Reviewing project quality

Work in progress

AusAID procedures for rapidly reviewing the quality of Australian aid activities

July 2003

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Quality Assurance Group
Program Evaluation Section
Office of Review and Evaluation

Australian Agency for
International Development

Contents

Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms

ADG   Assistant Director General

AMB   Activity monitoring brief

APS6   Australian Public Service, Level 6

AusAID   Australian Agency for International Development

CPM   Country program manager

CPRAMP   Country portfolio risk assessment and monitoring plans

CSG   Contract Services Group

DAC   Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic
           Cooperation and Development

EL1   Executive Level 1

EL2   Executive Level 2, Director

EVAL   Program Evaluation Section

FMA 9   Financial Management and Accountability, Regulation 9

FMA Reg 8 Financial Management and Accountability, Regulation 8

HLC   High-level consultations

NGO   Non-government organisation

ORE   Office of Review and Evaluation

PCC   Project/program coordinating committee

PDD   Project design document

PDF   Portable document format

PDU   Personnel Development Unit

QAE   Quality at entry

QAG   Quality Assurance Group

QUAL   Quality Improvement Section

TAG   Technical advisory group

Introduction

The Quality Assurance Group (QAG) of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) has identified the key steps taken in rapid reviews of the quality of its aid projects.

This work-in-progress document summarises the steps taken in six reviews conducted between 1999 and 2002: the 1999 quality-at-entry review, the 1999 risk-and-success review, the 1999–00 quality-in-implementation review, the 2001 NGO project quality review, the 2002 quality-at-entry review and the 2002 quality-in-implementation review.

This document presents the practical knowledge gained during those reviews as a general guide for future evaluations of Australian aid projects. There are many places in our procedures where changes and improvements could be made. That is why this document is considered a work in progress.

The 24 key steps identified and the estimated time required for each are presented at a glance on page 3 to provide an appreciation of the steps that can be implemented concurrently and the overall time. Each of these steps is then spelled out in the remainder of the document.

The text frequently refers to the many documents prepared by the QAG team that are used in the course of a review. Examples of these documents are attached in order of reference at the back of this document. Their prefix number relates to the relevant step.

Lincoln Young and Marilou Drilon wrote the initial QAG operational handbook in 2000 for program areas and task managers looking to assess project quality using a structured peer review. This revised document will continue to be updated to reflect improvements to the QAG process.

What is quality assurance?

Quality assurance in AusAID is about promoting the continuous improvement of project quality. A system of benchmarks is used. Key parts of project design and implementation are assessed against the benchmarks or 'quality standards' that have been set by AusAID from its long experience with development projects. After assessing projects against the quality standards, clear and accurate feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the projects is provided to designers and implementers. By 'measuring' quality and then tracking project quality over time, shifts in quality can be determined.

Concepts of quality change as our knowledge of development evolves and priorities change. The quality standards selected must therefore be kept up to date by exchanging information with AusAID staff and members of the international development community and parallel organisations throughout Australia.

More generally, quality assurance may be applied to any internal management activity that assesses the current quality of performance against accepted benchmarks with the aim of improving performance. Quality assurance in AusAID is based on the strong correlation found between good quality project processes in design and implementation and successful project outcomes.

Quality assurance is sometimes confused with quality control or even the audit function. Quality control is where a uniform output is required, such as in manufacturing or administration. Such control is not practised in development aid because of the number of complex processes and variables that make uniform standards and tight controls over quality an unrealistic aim. It would also be counterproductive because it could stifle creativity.

Day-to-day quality assurance of aid activities is the responsibility of AusAID program areas (especially the posts), with the support of technical advisers and the Contract Services Group (CSG). Other key stakeholders such as contractors, partner governments and beneficiaries also have important roles in quality assurance. For AusAID's Office of Review and Evaluation (ORE) the challenge is how best to include all stakeholders in positively supporting the quality assurance objective.

Suggested key steps and indicative timeline for 'QAGing' projects

Month	Step	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Month 1	1. QAG prepares the draft preparation timetable (about 2 hr)	▓			
	2. QAG identifies the panel members (3 wk)	▓▓▓	▓▓▓	▓▓▓	
	3. QAG prepares the consultants' terms of reference & undertakes the selection (4 wk)	▓▓▓	▓▓▓	▓▓▓	▓▓▓
	4. QAG books the meeting rooms (1 hr)				▓
	5. QAG selects projects at random & gets them cleared by the ADG (3 wk)		▓▓	▓▓▓	▓▓▓
Month 2	6. QAG prepares information for desks, posts, consultants, contractors & panels (1 week)	▓▓▓			
	7. QAG notifies desks of the times for their meetings with panels & distributes briefing notes (1 hr)		▓		
	8. Desks arrange teleconferencing with posts & Australian team leaders & distribute briefing notes (2 hr)		▓		
	9. QAG gives desks lists of project documents required (2 hr)		▓		
	10. QAG collects & copies project documents (3 wk)		▓▓	▓▓▓	▓▓▓
Month 3	11. Consultants undertake preliminary analysis of projects (6 days)	▓▓▓			
	12. QAG briefs panels, desks, posts & contractors before project assessments (1 hr)		▓		
	13. QAG contacts desks to confirm the scheduled panel discussions (1 hr)		▓		
	14. Panels undertake the assessments (12 days)		▓▓	▓▓▓	▓
	15. Consultants & panel leaders prepare individual project reports (12 days)		▓	▓▓▓	▓▓▓
Month 4	16. QAG circulates project reports to desks & posts for comments (2 days)	▓			
	17. Panel leaders & QAG prepare final individual project reports (2 wk)	▓	▓▓▓		
	18. Consultants prepare panel reports (3 days)			▓▓	
	19. Field teams prepare for & undertake field assessments of projects (1 wk + 2 wk)	▓▓▓		▓▓▓	▓▓▓
	20. QAG seeks feedback on the review process (1 wk)				▓▓▓
Month 5	21. QAG prepares draft overall review report (1 wk)		▓▓▓		
	22. QAG finalises overall report & submits it to the AusAID Executive (3 wk)		▓▓▓	▓▓▓	▓▓▓
	23. QAG generates an action plan				▓
Month 6	24. AusAID publishes the final report (4 wk)	▓▓▓	▓▓▓	▓▓▓	▓▓▓

1 QAG prepares the draft preparation timetable

- The time and energy required to bring about a QAG review from start to finish should not be underestimated. The draft timetable should be prepared well before the review is scheduled to begin. The whole QAG team should be involved in the planning and should meet several times as the timetable is refined and preparation tasks are accomplished.

- The 'Suggested key steps and timeline for 'QAGing' projects' (see the previous page) lists the generic tasks that need to be done. It is important to allocate these tasks to members of the QAG team at the first planning meeting. The target completion dates for the various tasks should also be agreed to.

- MS-Project 2000 is useful software for displaying the tasks against time and showing the sequence of events (see attachment 1.1).

> **TIP**
>
> **A great deal of lead-time (and effort) may be required to identify panel members and obtain their commitment. Three weeks lead-time was found to be about right.**

2   QAG identifies the panel members

Each review usually requires the input of 4–5 panels. The role of a panel is to assess a number of projects using a structured assessment form/tool, identify project strengths and weaknesses, suggest actions to improve project quality, and identify general lessons learned and examples of good practice.

Panel composition

- A panel generally includes 4–7 people– three members of AusAID staff, a moderator, sometimes a consultant, sometimes an informal member from within AusAID and occasionally an observer from outside AusAID.

- The AusAID panel members are the panel leader (a Director), someone in an EL1 position (preferably from desk, post or CSG) plus a sector adviser.

- The moderator is usually an adviser to AusAID or a consultant familiar with AusAID systems and operations. This panel member is knowledgable about the quality frame and ensures that the quality standards are interpreted consistently across the panels.

- The consultant is drawn from expressions of interest received from companies in response to an AusAID letter seeking the nomination of suitable consultants to support the analytical work of the panel (see step 3). The inclusion of outside consultants in the panels has brought new ideas and approaches into QAG and strengthened the credibility and independence of the review process.

- The informal member, whose participation is at the discretion of the panel leader, is likely to be at the APS6 level and seeks to participate because of the intensive learning experience the review offers. Normally the informal member contributes to discussions but does not necessary participate in scoring. This member usually attends the assessment of only one project of particular interest.

- An outside observer participates at the request of, for example, a director, an Assistant Director General (ADG) of a program area, CSG or an NGO. The observer, usually a member of the NGO and contractor community, or a visitor from a multilateral agency or the DAC, has the opportunity to see how AusAID operates and gives feedback on their observations.

- Members of the QAG team should also sit in with the panels. Their presence is not usually needed for the whole review; they can plan to join the panels at strategic times, eg during panel discussions and interviews with desk officers, or during the project scoring. Their role is to ensure a consistent approach during the review. QAG members should plan to spend more time with the panels during the review of their first project.

Selection of AusAID panel members

- The following procedure was used in 1999 for the quality-at-entry review. Using AusAID's staff list a selection frame was prepared that consisted of the names of all AusAID staff in Canberra who had experience in program areas and were in EL1, EL2 and sector adviser positions. Their names were listed under their respective sections.

- A note was made against the names of staff who had already served on a QAG panel; they were not requested to join another in the same year. A note was made against the names of other staff who had not been available previously but had expressed an interest in later participation.

- The QAG manager then contacted the directors (EL2 staff) who had previously expressed interest to seek their membership. To make up the panel numbers he contacted the other Directors on the list. They were given two to three months notice and firm dates for the review. They were also given the names of other directors with QAG experience whom they could talk to. The same approach was used to recruit EL1 staff and sector advisers. A list of panel members was thus prepared (see attachment 2.1 for an example).

- Informal members were identified by sending out a notice through the intranet. QAG keeps a logbook of expressions of interest from AusAID staff volunteering to join an assessment panel (see attachment 2.2 for an example).

- No outside observers were included as panel members.

3 QAG prepares the consultants' terms of reference and undertakes the selection

Role of the consultants

- Each panel includes a consultant to support its analytical work. In working with the other panel members, the consultant has three broad tasks:

  1. to undertake preliminary analysis of projects and prepare materials to assist the panel

  2. to participate in all discussions and scoring of projects, and

  3. to write up the reports on each project assessment and on the overall findings of the panel, in consultation with the panel leader and QAG staff.

- The terms of reference for the five consultants who were members of the quality-in-implementation panels in 1999–00 are given in attachment 3.1.

  – Two of the consultants used as project analysts were subsequently selected to support QAG staff in field assessments and in preparing the draft of the final quality-in-implementation report. The consultants had five broad tasks:

    1. prepare for the field assessments by studying the key project documents so as to participate in discussions with in country stakeholders

    2. prepare a brief issues paper on each project to guide in-country discussions

    3. assist the QAG team leader with in-country discussions and write up the findings giving the preliminary conclusions

    4. help to consolidate the findings of the panels and the field teams into a coherent statement of program quality achievements and shortfalls, and

    5. draft chapters of the final report.

  The terms of reference for the two consultants who supported the field assessments are given in attachment 3.2. Outlines of the issues paper, the field visit report and the draft overall quality-in-implementation report are also specified in this attachment.

Qualifications of the consultants

- The consultants require both relevant qualifications and a high level of skill in project analysis and design. It is important that they also have wide knowledge and experience working in developing countries on feasibility and design studies, appraisals, monitoring and evaluation. A deep knowledge of AusAID's approach and working environment is essential. An ability to work well with the panels and to write clearly and concisely is also essential.

Selection of consultants

- A letter asking for expressions of interest should be sent to a number of companies seeking the nomination of suitable consultants.

- The nominations should then be evaluated based on an assessment of technical merit and price scores set out in CSG's contracting out guidelines, specific to contractor selection procedures for consultancy services contracts. FMA Reg 8 approval from the Director of the Program Evaluation Section to use this evaluation methodology is required.

  - In the selection for the 1999–00 review of quality in implementation, technical merit was given greater emphasis, accounting for 90 per cent of the total score and the price component the balance. The scores were arrived at following discussions with AusAID staff who were familiar with the work of the nominating consultants.

  - The methodology used in evaluating the nominations is given in attachment 3.3.

> **TIP**
>
> **The consultants selected should be able to work well under pressure. The reports they are required to prepare are onerous and, when the panels are sitting, they have little spare time.**

4 QAG books the meeting rooms

- Meeting rooms in which the panels will be briefed on their roles and responsibilities should be booked four weeks in advance.

- Usually there are two, but sometimes three, panels scheduled to conduct project assessments simultaneously. It is preferable to keep the same room for each panel during their review, although this may not always be possible.

  – Two panels operating simultaneously provides an opportunity for interpanel meetings to give feedback on the process, how the panels are operating and how they are interpreting the indicators to make their judgments. The meetings also provide an opportunity to identify areas of ambiguity in applying certain standards in assessing project quality and to report on general trends and findings.

- The room capacity is based on the number of panel members and the expected number of observers, desk officers and representative from the Australian managing agent who will participate in discussions with the panel.

- Arrangements are made with Admin Services Group (ASU) to install phones in the meeting rooms to allow panels to conduct phone interviews with posts and team leaders in country.

> **Tips**
>
> **Rooms should be inspected prior to meetings to ensure that the phones are installed with STD and ISD access.**
>
> **A maximum of two panels operating simultaneously is preferable in terms of available resources.**

5   QAG selects projects at random and gets them cleared by the ADG

The sample size

- QAG selects samples of projects and programs to review quality at entry or quality in implementation. These are stratified random selections to ensure that each of AusAID's five sectors – health, education, governance, rural development (including environment) and infrastructure – are equally represented. The samples are further stratified to ensure that the projects represent the regions where AusAID is most active – Papua New Guinea, Pacific, East Asia, and other (which includes Africa and South Asia).

- The projects reviewed in the 1999 review of risk and success were not randomly selected but nominated for review by their desks. Eight of the 19 nominated projects were selected by QAG based on whether they had been recently reviewed (by, for example, a technical advisory group), the learning gain, and the balance of sectors and regions.

Random sampling procedure

- A sample frame that includes all of the bilateral projects and programs being either implemented (for a quality-in-implementation review) or designed (for a quality-at-entry review) needs to be prepared by QAG in conjunction with the Information and Research Services Unit. To date, the sample frames prepared have been based on the activity management system.

- The projects in the sample frame should meet particular criteria. For the 2000 and 2002 quality-in-implementation reviews, the frame contained only projects that had been running for one year and still had at least one year to run before completion. The total budget approved for each project had to be over $600 000. Projects that had been previously QAGed were removed, as were projects that may have had a recent evaluation or review.

- The sample frame can be generated in an Excel spreadsheet (see attachment 5.1 for an example). This should then be given to the Information and Research Services Unit with a request to generate four random sample sets of 20–30 projects (with their sector and region indicated). The Excel random sampling tool can generate these sets.

- If QAG decides to select eight projects from the Pacific region, the first eight projects in the Pacific region in the first sample set are selected. If the first sample set does not include eight projects in the Pacific region the second sample set is

used (then the third sample set, etc) until eight are identified. If one sector (or one primary DAC sector) is over-represented in the subsample of eight (eg primary education) it is permissible to look at the other sample sets for replacement projects in the Pacific region until a more representative subsample is found.

- Given that some data in the activity management system have been found to be unreliable (project start dates have been wrong), the final list of projects needs to be checked with the desks to ensure that they still fit the criteria. For those that fail, substitutes have to be found from the sample sets. Although the desks are the best source of project information, they should not be contacted excessively.

- Any changes to procedures should be checked with the Information and Research Services Unit to ensure that the sample remains random.

Substitution of projects

- When the desks are notified that projects under their supervision have been selected for review, desks may request that 'their' projects be removed from the sample. Valid reasons for finding a substitute project relate mostly to special management and funding arrangements:
  - mixed credit arrangements
  - linkage programs
  - AusAID's minor role in the project.

- On a few occasions no valid reasons can be given to justify finding a substitute project. QAG has prepared a list of possible responses to desks on why projects cannot be removed from the random sample list, and on the benefits that can go to the desks if one of 'their' projects is reviewed (see attachment 5.2).

- If a number of projects need to be removed from the sample list, QAG prepares a list that methodically details the name of the original project, the reasons for its removal, and the names of proposed substitute.

Clearance procedures

- When a final list of projects is determined, the QAG manager sends a minute to the ADG of the Office of Review and Evaluation, through the Director of the Program Evaluation Section, seeking endorsement of an attached list of projects.

- After endorsement, any change to the list requires a minute seeking the ADG's endorsement of the change. The reasons for the proposed change should be given.

> **TIP**
>
> **It may be very difficult to find replacement projects because of the need to balance the sectors and regions represented.**

6 QAG prepares information for desks, posts, consultants, contractors and panels

- Guidelines and briefing notes need to be prepared for all those involved in a QAG review so that they understand what is expected of them and have a good appreciation of the overall process.

- For quality-in-implementation reviews to date, separate (but overlapping) guidelines have been prepared for AusAID staff, consultants, Australian team leaders and project contractors, panel members and panel leaders.

  1. Briefing notes provided the **AusAID staff** (desks, CSG, sector advisers and posts) involved in the discussions with the panel with information on QAG, the objectives of the review, outputs expected, QAG's approach, the discussions and procedures followed, the reports to be prepared and the feedback questionnaire (see attachment 6.1).

  2. A guideline provided the **consultants** with details of the activities they should undertake and the outputs expected during the preparatory stage and the panel stage (see attachment 6.2).

  3. Briefing notes provided relevant information for the Australian **team leader and project contractors**, giving them some background on QAG, the objectives of the review, the purpose of their discussions with the panel, and the procedure that the panel will use during the discussions (see attachment 6.3).

  4. A guide containing general information was prepared for the **panel members** (see attachment 6.4). As well as information on the background, the objectives and outputs of the review, the guideline gave explicit details on the approach and methodology that the panels should follow. A code of behaviour for conducting discussions with desk and posted staff was also suggested.

  5. A guide for **panel leaders**, tasked with introducing and leading the discussions with the desk, post and contractors, was prepared so that all the panels had a consistent methodology (see attachment 6.5).

- To avoid repetition and the possibility of inconsistencies, one briefing document that includes guidelines where appropriate and meets the requirements of all participants in the review process would be an improvement.

7   QAG notifies desks of the times for their meetings with panels and distributes briefing notes

- QAG staff should notify the desks by phone about the proposed times and venues for discussions with the panels. Once initial agreements are reached on suitable times for staff to meet with the panels, the QAG manager emails briefing notes on how the assessment process will be conducted and the proposed timetable.

- Copies of the assessment form (see attachment 7.1 and attachment 7.2 for examples) are forwarded to the desks to facilitate their preparation for discussions, together with relevant briefing notes on the assessment process.

- Discussions with the desks usually take place on day 2 of project assessments. Panel discussions usually start with the desks and are followed by discussions with the posts and then the Australian team leaders. This arrangement is reasonably flexible to allow for people's availability and work priorities. There have been occasions when panels have conducted interviews on day 1 or day 3 to accommodate short-notice changes to people's schedules.

> **TIP**
>
> **It is preferable for panels to speak to the Australian team leader in country rather than the project director in Australia, although sometimes both may need to be involved.**

8 Desks arrange teleconferencing with posts and Australian team leaders and distribute briefing notes

- The desks arrange for the posts and Australian team leaders to participate in panel discussions. They provide names and contact details of relevant project staff to QAG. This information is recorded by QAG in the schedule matrix that is included in the guidelines or briefing notes for the panels, desks and posts.

- In most cases the desks will advise the posts and the Australian team leaders of the proposed schedule of discussions and agree on times for teleconferencing with the panels (taking into account the time differences between Canberra and the partner countries). Alternatively, the desks may advise QAG to make arrangements directly with the posts and the Australian team leaders, and to keep them abreast of any changes or new developments.

- The desks forward to the posts and the Australian team leaders the QAG briefing notes on QAG's background, the purpose of the review, the approach and expected outputs of the review, and how panel discussions will be conducted.

9   QAG gives desks lists of project documents required

In preparation

- QAG prepares a spreadsheet with the name of each project, its key result areas, the country in which it is located, the section of AusAID administering it, in addition to the names and contact details for the section director, country program manager and the desk officer. This is a key document for contacting desks and checking details for reports.

- QAG should ensure that the desks have been informed of the upcoming assessments of their projects through official channels. It takes two or three days for the information in minutes dispatched to section directors to be received by desks.

Documents required for assessment list

- QAG staff contact the desk officers to request the documents needed to undertake the project assessments (see attachment 9.1).

- The desks should be given a list of the documents required and a reasonable amount of time – say, one week – to bring together the documents. QAG staff should then collect them from the desks.

- If the desks have difficulties in identifying the documents required, QAG staff or the consultant should offer to help them.

- If the desks are unsure whether to include certain documents in the review, the criterion to use is, if those documents have useful information about the project beyond what the documents already supplied can offer, include them. It is better to err on the side of caution.

> **TIP**
>
> **Some projects do not follow the usual AusAID standards for naming their documents. Desks in doubt about the required documents should speak to a QAG staff member.**

10 QAG collects and copies project documents

Collecting

- The desks should check against the QAG list that they have collected all of the requested documents. In some cases, documents may have a different name from that on the list.

- If the desks do not contact QAG staff by the date agreed for the collection of the documents, QAG should follow up on the status of the document collection. If there are delays QAG staff should collect the available documents and make a note to collect the remainder.

- When QAG staff collect the documents from the desks they should note the names of the actual documents provided on the list of documents required for assessment. Mistakes can be made by the desk and/or QAG because sometimes the names of different documents are similar, or it may be difficult to identify the documents required from the names in the list.

- Because the documents collected from the desks will be returned to the desks, they should placed in the QAG office area in boxes clearly marked 'originals' and with the name of the country, the project name, and the specifics of the review – for example, Papua New Guinea – Lae City Water Supply Project – Panel no. 2 – 2002 quality-at-entry review.

