

ANU-UPNG partnership phase 2 completion report (2021-2025)

February 2026

“This book is yet another example of the value of working with our international friends. Good, long-lasting, institutional partnerships are critical for building our nation’s capacity. I have been a strong supporter of the UPNG-ANU partnership. I would strongly support another phase and will take this view to the Ministerial talks in Canberra later this year.

My congratulations to UPNG, the ANU and everyone else involved in producing this extraordinary book on PNG’s economic history since independence.”

Hon Mr Ian Ling-Stuckey, PNG Treasurer, speaking at the launch of the [*Struggle, reform, boom and bust: an economic history of Papua New Guinea since independence*](#) 20 August 2025 at the University of Papua New Guinea

“It is important to highlight that aside from increasing local staff capability, student numbers and course offerings, there has also been a significant modernisation of the curriculum and pedagogical approach. Key informants interviewed for this evaluation highlighted the shift that has taken place over the years with a greater focus on critical thinking and understanding concepts, as opposed to rote learning, this has resulted in higher grades as evidenced by ANU Economics Exam testing. These efforts have resulted in hundreds of PNG undergraduate and postgraduate students receiving a much higher quality economics and public policy education than would otherwise have been the case.”

A case study of the ANU-UPNG Partnership as part of the mid-term review of APEP program by Palladium, June 2025.



Summer School students with ANU staff and friends.

This report is a final deliverable under Phase 2 of the ANU-UPNG partnership. It is written by Andrew A Mako, Dr Nematullah Bizhan, and Professor Stephen Howes, of ANU's Development Policy Centre with the assistance of various colleagues. The authors would like to thank all the many ANU and UPNG colleagues who have not only provided input to the report, but have also contributed over the years in so many ways to the success of the ANU-UPNG partnership.

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Executive Summary

Background

Decades of experience have shown that reform to boost development and reduce poverty only succeeds when it is home-grown, not externally imposed. For this reform to occur, a country needs a cadre of good economists and public policy experts, both to work in government and to promote public discussion of key policy issues.

While the University of Papua New Guinea economics department has a proud history, by 2010 it had become run down, with senior staff leaving for jobs elsewhere resulting in a shortage of lecturers. A partnership between the Development Policy Centre at ANU and UPNG's School of Business Administration (now called the School of Business and Public Policy, or SBPP) began in 2013, with expanded arrangements in place from 2015 with the signing of an MOU between the ANU and UPNG vice chancellors (refreshed in 2018) and support of the Australian Government. The first phase of this project, known as the ANU-UPNG Partnership, ran till the end of 2020. The Australian and PNG governments agreed to fund a second phase from 2021 to 2025. This report covers that second phase.

Evaluations (2020, 2023, 2025)

Both phase 1 and phase 2 of the project have been evaluated. Phase 1 was evaluated in 2020. Overall, the evaluation was very positive. [The report is online.](#)

Phase 2 was evaluated twice. First in mid-2023 by APEP's MERLA team. [The report is online](#), and it was used to grant the project its additional two years in phase 2 from 2024 to 2025. APEP's MERLA evaluation team was very positive about the project, finding that "[T]he Partnership is contributing to a stronger PNG which is in Australia's interests as much as it is in PNG's interest. Strong relationships are being developed between the two countries through the Partnerships teaching and outreach activities and sharing of human resources. PNG is the leading economy in the developing South Pacific region. Graduates from MEPP and MIDECC will contribute to informed understanding of economic issues and capacity to plan and deliver well developed economic responses to development issues and provide leadership throughout the Pacific."

Further the mid-2023 phase 2 MERLA evaluation also concluded that "[T]he Partnership demonstrates value for Money (VfM) having attracted GoPNG co-funding support to SBPP; and provides an Australian-standard MEPP qualification at a fraction of the cost of sending students to Australia for postgraduate studies. "

The second evaluation of phase 2 was carried out in 2025 by an independent consultancy firm (Palladium) as a case study of the APEP's mid-term review. The evaluation was impressed with the project, and among others concluded that "...there has been a significant transformation in the quality and sustainability of SBPP teaching in economics and public policy, and a significant improvement in student experience..."[T]his has helped advance the objectives of the Australia-PNG Development Partnership Plan (2024-2029) in a number of ways. The partnership...clearly contributes to Outcome 1.1 of the DPP by 'supporting macroeconomic management and broader economic reform.'

All phase 1 and 2 evaluation reports of the project (except for the 2025 evaluation which is on [DFAT's website](#)), together with annual plans and reports, and end-of-phase-I-project reports are available on the [Devpol website](#).

Objective, components and costs

The **objective** of the project remained unchanged between phase 1 and 2, namely to:

address critical weaknesses within SBPP and help realise a stronger SBPP, as well as a deeper and lasting relationship with the ANU

The **four project components** were also unchanged:

1. Strengthening SBPP teaching and the student experience
2. Collaborative research and outreach
3. Staff and student exchanges
4. Project management

Reduced costs. Although the objectives and components were unchanged, the project has been downsized from an annual average cost of \$2.0 million in phase 1 to \$1.5 million in phase 2. Inflation of about 20% between the two phases has further reduced the real funds available. Therefore, instead of five ANU staff being based at UPNG, there were three in the first three years of phase 2 (2021-2023). This was further reduced to only two in the last two years of phase 2 (2024 and 2025). Program management support has also been reduced. Indirect costs for deployed staff (accommodation, cars, security) are covered by Abt. The sustained and in some cases higher level of results achieved by the project despite significant budget costs indicates increased value-for-money.

Partnership results

Key Phase 2 partnership results are summarised below.

- **Mainstreaming.** As the project matures, more emphasis is given to mainstreaming. The **ANU-UPNG MOU** had been between the two partner schools, SBPP and Crawford. It is now being replaced by a university-wide MOU, signed in August 2023 at the PNG Update by vice chancellors of ANU and UPNG. We also introduced, and sponsored new **prizes** for the top graduating student in economics, the *Sir Morauta Prize* in economics, which is awarded to the top graduating economics student. That has now been broadened by UPNG into prizes for top graduating students in all eight SBPP divisions, including for the top student graduating from the school. Importantly, the concept has been adopted by all the other schools across the university. The tutor workshops we ran for several years have now been replaced by UPNG-organised, university-wide tutor training. As other parts of Crawford and ANU get to know SPBB and UPNG, new opportunities open up: for example, facilitation of membership of international associations.
- **Support for critical government reforms.** The ANU-UPNG partnership has played a critical role in relation to the Marape Government's signature economic reform, the reform of the Central Banking Academic. Devpol Director Professor Stephen Howes has served on the three-person [Independent Advisory Group](#) reporting to the Treasurer since mid-2021. The IAG's first phase report has been concluded and the Central Banking Act amended. The second-phase report was delivered. In addition, various UPNG academics and project staff have participated in the Secretariat for the IAG, while others were engaged in various key government policy work such as forestry resource development, and special economic zone.

