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Build a performance pay system fit for a profession

The debate over performance pay for teachers has almost been derailed by a failure to look beyond the narrow confines of individual schools or state school systems and to focus on the central issue of what needs to be done to improve teaching standards for school students.

Teaching is one of the few professions in the country that does not have its own certification system for identifying highly accomplished practitioners.

One guideline for approaching this challenge is to look to the US where the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards provides an endorsement that a teacher has met specified high standards of teaching practice.

Its certification provides the most rigorous and legally defensible system operating internationally. Teachers submit a variety of forms of evidence, including evidence of student learning over time and videotapes of their teaching. No other system for assessing teacher performance has subjected itself to so many tests of its validity and reliability and, as a result, its fairness and legal defensibility.

The US experience identifies two distinctions that need to be made in the Australian performance pay debate.

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The first is between an assessment system and a recognition system. A national professional body, like the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in the US, conducts the assessment system and provides the certification. But it is the prerogative of employing authorities to decide whether and how they will recognise that certification.

The Board does not tell employers and unions what form of recognition they should give to teachers who gain National Board certification. But it does provide a service they can adapt to their needs to provide incentives and recognition for good teachers.

There is, therefore, an important separation between the system for assessing teacher performance and the system for giving financial recognition to teachers who gain certification. The Australian teaching profession needs a national body that provides a certification service.

It is unrealistic to expect individual schools to create and operate their own assessment and certification schemes. Nor can such schemes provide consistency of judgment from school to school, or lead to a certification with profession-wide respect and portability.

The National Board certification system has been operating for twenty years. It is modelled on certification bodies in other professions, such as medicine.

As its certification has gained credibility, employers have increasingly found ways to give their teachers financial incentives to apply for Board certification, sometimes through bonuses; more often through access to higher salary scales.

Nearly every state in the USA offer financial rewards for teachers achieving National Board certification, which has already lasted much longer than most merit pay schemes with similar aims, but very different methods of assessing teacher performance.

The second important distinction is between two types of teacher evaluation. One is the proper responsibility of employing authorities, in the public interest. This is often described in terms of "performance management" or annual performance reviews. These reviews are based on the requirement that teachers fulfil their contractual duties.

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These reviews may lead to bonus payments for performance, but this is very rare in teaching. Schools find it simpler, and safer, to focus on more pay for extra work than more pay for better teaching. An external certification system lowers the heat on school administrators, who may face accusations of bias and cronyism if they try to set up their own evaluation schemes.

The other type of evaluation is conducted by professional bodies and leads to some form of advanced certification such as Certified Practising Accountant (CPA) or Chartered Engineer. Success in this kind of performance evaluation leads to a portable qualification that belongs to the individual and is not tied to a particular employer or position within an organisation.

However, professional associations know that they must ensure their certification is rigorous if employing authorities are to use it in selection and promotion decisions.

The debate in Australia often fails to make this important distinction, for example by proposing that each school develop its own scheme for assessing teacher performance for high stakes decisions. Such an approach would be equivalent to every business developing its own CPA system for accountants, or each hospital administration developing its own certification system for doctors who reach high standards in their field of medicine.

Why would we do this for teaching when we would never think of doing it in other professions?

Teaching, as a profession, needs a system for providing an independent, authoritative performance assessment service to schools and school systems seeking to provide incentives to teachers to attain high standards and to retain those who do. In the absence of such a system, it will be difficult to create a strong market for highly accomplished teachers.

Australia does not need a raft of half-baked performance pay or bonus pay schemes, here today, discredited yet again tomorrow. What we need is bi-partisan support to build a rigorous national certification system fit for a profession -- one that employing authorities and the public regard as a solid foundation on which to provide better salaries and career paths for teachers who reach high standards of performance.

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Lawrence Ingvarson is a Principal Research Fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research. He recently prepared a report, *Research on Performance Pay for Teachers* for the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training with Elizabeth Kleinhenz and Jenny Wilkinson. The report is available at the [DEST](#) and [ACER](#) websites.

This article was originally published in *The Canberra Times* ('Rating teachers: you need to be certified,' by Lawrence Ingvarson, *The Canberra Times*, 20 June 2007, page 19).

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ACER launches Leadership Centre

ACER launched the *ACER Leadership Centre* at the beginning of July, coinciding with the commencement of Dr Neil Carrington as Director of the Centre.

The Leadership Centre replaces the former Australian Principals Centre (APC) and broadens the leadership focus to include all educational leaders. The new ACER Leadership Centre will focus on providing practical support to the professional learning and professional work of current and aspiring education leaders throughout Australia.

These leaders include those in schools and the tertiary sector, but also include staff in other school leadership roles and organisational/system leadership positions. The support provided through the Leadership Centre will take a variety of forms, possibly including networking opportunities, coaching/mentoring services, leadership publications, online resources, professional development opportunities and HR tools.

Neil Carrington is an experienced educator and counsellor who has worked in a variety of K-12 education settings in Queensland, NSW and London. He lectured in Educational Psychology and Teaching Practice at Queensland University of Technology and the University of Western Sydney, was Director of School Experience at the University of New England and Director of Teaching and Learning at QUT. He also spent six years as the Foundation Director of Education for Mater Health Services with responsibility for all organisational and professional development, education, and training for medical, nursing, allied health and administrative/executive staff. As well as his initial teaching qualification, Dr Carrington has a postgraduate qualification in Special Education, a Masters degree in Education, second Masters degree in Educational Psychology and a PhD which focused on Gifted Education. Neil is located in ACER's Brisbane office.

