

**Independent Progress Review of Tonga Education Support Program II
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE AND LEARNING AND DISSEMINATION**

Investment Objective/s

The Tonga Education Support Program II (TESPII) aims to improve equitable access, improve early grade student learning outcomes and strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Training (MET). It is a \$6.5 million program (Australian contribution) which commenced in April 2013 and will be completed in June 2016.

Investment Summary

AidWorks number	INK888		
Commencement date	1 April 2013	Completion date	30 June 2016
Total Australian \$	AUD6.5 million (and New Zealand co-finance TOP 5 million)		
Delivery organisation(s)	Ministry of Education and Training		
Implementing partner(s)	Ministry of Education and Training		
Country/Region	Tonga		
Primary sector	Education		

Independent Progress Review Summary

Review Objective: The Independent Progress Review (IPR) was undertaken 27 months after the commencement of TESPII as part of DFAT's standard quality performance processes. The review had two purposes:

- to inform priority actions for Ministry of Education and Training (MET) and development partners for the remaining period of TESPII with a view to sustaining achievements; and
- to provide information to help inform development partners' decisions on future support to education in Tonga beyond TESPII.

Review Completion Date: September 2015

Review Team: Ms Sue Emmot, Team Leader and Evaluation Specialist; Mr Rob McIntosh, Team Member and Organisational Development Specialist; two officials from DFAT Canberra and one Government of Tonga representative.

Independent Progress Review Key Messages

Progress in delivering TESPII's intended outputs has been variable.

At the classroom level there is evidence that curriculum materials are generally available and that systems for professional development and school based management are generally working. Access to these resources appears equitable across the islands. The school based management and grants require continued funding.

However, results to date are not commensurate with the amount of time and financial input from development partners and MET. The ambition of the program is greater than the capacity to implement it or within the timeframes involved.

The choice of earmarked budget support as the modality has also proved to be challenging for MET and development partners. There have been multiple donor programs running simultaneously in the education sector, which creates a complex operating environment and a high administrative burden for MET.

Recommendations and Management Response

The Independent Progress Review made four recommendations regarding program improvement opportunities and options for support beyond the current life of TESPII.

DFAT will engage in ongoing dialogue between development partners and MET, particularly through the Joint Program Oversight Group (JPOG), to identify areas of support required to ensure TESPII achieves realistic objectives and targets for the remaining period of the program. DFAT will focus its engagement particularly on the three key priorities identified by the review (see also recommendations 1-3).

DFAT will work with development partners and Government of Tonga to identify options for continued support for education beyond the life of TESPII. This includes consideration of DFAT consolidating its support to education on skills development and scholarships. This is an ongoing conversation with government and development partners, and will be considered as part of negotiations to develop a new Aid Partnership between Australia and Tonga.

DFAT's responses to the specific recommendations are as follows.

Recommendation 1: MET to increase co-ordination of core MET activities and progressive mainstreaming of key functions such as the school based management unit to ensure activities align.

Response: Agreed, noting this is primarily a recommendation for MET. It may be necessary to allocate some of the existing TESPII funding to integrate the school-based management function, build capacity to carry it out and mentor new staff in their roles. Completion of these activities is essential to ensure the benefits of TESPII will be sustained. Technical assistance could also play a valuable role in helping build MET's capacity to meet this recommendation.

Action: Through the Joint Program Oversight Group (JPOG), DFAT will work with MET and development partners to identify areas of support needed to implement this recommendation and provide technical assistance as required, in line with the revised TESPII work plan.

Responsibility: DFAT DHOM and Senior Program Manager, with JPOG members from MET and NZ MFAT.

Recommendation 2: MET critically needs a clear plan for strengthening the Education Management Information System (EMIS) to produce good quality system information to support future planning, reporting and resource allocation.

Response: Agreed. MET/TESPII may benefit from engagement with a new regional technical support facility established at the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) to assist Pacific Island countries in improving their national EMIS.

Action: DFAT will work with MET and development partners to identify areas where we can provide assistance to MET to implement this recommendation, either through TESPII or regional programs.

Responsibility: DFAT DHOM and Senior Program Manager, with JPOG members from MET and NZ MFAT.

Recommendation 3: MET to prioritise delivery of professional development, including for principals, in the next 12 months to make the most difference to teaching and learning in the classroom.

Response: Agreed. Together with planning and information, professional development is a critical area that can underpin a sustainable shift in the way the Tongan education system functions.

Actions: DFAT will work with MET and development partners to ensure professional development activities are included in the revised TESPII work plan.

Responsibility: DFAT DHOM and Senior Program Manager, with JPOG members from MET and NZ MFAT.

Recommendation 4: Development partners funding for education should be continued, with the level of funding dependent on the ability of MET to strengthen its system and remove some of the blockages that have slowed progress to date. Development partners should consider using a mixed approach: general budget support for established system support such as school grants and a more managed funding modality for other initiatives which require closer engagement from development partners.

Response: Agreed. The nature of Australia's support to education in Tonga is an ongoing conversation with government and development partners, and will be considered as part of negotiations to develop a new Aid Partnership between Australia and Tonga. This includes consideration of DFAT consolidating its support to focus on skills development and scholarships.

Action: DFAT will work with Government of Tonga and development partners to identify options for any continued support to education and skills development beyond the life of TESPII.

Responsibility: DFAT HOM and DHOM, with Government of Tonga.

Learning and dissemination plan

To support organisational learning and program management improvement activities DFAT will:

- share the report with program stakeholders who participated in the evaluation, and DFAT education specialists;
- publish the final report on the DFAT website; ensure the report's analysis feeds into ongoing dialogue with partners and programming decisions; and
- monitor implementation of recommendations through the Joint Program Oversight Group, Australian Aid Quality Check processes and regular MET-DFAT discussions.

Prepared by: Polynesia and Micronesia Section

Approved by: _____ *Date:* _____

Ms Jenny Da Rin, ASPZB