



Vanuatu Education and Skills Design Stage 1 – High Level Modality Review

December 2024

Executive Summary

Australia is a long-term partner and supporter of education and training in Vanuatu. This has ranged across early childhood care and education (ECCE), primary education and skills/technical and vocational education and training (TVET). These sub-sectors remain a core priority for Australia's development cooperation with Vanuatu. Australia's *International Development Policy*¹ recognises the centrality of education and training for every nation's ongoing development, and its Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) puts increased emphasis on measuring Australia's contribution to improved learning outcomes, skills training and positive policy change in the sector².

Education and skills are important Government of Vanuatu (GoV) priorities, as articulated in the *National Sustainable Development Plan 2030*, which commits to developing "an inclusive, equitable and quality education system with life-long learning for all". Specific directions are contained in the *Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategy*, and the *National Skills Development Policy 2023-2030*.

Two significant investments comprise the majority of Australia's current support to Vanuatu's education and skills sectors: the Vanuatu Skills Partnership (VSP) and the Vanuatu Australia Education Support Program (VAESP), which is inclusive of Australia Awards Vanuatu. The programs are separate, with unique scope and focus: VAESP focuses on working within the formal education sector to support the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to improve quality, access and management in the early years of education to improve education delivery in schools, improve student access and learning outcomes and system effectiveness; VSP focuses on skills development for employment and entrepreneurship and the strengthening of links between the training and productive sectors for inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and supporting developmental leadership and good governance to drive service delivery reform. Managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) from the Australian High Commission in Port Vila ('Post'), both programs conclude in 2026³. DFAT has therefore commissioned a design team to work with stakeholders to design the next phase of Australian investment and support.

The first phase of the design process is a **high-level modality review** to synthesise the strengths and challenges in VSP and VAESP, and to recommend the best modality for the next design, particularly whether the two programs should remain as separate investments, or be brought more closely together in a single design and contract. The overall aim is to increase the coherence, coordination and efficiency of Australia's programming in these sectors, reflecting their joint positioning under Vanuatu's MoET, and to build on the most successful elements of both programs to enable greater achievement of development outcomes for Vanuatu and its citizens.

The high-level review examined existing documentation and evidence, and has identified strengths and issues in both current programs:

¹ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/australias-international-development-policy>

² <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/performance-delivery-framework.pdf>

³ The programs end at quite different times in 2026, however: VSP in January and VAESP in December.

VAESP, with its mixed modality design (managing contractor with a mix of international and national staffing and technical advisory support, direct funding arrangements⁴ (DFA) and independent education specialist) is well suited to the complex context and brings some efficiencies. It is structurally aligned with MoET (e.g. co-located advisers, funding aligned with MoET annual plans) and works in support of MoET, with a high degree of relevance to GoV and GoA priorities. There is evidence of promising practices beginning to emerge, in curriculum improvement, parent support and inclusive education. The Australia Awards Vanuatu program is valued and has the potential to grow and innovate to increase its impact. The direct funding arrangement is flexible, valued by GoV, and can accommodate additional funding when required to respond to disasters or other emerging needs.

There are some significant issues facing VAESP, however. Progress towards its outcomes is dependent on the leadership and priorities in MoET, and combined with VAESP's responsive approach this has encouraged a focus on the delivery of outputs. How VAESP outputs are contributing to sustained change at a classroom level is less evident. There is significant scope for a more adaptive, politically-informed approach guided by a robust theory of change and strategic risk management. Local expertise and leadership are under-utilised and undervalued, and there has been a prolonged lack of meaningful monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). As a result, evidence of positive outcomes, including in gender equality and disability inclusion, is limited.

There are signs of some disconnect between the different component modalities i.e. the contractor, (currently Tetra Tech), direct funding, the independent education adviser, and some challenges in MoET management of the DFA, with gaps in monitoring, auditing, reporting and expending. There is uncertainty about the future of Open VEMIS (Vanuatu's education management information system), which has been supported by VAESP with plans for a new EMIS with funding from the Global Partnership for Education.

VSP is locally led, managed and staffed, uses a support contractor modality, has access to support from international personnel on key technical issues, and is complemented by a Strategic Adviser engaged by Post. The support contractor modality is provided by Palladium (a managing contractor engaged by DFAT) and operates in support of the local leadership, through a Support Hub which provides specialist inputs on demand in areas including MEL (known as Quality Systems), strategic communications, contracts and finance, and programming/partnerships. Implementation is complemented by co-investment from the GoV and some targeted direct financing.

VSP has been widely judged to be a leading example of an effective DFAT investment, demonstrating how genuine local leadership and a long-term, adaptive and politically-informed program can contribute to tangible development outcomes. The program has effectively decentralised delivery, including through the integration of Skills Centres within MoET, and their partnerships with provincial government. There are collaborative and practical partnerships with productive sectors and with local communities, supporting sound links between skills development and market access.

⁴ Direct funding has also been used to provide funding for VSP to support economic recovery activities in Ambae.

The incubation of local, developmental leadership is a core achievement of VSP and represents an important element in program culture and priorities. It is the product of intensive, purposeful and sustained planning and human resource management. VSP has a strong track record on the inclusivity of women and people with disabilities which is influencing well beyond its own activities. The ‘support contractor’ model is central to this success, along with a strong culture of performance and learning, high quality monitoring, evaluation and learning (quality systems).

Most of the issues facing VSP have emerged from its expansion and its success. It navigates multiple relationships and partnerships at national and sub-national levels, is facing high demand for its assistance which is stretching program resources, and there are risks associated with the program’s reliance on key individuals.

Summarising the key strengths and issues which have been identified through this rapid review of both VAESP and VSP implementation, a number of broad findings emerge. These have informed the design team’s recommended approach to investment design:

- **Balancing national and sub-national work** is a crucial key to success, aligned to Vanuatu’s commitment to decentralisation and the priority GoV places on the provincial level.
- **Sub-national service delivery** strengthening can build community and political demand for good quality services and sound policy and budgeting, opening the doors for national-level influence. It can also spread risk and create opportunities for innovative work and partnerships.
- **Explicit alignment with Vanuatu’s policy priorities** is essential and lays the foundation for collaboration, local ownership, and local relevance.
- **Political instability in Vanuatu persists**, so programs need to navigate that reality sensitively, strategically and creatively and with strong information and relationships. Working at national and provincial levels, and with other forms of governance, is important.
- Understanding and **operating within the political economy, with a systems-relationships focus**, is important, as is working with reformist leaders in the system, at all levels.
- **Organisational culture** is equally critical to success: this entails long-term local developmental leadership and the incubation of future leaders, supported by culturally-appropriate human resource management and an organisational culture that supports well-informed adaptation, accountability for performance, and constructive collaboration.
- A **strong team led by reform-minded, developmental leaders** is essential for success, and it requires purposeful planning, support and allocation of resources, and courageous human resource management.
- combination of **local leadership with an effective support contractor model** has enabled strong outcomes while more conventional managing contractor structures have been less effective. Further, shifting to an effective support contractor model has required extensive management and advocacy effort by Post and the Strategic Adviser, over many years.
- **GEDSI achievements** require cultural and contextual alignment, strong partnerships with government at all levels and civil society, integration within systems, and strong MEL. They also require substantive investment, both funding and skilled staffing.

- **MEL and strategic communications** have been key success factors, or their absence has been a weakness, so prioritising investment in these is essential.
- The **DFA mechanism** has allowed efficiencies and the flexibility to respond to emerging priorities. It is highly valued by GoV and provides important autonomy for MoET which should be protected. Some efforts to improve the complementarity of support delivered through the DFA and the MC or support contractor support are evident, but have been largely ad hoc and without adequate MEL.
- Many **opportunities for collaboration exist** but have not fully been realised between VAESP and VSP. Examples include investing in stronger pathways between schooling and skills offerings, coordination regarding GEDSI approaches, collaboration across education-skills (e.g. Farm to School links with curriculum), and creating closer links with Australia Awards.

Conclusions and recommendation

Based on document review, consultations and team discussions, **the design team recommends that the next phase of Australian support to education and skills in Vanuatu be developed as a significant, integrated investment design document which incorporates all the components.** This will deliver efficiencies, enable the expansion of the support contractor approach, and will suit a significant investment which is wholly focused within a single sector.

This approach is recommended based on the judgement that a combined multi-component investment supported by a contractor will deliver the greatest gains in both efficiency and effectiveness, without significant additional risk.

Experience has shown that Post's role has been instrumental in enabling the support contractor model to develop and become established. Therefore, the design must also address the required resources within DFAT to ensure the Post can provide the essential strategic and management input which will enable the greatest achievement of investment outcomes.

With details to be determined and confirmed through the design process, the pillars or components are likely to include targeted investments in: skills, basic education (including infrastructure), scholarships, and complementary support for any future direct funding arrangement. The program logic should explicitly feature the 'ways of working' so that local developmental leadership, partnership, inclusion, and adaptive management are resourced appropriately and given sufficient priority.



Acknowledgements

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We were finalising this report as the awful earthquake struck Vanuatu, on 17 December 2024. Our ni-Vanuatu team members are, with their fellow citizens and residents, still experiencing the aftermath, while the rest of the team sends all our thoughts, prayers and sympathy to the resilient people of Vanuatu.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Current program summaries	2
2	Review overview.....	3
2.1	Method.....	4
3	Findings.....	5
3.1	Education sector support: VAESP, including the DFA	5
3.2	Skills sector support: VSP	17
4	Summary and recommendation.....	24
4.1	Modality for future design.....	25
5	Next steps.....	28
	Annex 1: List of people consulted	29
	Annex 2: Documents consulted	34
	Annex 3: Terms of Reference.....	37

Acronyms

Abbreviation	Meaning
AAPS	Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships
AAV	Australia Awards Vanuatu
ADRA	Adventist Development Relief Agency
ANS	Assessment of National Systems
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit (Vanuatu)
DFA	Direct funding arrangement
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
ECE	Early childhood education
GEDSI	Gender equality, disability and social inclusion
GfG	Governance for Growth program
GoV	Government of Vanuatu
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IES	Independent Education Specialist
IMR	Investment Monitoring Report (DFAT)
LEG	Local Education Group
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MC	Managing contractor
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand)
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training (Vanuatu)
MoJCS	Ministry of Justice and Community Services (Vanuatu)
MTR	Mid-term Review
NER	Net enrolment ratio
NSDP	National Sustainable Development Plan 2030 (Vanuatu)
NUV	National University of Vanuatu

Abbreviation	Meaning
OV	Open VEMIS
PAF	Performance Assessment Framework
PEO	Provincial Education Officer
PFM	Public financial management
PILNA	Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
PMO	Prime Minister's Office (Vanuatu)
PSC	Public Service Commission
PSP	Parent Support Program
PTAG	Provincial Technical Advisory Group
PTB	Provincial Training Board
SMT	Senior Management Team (VSP)
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
VAESP	Vanuatu Australia Education Support Program
VANSTA	Vanuatu Standardised Test of Achievement
VDPA	Vanuatu Disability Advocacy and Awareness Association
VEMIS	Vanuatu Education Management Information System
VIPAM	Vanuatu Institute of Public Administration and Management
VITE	Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education
VQA	Vanuatu Qualifications Authority
VSP	Vanuatu Skills Partnership
VSPD	Vanuatu Society for People with Disability

1 Introduction

The *National Sustainable Development Plan 2030*⁵ (NSDP) articulates Vanuatu’s long-term aspirations and intentions for national development across all sectors. It commits the nation to developing “an inclusive, equitable and quality education system with life-long learning for all”. The *Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategy*, and the *National Skills Development Policy 2023-2030* provide more specific national direction for the sector.

However, the education and training sector has faced multiple challenges over recent years, not least with the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions, several damaging tropical cyclones and other environmental disasters, and periodic government and policy instability and change. There have been many Ministers and gaps in sector leadership in the public sector, and industrial action by teachers in mid 2024 further illustrated the tensions and issues facing the sector. Meanwhile, amongst a generally negative trend in education outcomes in Pacific nations⁶, Vanuatu has had particularly striking drops in literacy and numeracy rates, as well as sizeable reductions in government funding invested in education per capita. There are also significant numbers of young people who are not in work, education or training⁷.

