Report summary

This report outlines our assessment of the key processes for overseeing the delivery of the Advance Queensland initiative from its beginning in 2015 to its replacement in 2026.

Why did we perform this assessment?

Advance Queensland (AQ) was a significant government initiative designed to foster innovation by building a diversified economy and creating jobs that was launched in 2015. In August 2026 the Queensland Government released a new *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 AQ initiative was delivered through 114 individual programs managed by several government departments.

In 2022, the Queensland Government launched *Advance Queensland – Innovation for a Future Economy 2022–2032 Roadmap* (2022–2032 roadmap), which refocused the AQ initiative's objectives and amended the way it was monitored and evaluated.

In June 2025, the Minister for the Environment and Tourism and Minister for Science and Innovation wrote to the Auditor-General requesting QAO consider auditing the AQ initiative and raising concerns about the initiative's effectiveness, governance, and value for money. Given the length of the initiative, the number of programs, and the initiative's changes since 2015, our assessment focused on how the overall impact of the AQ initiative was monitored and evaluated rather than focusing on the outcomes of the individual programs or activities under it. We refer to this as the whole-of-initiative level.

DEFINITION

In this report we use the following terms to describe the AQ initiative and the activities under it.

AQ initiative: all funded programs and activities agencies delivered as part of the government's targeted investment in innovation.

Programs: a funded program or activity delivered to advance the objectives of the AQ initiative. These included grants, partnerships, competitions, procurement of goods and services, events, and sponsorships.

What did we find?

The AQ initiative had broad objectives, that were not supported by key targets and defined success metrics

While the AQ initiative identified objectives linked to approved strategies, the objectives did not include specific targets or success measures. Well-defined objectives and measurable expected outcomes allow for better data capture when measuring performance. Information provided to us about the individual AQ programs did not clearly demonstrate how program objectives aligned with the overall AQ initiative objectives.

Monitoring and evaluation of the AQ initiative changed focus under the 2022–2032 roadmap

In approving the AQ initiative, the Queensland Government set clear governance expectations, including rigorous evaluation, trial-based approaches, and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The initial governance structures aligned with this expectation, with monitoring and evaluation occurring at a whole-of-initiative level.

The Queensland Government commissioned 2 macro-level evaluations of the AQ initiative in 2019 and 2021. The second macro-level evaluation, completed in 2022, reported that many effects from the AQ initiative (both positive and negative) would likely emerge over the next 5 years. No macro-level evaluations of the AQ initiative were performed after 2022.

With the launch of the 2022–2032 roadmap, governance was decentralised, with individual departments responsible for monitoring and evaluating the AQ programs they delivered. This meant that after June 2022, monitoring of the AQ initiative only focused on legacy AQ programs, with unexpected funds and programs funded under the 2022–2032 roadmap.

By June 2022, budgeted funds for programs commenced prior to the launch of the 2022–2032 roadmap were largely committed and most programs were no longer accepting applications or had formally closed. However, the outcomes of these programs were only likely to emerge over the next 5 years. Monitoring of initiatives and programs with longer-term objectives should consider how the outcomes of the initiative and supporting programs will be assessed after the allocated funds are spent.

We could not identify the total amount spent on the AQ initiative

Reporting on the total spend for the AQ initiative against the approved budget was initially provided to the AQ steering committee. This information was also provided as part of quarterly briefs to the Minister for Innovation.

However, following the launch of the 2022–2032 roadmap, the reporting of budget and expenditure only focused on programs funded under the 2022–2032 roadmap. There was no longer reporting on the total budget and expenditure of the AQ initiative from its inception.

In preparing this report, we relied on information from the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation (DETSI) and annual state budgets. As the information provided was compiled from several different sources, it was difficult to reconcile the total amount funded and spent under the AQ initiative.

Based on the information provided, the Queensland Government does not currently have oversight of the total funds spent across the AQ initiative and does not know how it compares to the approved budget. The lack of central monitoring of spending meant DETSI could not confirm if AQ funding was used efficiently, effectively, and economically in alignment with the AQ initiative's objectives.



What do entities need to do?

We make 5 recommendations to all departments based on our assessment and learnings that can be applied to future initiatives. Our recommendations focus on the following themes:

- establishing governance at a whole-of-initiative level
- designing objectives for initiatives and programs
- enhancing performance monitoring and evaluation
- improving transparency and accountability.

We asked DETSI to respond on whether it agrees with our recommendations. The department has agreed to all of our recommendations.