

Fiji Education Sector Program

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INDEPENDENT COMPLETION REPORT

Prepared for AusAID

By

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Aid Activity Summary

Fiji Education Sector Program			
AidWorks Initiative Number	INF528		
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Delivery Organisations	Cardno ACIL, in conjunction with the Western Australia Department of Education and Training and Curtin University of Technology		
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Country/Region	Fiji Islands		
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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACECE	Advanced Certificate in Early Childhood Education
AMB	Activity Monitoring Brief
AMC	Australian Managing Contractor
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BELS Project	Basic Education and Life Skills Project
BEMTUP	Basic Education Management and Teacher Upgrading Project
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit
CUT	Curtin University of Technology
DPE	Diploma in Primary Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EFA	Education for All
EU	European Union
FESP	Fiji Education Sector Program
FIT	Fiji Institute of Technology
FILNA	Fiji Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
FNU	Fiji National University
FIG	Fiji Interim Government
GoA	Government of Australia
HRM	Human Resource Management
ICR	Independent Completion Report
IST	In Service, Scholarships and Training Unit
IT	Information Technology
KLA	Key Learning Area
LANA	Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
LTC	Lautoka Teachers' College
LTCUP	Lautoka Teachers' College Upgrade Project
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoE	Ministry of Education (Fiji Interim Government)
MoFNP	Ministry of Finance and National Planning (Fiji Interim Government)
NCF	National Curriculum Framework

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
PACTAF	Pacific Technical Assistance Facility
PDD	Program Design Document
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PMMG	Program Management and Monitoring Group
PSC	Public Service Commission
PM	Program Manager
QAI	Quality at Implementation
SMT	Simplified Monitoring Toolbox
SoS	Scope of Services
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SWAp	Sector Wide Approach
TA	Technical Assistance
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
TNA	Training Needs Analysis
TOR	Terms of Reference
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
USP	University of the South Pacific
WADET	Western Australia Department of Education and Training

Executive Summary

The Australian-funded Fiji Education Sector Program (FESP) was designed to support efforts by the Fiji Interim Ministry of Education (MoE) to deliver quality education services and improve education outcomes, especially for children in disadvantaged and remote communities. FESP focused on systems strengthening and capacity building (through the provision of technical assistance and funding of training activities). The A\$28 million program started in June 2003 and was completed on 31 December 2009.

The Independent Completion Report (ICR) team was asked to provide information to AusAID and the MoE on program performance, in particular to (i) assess FESP's impact on education outcomes at the school level including access, literacy and numeracy; (ii) assess the outcomes of FESP's institutional strengthening of the MoE and (iii) compile any lessons learned in regard to implementing a program during changing political climates. The ICR team has examined and reviewed relevant education sector, strategic planning and program documents associated with FESP, and from 12 to 23 April carried out a field visit to the Fiji Islands, during which meetings and interviews were held with AusAID Suva, MoE staff, former program counterparts and a range of education sector stakeholders. The team undertook school visits in Suva, Central and Western Divisions, as well as visiting the Lautoka Teachers College. Preliminary findings were presented to MoE and AusAID on 23 April and subsequently through a written Aide Memoire.

KEY FINDINGS

Implicit in the design of FESP is a 'theory of change' based on achieving improved educational outcomes for students (including disadvantaged and remote areas) by addressing system-wide improvements to education planning, management and delivery. This desire to address system-wide improvements formed part of the rationale for adopting the 'program approach' instead of a series of stand-alone projects. At the time of design, AusAID was also contemplating the future transition to a sector-type approach for education support in Fiji. This overall approach, however, assumed that the MoE possessed, or would soon acquire, the capacity and resources to roll out and sustain the improvements introduced across the system - to districts, schools and classrooms.

Overall, the ICR believes that the FESP investments resulted in important achievements for the education sector in Fiji. However, the ICR also believes that the most significant risk to the sustainable improvement of educational outcomes is that many of the system benefits introduced by FESP have not been transmitted to the classroom level nor have mechanisms been set in place to achieve this. Without further external assistance, severe resource limitations within the MoE will prevent many of these improvements from reaching the intended beneficiaries – the children of Fiji.

Relevance

The goal and purpose of FESP were consistent with the strategic priorities of FIG regarding the future of the education sector, and the intent of the 2000 Education Commission report. During implementation, there was evidence of alignment to MoE priorities, in particular to the three-year Strategic Development Plan and one-year Corporate Plan, and the findings and recommendations of

the 2005 Education Summit. Through the life of the program, the key objective for the FIG and MoE remained improving the quality of education in Fiji.

Following the events of December 2006, the Australian Government limited its assistance to certain sectors of the development cooperation program. FESP, however, was retained and continued to work with MoE counterparts, although contacts between AusAID and higher levels of government were restricted. The program operated within the constraints of the Australian Government's policy of engagement with the Fiji interim government.

Effectiveness

The ICR believes that a large part of the success of FESP is due to the high level of commitment and professionalism demonstrated by staff of MoE, AusAID and the technical and human resources made available by the contractor. Some of the notable achievements include:

- Increased leadership and management capacity for MoE, LTC, district education offices and schools (including principals, head teachers and school management committees);
- Improved policy and planning within the MoE central office and at the district level;
- Improved capacity to plan and develop new learning assessment frameworks and practices;
- Improved capacity to plan and develop new curriculum (e.g. the national curriculum framework and the early childhood education curriculum guidelines);
- Better use of management information systems to inform decision-making, especially teacher allocations;
- Improved teacher training in early childhood and primary education pre-service courses;
- Development of leadership and teaching competency frameworks, which can be used to inform professional development programs and in-service training needs, and
- Lessons learned from implementing TVET pilot programs that have contributed to strengthened schools-based vocational education, aligned with competency requirements at tertiary levels.

The MoE's perception is that the most important results from FESP have been increased capacities in the organisation to plan, monitor and review across the education system. This has included supporting the progressive decentralisation of some of these functions to the district and school level.

The ICR notes that FESP also supported activities which have subsequently been altered, discontinued or are unable to be supported by current levels of MoE resources. These included:

- Reduced pace of implementation for the national curriculum framework;
- Failure to fully incorporate early childhood education into the education system, despite the considerable efforts on developing curriculum and teacher training;
- Limited utilisation of school based planning for guiding school activities, influencing resource provision and monitoring school management;
- Limited scope for implementing organisational restructuring recommendations with positive initiatives in certain areas, exacerbated by the ongoing lack of budgetary resources, and
- A SIMS database that is not fully operational, not integrated with other MoE information systems, and is not user-friendly.

A number of pilot programs were also undertaken by FESP, including:

- Enterprise education which, although successful in implementation, has not been identified by MoE as a continuing priority, and
- Elementary distance education, which the ICR believes has received insufficient attention in relation to potential benefits, if the program could be widened in scope and funded appropriately.

Efficiency

The ICR believes that the high number of program interventions at times stretched the capacity of the MoE to dedicate appropriate personnel to activities, to effectively manage those activities and to ensure institutionalisation and sustainability of results. While FESP claims to have produced a cost-benefit analysis, this ICR has not been able to obtain a copy.

AusAID and MoE agreed on a contractor model, based on a range of factors, including counterpart capacity. However the contractor model is not always the most efficient mechanism for delivery of activities, as there are comparatively high management costs. Nevertheless, the model was modified to increase productivity - for instance to locate staff within MoE, and aligning management, planning and financing systems as much as possible. The contractor model also allowed FESP to continue to deliver activities, despite the political difficulties between Australia and Fiji following the events of late 2006.

Impact

The ICR is unable to assess the long term impacts of FESP activities due to a number of factors, largely because the contractor did not prepare a comprehensive baseline nor properly assess contributions made by program activities, there is a lack of reliable time series data on educational outcomes, and the absence of mechanisms to ensure that system changes can be sustainably transmitted to the school, classroom and student levels. To date, indicators such as student enrolment, retention and academic performance do not appear to have been influenced by the changes introduced in management practice, the new curriculum and assessment approaches or the improvements in teacher capacity. Given its critical importance to all education stakeholders, as a minimum, FESP should have enabled MoE to continuously and comprehensively examine academic outcomes for trends - improvements or otherwise - especially by location (urban, semi-urban, rural and remote variables), by districts, and by gender.

There have been some positive impacts at the school level in relation to better teacher mobilisation (primarily due to the use of FESA), improved school-community relations (from the leadership and management training), improved early childhood curriculum, better targeting of school funding and improvements to pre-service teacher training (new diploma graduates from FNU Lautoka). The more significant of the program's positive impacts have occurred in the MoE's central functions. The introduction and use of FESA has also produced substantial improvements in records management and the efficiency of the work environment.

Sustainability

The ICR believes that FESP's joint management approach, alignment of planning with MoE strategic plans and budgets provided for a degree of counterpart ownership and direction. The contractor did undertake a procedure of handover of individual activities and for the program as a whole; however

this did not always take into the technical capacity and/or resources available to MoE to maintain activities. External impacts such as significant staff turnover at the senior levels and lower than expected budgets for education also contributed to limited sustainability in some areas.

The retirement of a large percentage of senior education managers due to the reduction in the mandatory civil service retirement age from 60 to 55 years has had the largest negative impact on the sustainability of program activities and outcomes. The groups most affected by the retirement policy are the cadre of trainers for the leadership and management courses, the trained head teachers/principals as well as a significant number of senior managers at the central and district levels. One response from FESP was the design and implementation of the 'Future Leaders' program, which was targeted to individuals under 45 years of age who demonstrated potential for management assignments.

Of particular concern is the capability of the MoE to effectively implement the curriculum framework, and related activities such as extensive, intensive and continuing in-service training of teachers. The ICR also believes significantly increased resources are also needed to maintain the quality and quantity of training for the leadership and management programs, the training of teachers, supervisors and others in school-based assessments, and in the training for early childhood education curriculum implementation.

The resources required for the replacement/renewal and repair of IT and instructional equipment provided by FESP are also beyond the current budget allocations provided to the MoE. Future programs of assistance to the MoE need to keep in mind that FESP's small investment in improving management information systems has resulted in substantial improvements in efficiency at MoE headquarters.

Gender Equality

The program appeared to be gender-sensitive in that consideration of gender equality was incorporated in activities from the planning stage. Specific outputs, such as curriculum materials, were appraised on a gender basis, and the leadership and management courses promoted participation and support for female staff and community representatives. Within MoE, there has been an increasing proportion of female senior staff, although this may not be attributed directly to program activities. In general, however, the overall impact by the program on improving gender equality in Fiji could not be assessed as there were no specific activities designed for this objective. Gender information forms part of the MoE database systems, and outcomes data can easily be disaggregated on a gender basis. Basic analysis indicates that there is only a very slight problem of female disadvantage in enrolment ratios at the early primary levels, but this reverses to a major advantage at the higher secondary levels. The evidence also indicates that females are now outperforming males at all levels of primary and secondary education. As is the case for overall program impact, the results of any changes introduced by FESP may only be evident once they reach the classroom.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The M&E system developed for FESP was only partially successful at meeting the need for demonstrating achievement of outcomes and providing appropriate information to guide decision making. FESP developed a sophisticated system of internal program monitoring and evaluation; however this did not produce information on educational outcomes. Instead, the M&E system

focused on ensuring that activities were implemented in accordance with the Annual Plan, and compiling results from individual inputs, pilot programs and component level sub-activities. It may have been better to direct the program's M&E resources into activities that better supported MoE's need to measure educational outcomes, which would have also improved the program's ability to measure its own performance, contributions and impact.

