



## Independent Review of the PRQS – DFAT Management Response

### Aid Investment

Investment: Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS)

Commencement date: February 2009

Completion Date: December 2016

Total AUD: 3,058,399

Delivery organisation: Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)

Initial Objectives: The PRQS aimed to

- support the mobility of Pacific learners and labour, and foster and sustain regional integration
- facilitate informed decisions and choices about comparable and recognised qualifications, accrediting agencies, education and training institutions, professional status of workers, and regional occupational standards in the Pacific region.

### Independent Review

Review Objective: Strategic review of the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS) including to:

- identify lessons learned from the PRQS's efforts to facilitate the benchmarking of Pacific qualifications against international standards and to facilitate Pacific learner and labour mobility
- recommend to DFAT a future model of support that will promote greater institutional and program compliance with quality standards, foster international recognition of qualifications, and facilitate Pacific learner and labour mobility.

Review Team: Andrea Bateman (Bateman & Giles Pty Ltd), Ewen Holstein (New Zealand Qualifications Authority), Dr Sereana Kubuabola (University of the South Pacific)

Review Date: March – September 2016

### DFAT Response to Review

Commencing in 2009, DFAT's regional development assistance for education has included funding for PRQS. PRQS progress to date includes recognising and listing six national agencies, one regional agency for United States-aligned education systems, two sectoral agencies, 124 quality-assured qualifications, and three regional benchmarks. PRQS progress reflects member countries' own progress in establishing National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), quality assurance and governance arrangements. In the context of working across national systems to deliver a regional register of qualifications and standards, PRQS has contributed to raising awareness and establishing the first regional framework for qualifications and standards.

While these important outcomes lay the foundations for a regional qualifications and standards register, progress toward the original intended outcomes has been more limited. In large part this is due to the context in which PRQS has operated. To achieve the original intended outcomes, the context in which PRQS has operated would also need to change. Whether Australia should invest further resources in PRQS at this stage is tied to questions of resource availability, viability, alternative approaches in the sector and consolidation of development approaches across the region.



DFAT acknowledges that the PRQS has operated in a complex context, managing competing demands between country-specific and regional approaches to standards and qualifications. The Review identifies several significant and continuing challenges that any revised model would need to address, including:

- reliance on other bodies and agencies to populate the register
- limitations on the benchmarking and comparison capability of the register, including regarding qualifications details
- the degree of ownership and engagement of key stakeholders across the region
- working through the issues to be able to register providers or accredit qualifications across borders given the national context of legal obligations
- member countries' level of interest in and commitment to a centralised approach to quality assurance acknowledging that only two countries, Tuvalu and Kiribati have opted to register their institutions and qualifications directly to the Regional Frameworks.

DFAT considers

- the enhanced model proposed by the Review may not be feasible at this time given the limited resourcing available and the current operating context
- given the nature of many of the challenges and the present approach, assistance from donors may not be the most appropriate mechanism to bring about the changes that would lead to greater success
- limited available development resources may be more likely to achieve outcomes through alternative approaches
- 8 years of implementation have demonstrated that for a successful outcome, the preconditions at the higher levels of Government, as set out in the review report, need to be in place.

DFAT agrees that the improved quality, relevance and recognition of qualifications and standards is a key strategy to facilitate labour mobility.

However, at this time, DFAT has decided to discontinue funding for the PRQS. DFAT is considering supporting the following approaches - integrated within other investments - to achieve greater quality, relevance and recognition of Pacific qualifications:

- encourage the development and adoption of regional occupational standards in specific priority industry sectors in the Pacific region (e.g. travel, tourism and hospitality, engineering) - to facilitate industry-driven recognition of national qualifications and competency specifications
- offer incentives to institutions willing to implement internal and external quality assurance systems and continuous improvement strategies
- support responsive quality assurance systems based on strong partnerships between regulators, governments, industry and providers.

DFAT intends to explore options for this work to be carried forward through existing and future DFAT investments related to skills development. The Review findings inform DFAT's work in this space.