- **GoPNG funding.** Very few aid interventions receive GOPNG funding, particularly in the area of technical assistance and training. However, in the 2020 budget, GOPNG committed K5 million to the ANU-UPNG partnership (see Volume 3 of the 2021 budget, p. 34). This money was delivered to UPNG in 2021. Since by then, Australian government funding for the second phase had materialised, this money was saved for future use (see below).
- **Complementarity to other Australian investments.** The UPNG funding is now being used to finance the maintenance of the Australian government financed buildings. These buildings are in many ways unsuitable to the PNG environment, for example, there are no fans and windows cannot be opened. Air conditioning is heavily relied on, and expensive, with the back-up generator frequently breaking down due to overuse. An electronic locking system is particularly vulnerable. While the Australian government has financed the maintenance since 2018, it is now the responsibility of UPNG, which has decided to put the money provided by GoPNG (the K5 million above) to this end. Without this funding raised as a result of the partnership, the cash-strapped UPNG would find it extremely difficult to fund the expensive maintenance funding requirements. In addition, and on a smaller, scale, in both Phase I and 2 the partnership has funded the cost of a librarian to staff the Australian government financed SBPP library. The partnership also provide salary top up for recent ANU graduates who are on temporary employment contracts at UPNG.
- **Bringing through the next generation.** Staff trained by the partnership are becoming increasingly active as researchers and commentators. Most notably, ANU-trained Maholopa Laveil was selected by the Lowy Institute as their first Pacific Fellow in 2022, taking leave from UPNG for the year, and moving to Sydney. He commenced his PhD in economics funded by the Australian Award Scholarship at the ANU in early 2025. Other lecturers, such as Anna Kapil, has also appeared on media to offered commentary on key policy and development issues of PNG. Key policies proposed by the partnership staff are being taken on board by the government, including the proposal by Project Coordinator, Andy Mako, and Director Prof Stephen Howes on removing GST on foods and essentials in the 2025 PNG national budget. The project is also bringing through the next generation of international experts dedicated to PNG. Former staff have gone on to work as consultants to the PNG Treasury (Luke McKenzie), PNG economist for ADB (Marcel Schroder), former DFAT Lead Economist for the Pacific and now an ADB staff (Jonathan Pryke), and as ANU's first female PNG lecturer (Nahayamui Rooney).
- **Teaching and Localisation.** In its first phase, the project taught on average 19 courses a year. In phase 2, that average has increased to 25. The increased scale is due to the successful strategy of training up junior lecturers. **Seven** top UPNG economics students have now completed their training at ANU in the Masters of International and Development Economics (MIDEC) at ANU's Crawford School, and have returned to lecture in economics at UPNG. Five are **currently** working as lecturers at UPNG; Only one of the seven returned graduates has departed UPNG for a position at the Kokoda Track Foundation, and that was after serving his agreed five-year term; another lecturer is on leave from UPNG to complete his PhD at ANU (under an Australian Awards scholarship) and will return after this. Two out of the five lecturers are on permanent UPNG contracts. The Partnership is financially supporting the other three lectures who are on temporary contracts, as they are not paid salaries by UPNG during the semester breaks.

The Partnership started providing scholarships to tutors in UPNG's Public Policy Management (PPM) Division in 2020 with the aim to build up the teaching capacity in the division. Recipients study the Master of Economics and Public Policy (MEPP) at UPNG, and upon the completion of study, they continue teaching as a lecturer or tutor in the Division. To-date, eight scholarships have been provided to seven SBPP staff. Half of the scholarships have been awarded to female recipients. Of the eight, two are currently studying MEPP, and one will commence in 2026. Five MEPP scholarship recipients are currently teaching courses at the SBPP. Only two, Moses Sakai and Raymond Dorum, have taken up roles at the PNG's National Research Institute (PNG-NRI) as a Research Fellow and at the PNG's Treasury department, respectively.

The above initiatives have greatly strengthened the national faculty of UPNG's SBPP, particularly in economics and public policy. With the economics division hanging by a thread before the partnership, now the economics faculty (as well as public policy) are fully staffed by UPNG staff.

For the first time since the commencement of the partnership, semester 2 of 2025 marked the significant (localisation) milestone when all undergraduate courses in economics were taught by UPNG staff, bulk of them by ANU trained staff.

- **Access to Australian and international expertise.** Lectures are now delivered by a mix of online and in-person lectures. This has not only resulted in significant savings, but also enables us to access top Australian expertise, with our stable of lecturers expanded beyond our own ANU lecturers to include climate change expert, Dr Melanie Pill, and water economics and governance expert, Dr Safa Fanaian in the last two years.
- **Masters of Economic and Public Policy (MEPP).** Phase 1 of the partnership established a new two-year postgraduate program in economics and public policy at UPNG, with world-class teaching. Annual enrolments have continued to grow in Phase 2, from less than 10 initially to more than 40 now, mostly mid-level public servants from the Government of PNG, which is directly strengthening the capacity of the PNG government.
- **The PNG Update.** The PNG Update, hosted at UPNG since 2014, has become PNG's premier public policy forum, growing in the number of attendees and presenters each year. After two years of disruption due to COVID, the Update was held once again in 2023 and 2024. A special PNG Update conference was held in 2025 that coincided with PNG's 50th Independence Anniversary. The increase in the number of PNG, PNG female, and UPNG presenters over the years has been remarkable, and in 2025 73% of presenters and 68% of authors were Papua New Guinean, an increase from 69% and 65% respectively in 2024.
- **Books.** An important milestone of the Partnership was the publication of two books. The first book was published in 2022 titled *Papua New Guinea: government, economy and society*. The second book, *Struggle, reform, book and bust: an economic history of PNG since Independence*, was published in 2025 and launched at the 2025 PNG Update conference by the PNG Treasurer. Both books are joint projects of the Devpol and SBPP teams, and are freely available online at ANU press for anyone to access/download.

