

Management Response

DFAT welcomes the Mid-Term Review's (MTR) evaluation of Australia's human resource development cooperation in Vietnam (Aus4Skills). The review successfully identifies what is working well in the Aus4Skills program, what should be improved, and what should or could cease. The MTR's analysis and recommendations will help Aus4Skills meet its end-of-program outcomes and strengthen the program's relevance and sustainability.

DFAT agrees with the MTR's findings that Aus4Skills is a valuable part of Australia's engagement with Vietnam, and that Aus4Skills' support to higher education and advancing women in leadership is on track to meet end-of-program outcomes. We value the review's recommendations that Aus4Skills' ability to adapt to Vietnam's changing environment is effective, but could be strengthened through a greater emphasis on mid to long term planning, strengthened governance and increased collaboration and policy dialogue with priority stakeholders.

DFAT has already begun implementing a number of the MTR's recommendations. In particular, the review's independent analysis and recommendations are being used by DFAT to set the remainder of Aus4Skills' objectives and work plan to December 2020. This includes considering new ways that Aus4Skills and DFAT can support and engage priority stakeholders.

The MTR's findings and recommendations will also contribute to DFAT's analysis on whether Aus4Skills will continue to be a valuable part of Australia's future engagement with Vietnam. This will subsequently inform DFAT's decision on whether to extend Aus4Skills beyond 2020.

Management response to recommendations

Strategic Recommendations 1-5
<p>Recommendation One</p> <p>DFAT, in collaboration with relevant Australian Government agencies, identify the policy objectives and influence priorities to which Aus4Skills will be expected to contribute in the coming 18 months.</p> <p>Response: Agree</p> <p>Actions: Development of an Aus4Skills 18 month plan (July 2019 – December 2020), following broad consultation with relevant stakeholders and DFAT executive.</p> <p>Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT and Aus4Skills (Managing Contractors – Coffey), 18 month plan drafted June 2019.</p>
<p>Recommendation Two</p> <p>DFAT and Aus4Skills agree on the role Aus4Skills will play in contributing to specific DFAT policy objectives and influence priorities. Aus4Skills to provide evidence and analysis, and to keep DFAT informed of possible entry points for policy dialogue arising from Aus4Skills activities.</p> <p>Response: Agree</p> <p>Actions: As per recommendation 1, to be considered as part of the development and implementation of the 18 month plan.</p> <p>Responsibility: DFAT and Aus4Skills (Managing Contractors – Coffey) – ongoing.</p>

Recommendation Three

DFAT to further discuss its emerging ideas on leadership development activities with relevant partners in Vietnam and Aus4Skills, with a view to designing a stream of leadership support activities in addition to the WIL-J.

Response: Agree

Actions: Initial discussions on new leadership support activities inform the 18 month plan. A concept note on the leadership support activities will be drafted alongside the development of the 18 month plan, and integrated into the plan, with ongoing flexibility to respond to emerging needs and opportunities.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT and Aus4Skills (Managing Contractors – Coffey), discussion in May, Concept note drafted July 2019.

Recommendation Four

DFAT and MOET restructure the functions and membership of the PCC and alter the timing of PCC meetings to better serve Australia and Vietnam's needs for a consultative forum that provides clear direction setting for Aus4Skills.

Response: Agree

Actions: PCC structure to be reviewed and adjusted in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT July 2019.

Recommendation Five

DFAT to confirm any additional strategic priorities for Aus4Skills as soon as possible and use the planning process for the 2019/2020 financial year to detail activities and budgets in line with this.

Response: Agree

Actions: Determine priorities as soon as practicable, in consultation with relevant stakeholders and with ongoing flexibility to respond to emerging needs and opportunities.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT and Aus4Skills (Managing Contractors – Coffey) completed.

Operational

Recommendations 6-9

Recommendation Six

Aus4Skills continue to implement Components 1, 2 and 3 as per the design to expand and consolidate the individual and organisation achievements to date. Aus4Skills continue to work with implementing partners to enhance inter-organisational learning (for example, to support standardisation of curriculum development and quality assurance systems).

Response: Agree

Actions: Facilitate operational level discussions to expand strategic utilisation of Component 1-3 investments into national/central agency policy influence.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT and Aus4Skills (Managing Contractors – Coffey) - Immediately and ongoing.

Recommendation Seven

DFAT and Aus4Skills retain Component 4 and limit the focus of activities to Australia Awards Short Courses and Informal Learning Opportunities that enhance individual skills capacity at the individual level across more than one Aus4Vietnam program. Sector specific and/or organisational human resource development support should be addressed through each of the other Aus4Vietnam programs.

Response: Partly agree

Actions: Components 4 & 5 to be merged. Establish mechanism to identify demand-driven priorities under merged components 4 & 5 on an ongoing basis.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT and Aus4Skills (Managing Contractors – Coffey) - Immediately and ongoing.

Recommendation Eight

DFAT's HRD team agree a 'ways-of-working' framework with relevant DFAT Post staff that identifies the processes for consultation and decision-making during the planning process. This could include consideration of annual plan decision-making at the deputy Head of Mission or Head of Mission level.

Response: Agree

Actions: More formal and regular consultation mechanism to be developed.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT stakeholders and Aus4Skills (Managing Contractors – Coffey) – documented August 2019.

Recommendation Nine

DFAT's HRD team and relevant Aus4Skills staff document respective responsibilities across key tasks to ensure efficient use of resources in both teams.

Response: Agree

Action: More formal and regular consultation mechanism to be developed.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT and Aus4Skills (Managing Contractors – Coffey) – documented August 2019.

