



# Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade response:

## Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme aged care expansion end of program evaluation report

This document has been developed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). It responds to the recommendations set out by Clear Horizon in the aged care expansion (ACE) end of program evaluation report.

Recommendation		DFAT response	
1.	Given PALM scheme sending countries' aspirations about future PALM scheme aged care employment opportunities, a decision about multi-year funding is made as soon as possible to avoid PALM scheme employer/Registered Training Organisation (RTO) attrition and provide assurance to sending countries.	Agree	Design of next PALM scheme care skilling program to outline funding arrangements, with multi-year funding to be considered.
2.	Work is undertaken to understand Australian aged care providers' anticipated demand for PALM scheme workers to inform decisions about what is a feasible scale for a future PALM scheme care skilling program (in terms of worker numbers) in the short and longer-term.	Agree	Consult with current and potential future PALM scheme employers and map anticipated demand, building on existing data collection. A broader market analysis will also be considered.
3.	The optimal balance between PALM scheme employer and sending country interests is defined which fosters demand while managing sending countries' expectations of PALM	Agree	Outline in the new PALM scheme care skilling program how it aims to respond to both PALM scheme employer and sending countries' interests, noting the PALM scheme is a demand-driven program and most PALM scheme sending countries have ambitions for greater PALM scheme aged

	scheme aged care participation in line with their broader social and economic development ambitions.		care participation. Consultations will explore this aiming to embed mechanisms into the program design that manage expectations of program participation.
4.	A funding allocation method is developed that addresses both PALM scheme employer demand and sending country participation aspirations.	To be considered	Consider Clear Horizon's recommendations on a hybrid funding allocation method and consult on potential methods, with the allocation method to be articulated in the next PALM scheme care skilling program design.
5.	A design document (which includes an intervention logic) is developed for a new PALM scheme care skilling program and all other skills investment projects. The document could be based on a template for skills investment designs which would assist cross-investment comparison. The template includes a monitoring and evaluation framework.	To be considered	Consider developing a standard program design document for PALM scheme skills investments incorporating an intervention logic and monitoring and evaluation framework.
6.	<p>The deadlines for training completion for a new PALM scheme care skilling program and other skills investments involving Australian Qualifications Framework qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are aligned with the Australian Skills Quality Authority's (ASQA) guidelines for the volume of learning for qualification completion, not DFAT funding cycles</li> <li>account for labour sending units (LSU) standard PALM scheme mobilisation processing times (generally 5 - 6 weeks from submission of recruitment plan) to avoid PALM scheme employers having to recruit and mobilise workers quickly, placing pressure on LSUs, workers and their families.</li> </ul>	Agree	Ensure PALM scheme care skilling program participants have the time to complete their training set out in ASQA's guidelines and mobilisation timeframes are the same as standard PALM scheme mobilisation timeframes.
7.	<p>To mitigate the risk of a PALM scheme employer's job placement failing to eventuate in a timely manner (as has occurred with three of the five ACE 2024 PALM scheme employers), a two-tier system for allocating ACE worker numbers to PALM scheme employers is implemented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PALM scheme employers, both labour hire and direct employers, who are new to the ACE</li> </ul>	To be considered	Explore both recommendations during the design of the next PALM scheme care skilling program while seeking alignment with standard PALM scheme settings.

	<p>program, aged care sector and/or the PALM scheme, are initially allocated a smaller number of workers until they demonstrate capacity to mobilise placements efficiently</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>labour hire and direct PALM scheme employers who are aged care industry specialists and have a track record in the PALM scheme are allocated the worker numbers they request (within caps under the PALM scheme Approved Employer Deed and Guidelines, and subject to decisions of LSUs).</li> </ul>		
8.	<p>There is greater accountability for PALM scheme employers to make timely use of aged care skilling funding by mobilising workers within a reasonable period, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a clause is included in the ACE Subcontractor Agreement stating the expectation that workers will be mobilised within a reasonable time (e.g. two months) after recruitment/completion of training, unless unanticipated delays occur (e.g. LSU-related reasons; flight delays). If workers are not mobilised by a specified number of weeks after completion of in-country study, other PALM scheme employers will be invited to recruit from the worker cohort.</li> <li>in the case of mobilisation delays, PALM scheme employers are requested to pay workers a stipend after a defined period at their own cost (not a cost to the program). This will help to lessen financial hardship for workers caused by the delay, especially for those who left paid employment to undertake an in-country course</li> <li>ACE PALM scheme employers maintain regular communication with LSU staff, especially regarding any specific requirements for recruitment and mobilisation; and</li> </ul>	<b>To be considered</b>	<p>Explore new and alternative models for ensuring timely mobilisation of workers in the design of next PALM scheme care skilling program, including those recommended.</p> <p>Explore what communication requirements and protocols can be included in the next PALM scheme care skilling program design.</p>

	potential/actual delays in worker mobilisation so this information can be communicated to workers and their expectations managed.		
9.	<p>LSUs ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>aged care candidates in the work ready pool have the digital skills required for online study and assessment</li> <li>people considering becoming an aged care candidate are made aware there may be a delay in leaving for Australia following selection by a PALM scheme employer.</li> </ul>	<b>To be considered</b>	Engage with LSUs on expectation management for potential future participants in a care skilling program and on the skills required to participate in a program that could involve online study and assessment. To also consider how the government can support these skills needs in the next PALM scheme care skilling program design and PALM scheme skills strategy.
10.	DFAT consults the Samoan Government to determine its interest in leading a skills transfer pilot for PALM scheme workers from the NT-Samoa Aged Care pilot (who are due to return home in September 2025) to integrate returning workers' skills into Samoa's health system and to identify opportunities (paid and unpaid) for returned workers to use their skills in their communities.	<b>Agree</b>	Consult with the Samoan Government on this recommendation and consider linkages to broader reintegration work.
11.	New ACE PALM scheme employers are encouraged to put arrangements in place that have been shown to contribute to worker study success, such as access to a laptop for study and assessment; regular rostered (paid) study days; daytime (not night-time) shifts and limits on the amount of overtime worked.	<b>To be considered</b>	Consider what encouragement and guidelines can be provided to PALM scheme employers in the next PALM care skilling program design, noting each employer will also have their own shift and overtime processes, while also meeting the requirements of the PALM scheme Approved Employer Deed and Guidelines.
12.	PALM scheme employers/RTOs undertaking in-country training are informed about worker feedback from the evaluation interviews, especially about individualised learning support being limited by tutor/class size; financial support for transport costs and for students to buy expensive internet data for online learning.	<b>Agree</b>	ACE evaluation report to be published on the PALM scheme website and consultations will also discuss feedback with PALM scheme aged care employers and RTOs.
13.	More preparation of LSUs for new skills investments especially in sectors about which LSU staff may be unfamiliar as was the case with aged care (other than Fiji, no other sending country has a formal aged care sector).	<b>To be considered</b>	Consultations, including those already underway, will test the assumption that LSUs require additional preparation for new skills investments.

	This could include visits to PALM scheme workplaces to better understand the workplace environment, the nature of the work, and PALM scheme employers' requirements for worker recruitment.		
14.	<p>Ensure alignment with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>skills investment initiatives by other agencies, such as the World Bank's work on Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Tonga, and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority's multi-year project on qualification recognition</li> <li>work being done on reintegration such as DFAT's partnership with the International Organisation for Migration; the Pacer Plus Implementation Unit's reintegration project to begin in 2025.</li> </ul>	Agree	Consultations, including those already underway, seek to ensure alignment with other Pacific skills investment initiatives, and relevant engagement will continue throughout the design of the next PALM scheme care skilling program and PALM scheme skills strategy.