> **TIP**
>
> **QAG staff should not contact the desks about missing documents until they are certain that they do not have them.**

Processing

- Each panel member will need one copy of certain documents, such as the project design document or the latest annual plan. One or two copies of other documents may be sufficient, since not all the panel members will need to read them. The consultant should decide on the number of copies required and inform the QAG staff member responsible for the copying.

- Thick or bound documents will need to be sent out to a printing contractor for copying. The QAG staff member fills out a printing request form at the services counter. Avoid cutting originals given by the desks. But if it is necessary, ensure that the desks find this acceptable and that there is an extra copy made (marked as 'original') to return to the desks.

- If there is a need to copy project files the pages must be returned to the files in their correct order. Only the concerned QAG staff and the consultant should handle the files.

> **TIP**
>
> **Usually the maximum number of copies required is 5 or 6.**

Preparing panel packs and other documents

- When the required copies of each document are available, QAG bundles the documents into 'panel packs' and 'other documents', secured with rubber bands.

  - Panel packs include those documents that all panel members require.

  - A cover page listing all documents included in the pack should be added. It may help (for easy reference) to number all documents and include the corresponding document number on the cover page listing.

- All panel packs are added to a 'copies' box that contains the 'other documents' of which only a few copies have been made (also with a cover page). QAG delivers this box to the panel during the briefing session.

Returning documents

- All original documents are returned to the desks. QAG keeps one copy of each.

- The desks may require some documents (such as the current working files) back within hours or days of supplying them. These documents should be copied and returned to the desks as requested.

- Usually most other documents can be returned after the panel reports are complete (see step 18).

- The multiple copies of the documents returned by the panels can go to the desks after checking through them to make sure there are no notations on them.

- When the boxes of documents are ready, contact the desks and arrange convenient times to return the documents.

- When returning the boxes of originals and any spare copies, thank the desks for getting the documents together in the first place. If necessary, apologise for any delay in returning the documents to them.

QAG storage

- The copies of documents that QAG wishes to keep for future reference must have a cover page attached naming the project, the country and for which review they were used. All the documents from one panel should fit into one box. The box should be labelled before storing.

11 Consultants undertake preliminary analysis of projects

- One of the main roles of the consultants is to undertake a preliminary analysis of the projects and prepare written material to assist the panels. The consultants should become sufficiently familiar with the quality of the projects to support the smooth functioning of the panels.

- Each consultant is given a list of the projects to be reviewed together with copies of project documents. Taking one project at a time, the consultant should read the documents to get a sound understanding of the project design and the progress of its implementation – if the review is of quality in implementation. One and a half days are allowed for reading and producing a document (see attachment 11.1 for an example) that includes the following information to assist the panel in its assessment of the project:

  - **project history** (dot points) including months and years of major events, eg when identified, when the prefeasibility, feasibility and appraisal studies were carried out, when implementation began, and whether there was a mid-term review and other important events or changes during preparation and implementation

  - **summary description** of the project (about half a page)

  - **notes against each quality standard** in the 'Comments' column of the QAG assessment form (for the consultant's own reference when working as a panel member and for providing additional information to other panel members, when required)

  - **preliminary ideas on project strengths and weaknesses** and notes on how possible contributing factors have influenced the project and where to find information (about half a page – enough to stimulate and assist panel discussion)

  - a **reading guide** for panel members, with comments on their importance in terms of the panel's assessment task

  - **copies of key pages from files** (where appropriate), and

  - a version of the **assessment form with document and page references** against key quality standards (for subsequent copying and provision to panel members).

- The consultants speak to the desks to obtain additional details about each project, if required. This contact should be kept to a minimum to avoid overburdening desk officers.

- The consultants should ensure that the correct project documents are available and that appropriate numbers of copies have been made, sorted and delivered to the panels before the project assessments commence.

- If a panel does not include a consultant, the desks should prepare documents outlining their projects' history/timelines and any other issues for panel discussion (any aspects of project history that is important to emphasise, project strengths and weaknesses, and questions relating to the overall project itself). The desks may present the documents in advance to the panel or take it to the discussion session.

TIPS

Panel leaders should ask the consultants to make a final check with QAG staff that arrangements are in place for discussions with desks, posts and contractor representatives.

12 QAG briefs panels, desks, posts and contractors before project assessments

Brief the desks and panel members

- Where possible, the desks and panel members should be briefed together to establish collegiate relationships between the panels and desks from the outset of the review, to maintain transparency within the review process and to promote ownership and support for the review.

- The QAG team briefs the desks and panel members before the project assessments start. The briefing usually takes about an hour and covers the objectives of the review, how the projects were selected, the use of consultants, the assessment procedures and the dates, the roles of key players, how to use the assessment form, quality standards and rating, and the reports to be prepared.

- The desks and panel members usually ask questions. So at least 20 minutes should be allowed for answering them.

- Briefing notes for the desks (see attachment 6.1 for an example) and the guide for panel members (see attachment 6.4 for an example) should be distributed (along with the copies of the project documents for panel members) at the briefing session.

Brief the panel leaders

- QAG may provide a separate briefing session for panel leaders if specific issues need to be addressed before the project assessments begin. Such a briefing may cover how to conduct discussions with desks, posts and contractors.

  - Agreement should be reached on a set of structured questions that the panel should ask during discussions.

- If a separate guide for panel leaders has been prepared it should be distributed at the briefing session.

Brief the posts and contractors

- QAG briefs the posts and project contractors by email. Their briefing notes outline the purpose of the exercise, the assessment procedures and the roles of key players (see attachment 6.1 and attachment 6.3 for examples).

13 QAG contacts desks to confirm the scheduled panel discussions

- Three days prior to panel discussions, QAG contacts each desk to confirm the schedule of discussions with the desk, post and Australian team leader. Occasionally, a desk will request QAG to follow-up directly with the post and the Australian team leader.

> **TIP**
>
> **QAG should give the desks, posts and Australian team leaders the assessment form and structured questions likely to be asked by the panel during discussions in advance to maximise the effectiveness of the panel discussions.**

14 Panels undertake the assessments

- The project assessments should begin as soon as possible after the panel briefing. Generally no more than 2 days should be spent on each project assessment but this can be varied.

- Each day is divided into two sessions. The first session is usually from 09.30 to 12.30 and the second session is usually from 13.30 to 16.30. These times allow panel members little time at their desks and it is vital that they do not allow other tasks to draw them away from punctually attending all the sessions.

- During the **first session on the first day**, the consultant (or a desk officer if there is no consultant on the panel) will brief the panel on the project and discuss the preliminary analysis document prepared (and distributed preferably a week earlier). The briefing and attendant discussions should take about 30 minutes. The panel members spend the rest of the morning (2.5 hours) discussing the information in the panel pack and other documents and giving a preliminary rating to the project using the quality standards in the QAG assessment form. The panel discusses issues of project quality as they arise.

  - The consultant (or panel leader if there is no consultant) should take notes of the discussion and maintain a careful record of the preliminary scoring.

- The **second session on the first day** is spent on discussions with the desk, post and contractor (even if the preliminary scoring has not been finished). Before the discussions occur, however, the panel members should agree on the issues for discussion. Discussions with the desk (and the CSG staff who may accompany the desk) may take about an hour. Discussions with the post usually take less time – often 30–45 minutes. Discussions with the Australian team leader may also take 30–45 minutes.

- The discussion atmosphere should be collegiate and friendly. The aim is to support staff and not to criticise anyone directly or by implication. Panels should be interested in assessing the project rather than the actions or performance of the people who manage it. Questions about the project should therefore avoid issues of staff performance. The desk, post and the Australian team leader should be treated as important contributors to the assessment.

- The discussions may run over to the **first session of the second day**, and often need to because of the time difference between Canberra and the location of the post/Australian team leader. After the discussions the panel should finalise the quality ratings.

- The **second session of the second day** is usually taken up with panel discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of the project, possible remedial actions, and general lessons. The consultant (or panel leader) is required to record the findings of the panel.

- The next day the consultant (or panel leader) prepares the draft summary report and completes (in draft) the assessment form (see step 15).

- QAG is open to innovative suggestions for improving this process. The above structure is the one tested in practice and found to be satisfactory.

TIP

It is best to finish assessing one project before starting another to avoid any possibility of confusing information between projects or not being able to recollect project details.

15 Consultants and panel leaders prepare individual project reports

- After the panel has finalised the quality ratings of each project and agreed on strengths and weaknesses and general and specific lessons, the consultant (or a panel member if there is no consultant on the panel) prepares a draft report on each project (comprising the completed assessment form and a summary report). The draft report should be prepared no more than one day after that project's panel assessment.

- The format and content of the draft report are:

  1. Assessment form

     The assessment form report consists of the agreed panel scores and associated comments where required. Usually, only the quality standards having very low or very high ratings require comment.

  2. Summary report

     The summary report on each project has three parts:

     - An *introductory section* that shows the details of the project and the review: country, name of project, current management and staff, review panel and the review date. (This part of the report is usually prepared by QAG staff.)

     - The body of the report has the following main headings:

       Summary description of the project
       A brief overview (usually one paragraph) plus a sentence or two on the main views of the panel.

       Strengths and weaknesses
       The main strengths and weaknesses (not more than 5 or 6 of each) and comments on their impact on the project and the factors responsible.

       Suggestions for project action
       Feasible measures to strengthen the project.

       General lessons learnt
       General lessons based on analysis of the strengths and weaknesses but usually not referring to the specific project.

       Examples of good practice
       Any examples of documentation (specify a document or parts of a document if possible) or practice from this project that the panel considered particularly innovative and that could be used as a model by other program areas or other parts of the agency.

– The final part of the report, which is prepared by QAG staff, lists the documents reviewed by the panel (project documents, sector-related documents, country-related documents and any other). A list of the people interviewed is also given.

The introductory section and the summary description of the project usually fit on the first page. The rest of the body of the report should take up a further two to two and a half pages. The final part should require no more than half a page.

• Both the assessment form and summary report should be marked 'draft'.

• The consultant will give the draft summary report and the completed assessment form to the QAG team leader for in-principle endorsement before passing it to the panel for consideration and comment and any necessary changes. The panel leader should coordinate the comments from the panel members. The QAG team leader will again clear the draft report before QAG staff pass it to the desk and post for comment.

16 QAG circulates project reports to desks and posts for comments

- QAG staff are responsible for ensuring that concerned desks and posts get electronic copies of the draft reports for comment. If comments need to be made by the Australian managing agents of projects (such as in a quality-in-implementation review) the QAG team leader will ask the posts (or the desks) to send *only* the draft summary report to them.

- Draft reports should always be sent out with an explanatory covering note. Posts and desks (and Australian managing agents) are requested in the covering note to email their comments to the QAG team leader within two working days from the date the draft reports are sent out. Alternatively, the desk may wish to discuss the report with the panel leader or QAG staff directly. QAG staff keep records of the dates that the drafts are sent out and to whom.

  - Sometimes the desks and posts request extensions to their deadlines. Usually the QAG team leader grants such extensions but always keeping in mind that the sooner the comments are received the sooner the final project reports can be prepared.

- The QAG team leader considers all comments and then forwards them to the panel leader to assess them.

- Changes to the panel ratings given are considered only if the project management staff is able to provide new information that was not available to the panel when they reviewed the project.

17 Panel leaders and QAG prepare final individual project reports

- After receiving all comments and holding further discussions with the desks if required, QAG staff work with the panel leaders and/or the consultants, as appropriate, to finalise the project reports.

- Sometimes comments are delayed, especially from the posts, and this task may become drawn out. If the desks/posts indicate that comments will not provide fresh information or correct errors in the reports, the QAG team leader should tactfully limit the amount of communication required before finalising the reports.

> **TIP**
>
> **If a panel leader is unavailable to finalise the project reports, with the leader's agreement QAG may need to take the initiative and finalise the reports.**

18 Consultants prepare panel reports

- After individual project reports have been prepared and before the final overall report is prepared, each panel has the option to prepare a panel report. These panel reports are later synthesised into the final report.

- Panel reports often have a sectoral focus since the panels, where possible, review projects from one sector. The reports contain the common themes from all of the projects assessed by a panel – project strengths, weaknesses, lessons, and possible remedial actions.

- There are two ways to prepare a panel report.
  1. Working closely with the QAG team and each other, the consultants (or assigned panel members if there are no consultants on the panels) may prepare overall panel reports on the findings from the project assessments.
  2. The panel members come together at the end of the project assessments for a few hours to do a broad analysis of all the projects that they reviewed, drawing out the common themes, which become the panel report.

> **TIP**
>
> **If required, the Information and Research Services Unit will support any analyses undertaken and any graphical representation of findings.**

19 Field teams prepare for and undertake field assessments of projects

- If it is feasible for a field team to visit project sites and if the objectives of a field assessment will be met (see below), field assessments of projects should be undertaken.
  - Inability to undertake a site visit does not necessarily mean a project cannot be chosen for verifying the panel's findings as there are other ways of acquiring the required information.

- Each field team should consist of a QAG staff member and a consultant. To ensure complete objectivity, neither person should have been on the QAG panel for the projects they are to assess in the field.

- The consultants prepare a table (see attachment 19.1 for an example) in which to record the outcomes of consultations with the desks and posts about the suitability of each project for field assessment.

- Inform those desks and posts that have agreed to their projects being assessed in the field whether their projects have been chosen for a field assessment.
  - QAG staff should ask the desks whether the QAG team leader may contact the post directly in relation to visiting the sites of the projects selected.

- QAG sends the detailed terms of reference for the field assessment teams (see attachment 3.2 for an example) to the posts and desks, together with the tentative assessment schedules including (tentative) flight details, for them to comment on. Copies of comments from the posts should be sent to the desks. The desks should see and be able to comment on the program prepared before it is finalised.

- QAG staff should ask the posts to book accommodation for the field teams and to organise the program in country (eg dates, times and venues for discussions with the Australian team leader, the partner government team leader, and the partner government, and for visits to the project site/s). The question of local transport should also be covered. Internal flights may have to be booked in country. The post can sometimes provide a vehicle, sometimes the Australian team leader is able to provide transport, or taxis or hire cars may be used. The posts should provide estimates of the in-country accommodation and transport costs.
  - Between two and three full working days per project were found to be sufficient for the projects visited as part of the 1999–00 quality-in-implementation review.

- After a program has been prepared and agreed to by all parties concerned, the QAG manager needs to prepare a minute for the ADG of the Office of Review and Evaluation, through the Director of the Program Evaluation Section, to seek approval in principle of the projects to be visited (see attachment 19.2 for an example).

- After the ADG endorses the projects to be visited, QAG draws up a travel program and submits it to the travel experts within AusAID to implement. Flight schedules should allow for maximum flexibility so that the order of countries to be visited can be changed if necessary. Make firm accommodation bookings after flights are finally confirmed.

- The consultant, in collaboration with QAG staff, should then prepare a one-page issues paper on each project to be visited. QAG should send these papers to the posts a few days before the team arrives in country. The key project documents, which the teams will require when they are in the field, need to be selected and if necessary copied. Weight and volume should be kept to a minimum.

Proposed criteria for selecting projects for field assessment

- The following criteria were used to select a mix of projects and programs for field assessments during the 1999–00 quality-in-implementation review:
  - most likely to provide useful information on in-country management, monitoring and reporting
  - scored either high or low in the second attribute (management) or against particular indicators/standards within that attribute
  - have reasonably accessible sites and an Australian team leader on site
  - can be split into two groups (PNG and Pacific, and South-East Asia), each group having a range of situations and high and low scores.

Objectives of field assessments

- The field assessments of projects and programs during the 1999–00 quality-in-implementation review had the following objectives:
  - to gather additional information on the quality of in-country aspects of project implementation, including contractor management and reporting and AusAID monitoring
  - to assess the views on the project of in-country stakeholders, particularly the partner government and beneficiaries
  - to assess the accuracy of the panels' desk assessments of in-country aspects of project implementation and to identify ways to improve the assessment methodology, where appropriate

–   to study AusAID's systems of monitoring and reporting as applied by the post and contractor to determine the extent to which they are workable and effective and to identify possible improvements

–   to brief posts, partner governments and contractors on QAG operations and outcomes and to discuss with post staff and contractors how QAG findings and recommendations are used to improve, for example, the use of activity monitoring briefs.

Activities to be undertaken during field assessment

*   The field assessments in the 1999–00 quality-in-implementation review were undertaken by two teams. One team visited four projects in the Pacific region while the other team visited five projects in East Asia. Each team took 14–15 days.

*   The following discussions were held during a field assessment:
    –   with post staff on the panel's findings, in-country realities affecting the project, the project's approach to monitoring and reporting, and contractor performance
    –   with the partner government on QAG's role and general approach, its views on the particular project and its views on ownership and sustainability, and
    –   with the Australian team leader and the partner government team leader on QAG's role and general approach, their views on the particular project and their views on ownership and sustainability.

Expected outputs

*   An assessment of the quality of in-country aspects of project implementation (including the views of in-country stakeholders).

*   Conclusions on the accuracy of the QAG panels' desk assessments and recommendations for improving the methodology, if required.

*   Conclusions and recommendations regarding the overall approach to reporting and monitoring on the particular projects.

*   Specific conclusions on the use of activity monitoring briefs and their accuracy with regard to the situations of the particular projects.

*   Recommendations to the posts on applying QAG findings on project monitoring and reporting.

> **TIPS**
>
> **When in country the team can split up (if necessary to complete the field assessment in the available time), with one member visiting the project site while the other member holds discussions with the post.**

20 QAG seeks feedback on the review process

- QAG advocates an open review environment and is particular about seeking feedback and suggestions for improving the review process.

- Questionnaires seeking feedback on the QAG review process are distributed to all panel members and to all those interviewed during reviews. The questions on the overall process cover the assessment framework, methodology, professional learning gains from the activity, effectiveness of the peer review approach, panel composition and operation, documentation and timing (see attachment 20.1 and attachment 20.2 for examples).

- Survey participants are usually given a week to respond, after which a reminder is sent by email. The return rate for completed questionnaires is recorded and the data are analysed. The results of the feedback survey may be incorporated as an attachment in the overall review report or remain as a stand-alone document (see attachment 20.3 for an example).

> **TIP**
>
> **The survey respondents should be given the options to remain anonymous and to return the completed questionnaires by email or hard copy.**

21 QAG prepares draft overall review report

- QAG is solely responsible for preparing the final review report. After all of the necessary information has been collected, the desks, posts and panels no longer have a role to play.

  – In the 1999–00 quality-in-implementation review, one of the panel consultants who also participated in the field assessments was selected to prepare the draft. Very clear guidelines were prepared for the consultant (see attachment 3.2).

- The overall report should be 10–15 pages, brevity increasing the likelihood that the findings will be read.

- Proposed format and content are:
  - Introduction
  - Brief description of objectives and methodology of the review   1 page
  - Key findings
  - Overall quality   4 pages
  - Detailed results
  - Reasons for variation in quality   2 pages
  - Recommendations   1 page
  - Annexes   As required

- When QAG completes the first draft it goes to the QAG panel members and QAG Advisory Group for comment. Suggestions for improvement are considered and changes are incorporated into the draft.

  – If the draft report is prepared by a consultant, the first draft is submitted to the QAG team for redrafting.

> **TIP**
>
> **Previous reports prepared by QAG can be used as models (see, for example, *Rapid Review of Project Quality at Entry, August 2002*)**

22 QAG finalises overall review report and submits it to the AusAID Executive

- QAG should not underestimate the time and effort required to finalise the overall review report. It may take several reworks over two to three weeks.

  – If a consultant prepares the draft, QAG may need to rewrite and/or restructure parts of it to put QAG's 'stamp' on it.

- The report's tone should be frank and if any point is worth making it must be clearly stated. All the findings must be backed up by evidence (including statistics) so that subjectivity is minimised. Although projects with merit or innovative aspects may be identified by name or country of location in the text, projects with serious difficulties should not be identified by name, although their problems can be clearly described in the text if they are required in order to make a point. QAG attempts to prepare well-written overall reports containing fresh information about project quality, and new ways of looking at recognised problems.

- The final report is submitted to the Executive for their comment. The Executive meets monthly and they require copies of the report at least two weeks before the report will be addressed at a meeting.

- The QAG team will incorporate any changes to the report suggested by the Executive.

23 QAG generates an action plan

- QAG generates a plan based on the issues and recommendations raised in the review to improve project quality. This plan suggests what needs to be done in the short to medium term to carry forward the report's findings.

- The action plan lists the recommendations, proposed actions, timing and the work area responsible for taking action (see attachment 23.1 for an example). The actions usually address policy, practices and processes and a number will relate to tightening up existing guidelines.

- It is preferable to present the action plan together with the final overall review report to the Executive. The QAG Advisory Group or the Executive may monitor and provide guidance, as appropriate, on the implementation of the plan.

- Alternatively, a draft action plan is circulated to program and policy areas for comment, leading to an agreed plan for implementation. The various work areas responsible for carrying out the action plan may be required to submit to QAG (who takes a coordinating role and reports to the Executive) formal progress statements on actions taken to improve project quality.

- The final responsibility for the implementation of the action plan rests with program areas. The Office of Review and Evaluation, the Personnel Development Unit and other support areas are limited to providing advice, guidelines and training. Activity managers, directors and branch heads are ultimately accountable for implementing the QAG report's recommendations and for ensuring projects achieve high quality.

24 AusAID publishes the final report

Clearance for publication

- All AusAID publications are subject to approval as part of AusAID's annual Forward Publications Plan (see *AusAID Style Guide*, chapter 5).

- To start the publishing process QAG needs to obtain the required approval to publish and submit a completed Publication Advice Form to the Publications Unit.

Editing

- Before the overall review report is published, a professional editor who is familiar with the *AusAID Style Guide* is contracted to undertake the final editing of the report. Before editing begins QAG staff discuss with the editor the purpose of the report, its intended audience, the level of editing required, whether/when the edited report needs to be available to the designer and whether/when any proofing of the designer's work is required.