Planning and reporting

Recommendations 10-16

Recommendation Ten

Aus4Skills update the indicative activities and budget for 2018/2019 financial year for DFAT consideration/approval. This should include a discussion between DFAT and Coffey regarding the contractual value for personnel costs for the remainder of the program.

Response: Agree

Actions: Discussions as per recommendation are currently underway.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT and Aus4Skills (Managing Contractors – Coffey) April 2019 (and ongoing as required to June 2019).

Recommendation Eleven

The planning process for the 2019-2020 financial year consider the period July 2019 – December 2020 (i.e. the final 18 month period of the program) to ensure coherence in the final stage of the Aus4Skills program.

Response: Agree

Actions: As per Strategic Recommendations 1-5.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT and Aus4Skills (Managing Contractors – Coffey) immediate implementation, 18 month plan drafted June 2019.

Recommendation Twelve

DFAT and Aus4Skills undertake a planning process in early 2019 which:

- a. is conducted in accordance with the 'ways of working' framework mentioned in the recommendations under 'effectiveness'.
- b. covers the period July 2019 – December 2020.
- c. identifies 'priority' activities and 'consolidation' activities for the remainder of program with minimal funds unallocated for emerging priorities.

Response: Agree

Actions: As per Strategic Recommendations 1-5.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT and Aus4Skills (Managing Contractors – Coffey) April – June 2019.

Recommendation Thirteen

The annual reporting cycle be changed from a calendar to financial year cycle to be in alignment with the planning cycle, with two reporting points (January, July) and revised report content.

Response: Agree – already implemented

Actions: As per Strategic Recommendations 1-5.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT and Aus4Skills (Managing Contractors – Coffey) immediately.

Recommendation Fourteen

DFAT to keep the Aus4Skills team informed of global Australia Awards changes and work with them to ensure appropriate alignment and clarification of roles, responsibilities and activities for effective implementation.

Response: Agree

Actions: DFAT to monitor Australia Awards Global Strategy and policies and inform Aus4Skills of changes as required.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT, ongoing.

Recommendation Fifteen

The 2020 Intake be maintained at similar levels to the 2018 and 2019 intakes, i.e. at least 40 and no more than 50 awards offered.

Response: Already agreed

Actions: 2020 intake agreed 50 awards will be offered.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: 2020 intake round closes April 2019, Awardees notified by 1 August.

Recommendation Sixteen

Following the review of the Australia Awards Global Strategy, DFAT Canberra and Post make decisions on indicative allocations for the Australia Awards 2021 – 2025 Intakes.

Response: Partly agree

Actions: Australia Awards Scholarships were outside the main focus of MTR, future decisions yet to be decided.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: DFAT, ongoing.

Monitoring and evaluation**Recommendations 17-20****Recommendation Seventeen**

Aus4Skills adjust its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to reflect agreed policy objectives and influence priorities and Aus4Skills' expected contribution. This should include the approach Aus4Skills will take to regularly documenting opportunities for policy dialogue.

Response: Agree

Actions: Update of M&E framework to ensure an appropriate mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators for the outcomes. DFAT will progress identified policy dialogue opportunities.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: Aus4Skills M&E team in consultation with DFAT, ongoing and based on 18 month plan.

Recommendation Eighteen

Aus4Skills extend measurement of the enabling environment for skills utilisation to include monitoring under Components 1, 2 and 3.

Response: Agree

Actions: Update of M&E framework to ensure an appropriate mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators for the outcomes.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: Aus4Skills M&E team in consultation with DFAT – Completed.

Recommendation Nineteen

Aus4Skills to update M&E framework to include outcome statements on private sector engagement and development, and contribution to policy dialogue.

Response: Agree

Actions: Update of M&E framework to ensure an appropriate mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators for the outcomes.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: Aus4Skills M&E team in consultation with DFAT – Completed.

Recommendation Twenty

Include gendered and disability outcomes in the monitoring and evaluation framework.

Response: Partly agree

Actions: Ongoing review of mechanisms to achieve gender equality, disability and social inclusion reporting outcomes.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: Review in late 2019.

Gender equality, disability and social inclusion**Recommendations 21-23****Recommendation Twenty One**

Continue to consider the gender balance of participants in short courses – for some courses (such as the ‘promoting gender outcomes’ short courses) it may be appropriate to focus on increasing men’s participation.

Response: Agree (noting the challenges of GEDSI in Vietnam)

Actions: Seek advice from and engagement of Aus4Skills Alumni Disability Advocacy Group to inform all components.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: Aus4Skills team in consultation with DFAT GEDSI adviser – ongoing. Establishment of Alumni Disability Advocacy Group currently in development by Aus4Skills Alumni Engagement Team underway and ongoing.

Recommendation Twenty Two

Aim to increase the participation of people with disabilities in the non-scholarship HRD activities. An appropriate starting point would be consulting with disabled people’s organisations who already have some links to Aus4Skills to determine how to best achieve this.

Response: Agree (noting the challenges of GEDSI in Vietnam)

Actions: Seek advice from and engagement of Aus4Skills Alumni Disability Advocacy Group to inform all components.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: Aus4Skills team in consultation with DFAT GEDSI adviser – ongoing. Establishment of Alumni Disability Advocacy Group currently in development by Aus4Skills Alumni Engagement Team.

Recommendation Twenty Three

Consider formalising the disability and social inclusion targets, and report progress towards them.

Response: Agree (noting the challenges of GEDSI in Vietnam)

Actions: Seek advice from and engagement of Aus4Skills Alumni Disability Advocacy Group to inform all components.

Responsible area(s) and timeframe: Aus4Skills team in consultation with DFAT GEDSI adviser – ongoing. Establishment of Alumni Disability Advocacy Group currently in development by Aus4Skills Alumni Engagement Team.