The ICR also examined AusAID's role in managing their monitoring and evaluation of the program. Of concern to the ICR is that there does not appear to have been any specific mechanism within AusAID or the contractor's plans for integrating the findings and recommendations from both the program's M&E system and the independent reviews into overall program management and implementation. This weakness may have contributed to the lack of strategic direction of the program that became evident in the later stages.

Analysis and Learning

The ICR believes that a lack of strategic engagement between AusAID, the MoE and the contractor contributed to the program losing direction, particularly in the later years of implementation. Despite a number of independent review and Technical Advisory Group (TAG) recommendations, the program did not adequately address major concerns such as planning for new curriculum implementation, strengthening of in-service teacher training, problems with SIMS and increasing MoE's capacity to measure educational outcomes. Some stakeholders and education officials expressed a preference for program activities to be increasingly directed towards improving quality at the school level, rather than continuing to concentrate program support at improving the systems at the central level. Perhaps a changed balance from providing support at the central level more towards providing support to a selected number of schools to demonstrate the value of the improved systems prior to further rollout may have better served the interests of sector stakeholders.

There were a number of challenges for FESP in implementing a program during a changing political and policy environment, including the key issue of maintaining a level of effective engagement between MoE and AusAID. However, FESP implementation continued to be flexible, and at no stage was operational engagement between the contractor's staff and MoE counterparts seriously affected. The ICR felt that limited high level contacts between AusAID and MoE may have contributed to the program's lack of strategic direction, however there were also other factors involved. FESP therefore demonstrated both the strengths and weaknesses of the program approach and the contractor model. Despite the political tensions, the program's technical support continued and the program managed to achieve a number of significant improvements for the benefit of the education sector in Fiji. The continued operation of FESP after the 2006 military coup and the high regard in which it was held by a wide range of Fiji's stakeholders in education (including MoE officials, school management and committees and teachers), illustrates that 'people to people' engagement between Australia and Fiji through an AusAID project in education (and probably also in health and other areas) can make a valuable contribution to the strength of our bilateral relationship.

The lessons learned from FESP will apply in many other environments where the risks from external factors remain high. These include:

- Ensuring flexibility in programming, to take into account new policy decisions, changes to counterpart budgets and capacity of institutions such as MoE to implement large reform efforts;
- Building on and strengthening MoE systems, especially existing service delivery and management mechanisms;
- Developing mechanisms to support schools at a decentralised and/or local level;
- Developing a continuing process of teacher professional development, given that teachers are at the centre of education reform;
- Ensuring that there are multiple counterparts for sustainable capacity building;
- Taking into account the absorptive capacity of the recipient organisation to deal with a wide range and number of program inputs;
- Managing the selection and deployment of technical advisers in keeping with MoE priorities;
- Ensuring that senior level strategic advice is readily available on a needs basis, and
- Embedding program management and support within the MoE.

Any future donor funded activity in the education sector will need to take into account the continuing fluid political and policy environment. It should be possible for AusAID to manage risks associated with continued involvement in the sector. For example:

- Having a practical approach to maintaining communication with MoE senior staff and other sector stakeholders, to ensure that Australian support continues to meet the most important needs of the people of Fiji. This may or may not have to involve a 'proxy' arrangement using (for example) a contractor or a senior education adviser;
- Having a program that is led and directed by MoE, with flexibility in relation to scheduling and sequencing;
- Using an appropriate model of delivery (with or without an implementing contractor) that ensures effective capacity building but also allows for the program to take into account the availability of counterpart resources and local absorptive capacity, and
- Including a review mechanism that provides AusAID and MoE senior management with timely information if the program's activities are at risk from external factors, and allows for withdrawal, suspension or slowing down as the situation warrants.

PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The ICR believes that any future Australian assistance to the education sector in the Fiji Islands should *be consistent with Australian and international approaches in regard to development effectiveness, ensure sustainability of previous Australian investments, be directed towards improving quality and equity of educational outcomes* in general, and address issues of access and quality for children from remote and disadvantaged communities.
2. The core elements of any package of assistance must include *strengthening the curriculum reform process, provision of quality teaching and learning resources, supporting assessment for learning, and improving teacher quality* through both pre-service and in-service programs.
3. Delivery of external assistance should be *flexible and responsive to priority needs* identified by MoE, and be scheduled in accordance with counterpart resources and capacities to

implement. There should be a mechanism for speeding up or slowing down the pace of implementation as required.

4. Working in Fiji will present AusAID with significant risks associated with the uncertain political and policy environment. However, it is considered that *these risks can be managed provided a sufficiently flexible and appropriate delivery mechanism* is used.
5. The ICR believes that the *current difficulties with collection and analysis of educational outcomes data through SIMS can be resolved at a relatively low cost yet will make a critical contribution.*

Evaluation Criteria Ratings

Evaluation Criteria	Rating (1-6)
Relevance	4
Effectiveness	3
Efficiency	2
Sustainability	3
Gender Equality	-*
Monitoring and Evaluation	3
Analysis and Learning	2

Rating scale: 6 = very high quality, 1 = very low quality. Below 4 is less than satisfactory.

*Insufficient information available

1. Introduction

1.1 Activity Background

1.1.1 In 2001, the Fiji Interim Government (FIG), requested support from the Government of Australia (GoA) in the education sector. This was driven in part by the Fiji Islands Education Commission Report (2000), which had identified development priorities and strategies for improving education quality. Australia, through AusAID, has traditionally assisted this sector, having successfully completed a number of projects in conjunction with the Interim Ministry of Education (MoE) over the previous decade, such as the Fiji Australia Teacher Education Project (1992-95) and the Basic Education Management and Teacher Upgrading Project (BEMTUP), which ran from 1996 to 2001. Australia had also provided funding for the multi-donor Basic Education and Life Skills (BELS) program, supplied an educational planning adviser through PACTAF and has provided in-Australia and in-region scholarships for students from Fiji for many decades. Australia has also provided considerable assistance through other regional initiatives through support to the University of the South Pacific (USP), and education programs/activities of other regional organisations such as SPC and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

1.1.2 In 2002, AusAID fielded a Planning Mission to work with MoE to identify and plan support to the sector and the resulting Program Design Document (PDD) was completed in September 2002. Rather than a series of stand-alone projects, the PDD recommended a program approach, to be implemented by an Australian Managing Contractor (AMC) utilising a management arrangement 'embedded' within the MoE. It was considered that this form of aid would:

- Promote coordination of the activities and alignment to strategic priorities;
- Provide for flexibility and responsiveness in meeting changing needs;
- Minimise the burden on MoE of managing FESP, and
- Provide an effective mechanism for different donors funding common initiatives.

1.1.3 It seems AusAID understood that any future assistance to the education sector in Fiji would continue to be driven by FIG and MoE priorities, with FESP as a transition phase to a more sector-oriented approach. From discussions with MoE and AMC staff, the ICR understands that Australian support to the education sector was expected to continue for a 15 to 20 year period – that is, beyond the timeframe of FESP.

1.1.4 FESP was subsequently tendered by AusAID and a contract was signed with Cardno ACIL (in partnership with Curtin University of Technology and the Western Australia Department of Education and Training) as the AMC in May 2003. Program implementation commenced in June 2003. In September of that year the existing Australian-funded Lautoka Teachers College Upgrade Project (LTCUP) was incorporated into FESP. Following a review in June 2006, FESP was approved to continue implementation, and in June 2008 was granted a further extension with completion scheduled for December 2009. Total project expenditure in the six and a half years of the activity was just over A\$ 28 million.

1.1.5 The original goal of the program was:

“To assist the MoE to implement strategic reforms, thereby improving the delivery/quality of educational services in Fiji, especially to disadvantaged and remote children”

The original purpose of the program was:

“To provide the MoE with a flexible, responsive support mechanism/facility to assist in improving the planning, management, provision and monitoring of education services”

1.1.6 During 2003 the AMC and MoE entered into a comprehensive planning process that identified activities to be implemented under the program, following a 25 point MoE Action Plan that had been developed in response to the 2000 Education Commission Report. Other activities were initiated after the Fiji Education Summit held in 2005, as well as following the completion and updating of the MoE strategic plans, the results of pilot programs and after the study visits undertaken by senior MoE staff to Western Australia. All new FESP activities had to be consistent with MoE strategic plans and were approved through the annual planning process by the program’s decision-making body, the Program Management and Monitoring Group (PMMG).

1.1.7 In December 2006, a military coup occurred in Fiji and an interim government was established. The GoA limited its assistance to certain sectors of the development cooperation program; however it was decided that FESP would be continued. Australia’s policy of engagement with the Fiji interim government was reviewed following the abrogation of the Constitution in 2009. A Situation Analysis was prepared as the precursor to drafting a Concept Note outlining future Australian assistance, which was finalised in June 2009. A further design mission was mobilised and was in-country at the time of the ICR.

1.1.8 The program’s original logframe contained four components, with some adjustments late in FESP implementation. According to the AMC, the logframe was changed in late 2008 to ensure that the final year of the program was consistent with the MoE’s Strategic Plan 2009-11, and to set the basis for future sectoral support. While the goal and purpose statements are clarified, the ICR found the decision to amend the logframe curious at such a late stage of the program (despite the stated rationale), especially with future funding still uncertain. For 2009, the following changes were made to the goal, purpose and component structure:

Level	Original Logframe (2003-08)	New Logframe (2009)
Goal	To assist the MoE to implement strategic reforms, thereby improving the delivery/quality of educational services in Fiji, especially to disadvantaged and remote children	To assist the Interim Ministry of Education (MoE) to improve education outcomes for children
Purpose	To provide the MoE with a flexible, responsive support mechanism/facility to assist in improving the planning, management, provision and monitoring of education services	Assist MoE to implement strategic initiatives across the organisation focusing on capacity development that raises the quality of education for the children of Fiji especially in disadvantaged and remote communities
Component 1	Build leadership and management capacity within the MoE	
Component 2	Build policy and planning capacity within	

	the MoE	
Component 3	Improve curriculum relevance and flexibility	Develop relevant and flexible curriculum
Component 4	Enhanced primary teacher education at Lautoka Teachers College	Implement new national curriculum in schools
Component 5		Improve effectiveness of TVET service delivery in MoE's Secondary Vocation Schools
Component 6		MoE staff are suitably qualified, competent and motivated to deliver education services
Component 7		Strengthen community participation in education
Component 8		Improve management through accountability, policies and programs
Component 9		Manage FESP in an effective, efficient and responsive manner

1.1.9 The changes to the logframe structure presented the ICR with a dilemma in selecting which one to use for performance assessment. Longitudinal data (collected by the AMC, MoE counterparts and independent reviews/TAGs from 2003 to 2008) had used the original logframe structure, while the contractor's ACR used the new logframe. As the new logframe had been approved by MoE and AusAID, and had been used for at least one whole cycle of program evaluation, this ICR chose to measure component and overall program performance against the new version (see Annex H).

