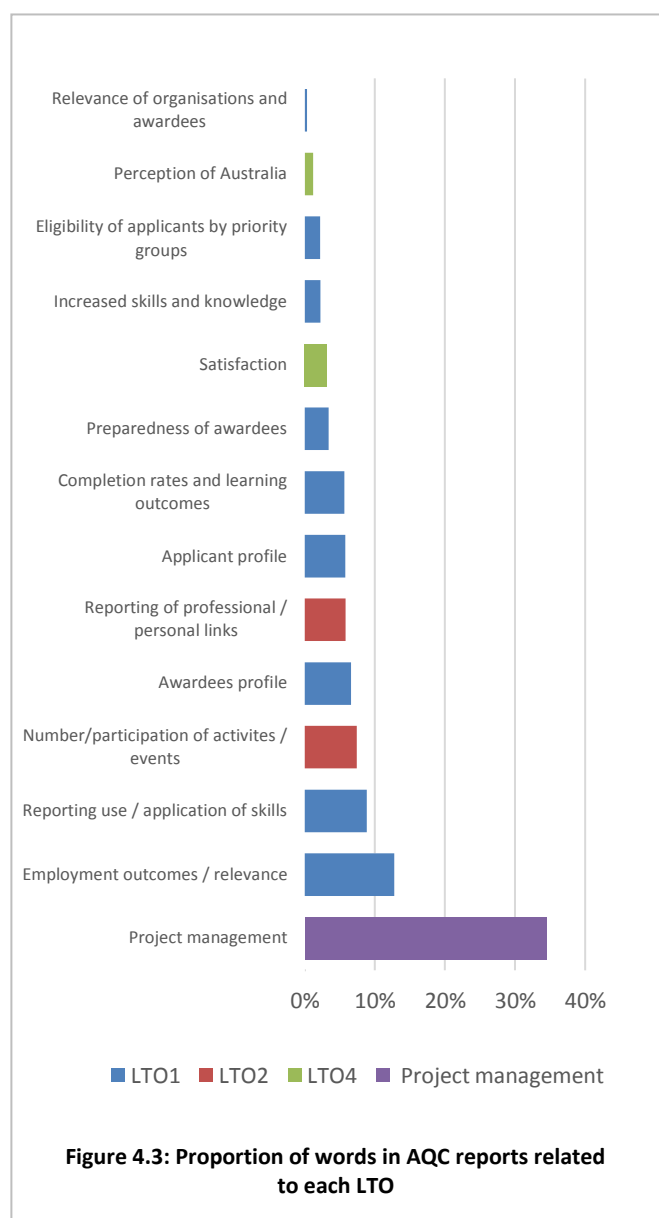


Figure 4.3: Proportion of words in AQC reports related to each LTO

The thematic analysis appeared to confirm this view, finding that the AQC had a tendency to provide evidence of ‘what works/is working’, without consideration of areas that might require improvement or that could be further enhanced. In contrast, the Australia Awards in Africa Six-Monthly Plan provided an example of more deeply reflective reporting. It reviewed progress in each area of the investment’s activities against a standard framework involving five linked categories (1) Activity Description (Process); (2) Performance Target; (3) Performance Result; (4) Lessons Learnt; and (5) Recommendations.

Finding 14. There is no statistical standard for M&E activity

DFAT Monitoring and Evaluation Standards (2017b) state that M&E activities for country/regional investments should address a set of detailed criteria (See Box 4.1).

Box 4.1 Relevant DFAT Monitoring and Evaluation Standards (DFAT, 2017b)

- 2.9 The plan is focused around key performance indicators and evaluation questions linked to specific intended uses of the information
- 2.10. The reach/coverage, quality, and exposure of participants to key deliverables are monitored and evaluated
- 2.12 Methods are fully described for sampling, data collection, management, analysis and processing
- 2.13 Baselines are constructed where appropriate
- 2.17 A strategy for the utilisation of information is described
- 2.19 The M&E plan can be easily understood by non-specialists and key stakeholders.

Even if issues with the AQC reporting requirements were effectively addressed, there is significant flexibility in the MEF regarding the ways in which these standards are put into practice at individual investment level. Thus, while the DFAT M&E requirements may be demonstrated within an individual investment, data across investments are not comparable or consistent, and are not amenable to aggregation to a global picture. The evaluation has identified issues with reporting outputs in four critical areas:

1. data relevance (i.e. a tendency to focus on process not outcomes);
2. data timeliness (i.e. use of lag/outdated data);
3. data coherence (i.e. lacking comparability, standardisation and consistency); and
4. data interpretability (i.e. limited/no supporting documentation to understand representativeness/accuracy of results).

