

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

ACEReSearch

[ACER eNews Archive](#)

[ACER Archives](#)

1-2010

ACER eNews 01 January 2010

ACER

Follow this and additional works at: https://research.acer.edu.au/enews_archive



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

ACER, "ACER eNews 01 January 2010" (2010).
https://research.acer.edu.au/enews_archive/41

This Article is brought to you by the ACER Archives at ACEReSearch. It has been accepted for inclusion in ACER eNews Archive by an authorized administrator of ACEReSearch. For more information, please contact repository@acer.edu.au.

Published January 2010

In this issue:

- [More still needed in overhaul of early childhood education](#)
- [Transparent school reporting](#)
- [ACER UPDATE](#)

More still needed in overhaul of early childhood education

The radical overhaul of Australia's preschool sector will require better legislating for the sector and increasing the number of early childhood education teachers, according to a policy paper released by ACER on 22 December. The policy brief, *Preschool Education in Australia*, summarises the current structure of preschool in Australia in contemplation of major policy shifts announced by the Commonwealth. It follows a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commitment last year to a "radical makeover" of the preschool sector.

COAG promised that by 2013 all preschool children would have access to high quality education programs delivered by degree-qualified early childhood teachers.

"COAG's welcome commitment to universal access illustrates a government awareness of the long shadow cast by early learning experiences," said ACER's chief executive Professor Geoff Masters.

"But implementing this commitment will require significant cooperation between the Commonwealth and the States to ensure that preschools do reflect our society's professed care for its youngest participants."

The policy brief highlights a need for more nationally consistent and comparable preschool data. Information about the preschool sector is currently 15 to 20 years behind what is available about schools.

Inconsistencies are also noted in how early childhood education is regulated across Australian states. Stark differences can be found in the qualifications and salary of staff employed in 'stand alone' preschools and long day care settings.

"Professional opinion often favours long day care and changing workforce needs demand it," Professor Masters said. "Yet teachers in long day care work longer, appear to be paid less and often are unable to register as teachers in their home state."

Professor Masters said a quick and dramatic increase in the number of early childhood teachers was needed before universal preschool education could be implemented.

Published January 2010

“The importance of preschool education for an individual’s future life opportunities demanded a more rigorous and committed approach.”

The policy paper, *Preschool Education in Australia*, was prepared by ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr Andrew Dowling and Research Fellow Kate O’Malley. It is available from the [ACER research repository](#).

Published January 2010

Transparent school reporting

This opinion article by ACER chief executive, Professor Geoff Masters, was published in The Australian newspaper on 22 January 2010.

Threats by the Australian Education Union to boycott this year's literacy and numeracy tests must have many scratching their heads. Why would teachers be opposed to better public information about what is being achieved in our schools?

At the heart of the teacher union threat appears to be a concern that test results will be interpreted as direct indicators of how well individual schools are performing. According to the AEU, there are two problems with such an interpretation. First, literacy and numeracy tests measure only part of what students learn in school and so only partially capture the contributions that schools are making. Second, schools work in very different socioeconomic contexts with significantly different resources, meaning that it is harder to achieve high test scores in some schools than in others. For these reasons, the union argues, measures of student performance are not good measures of a school's performance.

In England, an attempt has been made to address this concern by introducing 'league tables' that purport to show not measures of student performance, but measures of school performance. This is done by first predicting the test performances of students in each school based on their socioeconomic and other backgrounds. The difference between the predicted and actual scores in a school is then taken as a measure of that school's performance. The better students do than predicted, the higher the school's measured performance.

There are several well-recognised problems with this approach. First, it obscures actual student results. Second, it sets lower expectations of some students than others. A school in a low socioeconomic area can be judged to be performing as well as expected, even if students' levels of literacy and numeracy are unacceptable by anybody's standard. Third, this approach assumes that the difference between predicted and actual student results is due only to the influence of the school. As British statistician Harvey Goldstein puts it, parents relying on league tables of this kind to select schools for their children are using a tool not fit for purpose.

In Australia, education systems have chosen not to go down the path of trying to construct a measure of each school's performance so that every school in the country can be compared with every other school in a single 'league table'. Instead, the decision has been made to report actual student test results for each school, including on the My School website.

This is real transparency. It does not obscure actual student performances, and it does not suppress information on the assumption that the public might misinterpret it. The Australian approach is to put test data into the public domain with increasingly rich information about other student outcomes and schools' circumstances and resources so that users can make their own interpretations and judgements.

Published January 2010

To assist users to interpret student performances in a school, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) also provides student results for other schools with similar student intakes. In future years, information could be added about the literacy and numeracy progress that students in each school make across the years of school.

None of this will prevent newspapers from publishing simple lists of student results by school. But lists of this kind are likely to be of much less interest when parents are able to access extensive information about individual schools and their resources and to make more sophisticated comparisons of schools in similar circumstances.

[Professor Geoff Masters](#) is CEO of ACER and author of [Reporting and Comparing School Performances](#) (MCEETYA, April 2009).

Published January 2010

ACER UPDATE

ACER enters project agreements with Imam University

ACER has entered into a project agreement with the [Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University](#) (Imam University), a major institution of higher education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), to help establish an Imam University Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (ICEA). Once established the new centre will have an important influence on the educational process that takes place within the University and will also potentially improve and invigorate higher education throughout the KSA.

ACER will support the establishment of the ICEA by providing guidance, assisting local staff with skills development and conducting seminars to build the capacity of the ICEA staff.

Under a separate agreement ACER will develop a Cognitive Skills Test for Imam University to measure both critical reasoning and problem solving. Imam University will use the test to gain a better understanding of the growth in generic skills attained by its student population over the course of their undergraduate studies.

The project agreements were signed during a visit to ACER's Melbourne office by a delegation from Imam University in early January.

Indigenous school attendance and retention

ACER has been appointed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Social and Indigenous Group to prepare a paper on Indigenous school attendance and retention. The purpose of the paper is to review the quality and breadth of the available evidence on strategies for improving school attendance and retention, evaluate the evidence base in relation to this, and identify any gaps in the available research.

White re-elected to ISOC-AU

ACER Principal Research Fellow, [Mr Gerry White](#), has been re-elected as a Director of the Internet Society of Australia (ISOC-AU) which is the Australian Chapter of the international Internet Society. The Internet Society is a sub-committee of the international Internet Engineering Taskforce (IETF). The IETF makes the Internet work better by producing high quality, relevant technical documents that influence the way people design, use, and manage the Internet.

The goal of ISOC-AU is to assist the development of the internet for everybody in Australia. The work of ISOC-AU can be seen at: www.isoc-au.org.au

Published January 2010

Copyright © Australian Council for Educational Research 2015

All rights reserved. Except under the conditions described in the Copyright Act 1968 of Australia and subsequent amendments, no part of this electronic publication may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without written permission. Please address any requests to reproduce information to communications@acer.edu.au

[Subscribe](#)

Australian Council for Educational Research
Private Bag 55, Camberwell, Victoria Australia 3124
Tel: + 61 3 9277 5555
Fax: + 61 3 9277 5500
Web: www.acer.edu.au