- The editor provides a quote to QAG on the basis of the document to be edited and that quote forms the basis of the service order.

- According to an agreed schedule, the editor returns the edited document to QAG, the suggested changes are discussed and the document is finalised for the designer.

Design

- A designer that meets AusAID's requirements is contracted to design and layout the report. AusAID has a list of designers on its period contract database. The Public Affairs Group can recommend designers who have done excellent work for the agency, including designers who may not be on the period contract database.
  - QAG may ask to see a sample of the designers' portfolios.

- QAG contacts three designers to discuss the design and print specifications and other requirements for the report, to agree on a reasonable schedule for the work and to obtain quotes for undertaking the job.
  - The designers and the QAG task manager should be familiar with the *AusAID Style Guide*, chapters 6, 7 and 8, which cover corporate design, print production and electronic production of reports.

- When a designer is selected, QAG informs them of the job and the contract is prepared.

- AusAID requirements for print and electronic production of publications are covered in the *AusAID Style Guide.*

- If the report is not for wide circulation the report cover should state 'Restricted, not for external circulation'.

- If the published report is to be distributed widely and made available on the Internet for external audiences, it is advisable to prepare a minute to the ADG of the Office of Review and Evaluation, who will approve the dissemination strategy.

- QAG has ultimate responsibility for approving the designer and printer proofs. These need to be carefully checked for possible mistakes or amendments. It is usually a good idea to have 'fresh eyes' look at these.

> **TIP**
>
> **The design stage of publishing is not the time for changing text as costs can quickly escalate and schedules fall over.**

Print production

- QAG will engage the designer to assist with production specifications as well as with selecting a printer with the required technical skills and managing the printing process. QAG will require the designer to collect three print quotes from the list of recommended printers.

- The designer will deliver the approved report in digital form to the printer. The designer will ensure that the specifications are met and that the final product is of the highest quality. But QAG will need to approve the printer proofs (see *AusAID Style Guide*, chapter 7).

Electronic production

- To publish the report on the AusAID Internet site, QAG must obtain prior approval from the ADG and the Parliamentary Secretary.

- Because all printed AusAID publications must appear on the Internet, QAG will need to provide the Public Affairs Group with a PDF file of the text and/or graphic material prepared for the printer. Usually this means that QAG will ask the designer to prepare the file.

  – All PDF files prepared for the AusAID Internet site must meet particular standards (see *AusAID Style Guide*, chapter 8).

Attachments

Attachment 1.1
Preparation timetable
– 1999–00 QAG review of project quality in implementation

To do	Date	Notes	Staff responsible
Prepare sampling frame or selection criteria and select 20 representative bilateral/regional projects/programs plus 2 for test purposes		Selection criteria: • projects 1 year into implementation by Sept 1999 and at least 6 months to go • budget >$600 000 • agreed sectoral and geographic spread.	QAG staff & Statistics Unit
Book rooms for panels' use			QAG staff
Organise phones and teleconferencing			QAG staff
Prepare terms of reference for panels and circulate panel procedures			QAG staff
Finalise panel schedules			QAG staff
Advise involved directors of project selection, methods, procedures and timing			QAG staff Director/ADG ORE
Identify panel members, including possible consultants, and obtain commitments			QAG staff
Undertake assessment of 2 projects (pilot test)			QAG staff
Adjust assessment form, using feedback and results from pilot test			QAG staff
Prepare guidelines for panels.			QAG staff
Collect project documents from desks and copy them			QAG staff
Brief panels and desks			QAG staff

Attachment 2.1
Panel members and their allocated projects
– 2002 QAG review of project quality at entry

Panels and activities reviewed

Program	Activity	Approval ($'000)	Sector
Panel 1			
Michael Smitheram (panel leader), David Barber (sector adviser), Michael Hunt (ORE), Michael Baxter (adviser), Gillian Dadswell (SPA), plus part–time informal members Lorelle Bakker and Suzanne Bent (CSG)			
Viet Nam	Capital Aid Fund for Employment of the Poor (CEP) Microfinance Expansion	6 270	Governance
East Timor	Electoral Administration Capacity Building	2 032	Governance
Regional – Asia	Social Protection Facility	4 645	Governance
Tonga	Legal Sector Institutional Strengthening	1 717	Governance
Papua New Guinea	Bougainville Microfinance, Phase II	4 000	Governance
Panel 2			
Graham Rady (panel leader), Michael O'Shaughnessy, Heather MacDonald (sector advisers), Peter Davies (ORE), John Lea (QAG adviser), plus part–time informal members Terese Morey (CPL), Angus Barnes (ESG) and Anne Colquhoun (MSAA)			
China	Bazhong Rural Health Improvement	15 400	Health
Viet Nam	Water Resources Management Assistance	9 501	Infrastructure
Viet Nam	Three Delta Towns Water Supply and Sanitation	50 623	Infrastructure
Kiribati	Strengthening Public Utilities Board (PUB): Electricity, Phase II	3 930	Infrastructure
Papua New Guinea	Lae City Water Supply	22 412	Infrastructure
Panel 3			
Donelle Wheeler (panel leader), Carmel Krogh (sector adviser), Matthew Fehre (CSG), Sue Copland (PNG), Michael Baxter (adviser), and part–time informal members Son Nguyen-Thuong (EAST) and Lynette Matthews (MSAA)			
Cambodia	Agricultural Extension, Phase II	17 871	Environment & rural development
China	Alxa League Environment Rehabilitation and Management	14 167	Environment & rural development
Regional – South Pacific	Sea Level and Climate Monitoring, Phase III	10 200	Environment & rural development
Regional – South Pacific	South Pacific Regional Initiative on Forest Genetic Resources (SPRIG), Phase II	4 500	Environment & rural development
Solomon Islands	Red Cross Capacity Building, Phase II	1 000	Governance
Panel 4			
Nigel Nutt (panel leader), David Chantrill and Heather MacDonald (sector advisers), Romaine Kwesius (CPL), Marilou Drilon (ORE), John Lea (QAG adviser), and part–time informal members Renae Astone (CSG), Amber Davidson (PNG) and Kylie Munro (HMC)			
Philippines	Mindanao Basic Education	5 295	Education
Papua New Guinea	Curriculum Reform Implementation (CRIP)	33 105	Education
Papua New Guinea	Women and Child Health	53 000	Health
Regional – South Pacific	Strengthening Expanded Program of Immunisation (EPI)	1 563	Health
Samoa	Samoa Health	8 624	Health

Attachment 2.2
AusAID expressions of interest to join panels
– 1999–00 QAG review of project quality in implementation

List of volunteers as at 15 November 1999

Name	Branch	Section	Level	Claim	Assessment/ comments
A	SECTOR	GEG	APS5	Interested and willing to wait to join future panels reviewing education and gender projects.	
B	IPB	MAH	APS5	Is Acting APS6 for 5 months. Interested in health projects, with some experience in health field.	
C	AHR	NGOs	APS5	Has a strong background in health, with a Masters degree in Public Health. Has support from Ellen Shipley, Director, NGO Section, for her to join the QAG panel as informal member. (She'd like to know the outcome of QAG panel member shortlisting by 17 November, prior to their section planning day.)	
D	OPRE	STATS	APS6	Interested in becoming familiar with QAG operation and in learning more about project quality. Has previously assisted QAG in data analysis. Has field experience (Africa) in project assessment in health, governance and rural development. In the next rotation, she is planning a transfer to Country Programs area.	
E	AHR	AME	APS5	Is Acting APS6 looking after Middle East, Zimbabwe and Zambia activities, and finalising an NGO food security round. One of her projects was QAGed in the QAE round and found the experience extremely useful – gained insight into project quality.	
F	CSG	PCPS	APS5	Majored in Ag. Econ. (PhD) in microfinance. Is interested in joining the rural development QAG panel. Sees himself as contracts specialist and program(s) generalist.	
G	PAC	RPAC	APS5	Currently working on environment and natural resources sector with the desk. Ranked suitable in APS 6 round. Has been with AusAID for two and a half years.	
H	PAC	RPAC	APS6	Joined AusAID in January 1999. Previously worked with ACIL for one and a half years. Is currently working on environment and natural resources sector, specifically on sea level and climate change and monitoring, and fisheries.	
I	MKG	CLTB	APS5	Is interested to join the rural development panel. Is responsible for agricultural and natural resources management in the Mekong Basin. Need to check with CPM whether she can be away from desk during QAGing.	

Attachment 3.1
Terms of reference for consultant project analyst
– 1999–00 QAG review of project quality in implementation

A. Introduction

AusAID's Quality Assurance Group (QAG) was established in February 1999 with the objective of achieving a significant improvement in the quality of AusAID bilateral projects. Its main activities involve assessing projects (including those using the 'program approach') to determine their quality and identifying the key factors that influence their performance. These assessments generate lessons that can be applied across AusAID to improve the quality of project assistance.

QAG recently completed a rapid review of the quality at entry of 20 projects selected at random across all country programs. This review resulted in recommendations on ways to strengthen project preparation. These recommendations are being incorporated in AusGUIDE (AusAID's new project guidelines) and in training for AusAID desk officers.

The next round of assessments, to occur over the period October–November 1999, will focus on projects in implementation with the objective of determining how projects are performing on the ground and how their quality can be improved.

B. Approach to assessment of project quality in implementation

The main objectives of assessing project quality in implementation are to:

1. establish the overall level of the quality of AusAID projects in implementation

2. identify strengths and weaknesses in the preparation and implementation of the sample projects, and

3. make recommendations that can be applied broadly to strengthen the quality of AusAID projects in implementation.

Twenty projects will be selected at random covering a range of sectors and geographic areas. The review will be undertaken as a desk study by panels of three AusAID officers and one consultant (project analyst) under the guidance of QAG staff. Each panel will assess four projects grouped on a sectoral basis.

Each project will be rated in accordance with AusAID's quality standards. The panel's assessment of a project will be based on project documents and reports and discussions with the desk, post and contractor. Consideration will be given to the full range of factors that have influenced the development and implementation of the project.

The consultant project analyst will study the documentation of each project prior to the main assessment by all panel members. The purpose of this preliminary work will

be to extract and summarise key information on each project to assist the panel's assessment of project quality and factors contributing to it. Each panel will subsequently spend two and a half days assessing each project, arriving at a quality rating and conclusions on factors affecting quality. The consultant will then spend half a day preparing a project report prior to commencing the next project assessment.

C. Tasks of the consultant project analyst

The consultant's main tasks will include:

1. studying project documents (including files as required) to:
   - locate and summarise key information required for the panel's assessment of the project based on AusAID's quality standards checklist
   - identify factors affecting quality and problems encountered in preparation and implementation, and
   - clarify project history and the reasons for decisions taken

2. gather information from desks as required to supplement documents

3. prepare notes for panel members, setting out information gathered under task 1 above in an easily retrievable form and specifying where key information can be found in project documents

4. provide an initial briefing to other panel members on the notes and project material provided and participate fully as a panel member in discussions of issues, scoring of projects, discussions with desk, post and contractor, and identification of key factors influencing quality, and

5. prepare reports on each project in consultation with the panel leader and QAG staff and work in conjunction with the other panel consultants to prepare an draft overall report on the review.

D. Qualifications, skills and experience requirements

The consultant project analyst will have relevant qualifications and a high level of skill in project analysis and design. Substantial knowledge and experience working in developing countries on project feasibility/design, appraisal, monitoring and review are essential as is a good understanding of AusAID's approach and working environment. An ability to write clearly and concisely is also essential.

E. Reporting

The consultant will prepare reports on each project assessment and jointly prepare a draft report on the overall review adhering to the format and content required by AusAID.

F. Timing

The consultant will spend a total of approximately 22 working days as follows:

- 7 working days preparing for panels

- 12 working days as a panel member (which includes preparing reports on individual projects), and

- 3 working days preparing the draft overall report.

Attachment 3.2
Terms of reference for field assessment and final report
– 1999–00 QAG review of project quality in implementation

A. Introduction

QAG panels recently completed a rapid desk review of the quality in implementation of 20 projects. The projects were selected using a stratified random sampling process across all country programs. Five panels rated the 20 projects against about 60 quality standards grouped into four quality attributes – objectives and design, management, achievement of objectives, and sustainability. Individual project reports were prepared as were overall work-in-progress reports for each panel.

The next stage in this review is to visit nine of the 20 reviewed projects in the field. Two teams comprising a QAG team leader and consultant will visit four to five projects each from 22 January to 8 February 2000. Projects have been selected for this assessment in consultation with desks.

At the completion of the field assessments (or reality checks) an overall review report will be prepared. This report will incorporate the five work-in-progress reports and the reports of the two field assessment teams.

B. Objectives

The objectives of the field assessments are to:

- assess in more detail the quality of the in-country management of project implementation and identify additional lessons for improving project quality

- verify panel assessments of project quality and identify any improvements that can be made to QAG methodology, and

- review overall AusAID reporting and monitoring systems in the field.

C. Preparatory stage

The two teams will prepare for the field visits by reviewing panel reports and key documents for each project to be visited and by holding discussions with desks as necessary. In particular, preparation should aim to take account of any changes in the project or country situation in the past two to three months and note actions taken since the QAG panel assessment.

The key questions to be addressed during the visit will be identified, ranked and presented in a one-page issues paper for each project. Comment will be sought from the post on the listed issues during initial in-country discussions.

The final preparatory task will be to examine existing documentation on AusAID reporting, monitoring and review processes and any recent analysis of these systems. Discussions on monitoring and reporting will be held with concerned desks and sections prior to departure. The teams will consider the strengths and weaknesses of the current approaches. They will also prepare a checklist to structure discussion with posts (and partner governments where appropriate) on possible improvements to current monitoring and reporting. A common checklist will be agreed to ensure that both teams cover essential ground in their separate fieldwork.

The above preparation will take place over five days in Canberra prior to departure for the field visits.

The outputs of this stage will be:

- sets of key documents for each project to be visited and team familiarity with them

- a one-page issues paper for each project, and

- summary notes and a checklist of topics to be discussed on AusAID monitoring and reporting systems.

D. Field visits

1. Approach

a) *In-country aspects of project implementation*

The quality of in-country project implementation will be assessed with particular reference to:

- Design
  Standards 4.9 and 4.10, coverage of institutional arrangements and partner government inputs

- Management
  Standard 5.4, response and action times
  Indicator 6, contract and contractor performance
  Indicator 7, partner government support
  Indicators 8, AusAID management
  Indicator 9, monitoring and reporting

- Achievement of objectives
  Standard 10.2, outputs likely to be completed on schedule

- Sustainability
  Indicator 14, sustainability (beneficiaries)
  Indicator 15, sustainability (institutions)
  Indicator 16, sustainability (recurrent budget)

The teams will seek inputs to assessments from the post and partner governments and will consult with local and Australian project staff and target groups (project beneficiaries) where possible. This will provide an opportunity for posts, partner governments, Australian team leaders and local stakeholders to be directly involved in the QAG review.

These in-country project assessments will provide further important insights into the quality of project implementation on the ground. They will also enable general lessons to be drawn regarding management of projects by posted officers and contractors' project teams.

The field assessment teams will compare the original ratings with field assessments to enable verification of panel ratings. They will also explain any differences between field and panel perceptions and prepare addenda to QAG project reports where significant variation occurs. Specific project lessons (identified by panels) will be tested by observation in the field. In addition, AMB (activity monitoring brief) scores will be assessed for consistency with QAG findings on project quality.

The teams will brief the post, partner government staff and Australian project staff on the QAG process and collate reactions to both the process and overall outcomes. Improvements to future QAG assessment procedures will be identified in discussion with all in-country stakeholders. The teams will consider possible means of securing future input to the QAG process from partner governments and project beneficiaries.

b) Review of AusAID reporting and monitoring

In the wider review of AusAID reporting and monitoring the teams will consider the effectiveness of current performance monitoring and reporting systems in informing key stakeholders and in making appropriate adjustments to projects. The purpose will be to identify how monitoring and reporting by contractors and posts can have a greater impact on performance, particularly through AMBs. The views of in-country post and project staff will be important inputs. Assessment of the AMB system will be central to this analysis.

Monitoring is defined broadly to include contractor progress reporting, project coordinating committee meetings, post site visits and reporting, AMBs, reviews, contract milestone reporting and project completion reports. As part of this review the teams will monitor outcomes and effectiveness as well as progress against outputs. The analysis will focus on in-country elements of the system. The teams will explore possible partner government roles in AusAID monitoring and reporting and synergies between these activities by both governments.

2. Activities

The team's main activities will include:

- discussion with posted staff

- discussion with partner government staff at the national level

- discussion with local partner government and Australian project staff

- site visit, where practicable, and discussion with representatives of project beneficiaries

- concluding session with post and partner government staff.

The primary topics for discussion will be project implementation issues as listed in 1 a) and b) above.

The wrap-up meeting will seek to reach conclusions on:

- the quality of implementation management, including monitoring and reporting by AusAID and the contractor

- the likely achievement of project objectives and sustainability

- how the field assessment matches panel ratings

- suggested improvements in the QAG process

- suggested changes in reporting and monitoring systems that are likely to improve project outcomes (including effective use of AMBs).

3. Timing

After deducting travel time, about two days will be available for assessing each project and the monitoring systems at the post. Usually the first day will focus on discussion of specific issues on project quality assessment with post, partner government and project staff (guided by the issues paper). If time and the location permit, a site visit will be made. Approximately one day will be allowed for the consideration of the broader aspects of AusAID monitoring systems, including AMBs. The two team members may need to work separately to cover all of these topics adequately.

4. Outputs

Field assessment outputs will include:

- information on the quality of project implementation on the ground and lessons on project management, including monitoring and reporting by posts and contractors

- a comparison of field and panel quality ratings for in-country aspects of implementation (see 1 a) above) and any draft addenda for project reports

- an explanation of the basis of any variation in field and panel project assessments and ideas for improving the QAG process

- findings on validity of AMB scores

- where possible and appropriate, partner government endorsement of the QAG process and ideas for future quality assessment inputs by partner governments.

- a description and assessment of how AusAID monitoring and reporting systems are applied in practice by posts and contractors and recommendations on how they might be improved to secure higher quality project outcomes – AMBs being a particular focus of these recommendations, and

- if appropriate, possible options for addressing concerns and weaknesses in project implementation.

E. Final report preparation

The teams will combine to produce a final report that synthesises the findings of the five Canberra panels and the field assessments. This report will provide an assessment of the overall quality of AusAID projects in implementation. It will include a separate section on field visit findings. Strengths and weaknesses of implementation will be discussed, including the importance of design, management, achievement of objectives and sustainability.

General lessons will be drawn where common threads have been established across projects. Sectoral and regional lessons will be drawn where possible. The report will describe actual AusAID reporting, monitoring and review practice and develop suggestions for improved monitoring practices that should lead to higher quality outcomes.

The principal report feature will be a short set of recommendations that can be applied to raise the quality of AusAID projects in implementation. Attachment 1 includes a draft outline of the content of the final report.

F. Tasks of team members

QAG team leader

The team leader will:

- ensure that preparatory tasks are completed and that the post receives briefing sufficient to engage actively in the field assessments

- examine documentation on current AusAID monitoring and reporting processes, discuss this documentation with relevant desks and sections, and prepare a checklist for post monitoring discussion

- ensure that visit arrangements are in place and agreed by the post and desk

- lead in-country discussions on implementation quality and monitoring systems, including introductory and wrap-up sessions

- undertake separate discussions on monitoring systems as required and summarise the results, and

- supervise the preparation of visit reports and the draft final report.

Consultant

The consultant's main tasks will be to:

- (during the preparatory stage) study key project documents to gain sufficient knowledge to discuss the quality of implementation with in-country stakeholders

- prepare a one-page issues paper to guide fieldwork discussions and a checklist of monitoring issues for field discussion

- assist the team leader with in-country discussion of implementation quality and monitoring and reporting systems

- (in conjunction with the QAG team leader) collate post, partner government and project staff experiences and views on implementation management and monitoring/reporting, and discuss possible improvements in monitoring systems in country and summarise preliminary conclusions on monitoring in a brief visit report

- (on return to Australia) work with the QAG team leader to:

  - describe the current application of AusAID monitoring systems (including AMBs)

  - analyse in more detail the strengths and weaknesses of existing practice and draft recommendations for change to improve project outcomes

  - identify synergies between local and AusAID reporting and monitoring systems where appropriate

  - present this review of monitoring as a separate chapter in the quality-in-implementation report

- work with the other consultant and team leader to consolidate the findings of the five panels and two field teams into a coherent statement of program quality achievements and shortfalls, and

- draft chapters of the final report as required by the QAG manager, and discuss and comment on other report chapters as required.

G. Reporting

The consultants will prepare issues papers and individual visit reports and contribute to a draft report on the overall quality-in-implementation review as described above and following the format in attachment 1.

Attachment 1

Draft report outlines

A. Issues paper

When Preparatory stage.

Why To guide fieldwork and increase consistency in approach between two teams.

What One page plus summary assessment sheet, based on panel report, key documents and any extra desk information.

Contents

- Single word summary of three main project strengths and weaknesses and any good practice identified by panel.
- Discussion on panel ratings identified in D1 above.
- Points for field assessment of project.
- Attachment – Detailed panel ratings for indicators listed in D1.

B. Field visit reports

When End of fieldwork on last project.

Why To record fieldwork outputs and inform other team.

What Two to three pages plus attachments on:

- – summary findings for each project assessed
- – any addenda to panel reports
- – findings of monitoring review

Contents (two to three pages plus attachments)

- Quality of in-country aspects of implementation (including views of partner government and project staff on in-country aspects of implementation)
- Achievement of objectives and sustainability
- Comparison of field and panel assessments
- Lessons learned on implementation management and reporting
- Overall assessment of reporting and monitoring effectiveness
- Options for addressing weaknesses and concerns in project implementation
- Views on QAG process.