Australia is a long-term partner and supporter of education and training in Vanuatu. This has ranged across early childhood care and education (ECCE), primary education and skills/technical and vocational education and training (TVET). These sectors remain a core priority for Australia’s development cooperation with Vanuatu. Australia’s new *International Development Policy*⁸ recognises the centrality of education and training for every nation’s ongoing development, and its Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) puts increased emphasis on measuring Australia’s contribution to improved learning outcomes, skills training and positive policy change in the sector⁹. Two significant investments comprise the majority of Australia’s current support to Vanuatu’s education and skills sectors: the **Vanuatu Skills Partnership (VSP)** and the **Vanuatu Australia Education Support Program (VAESP)**. Managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) from the Australian High Commission in Port Vila (‘Post’), both programs conclude in 2026 - VSP in January, and VAESP in December.

The operational context and political economy in Vanuatu, as well as policy settings for both governments and the broader region, have evolved since the current designs of VAESP and VSP were created. Vanuatu’s refreshed Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) intentions are articulated in the Government of Vanuatu’s *National Gender Equality Policy 2020-2030* (NGEP) and *National Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2018 – 2025*. The MoET recently launched its new

⁵ <https://www.gov.vu/images/publications/Vanuatu2030-EN-FINAL-sf.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/pacific-education-backsliding-outcomes-financing-freefall>

⁷ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/pacific-education-backsliding-outcomes-financing-freefall>

⁸ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/australias-international-development-policy>

⁹ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/performance-delivery-framework.pdf>

Inclusive Education and Training Policy 2024 – 2030, and the *National Skills Development Policy 2023-2030*. DFAT's new *International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy*¹⁰ reaffirms Australia's support to realisation of the rights to education for learners with disabilities. DFAT's new *International Development Policy* and the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* place a stronger emphasis on locally led development, and on maximising the collective impact of donor investments. Therefore, DFAT has commissioned a Design Team to design the next phase of Australia's bilateral investments in the Vanuatu education and skills sectors.

The design process comprises two stages: a preliminary high-level modality assessment and review, synthesising key lessons from current programs and identifying opportunities to enhance the collective positive impact of Australia's overall support to the education and skills sectors. The overall aim is to recommend the best modality and design structure, which will increase the coherence, coordination and efficiency of Australia's programming in these sectors, reflecting their joint positioning under the Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). The emphasis is on responding to existing program strengths and identifying areas for improvement on the current investments, so that lessons and gains generated by both can inform a more joined-up approach to Australia's support to the national education and skills development system. Ultimately the design will aim to increase efficiency and amplify and expand the outcomes and impact of Australia's investments, for the benefit of Vanuatu and its citizens.

1.1 Current program summaries

1.1.1 Vanuatu Australia Education Support Program (VAESP)

The goal of VAESP is to support the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to achieve its goal of improving education access, quality and management, as detailed in the *Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategy* and operationalised through MoET's Corporate Plan. The central focus of VAESP is to support MoET to improve education delivery and learning outcomes in schools from early childhood care and education (ECCE) to year 6. The program works to increase both access to education, through strengthening infrastructure and inclusive approaches, as well as the quality of education delivery, through strengthening curriculum, teaching delivery and teacher management. VAESP also aims to support MoET's devolution at provincial and school levels, for improved planning, implementation and decision-making, as well as increased community and parental engagement.

VAESP works within MoET through a managing contractor (MC) (currently Tetra Tech), and includes direct funding to MoET through a direct funding arrangement (DFA) between Australia and Vanuatu. Guidance and oversight are provided via a high-level Steering Committee. VAESP is intended to contribute to the sustainability of outcomes through alignment with GoV priorities, staffing, timelines and activities. The program funds activities which aim to feed into, support and enhance local systems and MoET leadership, including through professional development of government staff. The VAESP MC

¹⁰ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/publications/australias-international-disability-equity-and-rights-strategy-advancing-equity-transform-lives>

also supports the administration of Australia Awards Vanuatu (AAV), which aims to address skills gaps identified in Vanuatu's *National Human Resource Development Plan*, and aligned with Government of Vanuatu's economic development priorities.

The current phase of education support, through VAESP, commenced in 2019 and is currently scheduled to conclude at the end of 2026.

1.1.2 Vanuatu Skills Partnership (VSP)

VSP is a locally led initiative that has established provincial Skills Centres (now integrated under the Tertiary Education Directorate (TED) of the MoET), which facilitate skills training and entrepreneurial support across key productive industry sectors, in partnership with a range of GoV ministries and all provincial governments. The two government agency counterparts for VSP are the MoET and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and all results are tracked against the aims of the NSDP. VSP has a strong focus on 'leadership incubation', supporting reformists at both provincial and national level to build coalitions to address challenges in the supply of in-demand skills for inclusive economic results. At the same time as maximising economic results, VSP seeks to strengthen the quality of, and access to, local training delivery, and the governance of the national skills development system. VSP also works directly with schools through its 'TVET in Schools' and 'Farm to School' initiatives.

VSP is locally led, managed and staffed, uses a support contractor modality, has access to support from international personnel on key technical issues, and is complemented by a Strategic Adviser engaged by Post. The support contractor modality is provided by Palladium (an MC engaged by DFAT) and operates in support of the local leadership, through a Support Unit which provides specialist inputs on demand in areas including MEL (known as Quality Systems), strategic communications, contracts and finance, and programming/partnerships. Implementation is complemented by co-investment from the GoV and some targeted direct financing.

VSP activities are increasingly embedded within MoET, as evidenced most notably by the ownership of Skills Centres by MoET, and the embedding of Provincial Skills Coordinators (PSCs) in MoET's organisational structure, as public servants with their salaries paid by GoV (topped up by VSP). There are also other GoV co-contributions from the productive sectors which are determined through joint annual planning.

The current phase of skills support, the fourth so far, commenced in 2017 and is currently scheduled to conclude in January 2026.

2 Review overview

The high-level modality review (stage 1 of the design) had two priorities:

- Analysing and synthesising the experiences of VSP and VAESP (inclusive of AAV) so the next phase of Australian investment can effectively build on successes and address challenges; and
- Determining the best modality and implementation approach for the investment itself. A key question to be addressed in this stage is how to structure the future investment, the degree of

integration or separation between support for skills, education and scholarships, and the most appropriate modality and contracting arrangement. As part of this, the review was required to recommend whether future design should be documented in a single, integrated investment design document, or two investment design documents.

Detailed, technical and design-specific issues¹¹ will be explored and addressed during the design stage in early 2025.

2.1 Method

The design team was commissioned late October 2024, and rapidly commenced work to prepare a Design Development Plan which set out the overall approach to the design, particularly the review stage. The review method was primarily a synthesis of existing documentation and evidence, complemented by targeted consultations with select stakeholders¹². DFAT, and the VSP and VAESP teams provided comprehensive document sets for review, and the team and DFAT worked together to plan a one-week program of stakeholder consultations in Port Vila on pre-specified dates (11-14 November) which coincided with the six-monthly VSP reflection and planning week. This timing provided the opportunity for the team to engage with officials and staff from the provinces, including Secretaries General and the Provincial Skills Coordinators without requiring provincial travel.

The structure of review consultations was designed to enable stakeholders to share openly their views on successes and challenges, taking into account local protocols and power dynamics. A mix of individual and group consultations were conducted and the team worked to ensure cultural protocols were followed to create a respectful environment for discussion.

The review included more than 30 consultation meetings with over 80 people¹³, including:

- GoV (including MoET, Provincial Governments, Ministry of Justice and Community Services (MoJCS), Departments of Agriculture and Tourism, Vanuatu Institute of Public Administration and Management (VIPAM)
- DFAT-supported programs (VAESP including Australia Awards, VSP, Governance for Growth)
- National University of Vanuatu (NUV), Vanuatu Qualifications Authority (VQA), New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), Civil Society (Vanuatu Society for People with Disability (VSPD), Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA)

The Australia-based design team members also held follow up discussions with some stakeholders during the margins of the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society Conference in Melbourne during the week of 25 November.

¹¹ This includes issues relating to climate change and disaster resilience which were not part of the review stage scope.

¹² As such, the review is not an 'evaluation' in the usual sense, and did not utilise a complete evaluation method.

¹³ Full list of people consulted is provided in Annex 1.

The draft report was submitted for review. Feedback was received from Post, including the Strategic Education and Skills Adviser, DFAT's Education, Design, GEDSI and Climate Change representatives and VAESP's Independent Education Specialist. The final report responds to and incorporates this feedback.

2.1.1 Limitations

Limitations to the review stage mainly resulted from the truncated timeframes for planning and implementation after the awarding of the contract. The timeframes were specified to ensure DFAT could finalise the review before the end of 2024. As a result, the document review was necessarily limited, focused on high priority documents and targeted sources for individual team members.

The review process was also limited by constraints in the design Team Leader's availability. She was unavailable to travel to Vanuatu for the required consultation dates, so the first round of in-country consultations was undertaken by the remainder of the core team, with the Team Leader contributing remotely during that week. That said, the consultations team undertook targeted data collection, and the synthesis of findings has been collaborative across the whole team. The review stage was always intended to be a high-level synthesis based on document review and consultations with key stakeholders, with the greater focus for the team being the design stage.

3 Findings

Based on the targeted document review and stakeholder consultations, the design team has synthesised the primary strengths of both current investments, and identified the main issues for the design to address.

3.1 Education sector support: VAESP, including the DFA

There are several key strengths in the current education sector investment, as well as a set of key issues which the future design will need to consider and respond to in order to enhance outcomes.

3.1.1 Strengths

a. Mixed modality design is well suited to complexity and has efficiencies

VAESP is delivered through mixed modalities:

- an MC, which manages financial and technical assistance (both local and international) to MoET and the administration of Australia Awards Vanuatu (AAV) (AUD47m);
- Direct Funding Arrangements (DFA) between DFAT and MoET (AUD54.3m) which provide grants to schools and support for priority needs e.g. rebuilding of schools post-cyclone;
- an Independent Education Specialist (IES) who provides on demand technical advice to DFAT and MoET, recently supplemented by the new Strategic Adviser role at Post for both skills and education¹⁴.

¹⁴ DFAT also has other smaller contracts and support for audits of the DFA

The blend of modalities is well suited to the complexity of the program, which requires a combination of system strengthening, organisational and individual capacity building, service delivery and coalition building for policy reform. The combination of modalities has the potential for facilitating collaboration between the MC, IES, AAV and MoET in working together to meet common targeted goals. DFAT Investment Monitoring Reports (IMRs) and MC reporting indicate the mixed modalities have enabled efficiencies with decisions made on a case-by-case basis as to which modality is most suited for delivery of different program activities.

The review found examples of where the modalities have been effectively leveraged to provide complementary support. For example, following a DFAT Public Financial Management (PFM) assessment in 2020, the MC was used to provide technical assistance to MoET to progress mitigation measures deemed necessary for DFAT to continue DFA funding¹⁵. Another example is the use of the DFA to support MoET with the provision of school grants and post-cyclone school rebuilds, which has been complemented by support through the MC for delivery of school-based management training and capacity development¹⁶, analysis of schools' use of grants to inform improvements of the grant policy¹⁷, and more recently, the provision of an infrastructure technical adviser. Consultations indicated that the IES allows for the provision of technical advice that is independent of, but also trusted by, MoET, DFAT and the MC, offering a valued 'critical friend' function. IMRs indicate that the IES has been particularly valued for bringing international 'best practice' and learnings from other similar countries in the region to the program.

b. Structural alignment with MoET (co-located advisers, funding aligned with MoET annual plans) and high degree of relevance to GoV and GoA policy priorities

The VAESP program logic and end of program outcomes are well aligned to MoET and GoV priorities, including the stated intention of strengthening decentralised delivery. Review consultations consistently emphasised the value of co-location of VAESP advisers in MoET for allowing for close collaboration and in many cases facilitating a sense of shared responsibility for activities. In recent years, the program has succeeded in aligning MC plans and MEL with MoET's corporate plan, which consultations and MC reporting confirm has been particularly valued by MoET. VAESP is involved in joint planning with MoET and has supported MoET to strengthen its planning processes, including greater involvement of provincial staff¹⁸.

