



Australian Government  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



# Australian Strategic Partnerships in Remote Education

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The Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

19 Prospect Hill Road

Camberwell VIC 3124

Phone: (03) 9277 5555

ABN 19 004 398 145

[www.acer.org](http://www.acer.org)

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## Introduction

Australian Strategic Partnerships in Remote Education (ASPIRE) connects Australian experience and expertise in remote education with partners in the Indo-Pacific region to support learning continuity, access, and equity in response to COVID-19 school disruptions. This report synthesises post-project participant feedback and offers recommendations for future ASPIRE partnerships.

ASPIRE is managed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) on behalf of the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as part of DFAT's *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response*.

## What is ASPIRE?

ASPIRE is about collaboration, sharing expertise and supporting our regional partners during the COVID-19 pandemic. ASPIRE connects Australian education experts with our counterparts in the Indo-Pacific, benefiting both teachers and students during the challenges of remote learning.

ASPIRE responds to the demand for quality education during repeated COVID-19 lockdowns and reduced face-to-face teaching. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted global learning and multiplied the challenges in accessing education, particularly for disadvantaged students. Education institutions want to see their teachers deliver quality remote lessons and their students actively engaged throughout repeated lockdowns. This is highly aspirational, even for the most resilient and well-funded education systems.

**ASPIRE is an innovative collaboration between Australian expertise in distance education and our neighbours.**

Importantly, it is demand driven, positioned to meet requests from partners to fulfill their diverse educational needs. From teacher training, curriculum development, and assessment modification through to community outreach, each ASPIRE partnership enriches the capacity of schools, universities, and education systems to continue delivering engaging content throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.



## How does ASPIRE work?

ASPIRE brings together government, institutional and community partners to support continuity of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Australia is a well-established provider of education, teacher professional development and quality remote learning. Our expertise in distance education was developed and refined over 100 years of online and radio teaching in diverse regional and remote communities.

Australia's reputation as a leading education provider is well-recognised. Our capacity to rapidly adapt systems and policies to support remote learning practice during school disruptions has provided partners with new ideas and approaches for adapting their own responses. In its pilot phase, ASPIRE partnerships have strengthened collaboration between Australian and Indo-Pacific institutions and promoted the value of Australian expertise in remote teaching and learning to key counterparts in government, tertiary institutions, community organisations and teachers.

Feedback from the three ASPIRE partnerships has been overwhelmingly positive.

**There is strong demand for the partnerships and a desire to continue to build on proven success.**

Indo-Pacific partners expressed confidence in learning new teaching techniques and skills, online delivery modes and student-centred approaches for remote learning.

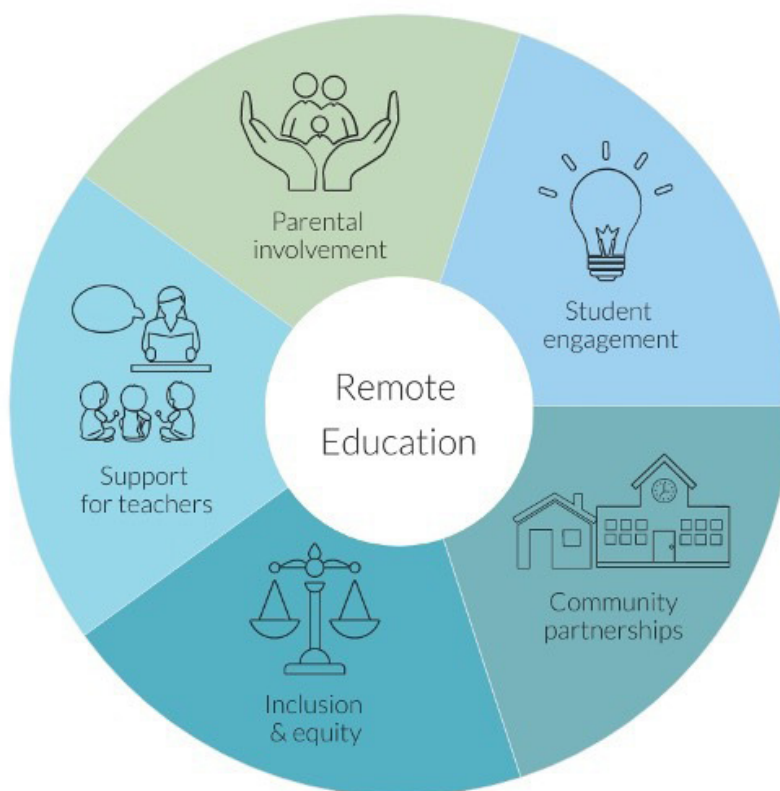


## Key findings

### Access to learning is a major challenge during COVID-19 lockdowns, especially for disadvantaged students.

ASPIRE partnerships have supported continuity of student learning and access to education in the Indo-Pacific at a time when all education providers are facing challenges around technology, student engagement, teacher confidence, and resource allocation due to COVID-19 lockdowns. Many in the region don't have connectivity, computer access or even photocopy facilities, and students may not have a computer, phone, or internet connectivity at home to access digital learning content. As in every educational context, disadvantage is amplified by lack of access to quality teaching and learning resources.

