

Pacific

ACER is working with Ministries of Education in the Pacific to develop institutional capacity to deliver comprehensive assessment systems at the national and school levels, as **Elizabeth Cassity reports.**

ACER's institutional capacity analyses in 2013 were a collaboration with staff in the Ministries of Education of Solomon Islands, Samoa and Papua New Guinea. The analyses were part of a regional pilot initiated by the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA).

The regional pilot aims to support Pacific Ministries of Education in developing policies and procedures to improve the quality of education as part of the Pacific Benchmarking for Educational Results (PABER) initiative. The institutional capacity analyses support the policy and system assessment component of PABER. Each capacity analysis contributes to an evidence base that will ultimately inform policy and establish interventions to improve learning.

Practical strategies and approaches for comprehensive assessment

ACER's work has supported the governments of Solomon Islands, Samoa and Papua New Guinea to explore practical strategies and approaches on how to develop institutional capacity to deliver comprehensive assessment systems at the national and school levels. Each capacity analysis has also included a review of quality assurance

measures to ensure the validity and reliability of each country's processes and procedures in their assessment systems.

The work has also addressed the technical knowledge and skills of staff in the assessment and examinations units of each country. ACER researchers used the Institutional Capacity Analysis Tool (ICAT), developed by project director Chris Freeman, to assist in data collection. ICAT enables analysis of the readiness and proficiency of assessment staff to satisfy the national policy on assessment. The tool was developed for the institutional capacity analysis in Solomon Islands, and was subsequently adapted in Samoa and Papua New Guinea.

The instruments for the tool included surveys and observation checklists to audit: the task demands associated with each assessment program; a survey of management staff members; a survey of all assessment staff members; a survey of staff technical capacity; a compilation of task demands within the assessment unit; and a compilation of all assessment deadlines.

In addition to adapting the tool to each country's context, the researchers



Elizabeth Cassity is a Research Fellow in the Policy Analysis and Program Evaluation research program at ACER.



reviewed existing documentation related to assessment and curriculum policies and procedures produced by the Ministries of Education. They also conducted interviews with all assessment and examinations staff as well as staff in other relevant divisions of each country's Ministry of Education.

Key outcomes

The three key outcomes of the institutional capacity analyses have been:

- to develop and adapt an institutional capacity analysis tool in consultation with the relevant assessment unit, tailored to the needs of that unit;

- to identify policy and capacity gaps in relation to the overall mission and functioning of the unit, human resources, and system structure and infrastructure; and
- to provide a report of the institutional capacity analysis that includes a three-year national assessment plan with a detailed budget.

The data collected through ICAT, relevant policy documents and interviews with key stakeholders have been synthesised and analysed to develop a profile of the institutional capacity and current processes, and identify capacity gaps.

A further and important outcome of the three institutional capacity analyses is the development of long-term collaborative relationships between ACER and the Ministries of Education in Solomon Islands, Samoa and Papua New Guinea. These relationships include, for example, the design of workshops, work attachments and other professional development activities to improve the capacity of assessment staff over a three-year period. Such collaboration is expanding the profile of ACER in the Pacific region in terms of education assessment and policy analysis.