

Review: Vanuatu Education Support Program MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Investment Summary

Investment Name	Vanuatu Education Support Program (VESP)
AidWorks reference	Investment INK372; Activity 12B301
Original dates:	1 March 2013 to 30 June 2017
Amended dates:	1 March 2013 to 31 January 2019 (amendment signed 19 June 2017)
Original value:	Total value: A\$33,796,778.92 (incl. A\$11,922,473.60 from the New Zealand Government)
Amended value:	Total value: A\$41,105,297.40 (Incl. A\$11,922,473.60 from the New Zealand Government)
Implementing partner:	Coffey International Ltd manages the majority of activities for VESP. Development Partners provide funds directly to the Ministry of Education and Training through a Direct Funding Arrangement (DFA) valued at A\$8,152,772.00.
Other key partners:	New Zealand Government
Country/Region:	Vanuatu
Primary sector:	Education
Initiative goals:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve the quality of education in Vanuatu 2. Improve equitable access to education for children in Vanuatu. 3. Improve the management of the education system in Vanuatu.

Review Summary

The aim of the review was to determine to what extent the intermediate outcomes agreed to in the VESP Monitoring and Evaluation Plan are on track; and to recommend strategies to improve the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the program (for the current phase, with a likely extension to June 2018, and for a future phase). The intermediate outcomes are:

1. Increase in the number of schools with teachers implementing the new curriculum for Years 1-3 using effective teaching and learning methodologies.
2. Increase in the number of schools and kindergartens implementing inclusion initiatives to improve access for children to kindergarten and Years 1-3.
3. Provincial officers providing necessary support to school leaders.

Review Team:

- Zoë Mander-Jones (independent consultant and review team leader)
- Roy Ben (Senior Program Officer Policy & Planning Unit, MoET)
- David Coleman (DFAT Education Specialist Canberra and technical lead)
- Cobin Ngwero (Senior Monitoring Officer/ Acting PEO Policy and Planning, MoET)
- Karen Soanes (First Secretary NZ High Commission, Port Vila)
- Christelle Thieffry (Senior Program Manager, Australian High Commission, Port Vila)
- Barbara Thornton (independent education specialist)

The review took place in October to November 2016, with the team in Vanuatu from 2-15 November. Consultations were conducted in Port Vila and two provinces – Sanma and Penama. An aide memoire was

presented to the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) and stakeholders at the conclusion of the field visit. The review was completed on 15 December 2016.

Key messages:

- VESP's targeted and integrated approach is effective and remains relevant.
- VESP is on track to achieve intermediate outcome one. The roll-out of the new curriculum is a significant achievement for MoET. The program will need to closely support and monitor implementation of the language transition strategy.
- VESP is making adequate progress in some areas to achieve intermediate outcome two. However, full achievement of this outcome is likely to be constrained by a number of factors, including the high number of over-age students in the school system.
- VESP is making adequate progress to achieve intermediate outcome three, however it is too early to assess results. For example, MoET's devolution plans have the potential to positively impact on children's learning, but these reforms are at early stages of implementation.
- While VESP is a well-functioning program, it is important to maintain a focus on the end of program outcomes (not just the intermediate outcomes). Over the next 18 months and beyond, all stakeholders should increase their attention on how the inputs and outputs of VESP are building appropriate pathways towards end of program outcomes.
- VESP is contributing to a multi-decade agenda of education sector strengthening. It is crucial to maintain the momentum of key reforms. Loss of momentum following early progress is a risk for transitioning to the next phase of support.

Overall response to the evaluation

DFAT welcomes the review findings and acknowledges the potential risks outlined in the report. DFAT will work closely with partners to address the risks in future implementation plans and in the design of the next phase for VESP.

DFAT agrees with all recommendations made and will work closely with MoET and other partners to ensure all recommendations are adequately addressed. In particular, DFAT acknowledges the impact of the program at the school level and agrees with the need to maintain momentum and strengthen communication strategies to engage with the different stakeholders. DFAT agrees that there will be need to work on a robust design for the next phase of support over the next 18 months, with strong MoET ownership. DFAT will also work closely with other development partners over this period.

Response to specific recommendations

Recommendation 1: Extend the current phase of VESP to December 2018

DFAT response: Agree

The original contract with Coffey International Ltd offered the option to extend to 30 June 2018. DFAT acknowledged that this timing does not match the calendar year and would end the program in the middle of the school year, with the risk of disrupting the roll-out of the curriculum material and the teachers' training. DFAT successfully negotiated (signed June 2017) with Coffey International Ltd the extension of the contract to the end of January 2019, to allow one month for handover for a future phase. The extension to the end of the school year in 2018 allows adequate time to collect data about the implementation of the curriculum and the language policy in primary schools.