Attachments to the field visit reports

The content should follow the general formats below and be limited to the number of pages shown. Attachments should be numbered according to countries/projects, ie A, B, C, D. Each attachment will have three sections as follows:

1. *Summary findings for project (2 pages)*
   - Field findings on implementation quality (design, management, achievements and sustainability)
   - Comparison of field and panel assessments of implementation quality
   - Accuracy of AMB scores
   - Suggestions for addressing individual project weaknesses
   - General lessons learned from field assessments (including examples of good practice)
   - Suggested improvements to QAG process
   - Annex: completed field assessment form

2. *Any addenda to panel reports (small table on separate page)*
   - List of field ratings that vary from panel ratings
   - Reasons for variation and additional information obtained

3. *Findings of monitoring review (2 pages)*
   - Description of monitoring and reporting system used in country (incorporating information obtained from desks)
   - Views of post on effectiveness of current system
   - Assessment of use and effectiveness of AMBs
   - Assessment of outcome monitoring and cooperation with partner government
   - Views of Australian team and partner government on monitoring and reporting (from individual project assessments)
   - Analysis and conclusions

C. Outline for draft overall quality-in-implementation report

Contents

Introduction

Objectives

Methodology

Quality in implementation

Key findings

Panel assessments

    Overall quality in implementation

    Detailed results

    Good practice

Field assessments

    Overall findings

    Comparison with panel assessments

    Partner government reaction/involvement

    Sustainability

    Lessons for field management

    QAG procedures

Reasons for variation in quality in implementation

Objectives and design

Management and contracting

Sustainability

AusAID reporting, monitoring and review practices

Current systems in practice

Effect on project outcomes

Suggested improvements

Recommendations

Proposed action plan (1 page)

Annexes

Attachment 3.3
Evaluation of consultants' proposals – 1999–00 QAG review of project quality in implementation

Criteria	Weight	A		B		C		D	
		Score (out of 10)	Weighted score	Score (out of 10)	Weighted score	Score (out of 10)	Weighted score	Score (out of 10)	Weighted score
1. Qualifications	10%	7	7%	7	7%	7	7%	7	7%
2. Skills in project design and analysis	30%	7	21%	8	24%	9	27%	7	21%
3. Experience and knowledge of undertaking feasibility studies, appraisal, monitoring and review in developing countries	30%	8	24%	8	24%	9	27%	8	24%
4. Understanding of AusAID's approach and working environment	30%	8	24%	9	27%	9	27%	8	24%
Total weighted score	100%		76%		82%		88%		76%
Technical score a	**90**%		**77.7%**		**83.9%**		**90%**		**77.7%**
Price (daily rate)			$780		$800		$800		$750
Price score b	**10**%		**9.6%**		**9.4%**		**9.4%**		**10%**
Total score	**100**%		**87.3%**		**93.3%**		**99.4%**		**87.7%**

a Technical score = Consultant's total score/Highest score obtained x 90. b Price score = Lowest cost /Consultant's own cost x 10

Attachment 5.1
Sample random frame
– 1999–00 QAG review of project quality in implementation

#	Activity name	Sector	Region	Country	Est. completion
60	Elementary Teacher Education	Education	PNG	Papua New Guinea	15.08.00
13	Basic Ed Man & Teacher Upgrade (BEMTUP)	Education	Pacific	Fiji	30.06.01
40	Education Sector Program	Education	Pacific	Kiribati	31.12.03
118	Aust/Sth Africa Institutional Links Program	Education	Other	South Africa	30.04.03
70	Correctional Services Phase 2	Governance	PNG	Papua New Guinea	15.09.01
113	Ministry of Lands Technical Assistance	Governance	Pacific	Solomon Islands	10.07.01
96	Street Children Nutrition & Education	Governance	East Asia	Philippines	30.06.01
8	Economics & Foreign Trade Training	Governance	East Asia	China	31.12.01
80	Health-Pigbel Vaccine Supply	Health	PNG	Papua New Guinea	31.12.03
33	Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies	Health	East Asia	Indonesia	16.11.02
44	Health & Social Development Project	Health	East Asia	Laos	30.06.01
128	Health Sector Management Project	Health	Pacific	Tonga	31.12.02
110	Water Authority Strengthening Project	Infrastructure	Pacific	Samoa	31.12.03
146	Provincial Water Supply Project	Infrastructure	East Asia	Viet Nam	06.06.00
119	Community Water and Environ Sanitation	Infrastructure	Other	South Africa	30.06.01
85	Bougainville Land Transport Rehab	Infrastructure	PNG	Papua New Guinea	31.12.02
120	CAA Chicomo Rural Development	Rural development	Other	Mozambique	31.12.00
11	Hebei Watershed Management & Livestock	Rural development	East Asia	China	31.10.00
28	Environmental laboratories Project	Rural development (environment)	East Asia	Indonesia	01.03.00
27	Coral Reef Management and Rehabilitation	Rural development (environment)	East Asia	Indonesia	30.11.02

Breakdown		Sector		Region		Country	
N = 20		Education	4	PNG	4	PNG	4
		Health	4	Pacific	5	Solomon Is	1
						Samoa	1
						Tonga	1
						Kiribati	1
						Fiji	1
		Governance	4	E Asia	8	Indonesia	3
						China	2
						Philippines	1
						Viet Nam	1
						Laos	1
		Rural develop.	4	Other	3	South Africa	2
						Mozambique	1
		Infrastructure	4				
Total			**20**		**20**		**20**

Attachment 5.2
Reasons why projects should not be removed from the random sample list of projects to be reviewed

1. Projects are selected at random and QAG cannot substitute another project without invalidating the selection system.

2. QAG cannot select a substitute project because there are only a limited number of projects in any sector, region or AMB rating category.

3. A sample of 20 projects from a total of, say, 90 projects that met the selection criteria is rather big. It is likely that all sections or countries will appear in the sample selection.

4. QAG staff will take on most of the work required for organising the documentation and sending out material to the post, keeping the desk in the loop.

5. The time required from the program staff is very small but the benefits are often great.

6. If program staff have had a project QAGed previously and do not want to be involved again, they should know that many desks have had two or more projects QAGed in succession.

7. QAGing is useful because it can endorse decisions made by the program staff and add the weight of an independent review team.

8. QAG panels combine all the relevant skills, and emphasise practitioners rather than professional evaluators.

9. QAGing provides program staff with credible independent feedback on the quality of their work and gives them a fresh perspective.

10. The actions recommended by the panels may help desks to strengthen the projects.

11. The lessons learned from the projects may be useful to the agency as a whole.

12. QAGing a project will help to establish an agency-wide benchmark for monitoring overall trends in quality.

13. QAGing is an intensive learning experience for program staff and may help them improve their performance.

14. QAGing is useful because it compares projects for quality across sections.

15. QAGing elevates issues requiring an agency response.

16. Results are fed into the good practice example site on the intranet and into AusGUIDE.

17. QAGing enhances accountability for quality.

Attachment 6.1
Briefing notes for desks and posts
– 2002 QAG review of project quality in implementation

Background

The Quality Assurance Group (QAG) was established in February 1999 as part of AusAID's commitment to strengthen quality assurance. A key activity of QAG is the assessment of projects and programs to identify lessons for improving quality.

QAG's approach to reviewing project quality has been to use rapid assessment techniques. The continuing success of this approach is demonstrated through the well-considered methodology and objective results and the lessons on project quality that panel members gain.

Panels spend 12–15 hours on a desk review of each project. The depth of this assessment does not compare with a full-scale review. However, it does provide enough knowledge to make a broad assessment of quality and the main factors involved. The use of a carefully designed and tested assessment form contributes to the results being reasonably objective and transparent.

An assessment of project quality in implementation was first undertaken by QAG in late 1999 and early 2000. The findings from this review focused on fundamental factors in improving project success during implementation.

The quality-in-implementation review

The main aim of the 2002 review of project quality in implementation is to qualitatively analyse issues, strengths and weaknesses of a sample of activities being implemented. The review will seek to identify improvements that can be applied broadly across all country programs. A vital aspect of QAG work, including reviews, is its contribution to building an agency culture of quality assurance and an agency-wide consensus on what makes 'quality' aid. Accordingly, some of the most important benefits of the review will be the lessons learned and the exchange of ideas between peers.

The sample of activities being reviewed was randomly selected. Assessments will be undertaken by panels of AusAID officers, a technical adviser and a moderator under the guidance of QAG staff. Each panel will also have one informal member. Panels will assess three projects each and allocate two days per project.

Timings for the project assessments are:

8 October - 5 November 2002	Document preparation
11–19 November	**Panel 1**
21–29 November	**Panel 2**
18–26 November	**Panel 3**
28 November – 9 December	**Panel 4**
16 December	Report drafting
January–February 2003	Field verification study
End of February	Submission of overall review report

Outputs

A panel's main outputs will be:

i. **Individual activity assessment** including a completed assessment forms detailing the agreed panel scores and associated comments and a summary report comprised of:

    –   an introductory section giving the details of the project and the review

    –   summary description of the project – brief overview

    –   Project strengths and weaknesses together with comments on their impact on the project and the factors responsible

    –   any suggestions for project action including practical measures to strengthen the project, and

    –   general lessons learned based on the analysis of strengths and weaknesses but usually not referring to the specific project

ii. **Field visit report** that verifies the findings and recommendations of the panels and incorporates partner governments' and beneficiaries' views into the quality assessment process (based on field visits to a small sample of reviewed projects identified for field assessments during the review process), and

iii. **Overall review report** that draws together the findings of the four panel reports and field investigations and outlines any broad recommendations.

The QAG approach

The methodology to be followed involves a rapid desk review of project documentation, structured interviews with the desk and posted officers, and representatives of the Australian managing agent (generally by teleconferencing or videoconferencing), and internal discussion. To ensure consistency across all panels,

a standard assessment form has been prepared based on AusGUIDEline 12. This format acts as a yardstick for comparing activities.

The project quality standards have been through a number of revisions and improvements. Panel members will also have an opportunity to comment on them at the completion of the review.

A list of peer review officers involvement in the panels is provided in the indicative work program. Each panel will review three projects. Two days are usually required for each project, including preparation and report writing.

Panel discussions with desk, post and contractors

After panel members have read and discussed the key project documents, consultations will be held with desk staff, the responsible AusAID officer at post and the contractor (where possible, this should be the Australian team leader at the project site). The main purpose of these discussions is to broaden the panel's understanding of the project, address key issues and to give desks, posts and Australian project staff an opportunity to present their views on the project.

The discussions usually start with the panel listening to the views of the desk, post or contractor on the strengths and weaknesses of the project and the key factors that will be important in determining its final success. This will be followed by panel members seeking clarification on points that may have arisen from their reading of the documentation and the presentation.

In most cases, individual standards in the assessment form are not discussed outside the panel unless specific information is being sought. Discussions with desk staff usually lasts one to two hours and phone calls to posted officers should not exceed half an hour. A similar amount of time is likely to be needed for discussion with contractors.

Reporting on individual projects

A report will be prepared on each project assessment. This will comprise a summary of about three pages plus the completed assessment form. The panel leader will prepare this report with assistance from the team. Once the individual draft report has been cleared by panel members and the QAG team leader a copy will be provided to all those who were involved in discussion with the panel (including the country program manager, desk officer, staff at post and the Australian team leader as appropriate) and to the section director.

Program staff will then have an opportunity to comment on the report (incorporating other stakeholder views as appropriate) and to discuss their response with QAG and the panel leader, if they wish. The report will then be finalised and distributed to the

relevant ADG with copies to the concerned director, country program manager and desk officer. Copies will also be provided to the ADG of the Office of Review and Evaluation and the Director of the Program Evaluation Section.

Where the desk and/or post disagree with the findings of a QAG assessment they will be asked to provide additional information so that QAG can re-examine its rating. Where the desk disagrees with the final assessment result a statement regarding the desk's views will be included in QAG's final report on that project. In cases where the desk holds significantly differing views, these differences will be considered at the next periodic review of the quality assessment process and the outcomes reported to the Executive.

Field assessments and compilation of the overall report

About three projects (25 per cent of the total twelve) may be selected for field visits in January-February 2003. A field assessment complements the findings of the desk-based rapid panel assessment. The field visits will focus on the key aspects of the development context influencing implementation. Discussions will be conducted with local stakeholders on implementation issues.

Projects that are likely to provide the most useful lessons and good practice examples for the management of project implementation will be selected. Panels will be asked to comment, in individual project reports, on the type of additional information that might be obtained from a field visit.

Following the completion of fieldwork, the panel moderators will prepare a draft overall report that will draw together the broad findings from the assessments and the field investigations. This draft will be circulated for comment before submission to the AusAID Executive.

Attachment 6.2
Guide for consultants
– 1999–00 QAG review of project quality in implementation

The review of project quality in implementation will extend over seven to eight weeks and be undertaken in two rounds, each lasting about a month. Each round will have three stages.

1. Preparatory stage

Activities and outputs

The consultant will be given a list of four projects to be reviewed together with copies of project documents. The main activities follow.

- Taking one project at a time, review the documents to get a sound understanding of the project design and the progress of its implementation. One and a half days are allowed per project for reading time and producing the following items to assist panel consideration of the project:

  – **project history** (dot points) citing the months and years of major events – eg when the project was identified, when the pre-feasibility, feasibility and appraisal studies were carried out, when implementation began, when (if at all) a mid-term review was undertaken – and any other important event or changes during preparation and implementation

  – a **summary description** of the project (about half a page)

  – **notes against each quality standard** in the 'Comments' column of the QAG assessment form (for the consultant's own reference when working as a panel member and for providing additional information to other panel members, when required)

  – **preliminary ideas on project strengths and weaknesses** and possible contributing factors, indicating how these factors have influenced the project and where to find information (about half a page of notes – enough to stimulate and assist panel discussion)

  – a **reading guide for panel members** that sets out a short list of key documents with comments on their importance (in terms of the panel's assessment task), and

  – a **version of the assessment form** with document and page references against key quality standards (for subsequent copying and provision to panel members).

- Where required, speak to the desk to obtain additional details about each project.

- Where appropriate, arrange for the copying of key pages from files.

- Become sufficiently familiar with the quality of the project in order to support the smooth functioning of the panel.

- Some time prior to the panel's consideration of each project:

    – ensure that the correct documents are available and that appropriate numbers of copies have been made and sorted, and

    – check with QAG staff that arrangements are in place for discussions with desks, posts and contractor representatives.

2. Panel stage

The consultant will participate in the work of the panels as a full member and have a role as a resource person.

- After the panel has finalised the quality ratings of each project and agreed on strengths and weaknesses and general and specific lessons, the consultant will prepare a draft report on each project (comprising a summary report and the completed assessment form). The format and content of the summary report is provided in the attachment to this guide.

- The draft summary report and the completed assessment form will be given first to the QAG team leader for in-principle endorsement before it passed to the panel leader and members for consideration and comment and any necessary changes. The draft reports will need to be cleared by the QAG team leader before being passed to the desk and post for comment.

- QAG staff will be responsible for ensuring that the concerned desks and posts get electronic copies of the draft reports for comment. After receiving comments from the desks and posts, and further discussion with the desk if required, QAG staff will work with the consultant and panel leader, as appropriate, to finalise the project reports.

3. Final report preparation stage

- Working closely with the QAG team and each other, the consultants will prepare draft overall reports on the findings from the projects assessed by each panel. That is, each consultant will prepare a separate report for his/her panel. The Statistics Unit will support any analyses undertaken and any graphical representation of findings, if required.

- Each overall report will be no more than 10 pages. The proposed format and content are provided in the attachment to this guide.

- The draft reports will be submitted to the QAG team for comment and any necessary amendment.

Attachment
Draft formats and content of reports

A. Reports on individual projects (examples will be provided)

(1) Assessment form

The assessment form report consists of the agreed panel scores and associated comments where required. Usually, only the quality standards having very low or very high ratings require comment.

(2) Summary report

The summary report on each project has three parts.

- 1. The introductory section (section 1) shows the details of the project and the review: country, name of project, current management and staff, review panel and the review date. (This part of the report is usually prepared by QAG staff.)

- The body of the report has the following section headings:

  2. Summary description of the project
     Brief overview (usually one paragraph) – description of the project prepared during the preparatory stage of project assessment, with a sentence or two on the main views of the panel

  3. Strengths and weaknesses
     The main strengths and weaknesses that have been identified (not more than 5 or 6 of each)
     Comments on their impact on the project and factors responsible

  4. Suggestions for project action
     Feasible measures to strengthen the project

  5. General lessons learned
     General lessons based on analysis of strengths and weaknesses but usually not referring to the specific project

  6. Examples of good practice
     Any examples of documentation (specify a document or parts of a document if possible) or practice from this project that the panel considered particularly worthy and that could be used as a model by other program areas or other parts of the agency.

- The final part of the report lists documents reviewed by the panel (project documents, sector-related documents, country-related documents and any other). A list of the staff interviewed is also given. (This part of the report (appendix) is prepared by QAG staff.)

Sections 1 and 2 above are usually fitted on the first page. Sections 3 to 6 take up a further two to two and a half pages. The final part should require no more than half a page.

B. Overall report

Contents

1. Introduction (1 page)

    Objectives

    Methodology

2. Quality in implementation (4 pages)

    Key findings

    Panel assessments

    　　Overall quality in implementation

    　　Detailed results

    　　Good practice

    Field assessments

    　　Overall findings

    　　Comparison with panel assessments

    　　Partner government reaction/involvement

    　　Sustainability

    　　Lessons for field management

    　　QAG procedures

3. Reasons for variation in quality in implementation (2 pages)

    Objectives and design

    Management and contracting

    Sustainability

4. AusAID reporting, monitoring and review practices (2–3 pages)

    Current systems in practice

    Effect on project outcomes

    Suggested improvements

5. Recommendations (1 page)

6. Proposed action plan (1 page)

Annexes

Attachment 6.3
Briefing notes for project contractors
– 1999–00 QAG review of project quality in implementation

Background

The Quality Assurance Group (QAG) was established in February 1999 as part of AusAID's commitment to strengthen quality assurance. A key activity of QAG is the assessment of projects and programs to identify lessons for improving quality. An assessment of project quality at entry was undertaken by QAG in March–April 1999 and the report is now available on the findings from that review.

The review used panels of AusAID staff to assess project quality at entry. This approach proved to be very successful. It produced well-considered and objective results and provided panel members with considerable insights into project quality. The approach is based on the successful use of assessment panels by the World Bank's Quality Assurance Group.

QAG's approach to reviewing project quality has been to use rapid assessment techniques. Panels spend between 10 and 15 hours on a desk review of each project. The depth of assessment does not compare with a full-scale review but it does provide enough knowledge to make a broad assessment of quality and the main factors involved. The use of a carefully designed and tested assessment form contributes to the results being reasonably objective and transparent.

The quality-in-implementation review

The main objectives of assessing project quality in implementation are to:

1. establish the overall level of quality of AusAID projects in implementation

2. identify strengths and weaknesses in the preparation and implementation of the sample projects, and

3. make recommendations that can be applied broadly to strengthening the quality of AusAID projects in implementation.

Projects were selected for this review by random sample. Assessments will be undertaken by four panels of three AusAID officers and one consultant under the guidance of QAG staff. Panels will meet for a little over two weeks. Each panel will assess four projects.

To help the panels ensure consistency in their findings, a standard assessment form has been prepared. This acts as a yardstick for comparing activities. The assessment form has 16 quality indicators and around 60 quality standards selected to suit the particular stage in the project cycle.

Assessment forms are developed from the project quality standards, which appear in AusGUIDElines (soon to be on the Internet). The standards used in QAG assessments are therefore consistent with the overall quality theme and individual standards applied throughout AusGUIDE.

Panel discussions with desk, post and contractors

After panel members have read the key project documents and had a chance to discuss the project among themselves, discussions will be held (by telephone as required) with AusAID staff (including the responsible AusAID officer at the post) and the Australian team leader at the project site. If the Australian team leader cannot be contacted, consideration may be given to holding discussions with the project director. The main purpose of these discussions is to fill out the panel's understanding of the project and to give desks, posts and the Australian team leader an opportunity to present their views on the project.

The discussions usually start with the panel listening to the views of the desk, post or Australian team leader on the strengths and weaknesses of the project and the key factors affecting its implementation. This will be followed by panel members seeking clarification on points that have arisen from their reading of the documentation and the presentation.

In most cases, individual standards in the assessment form are not discussed unless specific information is being sought. Discussions with desk staff usually last one to two hours and phone calls to posted officers should not exceed half an hour. A similar amount of time is likely to be needed for discussion with contractors.

Attachment 6.4
Guide for QAG panel members
– 2002 QAG review of project quality in implementation

Background

The Quality Assurance Group (QAG) was established in February 1999 as part of AusAID's commitment to strengthen quality assurance. A key activity of QAG is the assessment of projects and programs to identify lessons for improving quality.

QAG's approach to reviewing project quality has been to use rapid assessment techniques. The continuing success of this approach is demonstrated through the well-considered methodology and objective results and the lessons on project quality that panel members gain.

Panels spend 12–15 hours on a desk review of each project. The depth of this assessment does not compare with a full-scale review. However, it does provide enough knowledge to make a broad assessment of quality and the main factors involved. The use of a carefully designed and tested assessment form contributes to the results being reasonably objective and transparent.

An assessment of project quality in implementation was first undertaken by QAG in late 1999 and early 2000. The findings from this review focused on fundamental factors in improving project success during implementation.

The quality-in-implementation review

The main aim of the 2002 review of project quality in implementation is to qualitatively analyse issues, strengths and weaknesses of a sample of activities being implemented. The review will seek to identify improvements that can be applied broadly across all country programs. A vital aspect of QAG work, including reviews, is its contribution to building an agency culture of quality assurance and an agency-wide consensus on what makes 'quality' aid. Accordingly, some of the most important benefits of the review will be the lessons learned and the exchange of ideas between peers.

The sample of activities being reviewed was randomly selected. Details of the sampling methodology are attached. Assessments will be undertaken by four panels of AusAID officers, a technical adviser and a moderator under the guidance of QAG staff. Each panel will also have one informal member. Panels will assess three projects each and allocate two days per project assessment.

The quality of each project will be rated in accordance with AusAID's quality standards.

Indicative schedule of project assessments: 11 November – 9 December 2002

Country	Sector	Activity name	Dates
Panel 1			
Papua New Guinea	Governance	RPNGC Development Project Phase III, Part C	11–12 November
Cambodia	Rural development	Agriculture Quality Improvement Project	14–15 November
Kiribati	Governance	Strengthening Management and Information	18–19 November
Panel 2			
Burma	Education	Burma Distance Education Project Phase 2	21–22 November
Fiji	Governance	Fiji Islands Revenue & Customs Authority	25–26 November
Viet Nam	Infrastructure	Cuu Long Delta RWSS	28–29 November
Panel 3			
East Timor	Health	National Oral Health Program	18–19 November
China	Environment	Yangtze Flood Control and Management	21–22 November
Regional Asia	Infrastructure	MRC App Hydrological Network Improvement	25–26 November
Panel 4			
Papua New Guinea	Health	National HIV/AIDS Support Project	28–29 November
Papua New Guinea	Health	Health: Medical Equipment Mgt Project	2–3 December
Regional – South Pacific	Health	Pacific Action for Health NCD Project	6 & 9 December

Outputs

The panels' main outputs will be:

- a quality rating for each project and an indication of the overall level of quality of AusAID's projects in implementation
- suggestions for actions to address any weaknesses in individual projects
- general lessons for improving project quality in implementation, and
- examples of good practice for use by program areas.

QAG will prepare a follow-up action plan.

Approach

To ensure the panels adopt a consistent approach in their assessments, a standard assessment form has been prepared. This acts as a yardstick for comparing activities. The assessment form has 12 quality indicators and around 54 quality standards. These standards have been selected from the project quality standards in AusGUIDElines No. 12 to suit the particular stage in the project cycle. The standards are therefore consistent with the overall quality theme and individual standards applied throughout AusGUIDE.

The project quality standards, which have been through several revisions and improvements, were initially based on previous AusAID guidelines and the questionnaires used by the World Bank's Quality Assessment Group. They are the result of considerations by the QAG Advisory Group and their use as a basis for the previous reviews of quality at entry, risk and success, and quality in implementation. Panel members will have an opportunity to comment on the assessment form at the completion of the quality-in-implementation review.

The panels' methodology consists of reading project and contextual documentation, discussions with the desk, post and Australian team leader and internal discussion.

Further detail on staff involvement in the panels is provided in the assessment timetable. In summary:

- There will be four panels for the assessments.
- Each project will require 2 days and each panel will review three projects.
- A one-day break is allocated during the assessment period.

Informal panel members

Each panel will have one informal member. The purpose of the attachment is to give people the opportunity to strengthen their understanding of project quality and the application of the quality standards. Normally they would contribute to discussion but not participate in rating the project. The actual extent of their involvement is a matter for the panel leader to decide.

Discussions with desk and post staff

For these discussions the atmosphere should be collegiate and friendly. QAG aims to support staff and not to criticise anyone directly or by implication. Panels should be interested in assessing the project rather than the actions or performance of the people who manage it. Questions about the project should therefore avoid issues of staff performance.

During earlier reviews some desk officers felt that the approach of panel members involved in discussion with desk staff was, on occasions, too 'inquisitorial'. This perception should be avoided. If it is decided to focus on the problematic areas of design or implementation and to ask why certain things have happened, panel members should frame their questions sensitively. They should treat the desk as an important contributor to the analysis rather than as an interviewee.

Potential for conflict of interest

A panel member should declare any previous involvement with the project being assessed. If necessary that individual may need to abstain from rating that particular project.

Reporting on individual projects

A report will be prepared on each project assessment. This will comprise a summary of about three pages plus the completed assessment form. The panel leader will prepare this report with assistance from the team. Once the individual draft report has been cleared by panel members and the QAG team leader a copy will be provided to all those who were involved in discussion with the panel (including the country program manager, desk officer, staff at post and the Australian team leader as appropriate) and to the section director.

Program staff will then have an opportunity to comment on the report (incorporating other stakeholder views as appropriate) and to discuss their response with QAG and the panel leader, if they wish. The report will then be finalised and distributed to the relevant ADG with copies to the concerned director, country program manager and desk officer. Copies will also be provided to the ADG of the Office of Review and Evaluation and the Director of the Program Evaluation Section.

Where the desk and/or post disagree with the findings of a QAG assessment they will be asked to provide additional information so that QAG can re-examine its rating. Where the desk disagrees with the final assessment result a statement regarding the desk's views will be included in QAG's final report on that project. In cases where the desk holds significantly differing views, these differences will be considered at the next periodic review of the quality assessment process and the outcomes reported to the Executive.

Field assessments and compilation of the overall report

About three projects (25 per cent of the total twelve) may be selected for field visits in January-February 2003. A field assessment complements the findings of the desk-based rapid panel assessment. The field visits will focus on the key aspects of the development context influencing implementation. Discussions will be conducted with local stakeholders on implementation issues.

Projects that are likely to provide the most useful lessons and good practice examples for the management of project implementation will be selected. Panels will be asked to comment, in individual project reports, on the type of additional information that might be obtained from a field visit.

Following the completion of fieldwork, the panel moderators will prepare a draft overall report that will draw together the broad findings from the assessments and the field investigations. This draft will be circulated for comment before submission to the AusAID Executive.

Attachment 6.5
Guide for panel leaders
– 2002 QAG review of project quality in implementation

A. Introduction

The Quality Assurance Group (QAG) was established in February 1999 as part of AusAID's commitment to strengthen quality assurance. A key activity of QAG is the assessment of projects and programs to identify lessons for improving quality.

QAG's approach to reviewing project quality has been to use rapid assessment techniques. The continuing success of this approach is demonstrated through the well-considered methodology and objective results and the lessons on project quality that panel members gain.

Panels spend 12–15 hours on a desk review of each project. The depth of this assessment does not compare with a full-scale review. However, it does provide enough knowledge to make a broad assessment of quality and the main factors involved. The use of a carefully designed and tested assessment form contributes to the results being reasonably objective and transparent.

An assessment of project quality in implementation was first undertaken by QAG in late 1999 and early 2000. The findings from this review focused on fundamental factors in improving project success during implementation.

B. Approach to the assessment of project quality

The main aim of the 2002 review of project quality in implementation is to qualitatively analyse issues, strengths and weaknesses of a sample of activities being implemented. The review will seek to identify improvements that can be applied broadly across all country programs. A vital aspect of QAG work, including reviews, is its contribution to building an agency culture of quality assurance and an agency-wide consensus on what makes 'quality' aid. Accordingly, some of the most important benefits of the review will be the lessons learned and the exchange of ideas between peers.

The sample of activities being reviewed was randomly selected. Details of the sampling methodology are attached. Assessments will be undertaken by four panels of AusAID officers, a technical adviser and a moderator under the guidance of QAG staff. Each panel will also have one informal member. Panels will assess three projects each and allocate two days per project.

Particular attention will be paid to the main areas of weakness identified in the 1999–2002 study including:

- stakeholder participation in management and monitoring

- monitoring and reporting, and

- sustainability.

The quality of each project will be rated in accordance with AusAID's quality standards.

Indicative schedule of project assessments: 11 November – 9 December 2002

Country	Sector	Activity name	Dates
Panel 1			
Papua New Guinea	Governance	RPNGC Development Project Phase III, Part C	11–12 November
Cambodia	Rural development	Agriculture Quality Improvement Project	14–15 November
Kiribati	Governance	Strengthening Management and Information	18–19 November
Panel 2			
Burma	Education	Burma Distance Education Project Phase 2	21–22 November
Fiji	Governance	Fiji Islands Revenue & Customs Authority	25–26 November
Viet Nam	Infrastructure	Cuu Long Delta RWSS	28–29 November
Panel 3			
East Timor	Health	National Oral Health Program	18–19 November
China	Environment	Yangtze Flood Control and Management	21–22 November
Regional Asia	Infrastructure	MRC App Hydrological Network Improvement	25–26 November
Panel 4			
Papua New Guinea	Health	National HIV/AIDS Support Project	28–29 November
Papua New Guinea	Health	Health: Medical Equipment Mgt Project	2–3 December
Regional – South Pacific	Health	Pacific Action for Health NCD Project	6 & 9 December

The review will assess the quality of design according to the four quality attributes:

- appropriate objectives and design

- managed in a professional manner

- likely to achieve its objectives, and

- likely to have sustainable outcomes.

C. Tasks of panel leaders

The role of panel leaders is to lead the peer group through the review process as the primary point of contact with the desk, post and contractor. They should encourage all panel members to participate fully in the panel work of study and analysis. The panel leaders may guide the discussions if necessary but the approach used is always democratic and collegial. Time is the discipline of the rapid assessment approach to project quality review.

The general tasks of panel members are to:

- study the project documentation, discuss quality issues within the panel, with the desk officers (in person), with the post and with the contractor (by phone)

- decide on the quality ratings of each project, and

- provide comments to the panel leader or panel moderator on the main points regarding quality so that the final assessment forms and the draft project summary reports accurately reflect the main views of the panel.

The panel leaders should ensure that the panels:

- review each allocated project and, after discussions within the panel and with the desks, posts and contractor, agree on ratings for the quality standards and indicators in the assessment form as well as an overall quality rating

- identify the main strengths and weakness of each project

- suggest actions to be taken by the implementers to address any weaknesses in design and/or implementation for individual projects

- identify general lessons (if any) for improving the quality of projects in preparation and design, and

- identify examples of good practice and innovation where they exist.

A report will be prepared on each project assessment. This will comprise a summary of about three pages plus the completed assessment form. The panel leader will prepare this report with assistance from the team. Once the individual draft report has been cleared by panel members and the QAG team leader a copy will be provided to all those who were involved in discussion with the panel (including the country program manager, desk officer, staff at post and the Australian team leader as appropriate) and to the section director.

Program staff will then have an opportunity to comment on the report (incorporating other stakeholder views as appropriate) and to discuss their response with QAG and the panel leader, if they wish. The report will then be finalised and distributed to the relevant ADG with copies to the concerned director, country program manager and desk officer. Copies will also be provided to the ADG of the Office of Review and Evaluation and the Director of the Program Evaluation Section.

Where the desk and/or post disagree with the findings of a QAG assessment they will be asked to provide additional information so that QAG can re-examine its rating. Where the desk disagrees with the final assessment result a statement regarding the desk's views will be included in QAG's final report on that project. In cases where the desk holds significantly differing views, these differences will be considered at the next periodic review of the quality assessment process and the outcomes reported to the Executive.

At the completion of the project assessment, the panel leader should ensure that feedback is given to QAG on:

- the use and applicability of the quality standards and indicators in the assessment form, and

- on the appropriateness of the peer review procedures used.

D. Suggestions for conducting interviews/panel discussion

When panel leaders are interviewing staff or a project team, there are a few things to keep in mind.

- Make the introductions.

- Thank the desk, post, project staff for participating in the QAG review.

- Check whether the briefing material on the assessment process (sent by QAG staff or by the desk) was received.

- Explain the purpose of project assessments:
  - to establish the overall level of quality of projects in implementation
  - to identify strengths and weaknesses in the sample projects, and
  - to make broad recommendations on improving the quality of projects.

- Explain that the purpose of today's discussion is to fill in gaps in the information the panel obtained from reading project documents.

- Explain the format of the discussion and how long the session usually takes.

- Explain that a report will be prepared on each project including:
  - strengths and weaknesses
  - suggestions for project actions (for desk consideration)
  - general lessons for broad application
  - any examples of good practice, and
  - a completed assessment form.

- In sequencing questions, start with questions of fact. Questions requiring opinions and judgments should follow. In general, begin with questions about the present and move to questions about the past and future.

- Phrase questions carefully to elicit detailed information. Do not hesitate to press for further details or information simply by rephrasing the person's answer in the form of a question.

- Maintain a neutral attitude. Avoid giving the impression of having strong views on the subject under discussion.

- Avoid interrupting your interviewee. Listen. Avoid talking too much.

- Don't wear out your subject. When the agreed time has ended or when you sense that the interviewee is growing tired or losing interest, bring the interview to a close and make arrangements for a follow-up, if necessary.

- After the interview/discussion:
  - explain that a draft of the report will be provided to the desk for comment and passed to the post and contractor within a few days of the discussions and that comments and suggestions will be taken on board in finalising the individual reports
  - advise that a feedback questionnaire will be provided in which desk staff can provide their assessment of the review process and provide comments and suggestions for improvement
  - thank the participants
  - review the notes with the panel as soon as possible, and
  - share and discuss your impressions of the interview with other panel members.

E. Timing

Each panel member's input into the review will be 6 working days, with one day free between projects.

Schedule for panel assessment of projects

Day	Date	Panel/project	Day	Date	Panel/project
Mon	11/11	Panel 1A	Mon	25/11	Panel 2E + Panel 3I
Tues	12/11	Panel 1A	Tues	26/11	Panel 2E + Panel 3I
Wed	13/11	BREAK	Wed	27/11	BREAK
Thurs	14/11	Panel 1B	Thurs	28/11	Panel 2F + Panel 4J
Fri	15/11	Panel 1B	Fri	29/11	Panel 2F + Panel 4J
Sat	16/11		*Sat*	30/11	
Sun	17/11		*Sun*	1/12	
Mon	18/11	Panel 1C + Panel 3G	Mon	2/12	Panel 4K
Tues	19/11	Panel 1C + Panel 3G	Tues	3/12	Panel 4K
Wed	20/11	BREAK	Wed	4/12	BREAK*
Thurs	21/11	Panel 2D+ Panel 3H	Thurs	5/12	BREAK*
Fri	22/11	Panel 2D+ Panel 3H	Fri	6/12	Panel 4H
Sat	23/11		*Sat*	7/12	
Sun	24/11		*Sun*	8/12	
			Mon	9/12	Panel 4H

* Break due to non-availability of technical adviser.
Note: Alpha letter (A, B, C, D, E etc.) denotes project.

Indicative daily timetable for panels

Day one	Activity
9.00–1.00	Studies documents and discusses key questions. Develops initial quality ratings [provisional].
1.00–2.00	*Lunch break*
2.00–4.00	Agrees on issues for discussion with desk, post and contractor.
	Holds discussions with AusAID desk officer plus telephone discussions with post, contractor and/or implementing partner (if needed).
4.00–5.00	Discusses ratings and identifies strengths, weaknesses, actions required and general lessons.

Day two	Activity
9.00–1.00	Prepares final draft of project quality ratings.
1.00–2.00	*Lunch break*
2.00–3.00	Finalises the strengths and weaknesses, actions required and general lessons.
2.00–5.00	Finalises the draft project summary report – panel leader to coordinate.

Random sampling procedure and selection for the review

QAG prepared a sample frame that included all bilateral and regional projects/programs being implemented that were more than one year into implementation and have at least one year more to run before completion. The total budget approval for each project selected is greater than $600 000. Projects previously QAGed were removed from the sample.

Assistance from the Information and Research Services Unit was sought to generate the data based on the selection criteria. Further data on activity monitoring briefs were provided by QUAL to pre-screen project selection. Projects with no activity monitoring briefs were removed from the sample, indicating early implementation stage. A total population of 132 projects was generated, from which 12 randomly selected projects were drawn. In an earlier minute to the ADG of the Office of Review and Evaluation dated 20 August 2002, it was proposed that a sample of 12 projects would be selected according to their activity monitoring brief rating with stratification to include a reasonable spread of regional representation across the program.

Representativeness

The sample of 12 was selected from the population of 132 activities to ensure balanced representation among regions and activity monitoring briefs, as indicated.

Region	AMB scores			Total
	> 3	= 3	< 3	
East Asia	2	1	1	4
Pacific island countries	1	1	1	3
Papua New Guinea	1	1	1	3
South Asia/Africa	0	1	1	2

An Excel program was used to randomly select the 12 projects (see spreadsheet). This method does not provide a full sectoral balance (eg health and governance are slightly over-represented) but reflects AusAID's current portfolio position. Key result areas and regional representation in the sample are as follows:

Key result areas	No. in sample	Region
Health	1, 1, 2	East Asia, Pacific island countries, PNG
Governance	2,1	Pacific island countries, PNG
Infrastructure	1,1	Regional South Asia, East Asia
Rural development	1	East Asia
Environment	1	East Asia
Education	1	East Asia

Attachment 7.1
Assessment form
– 2002 QAG review of project quality at entry

Project	
Country	
Date	
Panel leader	

Indicators and attributes

Attribute A	Rating	Attribute B	Rating	Attribute C	Rating	Attribute D	Rating
Project has appropriate objectives and design		Project preparation is managed in a professional manner		Project is likely to achieve its objectives		Project is likely to have sustainable outcomes	
Indicators		**Indicators**		**Indicators**		**Indicators**	
1. Appropriateness of objectives 2. Partner country participation in design process 3. Adequacy of design process 4. Standard of final design		5. Timeliness of preparation 6. Standard of contract 7. Strength of partner government support 8. AusAID's management and use of resources		9. Likely progress in achieving objectives		10. Sustainability of benefits 11. Sustainability of improved institutional capacity 12. Maintenance of future recurrent budget	
Attribute A:		**Attribute B:**		**Attribute C:**		**Attribute D:**	
Overall project quality rating:							

Scoring aid quality explanations

5   **Best practice:** This excellent score should not be given lightly. The project presents a situation with above-normal good aid practice, particularly something innovative, that is suitable for presenting to AusAID staff as a model to follow.

4   **Fully satisfactory:** This score is normally as good as it gets. The situation satisfies all AusAID quality requirements. There are only minor weaknesses in the project as a whole that have not been addressed.

3   **Satisfactory overall:** This is the lowest score that satisfies AusAID requirements. It represents satisfactory aid. However, this score usually means that there are weaknesses as well as strengths but that the weaknesses are not severe enough to threaten the viability of project.

2   **Marginally satisfactory:** This score indicates the presence of serious weaknesses . The main difference between 2 and 3 is that a score of 2 indicates that the weaknesses require early action if the project is to continue to progress.

1   **Weak:** This score indicates that aspects of the project (or the project) are seriously deficient with respect to quality requirements. It also usually indicates that problems are throughout the project and that immediate and decisive action is needed to address them.

Some scoring principles

• When awarding scores, panels should use only whole numbers.

• Very few quality standards are 'not applicable'. Such a response should be restricted to the occasional cases where a quality standard is judged to be irrelevant.

• Panels may adopt provisional scores for some of the quality standards, pending the receipt of further information or the conclusion of interview processes.

• Panels should rate the quality standards within an indicator before they rate the actual indicator. Similarly, only when the indicators within an attribute are rated should panels rate the attribute. When the attributes are rated the panels can then award a rating for the whole project.

• Panels should not average rating scores when converting to a higher level, eg from quality standards to indicator. Where the appropriate indicator level score is not readily apparent, panels will need to reflect on the relative importance, for this particular project, of each of the standards making up the indicator so as to arrive at the most appropriate rating. Panels should not amend the quality standard ratings in order to ensure a better 'fit' for an indicator level rating.

• Panels should be alert to the tendency to adopt a central position by awarding a '3' when a higher or lower score is appropriate.

• Strengths and weaknesses are briefly recorded in the comments column – usually next to all scores except 3.