### Remote education programs are most effective when they incorporate five key principles.



## ASPIRE responded to remote teaching and learning priorities of in-country partners.

The ASPIRE pilot phase was responsive to in-country demand from Indo-Pacific governments and organisations who identified support for teachers and community partnerships as their greatest capacity gaps in transitioning to remote teaching and learning.

Many teachers lacked confidence with aspects of educational technology and had limited skills or experience to deliver online learning. A significant number of students are being left behind because there's little support to access education remotely. The lack of hardware, connectivity or motivation is compounding disadvantage.

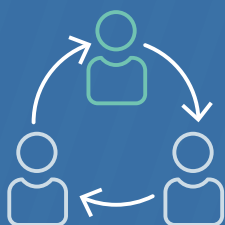
## ASPIRE has expanded regional partnerships.

The ASPIRE partnerships have been mutually beneficial. Indo-Pacific teachers, teacher trainers and practitioners have been upskilled in remote teaching techniques, digital resources and tools. Policymakers and administrators have been introduced to Australian best practices in high-quality teaching and learning to inform their own policies and practices in the delivery of remote education. ASPIRE facilitated opportunities for Australian institutions to expand their networks and form new linkages with Indo-Pacific governments and organisations, providing the foundations for enduring educational partnerships between Australia and its regional neighbours. ASPIRE partnerships are contributing to resilient education systems with long-term economic benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

The successful and far reaching ASPIRE pilot program is due to conclude this year, but the new partnerships have created momentum and demand for continued Australian support for quality remote teaching and learning approaches. The partnerships can successfully meet the capacity needs of Indo-Pacific organisations to lead and implement remote education policies and practices to support equity of access and continuity of learning.

## ASPIRE Partnership One: Innovative Online Learning for Lao Lecturers

*Monash College and Laos Ministry of Education and Sports*



**364**

Active engagements and collaboration on the online forum



**58%**

Participants with some experience and low confidence in learning management systems before the course



**89%**

Participants who feel confident training other teachers in learning management systems after the course



**71%**

Participants who completed the entire course



**80%**

Participants who would recommend the course to other lecturers and teacher trainers



**89%**

Participants who think parents and the community play a role in the success of remote education after the course

## Partnership Overview

Over the last two years teachers in Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) introduced student-centred learning for the first time as they embraced a new primary curriculum, all while navigating the challenges of schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this ASPIRE partnership, the Lao Department of Teacher Education requested Monash College to develop interactive virtual workshops and a series of self-learning modules for Teacher Training College lecturers and pedagogical advisors, delivered on a digital learning platform. For many, it was the first time they engaged collaboratively with colleagues on a digital learning platform; it was their first insight into student-centred learning; and it was their first experience with online teaching pedagogy.

## Outcomes

Feedback from the participants was very positive, with many asking for the same training for their colleagues. Teacher trainers, teachers and principals learnt from watching Monash College experts deliver the training, as well as engaging with content on the digital learning platform.

**The course was collaborative, and the partnership provided opportunities for participants to share ideas and experiences with their colleagues.**

Participants acknowledged that this new learner-centred approach had obvious benefits for online learning, and they ultimately hoped to apply it in a classroom setting.

For many of the Lao lecturers who participated in the training, the project gave them an insight into the benefits of growing a community of practice, resource sharing, and supporting colleagues with best practice tools and advice. They were proud to be a part of something bigger, and eager to continue supporting their students.

Future expansion of the project could include supporting teachers by faculty, or enhancing accommodations and adjustments for the special needs of student groups, such as those with a disability, gifted students, or at-risk students. Participants expressed a desire to develop a resource repository and discover further tools for online student engagement and assessment.





## Lessons Learned

- Australian expertise and Monash College's reputation as teaching experts is well recognised and highly valued.
- Immersive learning (by watching experts deliver training remotely through a learning management system) is highly valued, providing participants with the experience of online learning tools and approaches from a student perspective.
- There is a high level of collaboration and engagement between participants, creating the foundation for a community of practice through the sharing of ideas and practices that support remote learning.
- Teacher confidence in resources to support remote teaching and learning improved.
- Internet connectivity and digital access for remote learning was not a barrier for most participants.
- There was enhanced awareness of the importance of parents and community to teaching success.



