

Independent Progress Review

Basic Education Sector Transformation Program

DFAT Management Response

DFAT thanks the Independent Progress Review team for its high quality review and comprehensive report. The review identified key lessons and recommendations to strengthen the delivery of the Basic Education Sector Transformation (BEST) program, and to help inform current and pipeline aid program activities.

The review examined the program’s design, inception and operational phases. BEST partners have indicated this is a sound assessment of the achievements and challenges of this large, technical program. The report usefully considered the impacts of political, resource and relationship dynamics on the program, and drew out important lessons that will help BEST to deliver results that align clearly with end of program outcomes.

DFAT agrees in full with the four high priority recommendations one, two, three and four, and the medium priority recommendation five. DFAT only partially agrees with recommendation six. More detailed responses to each of the six recommendations follows in the table below.

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action Plan	Timeframe
1 – High Priority Implement formal program governance structures and improved contractual arrangements, based on a pragmatic revision of the program design, to counteract the informal decision making processes and improve accountability, transparency and formal communication.	Agree	<p>DFAT fully agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>This BEST governance structure and mechanism is in place, but stronger planning and commitment to scheduled meetings is needed. A more formalised approach will help ensure that the use of funds is strategic, transparent and accountable, and takes into account the roles and responsibilities of various actors in the education sector. All partners, including DepEd and the Commission on Higher Education, need to be regularly updated on expectations to commit to the BEST governance structure.</p>	<p>The Facilitating Contractor to strategically map out, and commit to maintaining, a schedule of all governance meetings until the end of the program. This plan should identify key slippage risks and mitigation strategies. The Facilitating Contractor will share this list with all implementing partners, and communicate any updates in a timely manner. At a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Steering Committee: once a year • Program Management Committee: twice a year • Technical Working Groups 1 & 2: minimum of once before a Program Management Committee meeting, or as regularly as operational areas require. <p>DFAT to deliver to all BEST implementing partners, including DepEd and the Commission on Higher Education, a presentation to clarify the BEST program's formal governance arrangements.</p> <p>Streamline all five BEST Implementing Partner agreements under the Facilitating Contractor contract to improve coherence of administration, financial management and monitoring and evaluation. This should also strengthen communications, accountability and transparency.</p>	<p>Schedule to be compiled and circulated by the end of March 2018, then updated at least annually through the PSC meeting.</p> <p>By March 2018</p> <p>Contract amendment discussions to be held with all implementing partners by April 2018, and all contracts amended by February 2019.</p>

<p>2. High Priority</p> <p>Improve mechanisms to better evaluate and adopt the research produced by the Philippine National Research Center for Teacher Quality and the Assessment, Curriculum and Technology Research Centre into policies and practice in DepEd.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT fully agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>The research centres have produced important research that should influence education policy. However, some of this research is either not well understood by or not influencing key policy analysts, planners and decision makers. DepEd needs support to assess and adopt BEST research. Senior officials also need to more actively shape the direction of the research undertaken with BEST support. This recommendation had already been identified prior to the Independent Progress Review and technical support was approved under the BEST Annual Plan 4. Technical support has been allocated to strengthen DepEd's Policy Research Division to better manage and share products developed by the research centres.</p>	<p>Facilitating Contractor to work with the Research Centres to develop and maintain with DepEd's Policy Research Division, a catalogue of research products starting with, but not limited to, education research undertaken with support from BEST.</p> <p>Facilitating Contractor to support the DepEd Policy Research Division's knowledge management function to improve DepEd's uptake of research products delivered under BEST, particularly the translation of research findings into policy and practice.</p> <p>Facilitating Contractor to review the research currently being developed under BEST to identify what is likely to have the most direct and immediate application to DepEd. Existing structures, including the Technical Working Groups, should be identified as forums to share and evaluate research for use within DepEd and to channel the research to the appropriate areas for action.</p> <p>Under the BEST Annual Plan 4, technical assistance has been approved to strengthen research, evidence-based policy development and policy writing across DepEd. This includes support to conduct two policy research studies to guide the Policy Research Division to carry out these functions</p>	<p>Catalogue to be established by April 2018</p> <p>Reflected in Annual Plan 4; ongoing.</p> <p>Initial stocktake by 30 June 2018; ongoing</p> <p>ongoing</p>
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<p>3 – High Priority</p> <p>Strengthen the program's M&E to better understand the contribution BEST is making towards achieving end of program outcomes, and to improve accountability, transparency and understand what works, what doesn't and under what conditions.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT fully agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>Improving the BEST program's M&E has been an agreed priority since Annual Plan 3. Prior to the Independent Progress Review, the Facilitating Contractor updated the BEST program logic and Theory of Change and delivered a new M&E framework that reflects the contributions of all five BEST Implementing Partners. The new M&E system will now track all partner contributions towards end of program outcomes, including progress under Intermediate Outcomes and Outputs.</p> <p>DFAT notes that the Facilitating Contractor has already begun to implement the new M&E system.</p>	<p>Facilitating Contractor to continue implementing the updated M&E system, including implementation approaches listed in Annex 6 of the Independent Progress Review report (p. 66), and streamline communications on the roles, responsibilities and expectations of BEST implementing partners for BEST M&E.</p> <p>Facilitating Contractor to develop a system to monitor and report on the number and nature of DepEd requests for assistance, including what was requested, what was provided and how each request links to BEST objectives and activities.</p> <p>Facilitating Contractor to map out all BEST interventions at all levels of the education system to increase transparency and help inform DepEd of areas with specific technical needs, or areas to pilot and scale up approaches.</p>	<p>Reporting responsibilities and schedules to be clarified by end of March 2018.</p> <p>In place by 30 June 2018.</p> <p>By 30 June 2018.</p>
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<p>4 – High Priority</p> <p>Reorient some program resources to enable a sharp focus on improving teaching, learning, participation, gender equality and inclusion in target divisions through a whole of school approach.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT fully agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>To demonstrate the impact of the national reforms it has supported, the BEST program needs to adopt a localised, whole of school approach to improving school performance. This recommendation aligns with the original design document. BEST will begin with a pilot in 30 schools in two Regions, with the goal of scaling up. This would require a stronger emphasis on improving teaching and learning, while sustaining support for school based management, school improvement programs, continuous improvement, monitoring, evaluation and adjustment, and information systems development.</p> <p>DFAT notes that the Facilitating Contractor had already begun to shift to this approach prior to the Independent Progress Review.</p>	<p>Facilitating Contractor to lead the adoption of a whole of school approach, including approaches in Annex 6 of the IPR report (pp. 67-68). This effort should target divisions in the six key BEST districts, and schools likely to make the biggest difference to the majority of students passing.</p> <p>Facilitating Contractor to identify resources to increase technical support to BEST regions. The Facilitating Contractor should also continue to provide technical support to DepEd central, focusing on areas critical to achieving the objective of improved learning participation and inclusion, such as the National Educators Academy of the Philippines, the Bureaus of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Assessment and the Planning Service.</p> <p>The whole of school approach should be underpinned by an increased focus on gender responsive education, inclusive education and education-employment linkages, on which Australia is well placed to offer technical expertise.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
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<p>5 – Medium Priority</p> <p>Develop a clearing house for local innovative strategies, policies and practices at the school level.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT fully agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>This recommendation will be addressed through the implementation of the BEST Innovation Fund presented to DFAT by the Facilitating Contractor. The Fund is in the final stages of DepEd's approval process. It has two distinct functions: (i) a small grants component and (ii) support for implementation of the whole school development pilot. The innovation grant component will be one way to generate and assess innovative school level projects that could inform new local policies and practices. The proposed clearing house could be used to capture and share results to encourage replication and scale-up of innovative approaches.</p>	<p>Facilitating Contractor to complete the establishment of the BEST Innovation Fund.</p> <p>Facilitating Contractor to encourage BEST implementing partners to undertake research on innovative local policies, school practices and projects for evaluation and dissemination.</p> <p>Facilitating Contractor to work with DepEd's ICT group to develop a basic concept for the design of a knowledge management system and assess the total cost and capacity for DepEd to manage it.</p>	<p>By 30 June 2018</p> <p>Commence by 30 June 2018; ongoing</p> <p>By December 2018.</p>
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<p>6 – Medium Priority</p> <p>Implement donor coordination and collaboration mechanisms to create more value from available donor resources for DepEd.</p>	<p>Partially agree</p>	<p>DFAT partially agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>There is interest by other donors for Australia to support donor coordination through BEST. However, DepEd is responsible for overall donor coordination through the Project Management Service.</p> <p>However, BEST can continue to assist DepEd to strengthen its internal governance mechanisms in support of more effective donor coordination.</p>	<p>Facilitating Contractor to work with DepEd to identify its donor coordination capacity gaps and strengthen the Project Management Service to implement its donor coordination and management function, including documenting and mapping donor activities in relation to the BEST program and DepEd's education reform agenda.</p> <p>Facilitating Contractor to continue to network and capture links with other donors and DepEd on points of common interest, such as budget execution, and identify areas of technical overlap or complementarity in the development of interventions. The Facilitating Contractor will share with DFAT through its M&E system strategic level information on how BEST investments are complementing other donor activities.</p>	<p>Identify capacity gaps and propose remedies by 30 June 2018; provide ongoing support</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
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