- **Blog.** Representation of PNG and UPNG authors on the Devpolicy Blog has grown rapidly. The Devpolicy Blog has published more than 60 blogs on PNG-related topics each year. In 2015, only 9% had a PNG national as author; in 2024 and 2025, that figure was more than 50%.
- **Databases.** The project maintains four databases. Two of them were added in phase 2. The databases are: budget and elections databases (phase 1); and economics and MP databases (phase 2). The databases are widely used by the government and policy makers including by the PNG Prime Minister, and the broader PNG research community.
- **Seminar series.** Regular monthly seminar series started in mid-2021, since then 29 seminars have been held, at ANU, at UPNG, and online. 19 of them were convened from mid-2023 to November 2025.
- **Summer School.** The ANU-UPNG Summer School, which started in 2018, but which was suspended due to COVID in 2021 and 2022, resumed in 2023, and successfully held in 2024 and 2025. The summer school provides the opportunity for the top ten third-year undergraduate students from both economics and public policy to travel to Australia to complete a customised program of coursework at the ANU Crawford School of Public Policy, and to participate in extracurricular activities such as meetings with DFAT. Gender equity is considered in the selection of students.
- **Value for money.** Costs in the second phase are 25% less than in the first phase, and that is before inflation. But results are in many areas higher (more courses taught, for example) indicating greatly increased value for money.

Conclusion

Despite an almost 40% budget cut (adjusting for inflation), in its second phase and further reduction of staff allowed in Port Moresby in the project's 2024 and 2025 period, the ANU-UPNG Partnership is delivering more than ever. This indicates a high level of efficiency and effectiveness, and a high value for money. It also augurs well for sustainability.

We are pleased that the Australian High Commission is supporting to fund a third phase (to be formalised in January/February of 2026), which would embed the progress of the partnership, as well as build on its successes, including broadening faculty strengthening to other divisions of SBPP, especially Accounting, as they face acute staff shortage, as well as include students from the other six divisions of SBPP in the summer school program, and extent support to other student societies at SBPP. And importantly, the third phase would further strengthen research capacity especially of young UPNG lecturers, including recent ANU and MEPP graduates who are teaching at UPNG.

1. Introduction

This section provides a brief background and context. Section 2 sets out the partnership's philosophy. Section 3 deals with objectives, components and costs, and Section 4 results. Section 5 outlines the partnership's M&E system. Section 6 considers challenges, and the final section concludes with lessons learnt.

Decades of experience have shown that reform to boost development and reduce poverty only succeeds when it is home-grown, not externally imposed. And for reform to be home grown, a country needs a cadre of good economists and public policy experts, both to work in government and to promote public discussion of key policy issues. The University of Papua New Guinea is the only university in PNG where economics is taught, and one of only two where public policy is taught.

While the University of Papua New Guinea economics department has a proud history, by 2010 it had become run down, with senior staff leaving for jobs elsewhere resulting in a shortage of lecturers. A partnership between the Development Policy Centre at ANU and UPNG's School of Business Administration (now called the School of Business and Public Policy, or SBPP) began in 2013, with expanded arrangements in place from 2015 with the signing of an MOU between the ANU and UPNG vice chancellors (refreshed in 2018) and support of the Australian Government. The first phase of this project, known as the ANU-UPNG Partnership, ran till the end of 2020. The Australian and PNG governments agreed to fund a second phase from 2021 to 2025, with the number of project staff based in Port Moresby reduced in the last two years (2024 and 2025). This report provides an overview of project activities from mid-2023 to 2025, and includes highlights of key milestones in the past 10 years of the partnership.

2. Partnership philosophy

The partnership has always been explicit about its philosophy, sometimes called the project narrative. It has been reproduced with minimal variation in every project plan and report. The emphasis is on: a long-term approach and continuity; partnership and having skin in the game; producing both tangible and intangible benefits; requiring high-level support; and being adaptive and realistic. The box below contains the version of the project's philosophy from the first progress report (for the first half of 2016).

This project philosophy has served the project well. High level support has been sustained, even with the departure of Foreign Minister Julie Bishop. In particular, successive UPNG VCs have continued to support the project. And The PNG Treasurer Ian Ling-Stuckey has emerged as a strong supporter.

ANU-UPNG partnership philosophy

The project takes a long-term approach. Aid funding for this partnership may wax and wane (and we hope it waxes) but the project has been set up to be here for the long term, at least a decade. Of course, there is no guarantee it will last for a decade, but that is the intent: there is little point to setting up a shorter-term project. Focusing on longer-term outcomes enables us to adapt to the many surprises and unanticipated twists and turns along the way, including, most recently, the pandemic.

The concept of partnership is critical. Both parties have skin in the game. Both have made a long-term commitment to the partnership. Both are prepared to discuss and resolve issues in a transparent manner.

The benefits of the project are both direct and indirect. Perhaps the most important, certainly the most tangible, benefits of the project are for the students who otherwise might receive

no teaching, and certainly a lower quality of teaching. These are the future leaders of PNG after all. But there are also important indirect benefits – the systemic changes, the research and outreach. This dual approach serves as both a risk mitigation approach and as a way to maximize project value.

The project has and requires strong support from the highest levels. Australia’s former Minister for Foreign Affairs Julie Bishop MP initiated the expansion of the project during a meeting in mid-2014 with the then ANU Vice Chancellor. The high-level champion of the project is currently the PNG Treasurer. Given the difficulty of the project, high-level support is critical for success.

The project has strong UPNG ownership. The project is as much a UPNG initiative as an ANU one. It was the former UPNG VC’s initiative to seek a new MOU with ANU, and it was his drive that brought that into fruition. The SBPP Dean plays a critical role in providing day-to-day support to the partnership and its various initiatives. Without this, the project would undoubtedly falter.

The project takes an adaptive, learning-by-doing, and adjusting-as-we-go approach. This is the only approach that makes sense. We learn as we go, documenting what we learn along the way. The latest shift to virtual teaching is a good example of the project’s flexibility and evolution.

The project values continuity. To develop good relationships, and to learn to be effective, staff need to be in place for as long as possible. Long-standing relationships between ANU and UPNG faculty are key to the success of the partnership. If project staff do well, we want them to stay for as long as possible.

The project is based on realistic expectations and seeks incremental gains. It would be foolhardy to wish away the systemic challenges that UPNG faces in a range of areas. No external intervention can turn UPNG around, or even a part of the university. However, an external intervention can make a difference, and be judged a success, provided realistic expectations are maintained.

Extracted from the 2021 plan; reproduced in all plans with minimal variation

3. Partnership objective, components and costs

The official partnership **objective** (for Phase 1 and 2) is to

address critical weaknesses within the existing School of Business Administration and help realise a stronger SBPP, as well as a deeper and lasting relationship with the ANU

To achieve this objective, the partnership includes four **components** (unchanged between phase 1 and 2 except for slight language changes):

1. Strengthening SBPP teaching and the student experience
2. Collaborative research and outreach
3. Staff and student exchanges
4. Project management

Reduced costs. Although the objectives and components were unchanged, the project has been downsized from an annual average cost of \$2.0 million in phase 1 to \$1.5 million in phase 2. Inflation of about 20% between the two phases has further reduced the real funds available. Therefore, instead of five ANU staff being based at UPNG, there are now only two. Program management

support has also been reduced. Indirect costs for deployed staff (accommodation, cars, security) are covered by Abt. The sustained and in some cases higher level of results achieved despite the very significant budget costs indicates increased value-for-money.