The program's role in facilitating the provision of grants to kindergartens and schools and the transition from DFAT-GoV co-financing of grants to GoV now financing 96% (IMR 2024) is a good example of strategic alignment between VAESP funding and MoET, and leveraging the DFA to influence GoV policy implementation and resourcing. What is not clear from the available documentation is how and in what ways the program has learnt from this success and is using these learnings to inform future plans. We understand that the agreement for MoET to take over grant funding over time was built into DFAT-

¹⁵ IMR, 2021; VAESP Strengthening PFM in education sector, 2024

¹⁶ MTR 2022

¹⁷ VAESP Annual Report, 2023

¹⁸ VAESP Annual Report 2023, Strengthening PFM update 2024

MoET partnership agreements. However, there does not appear to be any systematic reflection on what were the enabling factors for this agreement to be upheld and effectively implemented, and what can be learnt from this experience to inform future approaches.

c. Promising practices: curriculum improvement, parent support program and inclusive education

Enhancing the quality of teaching at ECCE and primary levels has been a key objective of VAESP throughout both phases. To achieve this, VAESP has invested significantly in supporting MoET to develop the new outcome-based curriculum and associated teaching resources and, under phase 1, deliver field-based training for teachers. Reporting from phase 2 of VAESP consistently identifies the continued delivery of teacher training for the new curriculum as a key challenge. The challenges in this area have been further exacerbated with the reforming of the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education (VITE) into the School of Education within the National University of Vanuatu (NUV), the disbanding of MoET's dedicated in-service training unit and provincial level positions supporting teaching (e.g. the zone curriculum advisors), and disruptions caused by COVID-19 and environmental disasters¹⁹.

The 2023 Annual Report indicates VAESP has responded to these challenges through working closely with the MoET Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) to develop a school-based **Curriculum Improvement Plan**, that involves funding and training of Curriculum Improvement Officers based in the provinces to deliver school-based teacher professional development alongside provision of targeted curriculum resources. Strong local leadership within CDU and VAESP is being leveraged effectively to progress this initiative, with well-targeted support of international TA.

While it is early days with this initiative, it shows promise for addressing the need for greater engagement at a provincial level and the absence of sustained professional development support to teachers. It indicates the potential for strategically adaptive programming by VAESP and support for reform-minded local leadership. However, as will be discussed in the issues section below, it is not clear how this support is situated within a broader politically-aware strategy for engaging in the strengthening of sustainable models for ongoing teacher professional development.

The **Parent Support Program (PSP)** focusses on educating parents of ECCE-aged children, and has demonstrated promising results in reaching and benefitting parents across Vanuatu. Delivered in collaboration with Save the Children and UNICEF, each organisation focusses on different provinces. The 2024 IMR indicates that 100% of surveyed parents who were engaged in the program reported better communication with their children. VAESP's 2024 annual plan reports that by 2023, the PSP had reached all school communities in Vanuatu. Key informants reported that the PSP is an example of an education initiative which was successfully delivered in all provinces. While PSP is focused on continuing education for children during and after disasters and is not a longer-term program, lessons from this could inform future decentralisation efforts.

The 2022 MTR indicates gains in delivery of **inclusive education**. Progress includes increased awareness of educational options for children with disabilities as a result of communications campaigns, technical input to the development of MoET's new *Inclusive Education and Training Policy 2024 – 2030*, and the

¹⁹ MTR, 2022

provision of resources in English, French and Bislama which have helped teachers in 45 “model” inclusion schools in Shefa and Penama provinces to identify and support students with disabilities²⁰. This occurred as part of a lengthy pilot that ended in 2024²¹. The 2024 IMR reports that 100% of model school teachers surveyed had increased their understanding of how to support students with diverse learning needs in the classroom.

d. Australia Awards program is valued and has potential to grow and innovate

In 2019, the management of the Australian Awards Vanuatu (AAV) program was transitioned from the Australian High Commission to come under the VAESP contract with the VAESP MC. The MC is responsible for the operational management of AAV with DFAT continuing to play a strategic role in engagement with MoET and the Public Service Commission, key stages of the selection/awarding process, alumni activities, and in oversight and priority-setting.

Consultations affirmed that AAV is a highly valued component of DFAT’s investment in education and skills development in Vanuatu. Following the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic numbers of new awardees have increased. As of 15 February 2024, a total of 55 AAV scholarship awardees are studying in Australia and 23 Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships (AAPS) awardees in Fiji. Over 520 alumni are registered in the AAV alumni database, which is double the number since 2019. The AAV MEL system appears to function somewhat separately from the rest of VAESP, and includes an annual reflection and learning process, which provide a platform for ongoing program improvement, in collaboration with Post.

There have been some positive developments and innovations undertaken by AAV in the last two years that demonstrate the potential to further grow and strengthen the program. For example,

- An increased focus on offering awards for study at TVET institutions in Australia; five 2024 awardees are undertaking a TVET course.
- Discussions with VSP to explore opportunities for pathways for AAV TVET graduates and engagement with Skills Centres to promote AAV to people in provincial locations.
- Three individuals with disabilities were awarded an Australia Award in 2023, and there was close liaison with DFAT’s Australia Awards Disability Support Consultant to assess (and provide) necessary support.
- A workplan for improving access to AAV for people with disabilities was developed in 2023.
- Localisation of staffing with AAV now run by two ni-Vanuatu staff members.

e. The DFA is flexible, valued by GoV, and can accommodate additional funding to respond to disasters and other emerging needs

The DFA mechanism has proven itself a useful channel for rapid and efficient distribution of funds and has provided the flexibility to respond to emerging priorities such as post-cyclone and COVID-19

²⁰ MoET. (2023). Disability Inclusive Education Resource Mid-Point Review Report.

²¹ VESP Annual Plan, 2024

responses. The DFA has functioned as an effective conduit for the timely delivery of funds down to the community level. This is a significant achievement given the extent of overlapping disruption of tropical cyclones and COVID-19 inflicted on the education system and Vanuatu as a whole. Notably, this was only possible because of the school grant financing system developed by MoET, which has been strengthened over time through technical assistance from VAESP and DFAT's continued investment in the school grants system. This is a good example of the pay-off from long-term, sustained, strategically focused investment.

The quantum of funding disbursed through the DFA has increased significantly over the last seven years of VAESP. While this created challenges for MoET in terms of meeting required reporting, the provision of TA support through the MC to assist MoET in this area demonstrates the potential for complementarity through the two modalities. DFAT commissioned an in-house review of all DFAs in 2024 to provide guidance on improving their utilisation in the future. While not specific to the education sector DFAs, the review highlights relevant lessons learned such as the importance of ensuring greater specification of activities to be implemented under DFAs and their link to strategic outcomes, and the need for more coordinated support by DFAT for addressing PFM issues that are common across all sectoral DFAs.

3.1.2 Issues

a. Centralised focus on MoET planning, guidance, and documentation has limited provincial engagement and delivery, and overshadowed investment in practical implementation and change at the classroom level

The VAESP design stipulates a provincial focus, however documentation and consultation with key informants indicated that VAESP's implementation has been strongly centralised, with limited engagement or delivery at the provincial level. While there are inherent contextual challenges in reaching, implementing and coordinating delivery in schools in remote locations across Vanuatu's six provinces, VAESP has tended to focus more on policy development than support for practical implementation at a school level, with an emphasis on supporting national-level planning and reporting, and the development of guidance documents. Over-reliance on centrally-led activities limits engagement with, and leadership development amongst, Provincial Education Officers, school heads and teachers. It also amplifies any risk that national government instability presents to the whole program.

With the exception of the ECCE PSP, provincial and school-level delivery through VAESP has tended to rely on cascade or 'train the trainer' models, whereby one-off trainings are provided to provincial level staff, principals or individual teachers with the assumption that they will share learnings and implement changes, in the absence of ongoing support and follow up (as evidenced in the 2022 MTR and VAESP Annual Reports). VAESP reporting provides little evidence of this top-down approach, combined with a focus on quantity rather than quality of activity delivery (see point c. below), succeeding in bringing about sustained practice-change at the school and classroom level. For example, VAESP has supported the development of school strategic plans, but there is no evidence of ongoing support for schools to implement and use these resources and to monitor and learn from the classroom/student level impacts.

In 2022, VAESP worked with MoET to deliver principals' induction training to 35 principals. Ongoing follow-up to support these principals to implement their learning was planned. Yet the 2023 Annual Report provides no evidence of this being implemented, reporting only stand-alone trainings for principals in the use of Open VEMIS (OV) and financial management.

The MTR notes that while a small number of provincial-level efforts have been supported, further initiatives are required to amplify this, such as a planning process that identifies the diverse needs across provinces, and zone networking grants. It recommends that VAESP should support the MoET in realistic devolution / decentralisation efforts, including clarification of roles at provincial level, and adoption of a more nuanced approach in the way it operates within provinces.

Notably, the design of VAESP phase 2 incorporated a dedicated strategy for piloting provincial partnerships, as a mechanism for supporting locally-led innovation at provincial level, from which lessons could be learned for system-wide change. The design stated that *“VESP Phase II will facilitate a competitive and demand-driven selection process to initially identify up to two provinces interested in overcoming current barriers to improved learning outcomes”*. While this appears to have informed VAESP's approach to ECCE and the Parent Support Program, the strategy for evaluating, learning and scaling up this pilot is not clear. There is no evidence of how the learning from this is being used to inform provincial engagement and approaches for progressing decentralisation in other outcome areas.

b. Focus on output delivery rather than adaptive, politically-informed approach guided by a robust theory of change and strategic risk management

There is minimal evidence of a strategic approach to manage the challenges and risks of working within MoET systems at all levels. This is particularly surprising given the political changeability of Vanuatu's government (MoET's Director-General noted that there have been 14 Ministers of Education in four years), and the many sensitive policy issues which have been debated within GoV. Further, there is almost no evidence of the use of adaptive, politically informed approaches to enable decentralisation, including indications of VAESP engagement with powerholders at the provincial level to strategise, plan or implement efforts.

For example, VAESP invested heavily in supporting MoET's promotion of the use of vernacular language in the early years of schooling. VAESP support appears to have worked effectively at building community and school level support for this approach²². However, it is not evident in any of the VAESP reporting if or how the program engaged at a political level (either national or provincial) to build support for the use of vernacular. Reports do not identify political support for language policy as a potential enabling factor (or risk if not present) and there is no mention of strategies for managing the risks of VAESP engagement, despite it being well-known as a contentious issue. In response to GoV's announcement of a change in policy on the use of Bislama in 2023, some actions were taken under VAESP to enhance communications on the rationale for the use of vernacular and assist MoET in advising teachers on appropriate strategies²³. However, the review was unable to find evidence (either in reports or through

²² MTR 2022

²³ VAESP 2023 Annual report

consultations) of VAESP taking a more strategic approach or investing in any analysis or research into the effectiveness (or not) of the policy, despite support for evidence-based approaches being a key priority for Australian support to education.

VAESP reporting repeatedly highlights its ‘embeddedness’ and alignment with MoET as an indicator of program success. While valued by MoET, there is little evidence to show how the program manages and mitigates the constraints to achievement of education outcomes that this embeddedness presents. Vacancies in MoET, weak human resource management and outdated organisational structures are consistent features of VAESP’s operating environment, partly linked to the functioning of the Public Service Commission. It is not clear how VAESP has mitigated the constraints of this operating environment, and strategies appear limited to the provision of more technical advisor support. While this may be improved by stronger risk management and adaptive programming from the MC, it also raises questions about the program design and how to best utilise different modalities to affect change within the operating environment.

The MTR notes that a changing operating context for VAESP requires revisions to the program logic and logic pathways, but that this has not routinely been done within the program. Document review confirms that there continue to be issues with the overall theory of change for the program, and gaps in how it makes decisions about what to prioritise and how to respond to MoET requests. Without careful analysis of problems and the political economy, and in the absence of sound MEL (see below) or systematic consideration of intervention logics for program activities, this appears to have created a somewhat incoherent program of work not well aligned with agreed intended outcomes.

c. Prolonged lack of meaningful monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)

Well-informed implementation of a complex program pursuing change in a volatile environment requires a consistent flow of robust, relevant and useful data and analysis, so decisions can be based on sound evidence. Not helped by the issues with the overall theory of change and logic pathways discussed above, there appear to have been prolonged difficulties achieving meaningful MEL within VAESP. This has had implications for effective management and implementation and meant little accountability for progress towards outcomes. Effective use of evidence/data to inform management, as well as accountability, and reflection and learning, has been patchy, although there have been recent efforts to add more rigour to regular reflection and learning.

