



# REVIEW OF UPTAKE OF ODE RECOMMENDATIONS

DECEMBER 2017

## INTRODUCTION

This review is conducted annually and assesses the Department's progress in implementing management responses to recent ODE evaluations. The review has three objectives:

- To assess the extent to which actions proposed in management responses have been implemented by program areas;
- To determine how ODE evaluations have influenced aid program management and policy; and
- To identify lessons to improve the impact of future ODE evaluations.

## SCOPE

This review includes six ODE evaluations from last year's uptake review. The evaluations being reviewed for a second time are:

- Australia's Humanitarian Response to the Syria Crisis (September 2014)
- Working in Decentralised Service Systems (January 2015)
- Research for Better Aid (February 2015)
- Window of Opportunity: Targeting Undernutrition in Children (April 2015)
- Evaluation of the Australia-Vietnam Country Strategy 2010-15 (May 2015)
- Evaluation of the Australian NGO Cooperation (ANCP) Program (August 2015).

This review also includes five ODE evaluations completed after the last review and before September 2016:

- Banking our Aid: Australia's non-core funding to the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank (September 2015)
- Evaluation of the contribution of Australia Awards to women's leadership (December 2015)
- Investing in Teachers (December 2015)
- Gearing up for Trade (April 2016)
- Evaluation of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) – Government of Australia Partnership (August 2016).