Recommendation 2: Start planning now for a smooth transition to VESP II

DFAT response: Agree

The extension of Phase I will allow time for joint planning with partners for the next phase, without losing momentum in implementation and the current program. DFAT will develop an appropriate design process and recruit design team members in consultation with partners. The timing and duration of the design process will maximise MoET ownership of the process and the design.

***Recommendation 3:** The VESP Steering Committee should closely monitor the implementation of the language transition strategy*

DFAT response: Agree

Field work recorded evidence of a lack of understanding about the transition to the international languages (English and French). There is a need to focus on information dissemination to school leaders, teachers and the whole community. MoET is responsible for implementing and closely monitoring the language transition strategy. Through steering committee meetings and other regular contact with MoET officials, DFAT will regularly discuss implementation of the language transition strategy. Where appropriate, DFAT will provide support to MoET, including through joint monitoring visits.

***Recommendation 4:** Training and professional development around the new curriculum should be intensive and ongoing.*

DFAT response: Agree

Data shows that over 1,000 teachers have benefited from in-service training. The task of implementing a new curriculum, new teaching methodologies and a new language policy requires continuous training, mentoring and support. There is potential for different forms of training at this stage in the program, such as cluster group training and distance learning. DFAT will work closely with partners to ensure training and professional development continues, and is appropriate to the context.

***Recommendation 5:** The partnership between CDU and VITE/ISU be further strengthened*

DFAT response: Agree

The relationship between units in MoET - Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), Examination and Assessment and the Vanuatu Institute of Teachers' Education (VITE), which develops training for teachers is crucial for the success and sustainability of the curriculum implementation. DFAT will continue to support this partnership, through support to CDU to manage a quality process for curriculum, and support to VITE in revitalising training efforts and exploring approaches for more proactive engagement in new in-service training.

***Recommendation 6:** The VSEP Steering Committee closely consider the findings of all monitoring studies*

DFAT response: Agree

When completed, the findings from the monitoring studies will be presented to the Steering Committee, which will inform decisions for the short, medium and long term. These studies will provide evidence to inform planning, policy development, activities and budgets for the coming years for all members of the Steering Committee, including the Prime Minister's Office, MoET and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management.

***Recommendation 7:** The VESP Steering Committee should increase its attention on how VESP activities are building pathways towards the higher level end of program outcomes.*

DFAT response: Partially Agree

The end of program outcomes are for a 10-year horizon. In the coming months, the program will continue to monitor progress against outcomes in line with the M&E system. There will be an opportunity in the design of next phase to review end of program outcomes.

***Recommendation 8:** Dealing with over-age enrolment should be a key priority for the sector*

DFAT response: Agree

This issue has been discussed with the Director General of MoET, and in Steering Committee meetings. It has financial implications for MoET, as school grants are calculated on enrolment data, but it also has a strong impact on learning outcomes for children. Through the current program, a communication strategy

was developed to target children entering primary education at the right age (6 Yia, Klas 1). DFAT will explore this issue as part of the design of phase II and will continue strategic discussions with MoET, including through the upcoming review of the school grant criteria.

Recommendation 9: MoET should continue to implement the recommendation of the SECCE Evaluation.

DFAT response: Agree

MoET extended World Vision's contract to ensure a smooth transition from the pilot program to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Unit.

Recommendation 10: MoET should continue to strengthen connections between kindergartens and primary schools, including a focus on household financial contribution

DFAT response: Agree

ECCE is the foundation of education. If the link between ECCE and primary education is not strengthened, there is a risk to the implementation of the language and curriculum reforms, amongst other policies. DFAT will work closely with MoET to address this issue, including any budgetary constraints. The five year strategy (to be completed by June 2017 with VESP support) will present costing options for MoET to consider.

Recommendation 11: Reducing the numbers of out-of-school children should remain a priority for the sector and should become more of a focus for VESP II

DFAT response: Agree

DFAT will work closely with MoET to prioritise better access to education for out-of-school children. The Strategy for Australia's Aid Investment in Education 2015-2020 prioritises equity, with a particular focus on gender and disability inclusiveness, because fairer education systems are also the most effective.

Recommendation 12: MoET places a stronger focus on communications and regulatory oversight as important strategies to progress reforms (both now and in the future)

DFAT response: Agree

Developing a strong communication strategy is an activity in the 2017 Annual Implementation Plan.

Recommendation 13: The VESP Secretariat continues to monitor and report to the VESP Steering Committee on the effectiveness of its capacity development activities.

DFAT response: Agree

Reporting on progress at Steering Committee meetings is led by MoET managers responsible for this exercise, with support of VESP advisers.

Recommendation 14: MoET looks to strengthen the integration of VESP within broader sector governance mechanism.

DFAT response: Agree

DFAT acknowledges that it is important to make sure VESP is not perceived or presented as a stand-alone program, but is integrated in MoET's Business Plan, Corporate Plan and the Vanuatu Education Sector Strategy. DFAT will work closely with MoET to ensure the current program and the next phase respond to MoET's plan and priorities.