The 2022 MTR made some stark findings on the quality of the MEL system and its implementation²⁴. Noting that MEL had been challenging since the start of the program, it also reported that weak MEL had been an issue in the contractor’s formal performance assessments at least twice. There have been multiple reviews and revisions to the MEL Plan, but as of 2022 the MEL system did not adequately meet DFAT Standards. It is not clear if this has been addressed, as the 2024 IMR indicates that a further review of the MERL Framework would occur in mid 2024 but there is no evidence that this has happened (the current MERL Framework is dated September 2022, before the date of the MTR). Gaps in MEL practice have been exacerbated by frequent changes in MEL personnel, particularly at the senior level, and the

²⁴ MTR. 2022. p28

most recent recruitment round for a MEL Specialist did not deliver a suitably qualified candidate. Further, there appears to have been no formal learning and reflection system in place until recently.

d. Fragmented and weakly coordinated approach to system improvement

VAESP has delivered a high volume of activities and outputs, increasingly using MoET’s annual operational plan to guide its activities. However, there is limited evidence of a strategic approach to ensuring the many different activities ‘add up’ and contribute to achievement of longer-term strategic outcomes.

The 2022 MTR found that; *“the current VESP II TA are spread too thinly and working across too broad a range of areas... and is prioritising quantity over quality”*²⁵. This review has found little indication that VAESP has addressed this issue since the MTR. Recent reporting and review consultations show a continued focus on a broad range of activities and an emphasis on responsiveness and alignment with current (often short-term) MoET priorities, to the detriment of a more strategic focus on navigating the current political economy to achieve long-term outcomes. This weakness is further exacerbated by the absence of a strong theory of change for VAESP, as discussed above.

Further, effective connections between the different VAESP modalities (MC, DFA and IES) are limited. While there are examples of complementary support through the MC and DFA, these appear to be most often reactive measures to identified challenges, rather than part of a more strategic approach to leveraging complementarity of the two mechanisms.

VAESP is largely implemented in isolation from other education programs. Noting this, the 2022 mid-term evaluation recommended reinvigoration of the Local Education Group (LEG), which brings together education stakeholders. This has been reinstated; however, meetings are only held bi-annually, and mainly involve information sharing and reviewing Global Partnership for Education (GPE) proposals and reports, which does not sufficiently enable coordination amongst stakeholders. While the VAESP Steering Committee meets regularly, reporting indicates that it is largely focused on information sharing and monitoring of VAESP progress, rather than an opportunity for strategic direction or more substantive policy dialogue. While the Steering Committee is nominally the governance structure for all modalities under VAESP, key decision-making on the DFA appears to take place separately through DFAT-MOET discussion. Few mechanisms exist to leverage more effectively to maximise education investments and joint policy dialogue.

Stakeholder roles are unclear, and MoET’s 2023 Disability Inclusive Education Resource Mid-Point Review Report highlighted frustrations experienced by school principals linked to contrary inclusive education advice provided by different programs – in particular VAESP and the GPE. The report includes a quote from a principal who expressed there are “too many people doing different things in inclusive education”. The report notes the need for VAESP and GPE to collaborate and coordinate more closely.

²⁵ MTR, 2022, p27

e. Limitations in the management of the DFA – monitoring, auditing, reporting, expending + gaps between VAESP and DFA delivery

While the use of the DFA has enabled efficiencies, there exist a range of challenges and limitations in making most effective use of the DFA. Of most relevance to this high-level modality review is the lack of clarity in how the DFA fits within the overall program logic of VAESP and weaknesses in the strategic management and MEL of the DFA and its effectiveness as a modality for contributing to achievement of program outcomes.

As noted earlier under Strengths, there is evidence of the MC playing a valuable role in supporting MoET to strengthen PFM systems and capabilities, in response to the findings of the 2020 PFM assessment. Progress has been made on addressing weaknesses in auditing and delays in expenditure, as evidenced in the 2023 report from VAESP on strengthening PFM in the education sector (further updated in June 2024). However, the VAESP MEL framework and reporting structures produced by the MC do not cover activities delivered through the DFA. As such, the mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of the DFA and determining lessons learned to inform future DFAT investments is not clear.

Furthermore, it is not clear where responsibility sits for monitoring, reporting and managing risks in the use of the DFA and progress in strengthening MoET capabilities for effective use of DFA funding. Based on the 2023 (ad hoc) report from VAESP on PFM strengthening, several issues remain unresolved²⁶. Consultations revealed mixed views as to whether MoET and GoV systems and capabilities are sufficient for managing further DFA funding increases or expansion in the range of activities funded through the DFA mechanism (beyond school grants and infrastructure). This is reinforced by the findings of the 2022 MTR, which reported MoET concerns with the burden of DFA management and reporting and recommended more dedicated support from the MC to MoET for DFA management.

The Assessment of National Systems 2023 Update (ANS) examined fiduciary and other risks presented by utilising partner government systems. Overall, the 2023 Update found an increase in inherent risk compared to the situation in 2018. This is attributable mainly to the move to general budget support. It found that Australian actors by seeking to improve development outcomes and reduce fiduciary risk, have the effect of exercising de facto control over funds²⁷. In short, taking the approach of using compensatory controls at the expense of digging in for the long haul with partners to use partner government systems. The ANS 2023 Update findings reinforce the findings of this Review, that there are opportunities to utilise the DFA mechanism in education more strategically and effectively to achieve both development outcomes and strengthened partner government systems.

f. Underutilisation and undervaluing of local expertise

To date, VAESP's Team Leader and Deputy roles have been filled by international / expatriate personnel, with several ex-MoET, experienced ni-Vanuatu individuals hired in senior program positions. However,

²⁶ These are documented in the 2024 update to the PFM Analysis of the Education Sector 2023

²⁷ DFAT, *Review of Direct Funding Arrangements (Consultation paper)*. 2024

consultations indicate that decision-making responsibility as well as positional authority, has been held primarily by the Team Leader and Deputy Team Leader.

Validating this, the 2024 IMR notes that more use could be made by VAESP of its senior local staff, to ensure the program is more politically informed. This finding was also shared by key informants during consultations, who reported that inadequate utilisation of local expertise has led to missed opportunities to leverage experienced, locally engaged staff, reform-minded local leaders and provincial partnerships.

VAESP's MC is heavily involved in key VAESP functions and provision of staff: at the time of writing, the Acting Team Leader has been seconded from the MC's senior management, and MEL advisory support is provided by MC corporate staff rather than specialists recruited specifically to meet the needs of the program. A risk of this arrangement is that decision-making power is in the hands of outsiders who are unlikely to have granular knowledge or understanding of Vanuatu's political context and economy, and who do not necessarily have a long-term commitment to the program. This could be offset by greater engagement of VAESP's experienced senior ni-Vanuatu advisers in context analysis and decision-making but there is no evidence that this has been the approach within the contractor or program leadership.

g. Uncertainty about Open VEMIS (supported by VAESP) / new EMIS (to be supported through GPE)

There is lack of clarity within VAESP and the MoET regarding the future of OV, which has faced a number of issues with its functioning. UNESCO has also supported MoET with OV and a review was undertaken in 2023, but it has not been shared with VAESP. Also, many stakeholders seem to be unaware of upcoming changes to be implemented with funding from GPE²⁸. This is a risk to future MEL which is likely to rely on EMIS data and potentially risks the loss of significant progress achieved in establishing OV under previous VAESP support. As such, it is an immediate issue that needs to be addressed under the current program.

VAESP annual reporting provides minimal evidence of problems with OV of the scale that would justify changing the platform. The VAESP 'Pausing and Reflecting' presentation from July 2024 references an 'OV options paper' delivered in October 2023, which may provide further detail, but the review team did not have access to this document. However, the lack of awareness amongst key MoET and DFAT stakeholders about the impending changes revealed through our consultations is highly concerning. It suggests weaknesses in the current coordination and governance mechanisms for VAESP, which need to be considered in the new design.

h. Innovation in Australia Awards offerings and expanding outreach are relatively recent and nascent developments

²⁸ MoET was awarded a USD1,150,000 GPE system capacity grant in November 2024. Development of the proposal for this grant had taken place over 2024, coordinated by Save the Children as the grant agent and the Australian High Commission as the coordinating agency. The review team has not yet sighted documentation on the proposal, but consultations indicate it includes support for i) upgrading of Open VEMIS to a platform using more current technology and training of principals, teachers and provincial education staff in using data ii) updating of the school grant funding code.

Over the life of the VAESP investment, AAV has been managed in a fairly conservative fashion, both when managed directly by the Australian High Commission and once transitioned to the MC under their VAESP contract. Initiatives to enhance equity and inclusiveness of award processes and explore a wider range of award types are relatively recent and still in early days of development. Consultations highlighted the opportunity to further strengthen collaboration between AAV, VAESP and VSP, and expand more innovative approaches such as short course awards.

Another notable issue raised in the AAV 2023 annual report is that of low achievement rates of Vanuatu AA applicants in the IELTS. Similar challenges in the literacy capabilities of young people accessing skills programs have been identified by VSP and is a potential area for collaboration across DFAT's education investments.

As noted earlier, the decision to shift management of AAV from Post to the VAESP MC appears to have brought efficiencies and provided more dedicated management resource. However, part of the rationale for a MC modality for Australian Awards is the ability of MCs to draw on lessons learned from other Australia Awards programs and invest in innovative approaches for enhancing inclusiveness and maximising impacts of AAV. While some promising initiatives have been started under AAV in the last two years, much more can be done to bring AAV closer to the quality offered by Australian Awards programs elsewhere.

While efforts to promote AAV in the provinces and amongst people with disabilities have begun, the opportunity exists to do more, learning lessons from other Australia Awards programs in the region which utilise strong GEDSI approaches.

i. Progress towards and evidence of gender equality and disability inclusion outcomes is limited

MoET data from 2021 and 2022 indicates that the net enrolment rates (NER) for girls in both years was 92%, while for boys it was 89% and 90% respectively, indicating that girls are progressing through primary schools at a higher rate than boys (IMR, 2024). 2021 VANSTA and PILNA results indicate that a greater proportion of girls are meeting or exceeding minimum standards, compared to boys. The 2022 mid-term evaluation of VAESP noted that further information is needed on how global trends indicating that girls outperform boys in school is manifesting in Vanuatu, however further program documentation relating to this could not be located.

VAESP's gender equality efforts have been fragmented and had limited and mixed results. The 2024 IMR reported that PSP training in Torba strengthened the confidence of 13 women in Torba, however reporting on PSP indicated that it was difficult to engage men in positive parenting training. New literacy teaching flashcards align with gender equality principles and are respectful of gender roles - for example, flashcards depict both women and men as doctors, pilots, carers, nurses, police officers and firefighters (VAESP, 2024). While efforts have been made to mainstream GEDSI approaches across some VAESP activities, specific efforts to promote gender equality amongst students, and across the education sector, are limited.

There is minimal and only recent evidence of efforts that are informed by, or seek to address, social norms relating to gender equality, or which support the elimination of violence against women and girls. For example, in 2023 VAESP undertook a study on gendered expectations, roles and results in Vanuatu

primary schools and with MoET has produced a summary booklet to be disseminated as a mechanism to “highlight traditional norms and gender differences within Vanuatu’s education context and guide the direction of IE”²⁹. However, there is little detail on what the strategies are for utilising these outputs to contribute to more transformative change. Similarly, VAESP has supported MoET with the establishment of a Provincial Women in Education Leadership Network (PWELN) since 2016. This has incorporated leadership training for women, however there is minimal evidence regarding outcomes. VAESP’s longer-term strategy for enabling this potentially valuable structure to support provincial women in education to bring about meaningful change is unclear.