1.2 Evaluation Objectives and Questions

1.2.1 The ICR process is part of AusAID's quality assurance framework intended to provide information to AusAID and the MoE on program performance. For activities with a value of greater than A\$ 3 million or for those with strategic or political importance, AusAID policy requires an independent evaluation be conducted every four years or upon activity completion. Such an independent evaluation is the main source of information on the effectiveness of the aid program and is also intended to improve future activity design and implementation.

1.2.2 In particular, this ICR mission was required to:

- (i) Assess FESP's impact on education outcomes at the school level including access, literacy and numeracy;
- (ii) Assess the outcomes of FESP's institutional strengthening of the MoE, and
- (iii) Compile any lessons learned in regard to implementing a program during changing political climates.

1.2.3 It was not expected that the ICR would comprehensively evaluate individual activities but rather how the activities as a whole have impacted on the program outcomes. The Terms of reference (TORs) for the ICR are included at Annex A.

1.3 Evaluation Scope and Methods

1.3.1 The TORs provide the scope for the evaluation process of FESP. The activity is to be assessed for performance against the quality criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact,

sustainability, gender equality, monitoring and evaluation and analysis and learning. The ICR team was contracted and commenced work in April 2010.

1.3.2 The ICR team developed an Evaluation Plan to guide the conduct of the evaluation, identify potential informants for meetings and interviews, and other information needs. Questions were prepared for the various categories of informants. A copy of the Evaluation Plan is at Annex B. Other tasks for the team included examining and reviewing relevant education sector, strategic planning and program documents associated with FESP. A list of documents reviewed is included at Annex D.

1.3.3 From 12 to 23 April, a field visit to the Fiji Islands was undertaken, during which the team held meetings and conducted interviews with AusAID Suva, MoE staff, former program counterparts and a range of education sector stakeholders. In addition, available information on educational outcomes was obtained and analysed from data sources within MoE and elsewhere. The team undertook school visits in Suva, Central and Western Divisions, as well as visiting the Lautoka Teachers College. A list of persons met and organisations consulted is included at Annex C.

1.3.4 On 23 April, the ICR team presented their preliminary findings to the MoE and AusAID at a meeting in Suva. An Aide Memoire was prepared and was later distributed to the primary stakeholders.

1.4 Evaluation Team

Team Leader	Mr Bill Pennington
Education Specialist	Mr Nelson Ireland
Economics Specialist	Professor Wadan Narsey

2. Evaluation Findings

2.1 Overall

2.1.1 Implicit in the design of FESP is a ‘theory of change’ that is based on achieving improved educational outcomes for students (including those in disadvantaged and remote areas) through system-wide improvements to education planning, management and delivery. This strategy is consistent with current thinking on development effectiveness, particularly in relation to sustainability and strengthening host country capacities. The strategy was also in line with AusAID’s Better Education Policy (released in 2006) which states that technical assistance and training have a greater impact when complemented by initiatives to strengthen the systems themselves. The ICR understands that FESP activities were aimed at improving the central functions of the MoE¹. Implicit in this approach is the assumption that the MoE possessed, or would develop the capacity and have resources available to roll out and sustain the improvements introduced across the system down to districts, schools and classrooms where improvements in academic outcomes are expected to be achieved.

2.1.2 FESP’s design objectives were also consistent with Fiji’s stated education priorities emerging from the 2000 Education Commission, the 2005 Education Summit and implementation remained consistent with MoE strategic and corporate plans as they were developed. The program was also consistent with assisting Fiji to meet international and regional objectives such as MDG 2, EFA and the education elements contained within both the Port Moresby Declaration and the Cairns Compact.

2.1.3 The need to address system-wide improvements formed part of the rationale for adopting the ‘program approach’ instead of a series of stand-alone projects. At the time of design, AusAID was also contemplating the possible transition to a sector-type approach for education support in Fiji, although the PDD assumed that a contractor would be used to manage delivery. The contractor model does have a number of limitations, especially in regard to program flexibility, limitations on the sourcing of technical assistance and comparatively high management costs (although these can be mitigated). If designed now, a program approach would no doubt incorporate better the themes outlined in the subsequent Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008).

2.1.4 The ICR generally concludes that over the six and a half years of FESP, there have been some significant improvements in the quality of the education system in the Fiji Islands². The program achieved most of its output level targets, and did so on time and within budget. The level of satisfaction among stakeholders was high. The ICR believes that a large part of the success of FESP is due to the high level of commitment and professionalism demonstrated by staff of MoE, AusAID and

¹ There were some activities that had broader reach, such as the delivery of a leadership and management training program, strengthening pre-service training and the piloting of school-based programs in selected areas.

² A summary of performance against the final FESP logical framework is provided at Annex H.

the technical and human resources made available by the AMC. Some of the notable achievements include:

- Increased leadership and management capacity for MoE, LTC, district education offices and schools (including principals, head teachers and school management committees);
- Improved policy and planning within MoE headquarters and at the district level;
- Improved capacity to plan and develop new learning assessment frameworks and practices;
- Improved capacity to plan and develop new curriculum (e.g. the national curriculum framework and the early childhood education curriculum guidelines);
- Better use of management information systems to inform decision-making, especially teacher allocations;
- Improved teacher training in early childhood and primary education pre-service courses;
- Development of leadership and teaching competency frameworks, which can be used to inform professional development programs and in-service training needs, and
- Lessons learned from implementing TVET pilot programs that have contributed to strengthened schools-based vocational education, aligned with competency requirements at tertiary levels.

2.1.5 The MoE's perception is that the most important results from FESP have been increased capacities in the organisation to plan, monitor and review across the education system. This has included supporting the progressive decentralisation of some of these functions to the district and school level.

2.1.6 FESP also supported activities which have subsequently been altered, discontinued or are unable to be supported by current levels of MoE resources. These included:

- Reduced pace of implementation for the national curriculum framework, due to concerns over the capability of teachers to effectively implement the curriculum – thus a much more detailed set of curriculum guidelines are being prepared.
- Failure to fully incorporate early childhood education into the education system, despite the considerable efforts on developing curriculum and teacher training. Two factors affected this – (i) the lateness in the work being undertaken and (ii) the costs involved;
- Limited utilisation of school based planning for guiding school activities, influencing resource provision and monitoring school management. This is really an issue of capability at both the school level and the supervision level – it takes a number of years of progressive and intensive support to get this to function well;
- Limited scope for implementing organisational restructuring recommendations with positive initiatives in certain areas, exacerbated by the ongoing lack of budgetary resources and the lack of a concerted whole of government approach to civil service reform, and
- A SIMS database that is not fully operational, not integrated with other MoE information systems, and is not user-friendly, due to a poor choice of technical solution by the contractor.

A number of pilot programs were also undertaken by FESP, including:

- Enterprise education which, although successful in implementation, has not been identified by MoE as a continuing priority, and
- Elementary distance education, which the ICR believes has received insufficient attention in relation to potential benefits, if the program could be widened in scope and funded appropriately.

2.1.7 The ICR considers that as the program progressed, FESP became less strategic in direction and less able to address systemic needs and priorities. The long term resource implications of some FESP-supported activities (especially the national curriculum framework and professional development programs) did not appear to have been fully taken into account, or program managers may have assumed that Australian support would continue for a longer period. The program was not able to successfully address this apparent loss of strategic focus, despite a number of requests from MoE in the early stages of the program, or the findings of AusAID-initiated external reviews. The loss of strategic focus was exacerbated by the deterioration in political relations at the highest levels, following the events of December 2006 and the subsequent uncertainty surrounding future Australian assistance. This situation, particularly in the latter years of the program, may have affected FESP's ability to achieve the desired improvements in educational outcomes and the sustainability of many of the interventions.

2.1.8 The program contained a high number of inputs, especially technical assistance, which the MoE reported they had difficulty managing given their limited human resources, many of whom were already burdened with their regular MoE responsibilities. Scheduling by the contractor often did not take into account the absorptive capacity of counterparts and the MoE's priorities and appeared, in some instances, to be driven by the achievement of the AMC's contract milestones. Advisers sometimes did not have the requisite capacity building skills or experience, and this, coupled with MoE's limited resources and the program's deadlines, meant that advisers at times completed tasks without associated skills transfer, thereby undermining sustainability.

2.1.9 The ICR was informed by some stakeholders that it is 'too early' to determine if the systemic improvements supported by FESP have actually resulted in improved educational outcomes. The ICR however considers that with a six and a half year timeframe, a program such as FESP should have produced some visible improvements in educational outcomes, if the systemic improvements had been transmitted to the teacher/classroom level. However, this may not have occurred to the extent desired because of a combination of factors such as limited strategic direction, poor coordination and scheduling of some program activities which were not taken to completion, as well as a lack of human and financial resources for important elements of this process (especially in-service training). It is the ICR's view that, while FESP has provided MoE with a good platform for sustaining and expanding these systemic improvements, without further external assistance many improvements will only be able to be continued at a much slower pace, or perhaps not at all.

2.2 Relevance

Focusing Questions

Were the objectives relevant to Australian Government and partner government priorities?

Were the objectives relevant to the context/needs of beneficiaries?

Was the program able to adapt with the changing objectives of stakeholders and the changing political environment?

If not, what changes should have been made to the activity or its objectives to ensure continued relevance?

2.2.1 The goal and purpose of FESP were consistent with the strategic priorities of FIG regarding the future of the education sector, and the intent of the 2000 Education Commission Report. In the design and early stages of the program activities, there is evidence of alignment to MoE priorities, in particular to the three-year Strategic Development Plan and one-year MoE Corporate Plan which were based on the 2001 Action Plan, and the findings and recommendations of the 2005 Education Summit. Through the life of the program, the key objective for the FIG and MoE remained improving the quality of education in Fiji.

2.2.2 The original design of FESP was developed during a period in the Australian bilateral relationship with Fiji when development cooperation was programmed in response to FIG's strategies and priorities. Following the events of December 2006, AusAID has not developed a new country program strategy for Fiji. During the FESP program period, the Australian Government released a White Paper on the aid program³, and AusAID developed a Better Education Policy (both in 2006). Earlier in the life of FESP, AusAID devolved responsibility for managing FESP from Canberra to the Suva post. AusAID commissioned a number of independent reviews of the program but did not appear to request major changes to FESP, or redirect any of the program's activities based on the changing circumstances, new policies or devolved administrative arrangements. Some cross cutting policies that AusAID began to emphasise more in program delivery - such as the mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS and peace and conflict - were incorporated in the program.

