



Investment Concept

Investment Concept Title: PNG Secondary Education Program
Start date: 2025 End date: 2029
Total proposed DFAT funding: AUD 25 million
Total proposed funding from all donor/s: AUD 25 million

A. Development Context (What is the problem?)

Situation Analysis

PNG is one of the lowest per capita spenders on education in the Asia Pacific region. Its growing population experiences poor learning outcomes, challenging the country's development aspirations. Approximately 80 per cent of PNG's population live in rural and remote areas and 40 per cent are under the age of 15. PNG faces systemic challenges in providing this young and diverse population access to a quality education. Australia has advocated for an increase in the budget allocation for education, but this has yet to be realised. PNG has over 2.2 million school students, of which approximately 200,000 are secondary students enrolled in around 300 schools.

Overall student retention rates are poor, with only 16 per cent of boys and 12 per cent of girls who enter school at elementary level completing grade 12. Despite some improvement in recent years, girls in PNG still have lower participation rates in primary and secondary school, going against the trends shown in all other Pacific island countries. Girls often face more significant barriers to secondary education due to cultural norms, early marriage, and limited access to sanitary facilities in schools.

A growing concern for PNG tertiary institutions is that the strained **education system is producing year 12 school leavers with low quality academic results**, which limits their ability to proceed to tertiary education or gain skilled employment. This is evidenced by lower tertiary enrolments in courses requiring higher GPA scores for STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) related courses. Teacher training colleges report high dropout rates of trainee mathematics teachers. Other institutions are establishing bridging programs to prepare entrants for science-based degrees.

PNG's National Education Plan (NEP) 2020-2029 includes major outcomes of providing all PNG students with access to 13 years of education and training in an environment that is conducive to learning. It aims to create well-trained and qualified teachers to meet student demand, and provide sufficient resources and support at schools to allow quality teaching and learning to take place.

PNG's **National Department of Education (NDoE) faces challenges implementing the NEP** and introducing the necessary system-wide reforms to improve and expand education services. Previous support from Australia demonstrated that improvements in literacy and numeracy were possible in targeted locations but that NDoE was unable to incorporate the in-service and additional training required for larger cohorts. Direct support to targeted schools presents an option for effectively supporting improved learning outcomes in secondary education with a modest budget.

The Government of PNG (GoPNG)'s **Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP IV)** proposes, by 2027, to increase the number of National Schools of Excellence (NSoEs); and the number of grade 11 students enrolled in STEM subjects and reduce the student to teacher ratio. Improving the quality of secondary teaching in targeted secondary schools aligns with GoPNG policy requirements and provides an opportunity for Australia to contribute support towards a priority outcome.

The **PNG Secondary Education Program** will support GoPNG to improve learning outcomes for secondary school graduates and strengthen leadership capabilities, including for girls, women and people with a disability, in an environment that promotes good citizenship, national unity and collaborative relationships between students from diverse backgrounds. Conventional and innovative approaches will be used to deliver the program's Goal, Objective and End of Program Outcomes.

B. Strategic Intent and Rationale (Why should Australia invest?)

The **PNG–Australia Comprehensive Strategic and Economic Partnership (CSEP)** recognises that high-quality education and research is fundamental to development and commits PNG and Australia to strengthen the delivery of secondary, TVET and tertiary education and to foster people-to-people links.

Australia's **International Development Policy (IDP)** recognises investing in people expands opportunities for all and is indispensable to lasting progress. Australia currently supports early grade education, TVET and Australia Awards Scholarships, but not secondary education—which provides a foundation for successful post-secondary education, training and employment. The program design will have strategic coherence with the IDP, Development Partnership Plan (DPP) for PNG and current DFAT-funded education programs.

The **PNG Secondary Education Program's** objective is for students at participating high performing upper secondary schools to have improved learning outcomes and leadership capabilities.

PNG's education needs are extensive and the proposed budget for this investment is modest. Therefore, support will be directed at targeted secondary schools. However, this program will offer support to teachers across all PNG secondary schools by providing access to the online professional development modules and subject-based communities of practice focused on STEM and English subjects. Australia has a comparative advantage due to our technical expertise and a history of long-standing relationships across the education sector.

An ODA eligibility assessment has been undertaken using the ODA Eligibility Flowchart and the program is ODA eligible.

C. Proposed Outcomes and Investment Options (What?)

The program goal will contribute to GoPNG's MTDP IV objective for 'Quality Education and Skilled Human Capital': *"Achieving an educated, skilled and productive human capital that provides the enabling environment for resilient economic growth"*. It will improve learning outcomes and leadership capabilities in select PNG secondary schools and support people-to-people links with Australia.

Proposed End of Program Outcomes (EOPOs):

1. **Better teaching and learning** in targeted subject areas. EOPO 1 speaks to improved learning in targeted areas for students. This will be done by strengthening teachers' knowledge and teaching skills, providing access to up-to-date teaching resources, and improving collaboration between teachers and improving management practices.
2. **Safe, resilient and inclusive schools, particularly for girls, women, and people with a disability.** EOPO 2 directly seeks to improve the school environment through leadership (students, school leaders and teachers) capable of steering a pathway that reduces violence in all its forms. Activities under EOPO 2 will focus on developing student and teacher leadership capabilities; promoting gender equality, inclusion and safety; developing school plans to mitigate and manage climate change and disaster events; and supporting targeted infrastructure upgrades and internet connectivity.
3. **Supportive Australia-PNG relations.** Activities under EOPO 3 will be designed to ensure that Australia and PNG have stronger partnerships and people-to-people links in the secondary education sector. Drawing on Australia's relatively strong systems of secondary education, activities will provide opportunities for information exchanges and linkages, with a view to creating enduring relationships.

Primary beneficiaries will be secondary school students and their teachers in participating schools, through targeted quality improvements in teaching skills, resources and the teaching and learning environment.

Gender equality will be a focus, with the program working to promote gender equality, inclusion and safety in schools.

Climate change and disaster risk response will be incorporated in the design, with a specific climate change objective currently proposed as an intermediate outcome for the investment.

E. Risks

Child Protection and the presentation of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse or Harassment (SEAH) will be addressed through assessments of the implementation provider and partners as part of the capacity assessments.

The **limited capacity of government partners** and potential limited engagement by NDoE and/or participating schools may limit the potential impact and sustainability of the investment.

Low-capacity partners at either the national or the school levels may present fiduciary and sustainability risks to the investment. To manage these risks a phased approach will be undertaken; partner capacity assessments will be done as part of the baseline; early activities to build capability will be prioritised; regular monitoring to ensure program activities align with GoPNG priorities; and appropriate governance mechanisms to ensure visibility and engagement from key partners.

Other risks to be assessed for implementation include interruption to activities arising from **natural disasters and localised insecurity risks** prevalent to PNG will be addressed through the design process.