In the absence of a common data framework, each investment benefits from an inherent flexibility which itself can foster innovative evaluation designs and M&E activities. On the other hand, this flexibility allows MEF users to interpret criteria in a multitude of different ways, and negates any possibility of a global picture. As current reporting requirements do not compel standardised data to be provided by post nor managing contractors, M&E activities are occurring in non-standardised ways. The potential for centralised quality control appears limited, and elaborate M&E processes in-country often seem to be making it harder, rather than easier, to track decisions to see how they have played out in practice.

Finding 15: The MEF global evaluation questions are very narrow

The MEF states that one of its purposes is to ‘provide consistency and clarity about what information is required, when, and by whom’ (p.4). More specifically, it is intended to provide information to answer six ‘important evaluation questions’ about the global Australia Awards investment. It could be argued that they should be the touchstone against which countries/regions design and report on their investments to ensure that the global investment has the essential information it needs.

Thus, the nature of these questions is critical. Questions 1 to 3 cover basic demographics and provide a high-level snapshot of how Australia Awards are being distributed. Questions 4 to 6 relate to LTO 1 and 2. Several questions contain references connected to Principle 1 (See Box 4.2).

Box 4.2 - Australia Awards: Global evaluation questions posed in the MEF (p.5)

1. Who are the awardees?
2. What sectors and fields of study is Australia investing in, and how well do these align with the Strategy, with broader Australian aid priorities and the other priorities of the Australian government? (*Principle 1*)
3. What sorts of people and organisations are awardees connecting with while participating in the program, what is the nature of those connections and are they maintaining links afterwards? (*May eventually contribute to LTO 2*)
4. Where are alumni working and how are they using the skills, knowledge and networks developed through the Australia Awards? (*LTO 1, Principle 1*)
5. How are alumni contributing to the development of their home country and what has the impact of those contributions been? (*LTO 1*)
6. How are alumni contributing to the relationship between that country and Australia? (*LTO 2*)

A review of the country/regional M&E documentation provided to the evaluation revealed a common set of core domains used in the various M&E data frameworks currently in use. While there are several different M&E designs and methods in place, there is considerable overlap in the core measures and indicators or relevance to the Australia Awards at the global level (See Appendix E). Some of these do align with the MEF questions above, and could provide the basis for the development of a common set of core items for reporting to a central repository.

It was beyond the evaluation's scope to ascertain whether the six key questions are in fact the right six. As part of the revision of the Strategy and associated M&E, it will be important to identify the critical information that is critical for central reporting and decision-making. As these are the areas where consistency is paramount, the evaluation suggests they should be mandated. However, this would not preclude posts from collecting data against other measures designed to inform their own continuous improvement processes.

4.2. Observations

Regardless of the extent to which data collections, measures and reporting outputs are standardised to generate a more global picture, managing contractors and posts must, at a minimum, ensure that the evaluation design aligns with the global MEF to inform a global understanding of the overall investment.

If the gap in the evidence base is to be filled, this may include a requirement to collect and report against core set of data on inputs, processes and outcomes that can be readily aggregated into a global picture. This will help communicate and articulate a shared vision of 'What does success look like?' Consistent with DFAT rules of proportionality (DFAT, 2014b), these data requirements would need to be considered against the proportional size of the investment

While the MEF does 'require monitoring of key investment deliverables' through the APPRs, AQC's and other reporting mechanisms, there is currently no standard approach that draws the significant M&E work together in way that allows comparisons and aggregation.

In achieving these objectives, there is a balance to be struck between:

- a prescriptive MEF that specifies the statistical standards and technical specifications of each data collection, the types of measures and indicators; and the reporting outputs required by the funding body (such is the case with Commonwealth Department of Education and Training reporting requirements of universities); and
- a flexible MEF that describes a set of broader expectations around building an appropriate

and proportional M&E approach that can demonstrate progress towards achieving the long-term outcomes in the Strategy.

The key to finding this balance lies in being very clear about exactly what information the global investment actually needs, and making this a requirement for inclusion in investment designs and associated M&E activity.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Concluding remarks

The Strategy has laid the foundations for change

The evaluation identified two overarching roles for the Strategy and MEF:

1. to help country/regional programs adopt a strategic and globally consistent approach to Australia Awards investments, with decisions and activities reflecting Australia's foreign policy objectives, principles and priorities; and
2. to provide a framework against which the progress and effectiveness of the global Australia Awards investment can be monitored, to provide the information needed for high-level decision making.

Although the evaluation identified some fundamental issues that need to be addressed, it also found evidence that the Strategy has started the process of change. Importantly, country/regional programs acknowledge the need for a global strategy. The importance of this should not be underestimated, given the degree of autonomy that existed prior to this. The relatively low-key introduction of the Strategy, and the high degree of flexibility associated with its application, have enabled posts to grow accustomed to its existence. In the main, individual investments are attempting to put its key messages into practice. In particular, there are indications of effort invested in determining the alignment of Australia Awards investments with the needs and agreed priorities of partner countries; alignment of some selection criteria and short course topics with these priorities; and a strong focus on gender equity and disability.