4. Partnership results

This section covers the results of the project in relation to the four components set out in the previous section.

4.1 Strengthening SBPP teaching and the student experience

This was the largest component of the project, and delivered results, from excellent teaching to course development, and from staff mentoring and student engagement.

Teaching. In Phase 1, the project taught 3,651 students in 100 courses. These figures climbed in Phase 2 to 6,396 student (75% increase) and 128 courses (28% increase). (See summary table below). The increased scale is due to the successful strategy of training up junior lecturers. Seven top UPNG economics students have now completed their training at ANU in the Masters of International and Development Economics (MIDEC) at Crawford School, and two are currently studying at ANU. A total of 9 ANU scholarships to 3 female and 6 male top UPNG economics students have been awarded to study at ANU under phase 1 and phase 2 of partnership.

The partnership has also sponsored tutors in the Public Policy and Strategic Management Divisions to take the MEPP to improve their knowledge and promotion prospects, and thus strengthen these divisions as well. One economics tutor was also sponsored for the MEPP. By the end of 2025, eight MEPP scholarships were awarded to SBPP staff, 50% of which were to female recipients. Five MEPP scholarship holders have completed the program; one is expected to graduate in April 2026, another will commence second year studies in 2026; and a new recipient of the scholarship will begin studies in 2026.

ANU lecturers are increasingly teaching at the postgraduate level, and increasingly involved in mentoring junior lecturers. However, where critical gaps exist, ANU staff are still involved in undergraduate teaching, for example of a 300-student first-year Foundation economics course.

All classes were asked to evaluate their lecturers and courses, with almost universally very good results. Average scores have reduced over time. However, this is to be expected with first a greater mix of lecturers, and then more lecturing by young lecturers who are still learning. However, scores seem to have stabilised at around 4.2 in the 2023-2025 period. The overall score for both phases is 4.4. At ANU, anything above 4 is considered very good. Note that the UPNG lecturers trained at ANU are also required to submit to student evaluations (not a standard UPNG requirement).

We have also noted a tendency for the evaluation scores of UPNG lecturers to improve over time. There was a definite male bias in the classes, something returned to later, under challenges. As well as the full-time, regular ANU lecturers, the project has also involved a number of lecturers from the PNG think tank, NRI, and from overseas from time to time. In both phases, over 10,000 students were taught (31% female) in 228 courses in the last decade, when compared to just 127 students and 5 courses in 2015.

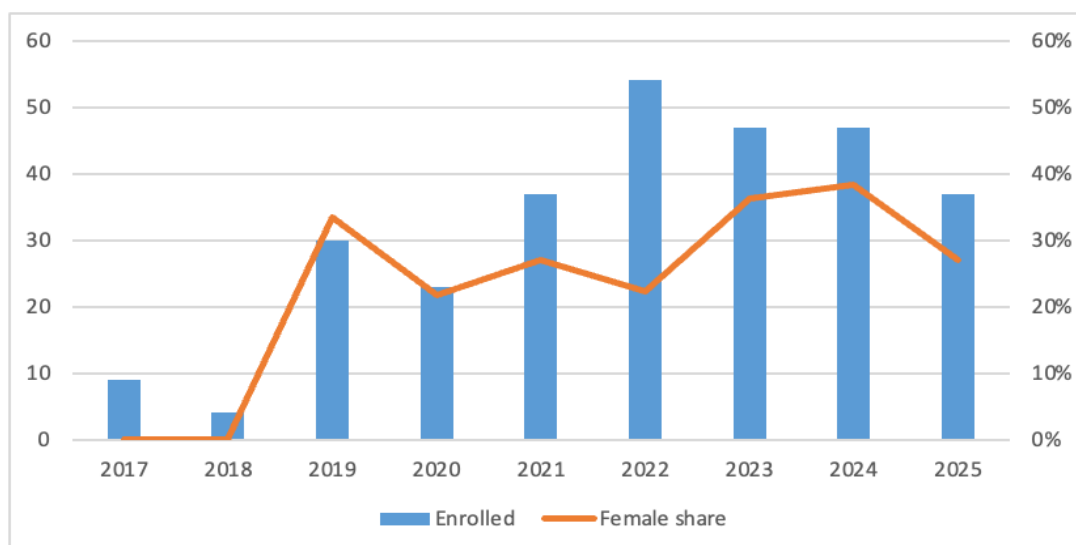
Summary of project teaching

Year	Courses			Students			Ave. evaluation score (out of 5)
	Total	Undergrad	Postgrad	Total	Female	Male	
2015	5	5	0	127	42	85	4.9
2016	11	11	0	554	207	347	4.7
2017	18	12	6	638	176	462	4.5
2018	23	12	11	604	183	421	4.5
2019	20	10	10	719	172	547	4.5
2020	23	14	9	1009	246	763	4.5
2021	25	16	9	1177	365	812	4.3
2022	26	17	9	1297	412	885	4.1
2023	25	16	9	1338	479	859	4.2
2024	26	16	10	1238	450	788	4.2
2025	26	16	10	1346	417	929	4.2
Av/Total	228	145	83	10047	3149	6898	4.4

Informal monthly mentoring/information sharing meetings are held with recent ANU economics and UPNG MEPP graduates to discuss issues around teaching and research.

Masters of Economic and Public Policy (MEPP). Phase 1 of the partnership established a new two-year postgraduate program in economics and public policy at UPNG, with world-class teaching. Annual enrolments have continued to grow in Phase 2, from less than 10 initially to more than 40 now, mostly mid-level public servants, but ANU and UPNG agreed to cap admissions at 40 to maintain the quality of the program. Most students are mid-level public servants. The MEPP program offers two pathways in the second year. Students can complete the program through coursework or undertake a supervised research paper equivalent to three courses, with supervision provided by ANU or UPNG academics. To date, 39 students have completed the MEPP research paper, 35 of them since 2019, representing a significant achievement for the program. This means the MEPP program is contributing directly to strengthening the capacity of the government of PNG. The share of female students has also increased greatly from zero in the first two years to 20-30% from 2019 to 2022 to 38% in 2024.

MEPP enrolment, and female share, 2017-2025



Most of the MEPP courses have been taught by ANU faculty, while some by faculty supported and financed by the ANU. An initial problem with the MEPP was the requirement that graduation required the completion of a research project. This proved to be beyond the reach of most students, and a coursework-only variant version of this course has now been developed, as well as a one-year only program. Students who take the research project continue to struggle. Another lesson is that a pro-active approach is needed to ensure student completion. With these problems now being addressed, completion rates are regarded to be satisfactory.