Attribute A: Project has appropriate objectives and design

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Comments
Indicator 1: Appropriateness of objectives			
1.1	Objectives are measurable, clear and realistic.		
1.2	Objectives are consistent with AusAID's key result areas and country strategy.		
1.3	Objectives are consistent with AusAID's sector development policies and policies on poverty, gender and environment.		
1.4	Beneficiaries' needs are reflected in objectives.		
1.5	Objectives are consistent with national development priorities and endorsed by aid coordinating authority of partner government.		
1.6	Objectives take account of other activities.		
Overall score for indicator 1			
Indicator 2: Partner country participation in design process			
2.1	Implementing institution's staff and other partner government stakeholders are clearly identified and actively participated in and contributed to all stages of design process.		
2.2	Other stakeholders, especially beneficiaries, are clearly identified and actively participated in and contributed to all stages of design process.		
Overall score for indicator 2			
Indicator 3: Adequacy of design process			
3.1	Appropriate pathways were followed for identification, prefeasibility study, feasibility study and appraisal.		
3.2	Preparation studies were of high standard. a) Terms of reference provide clear and appropriate guidance to the study team. b) Sufficient field time and resources were allowed. c) Necessary design and technical skills were included on study teams.		
3.3	Development analysis identifies the factors likely to affect project success, and informs the design team.		
3.4	Design process took account of other projects and evidence provided of how lessons and possible complementarity have been incorporated.		
3.5	Alternative approaches and designs were considered.		
3.6	Log frame approach was applied clearly and logically.		
3.7	Australian-funded components of co-financed and multilateral activities meet AusAID quality criteria.		
3.8	Appropriate peer review was undertaken.		
3.9	Adequate appraisal was undertaken. Final design incorporates appraisal recommendations.		
Overall score for indicator 3			

Attachment 7.1

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Comments
Indicator 4: Standard of final design			
4.1	The project design document is clear, logical and current and addresses contracting and implementation needs.		
4.2	Log frame matrix presents realistic and measurable objectives and outputs and clear indicators.		
4.3	Monitoring framework describes monitoring activities in terms of log frame outcomes and outputs and details the data, analysis and reporting requirements.		
4.4	Design incorporates a specific strategy to address poverty.		
4.5	Specific strategy incorporated to address gender in development		
4.6	Design incorporates a specific strategy with right level of detail to address any environmental concerns.		
4.7	Risk analysis • Main risks are identified • Risk management plan sufficiently detailed and realistic.		
4.8	Sustainability analysis • Main risks to sustainability are identified. • Sustainability strategy is sufficiently detailed and realistic • Phase-out strategy is prepared.		
4.9	Design is sufficiently flexible to allow for adjustments during implementation		
4.10	A 'responsibility table' clearly links log frame outputs to contract milestones and partner government responsibilities.		
4.11	Clear and workable institutional and organisational arrangements have been endorsed by the partner government.		
4.12	Cost schedules provide adequate detail of estimated partner government and Australian inputs.		
4.13	Design includes clear and achievable implementation strategy and schedules.		
4.14	Contract scope of services and basis of payment are clear, concise and consistent with project design document.		
Overall score for indicator 4			

Attribute B: Project preparation is managed in a professional manner

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Comments
Indicator 5: Timeliness of preparation			
5.1	Response and action times are acceptable to AusAID stakeholders.		
Overall score for indicator 5			
Indicator 6: Standard of contract			
6.1	Contracting strategy is appropriate.		
6.2	Contract scope of services and basis of payment will facilitate successful implementation. a) Risk has been sensibly allocated between parties. b) Appropriate milestones have been identified.		
6.3	Contract is likely to provide implementers with adequate flexibility.		
6.4	Reporting requirements are appropriate.		
Overall score for indicator 6			
Indicator 7: Strength of partner government support			
7.1	Project has strong support from key senior officials of the partner government.		
7.2	Memorandum of understanding sets out clearly and in appropriate detail the responsibilities and contributions of both the partner government and AusAID.		
Overall score for indicator 7			
Indicator 8: AusAID management and use of resources			
8.1	Desk and post staff have appropriate knowledge and skills for managing the project.		
8.2	AusAID resources contributed significantly to the project's preparation.		
Overall score for indicator 8			

Attribute C: Project is likely to achieve its objectives

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Comments
Indicator 9: Likely progress in achieving objectives			
9.1	Current assessment indicates that the project is likely to be successfully implemented and to achieve its objectives.		
Overall score for indicator 9			

Attribute D: Project is likely to have sustainable outcomes

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Comments
Indicator 10: Sustainability of benefits			
10.1	Beneficiaries are likely to have sufficient improved knowledge, skills and resources to maintain benefits after the project is completed.		
10.2	The system or facility producing benefits is likely to be financially supported by the partner government, the community or the beneficiaries after the project is completed.		
Overall score for indicator 10			
Indicator 11: Sustainability of improved institutional capacity			
11.1	Partner government staff requirements after the project is completed have been assessed and clearly presented and agreed to by the partner government.		
11.2	Project is likely to give implementing institution sufficient knowledge and skills to maintain the organisation, systems and equipment necessary for increased institutional capacity after the project is completed.		
Overall score for indicator 11			
Indicator 12: Maintenance of future recurrent budget			
12.1	Partner government's financial inputs after the project is completed (both ongoing and incremental) have been assessed and clearly presented and accepted by the partner government.		
12.2	Increases in recurrent budget after the project is completed are likely to be manageable.		
Overall score for indicator 12			

Attachment 7.2
Assessment form incorporating guidelines
– 2002 QAG review of project quality in implementation

Project	
Country	
Date	
Panel leader	

Indicators and attributes							
Attribute A	**Rating**	**Attribute B**	**Rating**	**Attribute C**	**Rating**	**Attribute D**	**Rating**
Project has appropriate objectives and design		Project is managed in a professional manner		Project is likely to achieve its objectives		Project is likely to have sustainable outcomes	
Indicators		**Indicators**		**Indicators**		**Indicators**	
1. Appropriateness of objectives 2. Adequacy of design process 3. Standard of final design		4. Timeliness of implementation 5. Standard of contract and contractor performance 6. Strength of partner government support and value of dialogue 7. AusAID's management and use of resources 8. Effectiveness of project monitoring and communications		9. Progress in achieving objectives		10. Sustainability of benefits 11. Sustainability of improved institutional capacity 12. Maintenance of future recurrent budget	
Attribute A:		**Attribute B:**		**Attribute C:**		**Attribute D:**	
Overall project quality rating:							

Scoring aid quality explanations

5 **Good practice:** This excellent score should not be given lightly. The project presents a situation with above-normal satisfactory practice – something innovative – that is suitable for presenting to AusAID staff as a model to follow.

4 **Fully satisfactory:** This is a high score. The situation satisfies all AusAID requirements. There are only minor weaknesses in the project as a whole that have not been addressed.

3 **Satisfactory overall:** This is the lowest score that satisfies AusAID quality requirements. It represents satisfactory aid. However, this score usually means that there are weaknesses as well as strengths but that the weaknesses are not severe enough to threaten the viability of the project.

2 **Marginally satisfactory:** This score indicates the presence of serious weaknesses. The main difference between 2 and 3 is that a score of 2 indicates that the weaknesses require early action if the project is to continue to progress.

1 **Weak:** This score indicates that aspects of the project (or the project) are seriously deficient with respect to quality requirements. It also usually indicates that problems are throughout the project and that immediate and decisive action is needed to address them.

Some scoring principles

- When awarding scores, panels should use only whole numbers.

- Very few quality standards are 'not applicable'. Such a response should be restricted to the occasional cases where a quality standard is judged to be irrelevant.

- Where the award of a rating to a standard calls for a 'yes' or 'no' answer, a 'no' response should be scored as 1.

- Panels may adopt provisional scores for some of the quality standards, pending the receipt of further information or the conclusion of interview processes.

- Panels should rate the quality standards within an indicator before they rate the actual indicator. Similarly, only when the indicators within an attribute are rated should panels rate the attribute. When the attributes are rated the panels can then award a rating for the whole project.

- Panels should not average rating scores when converting to a higher level, eg from quality standards to indicator. Where the appropriate indicator level score is not readily apparent, panels will need to reflect on the relative importance, for the particular project, of each of the standards making up the indicator so as to arrive at the most appropriate rating. Panels should not amend the quality standard ratings in order to ensure a better 'fit' for an indicator level rating.

- Panels should be alert to the tendency to adopt a central position by awarding a '3' when a higher or lower score is appropriate.

- Strengths and weaknesses are briefly recorded in the comments column – usually next to all scores except 3.

Attribute A: Project has appropriate objectives and design

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Guidelines
Indicator 1: Appropriateness of objectives			
1.1	Objectives are measurable, clear and realistic.		Objectives should be easy to understand and measure. This standard should be given a high weighting in overall assessment against indicator 1.
1.2	Beneficiaries and stakeholders' needs are reflected in objectives.		Log frame addresses specific target population needs.
1.3	Objectives are consistent with AusAID's country strategy.		All relevant policies should be checked.
1.4	Objectives are consistent with the national development priorities of the partner government.		Official endorsement may be in original request, letter responding to draft project design document or agreed memorandum of understanding.
Overall score for indicator 1			
Indicator 2: Adequacy of design process			
2.1	Appropriate pathways were followed for identification, prefeasibility study, feasibility study, appraisal and use of peer reviews.		Pathways should be consistent with alternative pathways and decision criteria in AusGUIDE.
2.2	• Preparation studies were of a high standard (one score only). • TOR provided clear and appropriate guidance to the study team. • Sufficient resources and field time were allowed.		• Studies should be consistent with AusGUIDElines (subprojects need to meet all quality standards). • If limited time was available for preparation, design should allow investigation/design work at start of project. • Team should include practical design skills and appropriate technical skills.
2.3	Development analysis identified factors likely to affect project success, and informs the design team.		Analyse the situation, define the problem and assess the 'without project' case. At the prefeasibility stage, analysis is usually preliminary and selective.
2.4	Stakeholders, especially the partner government and beneficiaries, have actively participated and contributed at all stages of design process.		The partner government is actually responsible for project activities on the ground, eg local work unit, including women's groups sponsored by the partner government.
2.5	The log frame approach is clearly and logically applied.		This approach is described in AusGUIDE.
2.6	Design process takes account of other projects and evidence of how lessons and possible complementarities have been incorporated.		Include planned and ongoing projects of AusAID, other donors and the partner government.

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Guidelines
Indicator 2: Adequacy of design process (continued)			
2.7	Alternative approaches and designs were considered.		Documentation on the alternatives considered is provided in project design document. Alternatives are evaluated for cost effectiveness including social/institutional costs and benefits.
2.8	Australian-funded components of co-financed and multilateral activities meet AusAID quality criteria.		Proposals from co-financing partners should be subject to adequate assessment and adjustment by AusAID.
2.9	Appropriate peer review has been undertaken.		Peer reviews are an ongoing input and are well staffed, and their views are taken into account.
2.10	Adequate appraisal has been undertaken.		Assessment against quality criteria should make clear and well-substantiated recommendations for improving design quality where required. Appraisal team should be independent of design team with the correct mix of skills and some AusAID representation. Activity teams and/or peer groups may appraise small, straightforward projects being approved at ADG level (see AusGUIDElines for teams and peer groups – under preparation). For programs the program design document should be appraised.
Overall score for indicator 2			

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Guidelines
Indicator 3: Standard of design			
3.1	The project design document, or latest annual plan, is clear and logical and addresses contracting and implementation needs.		The document should be easy to read, allow information to be located easily and include an extended executive summary for subsequent translation as required.
3.2	Log frame matrix presents realistic and measurable objectives, outputs and clear indicators.		Matrix should be a maximum of two to three pages, including cross-cutting issues such as poverty reduction where appropriate. Quantified targets should be included where possible, especially for outputs.
3.3	AusAID's appropriate crosscutting issues have been incorporated.		An outline of each strategy for addressing crosscutting issues should be included as required.
3.4	Clear and workable institutional and organisational arrangements are in place.		The partner government implementing agency has the appropriate mandate. The project design document includes a diagram showing organisational linkages. Arrangements should have been set out and agreed by the partner government in the memorandum of understanding.
3.5	Cost schedules provide adequate detail of estimated partner government and Australian inputs.		Detailed cost schedules should be provided relating to ongoing and incremental costs during the project. (For post-project costs, see indicator 14.)
3.6	Clear and achievable implementation strategy and schedules are part of the design.		Design should include bar charts with time scale for specific activities and sufficient time allowed for first annual plan preparation.
Overall score for indicator 3			

Attribute B: Project preparation is managed in a professional manner

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Guidelines
Indicator 4: Timeliness of implementation			
4.1	Project starts up efficiently, and the first year's annual plan has been prepared and agreed without delay.		Local implementing agency should be involved in planning and agree on content of memorandum of understanding and annual plan and approach of contractor. Target population should also be involved in planning.
4.2	Response and action times in undertaking project implementation are acceptable to AusAID stakeholders.		Adequate time should be allowed to receive responses from or for action to be taken by partner government, co-financing organisation, contractor, post, sector groups, CSG and desk.
Overall score for indicator 4			
Indicator 5: Standards of contract and performance by contractor (or multilateral agency)			
5.1	Contracting strategy is appropriate.		Contract specifies an appropriate mix of inputs and outputs. Scope of services adequately addresses responsibility table allocations.
5.2	Design is sufficiently flexible to allow for adjustments during implementation.		Design identifies aspects of project where adjustments might be possible and suggests possible mechanisms for flexibility.
5.3	Contract scope of services and basis of payment are clear, concise and consistent with project design document or latest annual plan.		Contract is easy to read and understand and is aligned with CSG good practice examples.
5.4	Contract scope of services and basis of payment have facilitated successful implementation (one score only). • Risk has been sensibly allocated between parties. • Milestones have been identified.		Risk allocation should depend on the abilities of AusAID and contractor to deal with the risk. This split should have been identified before tender and the contractor priced their risk in the tender. Milestones should be tied to objectives/outputs of the project (rather than to processes such as a report or a project coordinating committee meeting). Contractor activity will not in itself achieve project objectives. Standard of performance against each deliverable or milestone should be specified in scope of services or basis of payment. Basis of payment must be achievable and measurable.

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Guidelines
Indicator 5: Standards of contract and performance by contractor (or multilateral agency) (continued)			
5.5	Contractor's performance is on track and efficient.		Performance is indicated by achievement of outputs and outcomes, activity monitoring brief scores, activity preparation brief content and desk/post assessments.
5.6	Contractor's project team is optimistic, confident and motivated.		Team spirit is indicated by project visits by post and desk.
5.7	Contractor develops professional partnerships with stakeholders.		Partnerships are reflected in quick joint decisions and actions where required.
5.8	Partner government project staff are trained on the job and work in a professional capacity.		Australian advisers provide on-the-job training rather than undertake project themselves.
Overall score for indicator 5			
Indicator 6: Strength of partner government support and value of dialogue in country			
6.1	Partner government policy environment remains favourable for project implementation.		Assess environment using development analysis. Partner government policy should support the improvements targeted by the project and enhance the likelihood of partner government resources being made available.
6.2	Project has strong support from key senior officials of the partner government in implementation.		Support should be reflected in partner government provision of staff and funds during preparation and implementation and in senior officials devoting time to attend meetings and visit the project.
6.3	Working relationship between the post and partner government allows for problems and sensitive issues to be discussed openly and resolved quickly.		Including strong mutual understanding of partner government and AusAID positions and approaches.
6.4	The Australian team leader and the team leader of the partner government have a productive working partnership.		This partnership should be reflected in quick decisions and actions where required.
6.5	Institutional and organisational arrangements are working well.		The effectiveness of the arrangement is as assessed by the partner government, the Australian team leader and post.
6.6	Partner government responsibilities and inputs are maintained at levels agreed to in memorandum of understanding and/or memorandum of agreement.		As reported by the Australian team leader and assessed during post monitoring.
Overall score for indicator 6			

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Guidelines
Indicator 7: AusAID management and use of resources			
7.1	Desk and posted staff have had sufficient opportunity to become familiar with the project and to monitor it first hand.		Staff should be able to form their own opinion about conditions on the ground for the target population and the project team, about the quality of contractor and partner government project staff and about whether the project is likely to succeed.
7.2	Strategic use of AusAID teams and/or technical advisory groups have added value to project implementation.		Examples should be available of how the technical advisory groups have added to AusAID's ability to manage the project.
Overall score for indicator 7			
Indicator 8: Effectiveness of project monitoring and communications			
8.1	Risk management strategies are monitored and adjusted as required during implementation.		Such strategies should be monitored during the project visit by the post or at meetings. Partner government staff should be included.
8.2	Reporting requirements are appropriate.		Reporting should keep AusAID well informed of project progress and issues without distracting the field team from other responsibilities.
8.3	Communications between the post and the Australian team leader are regular and frequent.		Communication should generally be by telephone, email and fax. Meetings may also be appropriate if distances allow.
8.4	Field team is responsive to beneficiaries' and stakeholders' views.		Problems and issues arising from beneficiaries or other stakeholders have been discussed and quickly resolved.
8.5	Monitoring framework describes monitoring activities in terms of log frame outcomes and outputs and details the data, analysis and reporting requirements.		Monitoring tasks should be easy to understand and results easy to link back to log frame. Schedule of monitoring activities should be provided.
Overall score for indicator 8			

Attribute C: Project achieves its objectives

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Guidelines
Indicator 9: Progress in achieving objectives			
9.1	Realistic overall assessment indicates that the project is likely to achieve its objectives.		This assessment should reflect all assessments relating to design and management.
9.2	Activities and outputs are likely to be completed on schedule.		Schedules appear realistic. Project is meeting its scheduled targets.
9.3	Activities and outputs are likely to be completed within budget.		The budget should be approved prior to the start of implementation.
9.4	Improvements are likely to occur in AusAID's crosscutting issues.		Likely improvements in cross-cutting issues are reflected in the project objectives as described in logframe goal, purpose and outputs.
Overall score for indicator 9			

Attribute D: Project has sustainable outcomes

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Guidelines
Indicator 10: Sustainability of benefits			
10.1	Sustainability strategies are monitored and adjusted as required during implementation.		Monitoring and adjustments during implementation should ensure that the strategies will achieve sustainable outcomes.
10.2	Counterparts and beneficiaries are likely to have sufficient knowledge, skills and resources to maintain benefits post-project.		Project activity manager/ implementing agent should focus on management aspects. Essential project documents should be translated into the official language of the partner government where appropriate.
10.3	A system of benefits, or a facility providing benefits, is likely to be financially supported by the partner government, the community or the beneficiaries, after the project is completed.		Knowledge, skills and resources needed should be clearly identified and the means of providing them included in the project. Means of generating finances should be clearly spelt out and understood by the target population. Appropriate training should be included in the project. The implementing agency should be likely to meet its financial commitments during the project (see standard 7.6). Project has built-in commercial or income-generation incentive that is likely to encourage the implementing agency to maintain the budget after the project is completed.
Overall score for indicator 10			

#	Indicators & associated quality standards	Score	Guidelines
Indicator 11: Sustainability of improved institutional capacity			
11.1	Implementing institution has high-level officials personally committed to maintain benefits after the project is completed.		The extent of involvement of officials (especially in implementation) and the nature of decisions relating to the project indicate the level of support.
11.2	Project is likely to give implementing institution sufficient capacity to maintain assets and systems after the project is completed.		Project activity manager/ implementing agent should focus on management aspects. Essential project documents should be translated into partner government official language where appropriate.
Overall score for indicator 11			
Indicator 12: Maintenance of future recurrent budget			
12.1	Partner government's commitment favours the continuation of benefits after the project has been completed.		The commitment should be set out in the project design document and the memorandum of understanding.
12.2	Increases in the recurrent budget after the project is completed are likely to be manageable.		The increases should be small relative to the usual funding provided for government activity being targeted by the project. (The bigger the increase in ongoing costs the lower the chances of sustainability.)
Overall score for indicator 12			

Attachment 9.1
Project documents requested from desks
– 2002 QAG review of project quality in implementation[1]

Project document	Desk/QAG comments
Project–specific	
Partner government request for assistance	
Activity preparation brief	
FMA 9 approval to proceed to design	
FMA 9 approval to proceed to implement	
Any subsequent FMA 9 approvals	
Post/desk feedback on design/appraisal/preparation	
Partner government comments/approval on design	
Project design document (PDD)	
PDD annexes	
PDD working papers	
Risk analysis table	
Log frame matrix	
Change frame and/or any revisions	
Project memorandum of understanding	
Contract and any amendments	
Annual plans	
Monthly, quarterly and/or six monthly reports	
Latest activity monitoring brief	
Appraisal notes	
Record of any peer review	
Technical advisory group reports	
High-level consultation reports and/or project coordinating committee minutes	
Project implementation document(s)	
Peer review report(s)	
Sector–related	
AusAID sector policy statement	
Relevant national government sector plan and strategy	
Country–related	
AusAID country strategy and updates	
Umbrella memorandum of understanding	
Poverty analysis (if any)	

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1 A review of quality at entry would have less documentation.

Attachment 11.1
A consultant's preliminary analysis of a project
– 1999–00 QAG review of project quality in implementation

Country	China
Project	Hebei Watershed Management and Livestock Project
Date assessed	November 1999
Consultant	John Wrigley

Project history

August 1992	Identification mission listed four projects for prefeasibility study, including Hebei.
January 1993	Prefeasibility study report.
October 1994	Project Design Document. ASI appraisal note of November 1994.
October 1995	Contract 5021 with Australian managing contractor, ACIL. Winning bid suggested substantial changes to project design document but not all agreed by AusAID. To be handled in project implementation document (PID).
November 1995	Memorandum of understanding signed. Australian team leader arrives.
April 1996	Draft PID submitted. Not accepted.
November 1996	Revised draft PID submitted. Still not acceptable.
December 1996	Adviser Services Group appraisal of draft PID.
December 1997	PID accepted.
July 1998	Decision to review progress, primarily due to slow progress in water development component.
November 1998	Project review report. Recommended continuation with additional Australian inputs and subject to additional commitment by China.
May 1999	Contract variations flowing from review agreed. Discount negotiated on some additional inputs to cover earlier Australian managing contractor shortfalls.
November 1999	Australian monitoring brief reports much improved performance. Australian managing contractor and partner government have applied review recommendations.

Project summary

The project arose from a 1992 identification mission and was prepared in pre-feasibility and design studies. The memorandum of understanding was signed and staff mobilised in November 1995. The PID was finalised in December 1997 and is the key design document.

The project aims to improve the standard of living and increase incomes for farmers through the sustainable use of natural resources in Xingtai County. It seeks to do this by:

- implementing watershed management plans and sustainable farming systems
- implementing sustainable livestock production systems
- improving the operational capacity and technical skills within bureaus to provide extension and other support services, and
- effectively and efficiently managing the project.

It is being implemented in one county of Hebei Province over five years at a cost to Australia of $5.6 million. About 6000 families are expected to benefit from the watershed component and about 15 000 families from livestock activities. Staff in county bureaus, AHB, AB, FB, WRB, and township services will benefit from training.

The project was reviewed in late 1998 and the application of review recommendations appears to have improved implementation during 1999. Lack of access to credit and uncertain water resource characteristics remain important risk factors.

Key reading list

PID	Presents the agreed project design – logframe (p. 19), component description (p. 68 et seq) organisation (p. 79 et seq).
Review	Assesses progress, analyses problems and recommends additional inputs to ensure success (November 1998).
MOU	China inputs.
6MR, Sept. 1999	Most recent Australian managing contractor progress report.
AMB, Nov. 1999	
PCC Minutes	December 1998 and June 1999.
Annual Plan 1999–00	Problems and work plan (pp. 27–32).
Contract 5021	1995 Schedule 2, Annex 1. Plus most recent variation of May 99, schedule and correspondence.
Other	Project design document, two appraisal notes, monthly reports, component reports, correspondence desk/Australian managing contractor.

Possible project strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

- Technical improvements in livestock production have been achieved, with likely positive impact on incomes and the environment.

- Demonstrated benefits of watershed planning and small-scale irrigation development for fruit production.

Weaknesses

- Possible lack of sustainability of water resource development and slow progress in irrigation development.

- Institutional arrangements giving leadership to AHB, when activities are now largely water resource development. Project depends on activity of at least four bureaus plus township staff. (PMO and Australian team leader may have been better placed in county government RD or agriculture committee, with LTAs in specialist bureaus?)

