



REVIEW OF UPTAKE OF ODE RECOMMENDATIONS

DECEMBER 2018

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 know what impact ODE evaluations had on aid program management and policy; and
- To identify lessons to improve the impact of future ODE evaluations.

SCOPE

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

- 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).

This review also includes four ODE evaluations completed after the last review and before September 2017:

- Evaluating a decade of Australia's efforts to combat pandemics and emerging infectious diseases in Asia and the Pacific 2006-2015: are health systems stronger? (August 2017)
- Investing in roads – lessons from the Eastern Indonesia National Roads Improvement Program (EINRIP) (March 2017)
- Humanitarian Assistance In The Pacific: An evaluation of the effectiveness of Australia's response to cyclone Pam (February 2017)
- Evaluation of the management arrangements for the Civil Society Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (December 2016)

METHOD

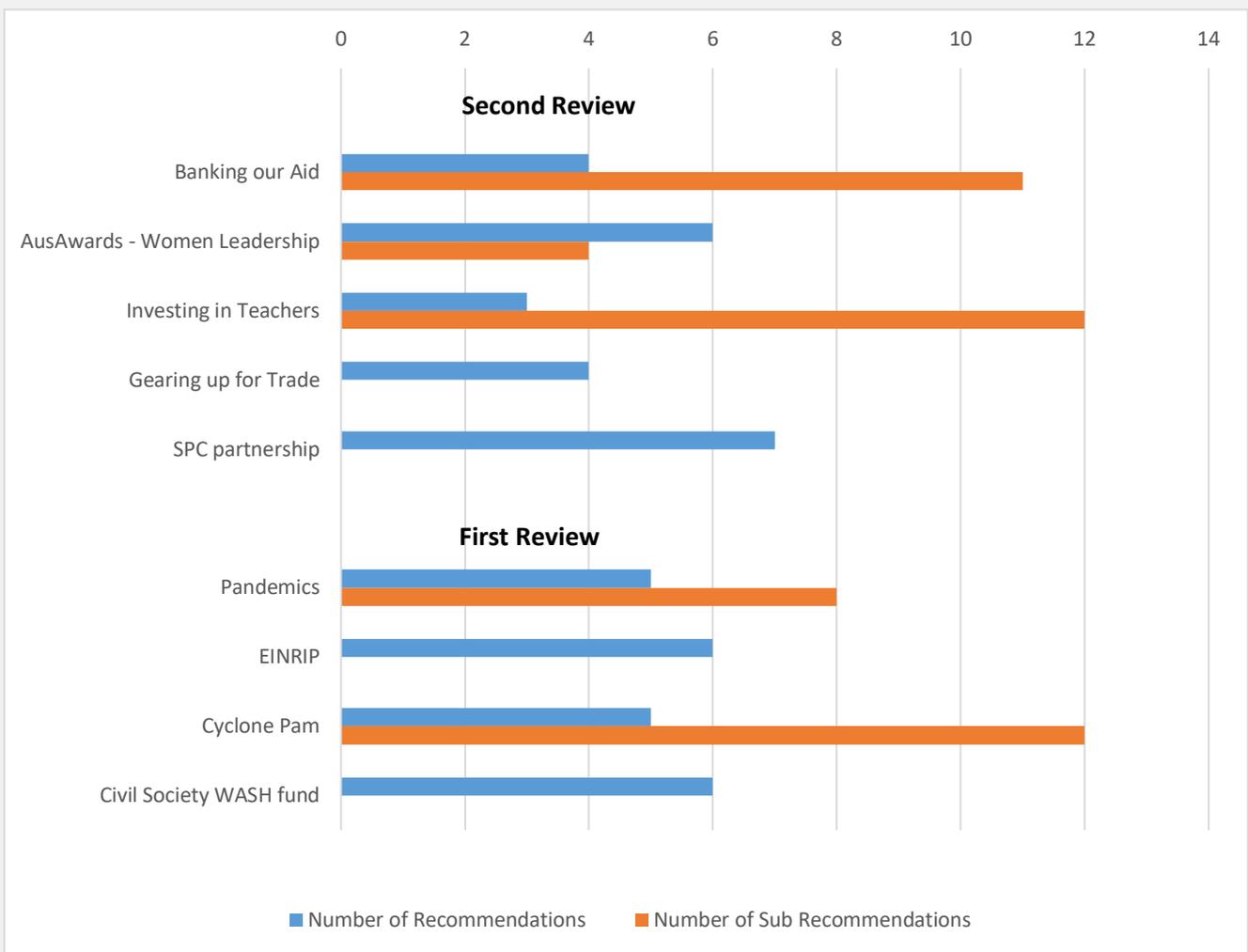
ODE requested an update of progress against management responses for the above evaluations and provided guidance and a template for responses. Divisions were also invited to comment on the evaluation in regard to its most significant contribution. ODE then conducted a desk-based review of responses and 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, with some having a large number of sub-recommendations and some not having any sub-recommendations.