Ten MEPP scholarships for public servants are provided by Australian Awards, (through Abt), at a cost of \$14,000 per student. This is a good example of cross-program collaboration. This, as evaluated by APEPs' MERLA team in 2023 is a value for money (VfM) approach, as the MEPP program delivers world-class master program at UPNG rather than sending students to Australian universities which would cost a lot of money and commitment by students, most of whom are senior PNG government public servants.

On average, it costs the Australian government about \$150,000 to send a master's student to Australia for two years. To send 40 students each year would therefore cost about \$12 million each year.¹ The MEPP delivers a world-class education at a tiny fraction of this price.

With the budget cuts, increased use is being made of hybrid teaching involving in person and online teaching. While this has its challenges, it does mean that we are able to go beyond our own stable of excellent ANU lecturers to include climate change expert, Dr Melanie Pill and water governance expert Dr Safa Fanaian.

Curriculum development. ANU staff prepare and store course materials for the courses they have taught, and these are already available for use by others in the future.

SBPP library. The partnership has funded the costs of a librarian to run the new SBPP library, and make it available to students, but this has now been handed over to UPNG.

Support for student societies. ANU staff at UPNG have supported the Economics Student Society (ESS) since 2015 and the Public Policy and Management Student Association (PPMSA) since 2019. Previously, these societies were only partly or not at all functional due to lack of institutional support and financial problems. Support is provided for student-led activities such as school debates, essay competitions, guest speaker/motivational events, promotional materials, coffee chats, barbecues, study outings, orientation nights, and end-of-year events. Support is provided to final-year students with job application preparations and organising written references for employment on request. ANU staff also provide advice and encouragement to students regarding university study including on research and contribution to public policy (e.g., through blog writings), student life, and career pathways, when requested by individual students. These activities are important in enhancing learning and university life experience of students.

Reading group. Reading groups are a recent innovation, with 15 held from 2023 to 2025 with an average of 2.5 each semester. The reading groups are attended by students from all schools of UPNG, and women makes up more than 70% of the participants. It is organized and facilitated by ANU and UPNG staff (including recent ANU-sponsored economics graduates who are now staff at UPNG's

¹ After the first year, there would be two cohorts of 40 each in Australia in any one year.

SBPP). These interdisciplinary reading workshops introduce students to a selection of published research that examines some of the underlying issues in PNG. The aim of these workshops is to provide an opportunity for students to develop their skills to critically read and analyse academic papers, which is important for their learning at UPNG.

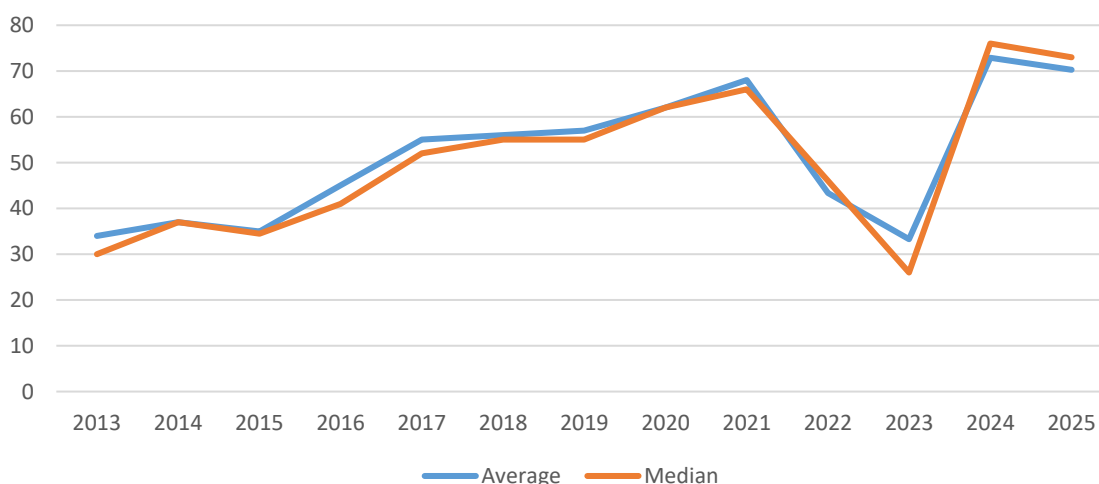
Economics exam. Since 2013, ANU staff have conducted an economics exam for third and fourth year students. The standard of the exam has been kept constant over time. In 2013, the typical student failed – badly. From 2017, the average student has passed, and the average continued to rise until 2021. In 2022, the average grade fell sharply as shown in the graph below. Various reasons for this have been discussed, including a big fall off in numbers and, related, an assessment clash. The ANU and UPNG teams deployed a strategy to turn the dramatic fall in the results of the ANU, and introduced measures including remedial classes and student consultation, and prizes. This paid off and the results bounced back significantly in 2024 and 2025 and have settled to its long term trend. In 2025 for example 67 students took the exam, comprising 31 fourth year students and 36 third year students. This is the highest level of attendance recorded for the exam since it began, and is an increase on the previous record set in 2024.

Fourth year scores remain the key metric of comparison over time, as third year students did not always participate.

In 2025, the average score for fourth year students was 70 out of 100. This is the second highest average score recorded since the exam began (the highest being 73 out of 100 in 2024), and more than double the average recorded in 2023 (33 out of 100). The median score for fourth year students was 73 out of 100, again marking the second highest median score since the exam began.

We are not aware of any other effort to measure improvements in learning outcomes from an aid-funded training or education program in PNG.

4th year student average and median grade out of 100, 2013–2025



4.2 Collaborative research and outreach

The PNG Update, now into its third year after COVID shut down, and the Devpolicy Blog provide growing spaces for PNG public policy discussions. The two new research databases and a new ANU-UPNG book on Economic History of PNG are significant contributions to UPNG research capacity. Involvement in the Government's signature reform process provided an unexpected opportunity.

Support for critical government reforms. The ANU-UPNG partnership has played a critical role in relation to the Marape Government's signature economic reform, the reform of the Central Banking Academic. Devpol Director Professor Stephen Howes has served on the three-person [Independent Advisory Group](#) reporting to the Treasurer since mid-2021. In addition, various UPNG academics and project staff have participated in the Secretariat for the IAG, making vital and timely contributions. The IAG's first phase report has been concluded and the Central Banking Act amended. The second-phase report is now being drafted. The process has involved high-level interactions with senior Treasury, BPNG, international and private sector staff and leadership. Some UPNG academics, especially recent ANU trained lecturers, have also been engaged by the PNG government in the last two years on important policy work such as the forestry resources development, national population census, and analysis of PNG government's special economic zones.