2.2.3 FESP was designed as a program approach, to be delivered through an AMC. The focus on systemic improvements, the choice of a program approach and the plan to move towards a sector funding model reflected global trends in improving development effectiveness. However, it is worth noting that a concurrent Australian-funded program in the Fiji health sector chose a different approach, and while direct comparisons should not be made, lessons for future programs could be drawn from the results of other activities in Fiji⁴. The FESP program approach provided a reasonable amount of flexibility through the FESP Annual Plan process, and aligning expenditure to the FIG financial year. The co-location of FESP management and technical advisers within MoE was also found to be very effective. This approach was contrasted with previous projects and the parallel EU FESP which were located in separate project offices outside of the MoE. The ICR was informed by the MoE that they would prefer this 'co-location' arrangement for external technical assistance in future programs.

³ Australian Aid: Promoting Growth and Stability (April 2006)

⁴ The ICR for the Fiji Health Sector Program was in-country at the time of this ICR.

2.2.4 The ongoing relevance of program activities was reinforced through joint program planning sessions between the MoE and the AMC. Regular PMMG meetings were held to review progress and approve the forward program. Monthly MoE Senior Staff meetings were attended by the AMC Team Leader to review progress, identify and resolve issues and to ensure continuous relevance to MoE directions. Regular meetings of the MoE and AMC Program Managers with AusAID (initially weekly and later bi-weekly) were held to inform the donor of progress, identify issues which needed to be addressed and to discuss adjustments to activity plans.

2.2.5 After December 2006, the alignment of program activities to MoE priorities continued, although the policy environment became increasingly complex. A number of directives emerged from the interim Prime Ministerial and Executive levels which put considerable pressure on MoE. These included the introduction of mandatory civil service retirement at age fifty-five, the elimination of the executive teacher position in schools, subsidies of student bus fares and the re-introduction of the inspectorate function. This policy environment, combined with several changes of Permanent Secretary, the loss of many senior managers due to retirement and decreasing real budgetary allocations to MoE created a situation where the alignment of program activities to MoE priorities was much less clear in the final year of the program than at the beginning of FESP.

2.2.6 With the key issue identified as improving the quality of education, FESP sought to support the development of a National Curriculum Framework (NCF), but also initiatives such as:

- i) Development of the Fiji Island Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (FILNA) - now renamed the Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (LANA);
- ii) TVET program revision (in 9 Vocational Schools);
- iii) An Enterprise Education pilot (58 schools and 5 school-community pilots);
- iv) An Early Childhood Education curriculum framework and guidelines; and
- v) A distance education pilot.

2.2.7 Other elements to address system quality included improving education management and delivery. Clear successes of FESP are improvements in MoE capacities for policy and planning, curriculum and learning assessment development, educational monitoring processes and data/information management (particularly in human resources management). At the school level, FESP succeeded in clarifying roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders, providing support to consultative planning processes and improving financial management.

2.2.8 The ICR identified a number of weaknesses in the program's implementation, including:

- The lack of a clear distinction between strategic decision making and the management of operational activities;
- Limited appreciation and acknowledgement of the ongoing resource implications and risks of major FESP initiatives such as in curriculum and assessment reforms;
- Insufficient appreciation of the structural weaknesses in MoE which reduced their ability to ensure that improvements could be effectively transmitted to schools and teachers, and
- An excessive reliance on supplying technical assistance and the provision of training activities for large numbers of participants, without keeping paramount the capacity of the MoE and the education system to absorb and sustain such activities.

2.2.9 Some of these problems were due to the choice of a contractor-led model (and the limitations of the head contract itself); some the result of a lack of resources within MoE (affecting scheduling and implementation, as well as sustainability); and some reflect the lack of strategic input from AusAID and MoE senior management once the program had commenced (suggesting a need for more effective senior management structures). This last factor became critical following the political events of late 2006 through 2009.

2.2.10 Even so, the ICR believes that the contractor-led model could still have been better used to take into account preferences expressed by the MoE, while implementing improvements recommended by the TAG and independent M&E reports. The program would have benefited from a significantly higher level of support to building an in-service capacity within the organisation at all levels - from the central office, through district offices, to clusters of schools and to in-service activities within each school. In relation to management, while the ICR understands that the role of the committee changed depending on the views of particular Permanent Secretaries, instead of a single PMMG, the program would have benefited from a higher level policy and strategic level steering committee, with operational management undertaken by another committee meeting more regularly to plan and provide oversight on individual activities.

2.3 Effectiveness

Focusing Questions

Were the objectives achieved? If not, why?

To what extent did the activity contribute to achievement of objectives?

2.3.1 The ICR believes that most FESP activities achieved their objectives at the output and component levels of the program (see Annex H for a summary assessment of program performance). Some of the successes and exceptions are detailed in the following sections.

2.3.2 Areas where the ICR believes the program was very effective include:

Development of the NCF – the methodology employed was effective in involving and consulting a broad cross-section of stakeholders, and in engaging education managers (particularly curriculum development staff) and teachers in the development of the framework and accompanying syllabuses;

Improving TVET programming and practices within MoE, which resulted in:

- Rationalisation of the number of vocational schools from 65 to 20, as well as limiting the number of vocational programs to those programs where there is likely to be a demand from industry/employers. NB: There is some concern over equity of opportunity to rural learners with resources concentrated in 20 centres;
- Articulation (franchising) with FNU for the first two (and in some instances three) certification levels in selected vocational schools, and
- Upgrading of vocational teachers skills through courses offered by FNU and APTC with funding support from MoE.

At FNU's Lautoka Teachers College, FESP significantly contributed to the upgrading of the Diploma of Primary Diploma (DPE) and the Advanced Certificate in Early Childhood Education (ACECE) Programs,

enhanced information technology (IT) and library services, upgrading of management capabilities and the preparation of new teachers to effectively perform assignments in rural and remote areas. The ICR notes, however that the merger of LTC with FNU has raised some concerns as to whether the practical focus of the programs will be continued;

Development of the ECE Curriculum Framework and Guidelines utilising a broad-based consultative model and being aligned to the NCF;

Changes in MoE management/work practices including:

- A dramatic improvement in the quality and use of FESA to improve efficiency and effectiveness in teacher allocations;
- Connection to the government intranet of MoE district offices for accessing FESA and SIMS;
- Regular attention to policy formulation and development through strengthened capacity and a calendar for policy development and review (useful product: differential funding formula favouring disadvantaged and remote schools).
- Increased focus on the monitoring of education delivery through school review and standards monitoring processes, although there is some confusion how these processes will continue with the recent reintroduction of the “inspectorate” function within MoE;

Improved school-community awareness. This resulted in a better understanding and practice of the respective roles and responsibilities of school heads, teachers and school management committees, including improvement in financial management. A useful product of this activity was the School Management Handbook).

2.3.3 Areas where the ICR believes the program has achieved only limited effectiveness relate to the uneven implementation of results from technical assistance and other inputs, which are generally associated with achieving component level, intermediate or long term outcomes. They include:

Implementation of the NCF. While the NCF was able to secure broad support (including Cabinet approval in 2007), there were gaps in communication and consultation within the MoE, as well as the seeming absence of strategic advice to carefully guide the early implementation stages. There was an optimistic belief that the NCF could be fully implemented within a five to six year time frame, even considering the major shifts in teaching and learning philosophies proposed and the system’s lack of capacity. Following the decision by the Permanent Secretary in late 2008 to delay implementation of the NCF, FESP was requested by MoE to support the development of a literacy and numeracy strategy. The current status of the strategy is not clear, nor how the strategy is linked to the NCF. Additionally, the pre-service teacher institutions still need to incorporate and adjust their curriculum and training to align with the requirements of the NCF and the new ECE Curriculum Framework. The ICR was informed that there has been an apparent decline in communication between the LTC and the MoE since the transfer of the LTC to the FNU earlier this year.

Late implementation support to the roll-out of the ECE Curriculum. The ECE Curriculum Framework and guidelines are aligned to the NCF (approved in 2007), yet the final guidelines and learning materials were approved for publishing only in 2009, following extensive trialling and development activities. MoE is still in the process of preparing and distributing the learning support materials and conducting orientations for the balance of the ECE teachers, with limited resources.

Limited success in developing a comprehensive and integrated in-service training system for teachers, including an important sub-system for providing follow-up support to ensure the application of newly acquired knowledge, skills and techniques in the classroom. FESP appears to

have been instrumental in the establishment of the Professional Development Unit (PDU) however the effectiveness of the PDU is seriously hampered by an inappropriately low level of staffing, the recent transfer of the well-trained and capable unit head, low levels of coordination with other work units that continue to provide in-service activities, and concerns about whether adequate training funds will be available. A system for determining in-service requirements and the design and delivery of activities to meet those requirements appears insufficiently developed. A very promising development is the preparation of national teacher competencies and school head competencies, with plans to conclude TNA data collection in the coming year. If completed and linked to FESA these TNAs could be used to guide in-service training needs, determining priorities for in-service activities and providing an on-line database of training that MoE personnel have taken.

Limited capture of lessons learned from the Enterprise Education and Distance Education pilots as well as the application of findings from the cross-cutting areas of Gender Equality and HIV/AIDS.

Box 1: A Tale of Two Systems

School Information Management System (SIMS)

One of the predecessors of FESP, the Basic Education Management and Teacher Upgrading Project (BEMTUP) had been responsible for supporting the development of a basic school management information system at the MoE. This first version of SIMS contained basic school data, and most users could easily access and use the data when needed. FESP scoping studies in 2003 and 2004 identified improvements to the schools information system as a priority. In spite of expressed concerns by the MoE technical staff not to deviate too far from the existing system, program TA and a locally contracted IT company developed and installed a new version of SIMS that was difficult to work with and modify, and is reported to be “not very user-friendly”.

Fiji Education Staffing Appointments (FESA)

In contrast to SIMS, the development of the FESA management information system was in direct response to a stated MoE problem with staff appointments and transfers. FESA was designed and developed working closely with MoE counterparts and skilled TA, who were praised for their ability to facilitate a high level of skills transfer. The system is web-based and constructed on an open source platform, with a simple user interface. The system links very easily with the FIG’s intranet. Management use of FESA information has resulted in significant cost savings and efficiencies. MoE personnel have the capacity to develop additional modules, and the system is continually being expanded to meet management requests for information.

Work continues to this day to ‘fix’ SIMS - the most likely scenario is migrating SIMS to a platform similar to FESA using the IT Unit’s in-house capacity that was developed as part of FESP.