- Lack of credit to fund water and fruit development.

- Lack of gender reporting makes it difficult to know how effective WF activity is.

- Lack of outcome reporting makes it difficult to assess progress towards overall objective.

Attachment 19.1

Outcomes of consultations with desks and posts – 1999–00 QAG review of project quality in implementation

Project	Country	Discussed with	Response	Recommendation
Africa				
Links	South Africa	A/Director interstate	• A full project review was scheduled for March 2000. A QAG review now would be overkill. • Not a good monitoring case study. Previous CPM decided project would not be monitored. Recent decision taken to monitor. Still evolving. • Some site visit feasible ('talking heads'). Much of the activity is in Australia. Multiplicity of counterparts all represented on the project coordinating committee. • General concern about post workload with several missions over next few months.	• Agreed for the South Africa and Mozambique projects not to consult post at this stage. Only if there were a strong wish to have QAG go to South Africa would it be necessary to approach the post. • Case for a visit is not strong but three projects could be covered at one post without necessarily visiting Mozambique. By scaling down activities re the Links project, the sensitivities re overkill given the pending full review might be accommodated. **Recommendation re all of the Africa projects:** *No visit at this stage*. But this could be reconsidered should other planned visits not prove feasible. There would be a need then to consult specifically with the CPM for Mozambique and with the post.
Community Water	South Africa	A/Director interstate	• While not classified as such, this is an NGO project involving a local NGO. • Primary focus of project is evaluation of community water supply projects. • Site visit is feasible. • Concerns about post workload.	
CAA Chicomo Rural Development	Mozambique	CPM interstate A/Director interstate	• Mozambique aid activities are now managed from Pretoria (political still from Harare). • Post interests could therefore be covered in conjunction with a Pretoria visit re the South Africa projects. • Project was 'filtered out' as not warranting QAG attention. Main issue is (not) monitoring NGO projects – a broader policy issue.	

Project	Country	Discussed with	Response	Recommendation
Indochina				
Provincial Water Supply	Viet Nam	Director	• Not supported because of a number of practical difficulties • The project has just been subjected to a two-week intensive TAG review. Another review so soon would cause problems. (The TAG review could be made available to the panel.) • The post officer (Bernice Lee) will be leaving the post at the end of January and has just handed over to her successor. • The project is widely spread (across five towns). Just talking with counterparts in Hanoi would not be productive. But even selective site visits would take 5–6 days. • Several feasibility study teams were delayed because of Y2k flying restrictions. They will be arriving around this time and the post would find it difficult to cope with a QAG process at the same time. • QAG undertook an in-country review of quality at entry.	**Recommendation:** *No visit.*
Health & Social Development	Laos	Director (delegated to CPMs) CPM	• In-country QAG activities are not supported at this time – more appropriate in, say, six months. • Project has just moved into redesign phase. Senior in-country Australian managing agent arrives only in January. • TAG will visit either 12/1 or 27/1. Both TAG and QAG visiting would be too much. Even TAG's visit is low key, given current sensitivities. • Redesign process caused political disruptions (given that withdrawal from one province was one option) and is another reason for very low-key actions at this critical period. • Site visit is not feasible and the Vientiane component has been removed from the redesign. • Would expect post to take similar line.	**Recommendation:** *No visit.* Given the redesign this is in a sense a 'new' project. Panel leader expressed view at combined panel leaders' meeting this project should be left alone at this time and given time to settle down. **Note:** Would be a good project to pick up in later QAG activities, providing a case study of 'before and after' and the impact of 'redesign' including a move from worst practice to best practice contracting.

Project	Country	Discussed with	Response	Recommendation
Indochina (continued)				
National Examinations	Cambodia	Director (delegated to CPMs) Desk officer who cleared line with A/CPM attending another meeting. CPM away.	• Desk generally supportive but some concerns about the timing/logistics given post workload. Will check with post. Post subsequently accepted visit). • Site visit feasible.	**Recommendation:** *Visit.*
South–East Asia				
AIDS Ambulatory Care	Thailand	Director (delegated to CPMs) CPM	• Supports in-country QAG assessment. Would include site visit. All feasible in two days. • Checked feasibility with post. Post has accepted visit.	**Recommendation:** *Visit.*
Healthy Mothers	Indonesia	A/Director	• Fully supports in-country QAG activities but concerned about timing. • Checked with counsellor. Post accepts visit but must be during week 24–28 January. • Australian managing agent is located in the province. A site visit to one province is probably feasible (see **attachment C** – requires total of three days subject to further checking).	**Recommendation:** *Visit.* Site visit is difficult but an outside option depending on final itinerary. **Note:** Must be 24–28 January.
TAMF	Indonesia	A/Director	• Project has not been in implementation for a long period. Case for in-country QAG is not strong. • Depends on post and whether Australian managing agent is back in town (currently in Australia).	**Recommendation:** *Visit* as an adjunct to the previous project. If both acceptable recommend a 'package' of three days for the health project assuming a site visit and then one day for the TAMF project

Project	Country	Discussed with	Response	Recommendation
South–East Asia (continued)				
Basic Education	Philippines	Director Post	• Supported. Particularly keen to see some partner government inputs into the QAG process. • Understood that there is a project 'site' in Manila – otherwise site visits would be very difficult given travel difficulties in the country generally. • Discussed with post (Peter Leahy). Supports visit. Doubts re Manila project site. Will look at other options. There may be another site that could be reached in a day.	**Recommendation:** *Visit.* Site visit options being examined.
China				
Hebei Watershed	China	Director	• Supportive but some concerns about timing and post capacity given other commitments. • Site visits would not be feasible for climatic reasons. • Not discussed with post, but the relevant officer (David Gowty) would be back in Canberra.	**Recommendation:** *No visit.* But this project could be held in reserve should other higher priority projects not prove feasible for visits. Would then need to check with the post.

(Continued on next page)

Project	Country	Discussed with	Response	Recommendation
Pacific				
Rural Water	Solomon Islands	Director CPM CSG	• The panel did not speak with the post (officer away) and the Australian managing agent. (There is a 'dispute' and all contacts between AusAID and the agent must be in writing.) • Some concerns that QAGing in-country activities might undermine a difficult situation but agree that in principle this project would be suitable for in-country work, particularly given the gaps in the panel assessment. Solution would not be to avoid the Australian managing agent, who would resent not being contacted, but to involve the Australian managing agent or team leader in a carefully managed way. • Post workload is heavy at the time but subject to checking with post might be manageable. • Sample site visit – day trip to Malaita – is probably feasible. • Agreed that this project could be visited subject to post views and subject to CSG views. But the contacts with the Australian managing agent would have to be managed carefully and with sensitivity, working carefully with the post and desk. • Discussed with CSG. CSG view is that QAGing in country is highly desirable. But there should be written advice to the Australian managing agent explaining the context – one of a number of projects being visited etc. Communication could be from desk but better coming from the QAG secretariat. Essential that there be contact with the Australian managing agent or team leader in any country visit. • CPM subsequently phoned post. Post supports visit and will advise later whether any particular days less suitable.	**Recommendation**: *Visit* including site visit, noting unique sensitivities re Australian managing agent plus the additional objective, which is in a sense to complete the panel assessment given that it had no contact with the post and Australian managing agent. Allow up to 2–3 days in country.

Project	Country	Discussed with	Response	Recommendation
Pacific (continued)				
Water Supply	Niue	Director	• In-country QAG activities would not be appropriate. Project has finished. Logistics difficulties – difficult to get to. Partner government may have views on certain project components.	**Recommendation:** *No visit.* QAG panel leader saw no value in a visit.
Basic Education	Fiji	Director CPM	• Supported in principle but some constraints. • Relevant post officer will have just ended his posting. But could be interviewed in Canberra. Post staff absences at the time. • Counterparts may not be available in January. • Will check with post.	**Recommendation:** *Visit subject to post support* but a lower priority. Visit only if Tuvalu is covered – as a 'package'.
Education Sector program	Tuvalu	Director CPM	• Supported in principle but some constraints. • Monitored from Suva. A Tuvalu Program Support Unit staff member recently appointed but not used for monitoring. • Geoff Adlide monitors the project and would probably travel to Tuvalu with the team, except that post staff resources are light on at the time. • Will check with post.	**Recommendation:** This project did not score highly in terms of need for QAGing in country. *Recommend visit subject to post agreement as part of a package* with the Fiji project since a visit has to include Fiji in any case.
Health Sector Management	Tonga	Director	• Supported. Of the Pacific projects this would be the best project to cover. • Will check with post.	**Recommendation:** *Visit subject to post agreement.*

Project	Country	Discussed with	Response	Recommendation
Papua New Guinea				
ASF	PNG	Director	• Firmly supports in-country QAG review although would have preferred this after project had been in implementation longer. • Some problems re availability of counterparts. Unlikely to be available in January. High-level consultations will start early February – possibly as early as 1 Feb but more likely end of that week. • Relevant post staff (Allison Sudradjat, the Counsellor, and the program officer, now Peter Izard) are likely to be available provided no clash with high-level consultations. • Happy for QAG to liaise with post • Subsequently spoke with Allison Sudradjat, who was supportive. Late January probably better. First week of February best avoided given high-level consultations and HLC preparations. Possible to talk with beneficiaries, given that components of the project have been completed. Also key counterpart keen to talk but will need to check re key counterpart's extended leave arrangements and advise Rick Nicholls on Thursday.	**Recommendation:** *Visit subject to further comment* by the post. Should it be decided to visit Port Moresby for this project, there would need to be some further dialogue with the post about the other projects – preferably after the post has seen the full terms of reference – given that even if only one project is 'formally' reviewed there are broader issues that affect all of the projects that can be discussed at least with the post.
Tertiary Health Services	PNG	CPM (who also spoke with Director)	• Given that QAG did not assess the project no point would be served in addressing this project. There would be no in-country activities and contact with the Ministry of Health would not be productive.	**Recommendation:** *No visit.* But in any broader discussions with the post it could be mentioned/discussed.

(Continued on next page)

Project	Country	Discussed with	Response	Recommendation
Papua New Guinea (continued				
Bougainville Land	PNG	Director	• Not supportive of any site visit. Peace Talks have 'broken down a bit'. Would take several days in Bougainville to talk to all the provincial key players. There have been too many visits and would be resented in Bougainville – would not get a warm reception. • A visit to the Bougainville Peace and Reconstruction Office in Port Moresby would be appropriate and might find someone there who has some knowledge of the project. Would of course miss the Australian managing agent who is in Bougainville. • Can talk to the post. Happy to see the project subjected to a QAG review in country provided there is no site visit.	**Recommendation:** *No visit* given inability to visit Bougainville and to meet with the Australian managing agent. But include the project more generically in discussing management/reporting/monitoring issues with the post. If time permits and suitable counterparts are available, fit in a visit to the Port Moresby Bougainville Office. **Note:** If necessary could QAG the project and prepare the necessary documentation. This need not impact on the ultimate itinerary given the limited nature of the activities. **Note:** In discussion with Allison Sudradjat re the ASF project (see above) she supported all of the comments made by the Director re this project. (She is responsible at the Counsellor level for both projects at the post.)
Elementary Teacher Education	PNG	A/Director & CPM	• Supportive in principle but guided by the post. • A/Director consulted post officer (Tony O'Dowd). Post has major problems with the timing but could contemplate a review after February. • In January and February there is particular pressure on the Australian managing agent and team leader and a mid-term review is imminent. There are also post staff shortages at the time. • A/Director happy for QAG secretariat to discuss this further with Tony O'Dowd, particularly if a visit to Port Moresby takes place in any case, focused on other projects.	**Recommendation:** *No visit.* But if there is a visit to Port Moresby to review other project(s) there could be further consultation with the post to come to some arrangement – as for the Bougainville project – that would allow for some limited and scaled-back review of activities including possibly a call on the partner government agency and on the contractor.

Note: The areas that have agreed that their projects could be covered have all been promised copies of the full terms of reference, – which would also have to be sent to the relevant posts. The terms of reference could also be sent to those areas that have projects that were examined by the QAG panels – just to show the process – for future reference. All of the areas accepting visits agreed that the QAG secretariat could liaise directly with the post, giving them copies of correspondence. But the consultant would suggest that when there is a firm decision to include a project on the itinerary the first advice go to the desk with a note that future communications would be directly with the posts. Each area was told that both they and the post would see and have an opportunity to comment on the one page issues paper prepared in the week before the visit for each project.

Summary

Projects recommended for visits where desks and posts have already confirmed:

Cambodia – National examinations

Thailand – AIDS

Indonesia – Healthy Mothers

Indonesia – TAMF

Philippines – Basic education

Solomon Islands – Rural Water

PNG – ASF (subject to counterpart availability)

Projects recommended for visits where desks have confirmed subject to post agreement:

Fiji – Basic Education

Tuvalu – Education

Tonga – Health sector

Possible project groupings assuming that all of the outstanding post responses are in favour of visits:

(subject to checking flight schedules – also the order of visits will need to take into account particular timing constraints that may be mentioned when the remaining posts respond in the next couple of days)

Panel 1: Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia (1+), Philippines

Panel 2: PNG (1++), Solomon Islands, Tonga

Fiji/Tuvalu could be added to panel 2 but this would require a 'quick' visit to Port Moresby dealing with one project only. PNG could be excluded with Fiji/Tuvalu added, particularly if there are flight schedule constraints.

It could be possible to add, say, Indonesia or the Philippines to panel 2 and add, say, PNG or Suva to panel 1 if there is a wish to make the panels less 'Asia' and 'Pacific', subject to flight schedules.

Attachment 19.2
Field visit authority
– 1999–00 QAG review of project quality in implementation

This submission seeks your approval for two teams to each visit four projects each as a follow-up to the quality-in-implementation review, conducted by the Quality Assurance Group (QAG). Team 1 (the QAG manager and a consultant) will cover South-East Asia, and team 2 (the QAG adviser and a consultant) will cover Papua New Guinea and the Pacific. Specifically team 1 will visit Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia; and team 2 will visit Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga. The visits will occur between 22 January and 8 February 2000.

Background and rationale

These field visits follow on from the review of the quality in implementation of 20 projects. This review took place between October and December 1999. A study of the potential for project visits was then undertaken by a QAG consultant in late December. Discussions were held with desks and posts and a report was prepared in order to assess the value of a field visit to each project. Eight projects were then identified for field assessment from the recommendations of the report:

Team 1
Indonesia – Healthy mothers, healthy babies
Thailand – AIDS ambulatory care
Cambodia – National examinations
Philippines – Philippines Australia Project in Basic Education (PROBE)

Team 2
PNG – Advisory support facility
Solomon Islands – Rural water supply and sanitation
Fiji – Basic education management
Tonga – Health sector management

Terms of reference

The objectives of the field visits are to:

1. assess the quality of in-country aspects of project implementation

2. verify panel assessments of project quality and to identify any improvements in QAG methodology

3. review AusAID reporting and monitoring systems in the field, especially activity monitoring briefs, and

4. discuss sustainability and how this can be best treated in implementation. Specifically examine project ownership, beneficiary participation, robustness of design and management, partner government's policies and priorities, project technology and asset maintenance.

The objectives will be addressed by revisiting project documents and panel assessments in Canberra before departure, and then by discussions in the field with posts, contractors, partner government representatives and, where possible, target groups. Reporting and monitoring discussions will range beyond the assessed projects and be guided by a checklist prepared before departure.

Outputs

The individual project field assessments of the quality of in-country implementation plus other findings of the field visits (see below) will be consolidated with the findings of the five quality-in-implementation panels into an overall report on the achievements and shortfalls of project implementation quality.

Specific and detailed outputs of the field visits include:

1. a comparison of panel and field assessments with the identification of any necessary addenda to the project report

2. identification of improvements in assessment methodology, including the quality standards and indicators used for rating quality in implementation from the perspective of other stakeholders such as government, contractors and (to some extent) beneficiaries

3. discussion of possible improvements in monitoring systems in country and a summary on preliminary conclusions on monitoring in a visit report, including an assessment of how actual monitoring in the field relates to monitoring expectations in the design (possible synergies between partner government and AusAID reporting and monitoring systems), leading to an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of existing AusAID monitoring systems (including activity monitoring briefs), with recommendations for improvements

4. a summary of the factors and strategies in the design that can promote sustainability and ideas on how sustainability can be promoted in implementation, including the indicators of sustainability, and

5. wrap-up discussions with appropriate AusAID posted staff, including a discussion on QAG processes and the outcomes of the rapid review of project quality in implementation.

Signed: . . . .

              Manager, QAG   Project Quality Adviser, QAG

Date: . . . .

Attachment 20.1
Evaluation by panel members
– 2002 QAG review of project quality at entry

Please answer the following questions with a rating based on your recent experience of the QAG assessment process.

Ratings: 5 = Good practice; 4 = Fully satisfactory; 3 = Satisfactory overall; 2 = Marginally satisfactory; 1 = Weak

	Rating				
1. Did the overall process (reading of project documents, intra/inter panel discussions, interviews with desk, posts and the Australian team leader) enable a reasonable and rapid understanding of project quality at entry?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Is the peer panel approach an effective and efficient way to measure the quality of projects?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Were the project documents provided appropriate and sufficient to enable a good understanding of the project in conjunction with the structured interviews and phone calls?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Did the composition of the panel allow adequate discussion of the elements of quality?	1	2	3	4	5
5. Did the panel procedures encourage active and free input from both panel members and the people interviewed?	1	2	3	4	5
6. Did the procedures help the panel to arrive at a balanced judgment?	1	2	3	4	5
7. Was the time invested by panel members justified by the outcomes?	1	2	3	4	5
8. Was the time invested by panel members justified by personal development and work gains?	1	2	3	4	5

OTHER COMMENTS

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Attachment 20.2
Evaluation by participants
– 2002 QAG review of project quality at entry

Please answer the following questions with a rating based on your recent experience of the QAG assessment process.

Ratings: 5 = Good practice; 4 = Fully satisfactory; 3 = Satisfactory overall; 2 = Marginally satisfactory; 1 = Weak

	Rating				
1. Document collection (Was document collection onerous for staff involved?)	1	2	3	4	5
2. Scheduling of discussion with panel (Was the interview scheduling process satisfactory?)	1	2	3	4	5
3. Panel composition (Did it reflect the range of skills required to assess quality in preparation?)	1	2	3	4	5
4. Usefulness of the quality-at-entry assessment framework (Does it cover the main aspects of project quality?)	1	2	3	4	5
5. Opportunity for staff to present their views (Did the panel encourage you to present your views and give you adequate time for this?)	1	2	3	4	5
6. Report drafting and finalisation procedures (Was enough time allowed for your feedback?)	1	2	3	4	5
7. Learning gain (Did the QAGing of your project add to your knowledge of project quality and how to achieve it?)	1	2	3	4	5
8. Usefulness of the quality-at-entry assessment to your work (Was it useful for present and future activities?)	1	2	3	4	5
9. Time required of staff for the process (Was the time required of you justified, given the outcome?)	1	2	3	4	5
10. Panel's overall operation (Did the overall operation of the panel allow it to make an adequate, rapid assessment of the project?)	1	2	3	4	5

OTHER COMMENTS

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If you wish to make further comments, please do so over the page.

Thank you. Your feedback will help to improve future assessments.
PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM PROMPTLY TO QAG (Marilou Drilon, Ext. 4835)

Attachment 20.3
Results of a feedback survey (draft)
– 2002 QAG review of project quality at entry

A questionnaire seeking feedback on the QAG review process was distributed to all panel members and others interviewed during the quality-at-entry review in February and March 2002. The return rate for completed questionnaires was 85 per cent for panel members and 46 per cent for others interviewed.

Both groups rated the overall review process as fully satisfactory. The results indicate an increase in awareness by AusAID staff of the review process and a continuing improvement in the quality assurance process and procedures. Panel members devoted approximately 10 work days to the review. The rapid assessment was demanding of staff inputs. However, staff considered the time invested as justified, given their gains in professional development and learning from the exercise.

Feedback from panel members

Eight questions were asked of the panel members (see table 1). The mode for all 8 questions was 4 (fully satisfactory). An improvement over the 1999 feedback results is noted for question 5, suggesting that active, free input from both panel members and those interviewed was encouraged. Comments from the panels, including suggestions for improving the QAG process, are listed below. (It should be noted that there are some inconsistencies in the panel respondents' comments.)

Assessment framework

- Not all the quality standards are readily applicable to all types of projects, eg sectorwide approach and multicountry projects. Panel members found anticipating outcomes for SWAP activities a challenge. It may be useful to develop a number of alternative quality standards for application to different types of project.

- The balance between the number of indicators under the attributes is uneven. For example, attribute C is based on only one indicator and one quality standard. Some standards appear to be duplicated under other indicators, eg standard 6.3 seems to be the same as 4.9, and 4.2 the same as 3.6.

- The quality framework is a useful tool. However, other methods could be applied in conjunction, in order to build confidence in the validity and reliability of the conclusions.

- The quality standards generally appear to be measuring quality by compliance with a minimum standard rather than by positive qualities such as strategic, responsive, demonstrating initiative.

- The review process is not necessarily comparable with the 1999 QAG process in terms of the benchmark expectations for scoring. For example, a 2 score may well have scored a 3 in the 1999 assessment for the same project, as panel member expectations are likely to be higher now with regard to awareness of sustainability, partner government ownership, gender, peer review, etc. This could be overcome by a calibration assessment of a 1999 project in parallel with the 2002 projects, by the same panel at the same time.

Table 1   **Feedback questionnaire: panel members' scores**

Total sample: 27   N = 23   Questionnaire return rate = 85%

Ratings: 5 = Good practice; 4 = Fully satisfactory; 3 = Satisfactory overall; 2 = Marginally satisfactory; 1 = Weak

Questions

Q1 = Overall process enabled reasonable & rapid understanding of project quality.