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ACER has also appointed Ms Mary Cahill to the Leadership Centre as Manager of Leadership Projects. She has extensive leadership experience in education and business with public and private sector organisations, having worked as a Principal, Zone Co-ordinator and Regional Manager in education and as a Divisional Manager for a national ASX-listed company in business. Mary is the founder of the [Principal for a Day](#) program in Australia. Her qualifications include a Bachelor of Education, Graduate Diploma in Educational Administration and a Masters of Business in Industrial Relations/Human Resources Management. Mary is located in ACER's Melbourne office.

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Breakthrough instrument in Autism detection for infants published

ACER Press has published a newly developed Autism detection tool, *The Autism Detection in Early Childhood* or ADEC has been developed by Flinders University psychologist Associate Professor Robyn Young and her team.

Once diagnosed, research has shown that children are most responsive to early intervention, particularly before the age of three. Early diagnosis could lead to better outcomes for children and major savings in health costs, estimated to be between \$4.5 and \$7.2 billion annually in Australia alone.

Following a research breakthrough by Associate Professor Young's team children as young as 18 months can be diagnosed using ADEC.

Associate Professor Young and her team have discovered it's the things a young child *doesn't* do that often provide the clues to the presence of Autism. Because early symptoms of Autism are often characterised by an absence of normal behavioural development, rather than the presence of unusual behaviour, diagnosis and early intervention can be crucially delayed.

"Many of the classic behaviours associated with AD, such as delayed or repetitive non-communicative speech, and obsessive interests, develop or become more apparent later in life," Professor Young said.

"Therefore, unless one is aware of when skills should develop and how they should develop; their absence may not cause concern. It is only when the secondary behaviours develop, and the more obvious milestones of speech and social play do not develop, that the child may receive more serious attention."

By that time, many of the early behaviours are no longer evident, complicating the clinical picture.

The ADEC describes 16 specific behaviours. If a child fails to demonstrate these behaviours by 18 months to two years of age it may lead to consideration of an early diagnosis of Autism.

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The relationship between these behaviours and AD are supported empirically, and the tool has now, with support from Flinders Technologies, been published through the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER).

There has already been considerable international interest in ADEC and its potential benefits: Mexico plans to use a modified Spanish version as part of a national screening tool and a Chinese version of the tool is also undergoing research in Malaysia and China.

Flinders University research is being extended to identify signs of the disorder even earlier, possibly from birth.

PhD student Danielle Robson is recruiting typically developing newborns and those at risk of developing Autism due to heritability factors to be involved in a longitudinal study of infant development.

The study will follow younger siblings of children already diagnosed with the disorder over 18 months to investigate whether there are early abnormalities in their development that distinguishes them from typically developing children.

Associate Professor Young said she hopes that tools such as ADEC will enable professionals to become familiar with the early presentation of the disorder.

More information about ADEC is available from [ACER Press](#) online or by phone on 1800 338 402 or (03) 9277 5447.

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ACER UPDATE

Appointment of new Research Director for Teaching and Leadership

Professor Stephen Dinham has joined ACER as Research Director in the Teaching and Leadership research program. Professor Dinham joined ACER on 1 July. Professor Dinham's most recent appointment was Professor of Educational Leadership and Pedagogy at the Australian Centre for Educational Leadership, University of Wollongong. He has also held senior academic roles at the University of New England and the University of Western Sydney. His main research interests include educational leadership and change, pedagogy/quality teaching, professional teaching standards, teachers' professional development and teacher satisfaction, motivation and health. . He also holds the position of Visiting Professorial Fellow, Australian Centre for Educational Leadership, University of Wollongong. [Read Professor Dinham's profile.](#)

Indicators of training quality

The Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) has awarded ACER the contract for the Development of Instruments and Collections to Support Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) Indicators. This work has been endorsed by the National Quality Council, which is the body that oversees quality assurance and ensures national consistency among public and private training providers. ACER has been commissioned to develop measures of employer satisfaction, and learner engagement and competency development, and will liaise with NCVET on aspects of the work. The project builds on work done in 2006 with PhillipsKPA for the Victorian Qualifications Authority

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Employability skills of senior students

DEST has awarded ACER the contract for a *Study into the assessment and reporting of employability skills of senior secondary students*. The purpose of the project is to analyse and evaluate appropriate methods for assessing and reporting, on a nationally comparable basis, Year 12 students' employability skills.

The project derives from Geoff Masters' 2006 report *Australian Certificate of Education: Exploring a way forward* (the ACE Report). The new project is in the Assessment and Reporting program area. A small piece of work by the University of Western Sydney will complement the ACER work. As was the case with the ACE Report and the recent CAS Report (Year 12 Curriculum Content and Achievement Standards), DEST will set up a project advisory group. The work is to be completed by the end of 2007.

Database of learning providers

ACER has signed a contract with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) for ACER to design and develop a data base of professional learning providers. The data base will support teachers to source appropriate professional learning activities to advance their skills and knowledge and to meet the requirements for renewal of registration.

Literature review on standards for teaching published

The New Zealand Teachers Council has published a major literature review on standards for teaching by Elizabeth Kleinhenz and Lawrence Ingvarson of ACER entitled, *Standards for Teaching: Theoretical Underpinnings and Applications*. The publication is also available on the [Council's website](#).

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Research Conference 2007

ACER's Research Conference for 2007 will be held in Melbourne from 12-14 August. This year's conference will address the theme of *The Leadership Challenge - Improving learning in schools*.

This conference will address key issues related to building leadership in schools that makes a difference to student learning outcomes. International and Australian presenters will provide news about the latest research on leadership practices that enable conditions for quality teaching and student learning and stimulate discussion about the resources and conditions that need to be in place if effective forms of leadership are to flourish and be sustained in our schools.

More than 500 delegates have registered for the conference so far. Limited places are still available. For further information and to register [visit the conference website](#)

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