Unsuccessful efforts to resolve the challenges in the development of an integrated and user-friendly SIMS. The MoE maintains various databases – on teaching staff (qualifications, teaching experience etc), school resources (buildings and infrastructure, learning assets, revenues, expenditures, government grants etc.), and national examinations and assessment outcomes. However, FESP failed to ensure that these various databases (which were being given considerable FESP assistance through relatively costly TA), were compatible with each other and capable of analysis across all

available variables. On the contrary, in each database school registration numbers are different; school names are spelled differently in different years, and location codes (remote, rural, semi-urban, urban) have not been entered into the databases in a consistent and comprehensive manner to allow cross database analysis. This latter weakness means that a range of analyses focusing on academic outcomes of remote and disadvantaged students (a key area for FESP) could not be carried out using these different databases. From information provided to the ICR, it appears that FESP took an already existing SIMS database set up by the previous AusAID project (BEMTUP) which the MoE technical staff were quite comfortable with, and changed the operating environment to one which was considerably less than user-friendly.⁵ Box 1 contrasts FESP's experiences with SIMS and FESA.

Low utilisation of school-based plans to guide school activities, to influence budget allocations or to monitor school management and school-based activities. It appears that there is no systematic monitoring of the school's three year strategic and annual plans for content or quality. There was no evidence provided that indicated the plans are used for monitoring school performance, nor are the plans being adjusted based on any feedback that might be provided. These school improvement plans, if supported systematically, can serve a pivotal role in guiding actions to support the teaching-learning process and consequently improving educational outcomes. Despite FESP producing a Handbook, few teachers have the capacity or training to successfully take advantage of these improvements. NB: this element was particularly affected by the loss of senior teachers due to the retirement policy.

Limited extent of organisational development and re-structuring without needed complementary PSC support. FESP TA inputs appear to have influenced some decisions to adjust the MoE structure, including the designation of an IT Unit; the establishment of the PDU, the overhaul of the CDU and the strengthening of the Policy and Planning functions. However, some of these decisions appear not have been accompanied by the requisite PSC actions to institutionalize these organisational changes. The MoE has also experienced high turnover of senior staff, a freeze on new appointments and reduced levels of annual budgets. Consequently, many of the organisational changes required to support decentralised educational management, remain unaddressed. Such radical organisational changes at all the targeted levels (school, school management, district, division as well as central office) would have required a higher level of specialised TAs from FESP and as well as an enhanced appreciation of and focus on the school and teachers as the critical building blocks of the educational system if school effectiveness was to be improved.

2.3.4 It was acknowledged in the contractor's ACR (and reinforced through the findings of this ICR) that some technical advisers, while knowledgeable and competent in their own areas, were not as experienced in providing effective skills transfer and capacity building. In some instances, the adviser undertook most of the responsibility to complete the assignment expected – reducing skills transfer to assigned counterparts. The ICR believes that an excessive reliance on Australian and international technical assistance (rather than from local or regional sources) not only added significantly to program costs, but may have led to inappropriate solutions in some cases. Some of these issues are addressed in detail in the following section.

⁵Weaknesses outlined by the MoE technical staff include lack of compatibility between the design of forms filled by schools and the on-screen versions, excessive and unusable data entry at district levels, weak designation of responsibilities for technical staff associated with the databases, and analytically inadequate interrogations of the data by senior management for policy issues, with simple tables being the only use - often just for annual reporting.

2.3.5 There appeared to be a lack of detailed assessment of resource, policy and system implications of new initiatives. A process of formative evaluation would have had the benefit of improving the effectiveness of implementation. One way to accomplish this would have been to focus on a targeted number of schools within a few select districts (i.e. a cluster approach) rather than providing all schools across the entire system with the same level of inputs.

Box 2: An Unfulfilled Promise: the Case of the PDU

From the beginning in 2003, FESP recognised the need for a coordinated and integrated approach to the professional development of MoE staff, teachers and school managers. In July 2007, the MoE established the Professional Development Unit (PDU), with FESP funding the staff positions. The PDU's first tasks were to coordinate and implement the Leadership and Management program of FESP, using an extensive training program targeting all school heads and school management committees, which proved quite successful. Later responsibilities of the PDU included coordination of other FESP supported training programs including orientations on the new curriculum, assessment and ECE.

In March 2009, following a minor re-structuring within the MoE, the In-Service, Scholarship and Training (IST) Unit was incorporated within the PDU, bringing with it two technical and two administrative positions and a small training budget. Subsequent attempts to coordinate training activities of other MoE units through a PDU Registry and a financial control process have failed – undermining the full potential of the PDU. At present there is limited coordination of MoE training schedules. With the end of FESP, the level of PDU training has been significantly diminished due to limitations on its budget and the failure to include a full range of training requirements in the 2010 MoE budget request.

As of April 2010, the PDU finds itself with only two of four staff positions filled. The original PDU head, a SEO who had been with the PDU since its inception in July 2007 and already demonstrated excellent dynamic performance, was promoted to another position in March 2010. Efforts to fill the lead position and the senior administrative position have not been successful. Without the necessary support the PDU will remain an unfulfilled promise in meeting the critical capacity development needs of the MoE.

2.3.6 FESP failed to explicitly address the key goal/purpose statements relating to remote and disadvantaged students. A few activities, such as the TVET pilots, did use a criterion of rural location as a selection factor, and FESP has assisted MoE at a policy level with the formulation of a new differentiated funding formula, which if continued will have an important impact in the medium to long term. MoE have indicated that information produced by the new FESA system, from the assessment database and potentially from SIMS could be used to further refine the differentiated funding formula to address the needs of disadvantaged schools. But there were no system wide attempts to focus on the inferior academic outcomes of remote, rural and disadvantaged students.

2.4 Efficiency

Focusing Questions

Did the implementation of the activity make effective use of time and resources to achieve the outcomes?

Did the activity support donor co-ordination?

Was a risk management approach applied to management of the activity (including anti-corruption)?

What were the risks to achievement of objectives? Were the risks managed appropriately?

2.4.1 Locating the FESP management within MoE improved communication and enabled the program to be more responsive to Interim Ministry priorities. Aligning the Annual Plans with strategic plans, the budget cycle and the financial year also improved the planning and implementation of activities, especially those that required some form of counterpart expenditure. However, the ICR understands that the Annual Plan (a contract milestone) was often prepared in advance of knowing the details of the MoE budget for the following year. In future, if AusAID uses a contractor model, consideration should be given to flexibility in submission dates of milestones to also take account of host agency requirements.

2.4.2 The ICR believes that the broad range and high number of program interventions at times stretched the capacity of the MoE to dedicate appropriate personnel to activities, to effectively manage those activities and to ensure institutionalisation and sustainability of the activities. This not only reduced the effectiveness of the program, but may also have had a negative impact on the performance of MoE's regular functions. The high level of reliance on costly international technical assistance suggests that FESP may not have provided value for money. While the AMC reported that they increased the use of locally sourced consultants as the program progressed, this appears to have been associated with backfilling of line positions and not by placing local or regional consultants in adviser roles. The ICR believes that this expertise is available in the Pacific, and future programs might examine ways in which this can be accessed more easily.

2.4.3 The ICR notes that the Annual Plans produced for FESP were very large documents, containing a great deal of information at an extraordinary level of detail. The ICR believes that there is a distinct possibility that the relevant MoE staff may not have clearly understood or appreciated the broader system wide implications of what they were approving. Future education sector programs need to keep in mind that approval of Annual Plans and other milestones should not be confused with or linked to negotiating and confirming operational details. Having a higher level strategic committee within the MoE, with a more focused briefing and decision-making role would have assisted in providing better strategic direction for the program.

2.4.4 While FESP claims to have produced a cost-benefit analysis, this ICR has not been able to obtain a copy. This would seem to be a major deficiency for a major donor project costing some A\$28 million.

2.4.5 While the choice of an implementing contractor model can be simpler for AusAID to administer, especially in a climate of devolution of responsibility for program management, it is not always the

most efficient mechanism for delivery of activities. Contractor models have significant fixed management costs, and head contracts can work against flexible delivery when based on achievement of internal milestones. The ICR notes that the standard contractor model was modified under FESP, to increase productivity, for instance to locate staff within MoE, and aligning management, planning and financing systems as much as possible. The contractor model also allowed FESP to continue to deliver activities despite the political difficulties between Australia and Fiji following the events of late 2006 – a SWAp or other sectoral approach with higher levels of policy engagement and partnership may not have been viable in those same circumstances.

2.4.6 The original FESP design did include risk assessment, which proved inadequate for factors beyond its control. Of course, what could not have been envisaged at the design stage were the massive changes in the bilateral relationship between Australia and the interim Fiji government, the uncertain policy environment and the lack of resources and capacity in the MoE to effectively implement changes that could lead to improvements in education outcomes. During FESP implementation, the risk management plan was updated by the AMC on a regular basis, and began to include a number of these external risks, many of which affected only the last 12-18 months of the program. As a result, some appropriate strategies were put in place – such as expanding the leadership and management training to a younger age cohort to replace those individuals over 55 who had been retired.

2.4.7 In terms of managing internal risks, in some critical areas such as curriculum development, there was insufficient preparatory work on the likely long term implications for the MoE. An alternative approach could have identified and engaged a group of ‘early adopter’ schools (and perhaps districts) that could have served as the initial ‘trials’ creating an early warning, integration and adjustment mechanism, with two-way communication between the top and the bottom. These early adopter schools could then have served as a source of trainers, coaches and facilitators for other schools in the system. Ideally, a multiple phase implementation strategy would have allowed a controlled and manageable amount of training, which would have better ensured the quality and sustainability of results within MoE’s limited resources.

2.4.8 FESP appears to have facilitated a donor coordination role, with representatives of EU FESP, NZAID and UN agencies invited to attend the PMMG meetings. This invitation was not always taken up, although there was some synergy between the EU program and FESP in relation to funding MoE staff attendance at curriculum workshops and training, and with the PRIDE project at USP in relation to ECE curriculum and further workshops and training. Harmonisation with EU FESP was successful at a technical level, less so at a management level due to the EU decision to manage their program outside the MoE. FESP management did try to improve awareness of the various donor programs within the MoE and amongst their own technical advisers, and to avoid duplication of activities.

2.5 Impact

Focusing Questions

Did the activity produce intended or unintended changes in the lives of beneficiaries and their environment, directly or indirectly?

Were there positive or negative impacts from external factors?

2.5.1 The program's development approach assumed that the strengthening of systems at the central level would eventually result in benefits to the intended beneficiaries – i.e. students, parents and school communities. The ICR is of the view that in terms of outcomes at the goal and purpose levels, FESP's M&E reports (both independent and prepared by the contractor) did not properly assess contributions made by FESP. Partly, this was due to the absence of a baseline and the lack of accurate and reliable time series data on education outcomes - although the ICR notes that crude aggregate statistics are reported annually by MoE in its reporting to FIG, regionally and internationally.