VAESP’s disability inclusion efforts centre on the establishment of, and provision of support to, model inclusion schools. National rollout of VAESP’s translated inclusive education resource has been approved (VAESP, 2024). However, impact at the school level is not yet evident. Results have been influenced by contextual factors such as the teachers’ strike, suspension of some principals, and MoET focus on other priorities. However, limited processes to measure the impact of inclusion efforts amongst students with disabilities are in place. Open VEMIS collects and disaggregates data by sex, and has the capacity to disaggregate data by disability, however this does not currently occur due to inaccurate entries located in the dataset which require MoET attention. Program-level reporting on school-level disability inclusion results is not available³⁰. As such, it is not currently possible to monitor changes in enrolled students with disabilities and their achievements using national education or VAESP program data³¹. While expectations regarding disability inclusion are outlined in the VAESP theory of change at the EOPO and IO levels, reporting against these is limited by insufficient processes to capture MEL data beyond training information.

Consultations indicated that VAESP has had limited engagement with Vanuatu’s Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (OPD), Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (VDPA). VAESP has had some past collaboration with service provider Vanuatu Society for People with Disabilities (VSPD), including linking Model Inclusion Schools with VSPD’s early intervention and mobility devices, however this has been limited.

The team’s consultations reinforced the 2024 IMR finding that there is room for improvement in implementation of VAESP’s GEDSI Strategy, with a need to strengthen partnerships for GEDSI. Implementation of the twin-track approach, which guides both GEDSI mainstreaming and targeted efforts, requires strengthening, particularly at the provincial and school levels.

²⁹ VAESP, Mid-year report, 2024, p.3

³⁰ It is understood that disability data will be collected in OV in 2025, supported by the new Inclusive Education Resource Book.

³¹ Lessons on addressing this could be drawn from Fiji, where Australia’s education investment has strengthened Fiji’s EMIS to enable the collection, analysis and use of disability-disaggregated data by both the Ministry of Education and the DFAT-funded education program.

3.2 Skills sector support: VSP

VSP is widely recognised as a model for locally-led development³² and an example of best practice in inclusion, localisation and adaptive programming. It has been referenced as a case study in DFAT strategic and policy documents including the *International Development Policy (2023)* and *DFAT's Guidance Note on Locally Led Development (2024)*. Its strengths were reconfirmed during review consultations, while there are also issues which have the potential to create challenges for the program's continued high performance.

3.2.1 Strengths

a. Decentralised delivery, including Skills Centre partnership with provincial government

For many years, VSP has worked collaboratively with its government counterparts at the national level, while implementing inclusive, environmentally sustainable skills development efforts at the provincial level. As highlighted in DFAT's 2021 independent evaluation of VSP, the Skills Centres established by VSP and located in five provinces, now act as the MoET's decentralised service delivery arms, staffed by local personnel, who are increasingly engaged through the Public Service Commission.

As well as working closely with MoET colleagues, in particular Provincial Education Officers, Skills Centres work in close collaboration with Provincial Governments, participating in and supporting Provincial Technical Advisory Groups (PTAG) and Provincial Training Boards (PTB). PTAGs guide provincial planning and progress, and PTBs guide skills development initiatives. Consultations with key informants indicated that long-term relationships with these structures ensure that skills efforts are linked with demand, are owned by all provincial stakeholders, and that the effects are sustained beyond any activity completion date.

Secretaries General consulted pointed out that the proximity and availability of Skills Centres in the provinces, strong relationships between Skills Centres and Provincial Government, and flexible ways of working, are key to VSP's successful decentralisation approaches. The robust working relationships between Skills Centres and Provincial Governments have been evident following cyclones Harold, Lola, Judy and Kevin – after which Skills Centres provided surge capacity and coordination support to enable Provincial Government management of disaster response³³.

The 2021 evaluation noted that VSP's ways of working have been significant factors contributing to its success, and its decentralised approach, utilised since the early years of the investment, has enabled demonstration of tangible results in terms of how an effective skills system can deliver inclusive, demand driven training at the community level. The repositioning of VSP as a counterpart to both the Government of Vanuatu's Prime Minister's Office as well as MoET following the 2021 evaluation elevated the role and relevance of VSP as a key partner in Vanuatu's decentralisation agenda.

³² This has been documented in the 2021 MTR, in multiple DFAT and other publications, and acknowledged by the Australian High Commissioner.

³³ Barbara, J. (2021). [How the Vanuatu Skills Partnership has supported local-level service delivery and decentralisation in Vanuatu](#).

As well as establishing a decentralised skills system, which provides a model for practical decentralisation to other parts of government³⁴, consultations with VSP's national and provincial government partners indicated a great deal of interest in continued VSP support for planning and systems strengthening – processes necessary to enable effective decentralised service delivery.

b. Collaborative and practical partnerships with productive sectors and communities, which link skills with markets

The 2021 evaluation highlighted that the Skills Centres, established and supported by VSP, effectively act as a broker between skills demand and supply: local training providers and industry coaches are contracted by the Centres to supply in-demand skills to support inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurship and employment in productive sectors, flexibly and at quality assured standards.

This approach is highly valued. As one informant noted *“If Vanuatu wants to achieve its 2030 goals, skills are needed in response to demand”*. A demand-driven approach requires partnerships with government across multiple sectors, and VSP has partnerships with departments of tourism, agriculture and industry, as well as the Vanuatu Intellectual Property Office, to enable local identification of demand and markets, and inform skills development requirements. VSP, through the Skills Centres, works closely with provincial government, down to area council officers, to engage with communities, and on the supply side strengthens training providers and skills governance and quality assurance mechanisms to support the skills development of individuals, and enable a conduit to markets.

c. Strong local VSP leadership and its team, supported by culturally appropriate human resource management and strong career pathways

VSP is entirely locally led, and it role models genuine, effective ni-Vanuatu leadership while also strengthening local leadership within the skills sector³⁵. VSP's demonstrated commitment to locally led development, and the successes this has brought, are well documented. VSP's leadership team, consisting of all ni-Vanuatu staff, enables implementation which navigates relational and political realities in a sensitive and informed way. This includes the establishment of partnerships and coalitions to effect reform, as well as setting in place norms for the VSP team. VSP's leadership team is a fundamental driver of the investment's success.

VSP's personnel are a critical enabler of its high-performance culture, and its strong leadership team, staff and international personnel are not accidental. VSP has a strong values-based culture, centered on respect, collaboration, humility and a shared commitment to nation-building. These values are role modelled by leadership, and underpin recruitment and human resource management of all staff and international personnel. These values also drive performance management of staff - including termination when necessary. As the VSP Director stated in a presentation at a recent Australian Aid Conference: *“we hire well, and we fire well.”* Working with Post, VSP has undertaken difficult terminations of both local and international personnel, and navigated the previous removal of the managing contractor, rather than taking the sometimes less complex path of accepting mediocre

³⁴ Barbara, J. 2021

³⁵ DFAT. (2024). DFAT Guidance Note: Locally-Led Development.

performance. In other words, creating a high performing, values-driven team on VSP has required concerted hard work over many years, spotting and nurturing talent but also constructively dealing with non-performing staff.

VSP is viewed as a human resources incubator by and for its local personnel. Consultations with staff revealed that VSP invests in professional development of staff, and promotes career pathways and leadership, including within provinces. As of 2023, 20 staff have been internally promoted, and seven moved on from VSP to senior external roles, including five within Government³⁶. The Director is a prominent example of this, having progressed over more than 10 years from his original position to his current role via an Australia Awards scholarship, long-term targeted mentoring, and a planned and supported career progression. Other VSP staff have progressed to senior positions in the Government of Vanuatu, with purposeful support from the program towards these roles. This is positioning key professionals in roles which are enabling them to contribute to national reform and nation-building. Consultations indicated that VSP's leadership has embedded culturally appropriate values into the organisational culture; this has created an enabling environment for VSP staff to work in a safe and empowered culture, that aligns with cultural values. VSP personnel are managed by its Senior Management Team, with support from the Support Hub and the support contractor. This mix enables a human resource management approach that incorporates and responds to cultural realities and complexities, while complying with DFAT expectations.

d. Incubation of local, developmental leadership

Related to the point above, and woven throughout VSP's work with partners at the national, provincial and community levels is support for the identification and incubation of developmental leaders who are committed and equipped to contribute to broad-based governance reform for the achievement of national development goals³⁷. VSP has nurtured a network of developmental leaders who have come to occupy important positions in provincial and national government agencies and are well placed to progress decentralisation policies³⁸. Consultations indicated that VSP uses savvy politically informed approaches to focus on reform-minded leaders, while engaging titled leaders who are less interested in systems change.

This two-pronged strategy is critical. Social change requires local leadership that is developmental in nature³⁹. Shifts in the status quo can be positive or negative, depending on the motivation and drivers of said local leaders. VSP identifies, strengthens and collaborates with local leaders who are motivated to contribute to positive changes to existing circumstances. Sometimes, these leaders may not have a senior title or position, but have influence within their realms. At the same time, VSP carefully and strategically engages with titled leaders to ensure they are part of the journey towards change, even when less invested in it.

³⁶ Vanuatu Skills Partnership, *Story of Change, Leadership incubation for locally-led development*, 2023

³⁷ Kinsella, S. & McNaughton, B., *Independent Evaluation of the Vanuatu Skills Partnership*, 2021

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ DT Global's *Locally Led Development Framework*, 2024

Critically, rather than viewing problems as simply technical issues to be solved by international advisers, VSP's local leadership navigates challenges structurally, relationally and politically^{40 41}. A deep understanding of the context and its stakeholders also enable VSP's leadership to identify opportunities for coalition-building and reform⁴². This, combined with an authorising environment enabled by the Support Contractor and DFAT, allows adaptive programming, and flexible and responsive delivery.

e. Support contractor model and the Support Hub

Supporting the above strengths, VSP's support contractor model enables the program's local leadership, and adaptive program delivery. The centrepiece of the support contractor arrangement is the Support Hub, which provides a range of services and support to the implementation team in Vanuatu. The 2021 evaluation concluded that the delivery modality works well and has been an important driver of the results achieved by VSP. The evaluation also found that the support contractor/support hub model has facilitated VSP to develop into a genuinely locally led program. Consultations with VSP personnel revealed that the Support Hub is seen as a key *enabler* of VSP's work at all levels, including Skills Centres. Key factors contributing to this include strong and trusting relationships between Support Hub and VSP staff, and the provision of program-identified professional development for program team members (both technical and management skills), including through technical assistance delivered by advisers.

Further, it is the specific individuals within the Support Hub which make the Hub service so effective, with their mostly long-term involvement in Vanuatu and the program and their personal qualities of humility and respectful communication. VSP staff trust the Support Hub personnel, who can in turn reinforce quality systems requirements with staff. The assistance it provides in facilitating MEL, quality systems, and 6-monthly planning is highly valued. The Support Hub has also played an important role in establishing systems to make workloads more manageable, while also offering responsive support when the in-country team faces particularly busy periods.

Several staff members compared the support contractor model to their previous experience with the conventional ways of working by an MC, while acknowledging that the current support contractor service is provided by a firm which usually operates as an MC. Staff highlighted that the support contractor operates in the background, with VSP's Senior Management Team (SMT) making decisions, unlike previous managing contractor arrangements, which were seen as undermining SMT's authority by intervening too directly, and wasting time in conflict over internal processes. The model requires an adaptive, partially autonomous approach which is substantially different from the conventional 'managing contractor'. The hub is ultimately a shared responsibility that involves managing risks, delegating authority, and protecting the identity and commercial interests of both a corporate contractor and the Partnership itself. However, VSP emphasises that the guiding 'north star' of the Support Hub is to support the reform-minded developmental leadership of VSP to achieve the outcomes of the investment.

⁴⁰ Yanhambath, F & Gibert, A. (2023). A localisation journey – the Vanuatu Skills Partnership.

⁴¹ Barbara, J. (2021). How the Vanuatu Skills Partnership has supported local-level service delivery and decentralisation in Vanuatu.