The Strategy has also provided a set of reference points, and an associated language, that will make it easier to discuss what the Australia Awards should be, and what they should not be. Thus, despite the shortcomings of the current design, it has provided the basis for a new version with the potential to set a clear direction and focus collective effort. However, this needs to be more than a 'refresh'. If the next iteration of the Strategy is to capitalise on the progress made to date, there are some critical issues that must be resolved.

There are fundamental issues that need to be addressed

The Strategy has not established a clear vision of what the Australia Awards should be

The introduction of the Strategy has brought several points of tension to the surface, the majority of which relate to the fundamental questions, 'What are the Australia Awards?' 'What are they really supposed to achieve?' and 'Who should they be for?' These questions must be resolved before any attempt is made to develop the next iteration.

Many of the DFAT staff consulted (including most of those at post) support the current, somewhat eclectic, approach outlined in the Strategy. However, two opposing views were expressed. The first was that Australia Awards should be about aid. This was supported by reference to the ODA requirement that aid should be 'administered with the promotion of the economic development and

welfare of developing countries as its main objective'⁹. There was an associated view that aid (LTO 1) and soft power (LTO 2) were mutually exclusive. The second was that the Australia Awards should be limited to long-term awards available to 'the best and brightest', with a standardised global selection process along the lines of a Chevening or Fulbright award. Posts should continue to offer other scholarships and short courses, but not under the Australia Awards brand. Beliefs underpinning this view can be identified in the differing interpretations of terms such as *prestige, leadership, merit and equity* across the global investment.

The program logic is flawed

Posts are using the current Long-term Outcomes (LTOs) as quasi-reporting goals, yet the program logic does not provide a clear, logical and user-friendly line of sight to these outcomes, and there are difficulties in the application of the Strategy's principles. At the same time, although attempting to introduce a global approach, the Strategy gives individual investments considerable latitude in how they will engage, even to the point of leaving it to them to decide which LTOs they should prioritise (or perhaps pursue at all).

Rather than trying to 'fix' the program logic, an alternative would be to develop a strategic framework incorporating a global aim, supported by a set of goals and objectives. The next iteration of the Strategy could identify these at a high level, without specifying the steps an individual investment should take (unlike the approach adopted in the MEF). This would set the global direction reflected in the vision, provide clear guidance on where individual programs should be aiming, while giving them the flexibility to decide how they will achieve these objectives within their own contexts. (Given the diversity of these contexts, and the need for local knowledge to identify appropriate priorities and strategies, some flexibility is critical unless the Australia Awards became a standardised global scholarship program).

There is no global picture of performance and no way of achieving this through the current system

The AQC reporting requirements do not lend themselves easily to the reporting of Australia Awards using data that is meaningful and useful centrally. However, even if this problem were to be resolved, the MEF has not enabled the collection of the valid, robust, comparable data that is needed to monitor progress and inform decisions about the global investment.

There is significant flexibility in the MEF regarding the ways in which DFAT M&E standards are being put into practice at individual investment level. Thus, data across investments are not comparable or consistent, and are not amenable to aggregation to a global picture. The evaluation has identified issues with reporting outputs in four critical areas: data relevance (i.e. a tendency to focus on process not outcomes); data timeliness (i.e. use of lag/outdated data); data coherence (i.e. lacking comparability, standardisation and consistency); and data interpretability (i.e. limited/no supporting documentation to understand representativeness/accuracy of results).

If the gap in the evidence base is to be filled, this may include a requirement to collect and report against core set of data on inputs, processes and outcomes that can be readily aggregated into a global picture. This would help communicate and articulate a shared vision of 'What success looks like'. There is a need for a balance to be struck between:

⁹ http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/official_development_assistance_definitions_and_coverage.html

- **a prescriptive MEF** that specifies the statistical standards and technical specifications of each data collection, the types of measures and indicators; and the reporting outputs required by the funding body (such is the case with Commonwealth Department of Education and Training reporting requirements of universities); and
- **a flexible MEF** that describes a set of broader expectations around building an appropriate and proportional M&E approach that can demonstrate progress towards achieving the long-term outcomes in the Strategy.

The key to finding this balance lies in being very clear about the exact information the global investment needs, and making this a requirement for inclusion in investment designs and associated M&E activity.

To ensure that this information gets to those who need it in a useable format, and in a timely fashion, some changes will need to be made to the current reporting arrangements. These might include: mandated Australia Awards content for APPRs, and for each section of Australia Awards AQC; alignment of AQC timing. If AQCs are unable to provide some of the information needed, this should be collected in another way. This does not have to become a further imposition on posts, but could provide a basis for the sharing of information and insights that posts feel is currently missing.

There is an over-reliance on written documents as a means of changing thinking and behaviour

In the implementation of the Strategy and MEF, there appears to have been an over-reliance on the power of low-level structures and systems, in the form of handbooks, guidelines and supplementary guidelines, to shift mind sets and initiate new behaviours (see Figure 5.1). This is a high-risk approach. Effective change management relies on people having opportunities to think their way out of existing behaviours and into others. This is more likely to occur as part of facilitated group interactions, where participants can reflect on different perspectives and can see that their input has been taken into consideration in the determination of outcomes.

