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Education for all in India

A delegation of professionals from India's National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), led by Professor Avtar Singh, recently participated in a series of workshops over a two week period at ACER's head office. The purpose of their visit was to receive training in the preparation and analysis of large-scale surveys to better monitor changes to educational outcomes under the Government's reform program.

Recognising that decisive action was required to achieve universal primary education for boys and girls by the year 2015 in line with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, in 2001 the Government of India embarked on a nation-wide program called Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

SSA's main goals are to enrol all children aged six to 14 years in school, to bridge all gender and social category gaps evident in schools, to achieve universal retention and to focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life.

According to the World Bank, who supplies funding toward the program, SSA is the largest ongoing Education For All program in the world. SSA is responsible for reducing the number of out of school children from 25 million in 2003 to 8.1 million in 2009. The current enrolment rate is more than 98 per cent of children in the age cohort.

Professor Singh, the Head of India's Department of Educational Measurement and Evaluation, said, "We established SSA firstly to enrol the children in the schools, secondly to retain them in the schools and subsequently provide them with education of reasonable quality."

Having made significant progress on enrolment and retention, the focus is now heavily on the issue of quality. However, definitions of quality are of little use unless there are processes in place to measure whether or not it is being achieved.

Under SSA, NCERT has a mandate to conduct a National Achievement Survey of Grades 3, 5 and 8 every three years. Two assessment cycles have been completed since 2002. Each of these assessment cycles utilised Classical Test Theory.

"For the third assessment cycle we want to improve the quality of the survey," Singh said. "We want to use Item Response Theory."

Data collection for the Grade 5 cohort has already taken place. In need of further training in survey analysis and measurement theory, NCERT turned to ACER. Unlike Australia's NAPLAN,

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India's National Achievement Survey is a sample survey conducted on approximately one per cent of the student population.

Realising that ACER's experience conducting international sample assessments such as PISA would be invaluable, Professor Singh travelled with six colleagues to ACER's head office in Melbourne. There, highly-qualified ACER staff delivered a series of workshops on topics such as sampling, test development, field operations, analysis, reporting and report dissemination.

Professor Singh said his colleagues had benefited from their participation in the fortnight of workshops at ACER.

"It was a very useful exercise," Singh said on the final day of workshops.

"We already have a plan of action for implementing the learning."

Spurred by the success of his team's visit, Professor Singh has reported he is open to exploring the possibilities of further collaborations with ACER as NCERT work towards fulfilling the aims of SSA; enrolment, retention, equity and quality.

Professor Singh identifies the supply of qualified and educated teachers as the biggest challenge India faces in providing all children with quality education.

Singh said, "We have children in the schools, now we need teachers in the schools."

"Right to Education stipulates that there must be one teacher for every thirty students," Singh said, referring to the 2009 Act of Parliament that outlines the State's obligations in providing free and compulsory education to all children.

"To meet that requirement we need one million teachers."

Professor Singh is confident that India can achieve the goals of SSA.

"It's a developmental process," Singh said. "It cannot be done overnight but we will do it."

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Big interest in Big Science Competition

On September 1 secondary school students from across the Asia-Pacific region participated in the Rio Tinto Big Science Competition.

ACER developed a Junior, Intermediate and Senior level science test for the competition and is currently analysing the results.

The one hour competition was open to secondary students of all abilities and ages, and tested their science knowledge and understanding.

To align the tests to the emerging Australian Science Curriculum, ACER based the questions on contemporary science issues such as car safety, environmental issues and dental health.

The questions assess critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and knowledge of science concepts and the methods of scientific inquiry.

ACER has designed the tests in a way that allows all students some success.

The final questions in each test are more challenging, in order to identify those highly-talented students who are the 'best of the best'.

When the test results are released in October, teachers will receive a comprehensive report showing how each student performed on each question, and how the school group performed against the national or regional average.

A National Presentation Ceremony for this year's top-scoring students will also be held in October.

All participating students will receive a certificate to recognise their achievement in the competition.

The Rio Tinto Big Science Competition regularly attracts the participation of around 40 000 students from Australia and neighbouring countries.

The competition has been held annually since 2005 however this is the first time that ACER has had contracted involvement.

The Rio Tinto Big Science Competition is organised by fellow not-for-profit organisation, Australian Science Innovations, whose aim is to encourage students to study science and consider science-based careers.

For more information on the Big Science Competition go to <http://www.asi.edu.au/bigscience/>

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Staff in Australia's Schools Survey underway

The Staff in Australia's Schools (SiAS) survey is now in schools. This is an important survey for the teaching profession.

ACER is conducting the survey on behalf of DEEWR. Its focus is information to improve teacher workforce planning. Topics covered include:

- teachers' background and qualifications
- professional learning activities
- workload
- career pathways
- future career intentions
- preparation for leadership roles
- school staffing issues

The survey involves random samples of Primary and Secondary schools:

- in the Government, Catholic and Independent sectors
- in all States and Territories

The survey is designed to be easy and quick to complete online. The data are confidential and no school or teacher will be identified.

It is critical that the invited Principals and teachers take part so that high quality, representative data are collected.

The survey is widely supported. The Advisory Committee includes government and non-government school employers, principals' associations, teacher unions, teacher education institutions, and the ABS. The survey is also supported by the Australian College of Educators (ACE).

For further information see: www.acer.edu.au/sias

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VET Leadership for the future

A new report into leadership in the VET sector by the LH Martin Institute at the University of Melbourne and ACER was released on 22 September. VET Leadership for the Future was co-authored by Hamish Coates, Justin Brown and Tim Friedman from ACER.

The report draws together reviews, prior research and a national survey of 327 practicing VET leaders. He says the current selection process for VET leaders needs to be revised against evidence of effective leadership capabilities and predicts large-scale staff departure over the next few decades. The full report is available online from ACER's [research repository](#).

ACER launches student journalism award

The Australian Council for Educational Research is offering an award for excellence in an article relating to education. Students who are currently enrolled in an Australian accredited course leading to at least a diploma level qualification are invited to enter. Small cash prizes totaling \$600 will be awarded to the place getters (\$300 for first place, \$200 for second place and \$100 for third place). In addition the winning and short listed entries will be considered for publication in one of the magazines published by ACER Press – Teacher and Inside Teaching. Entries close Friday 22 October 2010.

Dinham takes out Australian College of Educators Victoria medal

Research Director with ACER's Teaching, Learning and Leadership program, Professor Stephen Dinham has been awarded the Sir James Darling Medal by the Australian College of Educators Victorian Branch. The Sir James Darling Medal is named after the founder of the College and is awarded to an eminent Victorian educator, who has made 'an outstanding and sustained contribution to Victorian education.' Professor Dinham also took out the ACE NSW branch award, the [Sir Harold Wyndham medal in 2005](#) and is the only person ever to have won both prizes.

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Developing and Recognising Accomplished Teaching

ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr Lawrence Ingvarson recently participated in an invited international symposium on Developing and Recognising Accomplished Teaching at the University of Glasgow. The symposium was sponsored by the General Teaching Council for Scotland and brought together leading professionals and academics from different national systems to review the Scottish Chartered Teacher scheme and to examine issues such as:

- Defining and assessing accomplished teaching
- Roles for accomplished teachers across different systems internationally
- Policies to support aspirant and accredited Chartered Teachers
- Strengthening the role of the teaching profession in developing and recognising accomplished teachers. A copy of the paper Lawrence Ingvarson prepared for the symposium, Reflections on Defining, Assessing and Recognising Accomplished Teaching, is available on request.

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