The Devpolicy Blog: fostering a PNG policy discussion. Over the last few years, the Devpolicy Blog has emerged as the main forum for policy discussions about PNG. Port Moresby is the blog's biggest city for readership and Lae the fifth biggest. Every year (since 2013) Devpolicy.org publishes an average of 60 blogs on PNG. But what has really changed is the number of blogs with PNG authors which has gone up from none in 2010 to just 7 in 2015 to 30 in 2019 and has now jumped to more than 50.

The share of PNG blogs by PNG authors was only 8% in 2013. In 2024 and 2025, more than 50% of blogs had a PNG national as an author.

The key factor in this turn-around has been the help and encouragement provided especially but not only to UPNG academics and students. A K200 incentive scheme launched in 2018 has no doubt also helped. This would not have happened without the project.

From 2020 onwards, most of the PNG blogs, especially those with PNG authors, have been republished in one of PNG's national dailies.

Importantly, female authors from PNG have also increased from none more than a decade ago to almost half now. None of this would have happened without the partnership.

The PNG Update: PNG's premier public policy forum. Although it was not held in 2020 and 2021 on account of the pandemic, the PNG Update returned in 2022 as PNG's premier public policy forum. In 2019, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025, it was opened by the Prime Minister of PNG Hon James Marape. Evaluations of participants are overwhelmingly positive. Some 400-500 participants attend each of the two days of the Update. **The Update has grown over time in importance and popularity: one indication of this is the upward trend in submissions to the call for papers**, which has almost doubled between 2013 and 2023.

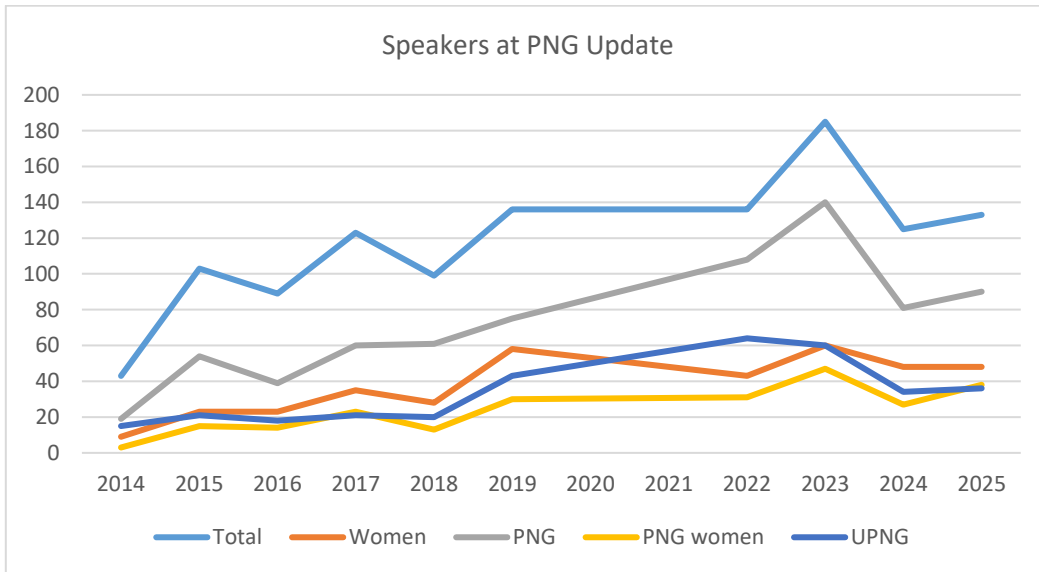
In terms of submissions, 161 submissions were received in 2025, the highest number recorded since the Update began (the previous record was 150 submissions in 2024), and more than double 10 years ago when phase 1 began.

The 2025 Update was a special conference as it coincided with PNG's 50th Independence Anniversary. It brought together eminent people such as Dr John Momis, Mr Bart Philemon and Dame Carol Kidu, who had played significant roles in the development of PNG over the years.

The increase in the number of PNG, PNG women, and UPNG presenters over the years is particularly noteworthy (see figure below). Since we started in 2014, the number of total speakers has grown by 227%, women speakers have grown by 450%, PNG speakers have grown by 492%, UPNG speakers by 500%, and female PNG speakers by 1500%.

In terms of shares, the number of PNG speakers over this same period (2014 to 2025) has risen from 46% to 84%, UPNG speakers from 23% to 42% and female PNG speakers from 4% to 19%.

PNG, UPNG, PNG female, and UPNG female speakers at the PNG Update: numbers



With 80%+ PNG speakers, the PNG Update has become a truly Papua New Guinean forum for discussing PNG issues.

Two books were published by the partnership. This is such a significant milestone. The ANU and UPNG teams combined to produce both books. The books are free to download. The first was on contemporary issues [Papua New Guinea: government, economy and society](#). Altogether some 22 authors were involved, 12 from ANU/Australia and 10 from UPNG/PNG. The book was launched by the PNG PM in October 2022.



(L to R) Professor Helen Sullivan, Dean of the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific; Robert Igara, Chancellor of UPNG; Hon. James Marape, Prime Minister of PNG; Professor Frank K. Griffin, Vice-Chancellor of UPNG; Jon Philp, Australian High Commissioner to PNG at the launch of the first book.

The second joint book was launched by the PNG Treasurer just before the 2025 PNG Update on 20 August 2025. It was also launched in Canberra by prominent economist, Prof Ross Garnaut. The book is on [An economic history of Papua New Guinea since Independence.](#)



At the launch of the book on Economic History of PNG by PNG Treasurer, third from left, with Prof Ian Findlay (UPNG Vice Chancellor), Prof Stephen Howes (lead author), and Sir Robert Igara (UPNG Chancellor), at UPNG.



Prof Ross Garnaut (back, second from right) with ANU students, staff and authors of the book, after the launch of the economic history of PNG at ANU, Canberra.

Two new databases. In its first phase, the partnership produced two research databases, in addition to the [PNG Pacific Research Portal](#). One is the [PNG Election Database](#), which contains detailed election results from all national general elections in PNG between independence, and is the result of an exhaustive and extensive data gathering exercise, and is only place these data are held. It is made publicly available through an interactive, dedicated website, that has already been extensively used. It has been updated to include 2022 election results. The other phase-1 database is the [PNG Budget Database](#), an Excel spreadsheet that now compiles information from PNG national government budgets from 1989 to 2024. The database is updated twice yearly, after the annual budget and when the FBO (Final Budget Outcome) is released. The budget is used by PNG commentators, the private sector and multilaterals.

