

**Evaluation of Australian and New Zealand support to
The University of the South Pacific 2010–2012
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE**

Initiative Summary

Initiative Name	University of the South Pacific Partnership		
AidWorks initiative number	INJ054		
Commencement date	1 January 2010	Completion date	31 December 2013
Total Australian \$	32,475,000		
Total other \$	0		
Delivery organisation(s)			
Implementing partner(s)	The University of the South Pacific		
Country/Region	Pacific		
Primary sector	Education		
Initiative objective/s	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhance the success of USP Students through improved student services. 2. Increase USP's research capacity, leading to greater access, applications and benefit of its research to the region. 3. Strengthen USP's administration and academic programs, enabling the delivery of efficient, relevant and quality services. 4. Build public awareness of outcomes of the Partnership. <p>We aim to achieve these objectives by supporting the priorities of USP's Strategic Plan through budget support and incentive funds targeted to policy priority areas.</p>		

Evaluation Summary

Evaluation Objective: The review looked at the Australia-USP and New Zealand-USP Partnerships to evaluate the impact and outcomes of the support. A key objective of the review is to utilise the advice and recommendations generated to inform the development of any new Australian support to USP.

Evaluation Completion Date: 31 December 2012

Evaluation Team: Prof Kate Ashcroft (Team Leader), Prof Joan Cooper (team member) and Lori Banks Dutta (AusAID Evaluation Manager)

AusAID's response to the evaluation report

- The final report submitted by the review team meets the quality criteria in AusAID guidance on evaluation reports. It addresses the terms of reference and incorporates feedback on the draft. The report reflects an understanding of the key issues, the rationale for recommendations is provided

and there is an executive summary for decision-makers. The style, format and writing are clear and accessible.

- The review was a useful opportunity to get an independent view of the Australia-USP Partnership, particularly as it was a new modality of engagement with USP when it was signed in 2010. The review confirms that the Partnership has been useful to USP in achieving 80 per cent of its key performance indicators in its strategic plan 2010-12. As much as impact can be attributed, AusAID funding has had a positive impact on USP's ability to achieve its strategic objectives.
- Our view that the Partnership modality has strengthened and deepened Australia's relationship with USP is supported by the review findings. The review notes that management arrangements for the Partnership work well supported by the frequent engagement on the ground between AusAID and USP. In highlighting the substantial work that has been done by USP senior management and staff to turn around finances, improve governance, review and ensure the relevance of its course offerings and improve the overall quality of its services to member countries, the review affirms our observation of USP's activities over the initial term of the Partnership. In suggesting that USP has some way to go to achieve its aspirations for equitable experiences for learners at regional campuses, including IT connectivity; student support services and HR management, the review team has pointed to issues that we will consider targeting for future support.
- The review found that the targets in the Partnership are largely focussed on inputs and outputs, rather than outcomes and higher level objectives. Noting USP's progress over the 2010-12 period and the maturity of the relationship between Australia and USP, the team has recommended that future support be based on more demanding outcomes and results. We take the point, and will include a more robust, outcomes-focussed performance framework in future Partnership support.
- The team noted that their work was somewhat constrained by the "relatively data-poor environment", though they felt confident basing their findings and recommendations on the quantitative and qualitative data collected (and it is notable that they did not offer a recommendation around this point). The lack of baseline information and comprehensive performance data is a concern. It is clear however, that USP systems are evolving and further planned developments will enable capture and reporting of more comprehensive data. The Dashboard Intelligence Business System (DIBS) can already provide data on institutional KPIs: pass rate, completions, retention, etc. disaggregated by gender, level of study, program, and country of citizenship. We have begun discussions with USP on the importance of reporting results to communicate their progress, the benefits accruing to member states, and the return on investment in USP. Holding USP accountable for reporting against its Strategic Plan and institutional KPIs will ensure that this type of information is more regularly available.
- Interesting points were raised by the team on USP's approach to gender and disability. The review noted that USP is addressing these issues, albeit at a basic level. Australia has encouraged and supported USP's efforts on these two cross-cutting issues, as they are priorities for Australia's aid program. Future support to keep the focus on this work could assist USP broaden its approach to these cross-cutting issues. Instead of focussing on females, USP might begin to address any inequity between males and females as gender issues (i.e. underperformance of males in education in the Pacific). For disability, progress in this area might be increased numbers of students with disability attending and being provided with the services they need to succeed at USP.
- The recommendation around support for mental illness and intellectual disabilities may be premature. There is little support in the region for students with these challenges. It is therefore unlikely that many students would present to USP qualified to begin University study. For individuals that do, their needs can be addressed on a case-by-case basis; much as other students with disabilities are supported now.