The five ODE evaluations reviewed for the second time had an average of five recommendations per evaluation. The four evaluations reviewed for the first time had a slightly higher average of six recommendations per evaluation.

Figure 1: Number of ODE recommendations and sub-recommendations



FINDINGS: MANAGEMENT RESPONSES TO ODE RECOMMENDATIONS

Management responses to recent evaluations had a similar proportion of ‘agreed’ responses to evaluations being reviewed for a second time.

Over the review period, there were three possible management response categories: disagree, partially agree, and (fully) agree. Following the 2016 Review of Uptake of ODE Recommendations, ODE removed the ‘agree in principle’ category from the ODE management response template because this category was problematic in regard to clarity of intent of the responding area. In spite of this, one recommendation was still given this response in 2017 (for the EINRIP evaluation). For the purposes of this analysis, ODE has reclassified this management response as ‘disagree’, as the related narrative indicated that the responsible area did not intend to act on the recommendation.

For evaluations being reviewed for the second time, management agreed fully to 20 (83%) of the recommendations, and partially agreed with four. For the more recent evaluations, management agreed fully to 19 (86%) of the recommendations, partially agreed with two and disagreed with one (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2: Management responses to ODE recommendations, by evaluation

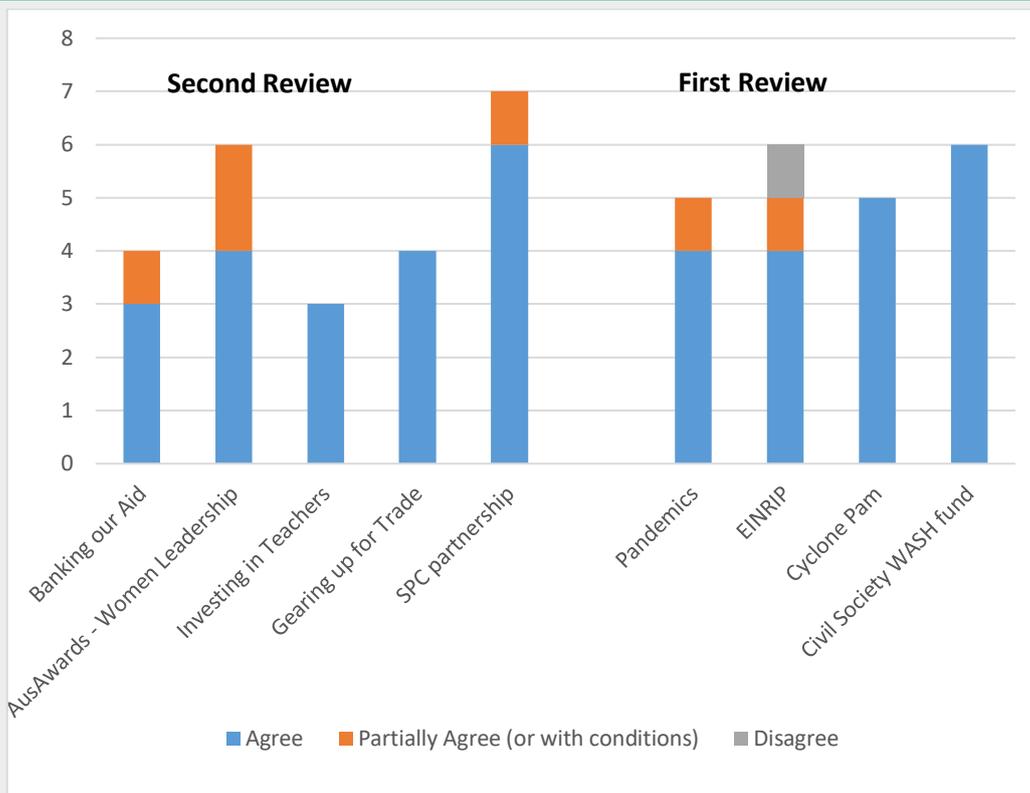
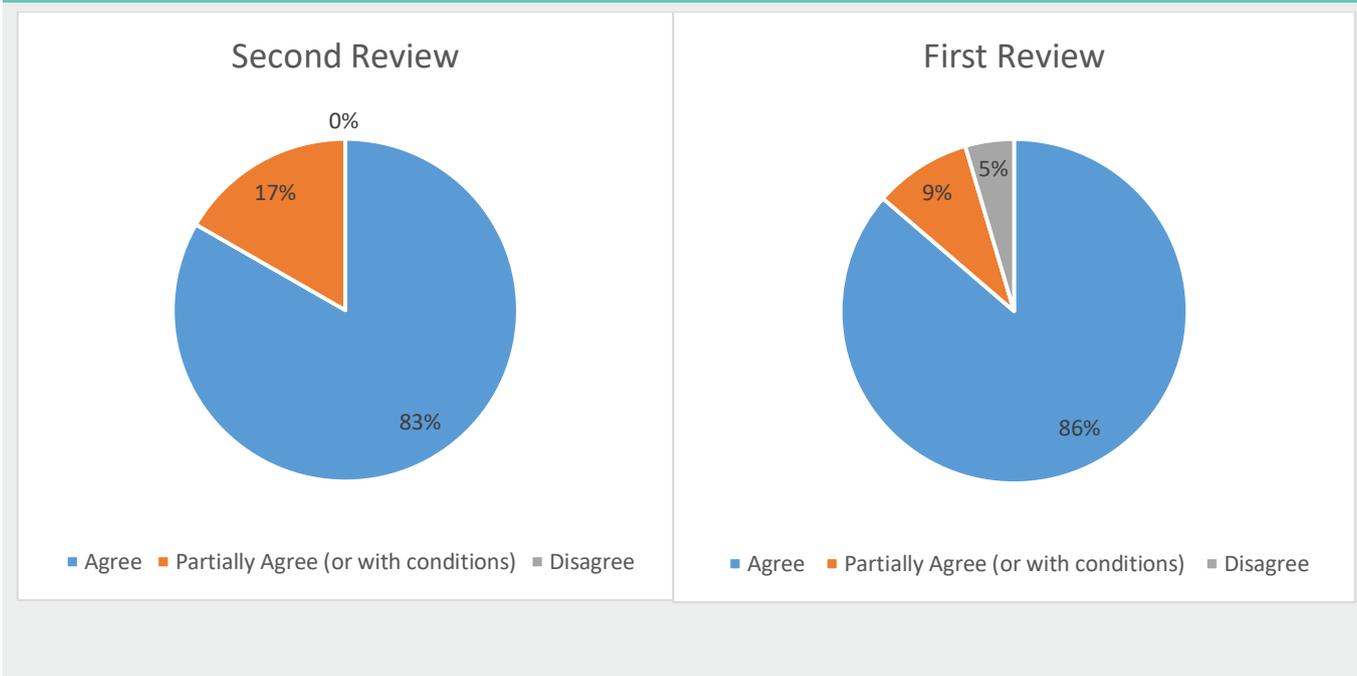


Figure 3: Management responses to ODE recommendations, 2nd and 1st reviews

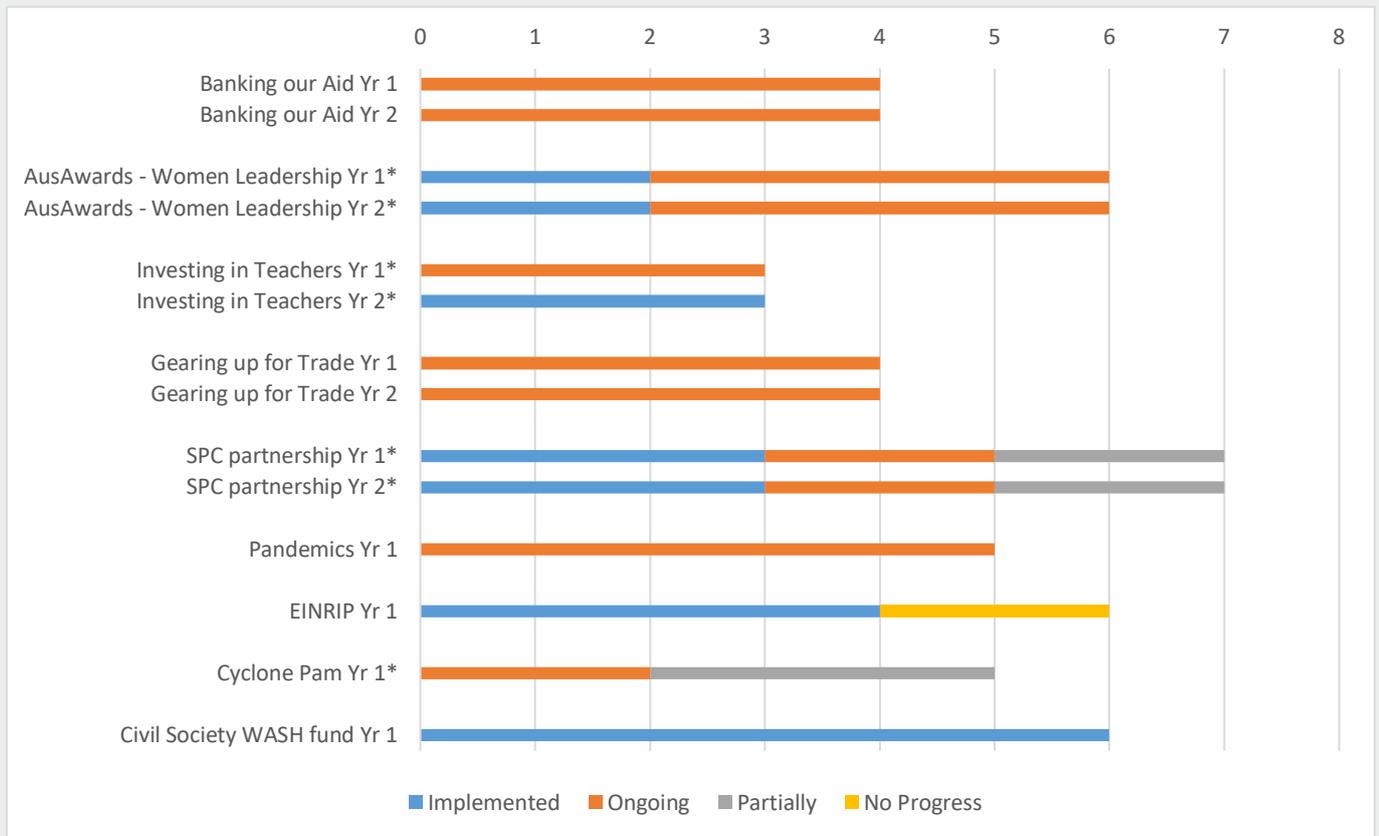


FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION OF MANAGEMENT RESPONSES

Evaluations being reviewed for a second time show progress with 33% of management responses being ‘fully implemented’, an increase from 21% in the previous year’s response.

