

## Management response to the Independent Review of Australia Awards in Tonga

### Summary of management response

DFAT welcomes the findings of the Independent Review of the Australia Awards in Tonga (AAT), 2024. The review provides valuable insights into the performance of the AAT, as well as Scholarships Implementation Framework 2025-2026 and makes recommendations for Australia's future investment in this sector.

DFAT agrees or agrees in part with all four recommendations of the Review. The recommendations are supported by the findings of the review and continues to align with Government of Tonga priorities, as well as Australia's bilateral development priorities in Tonga. These include rebalancing of the numbers of Australia Awards Scholarships (AAS) with Australian Award Pacific Scholarships (AAPS) and special consideration of TVET pathway prospectus for future intake. Further, the Review identifies opportunities to support AAT Alumni via an Alumni Engagement Plan, in order to enhance award outcomes such as specialised course counselling, leadership trainings and establishment of a Tonga Australia Awards Alumni Network.

DFAT thanks all stakeholders and alumni for their engagement.

Recommendation	Response	Explanation and Recommended Action plan	Timeframe
<p>Recommendation One</p> <p>The Australia Awards Tonga (AAT) program to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. continues to offer awards that are aligned with Tonga's development needs and with Australia's bilateral program for Tonga.</li> <li>b. rebalance award offers to approximately 60% AAPS and 40% AAS with Tonga Government interest in maximising the number of awards within the available budget.</li> <li>c. continues to target AAPS for undergraduate and postgraduate education (with TVET opportunities and scholarships provided through other mechanisms)</li> <li>d. continues to primarily offer AAS for postgraduate education.</li> </ul>	Partially Agreed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australia Awards will continue to be offered in priority areas outlined in the 2024-2029 Tonga Australia Development Partnership Plan. DFAT commits to engaging with the Ministry of Education and Training and the Public Service Commission to align to priority sector needs.</li> <li>• DFAT commits to reaching the recommended target for the 2027 intake and beyond. However, numbers will be impacted by application types and core funding for AAS places.</li> <li>• DFAT agrees to target AAPS for undergraduate and postgraduate education. However, DFAT will consider opportunities for TVET scholarships noting that the new regional Pacific Australia Skills program is in its inception stage and the bilateral skills activities are limited.</li> <li>• DFAT agrees to primarily offer AAS for postgraduate education except in instances where prioritised courses are not offered at regional institutions. From 2026, DFAT will offer a small number of study opportunities in Australia for Form 7 graduates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing (all actions)</li> </ul>

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<p>Recommendation Two</p> <p>To enhance award outcomes, the AAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. provide specialist course counselling to maximise awardee relevant knowledge and skill acquisition</li> <li>b. support awardees to prepare an award/reintegration plan to guide their academic, on-award experience and networking over their award</li> <li>c. conduct reintegration workshops for returning awardees</li> <li>d. work closely with DFAT Global Education and Scholarships Section (GLE) to maximise opportunities for the Tonga AAS to benefit from the on-award enrichment activities available in Australia</li> <li>e. develop and implement an Alumni Engagement Plan, which includes establishment of a Tonga Australia Awards Alumni Network</li> <li>f. provide leadership training to alumni identified as emerging leaders or in existing leadership roles in key organisations.</li> </ul>	Agreed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DFAT agrees to provide course counselling to short listed applicants from the 2027 intake process onwards. Prioritisation will be given to AAS.</li> <li>• DFAT will work with the Global Support Mechanism to develop a template for an award/reintegration plan</li> <li>• DFAT agrees to conduct reintegration workshops. The first multi-day to workshop was held in August 2025.</li> <li>• DFAT agrees to increase opportunities for Tonga AAS to benefit from the on-award enrichment activities available in Australia. DFAT will promote these opportunities during pre-departure briefings drawing on alumni and active members of groups. This has commenced in November 2025.</li> <li>• DFAT manages a Tonga alumni database and hosts regular alumni events. DFAT will develop an Alumni Engagement Plan by June 2026, including consideration of establishing a formal Tonga Australia Alumni Network to strengthen alumni engagement going forward.</li> <li>• Leadership training will be considered as part of the Alumni Engagement Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing, 2025-2026</li> <li>• by June 2026</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> <li>• By June 2026 / Ongoing</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>

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<p>Recommendation Three</p> <p>The AHC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. develop and implement a Gender, Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) strategy for implementation across the scholarships cycle of the AAT</li> <li>b. work with the DFAT GLE to establish feasible ways to increase Tonga's access to the Australia Awards Fellowships</li> <li>c. commence planning to establish a short course program under the Australia Awards (with topics to be determined in consultation with alumni and in accord with DFAT development program activities in Tonga)</li> <li>d. strengthen post-award MEL for improved evidence-based decision making, and for its MEL obligations with respect to Global Australia Awards MEL and DFAT Tier 2 reporting.</li> </ul>	Partially Agreed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DFAT agrees to develop a GEDSI strategy and implementation plan by December 2026.</li> <li>• DFAT will continue to promote AAF rounds through social media and through technical networks across our development portfolio.</li> <li>• DFAT recognises the value of short courses however cannot implement a new stream of bilateral courses due to resourcing constraint at Post.</li> <li>• DFAT agrees to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of AAT and will contract external resources through GSM to develop and implement an M&amp;E plan. Alumni contact tracing will be managed by the DFAT Alumni Officer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By December 2026</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
<p>Recommendation Four</p> <p>The AHC implement flexible in-country management of the Australia Awards, including whereby:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the AHC retain strategic in-house capacity for high value contact with awardees/alumni and stakeholders to form/maintain a strong association and branding with Australia</li> <li>b. post-award MEL activities are contracted out to a suitably qualified and experienced local organisation</li> <li>c. other more administrative post-award tasks to support implementation of the AAT's annual plan are outsourced as required.</li> </ul>	Agreed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DFAT agrees to this recommendation. DFAT will maintain strategic in-house capacity and will continue throughout the life cycle of the AAT. DFAT will allocate 2.3 FTE to manage AAT at Post.</li> <li>• DFAT agrees that local organisation should play a role in M&amp;E activities, however, this will be determined through the development of the M&amp;E plan.</li> <li>• DFAT has allocated 2.3 FTE to scholarships management and will continue to reflect on staffing and resource needs and outsource when required.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing (all actions)</li> </ul>