Considerations for the future engagement with USP

- The review provides a good basis for reflection on the Partnership in preparation for the development of multi-year funding to USP to commence in 2014. The review recommends that Australia continues support through the Partnership to 2018 (in line with the timing of USP's new strategic plan), with minor adjustments as noted above, to support USP's transformation to the excellent University that the Pacific needs. AusAID intends to move forward with the engagement with USP and will consider the review recommendations in discussions with USP on the next phase of the relationship, and incorporate them as appropriate.

- USP's Strategic Plan 2013-18 will guide its activities for the period. As the Plan articulates the strategic directions for USP (in consultation with stakeholders and approved by Council) Australia's investment in USP for the medium term (3-5 years) is likely to support the plan. There is also potential for support to USP under AusAID's updated Pacific Education and Skills Development Agenda (PESDA) and its associated delivery strategy. There may be scope for consolidating support to USP under the Partnership as subsequent initiatives under the PESDA are implemented.
- A Regional Situation Analysis (RSA) for the Pacific has been drafted as background to the development of a Regional Program Strategy for AusAID. The RSA identifies provision of regional public goods and the Australian Government's Comprehensive Aid Policy Framework (CAPF) as the filters for identifying initiatives for support and prioritisation under the regional program. As USP is the example of a provider of regional public goods in the RSA, it is expected that ongoing support to USP will fit within this new framework.
- A delivery strategy for Pacific regional organisations will be drafted in the first half of 2013 to guide the development of multi-year investment in regional organisations under the new Pacific Regional Strategy. The development of multi-year funding to USP will be subject to this delivery strategy, which is likely to support Partnerships as a modality.
- The recommendations of the review, the USP Strategic Plan 2013-18, the PESDA, AusAID's Pacific Regional Strategy, and the Delivery Strategy for Regional Organisations will all be considered in discussions on the next phase of the engagement between Australia and USP. This will ensure that the broad ranging analysis undertaken to inform these strategic and policy documents comes to bear on the development of the next phase of Australia's support for USP, building on what has been achieved to date and optimising the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the engagement.

AusAID's response to the specific recommendations made in the report

Recommendation	Response	Actions	Responsibility
1. Some project funding should continue, but at a reduced level.	<p>Agree</p> <p>There have been mixed results from project funding under the Partnership. However, there are projects such as the Future Climate Leaders' Program which have delivered desired outcomes for the Pacific. Sectoral projects which are addressing an identified need in the region and are in line with USPs broader strategic objectives should continue to be supported.</p>	<p>AusAID will negotiate the next phase agreement with USP to include the flexibility to support mutually agreed sectoral projects assessed as priorities on a case-by-case basis.</p>	<p>Regional Education Team (Suva)</p>