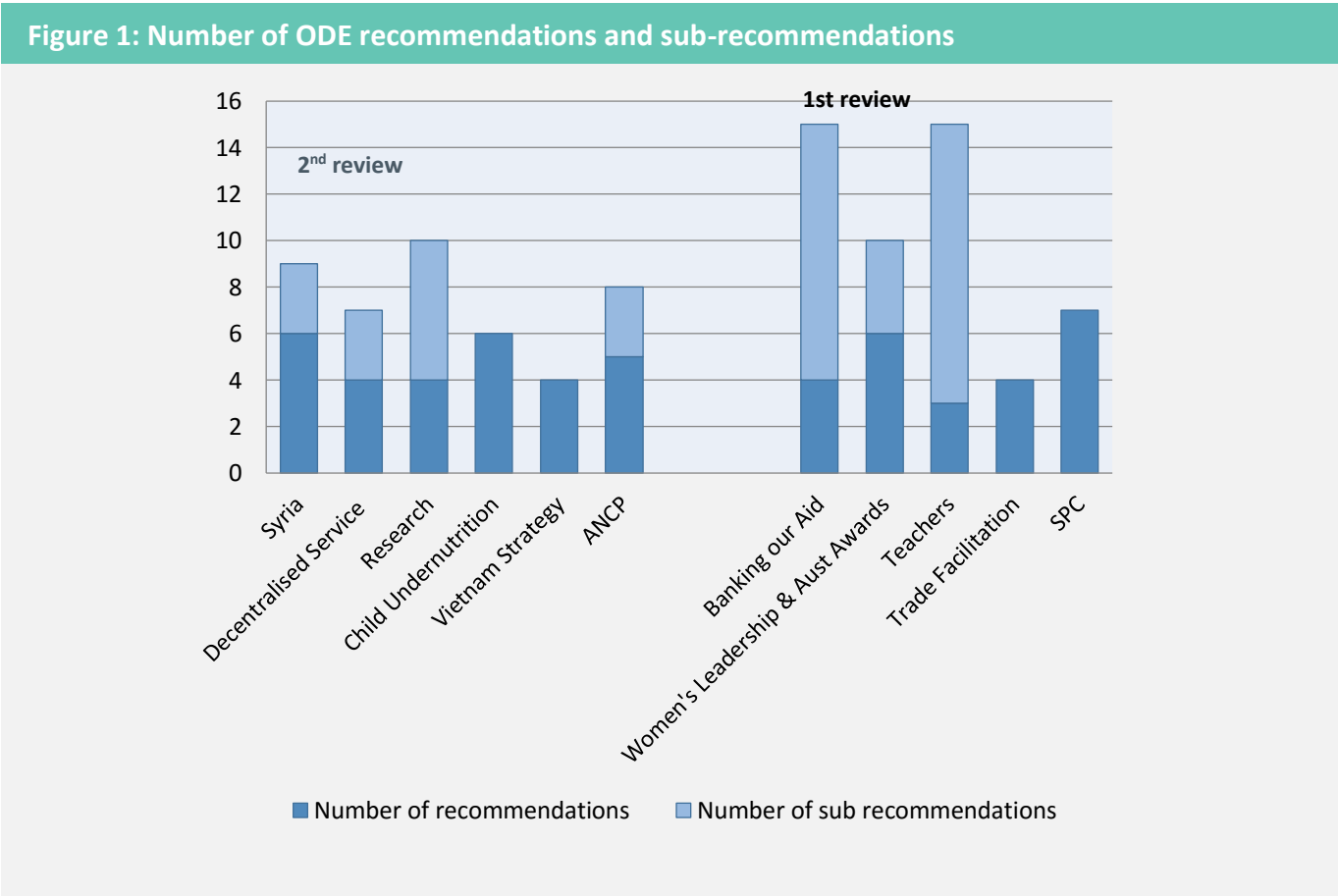
METHOD

ODE requested an update of progress against management responses for the above evaluations and provided guidance and a template for responses. Divisions were also invited to comment on the evaluation in regard to its most significant contribution and areas for improvement in the evaluation process. ODE then conducted a desk-based review of responses and consulted program areas to clarify issues where necessary.

FINDINGS: NUMBER OF ODE RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, recent evaluations have a similar number of recommendations as evaluations being reviewed for a second time, but they have more sub-recommendations.

The six ODE evaluations reviewed for the second time had an average of around five recommendations per evaluation. The five evaluations reviewed for the first time also had an average of around five per evaluation. However, these more recent evaluations had considerably more sub-recommendations (see Figure 1).



## FINDINGS: MANAGEMENT RESPONSES TO ODE RECOMMENDATIONS

Management responses to recent evaluations had a greater proportion of 'agreed' responses than evaluations being reviewed for a second time, though this may be due to the removal of the 'agree in principle' response category.

Over the review period, there were four possible management response categories: disagree, partially agree, agree in principle, and (fully) agree. Following the 2016 Review of Uptake of ODE Recommendations, ODE removed the 'agree in principle' category from the management response template because this category was problematic in regard to clarity of intent of the responding area.

For evaluations being reviewed for the second time, management agreed fully to 20 (69%) of the recommendations, agreed to a further five in principle, and partially agreed with four. For the more recent evaluations, management agreed fully to 20 (83%) of the recommendations, and partially agreed with four (see Figures 2 and 3). Consistent with the three previous reviews, management areas did not select the 'disagree' response category for any recommendations.

The decision to remove the 'agree in principle' category from the management response template has been validated to some extent by subsequent use of the categories, shown in Figure 3. The proportion of 'partially agree' responses is similar across the two groups, while the proportion of 'agree' responses increased. An 'agree' response requires a clearly articulated management action.