For evaluations being reviewed for a second time, implementation has largely remained the same as last year (see figure 4). The exception to this being the Investing in Teachers evaluation which has progressed its four recommendations from ‘ongoing implementation’ to ‘implemented’. Where implementation is ‘ongoing’, such as for the Banking our Aid 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. These recommendations are unlikely to be ‘fully implemented’ at any time in the future. For the SPC evaluation, two recommendations have been classified as ‘partially implemented’ as they are made up of some sub-recommendations that are ongoing and some that are not being progressed.

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, the degree of implementation has been varied with management responses reflecting all four categories of implementation (Figure 4).

The Civil Society WASH fund has fully implemented all ODE recommendations within a year of the publication of the evaluation. This has been the only program area to fully implement all recommendations in the first year since 2015. The implementing program area has indicated that their speedy uptake of ODE's recommendations, "points to an evaluation which had been well positioned to feed directly into forward planning and preparation for the follow-on program to the Civil Society WASH Fund. It can be easily argued that the Terms of Reference for the evaluation had been well thought through and that the forward looking nature of the recommendations meant that they could directly influence the design and roll out of our \$110.6 million investment in the Water for Women Fund."

Overall, evaluations being reviewed for the first time this year had a significantly higher percentage of ‘fully implemented’ responses (45%) than the cohort of evaluations being reviewed for the second time at a comparable point in time (21%) (See Figures 5 and 6 below).

Those second review evaluations however, had a much higher level of ‘ongoing implementation’ in their first year of review (71%) compared to this year’s first review cohort (32%). The fact that the ‘ongoing implementation’ category has not been superseded by the ‘fully implemented’ category in the second year of review suggests that the recommendations being implemented were not discrete activities that could be completed and that implementation would be ‘ongoing’ for the foreseeable future. Qualitative analysis of the ‘ongoing implementation’ responses supports this. An example of the style of recommendation that elicits an ‘ongoing’ response can be seen in recommendation 2 in Gearing up for Trade: Australia’s Support for Trade Facilitation Programs - DFAT should continue to build on its experience in incorporating gender and trade in its programs, and ensure all future trade facilitation program designs adequately consider gender dimensions and an analysis of gender gaps.

Figure 5: Degree of implementation of management responses to ODE recommendations, second review evaluations

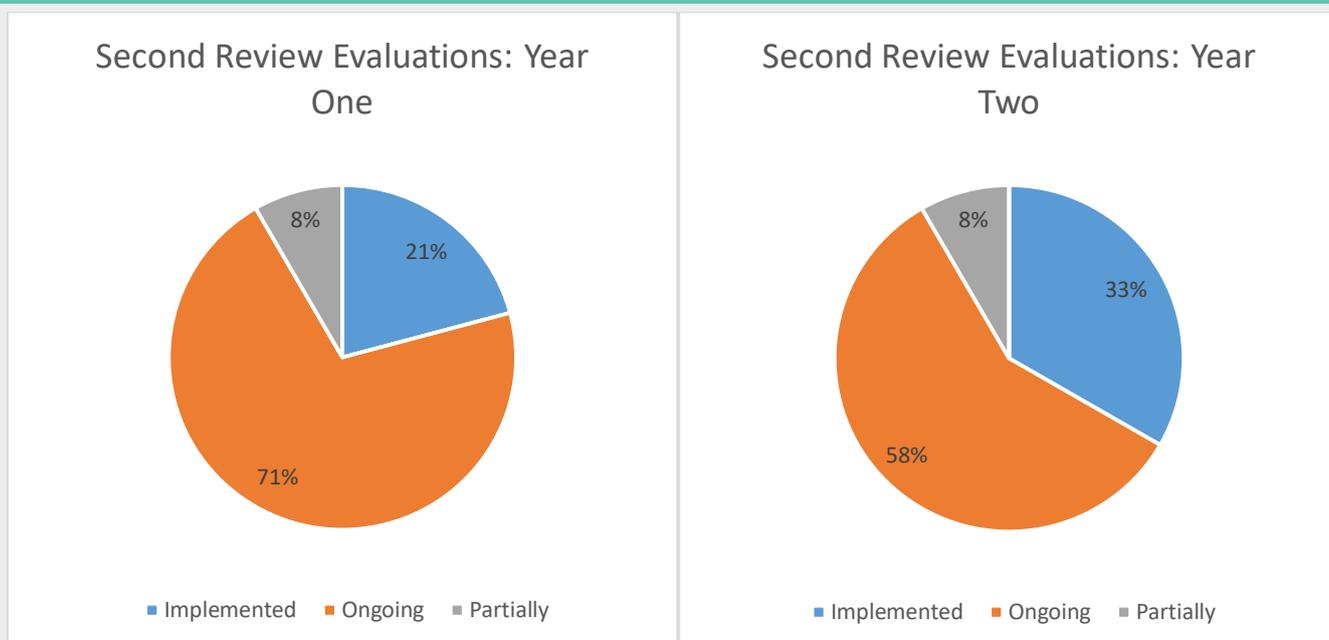
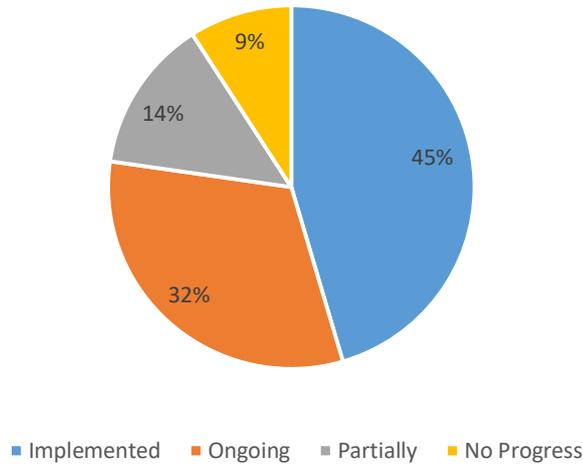