Recommendation	Response	Actions	Responsibility
2. USP and AusAID should develop a more critical stance to project planning, especially to the feasibility of the activities given the timelines ascribed to them.	<p>Agree</p> <p>Costing, budgeting and project management should be strengthened to ensure projects implemented by USP program areas are completed on time and on budget.</p>	<p>AusAID will prioritise scrutiny of proposals (including external appraisal, where appropriate) for project funding and work with counterparts at USP to ensure budgets and timeframes are realistic.</p>	<p>Regional Education Team (Suva)</p>
3. Wherever possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AusAID and NZ MFAT should continue to use a common reporting format, which is compatible with the annual cycle for activity planning and budgeting at USP and the triennial cycle of strategic planning and funding from other sources. Funds supplied and activities supported, whether on a competitive, commercial or incentive/core funding or project basis should be reported according to a common timetable, compatible with USP's own planning and reporting cycle. The flow of funds from competitive, commercial or incentive/core funding should form part of one overarching partnership and reporting agreement. 	<p>Agree all points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing established practice of common reporting aligned with USP processes minimises the accountability burden for USP and the stretching of resources at Post. In the main, reporting for all AusAID funding occurs on the timetable for the HLCs, which are timed for compatibility with USPs planning and reporting cycle. For efficiency, it is preferable to AusAID that all funds provided to USP form part of a single Partnership framework. However, due to the nature of the PESDA delivery strategy, consolidation of support to USP may be outside of the scope of the next phase of support, though it is a longer term goal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AusAID will continue the requirement for tripartite HLCs and accept the common reporting format for the term of the current Partnership arrangement (through 2013). Consideration will be given to continuing this practice in development of future support to USP from 2014, in consultation with USP and NZMFAT. AusAID will ensure the common reporting timetable is retained in the next phase of the engagement and will seek to ensure additional activities adhere to this schedule as they are agreed. Within the anticipated guidelines of the PESDA delivery strategy and the delivery strategy for regional organisations, the flow of funds in the next phase of support to USP will come under a consolidated Partnership framework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Education Team (Suva), in consultation with USP and NZMFAT Regional Education Officer Regional Education Officer

Recommendation	Response	Actions	Responsibility
<p>4. Incentive funding in the new USP/donor partnerships and some project funding in the next period should be targeted on the development of USP's human resources strategy for improving human capacity (particularly managers and key academics) and on improving its HRM function, policies and processes.</p>	<p>Partially agree</p> <p>As a key risk to USP achieving its strategic objectives, HR is an area that AusAID will explore for focussed support under the next phase of engagement with USP; however we may choose to provide this through mechanisms other than incentive or project funding.</p>	<p>AusAID will explore with USP the best approach to provide support for development of Human Resources Management in line with USP's established HR strategy and plan.</p> <p>PLP will provide management support to USP initially through mentoring and through engagement of a consulting firm to work on capacity and change management to support successful implementation of the strategic plan</p>	<p>Regional Education Team (Suva), in consultation with USP</p> <p>Pacific Leadership Program</p>
<p>5. Incentive funding should target student support in the areas of English language and ICT skills development and support at all regional campuses.</p>	<p>Partially agree</p> <p>USP has identified English language and ICT skills as graduate attributes that should be supported in all campuses. They have instituted compulsory university courses in each of these areas to ensure all undergraduate students acquire these competencies. Mastery of skills in these areas is vital to the employability of USP graduates, but AusAID will support acquisition of these skills at the foundation level through the PESDA delivery strategy.</p>	<p>AusAID will support students in the areas of English language and ICT skills development at foundation level to ensure they enter USP with these basic skills.</p>	<p>Regional Education Officer, in consultation with USP</p>