Figure 2: Management responses to ODE recommendations, by evaluation

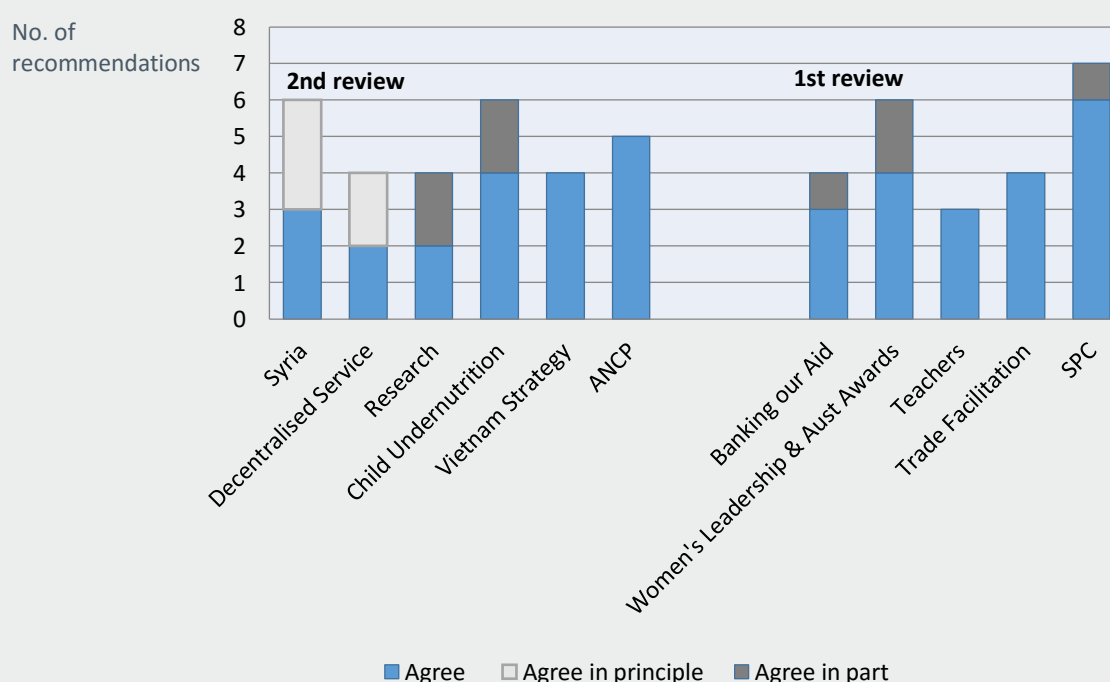
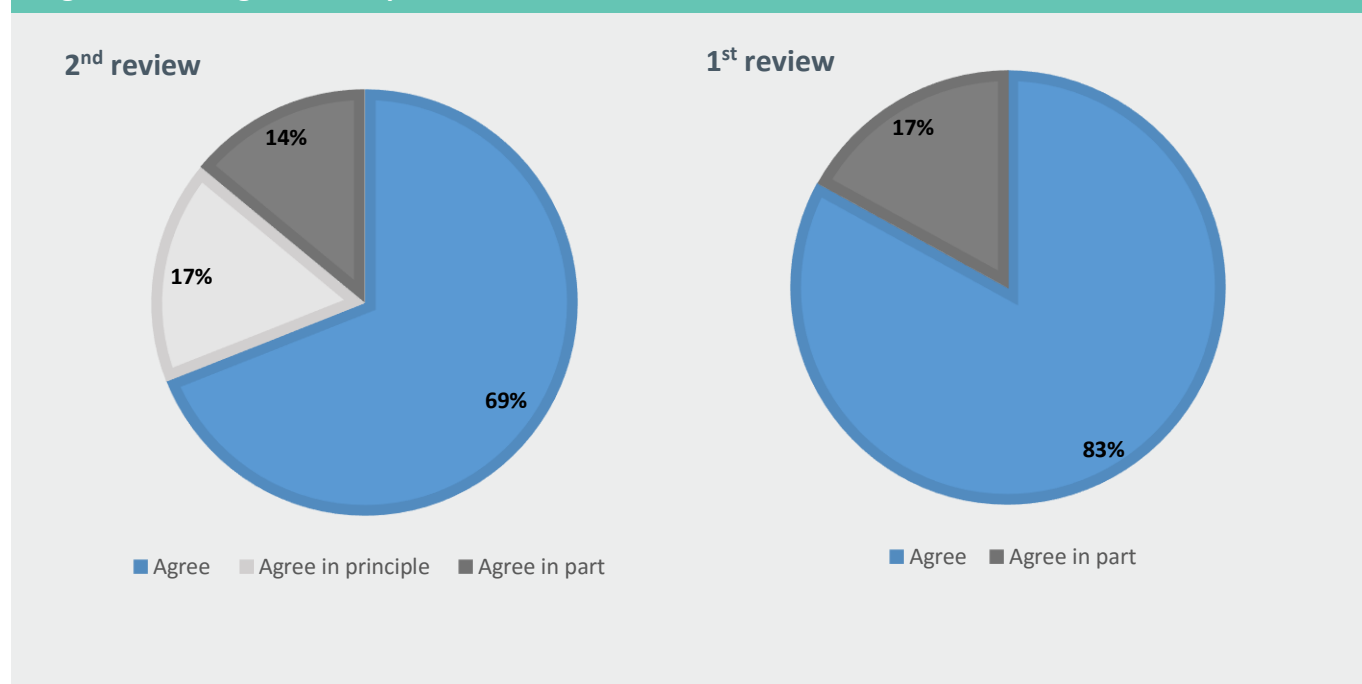


Figure 3: Management responses to ODE recommendations, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> reviews

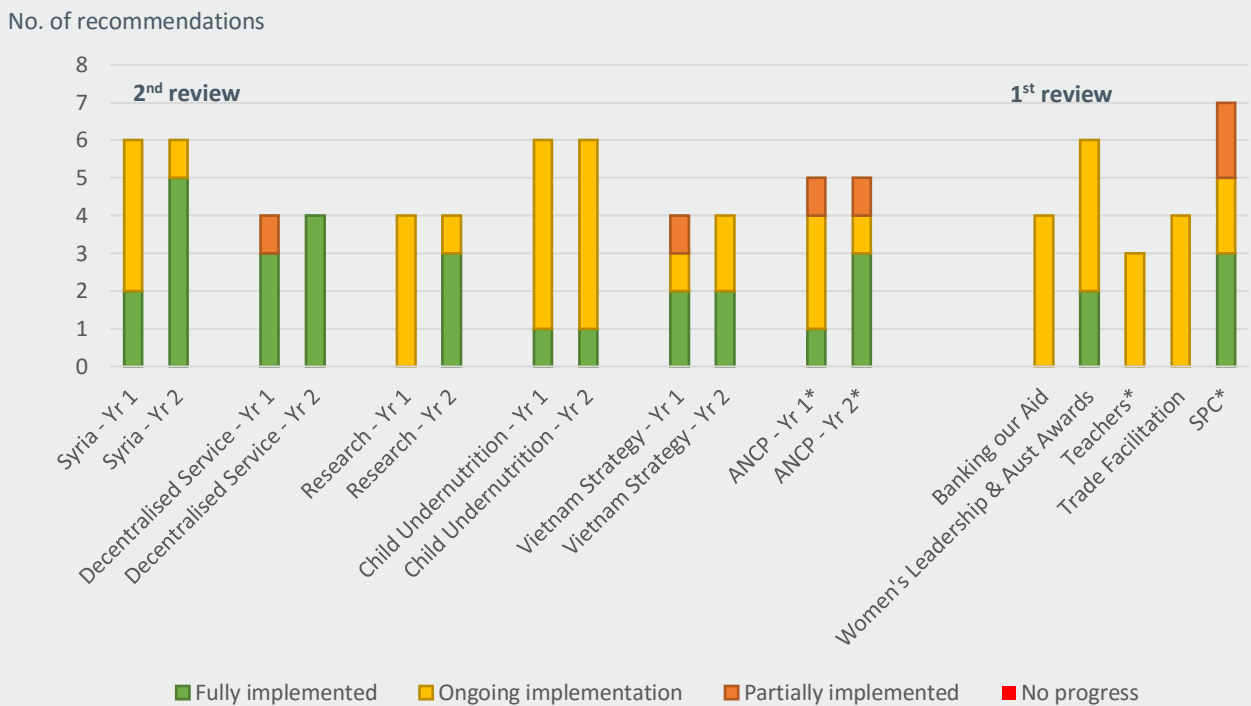


## FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION OF MANAGEMENT RESPONSES

Evaluations being reviewed for a second time show progress with 62% of management responses being 'fully implemented', an increase from 31% when reviewed the previous year.

For evaluations being reviewed for a second time, implementation has generally progressed (see figure 4). Where implementation is 'ongoing', such as for the child undernutrition evaluation, the nature of ODE's response category makes it difficult to distinguish between ongoing progress or no change compared to the previous year's reporting. For the ANCP evaluation, limited staffing resources constrained a planned independent data validation exercise until 2018, leaving that program's action 'partially implemented', but most other actions have progressed from the previous year. Overall, in the second year of review the percentage of fully implemented management responses increased from 31% to 62% (see Figure 5 over the page).

**Figure 4: Degree of implementation of management responses to ODE recommendations, by evaluation**



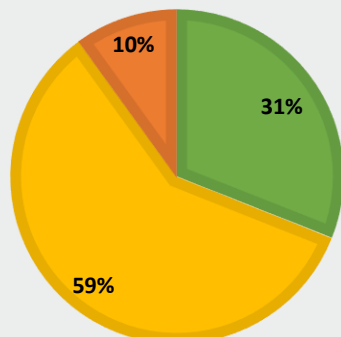
\*Indicates ODE has modified the program areas' response to this review to reflect implementation as against the management response to a recommendation as a whole. (That is, rather than reflecting implementation against any distinct sub-recommendations or individual planned action items in the management response).

For evaluations being reviewed for the first time, three evaluations reported an 'ongoing' implementation status for all management responses (Figure 4). Recommendations, sub-recommendations and management responses in these evaluations were framed in terms that were not time-bound or specific enough to be considered 'fully implemented' at any point in future.

Overall, evaluations being reviewed for the first time had a slightly smaller percentage of ‘fully implemented’ responses (21%) than the cohort of evaluations being reviewed for the second time at a comparable point in time (31%).

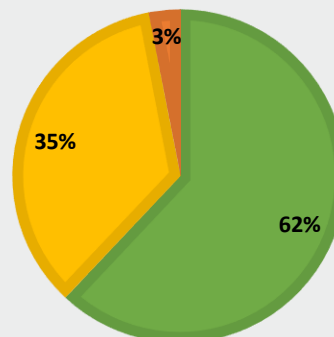
**Figure 5: Degree of implementation of management responses to ODE recommendations, 2<sup>nd</sup> review evaluations**

2<sup>nd</sup> review evaluations: Year 1



- Fully implemented
- Ongoing implementation
- Partially implemented
- No progress

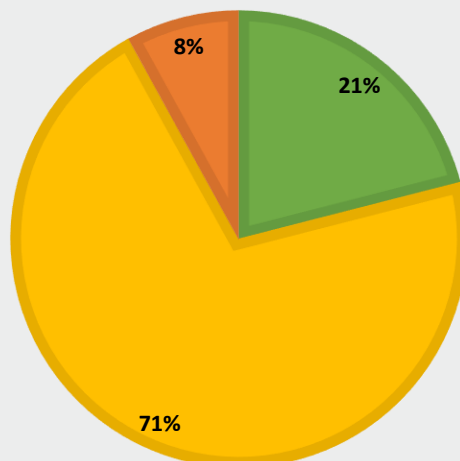
2<sup>nd</sup> review evaluations: Year 2



- Fully implemented
- Ongoing implementation
- Partially implemented
- No progress

**Figure 6: Degree of implementation of management responses to ODE recommendations, 1<sup>st</sup> review evaluations**

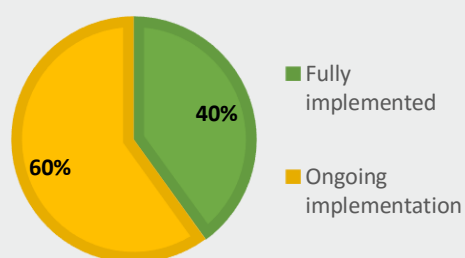
1<sup>st</sup> review evaluations  
(Year 1)



- Fully implemented
- Ongoing implementation
- Partially implemented
- No progress

Two evaluations produced 'Action Plans' as part of their management responses (Investing in Teachers and SPC Partnership evaluation). For these evaluations a different ODE template and guidance was provided for the management response, prompting areas to address each planned action. This provides a more positive picture of activities that have been 'fully implemented' rather than 'ongoing' (Teachers evaluation; see Figure 7). Conversely, this approach also highlighted activities which displayed 'no progress' (SPC evaluation; see Figure 8). Specifically, the management area reported 'no progress' in action items that were to be led by the partner organisation (SPC).

**Figure 7: Implementation of 'Action Plan' for Teachers evaluation**



**ODE evaluation**

No. of recommendations: 3

No. of sub-recommendations: 12

**Management response**

No. of action items under 'DFAT Action Plan': 10

(eg. for recommendation 1: 4 action items;

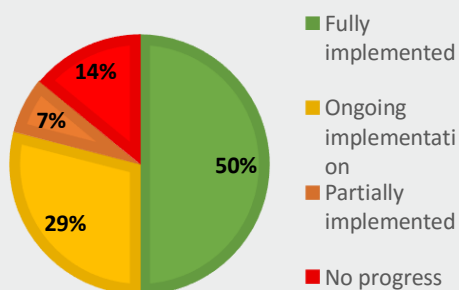
for recommendation 2: 4 action items;

for recommendation 3: 2 action items.).

In Figure 4, representation of implementation for 2 of the 3 recommendations defaulted to 'ongoing implementation' (despite containing 'fully implemented' action items under the Action Plan).

'Fully implemented' action items make up 40% of this Figure.

**Figure 8: Implementation of 'Action Plan' for SPC evaluation**



**ODE evaluation**

No. of recommendations: 7

No. of sub-recommendations: 0

**Management response**

No. of action items under 'DFAT Action Plan': 14

In Figure 4, implementation of one response to one of the 14 recommendations defaulted to 'ongoing implementation' (despite reporting 'fully implemented' action items). One response also defaulted to 'partially implemented' (where implementation of 5 action items related to one recommendation varied greatly: from 'fully implemented', 'ongoing' and 'no progress').

'No progress' responses did not feature in Figure 4 but make up 14% of this Figure.

## FINDINGS: IMPACT OF ODE EVALUATIONS ON AID PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND POLICY

Responses from program areas identified a number of activities that have contributed to improved program management and policy. In particular, program areas implementing management responses for the Gearing up for Trade and SPC Partnership evaluations described the most significant influences of ODE evaluations as:

- ensuring a greater focus on gender
- strengthening activity designs
- improving coordination among relevant DFAT areas
- providing greater clarity for guiding relationships with external partners, and
- providing impetus to better embed a new policy.

In other instances it is likely ODE evaluations contributed to faster change or provided legitimacy for driving change in program implementation, resource allocation (financial and human resourcing), or policy. Such an example is:

- Following the Banking our Aid evaluation, DFAT's Gender Equality Branch proactively engaged with divisional gender specialists and posts to ensure World Bank-led investments were appropriately informed by gender analysis.

One ODE recommendation was perceived by key stakeholders to be advancing an objective that lay outside the scope of the program, namely, recommendations regarding scholarship quotas in the Australia Awards evaluation. These were 'agreed in part', however quotas for female scholars were later adopted by some participating posts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ODE should revise the process for seeking updates from Divisions to avoid an elapsed time of greater than 12 months from the time of the evaluation.
- ODE should require management areas to address any evaluation sub-recommendations individually and identify timeframes for completion for each planned action.