2.5.2 The contractor also noted in their ACR that many of the systemic changes introduced during the program may not be observable at the outcomes level for a number of years. Of course, there are considerable difficulties in assigning responsibility for any changes observed to the program interventions, or measuring the extent of their contribution - (i.e. attribution and causality). However the ICR believes that because FESP inputs focused on the central level rather than the teaching-learning level, it is unclear whether anything has actually changed in the classroom. Indicators such as student enrolment, retention and academic performance do not appear to have yet been influenced by changes in management practice, new curriculum and assessment approaches or improvements in teacher capacity.

2.5.3 Nevertheless, despite the above observations, given its critical importance to all education stakeholders, as a minimum FESP should have enabled MoE to continuously and comprehensively examine academic outcomes for trends - improvements or otherwise - especially by location (urban, semi-urban, rural and remote variables), by districts, and by gender. The ICR was not expected to undertake a detailed analysis of educational outcomes data. However, given that the ICR is expected to make some judgment about the impact of FESP on academic outcomes, especially for remote and disadvantaged students, an exercise by the ICR has been conducted with the limited data made available by the MoE, where such analysis by location has been possible. A summary of the results from this limited analysis is provided in Annexes E and F.

2.5.4 The data that has been analysed suggests that gross enrolments at primary level have been decreasing, largely driven by demographic factors which have meant that the total number of primary age children in Fiji has been declining for some ten years. Estimates of primary school (ages 6 – 13) net enrolment ratios suggests that while there was a major improvement from 1996 to 2007 for Fijians, there seems to have been a small decline to 2009 for both Fijians and Indo-Fijians, possibly associated with worsening economic conditions. Drawing definite conclusions from this data would be risky, however. The data indicates that there is a substantial gap in enrolment ratios between the poorest 30% and the richest 30% of the population, at early childhood and higher education levels - although not at primary schools. Further research would need to be done to establish whether this gap is due to parents not being able to afford the costs of senior secondary and tertiary education, or whether the poorer children have lower academic performance which results in lack of progress to the higher levels.

2.5.5 Net enrolment ratios for both populations remain high at 103.8 and 105.1 respectively, but this may be difficult to maintain as population projections suggest that from 2011, the numbers of primary age children will rise again for another ten years. In high schools, gross enrolments

increased by 13 per cent between 1996 and 2009. Net enrolment ratios for high school (ages 14-17) are relatively high at 90.4 and 88.7 for Fijian and Indo-Fijian students respectively, but both have declined slightly in 2009. Population projections indicate however, that enrolment demand may be expected to keep reducing from the current levels to 2018 (a decline in potential demand of some 10%) before the demand begins to rise again, to peak around 2024. This time period of the next eight years therefore gives MoE and donors in education a 'one off' valuable window of opportunity to improve access for those who are currently not in school, while improving quality for those already in school.

2.5.6 The ICR notes that stakeholders need to be cautious in using published pass rates and mean marks in examinations as indicators of academic outcomes⁶. Changes in academic results over different years may also be caused by scaling of examination results or other factors, including disparities in the data that need further analysis. However, it is the impact on remote and rural disadvantaged communities that is of concern to stakeholders in FESP. In the Fiji School Leaving Certificate, the average pass rate for remote schools was some 7.5 per cent less than the national average. Similarly, in the Fiji Eighth Year Examination (FEYE) in English, the remote schools had roughly an 8% gap with national average (and a similar one in FEYE in Mathematics). Only time series data not affected by scaling, would clarify whether these types of schools have been showing any improvements over the last seven years. The analysis of this and other data (of scaled marks) is provided in greater detail in Annex E (Key Issues in Enrolment, Equity and Access) and Annex F (Key Issues in Academic Outcomes).

2.5.7 It may be noted that the unique structure of school management and financing in Fiji means that the MoE does not undertake systematic planning of school construction, expansion or rationalisation, but is primarily responsible for teacher provision and guiding the teaching and learning processes. There have been some minor positive impacts at school level in relation to better teacher mobilisation (primarily due to the use of FESA), improved school-community relations (from the leadership and management training), better targeting of school funding and improvements to pre-service teacher training (new diploma graduates from FNU Lautoka). As a result of the leadership and management training program, communities were more willing to work collaboratively towards the common interest of supporting improvements in the education of their children. Examples included entire communities coming together to transfer school building materials from point of delivery to the school site (for FESP-EU) and reduced conflict within factions of the community, and between the school and community, in order to support the school more effectively.

2.5.8 The majority of the program's positive impacts have occurred in the MoE's central functions. The introduction and use of FESA has produced substantial improvements in teacher allocation and appointments for a relatively small cost. Other improvements due to FESA have occurred in relation to records management, where staff of MoE report significant changes to the work environment, OH&S and efficiency. Other agencies, including the PSC, have indicated that FESA could provide an excellent model for a civil service-wide management information system. The ICR also understands

⁶ The ICR uses the results of national examinations to assess performance as this is currently the most reliable method of comparison, especially over time. The current transition to FILNA and the decision to phase out of national examinations will mean that in future, performance assessment will have to use a different set of data.

that strengthened policy functions have allowed the MoE to respond more effectively to recent and rapidly determined policy changes introduced by the interim government.

2.5.9 The ICR is of the view that the deterioration in the bilateral relationship between Australia and Fiji did affect the strategic direction of the program. The uncertainty over future funding for some of the ‘unfinished business’ of FESP could reduce the long term impact of AusAID’s investments in the education sector in Fiji. It should be emphasised that FESP has built considerable MoE capacity which has the potential to produce important system-wide improvements in the future. Curriculum reform, reform of assessment systems for learning, development/provision of teaching and learning support materials and professional development of teachers are the main areas where this potential has yet to be fully realised. Other examples include integration of management information systems and the differentiated funding formula for schools, the latter promising considerable benefits for remote and disadvantaged students.

2.6 Sustainability

Focusing Questions

Do beneficiaries and/or partner country stakeholders have sufficient ownership, capacity and resources to maintain the activity outcomes after Australian Government funding has ceased?

Are there any areas of the activity that are clearly not sustainable? What lessons can be learned from this?

2.6.1 The joint management approach, alignment of planning with MoE strategic plans and budgets did provide for a degree of counterpart ownership and direction. The AMC did undertake a procedure of handover of individual activities and the program as a whole. For example, advisers had to complete a skills transfer plan, and have this endorsed at the beginning and end of their placements. In the plans viewed by the ICR, each included a section on sustainability and each identified significant concerns about whether or not the interventions would be sustained beyond FESP. The ICR believes that the adviser plan process was limited in scope (on an activity-by-activity basis only), and understandably could not take into account MoE staffing changes and emerging resource limitations at the agency level. Apart from adjusting the leadership and management training program, FESP did not appear to build in any additional sustainability mechanisms in the last 12 months of implementation in response to increasing uncertainty over future external funding.

2.6.2 The MoE indicated to the ICR that the absence of adequate external funding threatens the sustainability of a number of initiatives introduced through FESP. As noted, program initiatives such as the development and implementation of the NCF were premised on some form of future support being available beyond the implementation period of FESP. It is not clear to the ICR when or whether the implications of this were communicated to the AMC or MoE by AusAID⁷, although the impression given by MoE and AMC staff was that they believed continuing support beyond FESP would be made available to the MoE for key areas such as curriculum reform.

⁷ AusAID prepared a Concept Note during 2009 outlining potential future assistance to education in Fiji, the recommendations of which represent a considerable departure from a program such as FESP.

2.6.3 The retirement from the civil service of a large percentage of senior education managers due to the reduction in the mandatory retirement age to 55 from 60 has had the largest negative impact on the sustainability of program activities and outcomes. At the start of FESP, the government had increased the retirement age from fifty five to sixty – as a result of which, MoE and the program provided capability building activities for individuals most of whom were in the age bracket of forty-five to fifty-five. MoE and the program justifiably assumed that these individuals would be in service for at least the next five years, allowing for the strengthening of management as well providing for appropriate succession planning. The reversal of this retirement age decision removed on a single day a significant number of senior staff that had been program counterparts, education managers and other beneficiaries of FESP-supported training and other capacity building efforts.

2.6.4 The groups most affected by the retirement policy are the cadre of trainers for the leadership and management courses, the trained head teachers/principals and the mid-level managers in the central and district offices. One response from FESP was the design and implementation of the 'Future Leaders' program, which was targeted to individuals under 45 years of age who demonstrated potential for management assignments. Unfortunately, the selection process of participants resulted in only about 50-60 per cent of those trained being eligible for immediate promotion to management positions.

2.6.5 Of particular concern is the capability of the FIG to effectively implement the NCF – even if the curriculum reforms are more slowly introduced as is now planned. Major challenges remain: ensuring that pre-service teacher training institutions (now outside the mandate of MoE) reflect the new curriculum; extensive, intensive and continuing in-service training of teachers; trained and experienced teachers being lost not just through retirement but emigration; ensuring equity in teacher qualifications and supply; follow-up supervision and support of trained teachers; and, a radical shift in assessment *for* and *of* learning. To effectively address these challenges, considerably higher levels of training (FNU are introducing a degree program with an exit at the diploma level), in-service training, support and monitoring are required, well above those currently provided through the limited resources of MoE and with the reality that future budget allocations for MoE are unlikely to increase in the near future.

2.6.6 The ICR believes significantly increased resources are also needed to maintain the quality and quantity of training for the leadership and management programs, the training of teachers, supervisors and others in school-based assessments, the training for ECE curriculum implementation as well as other areas. Creative solutions need to be implemented that support sustainable capacity-building as close to the school level as possible. The ICR believes a strong case could be made for continuing external funding for these activities.

2.6.7 The resources required for the replacement/renewal and repair of IT and instructional equipment provided by FESP are also beyond the current budget allocations provided to the MoE. While an IT Unit has been identified within the MoE – to sustain the investments in information systems – efforts are continuing to acquire permanent positions for the IT Unit as the individuals are currently under a contract appointment and/or re-assignment from within the MoE. Future programs of assistance to the MoE need to keep in mind that FESP's small investments in improving management information systems seem to have resulted in substantial improvements.

2.6.8 There is a concern that the recent merging of LTC and FCAE as a School of Education within the newly formed FNU may weaken the ability of these institutions to ensure that teacher training will be able to sustain the gains made under the FESP program and remain responsive to MoE's practical needs in curriculum and assessment reform. Plans to increase enrolments (mainly from fee paying private students) may reduce the strong coaching and facilitation mechanisms that were in place previously. However, there is no reason why FNU, under Fiji Government directive, should not increase its level of liaison and coordination with the MoE. As an institution under the umbrella of the FIG, FNU might be more amenable to specific MoE concerns than, say, the School of Education in the regionally controlled and oriented USP.

2.6.9 Resources provided by the EU FESP to support the practicum placement of pre-service teachers in remote and rural areas (part of the FESP/LTCUP reforms) were provided outside the budget of MoE and LTC, but were included in the revised DPE program assisted by FESP. Due to the success experienced with this initiative - indicating that the practicum placement is an effective mechanism to improve the awareness, knowledge and skills of new teachers - MoE provided a recurring budget to support this practicum placement. The FNU indicated to the ICR that all budgets would need to be reviewed and there was no guarantee that the support to practicum placement would continue.