In this regard, one size probably does not fit all. Heads of Missions, DFAT staff responsible for Australia Awards at post, and managing contractors, all need to understand and support the key messages of the next Strategy. However, they do not necessarily need to think their way into these, or to apply them, in the same ways. Support documents can be helpful as part of this process. However, the current ones are not user-friendly. They contain a detailed mix of high level guidance and detailed bureaucratic requirements, referenced to more general DFAT documents that the reader must source themselves. As the Australia Awards is only one of a range of commitments at post, it is not surprising that the evaluation found that managing contractors and locally engaged staff were more likely to be familiar with their content. This 'outsourcing of knowledge' may not be supportive of other staff seeking to implement and support the Australia Awards global investment.

5.1.1. The general thrust of the Strategy is sound

The evaluation was intended to review the Strategy and MEF documents with a view to making recommendations regarding the ways in which they could be 'refreshed.' It was not asked to consider whether the strategy that had been adopted was in fact the best one. However, the fact that some DFAT stakeholders want to shift the Australia Awards in a different direction, does suggest a need to ask, 'Is this the right strategy?'

It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to conduct a detailed consideration of alternative strategies involving changes of such magnitude. However, the evaluation team believes that the general thrust of the current Strategy is sound, and that a move in a new direction would have far-reaching, and potentially negative, implications for relationships with posts and possibly with partner governments.

The evaluation's recommendations are based on the considered view that Australia Awards:

- can support a country's sustainable development goals while also building relationships, and that both goals can be pursued with integrity. However, it is critical to identify the primary purpose;
- are a powerful brand and there are real benefits to grouping different kinds of awards under one banner. However, there would be value in differentiating the long-term scholarships more clearly from other modalities. One way to achieve this without making the recipients of other awards feel somehow inferior would be to create pathways for those interested and eligible e.g. from short course to long-term scholarship; and
- make a difference to issues of equity, but the emphasis of Australia Awards should not be on assisting individual members of disadvantaged groups to gain access to tertiary education. Rather, Australia Awards should identify individuals with the potential to gain new knowledge, skills and networks and utilise these for the greater good. The impact can be felt in varying ways, some of which may not obviously involve overt 'leadership.'

5.1.2. Next steps

The Strategy, MEF and associated support resources were designed to bring about a transformational change in the way the Australia Awards operates as a global investment. Kim's (2016) model of change provides a practical, and powerful way of identifying critical issues that must be addressed if change is to occur, and points of leverage – those areas where relatively small investments can bring big returns.

This systems thinking model demonstrates that actions taken to bring about transformational change are far more likely to be effective if they:

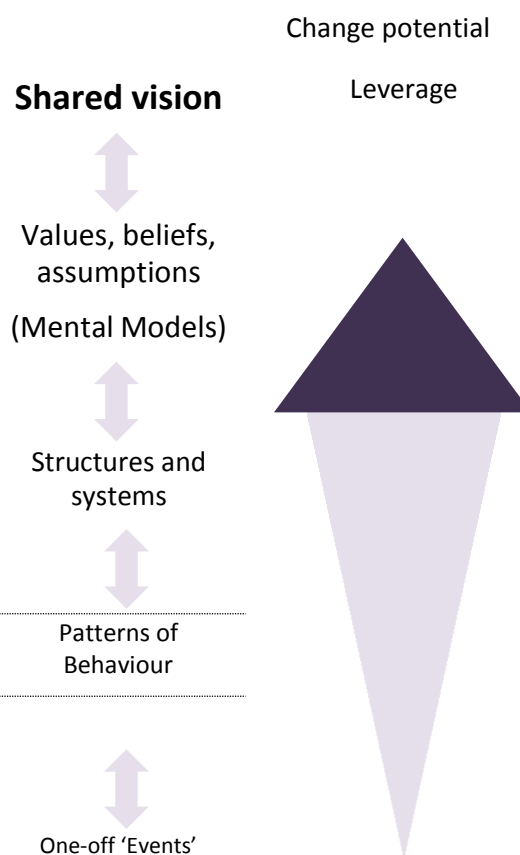
1. facilitate the development of a **shared picture – or vision** – of where things need to go, with enough detail to paint a compelling picture of the destination;
2. help **align values, beliefs and assumptions** (mental models) that underpin the vision;
3. ensure that **structures, systems and processes** are designed to support the achievement of the vision, rather than working against it;
4. draw on a systematic collection of evidence to identify **patterns of behaviour** that will show where things are working towards the vision and where they are not; and
5. use 'one-off' **events** to illustrate (desired/undesired) outcomes and behaviours.