⁴² Yanhambath, F & Gibert, A. (2023). A localisation journey – the Vanuatu Skills Partnership.

f. Strong culture of performance and learning (MEL/quality systems)

VSP demonstrates the use of monitoring and evaluation to enable a strong culture of learning. VSP utilises an approach that involves testing ideas, learning from these and scaling up (or not), depending on results. Monitoring and evaluation processes and results are used to enable this, and to track and demonstrate changes in alignment with the theory of change. MEL is known in VSP as quality systems. Several key approaches underpin VSP's quality systems. These include embedding and valuing quality systems by VSP staff and partners; local leadership of quality systems, with international support; MEL support for, rather than driving, adaptation; and VSP's quality systems being used to influence reform within GOV partners and their systems⁴³. VSP's MEL is strongly linked to Vanuatu's NSDP – enabling VSP to report directly on its contributions to nation building.

g. Inclusivity of women and people with disabilities is strong, and integrated into provincial plans

VSP's inclusion efforts focus on gender equality, known as 'better balance', and disability inclusion. VSP has demonstrated commitment to and results in its inclusion work, with significant investment of funds and other resources and substantial staffing allocation which has grown over time. Work has focused on empowering women and people with disabilities through skills development, norms-shifting and systemic reforms. VSP was recognised with a 2019 DFAT Secretary award for its work on disability inclusion. In the period January – June 2024, 49% of people accessing skills development opportunities facilitated by Skills Centres were women, and 10% were people with disabilities⁴⁴.

Skills Centres prioritise the provision of reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities and women with care-giving responsibilities and constraints on travel. A specific DFAT grant made available to VSP between 2016 – 2020 assisted training providers with these costs, and as a result, the number of people with disabilities participating in skills training rose significantly during that period. Similarly, a DFAT Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development grant in 2019 supported the development and implementation of VSP's Better Balance strategy, including reasonable accommodation costs to enable women's participation. Both grants recognised and strengthened VSP's strong disability inclusion and gender equality efforts and outcomes.

VSP's inclusion team supports colleagues across VSP's sectors and provinces to utilise disability approaches, through the use of a toolkit. VSP's data collection tools and databases collect and disaggregate disability data, enabling reporting on participation of people with disabilities disaggregated by sex, province, age, sector and type of difficulty.

Further, VSP has contributed to key structural reforms that increase opportunities for ni-Vanuatu with disabilities in the skills system and enable decentralisation of services to people with disabilities across all provinces. Through Skills Centres, VSP supports the incorporation of disability inclusion priorities into provincial plans, and several key informants consulted reported VSP is viewed as a leader in promoting decentralised disability inclusive practice. VSP collaborated with MoET to develop a first-ever *TVET*

⁴³ Silas, E. (2022). [Using MEL to support systemic reform: the case of Vanuatu Skills Partnership](#)

⁴⁴ Vanuatu Skills Partnership, Annual Progress Snapshot, 2024

Sector Inclusion Policy (2016 – 2020), and a subsequent *Inclusive Education and Training Policy 2024 – 2030*, which brings Vanuatu’s policy vision for inclusive education and skills together for the first time.

VSP worked with the Vanuatu Bureau of Statistics to assist with the incorporation of international best practice disability questions into the census for the first time. In partnership with the MoJCS, VSP resourced provincial disability officers in all provinces, using a staged approach to resourcing additional officers once MoJCS and the Public Service Commission had taken on funding for previously VSP-supported positions. As a result, there are now disability officers in all provinces for the first time, connecting people with disabilities across Vanuatu with government and non-government service delivery. VSP supported expansion of VSPD services beyond Port Vila – VSPD now has offices and delivers mobility device services in Sanma and Tafea provinces. VSP also partners with VDPA, which works with VSP to reach out to people with disabilities in remote location, establishing Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, and connecting people with disabilities to services including Skills Centres.

VSP has also reported strong results in gender equality and women’s empowerment. VSP’s work in this area is guided by its Better Balance Strategy. The use of “better balance” rather than “gender equality” terminology responds to local understandings, norms and attitudes regarding gender equality as a foreign or imported concept and practice, and solely an issue concerning women. These understandings can result in disengagement and even backlash from power holders. As such, VSP reframes gender equality approaches as seeking to achieve gender equality objectives by working together with both women and men. VSP partners with the Department of Women’s Affairs and DFAT’s Balance of Power program to progress VSP’s Better Balance Strategy focus areas: Women’s Economic Empowerment, Women in Leadership, and Ending Violence Against Women.

Skills sector participation rates largely reflect the high number of female participants in Creative Industries (a sector that traditionally engages women) but also reflect efforts to increase the proportion of female participants in the agribusiness and construction sectors. Several female VSP staff note that women are provided with opportunities to grow and encouraged to take on leadership positions within VSP itself. As the MTR stated: *“Women are encouraged to thrive and to seek support if they need it... within VSP there is room for women to grow as leaders”*.

h. The role of DFAT post has been instrumental over time

The VSP evaluation (2021) notes that DFAT/Post has played an important role in allowing local VSP leadership and staff to drive its strategic agenda. It notes that a key success factor is also the continued authorising environment which DFAT/Post has maintained for the program, which has made it possible for it to be responsive to evolving contextual priorities. Specifically: *“The mandate and trust granted to VSP by DFAT over many years has been a key factor in enabling the Partnership to think and work politically, align to Vanuatu’s interest, and be effective in achieving systemic change.”*⁴⁵ This was echoed by key interlocutors during review consultations, pointing to the important role Post plays in ongoing success. The design team was struck by the intensive effort which Post and the Strategic Adviser had to provide, over several years, to ensure the shift from ‘MC’ to support contractor was achieved. The

⁴⁵ Kinsella, S. & McNaughton, B., Independent Evaluation of the Vanuatu Skills Partnership, 2021, p7

importance of this has been instrumental. The DFAT contribution is not only in enabling VSP to function in the context of the Australian development program. Crucially, Post has assisted with the program's strategic engagement, especially at critical points. It has done this without micromanaging, and the evaluation concludes that this contribution by DFAT *"should not be underestimated."*⁴⁶.

3.2.2 Issues

While documentation and consultations confirm that VSP has been characterised by strong success, especially in recent years, this success has come with some challenges.

a. Navigating the relationship with MoET, including GoV leadership on skills development, is an ongoing challenge

Instability and changes within MoET have created some challenges for VSP in navigating this key relationship, with leadership changes, gaps in other key personnel appointments, and inactive Provincial Training Boards contributing further instability. The program's close partnerships with other parts of GoV, and at the provincial level, create a complex web of relationships, which require time and effort to manage well.

A key achievement of VSP was the integration of the Provincial Skills Centres into the provincial structures, with some Skills Centre personnel employed as public servants with salaries partly covered through government budgets. However, the remainder of the program team works outside government offices (unlike some VAESP personnel) and there are small pockets of MoET which described this as 'less integrated'. Any perception of a program being isolated from government partners and key stakeholders is not ideal, but other evidence (including the 2021 evaluation) suggests that there is broadly a good degree of ownership of VSP within GoV and high regard for the way it operates.

b. Scaling up and high demand from diverse stakeholders due to strong VSP reputation and relationships is stretching existing staff and program resources

The 2021 VSP evaluation identified *"there is a risk that if VSP's mandate continues to grow and the breadth of activities it is delivering further increases, that its human resources capacity will be stretched too thinly"*⁴⁷. Consultations confirmed that VSP's reputation as a reliable and respectful delivery partner make it a partner of choice for stakeholders from the community level to the provinces, and amongst national partners. This is stretching demand well beyond a conventional skills and productive sector program, into areas such as developmental leadership training (in partnership with the Balance of Power program) and planning, budgeting and monitoring systems (based on the system used within VSP).

While the quality systems team has made efforts to establish processes to support decision-making regarding how VSP responds to demand, these can be tricky to navigate given VSP's broad remit, wide networks and relationships, and the program culture of welcoming partnership. As a result, the risk identified in 2021 persists.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p31

⁴⁷ Kinsella and McNaughton, 2021, page 5

c. Reliance on key individuals in the program team and support contractor

As noted above, a core strength of VSP is the individual men and women who comprise the management and implementing teams and the Support Hub. The Director, the rest of the SMT, and many key other staff, are all instrumental in achieving outcomes for Vanuatu and in making the support contractor model the success that it is. This is, however, a significant risk. As articulated earlier, the continually increasing demand for VSP support from partners places ever-growing demand on some staff. The program relies on these individuals who would not necessarily be easy to replace, so if they were to be lost to VSP, there is a genuine risk that progress could stall or be derailed.

d. DFAT resourcing is not always sufficient, particularly in the face of high competing workloads

DFAT's role in the success of VSP is noteworthy, as discussed in section 3.2.1 (h), above. This, however, creates the risk that insufficient or inconsistent DFAT resourcing could undermine ongoing success in the future. The local leadership and support contractor model is not usual for DFAT investments, so it is not necessarily well-supported by business-as-usual systems and routine processes. and requires deep and strategic engagement and support from Post, while staff there have heavy and competing workloads and regular turnover of A-based staff. Given the importance of DFAT/Post in advancing the strategic engagement and policy influence of the program, protecting the authorising environment for its implementation approach, and helping it navigate the political economy of DFAT effectively, it is essential that Post has enough of the right staff time and expertise to consistently play this role.

4 Summary and recommendation

Summarising the key strengths and issues which have been identified through this rapid review of both VAESP and VSP implementation, a number of broad findings emerge. These have informed the design team's recommended approach to investment design:

- **Balancing national and sub-national work** is a crucial key to success, aligned to Vanuatu's commitment to decentralisation and the priority GoV places on the provincial level.
- **Sub-national service delivery** strengthening can build community and political demand for good quality services and sound policy and budgeting, opening the doors for national-level influence. It can also spread risk and create opportunities for innovative work and partnerships.
- **Explicit alignment with Vanuatu's policy priorities** is essential and lays the foundation for collaboration, local ownership, and local relevance.
- **Political instability in Vanuatu persists**, so programs need to navigate that reality sensitively, strategically and creatively and with strong information and relationships. Working at national and provincial levels, and with other forms of governance, is important.
- Understanding and **operating within the political economy, with a systems-relationships focus**, is important, as is working with reformist leaders in the system, at all levels.
- **Organisational culture** is critical to success: this entails long-term local developmental leadership and the incubation of future leaders, supported by culturally-appropriate human resource management and an organisational culture that supports well-informed adaptation, accountability for performance, and constructive collaboration.

- A **strong team led by reform-minded developmental leaders** is essential for success, and it requires purposeful planning, support and allocation of resources, and courageous human resource management.
- The combination of **local leadership with an effective support contractor model** has enabled strong outcomes while more conventional managing contractor structures have been less effective. Further, shifting to an effective support contractor model has required extensive management and advocacy effort by Post and the Strategic Adviser, over many years.
- **GEDSI achievements** require cultural and contextual alignment, strong partnerships with government at all levels and civil society, integration within systems, and strong MEL. They also require substantive investment, both funding and skilled staffing.
- **MEL and strategic communications** have been key success factors, or their absence has been a weakness, so prioritising investment in these is essential.
- The **DFA mechanism has allowed efficiencies** and the flexibility to respond to emerging priorities. It is highly valued by GoV and provides important autonomy for MoET which should be protected. Some efforts to improve the complementarity of support delivered through the DFA and the MC / support contractor are evident, but have been largely ad hoc and without adequate MEL.
- Many **opportunities for collaboration exist** but have not fully been realised between VAESP and VSP. Examples include investing in stronger pathways between schooling and skills offerings, coordination regarding GEDSI approaches, collaboration across education-skills (e.g. 'Farm to School' links with curriculum), and creating closer links with Australia Awards.

4.1 Modality for future design

The team's analysis and recommendation does not address the technical, implementation or management details of any options, as these will be developed during Stage 2 of the design process, but, in line with its Terms of Reference, just focused on the high-level modality decision so the design process can proceed with clarity on the overall modality. The design team considered two primary options regarding the most suitable design structure, for the next phase of investment.

