B. How we prepared this report

Queensland Audit Office reports to parliament

The Queensland Audit Office (QAO) is Queensland's independent auditor of public sector entities and local governments.

QAO's independent public reporting is an important part of our mandate. It brings transparency and accountability to public sector performance, and is a vital part of the integrity framework that provides public confidence in the system of government. By reviewing our reports to parliament, the community can assess whether entities are delivering government services in a manner that meets their expectations.

QAO provides valued assurance, insights and advice, and recommendations for improvement via the reports it tables in the Legislative Assembly, as mandated by the *Auditor-General Act 2009*. These reports to parliament may be on the results of our financial audits, on the results of our performance audits, or on our insights. Our insights reports may provide key facts or a topic overview, the insights we have gleaned from across our audit work, the outcomes of an investigation we conducted following a request for audit, or an update on the status of Auditor-General's recommendations.

We share our planned reports to parliament in our 3-year forward work plan, which we update annually: www.qao.qld.gov.au/audit-program.

A fact sheet about how we prepare, consult on, and table our reports to parliament is available on our website: www.qao.qld.gov.au/reports-resources/fact-sheets.

About this report

QAO prepares its insights reports under the *Auditor-General Act 2009*:

- section 63, which outlines the discretion the Auditor-General has for reporting to parliament.
- section 62, which outlines the Auditor-General may prepare interim and supplementary reports.

In accordance with the Act and the *Auditor-General Auditing Standards*, the Auditor-General may report to parliament on any matters, observations, and insights arising from audits that they consider to be significant or in the public interest.

QAO welcomes information on public sector performance and requests for audits from the public, elected members, public sector employees, and other integrity offices. This information is a valuable input to our work.

What we cover in this report

In June 2025, the Minister for the Environment and Tourism and Minister for Science and Innovation requested QAO consider conducting an audit of the Advance Queensland (AQ) initiative. The minister noted concerns about the initiative's effectiveness, governance, and value for money.

This report outlines our assessment of the key processes for overseeing the delivery of the AQ initiative since it commenced in 2015–16. This includes governance arrangements for monitoring allocated funding and achievement of objectives at a whole-of-initiative level.

Entities included in this report

In preparing this report, we focused on the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation (DETSI) as the current department responsible for administering the government's innovation function, including overseeing delivery of the AQ initiative.

We also engaged with the following departments responsible for delivering programs under the initiative:

- Queensland Treasury
- Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning.

Our approach

Why we focused on the AQ initiative

In preparing this report, we focused our assessment on how the Queensland Government monitored and evaluated the AQ initiative at a whole-of-initiative level. AQ was a significant government initiative aimed at fostering innovation through building a more diversified economy and creating jobs. It was launched in 2015 and ran through to August 2026 when the Queensland Government released the new 15-year *Ideas into Impact: From discovery to delivery, Science and Innovation Strategy*, which will replace the AQ initiative.

During this time, its approved budget grew from $180.2 million to $843.8 million. The number of individual programs grew from 8 programs managed by 2 departments to 114 programs managed by 9 departments across the life of the initiative.

We also anticipated that findings from our assessment would provide insights and learnings relevant for similar future initiatives.

What we did

We performed our assessment in accordance with the *Auditor-General Auditing Standards* (the standards). The standards recognise that in discharging their mandate, the Auditor-General is not limited to considering the mandatory professional requirements issued by the Australian Auditing and Assurance Standards Board.

Under the standards, the Auditor-General can assess information provided by anyone with concerns about financial management in Queensland public sector entities and, if appropriate, investigate the issue with the aim of strengthening and improving public sector performance and accountability.

We assessed the initiative as a whole because of its duration, the changes made over time, and the number of individual programs involved. Our aim was to determine whether the Queensland Government could identify the AQ initiative's overall impact and whether it was achieving its objectives.

In developing our work plan for this assessment, we considered the Queensland Government's expectations when approving the AQ initiative, including its overarching objectives and governance requirements. These expectations included that the AQ initiative would be centrally monitored and its performance regularly reported.

Our assessment focused on whether there was whole-of-initiative oversight that:

- included assessing whether the AQ initiative was meeting its approved objectives
- was consistent with initial governance arrangements approved for the AQ initiative
- allowed for monitoring and reporting on total funding allocated to and spent on the AQ initiative.

We conducted our assessment based on information and documentation that was either publicly available or provided by DETSI and other relevant delivery departments. This included:

- information supporting the implementation of the strategy and key decisions the Queensland Government made
- minutes of various governance committees
- publicly reported information about the AQ initiative and supporting programs
- other financial and performance information.

DETSI advised that information it provided to us was prepared from:

- estimates briefs
- state budget papers
- internal financial management tools, including departmental ledgers
- DETSI's grants management platform, and the central recipients' register.

We have relied on information provided by the relevant agencies and have not audited it.

What we did not assess

Our assessment of the AQ initiative did not include an assessment of the merits of the AQ initiative's objectives or whether they were achieved. It also did not include a detailed assessment of the individual programs delivered under the AQ initiative.

How we have reported our findings

Our assessment was not conducted as an audit or assurance engagement under Australian auditing and assurance standards. Accordingly, this report does not include a formal opinion or conclusion on the implementation of the AQ initiative.

Instead, this report identifies the key findings from our assessment of the funding arrangements and the insights we gleaned from these findings. We have included learnings we believe the Queensland Government should consider in developing similar programs in the future.