Actions that focus directly on achieving a shared vision and aligning mental models have the highest leverage (See Figure 5.1).

Using this model as a frame of reference, the evaluation collected and analysed a range of quantitative and qualitative data to identify five key areas where new thinking and associated effort has the highest potential to bring about desired changes in behaviour:

1. Investment in developing a shared vision of what the Australia Awards are, and what they are not, that can be encapsulated in a concise, compelling Strategy document.
2. Discussion about the differing perspectives about Australia Awards that currently exist within DFAT, with a view to aligning values and beliefs.
3. Design of a new strategic framework involving clear, achievable goals and objectives.
4. Revision of all Australia Awards support resources to ensure they clearly align with the agreed vision and the introduction of new mechanisms to facilitate interpretation and implementation at post.
5. Introduction of a standardised data framework and associated reporting mechanisms to inform decision making re the global Australia Awards investment.

Figure 5.1. Transformational Change: 5 levels of perspective



Unless these issues are addressed, there can be no progress towards the achievement of the Strategy's second purpose – a global picture of performance. As it appears unlikely that the Australia Awards will be exempted from using AQC's, a way must be found to ensure that these reporting outputs become more comparable and systematic. Thought should also be given to innovative ways of building a global picture that also engage posts and add value from their perspective. Central to this is a determination of exactly what information is needed centrally and in what form. This should become a core requirement for all posts.

5.2. Recommendations

1. Reaffirm the general intention of the Australia Awards as a tool for building relationships while assisting partner governments to pursue development priorities. Capture these symbiotic purposes in an overarching aim that makes the primary purpose clear.
2. Settle the question of who the Australia Awards should be for, and which awards will be incorporated under the Australia Awards brand, using the process as a tool to build consensus.
3. Set and communicate direction through a Strategy document that:

- Articulates a clear picture of what the Australia Awards are and what they are not.
- Incorporates a strategic framework involving the aim, a small set of high level goals and associated objectives and a set of reworked guiding principles to inform decision making at every level of the investment.

4. Review modalities, examining the way in which each of them can best contribute to the achievement of the Australia Awards goals and objectives. This could include, but is not limited to the following options:

- maintaining a range of modalities under the Australia Awards brand, but clearly distinguishing long-term awards as those aimed at developing global leaders and carrying the most prestige;
- clarifying selection criteria for each modality, considering the potential to have different emphases on *leadership*, *merit* and *equity*, in light of the new Australia Awards goals and objectives;
- maintaining flexibility, by not defining specific modalities within the new Strategy itself.

5. Develop requirements and guidelines that support a balance between global consistency and local flexibility by requiring:

- all investments be designed against the global aim, goals and objectives, allowing individual investments to determine which objectives are most pertinent to their contexts and the best ways to achieve these.
- all investments to report against a small set of identified global measures which contribute to a global picture of performance. Indicate an optional set of measures that can be used by individual investments to inform country specific decision-making and contextualise their reporting.

6. Commission a review of monitoring and evaluation data to identify critical information that needs to be reported about the global investment, both through the AQC process and, where required, through a customised Australia Awards process.

7. Review and revise all support materials to ensure they are genuinely aligned with, and further elucidate, each aspect of the revised Strategy.

8. Build DFAT staff capacity for strategic decision making within the Australia Awards through a staggered two year training program.

9. Develop more effective mechanisms to engage staff across posts so that they share ideas, learn from one another, and explore challenging issues associated with the Strategy, e.g. through regional forums, regular newsletters.

