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2012 continues to be an exciting year on the international front for ACER, with growing collaboration with our international partners in research and assessment programmes, as well as through driving professional capacity-building initiatives in our region and beyond.

In January, ACER was delighted to welcome Simaima Tavil-Melachon, a science teacher from Papua New Guinea and a recent Masters graduate from La Trobe University, as part of the prestigious 2012 Prime Minister’s Pacific-Australia Awards (PMPA) programme. In Simaima’s 3-month secondment to ACER, she focused on programs developing literacy and integrating science learning, as well as working closely with ACER staff in developing a proposal for a project improving literacy in PNG.

Amongst our collaborative efforts, ACER has been working on a range of global research and assessment initiatives to develop strong learning outcomes worldwide, such as investigating the impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on the learning process.

In consultation with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), ACER has been working on a project tracking student achievement and how this is measured in different countries, geared towards building and sharing knowledge of internationally comparable indicators in learning outcomes. Improving the quality of education to meet recognised and measurable standards ties into UNESCO’s ‘Education for All by 2015’ goals, and is a critical component of education for development.

In the latest report on the ongoing OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has meanwhile confirmed that girls tend to have stronger results in reading and understanding information than boys.

PISA 2009+ assessed 15-year old students’ knowledge and skills in 10 additional locations to the 64 countries and economies that participated in the main programme in 2009. The report found results were related to socioeconomic and demographic factors that could impact learning skills.

The fieldwork stage for the OECD’s Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) team also began, with thousands of students and teaching staff undertaking assessment tasks aimed to survey how final-year students apply the knowledge and skills built through their degrees. Evaluating the capacity of students in higher education in what they know and can do at the point of graduation provides a valuable and practical tool in assessing learning outcomes, when students are at the critical stage of realising their investment in education as they enter the job market.

While the AHELO Feasibility Study has involved collaboration across 16 countries through several project stages, ACER is also looking to further develop an international community of scholars in education research and assessment, which you can read about on pages 12-13 of this issue.

Finally, ACER is very proud to be involved with initiatives in improving indigenous learning, an important organisational priority and a commitment to respecting and including cultural identities in learning and teaching.

We look forward to updating you further on our work in education for development and inclusive education in future issues of International Update.

Peter McGuckian
Director of International Development, ACER
The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) has launched an initiative to track student achievement and its measurement worldwide. Known as the UIS Observatory of Learning Outcomes, the project will compile indicators of achievement among primary and secondary students in more than 200 countries. As a partner in the project, ACER was involved in a pilot study of the Observatory in 2011. ACER Deputy Director of International Surveys, Dr John Cresswell, is leading ACER’s involvement in the project.

The Observatory of Learning Outcomes contributes to the ongoing collective efforts by nations and the international development community to emphasise the importance of learning outcomes. It forms a key part of UNESCO’s Education for All agenda; a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. At the 2000 World Education Forum, 164 governments pledged to achieve Education for All and identified six goals to be met by 2015. Goal six seeks to improve the quality of education so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The design of the Observatory includes two components:

- A catalogue of all measures used by countries to understand the learning levels of their primary and secondary school children (i.e. from national assessments, including exams, and international sources) as well as selected attributes of the approaches countries choose to generate and express these indicators.

- A global database of internationally comparable indicators of learning outcomes by the end of primary school from existing and/or new assessments, with a focus on reading, numeracy and writing skills.

In 2011, ACER worked with the UIS during the pilot study of the catalogue component. The pilot involved collecting information about educational assessments from 24 participating countries. The data collection process was centred around a template that allowed data collectors to record information about the attributes of each assessment—for example, if it was a national or international assessment, whether it was norm referenced or criterion referenced, if it was administered as a sample or to a census of students.

Following completion of the individual country reviews, ACER combined the information and designed two different ways to report on each country’s assessments. The design of the first style of report from the database emphasised each assessment and the results obtained by the country. Some of the attributes of the assessment were recorded in detail; for example, the grade and language of assessment.

The second style of reporting the information from the database was to focus on a particular subject area and display results for that area in the different assessments undertaken by the country. This allowed a side-by-side comparison of results that a country obtained in national and international assessments, allowing countries to get an indication of the level of their own national assessment compared to other countries. This was found to be very valuable in some countries where national results were very high, but international ones were much lower.

ACER prepared an evaluation report on the pilot study and submitted it to the UIS and the Advisory Board of the Observatory of Learning Outcomes in late 2011. The design of the project has now been endorsed and the UIS is in the process of considering the implications of scaling up the project from the 24 countries in the pilot study to all 200 countries in UNESCO. This will be a complex task and ACER is preparing a discussion paper to help provide direction.
Girls outperform boys in reading in PISA 2009+

Results from an international student assessment of reading, mathematics and science released late last year reveal that girls tend to be better than boys at reading, understanding, remembering and summarising information.

The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international comparative survey of 15-year-olds’ knowledge and skills in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy. It measures how well young adults have acquired the knowledge and skills that are required to function as successful members of society. ACER has led an international consortium of organisations to develop, implement and analyse each triennial cycle of PISA since its inception.

Sixty-four countries and economies originally participated in PISA 2009. Ten additional countries and economies, who were unable to participate within the PISA 2009 project timeframe, participated in the study on a reduced and delayed timeline in 2010. This is known as the PISA 2009+ project.

The PISA 2009+ participants were Costa Rica, Georgia, Himachal Pradesh (India), Tamil Nadu (India), Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Miranda (Venezuela), Moldova and the United Arab Emirates. More than 46,000 students across these ten economies took part in the survey, representing a total of about 1,377,000 15-year olds.

Releasing the results in December 2011, ACER CEO Professor Geoff Masters said the survey found that girls significantly outperformed boys in reading in the PISA 2009+ economies. This was also the case for all 64 countries and economies participating in PISA 2009.

‘Girls not only tended to attain higher reading scores than boys, they were also more aware of strategies for understanding, remembering and summarising information,’ said Professor Masters.

‘Students who are highly aware of effective strategies for learning and who also regularly read a wide range of material, tend to demonstrate better reading proficiency than those who either have a lower awareness of effective strategies or read a narrower range of materials regularly,’ he said.

Professor Masters said that while school-level factors account for a considerable proportion of variation in reading performance between schools, much of this is associated with socioeconomic and demographic factors.

‘This suggests that policies around governance, accountability, the investment of educational resources and the overall learning environment are influenced by the social and demographic intake of the school,’ Professor Masters said.

Professor Masters said schools containing students with higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be more autonomous in their decisions about curriculum, make more of assessments for accountability purposes, have better student-teacher relationships and utilise more educational resources. According to Professor Masters, students attending these schools have better educational outcomes.

The results also showed both girls and boys from the PISA 2009+ nations had overall results in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy that were lower than the OECD average.

The full PISA 2009+ report is available from mypisa.acer.edu.au
From Facebook, Twitter or Yammer to barcode scanners at the checkout to the latest Angry Birds app, information and communication technology (ICT) has fundamentally changed the way we communicate, work, shop and play. Similarly, educators, researchers and policy makers are grappling with the ways in which ICT is changing learning and schooling. Students learn to use ICT and use ICT to learn, and that has led in many educational systems not only to an interest in computer and information literacy, but also to the assessment of computer and information literacy as a component of monitoring student achievement.

Sound assessments of computer and information literacy depend on a uniform framework and empirically based set of outcome standards, and these are at the core of the International Study of Computer and Information Literacy (ICILS).

The ICILS project conducted by ACER and others for the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) currently involves the education systems of 21 countries: Australia, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, the Republic of Korea, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand and