

AUSTRALIA AWARDS IN-COUNTRY SCHOLARSHIPS REVIEW AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Summary of management response

The Australian Government has outlined a strategic direction for a high quality in-country scholarship program that provides human resources to drive economic growth and development. Australia Awards PNG supports Papua New Guinean's to undertake long and short-term scholarships in Australia to build advanced professional and technical capacities, and long-term scholarships at partner institutions in PNG to build capacities and skills in critical demand (in-country scholarships).

The Scholarship Review of the in-country scholarship program found areas of benefit and a number of areas for improvement. Review recommendations included reducing the number of partner tertiary education institutions and working with remaining institutions intensively, introducing new training sectors and focussing on the entire student experience including graduate outcomes. Review recommendations have provided the foundations of a work plan to phase in a newly shaped in-country program from 2018.

While Port Moresby Post agrees with the majority of recommendations, factoring in some nuancing to guide implementation, we are aware that the first recommendation may have unforeseen legal, contracting and administrative implications. We have tasked the Australia Awards PNG Facility to undertake a comprehensive review of how the Australian Government contracts the In-Country Scholarships. Results of this review will inform the future approach to memorandum of understanding and other agreement documents.

Individual management response to the recommendations

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
Recommendation 1 That Tertiary Education Provider Memorandum of Understanding (or equivalent agreements) be undertaken with the Australian High Commission (AHC) rather than the AAPNG Facility.	Agree in part	Recommendation has legal, contracting and administrative implications that need to be explored further.	AAPNG Facility tasked to undertake a comprehensive review of contracting to identify contracting issues for AHC review.	Review completed by December 2017

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
<p>Recommendation 2</p> <p>That the current level of stipend paid to awardees be reviewed to ensure consistency across courses and Tertiary Education Providers (TEPs) and comparability with the experience and expectations of non-In country Scholarship (ICS) holders.</p>	Agree		AAPNG Facility tasked through this management response to review the current level of stipends and other entitlements for discussion with AHC.	For completion by October 2017

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
<p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>That future scholarships be targeted at a smaller number of awardees in a fewer number TEPs in each workforce area, while pursuing opportunities to extend to other workforce areas.</p>	Agree	Agree to the principle of providing scholarships at well performing institutions and other workforce areas that support Australia and PNG strategic interests and investments.	Appropriate partnership arrangements for the 2018 intake.	Partners identified by November 2017

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<p>Recommendation 4</p> <p>That a closer relationship be developed between the ICS program and existing PNG quality assurance and accreditation frameworks and their administering bodies to align TEP selection and monitoring with external quality assurance assessment.</p>	Agree		AAPNG Facility will continue to work with PNG Government counterparts to align Australia Awards assessments with improved accreditation frameworks.	Report by March 2018

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
<p>Recommendation 5</p> <p>That the approach to TEP monitoring be reframed to focus on assessing progress in capacity development, measured against agreed priorities for improvement.</p>	Agree		AAPNG tasked to undertake an assessment of the relevant national accreditation and quality standards frameworks and integrate into the monitoring and assessment of the program.	Report by March 2018

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
<p>Recommendation 6</p> <p>That the AHC and the AAPNG Facility, TEPs and relevant registration bodies continue to work together to streamline and support the registration process as a part of future student completion requirements.</p>	Agree		AAPNG Facility tasked to work with registration bodies to ensure students undertake accreditation on completion of their studies and move into gainful employment. AAPNG tasked to amend the monitoring and evaluation framework indicators so the program is accountable in this area.	Report by March 2018

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
<p>Recommendation 7</p> <p>That the AHC and the AAPNG Facility increase the linkages between ICS scholarship opportunities and potential workforce planning agencies to strengthen the coordination of workforce needs with workplace vacancies, including developing a greater understanding of the challenges and context of the environment in which students will eventually work and whether additional initiatives should also be considered.</p>	Agree	Agree that workforce planning is a critical area of support for awardees completion. The Australia-PNG Partnership for Development and labour analysis will set sector priorities for the program.	The AAPNG Facility is tasked to apply successful reintegration strategies to the program to ensure awardees are going into their fields of study on completion of award.	Report on proposed approach by March 2018

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
<p>Recommendation 8</p> <p>That a standard private sector partnership framework be developed that provides clear opportunities and benefits for potential partners and in accordance with the overarching strategic framework of the ICS program.</p>	Agree		Task the AAPNG Facility to develop this framework outlining opportunities and parameters for engagements.	Final framework by December 2017

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
<p>Recommendation 9</p> <p>That the redevelopment of the ICS Program be staged over a two to three year period, including exploring of new approaches including pathways scholarships and TEP centres of excellence.</p>	Agree		An independent mid-term evaluation will take place to measure effectiveness of the new program against program objectives.	Late 2019

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<p>Recommendation 10</p> <p>That the future design of the ICS Program be based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved targeting of scholarships (including pathways scholarships) and TEPs (including centres of excellence). • A clear decision framework for identifying priority workforce areas. • A clear decision framework for selecting TEPs. • TEP capacity development support grants based on development priorities identified through baseline and monitoring capacity assessments. • Greater integration of ICS program activities throughout the scholarship lifecycle and across AAPNG programs and the ODA investment. • Enhancement of the application process to includes applicant involvement and earlier selection of successful applicants. 	Agree	<p>Agree to enhancing selection of scholarships and tertiary providers based on merit, performance and Australia and PNG strategic interests and investments as guided by the AHC.</p> <p>The Australia-PNG Partnership for Development and labour analysis will continue to set the work program and sector priorities for the program.</p> <p>Agree to enhanced capacity development initiatives in the program.</p> <p>Agree to enhancement of program cycle, processes and integration of support throughout the cycle of the program.</p>	<p>Task the AAPNG Facility to undertake baseline assessment, and to develop an enhanced selection, on-award, reintegration and Alumni manual to guide 2018 implementation.</p>	