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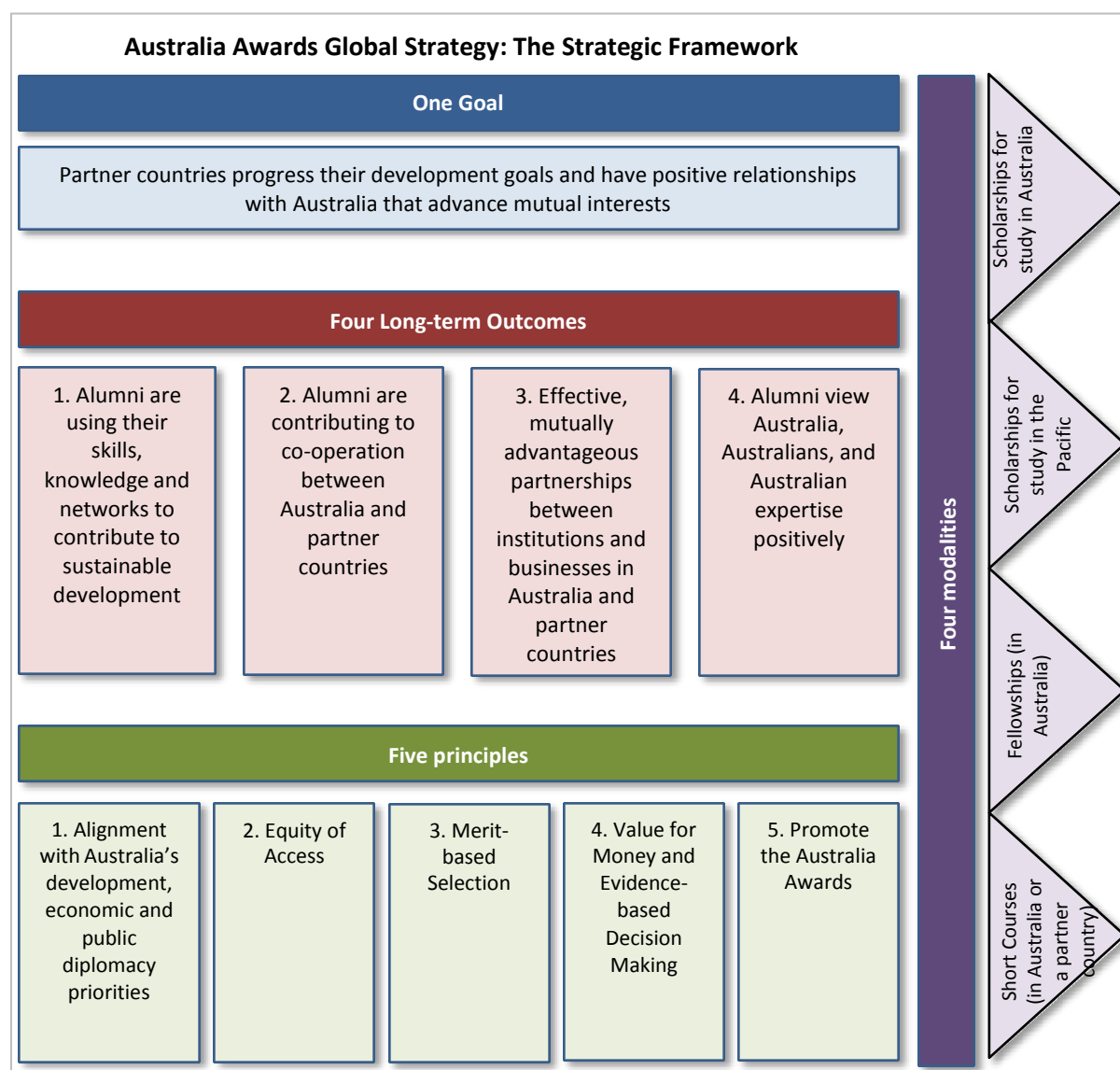
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APPENDIX A: STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

Grouping	Data collection method	Participants
DFAT Canberra	Interview	Scholarships and Alumni Branch
	Workshop	Executive Thematic areas Desks Other DFAT personnel
DFAT Posts	Interview	Indonesia (Post)
	Interview	PNG (Post)
	Interview	Vietnam (Post and Managing Contractor)
	Interview	Bangladesh (Post)
	Interview	Cambodia (Post)
	Interview	Mongolia (Post)
	Interview	Africa (Post and Desk)
	Interview	Fiji and Tuvalu (Post)
	Interview	Vanuatu (Post)
	Interview	South and West Asia (Desk)
	Interview	Solomon Islands (Post)
	Interview	Sri Lanka (Post)
	Interview	Philippines (Post)
Managing Contractors	Interview	Scope Global
	Interview	Palladium
	Interview	Coffey International

APPENDIX B: AUSTRALIA AWARDS GLOBAL STRATEGY REFERENCE DIAGRAM

There is no diagrammatic representation of the key elements of the Strategy provided with the document itself. ACER developed the following diagram to demonstrate the relationships between the key elements.



APPENDIX C: PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOUR IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AUSTRALIA AWARDS

The following table provides details of approaches to the Australia Awards adopted by country/regional programs. These have been mapped to components of the MEF. However, it was not always possible to establish whether the Strategy and/or MEF had driven this behaviour. Some of the elements captured in the MEF pre-date the Strategy by for many years. Others reflect broader government messages being emphasised at posts by senior DFAT staff members.

MEF reference	Patterns of behaviour	Observations
<i>DFAT works with partner governments to establish priorities and targets for scholarships and short courses in each country/region</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most country/regional interviewees stressed the amount of attention they paid to this, but references to priority areas not always included in selection criteria for Long-term Awards (LTAs) (and therefore not promoted to applicants) Some posts (and managing contractors) suggested it was not straightforward to identify future priorities and match applicants for LTAs More likely to find clear links to short courses which some posts value because they can respond quickly to emerging needs There were clear 'lines of sight' in countries where Australia Awards are part of larger aid initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many countries are <i>not</i> using Australia Awards in conjunction with other initiatives When used as stand-alone investments, are Australia Awards more likely to meet the soft power aspect of the Goal than the development aspect?
<i>Australia Awards promotes study and fellowship opportunities to potential applicants and host organisations or businesses</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A strong emphasis on promotion activities for LTAs aimed at increasing applicant numbers generally, usually in tandem with a strong emphasis on increasing diversity Some posts report a reduction in promotion to host organisations and businesses due to unavailability of fellowships Some posts are building links with individual government departments and see this as a strategic approach that gives them an opportunity to work with these employers to facilitate alumni re-entry and application of new learning Others are trying to reduce long-standing government involvement in/expectations about Australia Awards, particularly re selection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing numbers of applicants increases resource requirements and reliance on managing contractors. It also increases the number of unsuccessful applicants (in some countries there can be over 500) Increasing diversity creates a new set of challenges for LTAs. Many in disadvantaged groups have not had the educational opportunities required to meet minimum application requirements, and if successful may need additional support pre-award, on-award and/or post award
<i>Australia Awards receive high quality applications for scholarships, short courses and</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A focus on increasing the number of applications for LTAs to 'to improve the pool' A considerable investment in identifying and assisting women and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What constitutes 'high quality?' Limited guidance for individual programs, and some resistance from

MEF reference	Patterns of behaviour	Observations
<i>fellowships</i>	<p>members of other disadvantaged groups to apply. Impact evident in ratios of females to males for LTAs, but numbers of people with a disability still very low</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few countries are attempting to distinguish between raw numbers and those applications that meet stated minimum requirements (defined as 'high quality') 	<p>posts about some requirements)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No consistency across programs (and no clarity about whether there needs to be) Ties into the bigger question of whether the Australia Awards are for the 'best and brightest' globally and should therefore have one set of global requirements
<i>Australia Awards selects high-calibre, relevant applicants including women, people with a disabilities and applicants from other disadvantaged groups</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Merit based processes and requirements for long- term awards vary widely, with only some countries including detailed information on study categories, IELTS scores and employment experience. Leadership qualities are articulated in information about interview questions in the <i>Australia Awards Scholarships Assessment and Selection Guide</i>. However, these are not made explicit in most country/regional selection/application material, beyond a number of stock phrases in the introductory paragraphs. Much of the emphasis is on achieving a 50:50 ratio of men and women, and on increasing participation and selection of members of disadvantaged groups (Some suggest that this can lead to a downgrading of the focus on 'high-calibre') 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See above
<i>Awardees enrol in relevant and good courses of study</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some countries provide advice to applicants for LTAs but most leave the choice to them. Some are concerned about the quality of courses undertaken but beyond the scope of this evaluation to consider this further 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beyond the scope of this evaluation to consider this further
<i>Australia Awards prepares awardees well for their Australian experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some countries offer guidance on Australian academic expectations and approaches as well as briefings on life in Australia Many are investing in pre-departure preparation, particularly for awardees identified as needing additional English language development assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appears to be under control but beyond the scope of this evaluation to consider this further
<i>Host institutions, host organisations and DFAT provide effective support to awardees and fellows using awards</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some interviewees raised concerns about the extent to which universities were fulfilling their obligations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beyond the scope of this evaluation to consider this further
<i>DFAT engages with alumni after awards through alumni networks</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An increased focus on this area appears to be driven at least in part 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confusion over how the two strategies mesh together

MEF reference	Patterns of behaviour	Observations
<i>and activities that foster links, goodwill and professional development</i>	<p>by the Australia Global Alumni Strategy, which is changing behaviours (e.g. some posts have expanded alumni programs to encompass all alumni of Australian universities including those with Australia Awards)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While most posts facilitate regular gatherings, a few have implemented more targeted strategies e.g. small grants to support Australia Awards alumni to implement a new idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alumni Strategy appears to have greater awareness and possibly traction but beyond scope of evaluation to pursue this
<i>Employers deploy alumni so they can use their skills, knowledge and networks</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few posts are investing effort in building long-term relationships with major employers to encourage them to maintain a place for an employee on a LTA, and provide them with opportunities to apply their new knowledge and skills on return (Mostly government agencies but some examples of NGOs and private sector) Some posts are designing short courses in collaboration with employers (mostly government) Only two of eighteen countries explicitly require a Re-entry Action Plan (REAP) that indicates how the candidate plans to apply new skills and knowledge on completion of study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A REAP or similar mechanisms would appear to be an important requirement. Potential to mandate for all types of awards should be explored further A few posts demonstrating how this aspect of the Australia Awards can build links as well as assisting alumni but issues with time/resources make this challenging Question of how far posts (or managing contractors) should go, or should even have to go, to assist alumni and their employers
<i>Output A. Awardees/Fellows and their families have a positive experience of life in Australia</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most country/regional programs survey alumni asking if their experience was positive and almost invariably get yes as a response One post has chosen not to do this, suggesting it is not helpful. This post gathers more specific data, such as the nature of people-to-people-connections made on award and maintained upon return 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most interviewees saw this as very important Posts felt it was out of their hands. Some were concerned about what happened in Australia on LTAs but Post staff changeover means that those involved in selection of a cohort may not be there when they return so never see the specific results of their decisions. In large programs, impossible to provide additional support for 700+ awardees and their employers unless working with same employers over an extended period of time (Could be difficult as Australia Awards explicitly moving away from quotas)
<i>Output B. Awardees/Fellows complete good quality, relevant education, training other professional development and research activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completions are reported but some interviewees raised questions about the lack of attention to the length of time taken to complete Also some examples of qualifications undertaken that were likely to lead to employment in the partner country. This was a particular concern for some individuals with a disability returning to countries that do not have any tradition of employing them in mainstream roles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could be addressed through M&E clarification Symptom of deeper issues associated with the focus on disability. Suggests 'Do no Harm principle should be elevated to a general principle in the Strategy.