Recommendation	Response	Actions	Responsibility
6. Incentive funding should focus on student support services at the local campuses and promoting teaching methodologies and student services that meet the needs of students with mental health issues, intellectual learning problems and disadvantages.	<p>Partially Agree</p> <p>We support USP equitably providing student support services for all campuses and providing services for students with special needs based on individual requirements for assistance. However, as few university level students from the Pacific present with specific issues of mental health and intellectual learning problems, these issues will not be targeted for incentive funding.</p>	<p>AusAID will explore with USP the potential for incentive targets for student support services for regional campuses, noting that the number of incentive targets for each year will be limited to avoid unrealistic expectations of USP.</p>	<p>Regional Education Officer, in consultation with USP</p>
7. These services should be available to more students, including postgraduate students, so they may then go on to successful further study.	<p>Agree</p> <p>Student support services should be available to all, including postgraduate students, to support their success at USP</p>	<p>In discussing the possibility of an incentive target for equitable provision of student services, the scope of these services will be addressed.</p>	<p>Regional Education Officer, in consultation with USP</p>
8. Study at USP at various levels up to postgraduate level should be part of the scholarship offerings by AusAID and NZ MFAT in the next funding period.	<p>Agree</p> <p>The Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships currently cover study at various levels up to postgraduate for study in the region (including at USP).</p>	<p>Advise colleagues in the Scholarships area of the recommendation, as Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships are offered bilaterally (not through the regional program) based on the human resource development needs of Pacific governments.</p>	<p>Regional Education Officer</p>

Recommendation	Response	Actions	Responsibility
<p>9. There should be continued support from AusAID and NZ MFAT through project funding and/or core/incentive funding to improve ICT connectivity and to upgrade the human/technical support for students' learning in regional campuses so that they can take advantage of e-resources and learning opportunities.</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>Australia has been a frequent supporter of ICT development at USP, most recently funding the upgrade of the USP's internet speed to STM4 from STM1. These developments should be supported to ensure students and staff have reliable access to online resources, including Open Educational Resources (OERs)</p>	<p>Explore with USP opportunities for support to ICT development through the PESDA delivery strategy.</p>	<p>Regional Education Team, in consultation with USP</p>
<p>10. AusAID should focus some of its project funding on research relevant to the region's needs.</p>	<p>Partially Agree</p> <p>AusAID has supported the priority area of research at USP since 2010 with excellent results. Support for research has been provided through core (strategic plan) funding. As research continues to be a priority area for USP (with specific attention to research relevant to the region) and they have demonstrated success with the current funding arrangement, it may not be prudent to projectise this support. This is particularly true given the mixed results with projects at USP and the earlier recommendation around projects.</p>	<p>Discuss with USP an appropriate way to continue support for research, through the PESDA delivery strategy, emphasising the need to increase research relevant to the region.</p>	<p>Regional Education Officer, in consultation with USP</p>

Recommendation	Response	Actions	Responsibility
11. AusAID and NZ MFAT should continue to invest, through core and/or incentive funding, in reducing the inequity between the facilities at the Suva campus and the regional campuses, including investment in increased human resources, teaching space, more ICT equipment and bigger and better stocked science laboratories and libraries.	<p>Agree</p> <p>Regional campus development is a priority for USP and will be supported by AusAID to ensure equity in the facilities and services available to regional students.</p>	<p>Explore with USP opportunities for support to regional campus development, through the PESDA delivery strategy.</p>	<p>Regional Education Team, in consultation with USP</p>
12. In the next funding period, AusAID and NZ MFAT should negotiate with USP a framework that moves the balance between input and process targets and indicators somewhat towards outcomes and outputs.	<p>Agree</p> <p>It is important that we are able to “tell the story” of USP’s development and Australia’s contribution to it. To do this more outcomes based reporting and data will be required.</p>	<p>Enlist the assistance of an M&E expert to help develop the performance assessment framework for the next phase of the engagement, in consultation with USP, to ensure necessary M&E systems are in place</p>	<p>Regional Education Officer, in consultation with USP</p>
13. NZ MFAT and AusAID should continue to fund USP through the partnership agreements and maintain core and/or incentive funding at an increased level.	<p>Agree</p> <p>The Partnership modality has worked well and has provided a useful platform for deepening Australia’s engagement with USP.</p>	<p>Advocate for increased levels of funding to USP in AusAID budgeting processes and negotiate the next phase of engagement with USP with the intention of building on the current Partnership.</p>	<p>Regional education team, in consultation with USP</p>