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In this issue:

- [Political bias in HSC?](#)
- [Survey to provide snapshot of Australian teaching workforce](#)
- [ACER UPDATE](#)

Political bias in HSC?

Contrary to recent media reports, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has reached no conclusions about political bias in the NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC) chief executive Professor Geoff Masters said today.

It was claimed in a 19 October newspaper article that an ACER 'report' had concluded that there was no political bias in the HSC.

However, Professor Geoff Masters said that there was no report and that there had been no 'findings' of a study currently underway for the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.

"Somebody appears to have obtained a copy of a questionnaire that is being used as part of this study, but no conclusions about the presence or absence of political bias can be drawn from that questionnaire," Professor Masters said.

The study, which is examining the content, curriculum and standards of senior school subjects across Australia in English, mathematics, physics, chemistry and Australian History, will report later this year.

Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop announced the study in May following the release of a report on options for a single Australian Certificate of Education.

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Survey to provide snapshot of Australian teaching workforce

Information gathered from a new survey of staff in Australian schools will provide a much-needed demographic picture of the Australian teaching workforce and highlight specific workforce issues.

The *Staff in Australia's Schools Survey* is being conducted by ACER until December this year with the assistance of the Australian College of Educators (ACE).

Over 20 000 teachers and school leaders from more than 2000 government, Catholic and independent schools across Australia are being randomly selected and invited to take part.

The survey aims to describe more fully the teacher workforce by gathering information such as gender, age, school sector and level, qualifications and work roles. Attitudinal information regarding career plans, working conditions and attraction to leadership roles will also be collected to support future workforce planning. The last such national survey was conducted by the ACE in 1999.

ACER Research Director (Teaching and Leadership) Dr Phillip McKenzie, said the main purpose of the *Staff in Australia's Schools* survey is to provide an insight into the current and future workforce capacity needs of Australian primary and secondary schools.

"The project will provide critical information for governments, teacher educators, professional educators, professional associations and teachers themselves as they look to address the future staffing needs of Australia's schools," Dr McKenzie said.

He said the value of the data depends on teacher participation and urged teachers and principals to take part in the survey if invited. The survey can be completed on-line, and the responses are confidential.

In addition to the survey, consultations are being undertaken with key stakeholders around Australia regarding possible longer-term collaborative approaches to workforce data collection processes.

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The *Staff in Australia's Schools* survey was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training. It is being supported by an Advisory Committee representing government and non-government authorities, professional associations and teacher educators.

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ACER UPDATE

Teacher education accreditation

Teaching Australia has released a report prepared by ACER entitled, *Teacher Education Accreditation: A review of national and international trends and practices*, which examines the current state of teacher accreditation processes, in Australia and overseas. The report can be downloaded from the Teaching Australia website.

Perceptions of the International Baccalaureate Program in Australasian Tertiary Institutions

The number of secondary students completing an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma has risen rapidly in recent years, and the IB is playing an increasing role in preparing people for university study. The International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) is interested in universities' perceptions of the IB as a preparation for undergraduate study, and has engaged ACER to research this area of higher education. A survey is being conducted of senior university staff at all Australasian universities, which will be followed by a series of interviews. The study commenced in September and will run until early 2007.

Family Expectations and Post-School Plans

The Smith Family has commissioned ACER to conduct a study of Family Expectations and Post-School Plans. The project will combine a major literature review with around 10 case studies of young people and their families. The young people are from disadvantaged backgrounds and participating in the Smith Family's Learning for Life program. The project began in August and will conclude in March 2007.

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