

Mid-Term Review of the Pacific Benchmarking Education Quality for Results (PaBER)

DFAT MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

7 October 2016

Initiative Summary

The PaBER pilot provided assistance to three countries (Samoa, PNG and Solomon Islands) to measure and compare the performance of their national education systems. Overall it aimed to lift children's literacy and numeracy levels by equipping policy makers with information to drive effective interventions. The pilot benchmarked policy and system information that had critical influence on learning outcomes in 5 key policy domains. DFAT spent \$4.7 million on the pilot, which was implemented between May 2012 and June 2016 through the Pacific Community (SPC).

Mid-Term Review Summary

An independent Mid-Term Review (MTR) was conducted in February 2016 to assess progress and inform decisions on future assistance to this area. The review was conducted by Mr David Dean (Team Leader) and Ms Dianna Guild.

The MTR found that PaBER had provided a sound platform for a second phase of the activities beyond June 2016, with additional countries. However, the very nature of PaBER, with its complex regional and participating countries structure, and multiple activities, had led to challenges in implementation that would need to be addressed in any future phase. The MTR made numerous recommendations regarding program improvement opportunities and options for support beyond the current life of PaBER.

Management Response

DFAT initiated the PaBER pilot to test the usefulness of policy benchmarking as a model to improve education results. DFAT acknowledges a range of PaBER achievements and limitations, many outlined in the MTR. Genuinely designed by the participating countries, there was buy-in from the governments from the beginning: the program survived changes in Ministers and senior management in all countries. PaBER facilitated meaningful multi-country communication, coordination and collaboration (including sharing of sometimes sensitive system information). There is evidence PaBER findings and recommendations are helping to inform national education planning.

However, there remains a large gap between policy intent and policy implementation in the three pilot countries. Implementation is often weak. There is a risk that the countries will continue to produce good policies but not move to the more difficult area of implementing those policies at the school level. Lack of data makes it difficult to measure the impact of policy reform and implementation. Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) are weak in many countries, and sometimes more driven by external reporting

requirements. A continued region-wide focus on improved literacy and numeracy highlights the importance of strengthening assessment systems (assessment of and for learning).

DFAT does not intend to continue with a future phase of PaBER as a stand-alone project. Rather, DFAT intends to explore the integration of PaBER work into a more holistic program of assistance that facilitates improved region-wide learning assessment and system performance diagnostics – with an emphasis on improved student learning outcomes. As such, DFAT will not respond to each MTR recommendation. Instead, DFAT commits to ensuring that lessons learned from PaBER, including MTR findings and recommendations, inform any future planning and design of a proposed broader program, which will adopt a regional approach to improved learning assessment and system performance diagnostics in the Pacific.

To support organisational learning and program management improvement, DFAT will: share the report with PaBER stakeholders and DFAT education specialists; publish the final report on the DFAT website; and ensure the report's analysis feeds into ongoing dialogue with partners and programming decisions.

Prepared by: Emma Blanch, Pacific Regional Education and Health Section, DFAT

Approved by:  *Date:* 7/10/06

Rob Christie, Assistant Secretary
Pacific Aid Effectiveness and Advice Branch, DFAT