In its second phase, the partnership produced two new databases

- The [PNG Economic Database](#) is a database of key PNG economic variables since independence, not otherwise available. It was launched by the PNG Treasurer in September 2021.
- The [PNG MP Database](#) is a database of PNG MPs from this parliament and the last, tracking their party membership and support for or opposition to the government, again making data accessible that is not otherwise publicly available.

Also in the second phase, the partnership supported the finalisation and publication of two additional data sets: [the PNG District Development Dataset](#); and [the PNG Minister Dataset](#).

Seminar series. After several years of trying, a [regular monthly seminar series](#) was successfully introduced in mid-2021, since then 37 seminars have been held at ANU, at UPNG, and online.

Commentary Local economics division staff are now asked for their opinion for local and international news articles and on radio and TV. This did not happen prior to the partnership.

The PNG Project. The PNG Project encompasses the various research outputs undertaken in relation to PNG through the partnership. A sample of recent research includes:

- Anna Kapil and Stephen Howes. 2025. *Income tax in Papua New Guinea: changes over time*. Discussion paper at DevPol.
- Nemat Bizhan and Stephen Howes. 2024. *Papua New Guinea's public service commission since independence: sidelined or strengthened?* Discussion paper at DevPol and has also been published in a journal
- Terence Wood. 2025. *Giving aid to Papua New Guinea: a recipe for success*. DevPol blog as part of [Pacific Family Matters series](#).
- Alyssa Leng. 2024. *Are government ministers more likely to be re-elected? Evidence from Papua New Guinea*. Discussion paper at DevPol.
- Grant Walton and Michael Kabuni. 2025. *Anti-corruption reform and political will in Papua New Guinea*. Discussion paper at Devpol.
- Kingtau Mambon. 2025. *Unwanted births and fertility in Papua New Guinea*. Blog post reproduced on DevPol.
- Martin Davies. 2025. *What the first productivity study tells us about PNG's economy*. Study commissioned by the Employers Federation of Papua New Guinea.

4.3 Staff and student exchange

This component of the partnership promotes sustainability by delivering new lecturers to UPNG. The summer school is one of the most innovative features of the partnership.

A pipeline of new lecturers. Seven top UPNG economics students (5 male, 2 female) have now completed their training at ANU in the Masters of International and Development Economics at Crawford School, and have returned to lecture in economics at UPNG. Five are currently working as lecturers at UPNG; Only one of the seven returned graduates has departed UPNG for a position at the Kokoda Track Foundation, and that was after serving his agreed five-year term; another lecturer is on leave from UPNG to complete his PhD at ANU (under an Australian Awards scholarship) and will return after this. Two out of the five lecturers are on permanent UPNG contracts. The Partnership is financially supporting the other three lectures who are on temporary contracts, as they are not paid salaries by UPNG during the semester breaks.

The partnership is also sponsoring public policy tutors to undertake the MEPP in PNG to strengthen the Public Policy and Strategic Management Divisions at UPNG. This started in 2020 with eight MEPP scholarships awarded to-date to 4 female and 4 male staff of SBPP.

Summer schools. The ANU-UPNG Summer School program takes the top 5 economics and top 5 public policy students to Australia to complete up to six 6 weeks of academic coursework at the Crawford school and many extracurricular activities. The Summer School ran in 2018, 2019 and 2020, had to be abandoned in 2021 and 2022 and then resumed in 2023, and was also held in 2024 and 2025. The summer school gives students the chance to undertake customised student learning programs, engage in extensive networking, as well as expose students to new perspectives to life and student learning outside of PNG. Student evaluations are extremely positive.

4.4 Relationships and management

This is a complex project, but one that has been well managed throughout.

ANU-SBPP relationship. The relationship remained strong throughout, supported by regular meetings and visits. The visit by College of Asia Pacific Dean to UPNG for the 2017 and 2022 PNG Updates have been strong statements of support. The then ANU Vice VC also visited UPNG in August 2023, to among others, attend the PNG Update, during which a broader MOU between ANU and UPNG was signed.



Prof Brian Schmidt (then ANU VC) and Prof Frank Griffin (then UPNG VC) at the signing of MOU between ANU and UPNG. Hon James Marape (PNG PM) and H.E. Jon Philp (former Australian High Commissioner to PNG) as well as staff of ANU and UPNG celebrate.

Project management. Project management responsibilities are shared on the ANU side between the Program Officer (Aloha Jeon - Canberra), Project Coordinator (Andy A. Mako – POM), Team Leader (Nemat Bizhan – Canberra/POM), and Project Director (Stephen Howes – Canberra). All plans and reports have been delivered on time, and the various activities delivered successfully, and risks managed prudently.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

M&E tools. From the start, the partnership had built into it a number of M&E tools. Staff and student surveys were conducted in 2017. Evaluations of all courses and major events such as the PNG Update and Summer School are undertaken every semester or year. We also undertake the annual economics exam (discussed earlier). And six-monthly performance reports analyse our

progress. Reports continue to be sent to DFAT every six months and published on the web: see <https://devpolicy.crawford.anu.edu.au/png-project/anu-upng-partnership>. Progress reports use a traffic light system to indicate progress against annual targets.

There have been three evaluations of the partnership. The first phase was evaluated in 2020: it [is available on the Devpolicy website](#).

APEP MERLA Report 2023: APEP's MERLA team carried out an evaluation of the ANU-UPNG Partnership from mid-2023 to inform the decision to grant the project its additional two year in phase 2 (i.e. 2024 and 2025). [The report is online](#), MERLA evaluation team was very positive about the project, finding that "[T]he Partnership is contributing to a stronger PNG which is in Australia's interests as much as it is in PNG's interest. Strong relationships are being developed between the two countries through the Partnerships teaching and outreach activities and sharing of human resources. PNG is the leading economy in the developing South Pacific region. Graduates from MEPP and MIDEAC will contribute to informed understanding of economic issues and capacity to plan and deliver well developed economic responses to development issues and provide leadership throughout the Pacific."

Further the APEP MERLA Team's assessment of the project's phase 2 concluded that "[T]he Partnership demonstrates value for Money (VfM) having attracted GoPNG co-funding support to SBPP; and provides an Australian-standard MEPP qualification at a fraction of the cost of sending students to Australia for postgraduate studies. A cap on pastoral costs is suggested by APEP to further demonstrate VfM."

[APEP mid-term review and Case-study 2025:](#) The second evaluation of phase 2 was carried out in 2025 by an independent consultancy firm (Palladium) as a case study of the APEP's mid-term review. The evaluation was very impressed with the project, and among others concluded that "...there has been a significant transformation in the quality and sustainability of SBPP teaching in economics and public policy, and a significant improvement in student experience..."[T]his has helped advance the objectives of the Australia-PNG Development Partnership Plan (2024-2029) in a number of ways. The partnership...clearly contributes to Outcome 1.1 of the DPP by 'supporting macroeconomic management and broader economic reform.' This is available on [DFAT's website](#).