2.7 Gender Equality

Focusing Questions

What were the outcomes of the activity for women and men, boys and girls?

Did the activity promote equal participation and benefits for women and men, boys and girls?

2.7.1 The program appeared to be gender-sensitive in that consideration of gender equality was incorporated in activities from the planning stage. Specific outputs, such as curriculum materials, were appraised on a gender basis, and the leadership and management courses promoted participation and support for female staff and community representatives. Within MoE, there has been an increasing proportion of female senior staff, although this may not be attributed directly to program activities.

2.7.2 In Fiji schools, girls have been performing better academically than boys for many years; consistently scoring better in national examinations and having higher progression rates to the senior secondary levels. Basic analysis indicates that there is only a very slight problem of female disadvantage in enrolment ratios at the early primary levels, but this reverses to a major advantage at the higher secondary levels. The evidence also indicates that females are now out-performing males at all levels of primary and secondary education (see Annex F). It appears that some tertiary intakes are adjusted to ensure that there is a balance between males and females, although changes in demand for pre-service courses have meant a gradual 'feminisation' of the teaching profession. A greater proportion of early childhood and primary school teachers are female, so the strengthening by FESP of the DPE and ECE courses at FNU Lautoka will help these women gain improved qualifications and recognition of their skills. The program's TVET pilots included catering and tailoring, which has enabled a number of female students to enter this mode of education. However, with MoE improving the TVET system, male students who may have been limited by the

previous emphasis on academic subjects are now more likely to complete secondary education and proceed to further vocational training.

2.7.3 In general, however, the overall impact by the program on improving gender equality in Fiji could not be assessed as there were no specific activities designed for this objective although there was a section on gender equality in each Adviser Planning and Completion Report. Gender information forms part of the MoE database systems, and outcomes data (when available) can easily be disaggregated on a gender basis. As is the case for overall program impact, the results of any changes introduced may only be evident once they reach the classroom. At the educational outcomes level, data on enrolments and academic performance (see Annexes E and F) suggests that there are not any major gender issues from the point of disadvantages for females, although there appears to be an emerging problem of male under-performance- both in enrolments at the higher levels, and academic outcomes.

2.8 Monitoring and Evaluation

Focusing Questions

Does evidence exist to show that objectives have been achieved?

Were there features of the M&E system that represented good practice and improved the quality of the evidence available?

Was data gender-disaggregated to measure the outcomes of the activity on men, women, boys and girls?

Did the M&E system collect useful information on cross-cutting issues?

2.8.1 A monitoring and evaluation system for a program such as FESP must be able to do two things – to **prove** the achievement of results, and provide information to **improve** delivery of the program and future interventions. Unfortunately the M&E system developed for FESP was only partially successful at meeting these requirements.

2.8.2 FESP developed a sophisticated system of internal program monitoring and evaluation, consistent with AusAID requirements. However, as the 2008 independent review of FESP also noted, this did not necessarily produce information regarding program performance, especially at the outcomes level. The credibility of an M&E system depends on being able to demonstrate that outcomes have been achieved and that the program contributed towards these achievements. Instead, the M&E system focused on ensuring that activities were implemented in accordance with the Annual Plan, and compiling results from individual inputs, pilot programs and component level sub-activities. In a sense, the M&E system appeared to be designed for ensuring compliance rather than actually measuring performance.

2.8.2 The M&E system also lacked a useful baseline at the program level, and frequently for individual activities – although these were included in the AMC’s Scope of Services. The annual M&E exercise undertaken by the AMC produced large reports that were probably read by few counterparts. The ICR heard that these exercises, particularly the Most Significant Change component, were resource intensive for counterpart staff and produced few tangible benefits for the MoE or for those individuals participating in them. These reports, and the problems with the Annual Plan noted earlier, are indicative of another weakness in many M&E systems – that of inappropriate ‘data dumping’. M&E information is useful to program management when it is

appropriate to the requirements of decision making, absorbable by the intended targets, and is received in a timely fashion. Collection and presentation of vast amount of performance information, without adequate analysis and identification of the most critical results, are often a waste of valuable time and resources and counterproductive as it may lead to wrong decisions.

2.8.3 The ICR also examined AusAID's role in managing their monitoring and evaluation of the program. Over the program period, there were four separate TAG missions – in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007. In addition, AusAID commissioned two further independent progress reports in 2006 and 2008, the latter being associated with a larger Situation Analysis aimed at providing background information for a new phase of assistance in the education sector. A TAG performing well should limit the need for additional independent reviews. The ICR understands that AusAID was not happy with the results from the TAG missions; however this is an efficiency and management problem for AusAID to address, and not a rationale for commissioning further expensive reviews. Of greater concern is that it appears to the ICR that no consistent mechanism within AusAID or the AMC existed for integrating the findings and recommendations from the program's M&E system and these independent reviews into program management and implementation. This may have contributed to the lack of strategic direction of the program that evolved in the later stages.

2.8.4 Independent reviews of the program recommended that FESP support the MoE in developing systems for collecting educational outcomes data, including at school and district level, including for indicators such as student attendance. It may have been better to direct the program's M&E resources into activities that better supported this priority, which would have also improved the program's ability to measure its own performance and impact. The ICR found that performance data used by MoE management could be further improved, especially in relation to school data management in SIMs and student performance in FILNA/LANA. All the available datasets need to be linked and integrated, with staff and managers receiving further training in their use. Future programs of assistance would benefit from developing capacity within the MoE to:

- Identify where and when key education outcomes indicators are available on a regular basis;
- Extract, analyse and report on outcomes for MoE and FIG reporting purposes, including integrating information systems where needed, and
- Use schools and district staff effectively in the collection, validation, monitoring and reporting processes.

2.8.5 There is no doubt that a range of technical assistance provided under FESP has strengthened the capacity of MoE in their agency level monitoring and evaluation processes. There is evidence to suggest that results from FESA and SIMS are used by MoE management for decision-making, and for reporting to government, such as through the Annual Report. However the capacity to usefully collect, analyse and report on education outcomes is still far short of satisfactory. Refer to Annexes E and F for more detail.

2.8.6 During the program period, AusAID also amended its own approach to quality assurance. The original Activity Monitoring Brief (AMB) was replaced by the Simplified Monitoring Toolbox (SMT) and in turn this was replaced by the Quality at Implementation (QAI) report. By the end of the program in 2009 however, the AMC was still reporting to AusAID against the Key Result Areas (KRAs) which had been superseded. AusAID's changes to the quality assurance paperwork required staff at

post to be trained in their use, at a time when they were also adapting to newly devolved management functions. No doubt there has been a significant improvement in AusAID's approach to managing quality, and the QAI is a major advance on the AMB and SMT, but concerns remain that monitoring performance of complex programs such as FESP requires AusAID staff to have access to high level technical advice and resources, and that a focus on contract milestones means that less time is available for evaluating progress from a strategic perspective. It appears to the ICR that TAGs and independent reviews, rather than being used to guide and improve the program with the results shared with MoE and the PMMG were commissioned primarily as a mechanism to collect information for AusAID's internal reporting requirements.

2.9 Analysis and Learning

Focusing Questions

How well was learning from implementation and previous reviews (self-assessment and independent) integrated into the activity?

What lessons from the activity can be applied to designing future activities, particularly the new Education program?

What lessons from the activity can be applied to working in changing political climates?

2.9.1 As a program approach, FESP was intended to integrate lessons learned from implementation into activities. The programming of activities through an Annual Plan process did represent a serious attempt to respond to both MoE direction and results from activities (such as pilot programs). However the ICR believes that a lack of strategic engagement between AusAID, the MoE and the AMC contributed to the program losing direction, particularly in the later years of implementation. Despite a number of independent review and TAG recommendations, the program did not address major concerns such as planning for new curriculum implementation, strengthening of in-service teacher training, problems with SIMS and increasing MoE's capacity to measure educational outcomes. At an operational level, FESP was responsive to lessons learned, and the AMC made a number of amendments to implementation based on findings and results, in consultation with MoE counterparts.

2.9.2 Some stakeholders and education officials expressed a preference for program activities to be increasingly directed towards improving quality at the school level, rather than continuing to concentrate program support at improving the systems centrally. This debate as to where to focus support (at the central, district or school levels) is evident in program reviews as well as a discussion within the contractor's own ACR. Perhaps a change in balance between providing support at the central level more towards providing support to a selected number of schools may have better served the interests of the stakeholders and provided an appropriate feedback mechanism by analysing the experiences of these targeted schools to inform relevant adjustments to systems and policies at the central level. Program interventions that seek to 'cover' 100% of schools may be less effective and sustainable than more focused and limited 'proof of concept' approaches that the agency can then rollout to other schools within their own resource and capability limitations.

2.9.3 The ICR believes that there are a number of lessons learned from FESP that can be applied to the design of future education sector activities in Fiji. These include:

Building on and strengthening MoE systems. There will be an ongoing requirement in Fiji for a capable MoE to provide the enabling policies and systems to improve and support the delivery of quality education. Efforts to build capacity need to occur simultaneously at all levels within the system. To increase the likelihood of system improvement, the concept of phased implementation could be introduced –with a ‘mini-system’ created by focusing pilots/trials in a smaller set of ‘early-adopter’ schools and districts. These ‘early adopter’ clusters would be the target for new initiatives, permitting a comprehensive analysis of how these changes work together. Subsequent phased roll out of improvements to all districts and schools would then occur on a scale and at a pace commensurate with sustainable management and counterpart resourcing by MoE.

Building on and strengthening service delivery and existing coping mechanisms. Fiji’s schools are unique in the extent of community management and involvement. There is considerable capacity and commitment within these stakeholder organisations, school management committees and community bodies to support delivery of quality education throughout the country, as well as to address existing and emerging barriers to education. There are a range of existing coping mechanisms and models that have developed to meet the challenges of school operations and maintenance, costs of schooling, provision of learning materials/equipment and improving the learning environment. Future activities will be more sustainable if they build on and strengthen existing community based arrangements, and enable MoE to more effectively engage, strengthen and collaborate with these organisations. The experience of FESP-EU will provide valuable lessons for a future program if it is decided to move towards direct funding approaches⁸. It may be noted here that a recent political decision to introduce ‘school zoning’ (which will try to encourage students to enrol in the nearest schools) will pose major challenges to school management authorities focused on culture, religion or ethnicity.

Developing mechanisms to support schools at a local level. In support of the move to decentralisation of educational management, as well as considering the costs and ease of transportation in reaching many schools in Fiji, mechanisms that provide support as close to each school as possible need to be developed and strengthened. These mechanisms could include sub-district processes such as peer monitoring and review of schools, cluster-based supervision and support to neighbouring schools, school-based in-servicing, creating locally based teacher ‘learning communities’ and (where feasible) developing linkages with other ‘learning communities’, perhaps through the use of ICT.