MEF reference	Patterns of behaviour	Observations
<i>Output C. Awardees/Fellows build relationships with Australians and other awardees and Australian organisations and businesses</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The people-to-people and organisational links that are sought through Australia Awards are largely developed during the time that awardees are participating in their scholarships, fellowships or short courses. Those at post saw this as the awardees responsibility of DFAT, host organisations and the awardees. One program was providing examples of how other awardees had gone about this as part of pre-departure briefings Concerns that some awardees spend much of their time in Australia with other people from their own countries and with other awardees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beyond the scope of this evaluation to consider this further
<i>Output D. Institutions and businesses in Australia and partner countries undertake useful and relevant collaborations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isolated examples only, with most initiated by awardees and/or alumni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LTO 3 is raising awareness so posts are identifying and reporting on activities that occasionally ‘fall out’ of the Australia Awards process Should they be doing more? Should this be core business?

Further commentary on selected MEF reference points

MEF reference: Employers deploy alumni so they can use their skills, knowledge and networks

The capacity of alumni to be able to seamlessly re-enter their local employment market and apply their new skills and knowledge is critical to LTO 1. Some countries are more strategic than others – designing a series of actions across scholarship phases as an integrated whole, while others see this as a set of separate alumni events. A few countries are using formal Re-entry Action Plans (REAP) as a tool to maintain a line of sight from selection through to re-entry.

MEF reference: DFAT engages with alumni after awards through alumni networks and activities that foster links, goodwill and professional development

An increased focus on this area appears to be driven at least in part by the Australia Global Alumni Strategy, which is changing behaviours (e.g. some posts have expanded alumni programs to encompass all alumni of Australian universities including those with Australia Awards). While most posts facilitate regular gatherings, a few have implemented more targeted strategies (e.g. small grants to support Australia Awards alumni to implement a new idea).

It appears that most countries are investing heavily in the promotion of Australia Awards long-term awards (Principle 1 in action), with the emphasis being on attracting increasing numbers of applicants overall, and increasing diversity (principle 3). It was widely accepted that a bigger pool would increase the potential for better quality candidates. However, there were also other consequences.

- ❑ More applications increased the resources required for processing (and entrenched reliance on managing contractors); and
- ❑ The increased effort to attract women, individuals from remote areas and ethnic minorities increased the numbers of applicants who did not initially meet IELTS and/or some academic requirements, and led to an increase in provision of pre-application assistance, pre-departure English training and other assistance to transition into life in Australia.

Much of the emphasis is on achieving a 50:50 ratio of men and women, and on increasing participation and selection of members of disadvantaged groups.

APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF COMMON MEASURES AND INDICATORS

A1. Applicants Profile Description of (# / %)	B1. Awardees Profile Description of (# / %)	C1. Alumni Profile Description of (# / %)	D1. Program Management
<p>Examples of measures:</p> <p>A2. Eligibility of applicants by priority group</p> <p>A3. Progression from submitted to shortlisted</p>	<p>Examples of measures:</p> <p>B2. Preparedness of awardees</p> <p>B3. Relevance of organisations and awardees</p> <p>B4. Satisfaction of awardees with pre-departure</p> <p>B5. Satisfaction with course/ institution on award</p> <p>B6. Perception of Australia on award</p> <p>B7. Establishment of links on award</p> <p>B8. Completion rates and learning outcomes</p>	<p>Examples of measures:</p> <p>C2. Employment outcomes (+ relevance to award)</p> <p>C3. Increased skills and knowledge</p> <p>C4. Reporting use/ application of skills and knowledge</p> <p>C5. Perception of Australia on return (directly after)</p> <p>C6. Perception of Australia on return (18 months after)</p> <p>C7. Number of alumni activities/ events</p> <p>C8. Alumni participation in activities/ events</p> <p>C9. Employer activities/ events</p> <p>C10. Reporting professional links</p> <p>C11. Reporting personal links</p>	<p>Examples of measures:</p> <p>D2. Media monitoring</p> <p>D3. Employer engagement</p>

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE AGO (AIM, GOALS, OBJECTIVES) FRAMEWORK FOR THE AUSTRALIA AWARDS