Apart from our enduring partners at UPNG, the project is supported by the PNG Government, with PNG Treasurer Hon Ian Ling-Stuckey being our main advocate. He has launched couple of our activities: the Economic database, and the economic history book of PNG. While launching the book on the economic history of Papua New Guinea in August 2025, Hon Ian Ling-Stuckey said "...I would strongly support another phase and will take this view to the Ministerial talks in Canberra later this year. My congratulations to UPNG, the ANU and everyone else involved in producing this extraordinary book on PNG's economic history since independence."

6. Project risks and challenges

Certainly, the project has faced various risks and challenges over the years.

Lack of university reform. Many of the constraints to SBPP performance are beyond the control of the School to address, and need university-wide change. [Hopes were high in 2013](#) that the university would undertake far-reaching reform, but, while some progress has been made in a few areas, overall it has been disappointing. UPNG is the only university in PNG to teach economics (and only one of two to teach public policy). It is too important to abandon, but it is also important to be realistic. The project was designed to and did make gains despite a lack of university reform, but there is no doubt much more could be achieved with broader reform.

High level of risk. The high level of risk implicit in a project like this became explicit with the university shutdown and protests of 2016, the staff strike of 2019, and the pandemic of 2020-22. The adaptive, flexible approach taken from the start was the best way to respond.

Gender imbalance. Despite considerable effort, recruiting females to work in Port Moresby has not been easy. However, we do see significant gender initiatives and progress, including: more female MEPP students; more female PNG speakers at the PNG Update; gender quotas for the summer school and MEPP scholarships; encouraging female students to [speak out](#); making gender a research and PNG Update focus; and mainstreaming gender issues into lectures and research. Good progress has been made, but more needs to be done.

Staff continuity. A number of long-term Devpol staff are still active today, including Stephen Howes, Terence Wood, Grant Walton, and Nemet Bizhan. They have provided a frame around which other, newer staff have been able to join. At the leadership level, continuity was ensured by the partnership directors, Professors Howes and Pillai, being in position throughout. We are grateful for Dr Lawrence Sause, Acting Executive Dean of SBPP, for his ongoing leadership and support. Prof Pillai has been promoted to UPNG's Acting Pro Vice Chancellor (Planning & Development and Industrial Relations).

Sustainability. Sustainability was an objective of the partnership from the start, and the strategy is now showing results with five new economics lecturers in place at UPNG. That said, the project was always designed and presented as a multi-decadal one and there is no doubt that, if the partnership funding were withdrawn, sustainability would be at risk. While the partnership itself would continue, termination of funding would mean the Masters of Economic and Public Policy would collapse, there would be no more summer schools or scholarships, and that the future of the PNG Update would be in doubt. It would also be premature to hand over to a very young and inexperienced economics faculty at this stage. All are highly employable elsewhere, and, as experience shows, would easily find jobs elsewhere. To-date, of the ANU-trained economics lecturers, one has left to join ADB and then to Kokoda Track Foundation, but only after completing his agreed five years of teaching at UPNG. Two other staff members have passed the five-year mark and remain lecturers (one is pursuing a PhD). No staff has left before the agreed five years (though, tragically, one died).

7. Conclusion

The decision of the Australian government to invest two phases (for over 10 years) of the ANU-UPNG partnership was undoubtedly the correct one, and is illustrative of the need to make long-term investments in Australia's aid to PNG. The decision to continue with a third phase is likely and is highly welcome.

Apart from the various achievements summarised above, three more general ones have emerged from the second phase:

Mainstreaming. As the project matures, more emphasis is given to mainstreaming. The **ANU-UPNG MOU** had been between the two partner schools, SBPP and Crawford. It is now being replaced by a university-wide MOU, in place from August 2023 which the then Vice Chancellors of ANU and UPNG signed at the 2023 PNG Update. We also sponsored new **prizes** for the top graduating student in economics. That has now been broadened into prizes for top graduating students in all eight SBPP divisions, including for the overall top graduating student for SBPP. This concept has now been rolled out across the rest of the university. The tutor workshops we ran for several years have now been replaced by UPNG-organised, university-wide tutor training.

Bringing through the next generation of PNG experts. Staff trained by the partnership are becoming increasingly active as researchers and commentators. Most notably, ANU-trained Maholopa Laveil was selected by the Lowy Institute as their first Pacific Fellow in 2022 and based in Sydney for a year in Sydney. He is now on leave from UPNG to study PhD at ANU from early 2025. Other lecturers, such as Anna Kapil, Kingtau Mambon and Bobby are being requested to offer commentary by the media and participate government's policy work in areas such as taxation, special economic zones, and debt. Project Coordinator, Andy Mako, delivered the 14th Henry Kila Memorial Address to the Australia-PNG Business Council in 2023. The project is also bringing through the next generation of international experts dedicated to PNG. Former staff have gone on to work as consultants to the PNG Treasury (Dek Sum, Luke McKenzie), PNG economist for ADB (Marcel Schroder), DFAT Lead Economist for the Pacific and now ADB (Jonathan Pryke), and as ANU's first female PNG lecturer (Nahayamui Rooney). Kelly Samof joined ADB then to Kokoda Track Foundation.

GoPNG funding. Very few aid interventions receive GOPNG funding, particularly in the area of technical assistance and training. However, in the 2020 budget, GOPNG committed K5 million to the ANU-UPNG partnership (see Volume 3 of the 2021 budget, p. 34). This money was delivered to UPNG in 2021. Since by then, Australian government funding for the second phase had materialised, this money was saved for future use (see below).

Complementarity to other Australian investments. The UPNG funding is being used to finance the maintenance of the Australian government financed buildings. These buildings are in many ways unsuitable to the PNG environment, for example, there are no fans and windows cannot be opened. Air conditioning is heavily relied on, and expensive, with the back-up generator frequently breaking down due to overuse. An electronic locking system is particularly vulnerable. While the Australian government has financed the maintenance since 2018, it is now the responsibility of UPNG, which has decided to put the money provided by GoPNG (the K5 million above) to this end. Without this funding raised as a result of the partnership, the cash-strapped UPNG would find it extremely difficult to fund the expensive maintenance funding requirements.



ANU and UPNG staff in 2025 with UPNG's Acting Pro-Vice Chancellor, Prof Pillai (front, right)



Grand Chief Dr John Momis (former President of AROB) and H.E. Mr Ewen McDonald (Australian High Commissioner to PNG) at 2025 PNG Update.