Teachers are at the centre of the success and effectiveness of education reform. While quality teachers may not guarantee quality education, poor quality teachers will certainly not help to improve quality. The importance of pre-service and regular relevant in-service training (including cluster-based and in-school professional development) to inform and improve the knowledge and skills of teachers cannot be overstated. A rigorous in-service/professional development system for teachers and school heads, ideally linked to teacher training institutions, is required at the outset of any system-wide reform effort. Combined with this training and development system must be a process of follow-up supervision and support from the district, sub-district cluster of schools and head teachers to ensure appropriate application of newly acquired knowledge and skills. Some of the current and future issues in ensuring teacher quality for Fiji are detailed in Annex G.

⁸ FESP-EU is currently undertaking an end of project evaluation exercise. Indications suggest that the use of non-state actors for project delivery has had only limited success, and is unsustainable.

Capacity building efforts using multiple counterparts. Given the high attrition of experienced and qualified staff throughout Fiji's education system, a cross-section of individuals of different ages and assignments (at the managerial and supervisory levels) and the identification and assignment of multiple counterparts for participation in capacity building activities is essential to ensure longer-term sustainability of results.

Focusing efforts on key systems for quality improvements. Identifying the systems that will produce the most significant and cost-effective impacts on the teaching-learning processes, is critical for ensuring success, credibility, and ownership of the change process. Introducing too many activities in a variety of areas serves to dilute the attention of managers and weakens the effectiveness and efficiency of program investments. Quality, rather than issues of access and equity, remains the most important priority for the education system in Fiji (see Annex E).

It is also important to take into account the absorptive capacity of the recipient organisation and human resources to deal with an excessive range and number of program inputs. This concern was noted by the FESP PMMG as early as November 2004, although not adequately addressed. The recipient organisation should ideally lead activity implementation, and determine the scheduling and sequencing of inputs. Programs should not be driven by the desire to meet external and/or inappropriate milestones.

Selecting and deploying technical advisors needs careful management. Flexibility should be placed in future program arrangements to enable appropriate local and regional technical expertise to be contracted – a concern raised during the October 2003 PMMG, but again not addressed adequately. This may be somewhat easier in the future, given the significant numbers of capable and skilled MoE managers and staff who have retired from government.

Senior level strategic advice readily available. As restated by the present Permanent Secretary during the presentation of the preliminary findings of the ICR, activities must be directed towards improving educational outcomes. High quality senior level strategic advice and support should be available to MoE senior management as and when the need arises. Program management structures should reflect this, and not confuse the different strategic and operational roles. The use of independent reviews should be driven by the needs of senior MoE management, and be better incorporated into the program decision making process. The concept of a national/regional consultative group with experienced international advisors could be considered as a mechanism to help guide system-wide reform efforts, particularly with respect to curriculum reform implementation.

Program support should be 'embedded'. One of the contributing factors to the responsiveness, relevance and effectiveness of FESP was that the majority of technical advisers were directly working alongside MoE managers and staff.

2.9.4 Following the events of December 2006, the Australian Government limited its assistance to certain sectors of the development cooperation program. FESP, however, was retained and continued to work with MoE counterparts. The program operated within the constraints of Australia's policy of engagement with the Fiji interim government and these constraints will affect planning for the continuation of some activities following the completion of current assistance. Uncertainty over long term commitments to the sector created some difficulties in providing greater

strategic direction to the program at a time when there were significant changes at the higher levels of the MoE.

2.9.5 The continued operation of FESP after the 2006 military coup and the high regard in which it was held by a wide range of Fiji's stakeholders in education (including MoE officials, school management and committees and teachers), illustrates that 'people to people' engagement between Australia and Fiji through an AusAID project in education (and probably also in health and other areas) can make a valuable contribution to the strength of the bilateral relationship.

2.9.6 FESP therefore demonstrated both the strengths and weaknesses of the program approach and the contractor model. Despite the political tensions, technical support continued, communication between the AMC and counterparts remained strong, and the program managed to achieve a number of significant improvements for the benefit of the education sector in Fiji. The level and type of engagement was appreciated by MoE counterparts, in contrast to FESP-EU which had limited official communication and chose to use alternative delivery methods. As noted - had a SWAp type arrangement been in place, FESP would probably have ceased in early 2007 and most activities would have been left substantially incomplete.

2.9.7 FESP also had to cope with many significant changes within MoE - particularly the high turnover of senior level staff in key positions, many of whom were program counterparts. The current environment also includes a decreasing real budget for education, contracting (for 3 year terms) of all new appointments and promoted staff, and the restructuring of higher education which has removed responsibility for pre-service teacher training from the MoE. Given that many of these changes occurred during the last year of the program, FESP was not in a position to respond in a coherent manner. However, FESP did introduce a future leaders program to respond to high staff turnover, and the new management systems did provide MoE with increased capacity to deal with the impact of some changes introduced by the interim government. The contractor model does limit the flexibility to respond, as activities were already programmed against agreed Annual Plans and contract milestones scheduled. Changes would have required a substantial review of existing contractual commitments, renegotiation with MoE and additional approval from AusAID. It was not clear to the ICR that the management structures in place (i.e. the PMMG) had the required level of information, capacity and wherewithal to undertake this level of strategic redirection.

2.9.8 The ICR believes that once the program had been contracted, a momentum developed which made it difficult to substantially change the method of delivery. It is unclear whether AusAID or the MoE would have wished this in any case, as it would have required redesigning FESP and beginning many activities again. In fact, the MoE itself had expressed support for a contractor approach from the beginning, as it felt the burden of financial reporting and acquittal was beyond their current capacity. The experience of the FESP-EU program also suggests that government systems may not as yet provide adequate accountability mechanisms, although AusAID trialled an approach using MoE systems for emergency funding for school repairs following Cyclone Tomas in early 2010. The current political situation and limited bilateral engagement also precludes consideration of SWAp style approaches in the near future.

2.9.9 Any future donor funded activity in the education sector will need to take into account the fluid political and policy environment. For example:

- Remaining in communication with MoE senior staff and other sector stakeholders, to ensure that Australian support continues to meet the most important needs of the people of Fiji. This approach requires sufficient engagement to strategically direct interventions for the benefit of all schoolchildren, and prevent Australian assistance from being directed outside the system towards non-priority areas with lower rates of return and sustainability. As such, AusAID might consider using a 'proxy' arrangement such as a contractor or senior education adviser assigned to MoE;
- Having a program that is led and directed by MoE, with flexibility in relation to scheduling and sequencing. This will mitigate, to a certain extent, the problems of limited counterpart resources, availability of staff and the impact on MoE priorities of any new policy directives;
- Using an appropriate model of delivery (with or without an implementing contractor) that ensures effective capacity building but also allows for the program to take into account local absorptive capacity, and not be driven by contract milestones or financial year expenditure imperatives. A mechanism will need to be developed to alter the pace of implementation to correspond with the availability of counterpart resources (both financial and human). AusAID may have to accept that implementation (and hence expenditure) is likely to be slower or less consistent than under other approaches;
- Including a review mechanism that provides AusAID and MoE senior management with timely information if the program's activities are at risk from external factors, and allows for withdrawal, suspension or slowing down as the situation warrants, and
- Continuing its current policy stance much valued by the Fiji public, that AusAID's assistance in Fiji's education sector is for the benefit of the people, regardless of political relations at the highest level.

3. Evaluation Criteria Ratings

Evaluation Criteria	Rating (1-6)
Relevance	4
Effectiveness	3
Efficiency	2
Sustainability	3
Gender Equality	_*
Monitoring and Evaluation	3
Analysis and Learning	2

Rating scale: 6 = very high quality, 1 = very low quality. Below 4 is less than satisfactory.

*Insufficient information available

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 The design and approach of FESP in 2001-02 were premised on program support being directed towards improving the quality of education and equity of opportunity in Fiji. The ICR believes that access to education is not a significant problem at primary school levels, although there are lower enrolments for poorer children at early education and tertiary levels. It maybe worth noting that early childhood education is not funded by the government to the same extent as primary and secondary education, and for most families costs can be high. The ICR believes that the necessity to focus on improvements to the quality of education and equity has not changed throughout the duration of the program and remains relevant. Indeed, the overall sectoral objectives have remained relatively consistent.

4.2 The ICR believes that the original design logic remains appropriate, in that external assistance is most effective where it builds capacity of the education system to improve service delivery, which can lead to improved educational outcomes for students. The weaknesses of FESP were not due to the design or intent of the program, but in aspects of strategic management and the direction and nature of implementation. The challenge for AusAID and the MoE is to build on the achievements and goodwill generated by the FESP investments, and to complete the 'unfinished business' of the program so as to ensure that the benefits of an improved education system reach all schools, teachers, and students in Fiji, especially in remote and disadvantaged areas.

4.3 Summary of Recommendations

4.3.1 For Future Programs

1. The ICR believes that any future Australian assistance to the education sector in the Fiji Islands should be consistent with Australian and international approaches in regard to development effectiveness, ensure sustainability of previous Australian investments, be directed towards improving quality and equity of educational outcomes in general, and address issues of access and quality for children from remote and disadvantaged communities.
2. The core elements of any package of assistance must include strengthening the curriculum reform process, provision of quality teaching and learning resources, supporting assessment for learning, and improving teacher quality through both pre-service and in-service programs. Future aid implementation strategies should build on existing planning, management and delivery mechanisms, and strengthen these within MoE, school communities and education sector stakeholders.
3. Delivery of external assistance should be flexible and responsive to priority needs identified by MoE, and be scheduled in accordance with counterpart capacities to implement. While MoE have expressed a preference for a contractor model, with program management located within the Interim Ministry, the ICR believes that the FESP experience indicates this model would be far more effective and sustainable if program activities were driven by MoE's strategic and implementation oversight.

4. Working in Fiji will present AusAID with significant risks associated with the uncertain political and policy environment. However, it is considered that these risks can be managed provided a sufficiently flexible and appropriate delivery mechanism is used, taking into account major risks such as counterpart resource constraints, while maintaining positive engagement at an operational level for guiding planning and implementation, and responding to changes.

4.3.2 Other

5. The ICR believes that the current difficulties with collection and analysis of educational outcomes data through SIMS can be resolved at a relatively low cost and such an exercise will realise important benefits. It is recommended that AusAID, either prior to or early in any new program or activity, identify suitable technical advisers to work with MoE staff to resolve the current problems and establish a comprehensive, integrated and user-friendly management information system.
6. Weaknesses in the timely collection and presentation of monitoring and evaluation limits program management and effectiveness, and undermines the credibility of development interventions. Improving M&E in AusAID programs remains a priority, especially addressing the need to ensure the measurability and monitoring of outcomes, and avoiding 'data dumping' in compliance driven reporting.