## ASPIRE Partnership Two: Reviewing Samoa's Remote Learning Options

*The Queensland Department of Education and Samoa's  
Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture*



**82%**

Households with a television



**90%**

Households with a mobile phone



**90%**

Students relying on printed resources for learning materials, as reported by Samoan schools



**1 in 5**

Number of teachers with a laptop



**1 in 10**

Families with a computer at home



**25GB**

Internet data plan for a school with 50 teachers, used up in a week. Broadband bandwidth and stability are unreliable.

## Partnership Overview

This ASPIRE partnership between the Queensland Department of Education and the Samoan Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC) provided an in-depth analysis of Samoa's options for the delivery of consistent, quality, remote learning. The Samoan Response to Remote Learning during Covid-19 School Closures was prepared by the Queensland Department of Education to assess access to education in Samoa during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the many challenges faced by teachers and students in Samoa during COVID-19 lockdowns and the measles outbreak in 2019, a major problem was limited access to both internet and computers. Schools generally have poor connectivity, and only one in ten families have a computer at home. Throughout lockdowns, teachers have been frustrated by both technical problems and their inability to monitor student progress and engagement. Students do not upload completed worksheets and teachers cannot visit them at home to monitor wellbeing.

Most households in Samoa are rural, though over 90 per cent have a mobile phone, opening the possibility for MESC to deliver content for mobile remotely, supplemented by traditional modes such as radio, TV, and paper-based kits.

## Outcomes

The report produced under ASPIRE recommends infrastructure spending and enhanced connectivity to schools, staff, students, and communities to support a resilient and responsive learning framework. Additional needs were identified by the report:

- training for teachers in digital literacies and pedagogies;
- quality digital learning resources; and
- access to learning management systems.

The report concluded that students need lessons available on mobile phones and schools need learning packages ready to go as soon as lockdowns are announced.

**The system needs a consistent, quality, hybrid approach to deliver simultaneous face-to-face and remote learning, and to monitor student engagement and wellbeing during lockdowns.**



Communities need protocols for maintaining communication during emergencies, including health emergencies like a COVID-19 outbreak and natural hazards. The report recommended that MESC would need to produce, print, and disseminate learning materials, especially as paper-based learning remains popular, particularly for younger students and disadvantaged learners.

MESC also needs to invest in online learning and offer teachers professional development to build skills and confidence in diverse learning contexts. The report provides a timely analysis of the needs of Samoa's education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic and supports MESC to make focused decisions for successful remote learning options for all students.



## Lessons Learned

- Television is the most accessible and effective remote learning mode.
- Mobile phones present an opportunity.
- The most cost effective and sustainable model for village schools is a mobile network, 4G or satellite solution.
- Parent engagement is critical for supporting effective remote learning.
- Teachers need to gain skills and knowledge in digital learning design and pedagogy to facilitate effective teaching and learning.



Photo: The Australian Government's  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



## ASPIRE Partnership Three: Promoting Science to Students in the Pacific

*Australian National University's Centre for Public  
Awareness of Science and Pacific*



**11**

Locally produced  
educational resources



**15**

Capacity building  
workshops delivered



**18**

Key partnerships  
across 4 countries



**506**

Students and  
teachers engaged



**36**

Demonstration videos  
produced



**743,000**

Views across all videos

## Partnership Overview

The Australian National University's Centre for Public Awareness of Science (CPAS) is a vibrant ASPIRE partnership with organisations in Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, and Tuvalu. The partnerships aim to build Pacific capacity to deliver science education through training, outreach, video production, and peer-to-peer networking. The ASPIRE partnership resulted in 15 training workshops and engaged almost 200 educators on how to deliver hands-on science lessons and create digital content to support remote teaching and learning.

Teachers, lecturers, and education providers received training in the use of online and remote teaching practices to deliver science lessons that are aligned to the national curriculum in each country. They were supported in producing high-quality demonstration videos that could be used as a teaching resource to support students' home learning. As part of their assessment, primary school students watched science shows and developed their own recycling schemes; high school students shared science videos they created online and experimented with solar kits; and university students conducted science experiments using digital technology.

**Access to digital equipment is a major challenge for teachers in the Pacific, who often lack the skill and the technology to deliver online lessons during school closures.**

Pacific partners benefited from the training opportunities and equipment provided with the project, such as webcams, solar kits, class booklets, and video sites. These resources are perfectly suited to the current remote learning context, ensuring teachers have the appropriate materials to engage their students during home learning and provide a foundation for improved teaching practice and student learning.

## Outcomes

The project is far reaching, with social media channels and a growing number of student videos produced on science topics. The first science video competitions in Samoa and Kiribati attracted entries on topics from erosion to melting ice caps, showing how climate change and its impacts was top of mind for students. Two winners were primary school girls, proving the effectiveness of the project in reaching girls in STEM, one of DFAT's priorities.

