



## Building capacity for Bhutan's learning assessment



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ACER is supporting development of Bhutan's National Education Assessment Framework (NEAF) and strengthening local capacity for its implementation. **Dr Mee Young Han** reports.

In light of the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, countries in South Asia are strategically prioritising the strengthening of their learning assessment systems. Robust learning assessments provide high-quality data on the learning levels of students. The evidence collected is used to monitor progress and inform decision-making in education policy and practice. The development of a national assessment framework is a prerequisite for establishing a reliable national assessment that effectively measures the achievements of students.

Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment (BCSEA), Royal Government of Bhutan, commissioned ACER India to develop Bhutan's National Education Assessment Framework (NEAF) and develop the capacity of BCSEA to measure the quality of education at key stages of learning (Class III, VI and IX). The project has three distinct areas:

- Development of high-quality NEAF in consultation with Bhutan's education stakeholders
- Capacity development of BCSEA in robust assessments
- Technical support for the implementation of the National Education Assessment (NEA) that students will take at the end of Class III in English and mathematics in 2020 and 2021.

Through intensive capacity development, the aim is to ensure that BCSEA has the knowledge and technical proficiency to implement a high-quality NEA. In addition to capacity building, ACER India will support the

development of processes, systems, protocols, manuals, and methodologies with the intention of bringing global best practice in learning assessments to Bhutan's national assessment system.

ACER India conducted a workshop in Paro, Bhutan, which was attended by 37 participants nominated by BCSEA, including the Minister of Education, Royal Government of Bhutan. Participants were introduced to the five key areas of a robust assessment. ACER India experts briefed participants about the importance and components of the assessment framework, and technical standards.

ACER India prepared an initial draft of the NEAF for Classes III, VI and X prior to the workshop. The draft was not only curriculum-based but also aimed to address competencies in each domain. ACER India experts conceptualised the structure of the framework and the approach to assessing English, mathematics and science.

The development of the framework is conceived as a participatory process. The input from BCSEA and other experts present at the workshop ensured that the framework acknowledges local country-specific concerns and at the same time incorporates the international standards of large-scale national assessments. The resulting assessment framework draft was reviewed by a committee, which was composed of representatives from BCSEA, teachers, curriculum experts from the Royal Education Council (REC) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) and specifically formed for revisions and finalisation of the NEAF.

At the second workshop in April 2019 participants from BCSEA, REC and MoE, were joined by attendees from the Special Education Needs (SEN) division. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the changes suggested by the review committee and bring consistency in different domain chapters.

Additionally, a session was organised to explore accommodations for students with disabilities. The possibility of including a chapter in the NEAF on the accommodations and adaptations necessary to effectively assess the learning outcomes of students with disabilities was discussed. However, the decision to include children with disabilities in the NEAF is still under consideration.

The workshop also focused on incorporation of 21st century skills, bearing in mind the nine student attributes defined in the Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014–24. Skills or attributes that can be included in the assessment domains were identified for each subject. The criteria for their inclusion were discussed in detail.

The ACER India team visited both mainstream and special education schools to observe education practices and develop an understanding of schooling in Bhutan.

The framework will be finalised in July 2019. The next phase of the project is dedicated to institutional capacity building on the implementation of the NEA. BCSEA is planning to roll out a pilot survey in March 2020, followed by the main survey for Class III in October 2020. ■