Q2 = Effectiveness & efficiency of peer approach

Q3 = Project documentation appropriate & sufficient to enable good understanding of project.

Q4 = Composition of panel allowed adequate discussion of project quality elements.

Q5 = Panel procedure encouraged active, free-input from both panel members and people interviewed

Q6 = Procedure assisted panel to arrive at balanced judgement.

Q7 = Time invested by panel members justified by the project assessment.

Q8 = Time invested by panel members justified by personal development & work gains.

Panel member	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
1	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
2	4	3	4	1	4	2	3	2
3	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	4
4	3	3	4	4	3	2	3	4
5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
6	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4
7	4	5	4	5	5	4	4	4
8	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	3
9	4	3	4	3	3	3	2	3
10	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	3
11	4	5	4	3	5	3	4	4
12	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4
13	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4
14	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
15	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
16	4	4	4	5	5	5	4	5
17	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	4
18	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	3
19	4	3	5	4	4	4	4	5
20	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	5
21	3	4	3	3	2	4	4	4
22	3	4	5	5	4	4	5	5
23	3	4	1	2	3	3	4	4
Mode	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Mean	3.70	3.87	3.83	3.70	3.83	3.65	3.78	3.91

- If the review was looking at the adoption of recommendations from the 1999 quality-at-entry review, the sampling should have selected projects designed in 2000. Most of the activities reviewed by our panel were designed in 1999, possibly before the findings of the earlier review were published. Perhaps this review should have been held six months later.

- It may be useful to have two panels assess the same project in order to assess reliability.

- The point in time at which the project is being evaluated is an issue. In some cases the project had commenced implementation and this had revealed significant weaknesses in the project design document. Was it fair to mark down such projects when other projects had yet to commence implementation (and had yet to be tested against reality)?

- QAG indicators should be built into designer terms of reference. This should be explicit in AusGUIDE. The designs should not be submitted to AusAID unless designers have undertaken a self-assessment using QAG-type indicators.

- In the medium term the QAG scoring system may encourage 'dumbing down' of initiatives to minimise risk of a poor QAG assessment. A far simpler project design that is less ambitious and more likely to achieve its objectives and be sustainable, which is being rewarded through the QAG process, is consistent with a quality program. However, the 'dumbed down' type of activity is probably not consistent with encouraging more innovative and riskier initiatives that QAG members feel less confident about.

Assessment process

- There was some uncertainty about the time at which quality was being measured. Some projects had already commenced implementation and the assessment process was heavily influenced by any design deficiencies revealed during implementation. This issue of when quality at entry is measured raises one the fundamental questions in relation to quality. Is quality best measured at multiple points in the production process or at the point of product completion?

- Assessments should be realistically based on developments on the ground rather than on hopes or promises.

- It is worthwhile for the panel to rigorously assess whether the project concept is sound to start with.

- Face-to-face interviews with Canberra-based project directors and team leaders proved most valuable. Interviews should be scheduled with CSG staff and advisers involved in the design, as well as partner government counterparts.

- Involvement of the relevant desk officer throughout the QAG assessment, not just during a one-hour interview, would be highly valuable.

- It would be useful for QAG to provide information on how previous QAG recommendations assisted in developing design processes.

Panel composition

- Raising the status of the QAG panels improves the prospects of acceptance of their findings and influences middle management. It would be advisable to obtain Executive support for panel leaders to be at the EL2 level. Country program areas should provide senior staff (directors or very experienced country program managers) to provide senior implementers' views to the panels.

- QAGing is a formalised peer review process. QAG panels should comprise a mix of skills and backgrounds, but also reflect a vertical 'slice' through the agency, ie senior management should also participate in reviews, but not in the chairperson role.

- In the interest of efficiently internalising the lessons from these QAG exercises and to make them truly peer processes we should ensure that more desk/recent post officers are involved. It is desirable to have desk officers involved as panel members.

- Panels should comprise representatives from CSG, advisers, country programs, and one other. Panel members should have considerable experience in more than one region/sector.

- QAG panels should avoid potential conflict of interest situations, particularly when sectoral advisers on QAG panels were involved in developing the project design documentation.

- Continuity among panel members over the projects under review is desirable as it strengthens relativity.

- It is essential to have panel leaders do the follow-up to panel reports.

- The low level of input by project stakeholders, especially partner governments, in the QAG process may be a significant weakness as these people are usually the best informed about a project (although, perhaps, also the most biased). Arguably the stakeholders are also in the best position to learn from the QAG process. Currently, feedback is provided via circulating a draft report, which is a rather attenuated form. This circulation provides for limited debate. Perhaps the inclusion of a stakeholder on the panel as a resource person may be useful.

- It may be useful to include an external consultant on the panel.

- The skill mix of panels is not always complete. Our panel lacked a CSG representative and was consequently hesitant in making judgments about the adequacy of the contracting strategy.

Panel operation

- The briefing session prior to the review for panel members and program areas made the process more desk-friendly.

- Panel members should be free of other work obligations during QAGing. At AusAID House, panel members tend to return to their desk during short breaks and sometimes get caught up with work or are distracted from panel work. An outside meeting venue for QAG panels could be a useful enhancement to QAG panel operation.

- Panel members must collectively write the report on the second day.

- It is important to have the section director's input during desk discussion with the panel.

- A field study would be a useful way to calibrate the indicators based on in-country expectations of quality.

- Partner government participation on the QAG process through teleconference interviews would be a worthwhile enhancement.

- The use of a standard set of questions to be asked of stakeholders by the panel would assist in better structuring the interview process while still allowing for some tailored questions on specific issues. These questions (and requisite background briefing on QAG) could be provided to stakeholders in advance of the interview so as to speed discussions.

- Additional secretarial assistance for QAG during the QAG review is essential.

- It is not a good idea for the desk officers to sit in when the panel members are scoring. One doesn't wish to make comments that could hurt people's feelings.

- Use of a laptop computer during panel work is preferable.

- There is a risk of personality-driven biases, eg a dominant panel member or a chair who unduly influences the group.

Professional and learning gains

- The personnel development gains of participating in a QAG panel are significant. Panel members are exposed to wide range of corporate and professional development that is stimulating, informative and relevant to current work. The QAG process is an excellent means of broadening program experience in project design and in the wider context of international best practice. The opportunity to hear the views of experienced AusAID staff, especially advisers on projects, was useful.

- The QAG process is undervalued as a personal development opportunity by the agency.

- AusAID should encourage staff in the agency to be involved in peer reviews of project quality. The terms of reference for everybody working in the agency should include making a contribution to such peer review processes, and everybody should expect to have their work peer reviewed.

- AusAID needs to establish a system of Executive/SES support for the QAG process whereby ADGs and directors provide QAG panel members with time off to undertake QAG exercises. In effect QAG panel members would be considered off line and not expected to return to their regular job until after the assessment each afternoon. AusAID needs a culture (and the SES/Executive needs to show leadership) that recognises and rewards AusAID officers for being involved in QAG panels.

- The QAG process made large demands on the time of panel members, especially those still undertaking their regular workload. Perhaps greater recognition needs to be given to the input required of panel members and arrangements made at a section level to relieve panel members (as far as possible) of their normal work commitments.

- Increasing the flow of desk officers participating in quality reviews could perhaps enhance staff development. This might be achieved by having them observe or participate on a single project being QAGed. Alternatively the QAG process could support more rigorous self-assessments of projects by in-line staff. Do the self-assessments currently undertaken by staff have a sound basis?

Documentation and timing

- The QAG briefing package may include references on logframe approach guidelines and benchmarks of good practice examples. QAG could develop dot-point style benchmarks for what is considered good practice and what is poor practice for each standard as part of the supporting documentation.

- It was appreciated that some desks prepared activity timelines to assist the QAG panels in studying the documentation and getting a better handle of the project preparation stages.

- Where available, mid-term reviews and project completion reports of the preceding phase of the project should be made available to the panel, as well as any inception report.

- The time to read panel documentation proved especially taxing. To avoid insufficient attention being payed to QAGing it is suggested that panels receive documentation far in advance (more than 1 week) and the QAG panel be taken off line and away from AusAID House.

- The overall process enabled a rapid, efficient and reasonable understanding of project quality at entry.

- While participating in five assessments over two weeks was an intensive process, from my perspective it is preferable to extend the assessment process out over three or more weeks with breaks in between project assessments.

Scoring

- The scores tended to measure compliance with processes rather than dimensions of quality that are more broadly understood. Aspects of quality as commonly understood that do not appear to be captured in the scoring are:

    - *efficiency* – is the level of inputs appropriate to achieve the outputs, both for the design process and the ultimate project

    - *effectiveness* – is the project (cost) effective in achieving benefits (both for the design process and the ultimate project), and

    - *appropriateness* – does the project make sense in terms of AusAID's and Australia's comparative advantage in providing aid.

- The significance of the context for quality needs to be resolved. Is quality a measure of the integrity of the design process or the credibility of the final design, or both?

- The rating scale is restrictive. There is a big perceived jump between marginally satisfactory and satisfactory overall.

- In some cases the rating appears to be requesting a judgment about probabilities whereas the scale provides for only 'quality ratings'. Instances include standards 9.1, 10.2, 11.2 and 12.2. Apart from the confusion about how to assign a qualitative score against a quantitative judgment, these indicators appear not to measure how well risk has been managed in the project development but the level of inherent risk in a given project.

- The labelling for the scores is somewhat confusing and value laden. It may be better to have a simpler explanation (1 = unsatisfactory, 3 = satisfactory, 5 = excellent) and let panels work out how to interpolate the ratings.

- For some indicators it may be better to have a clear 'yes or no' option or explicit guidance to score 1 if something was absent or had not been performed. For our panel there were various cases where the document or action that formed the basis of an indicator did not exist or had not been performed and yet the standard was scored at 2 or 3 because the standard was not deemed relevant or important. This situation is aggravated as some standards are expressed in relative terms ('appropriate', 'adequate') while others are expressed in absolute terms ('specific', 'have been').

Methodology

- Test validity is an issue QAG is investigating. At its most basic level this might involve attempting to correlate a project's observed performance in the field against its QAG score. This is likely to be a challenging process – not least of which is the absence of a single unambiguous measure of project performance. It is likely that any attempt to appraise projects in the field would also rely on a broad set of performance indicators. In all likelihood these indicators would prove to be more strongly correlated against quality-at-entry indicators and attributes than the overall project rating.

- Going to the field should be valuable to QAG in clarifying what indicators and attributes have a real impact and what the relative weight of those indicators and attributes are.

- The QAG process should perhaps be aimed explicitly at outcomes such as ensuring that project preparation is procedurally correct, professionally undertaken and produces an outcome that should result in substantial benefit to target groups (ie compliance, quality and performance dimensions).

- Most of the effort of QAG appears to be directed at objective 1 while objectives 2 and 3 are dealt with in a less intensive manner by the panel. It may be useful to request the panel (with stakeholder input) to undertake an analysis of each project's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (I always think that opportunities and threats are worth identifying) as well as inviting suggestions for improving quality.

Feedback from other interviewees

The responses to the questionnaire (table 2) indicate that the interviewees rated the review process as satisfactory overall. The mode for 9 of 10 questions was 4 (on the 1 to 5 scale). This is a significant improvement on the 1999 results for which the mode was 3 for 7 of the 10 questions. The highest scoring feedback was the opportunity to have staff views known, where the participants rated this as good practice (5). The lowest scoring question concerned documentation collected from the desk, rated as satisfactory (3). On average, it takes half an hour of the desk officer's time to get the project documentation together and another hour to prepare a project preparation path timeline.

Table 2 **Feedback questionnaire: interviewees' scores** Feedback from desk, post, sectors and CSG

Total sample: 45   N = 21   Questionnaire return rate = 46%

Ratings: 5 = Good practice; 4 = Fully satisfactory; 3 = Satisfactory overall; 2 = Marginally satisfactory; 1 = Weak

Questions

Q1 = Document collection onerous for staff involved.

Q2 = Interview scheduling process.

Q3 = Panel composition

Q4 = Usefulness of the QAE assessment form.

Q5 = Opportunity of staff to have their views known.

Q6 = Report drafting and finalisation procedures. Time allowed for feedback.

Q7 = Learning gain

Q8 = Usefulness of the QAE assessment to the staff's work.

Q9 = Time required of staff for the process.

Q10 = Panel's overall operations

No.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
1	na	2	3	3	4	4	3	3	4	4
2	na	3	4	5	3	3	5	5	4	5
3	3	4	4	5	5	3	4	4	5	5
4	4	3	4	4	5	4	3	3	3	4
5	3	2	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
6	3	3		2	3	3	1	1	1	
7	2	3	4	2	3	3	3	2	2	3
8	3	3	3	3	4	2	3	3	2	3
9	4	3	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	5
10	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	3	4
11	4	4	5	4	5	4	3	4	4	4
12		1	4	3	4	4	3	4	3	3
13	3	4	4	3	4	3	3	3	4	4
14	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	3	3	3
15	3	3	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4
16	3	5	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	4
17	4	4		4	5	1	2	3	3	
18	3	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4
19	2	4	3	1	4	3	1	1	1	2
20	4	4	3	5	5	5	4	5	5	5
21	3	4	4	4	5	3	4	4	3	3
Mode	3	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4
Mean	3.22	3.33	3.74	3.52	4.19	3.43	3.24	3.33	3.24	3.68

na Not applicable.

In addition to responding to specific questions, some interviewees provided written comments.

- There was some confusion over whether the desks or the QAG panel was scheduling interviews with the Australian managing agent in the field.

- For the Lae city water supply project, the activity was largely undertaken using the CASP delivery mechanism and, as such, it was not appropriate to be QAGed.

- There is a need to be convinced that a rapid assessment can produce a satisfactory outcome, particularly in the case of the project that had undergone a re-scope since the time it was initially mobilised. It is desirable for the outcome to be utility focused (ie the quality-at-entry questions and focus are geared to getting an outcome that people can actually use).

- The QAG review was very useful. Not only was the actual committee discussion useful, but just having the chance to sit down and reflect on the main strategic issues for the project at hand in preparation of the QAG review was very valuable. It is an exercise that helps you to cut through the detail to the key strategic areas for project quality and helps to improve the quality of ongoing implementation.

- The QAG process gives authority to the desk's concerns for quality in the project and gives country program areas momentum to pursue them. There often isn't a financial incentive for Australian managing agents to respond to concerns raised by desks and posts (as they are often focused on the day-to-day issues and the next milestone payment); it is a credibility issue with the agents. So activity managers then have the impetus to pursue higher order issues.

- The process was painless and rewarding for the post. There are limitations with phone conferences, which tend to restrict much of the post's involvement. It would have been good to get a little bit of warning of the phone conference. Both of my interviews were at the end of very busy week when I was away for 4 days.

- It would help if the panel advised beforehand of the major issues they had with the project (via a few dot points). This would reduce repetition and encourage discussion on areas of interest or concern.

- There were no real problems with the QAG process and we got a good score so I'm not complaining. I am happy to be QAGed again.

- The panel's flexibility with phone interview times is appreciated.

- The panel interview with the desk officer was lengthy and comprehensive, which is justified. It is recommended that an hour be allocated to the desk to enable the panel to fully explore the context and risks, and balance out the over-reliance on documentation.

- Overall, the process was very impressive, as was the panel's ability to get across a project so quickly – a valuable exercise to understand project and program quality.

Attachment 23.1
Draft action plan for implementing recommendations
– 1999 QAG review of the risk and success of projects

1. Recommendations for managing risk and improving success

Recommendation	Action proposed	Action timing	Work areas
1.1 Risk assessment and management should be an integral part of project preparation and implementation.	Prepare case studies setting out examples of good quality risk analysis in a range of project contexts and stages, to be used as models to guide desks and contractors.	Short term	QAG QUAL
	Update AusGUIDE CPRAMP section, prepare materials and deliver risk-handling training for AusAID country programs and posted staff. Improve risk elements of terms of reference and briefings for preparation and implementation contractors.		QUAL QAG Program areas CSG
	Use risk updates as contract payment milestones.		
1.2 Greater effort should be directed at ensuring that projects are appraised in an independent and professional manner.	Review the quality of 10 recent appraisals selected at random and make recommendations for change in process, resources or staff training as necessary.	Short term	QAG
	Reinforce AusGUIDE appraisal guidelines to make clear the need for appraisal to be independent of design. Reconsider the idea that redesign/revision of the project design document is part of the appraisal process. Avoid appraisal becoming the new design.		QUAL Peer reviews
	Make clear the need to appraise inception and other substantial redesign events.		
	Fully document appraisals in activity preparation brief and project event register.		
	Increase the level of partner government involvement in appraisal by more frequently discussing appraisal notes by the post and the partner government.		
1.3 A sustainability strategy should be developed early in project preparation and be subject to ongoing review during implementation.	Complete a sustainability study (see also 2.2).	Medium term	QAG
	Use study outputs to strengthen AusGUIDE sustainability sections in preparation and implementation.		QUAL
	Cover generic sustainability issues as a separate part of country strategy development.		Program areas
	Inject and test innovative approaches to sustainability in selected existing projects and monitor outcomes.		

1. Recommendations for managing risk and improving success (continued)

Recommendation	Action proposed	Action timing	Work areas
1.4 Clear, relevant and realistic project objectives should be prepared and steps taken to ensure firm partner government commitment.	Develop criteria for realism by country and sector, based on recent project experience.	Medium term	Program areas
	Discuss and agree criteria between desk, post and sector advisers.		
	Make criteria widely available and use them to make better judgments on realism of objectives at preparation, appraisal and inception or review stages.		
	Reconsider work priorities of posted staff to increase resources applied to pipeline projects and ensure that new projects have high partner government priority.		
	Increase visiting resources for in-country program planning and high-level consultation preparation.		
	Give additional selection weighting to design proposals that include professional local participants.		
	Reduce assistance where partner government is chronically uncommitted.		
1.5 Where project risks are high, consideration should be given to phased implementation.	Highlight consideration of phasing in design team's terms of reference and briefing (through AusGUIDE).	Short term	QAG QUAL
	Survey desks need to understand why stop/go milestones are not already widely used to stimulate performance in early phases.		CSG
	Where staffing or political factors make stop/go difficult, prepare case studies to show desks how to vary level of assistance to components in later phases, according to the level of performance in early phases.		
	Use the risk analysis (1.1) to set risk levels above which phasing is mandatory.		
1.6 Efforts should be made to improve contractor reporting and AusAID monitoring.	Simplify and standardise contractor reporting but lift quality of reports by providing patterns, training and feedback.	Medium term	Program areas CSG QAG QUAL
	Avoid excessive use of reports as contract payment milestones.		
	Reassess AusAID monitoring processes, especially preparation and use of activity monitoring brief.		
	Identify changes in AusAID monitoring that are seen to help junior staff to do their job as well as provide information to higher level managers.		
	Provide models for feedback on reports and develop a reward system for prompt response to monitoring information, eg report-specific good practice in *Quality Quarterly* newsletter.		

2. Recommendations to improve AusAID processes

Recommendation	Action proposed	Action timing	Work areas
2.1 Undertake further assessment of the activity monitoring brief process to improve its use as a monitoring tool.	Review the preparation and use of activity monitoring briefs at posts, by desks and by senior management.	Medium term	QAG EVAL QUAL
	Assess contribution of activity monitoring briefs (as presently used) to project outcomes.		
	Recommend changes in the content of activity monitoring briefs, their preparation and approval procedures to improve the value of the tool within an overall AusAID monitoring framework.		
	Secure agreement to test a revised activity monitoring brief system in one country. Amend and apply across AusAID.		
2.2 Undertake a study of sustainability.	See 1.3. Report outcomes of study and innovation tests. Rewrite AusGUIDE sections.	Medium term	QAG QUAL
	Classify countries by generic sustainability level and suggest project strategies most likely to be useful in each class.		QAG Program areas
	Develop and fund low-level post-project support/weaning systems (eg Thailand Ubon Land Reform) and monitor effect on sustainability. These might include local NGO or private sector activities.		
2.3 Develop a system for ensuring dissemination and use of good practice examples.	Write up good practice examples from QAG assessments and place in project context for use as models.	Medium term	QUAL
	Incorporate these examples in relevant sections of AusGUIDE and in staff training programs and disseminate further using the intranet, a *Quality Quarterly* newsletter, etc.		
2.4 Consider the introduction of 'at risk' flags into guidelines for project preparation and implementation.	Discuss risk factors with desks, posts and sector advisers and agree on two lists of 5–8 risk indicators, one for projects in preparation and one for implementation.	Medium term	QAG EVAL PDU Program areas
	Train desk and post staff in assessment of these indicators.		
	Assess all projects at identification and, if they have poor scores for two risk indicators, subject them to additional care in preparation. If they score poorly for three indicators, consider carefully whether to proceed.		
	For projects in implementation, assess each indicator at the time of approval of annual plan and, if a project scores poorly on two indicators, revise plan, mount review or take other appropriate action.		

2. Recommendations to improve AusAID processes (continued)

Recommendation	Action proposed	Action timing	Work areas
2.5 Address gender analysis requirements.	Prepare case study and distribute good practice example (Indonesia Healthy Mothers & Babies).	Medium term	QAG QUAL
	Make clear in AusGUIDE the need to carry gender attention through from design to implementation, reporting and monitoring response.		QUAL
	Use gender outcome and indicator as payment milestone.		CSG Program areas
2.6 Introduce a standardised but simple system for recording project preparation processes.	Design and test a register of key project events and documents to be kept in front of current project file.	Short term	Program areas
	Circulate register to desks, explain and justify their use by reference to desk staff turnover and review/evaluation needs.		

Reviewing project quality

AusAID procedures for rapidly reviewing the quality of Australian aid activities

This work-in-progress document summarises the steps taken in six reviews of project quality conducted between 1999 and 2002. It presents the practical knowledge gained during those reviews as a general guide for future evaluations of Australian aid projects. The procedures will continue to be updated to reflect improvements to the QAG process.

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