Key partners played a central role in ensuring the success of the project.

- In **Samoa**, CPAS engaged NGO partners including, Imagine Samoa, Brown Girl Woke, and 350 Samoa. All groups actively run programs for students, teachers and the wider community and are well placed to disseminate digital content to support remote learning in the case of future school closures.
- Key partners in **Fiji** were the University of the South Pacific and the University of Fiji. For these institutions, the prolonged lockdown in Fiji created an impetus for lecturers to trial innovative remote teaching methods with the support and mentoring of CPAS. Lecturers from both institutions reported learning as much from the content as they did from observing the pedagogical approaches used by CPAS lecturers. There are plans to create and publish more demonstration videos on the university websites for student access and the integration of online tools as part of student learning assessments.
- In **Kiribati**, CPAS partnered with the Kiribati Teachers College and the Ministry of Education to deliver intensive teacher training sessions and produce teaching resources aligned to the national curriculum.
- In **Tuvalu**, CPAS helped develop and distribute teaching resources and teaching guides to support remote teaching and learning.

The outreach initiatives of this ASPIRE project are extensive. Hundreds of students and teachers are benefitting from the curriculum content delivered through science shows, professional development, and digital content production. Videos by teachers and students are a valuable learning tool linked to the curriculum. Locally-produced content is extremely relevant to each island nation's unique context. Lessons on how to harness social media and produce effective videos are a key part of the project's outreach and community engagement goals. Importantly, the ASPIRE activities have helped to bring together educators from across the four Pacific countries to share their learnings and successes through regional networking events. This has provided a platform for critical exchange and knowledge sharing in climate change communications that has expanded to other CPAS networks in the Asia Pacific region.



## Lessons Learned

- Increased awareness and demand for Australian expertise in remote education from teachers, students, ministries officials, tertiary institutions, and community organisations.
- Enhanced skills and knowledge in remote education practices is critical.
- Connectivity and access to digital resources are barriers to effective remote teaching and learning.
- Community outreach and virtual communities of practice are important to support continued professional learning for teachers.
- Social media is a valuable tool as a platform to facilitate online learning in the Pacific.



Photo: The Australian Government's  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



## Recommendations

1

Future partnerships should embrace a combination of high-tech, low-tech and no-tech remote learning solutions to support the diverse learning contexts of the Indo-Pacific.

Access to technology remains a major barrier to delivering quality, inclusive, remote education. Across the three partnerships, teachers expressed concern about the limitations of current tools and platforms available to students and teachers. They were concerned about supporting students with learning via technology, even where the infrastructure was available. Teachers questioned if their students have the required hardware, software, digital skill, and self-regulation to engage with online learning. For future delivery, greater emphasis could be placed on exploring the various options available for teachers and students who may need to adopt a low-tech or no-tech model.

2

Support teachers with a repertoire of skills to teach to a range of learners and contexts.

Through ASPIRE partnerships, teachers learned how to deliver engaging remote lessons, sometimes without the foundational basics of technology, resources or student assessment. In some countries, teachers can't produce learning materials for their remote students. Educators need new skills and knowledge to deliver remote lessons effectively and to adapt to changing contexts. This includes providing access to resources and professional learning opportunities, as well as opportunities to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing among teachers.

3

Address the learning gaps and the impact of school disruptions on the most disadvantaged students.

Disadvantaged students are more likely to disconnect from school entirely, losing the opportunity to build a stable future. This loss of student potential has devastating consequences for future human capital, social cohesion, and prospects for recovery. Future partnerships should aim to focus on improving student engagement during remote learning and prioritise flexible, remedial pathways for students at-risk of dropping out. This requires the involvement of parents and the community as facilitators of home learning and support for the transition back to the classroom when schools reopen.

## 4

A framework to transition from emergency remote education to a more sustainable education model is needed to support teachers in effective teaching and learning.

One of Australia's key strengths is evidence-informed policies that support remote education programs, including professional standards and regulatory frameworks, like teacher accreditation. Many countries may not have a framework of professional teaching standards, or even professional development for teachers. Indeed, teaching standards were only recently introduced to Australian schools and universities and are continually undergoing refinement as awareness around professional requirements and the diverse needs of students grows.

## 5

ASPIRE enhances the capacity of Australian partners to collaborate, share and contextualise Australian experiences, policies, practices, and tools in remote education with Indo-Pacific partners.

ASPIRE partnerships have proven to be relevant and effective in delivering demand-driven, scalable, remote teaching solutions in the Indo-Pacific region. Recognising that continuity and equity at all levels of education are vital to stability, economic recovery, and poverty reduction during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, Australian organisations could support skills building in remote learning by expanding the successful ASPIRE Indo-Pacific partnerships.





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