Consideration of the best design structure also included consideration of the best implementation partner arrangements (i.e. contractor, grant to government, funding to a multilateral or other bilateral development partner, or granting to non-government organisation(s)). Given the scale and complexity of the future design, grant funding to a non-government organisation was not judged to be suitable. Funding to a multilateral or bilateral development partner was also deemed inappropriate because it would be very difficult to design for an implementation approach which has proven so effective in VSP (local developmental leadership, support contractor model, adaptive, politically informed approach) when working within multilateral or other bilateral partner systems. And while direct funding to GoV would provide maximum government ownership and leadership, at present the team's assessment is that this is only appropriate for some of the likely activities and effective implementation and MEL of these activities would likely still require additional technical support. Therefore, a contractor-supported implementation modality is preferable.

In terms of the design structure, the two options considered are briefly outlined below, together with their main likely advantages, drawbacks and risks⁴⁸.

- (a) Preparing two or three standalone investment designs, addressing skills, basic education, and scholarships. The design would be contracted to separate contractors for implementation in parallel. This would spread the risk which would be posed by consolidating all activities into one program, with one contractor. However this structure would not address the current challenges in coherence, coordination and collaboration and would also not deliver any efficiencies in the provision of common support services, or management efficiencies for DFAT Post.
- (b) Preparing a single, integrated investment design, with education, scholarships and skills incorporated into a single design document and supported by a contractor⁴⁹. While there are some risks with assigning all contracted responsibility to a single entity (whereas current arrangements split risk between two contracts), this approach provides the opportunity to achieve efficiencies in several areas. These would include: the provision of support services, access to technical inputs, operational and management systems; and would facilitate close cooperation and collaboration rather than competition between contractors. Importantly, this option would also enable more streamlined and clearer communication with MoET and other GoV partners, which would lessen the burden on them while potentially also strengthening engagement and relationships. Contracting a single contractor for overall delivery of the design also does not preclude sub-contracting arrangements for particular components or the inclusion of grant-funding for non-government organisations within the design.

Across either option, an approach to effectively managing the mismatched contract end dates will need to be resolved during investment design.

Based on document review, consultations and team discussions, the design team recommends that the next phase of Australian support to education and skills in Vanuatu be developed as a single investment design document which incorporates all the components. This will deliver efficiencies, enable the expansion of support contractor approach, and will suit a significant investment which is wholly focused within a single sector.

With details to be determined and confirmed through the design process, the pillars or components are likely to include targeted investments in: skills, basic education (including infrastructure), scholarships, and complementary support for any future direct funding arrangement. The program logic should explicitly feature the 'ways of working' so that local developmental leadership, partnership, inclusion, and adaptive management are resourced appropriately and given sufficient priority.

The investment would be put to tender for a single contractor to provide support services. This approach is recommended based on the judgement that a combined multi-component investment

⁴⁸ An additional concern is how to best manage the transition between the current and the new phases, and how to accommodate (or adjust) the fact that the VAESP contract end date is 11 months later than the VSP contract end date.

⁴⁹ This would not preclude a contractor engaging sub-contractors to provide specialist services or advice, if required.

supported by a contractor will deliver the greatest gains in both efficiency and effectiveness, without significant additional risk.

The design should address the forward vision for the DFA, so the contractor's responsibilities include key activities to support implementation of DFA-funded activities, which are situated within the overall strategic vision for the investment.

Experience has shown that Post's role has been instrumental in enabling the support contractor model to develop and become established. Therefore the design must also address the required resources within DFAT to ensure the Post can provide the essential strategic and management input which will enable the greatest achievement of investment outcomes.

The detailed technical, operational, management and contracting details for the new investment will be addressed during Stage 2 of the design. The key considerations which will guide the design will be informed by the Investment Concept Note and likely include:

- Achieving efficiency through shared support resources and a support contractor modality.
- Increased attention to provincial-level work on the basic education side, and in scholarships, and maintenance of the provincial-level focus for skills.
- Greater integration of Australia Awards, including short courses.
- A strategic and appropriately balanced approach in basic education to advance: inclusive student participation and learning; public service delivery systems strengthening and improved efficiency; capacity for responses at the school/community level to external shocks such as environmental disasters; and GoA-GoV policy dialogue that reinforces GoV as holding primary responsibility for policy and operations, but which recognises the role of development cooperation in influencing systemic reform.
- Building a shared culture of partnership, collaboration, performance, adaptation, inclusion and responsiveness, that works across all components of the investment.
- Creating a meaningful program logic, theory of change and MEL framework which provides clarity of purpose and intention, and a sound foundation for implementation and management.
- Further strengthening and enhancing local leadership with appropriate support from "useful outsiders" (as described in VSP reporting).
- Integrating a DFA as one mechanism for the delivery of funds to the education and skills sector, and how to utilise the DFA to balance: education effectiveness, system strengthening and improved efficiency, flexible responses to disasters, policy dialogue in support of GoV priorities and leadership.
- Ensuring DFAT is resourced to provide strategic leadership and influence as a partner to GoV and as the manager of the investment, and to ensure it can proactively enable the expanded support contractor model.
- Integrating gender equality, disability inclusion, and inclusive climate and disaster resilience in line with DFAT's commitments, building on existing successful approaches in both programs and further alignment and partnerships with national government and at all levels and civil society, integration within systems, and strong MEL.

5 Next steps

Once DFAT has confirmed its preferred way forward for the design in response to these recommendations, the design team will work with Post to plan the second stage of the design in detail. The team will update the Design Development Plan to reflect these plans and proceed to make necessary arrangements for the planned two-week consultations and design development mission in March 2025. The design team leader will also contribute, as required, to DFAT's development of the Investment Concept Note for submission to the Development Programming Committee in January 2025. It is planned that the Investment Design Document will be finalised by 30 June 2025, ready for DFAT procurement and the commencement of a new contract at the start of 2026.

Annex 1: List of people consulted

Government of Vanuatu

Organisation	Name	Position
MoET	John Kaltau	Acting Director General/ Director, Tertiary Education Directorate
MoET	Bergmans Iati	Director-General
MoET	Gideon John	Director, Policy and Planning
MoET	John Jacques	Acting Director, Education Services
MoET	Marcel Yamsiu	Principal Education Officer, Education Services
MoET	Annette Samuels	Acting Principal Education Officer, Exams and Assessment Unit
MoET	Angelinah Eldad Virah	Principal Education Officer, Curriculum Development Unit
MoET	Thomson Wari Paul	Provincial Education Officer, SANMA
MoET	Carolyn Mahana	VEMIS Officer, PENAMA
MoET	Jerrold Joseph Arnhambat	Principal Education Officer, Teacher Development
MoET	Joe Gideon	Principal Education Officer, Scholarships
MoET	Julia Whippy	Principal Education Officer, Finance
MoET	John Tari	Provincial Education Officer, PENAMA
Vanuatu Qualifications Authority	Lesbeth Jimmy	Acting CEO (Assistant CEO)
Vanuatu Qualifications Authority	Talita Giyomatala-Tarileo	Principal Officer, Competency Development Unit
Vanuatu Qualifications Authority	Adlyn Wesley	Principal Officer, Standards and Qualifications Delivery
Ministry of Justice and Community Services	Ginette Morris	Disability Desk Officer
Department of Industry	Margaret Alili	Senior creative industry officer
Department of Women's Affairs	Stephanie Mael	Gender Officer

Organisation	Name	Position
Department of Agriculture	Mark Vurabaravu	Deputy Director
Vanuatu Intellectual Property Office	Lorensie Lingtamat	Copyright Officer
Vanuatu Institute of Public Administration and Management	Pala Luen	Manager of Vanuatu Institution of Public Administration and Management
Department of Tourism	Geraldine Tari	Principal Accreditation Officer

VAESP

Organisation	Name	Position
VAESP	Victoria Johnson	Interim Team Leader/ Tetra Tech Contractor Representative
VAESP	Rebecca Pryor	Senior Program Manager (former Operations/ Deputy Team Leader)
VAESP	Herem Navat	Lead Education Officer
VAESP	Denise Ng	MEL analyst
VAESP	Jill Wai	MEL Officer
VAESP	Kaba Marcel	MEL Specialist
VAESP	Hopkins Dick	Curriculum Improvement Coordinator
VAESP	Roy Obed	Senior Education Program Officer
VAESP	Sonia Wasi	Gender and Inclusion
VAESP	Joanne Mosen	Disability Inclusion Adviser
VAESP	Jennifer James	ECCE Specialist
VAESP	Michelle King	Curriculum Improvement Adviser
VAESP	Barbara Thornton	Independent Education Specialist
Australia Awards Vanuatu	Junilla Sese	Manager

Organisation	Name	Position
Australia Awards Vanuatu	Hansel Liunamel	Awards Officer
Australia Awards Vanuatu	Sara Freeman	AAV Consultant

VSP

Organisation	Name	Position
Senior Management Team	Fremden Yanhambath	Director
Senior Management Team	Ellis Silas	Deputy Director, Programs
Senior Management Team	May Garae	Deputy Director, Operations
Senior Management Team	Ruth Seketa	Finance Manager
National Managers	Wesley Jerethy	Training Provider Support
National Managers	Richie John	Creative Industries
National Managers	Richard Simeon	Agribusiness and Health
National Managers	Sherol George	Inclusion
National Managers	Erinah Kalo Malres	Tourism
National Managers	Tyson Jella	Environmental Sustainability
International Support	Chris Delany	Skills for Creative Industries Specialist
International Support	Rosie Boylan	Skills for Creative Industries Specialist
International Support	Anthony Bailey	Training Provider Support Specialist
Provincial Skills Centres Manager	Jimmy Kelvin	Skills Coordinator, TORBA
Provincial Skills Centres Manager	Simeon Bage	Skills Coordinator, SANMA
Provincial Skills Centres Manager	Willie Kiltop	Skills Coordinator, MALAMPA

Organisation	Name	Position
Provincial Skills Centres Manager	Amos Talu	Skills Coordinator, PENAMA
Provincial Skills Centres Manager	Charlie Kitchikitchi	Skills Coordinator, TAFEA
Quality Systems	Lucy Battaglione	Quality Systems Support
Quality Systems	Stuart Kinsella	Quality Systems Support
Support Hub	Alison Wells	Support Coordinator
Support Hub	Robbie Gillespie	Support Coordinator
Support Hub	Rachel Pynor	Senior Support Officer

Tertiary education and training institutions

Organisation	Name	Position
National University of Vanuatu	Jean-Pierre Nirua	President/Vice Chancellor
National University of Vanuatu	Ben Boulekouran	Principal, School of Education
National University of Vanuatu	Christelle Thieffry	Team Leader
National University of Vanuatu	Gayleen Tarosa	Deputy Principal/ Senior lecturer, School of Education

Provincial Government

Organisation	Name	Position
Tafea Province	Joe Iautim	Tafea Provincial Secretary-General
Torba Province	Albert Ruddley	Torba Provincial Secretary-General
Sanma Province	Carol Rovo	Sanma Provincial Secretary-General
Penama Province	Moses Bani	Penama Provincial Secretary-General

Civil society

Organisation	Name	Position
Save the Children	Polly Banks	Country Director
Save the Children	Jack French	Program Development & Quality
ADRA	Danny Masoe	Project Manager
Vanuatu Society of People with Disabilities	Judith Iakavai	Program Manager

DFAT and other development partners

Organisation	Name	Position
Australian High Commission Vanuatu	Emily Fisher	Deputy High Commissioner
Australian High Commission Vanuatu	Stephanie Kimber	First Secretary
Australian High Commission Vanuatu	Yvette Andrews	Senior Program Manager Education
Australian High Commission Vanuatu	Gina Dehinavanua	Program Manager, Education/ Skills/ Australia Awards
Australian High Commission Vanuatu	Anna Gibert	Education and Skills Adviser
Governance for Growth	Cameron Reid	Director
DFAT Canberra DVS	Belynda McNaughton	Senior Education Adviser
New Zealand High Commission Vanuatu	Holly Peacock	Second Secretary, Development
New Zealand High Commission Vanuatu	Minnie Takaro	Senior Program Manager
UNICEF	Fabiola Bibi	EIE and Infrastructure

Annex 2: Documents consulted

The team was provided with an extensive body of documentation, and given the short timeframes, particularly in preparation for the in-Vanuatu consultations, took a selective and targeted approach to document review. Prioritised documents consulted are listed here, with many more held for continued referenced for the remainder of the design process.