Figure 6: Degree of implementation of management responses to ODE recommendations, first review evaluations

First Review Evaluations



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

Program areas identified a number of different mechanisms as ‘the most significant influence’ on their programs following an ODE evaluation.

More often than not, the evaluation (and the follow up for this review) provided an opportunity to assess the lessons learned and consider alternative methods. The implementing area for the SPC partnership noted that ‘the ODE evaluation of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community – Government of Australia Partnership was an important opportunity to reassess the nature of DFAT’s engagement with SPC and guided negotiations on the revised Partnership Arrangement.’

In a similar vein, the program area responsible for the Eastern Indonesia National Roads Improvement Program stated that, “the evaluation strongly endorses this mode of aid investment and provides salient lessons for programs implementing physical infrastructure, particularly in the transport sector.”

The ‘Investing in Teachers’ evaluation has influenced the implementing area to ‘pursue a longitudinal evaluation approach’ and advocate for improvements to M&E structures within a number of education programs. They advised that without the ODE evaluation, they may have not been so targeted in gathering data on specific indicators (e.g. on teachers) given that the Education Strategy is not prescriptive on areas of specific investment.

Change in communication focus has been cited as the most significant change influenced by the evaluation of the Humanitarian Response to Cyclone Pam. The implementing program area now has a standard practice of developing a humanitarian response statement of intent and has also established a

crisis hub as a tool for communicating to the public and increasing transparency about Australia's response efforts.

ODE evaluations have also contributed to ensuring that important issues, such as gender equality and women's empowerment, are considered in the design and delivery of Australia Awards investments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If recommendations are endorsed by the IEC, ODE will implement them without producing a formal management response.

- 1) ODE staff should, where possible, avoid phrasing recommendations in a way that implies ongoing action with no clear end state, as this makes it difficult to measure progress in implementation in a meaningful way.
- 2) ODE should adjust the survey template and guidance for this review to ensure ease of completion and high quality responses, reflecting feedback from program areas.
 - a) Include more guiding explanations on each category of response (especially on the difference between the 'partially implemented' and 'ongoing implementation' categories) to strengthen consistency of reporting.
 - b) The template should be amended to include the use of drop-down menus and better layout to guide staff when completing the template.
 - c) ODE branding should be included in the template to give the survey more prominence.