

Middle East

The countries of the Middle East are forging ahead with educational development to ensure that their students are well prepared to meet the challenges of living and working in a global economy.

ACER's United Arab Emirates Office, located in Dubai and headed by Manager Alan Egbert, opened in October 2003 as the first educational research organisation in Knowledge Village. ACER UAE provides knowledge transfer, training and innovative educational services throughout the Middle East.

Most recently, ACER entered into an agreement with Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University in Saudi Arabia to help establish a Centre for Evaluation and Assessment. Once established, the new Centre will influence the educational theory and practice of the University, and will potentially improve and invigorate higher education throughout Saudi Arabia and further afield.

In 2008, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority of Dubai contracted ACER to implement the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The study assessed the

preparedness of the 15-year-old student population in both public and private schools in Dubai. More than 150 schools and 5500 students participated in the study.

The UAE Ministry of Education, recognising the value of benchmarking students internationally, has subsequently become involved in PISA, and in 2010 ACER is implementing PISA Plus 2009 throughout the United Arab Emirates.

Along with most of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, in 2007 Dubai participated for the first time in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which tests students in grades four and eight in mathematics and science. ACER was contracted by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority to assist with training, data analysis, development and writing of the Dubai TIMSS reports, and to provide consultancy on the implementation of policy recommendations stemming from the reports. For the first time in

Dubai, educational providers and policy makers were provided with extensive and invaluable data sets on the performance and achievement levels of public and private students in core subject areas. In 2011, the UAE will participate in TIMSS as a country-wide study.

The International Benchmark Test (IBT) in English, mathematics and science was designed by ACER, to enable student achievement levels in grades 3 to 10 to be benchmarked against local, national and international standards. Each year more than 15,000 students across the GCC countries participate in this assessment.

The English language is another core subject area that Middle Eastern countries consider an important part of an internationally competitive educational system. Specifically designed for the national population of the UAE, the English Language Skills Assessment (ELSA), developed by ACER, is a secure web-based English language proficiency test that



provides instant feedback to teaching staff on the nature of support required for individual students. ELSA is the first comprehensive English language test in the Middle East region to be developed specifically for an Arabic speaking population that tests reading, writing and listening in an online format. It is used extensively by the Abu Dhabi Vocational Education and Training Institute as a selection test for admissions purposes as well as an instrument for placing students in appropriate educational programs.

ACER has also been involved in monitoring innovative educational delivery methods in the region, including the Abu Dhabi Educational Council (ADEC) Private Public Partnership (PPP) program, under which the management of several government schools in Abu Dhabi were taken over by external education providers. A mandated part of the program was the external assessment of student performance and to achieve this ACER was contracted

to administer tests in English, mathematics and science across all grade levels in 2006. For the purpose, ACER developed tests in Arabic that were linked to the ADEC Standards to provide the first baseline assessment data to the PPP Providers and the Council.

Further to ACER's extensive work with the OECD and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in conducting international testing, is the organisation's experience in developing national tests to address the specific educational goals of a country. To this end, ACER developed the National Assessment of Student Achievement and Progress (NASAP) in partnership with the UAE Ministry of Education in 2003. It was the first evaluation program of its kind in the Middle East and constituted the national assessment of grades 3, 5, 7 and 9 in the core subject areas of Arabic, English, mathematics and science. It involved the establishment

of the Centre for Evaluation, Testing and Measurement (CETME) in Abu Dhabi. More than 25,000 national students participated in the test, which was hailed a pioneering success and has been attributed as being the catalyst for the education and curriculum reform that started in the UAE from 2004 onwards.

ACER was further involved in this reform by assisting in the development of the UAE's national curriculum in 2004-05 and training staff from the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Centre. The new curriculum stated explicit standards for each year level with outcomes and indicators of performance.

While this overview of projects that have been completed or are currently being undertaken by ACER in the Middle East is by no means exhaustive, it demonstrates the scope and variety of ACER's experience in the region to date.