GoV Policies and Strategic Documents

Government of The Republic of Vanuatu, *National Disability Inclusive Development Policy*, 2018

Pacific Islands Forum, *Pacific Regional Education Framework*, 2018

Pacific Islands Forum, *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*, 2018

Government of The Republic of Vanuatu, *Vanuatu National Skills Development Policy*, 2024

Government of The Republic of Vanuatu, *Vanuatu 2030 The People's Plan*, 2016

Government of The Republic of Vanuatu, *Vanuatu Human Resources Development Plan*, 2020

Vanuatu Australia Education Sector Program (VAESP)

Reports and design

Strengthening Public Financial Management in the Education Sector, 2024

Vanuatu Australia Education Support Program, *Annual Plan*, 2024
Vanuatu Australia Education Support Program, *VAESP II 2023 Annual Report*, 2023

Vanuatu Education Support Program, *VESP II 2022 Annual Report*, 2023

Vanuatu Education Support Program, *Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning Framework 2022-2026*, 2022

Vanuatu Education Support Program, *VESP II – Mid-Year Context Analysis*, 2022

Vanuatu Education Support Program Phase II Investment Design Document

Vanuatu Education Support Program, *VESP Phase 1 Completion Report*, 2018

Australia Awards

Australia Awards Vanuatu, *Annual Report*, 2023

Australia Awards Vanuatu, *Reflection Workshop*, 2023

Australia Awards Vanuatu, *Completion Report*, 2019

Evaluations and Reviews

Department of Foreign Affairs, *DFAT Management Response: Mid-Term Review of The Vanuatu Education Support Program II*, 2022

Department of Foreign Affairs, *Mid-Term Evaluation Vanuatu Education Support Program*, 2022

Department of Foreign Affairs, *Vanuatu Education Support Program Management Response*, 2019

Department of Foreign Affairs, *Vanuatu Education Support Program Mid-Term Review*, 2016

VAESP Steering Committee

Ministry of Education and Training, *VESP Steering Committee Direct Funding Arrangement Update*, 2024

Ministry of Education and Training, *VESP 2024 Annual Plan*, 2024

Ministry of Education and Training, *VSCM – Pausing and Reflecting, and a few more things*, 2024

MoET

Ministry of Education and Training, *Disability Inclusive Education Resource Mid-Point Review Report*, 2023

Vanuatu Skills Partnership

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Vanuatu Skills Partnership, *Leadership Incubation for Locally led Development*, 2023

Devpolicy Blog, *A Localisation Journey – The Vanuatu Skills Partnership*, 2023

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Vanuatu Skills Partnership, *Annual Progress Snapshot*, 2024

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Vanuatu Skills Partnership, *Annual Progress Snapshot*, 2023

Vanuatu Skills Partnership, *Annual Progress Snapshot Aligned with the National Sustainable Development Plan*, 2023

Vanuatu Skills Partnership, *Vanuatu Skills Partnership Program Logic*, 2023

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Vanuatu Skills Partnership, *Story of Change, Supporting locally-led disaster response in Tafea Province*, 2023

Vanuatu Skills Partnership, *Story of Change, Leadership incubation for locally-led development*, 2023

Corporate Support Plans and Reports

Vanuatu Skills Partnership, *Annual Corporate Support Plan*, 2024

Vanuatu Skills Partnership, *Corporate Support Report*, 2023

Reviews and Evaluations

Kinsella, S. & McNaughton, B., *Independent Evaluation of the Vanuatu Skills Partnership*, 2021

Barbara, J, [How the Vanuatu Skills Partnership has supported local-level service delivery and decentralisation in Vanuatu](#), 2021

Vanuatu Skills Partnership, *Thinking and working politically in the Vanuatu skills sector: supporting local leadership and building a political constituency for change*, 2019

Other

Yanhambath, F & Gibert, A. (2023). [A localisation journey – the Vanuatu Skills Partnership](#).

Silas, E. (2022). [Using MEL to support systemic reform: the case of Vanuatu Skills Partnership](#)

Vanuatu Skills Partnership, *Vanuatu Skills Partnership Video Links*

DFAT and Other

DFAT (2024). *DFAT Guidance Note: Locally-Led Development*.

DFAT (2024). *International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy*.

DFAT (2023). *Design and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Standards*

DT Global. (2024). *Locally Led Development Framework*.

Annex 3: Terms of Reference

Design(s) of the Next Phase of Support of the Vanuatu Skills Partnership and the Vanuatu Australia Education Support Program

Introduction

1. These Terms of Reference (ToR) will guide the design of the next phase of Australia's bilateral investments in Vanuatu's education and skills development sectors, to replace the current Vanuatu Skills Partnership Phase 4 (VSP) and the Vanuatu Australia Education Support Program (VAESP), which end January 2026 and December 2026 respectively.
2. The design will include a preliminary high-level review exploring opportunities to enhance the collective positive impact of Australia's overall support to the education and skills sectors. This will involve increasing the coherence and coordination of Australia's programming in these sectors, reflecting their joint positioning under the Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). Priority will be placed on identifying the strengths and areas for improvement of the current investments, so that lessons and gains generated by both can inform a more 'joined-up' approach to Australia's support to the national education and skills development system, improved investment outcomes and potentially increased efficiencies. This may include an approach, for example, where the two programs are combined; the two programs are distinct but have a shared implementation contractor and/or shared panel of technical assistance; or retain their current respective implementation approaches.
3. Following the preliminary review, there will be a 'stop-go' point, and the submission of a formal review report, including the recommended implementation/modality option, which will be detailed in a comprehensive investment design document(s), to be tendered for implementation by June 2025. It is expected that the next phase of Australia's bilateral commitment to basic education and skills development in Vanuatu will extend until 2034.

Background

4. Australia is a longstanding partner and steadfast supporter of education and training in Vanuatu - across ECE, primary schools and the skills/TVET sector. The Government of Vanuatu (GoV) has named education as one of its top three priorities (alongside infrastructure and health) as a foundational building block for the achievement of national development goals, and skills development as a central driver for inclusive economic growth and a dynamic private sector. Both are strongly reflected in the National Sustainable Development Plan 2030 (NSDP). However, the operational context and political economy in Vanuatu, as well as policy settings for both governments and the broader region, have evolved since the previous designs of both VAESP and VSP. In particular, DFAT's new International Development Policy and the Blue Pacific 2050 Strategy place a stronger emphasis on locally led development, as well as maximising 'collective impact' of donor investments. DFAT has also introduced new Tier 2 indicators as part of the Performance Assessment Framework for the new policy, putting increased emphasis on measuring Australia's contribution to learning outcomes, access to technical/vocational courses and positive policy change. Currently, although VAESP and VSP operate within the policy framework and priorities of the MoET, they are implemented in relative isolation from each other, managed on behalf of DFAT by two distinct Australia-based contractors.

5. The primary goal of VAESP is to support the MoET to achieve its goal of improving education

access, quality and management, as detailed in the Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategy and operationalised through the MoET's Corporate Plan. The central focus of VAESP is to support the MoET to improve education delivery and learning outcomes in schools from ECE to year 6. The program works to increase both access to education, through strengthening infrastructure and inclusive approaches, as well as the quality of education delivery, through strengthening curriculum, teaching delivery and teacher management. VAESP also aims to support MoET's devolution at provincial and school levels, for improved planning, implementation and decision-making, as well as increased community and parental engagement. VAESP is embedded within the MoET and contributes to the sustainability of outcomes by ensuring alignment with GoV priorities, staffing, timelines and activities. All VAESP plans and activities aim to feed into, support and enhance local systems and MoET leadership, including supporting professional development of government staff.

6. VSP is a locally led initiative that has established provincial Skills Centres (now integrated under the Tertiary Education Directorate (TED) of the MoET), which facilitate skills training and entrepreneurial support across key productive/industry sectors, in partnership with a range of GoV ministries and all provincial governments. The two government agency counterparts for VSP are the MoET and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and all results are tracked against the aims of the NSDP. VSP has a strong focus on 'leadership incubation', supporting reformists at both provincial and national level to build coalitions to address challenges in the supply of in-demand skills for inclusive economic results. At the same time as maximising economic results, VSP seeks to strengthen the quality of, and access to, local training delivery and the governance of the national skills development system. VSP also works directly with schools through its 'TVET in School' and 'Farm to School' initiatives. VSP uses an innovative 'Support Contractor' modality and has been recognised by DFAT as an example of locally led development cooperation that has achieved strong results, particularly at the provincial level.

7. The new investments in education and skills will be guided by the Vanuatu Government priorities as articulated in the NSDP, the Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategy, and the National Skills Development Policy (2023-2030). They will also be informed by and reflect the priorities of Australia's International Development Policy and the new Vanuatu Australia Development Partnership Plan (2024-2030), as well as DFAT's forthcoming Gender Equality Strategy (including the mandatory requirement for investments over \$3 million to specifically include gender equality at the outcome or intermediate outcome level) and Disability Equity Strategy.

8. Both VAESP and VSP have undertaken independent evaluations (in 2021 and 2022 respectively), along with annual Investment Monitoring Reports, which detail strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. Both programs are managed adaptively, with key documentation (e.g.: Annual Plans and Monitoring and Evaluation Plans) capturing how learnings are informing revisions to implementation approaches. This documentation, alongside key stakeholder consultations, will provide a strong basis for the preliminary high-level review as part of the design process.

9. There are also a number of other investments in Vanuatu supported by Australia as well as other donors in the education and skills development sectors. These include Australia Awards scholarships, Global Partnership for Education, the forthcoming successor to the Australia-Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) – the Pacific Australia Skills Platform (PASP), New Zealand's support to

the secondary education sub-sector, the forthcoming ADB-funded Supporting the Delivery of Skills Project and regional initiatives including Australia's support to the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) and SPC's Education and Quality Assessment Programme (EQAP). The new phases of VAESP and VSP will seek to maximise coordination and harmonisation with these initiatives also for optimal impact.

SCOPE OF THE DESIGN

10. The design process will incorporate two interrelated phases:

- a. High-level review of the current VAESP and VSP programs, including desk-based analysis of key review and monitoring and evaluation documentation validated by virtual and incountry stakeholder consultations, to inform the new design.
- b. Preparation of the design of the new phases of support for both the basic education and skills development sectors, as either an integrated Investment Design Document (IDD) or two connected, but separate, IDD's. Should the latter option be selected, the same design team will be responsible for both IDD's to maximise coherence and coordination, as well as resourcing efficiencies for DFAT.

The decision as to which IDD option will be most appropriate will be made by DFAT Port Vila Post, based on the findings and recommendations of the high-level review.

11. The design team will be guided and supported throughout the process by the DFAT Post Education and Skills team, Post's Education and Skills Adviser and Canberra's Design and Education Advisory Services.

High Level Review

12. The primary purpose of the high-level review is to identify:

- a. The key strengths and factors of success of both the VAESP and VSP programs.
- b.
- b. Areas for improvement for both programs with regard to the achievement of development outcomes and impact in line with their respective current Theories of Change.
- c. Opportunities to maximise strengths and learnings from both programs, and address areas of weakness, including through improved coordination and coherence, as well as greater alignment with GoV and DFAT's new policy settings.
- d. Practical strategies to operationalise improved coordination and coherence through the design of the next phases of investment, while protecting and building on gains made to date, and a recommended implementation modality and approach.
- e. Recommended approach to the preparation of the IDD – either as a single IDD that integrates investments in both sectors, or as connected but stand-alone IDD's.
- f. If a single IDD is selected, options as to the extent of integration between the two investments.

13. To identify the above data and make evidence-based recommendations, the design team will undertake a desk-based analysis of key review and reporting documentation, which will then be complemented and validated by in-Australia and in-Vanuatu consultations with key stakeholders (virtual and in-person).

14. The high-level review will be compiled into a draft report clearly addressing points a)-f) above, for feedback and approval by DFAT Post.

15. Following incorporation of any feedback from DFAT Post, and approval of a final report, the design team will prepare an IDD (integrated for both programs or two connected but stand-alone documents) in line with the DFAT-led design IDD template and DFAT's Design Monitoring and Evaluation Standards (updated 2022).