

# MEDIA RELEASE

## AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY VIENTIANE



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### **Australia and Laos work together to improve basic education**

H.E Dr Phankham Viphavanh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education and Sports and H.E John Williams, Australia's Ambassador to the Lao PDR, today signed an agreement to work together to ensure more Lao boys and girls complete a quality basic education.

Australia's new *Basic Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR* (BEQUAL) program will help an estimated 450,000 Lao girls and boys achieve literacy, numeracy and other life skills.

Dr Phankham said that improving education is one of the Lao Government's highest priorities, critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and lifting Laos from least developed country status.

"I am confident that BEQUAL is well aligned with the Lao Government's policy priorities, will actively contribute to human resource development in Laos and responds to the needs of the Lao socio-economic development plan" he said.

Mr Williams said that education was at the very heart of Australia's aid program in Laos. He reiterated Australia's commitment to work closely with the Ministry of Education and Sports to support the Lao Government's development priorities.

"Australia will work side by side with the Ministry to develop the curriculum, teachers and schools needed to ensure children go to primary school, and stay in primary school" he said.

Targeting the 66 most educationally disadvantaged districts in Laos, BEQUAL will strengthen the quality of teacher training, improve school infrastructure, provide learning materials, and increase participation of the most disadvantaged children – girls, children from ethnic minority groups and students with disabilities.

"We will draw on the expertise of the World Food Programme, UNICEF and non-government organisations. These partners are well placed to help break down barriers to education, including in some of the most remote and disadvantaged areas of the country" said Mr Williams.

The European Union plans to provide approximately US\$15 million to support BEQUAL through a new collaboration between Australia and the EU.

"As joint co-chairs of the education sector working group, Australia and the EU share a commitment to ensure our support for the education sector remains relevant, well-coordinated and coherent" said Mr Williams.

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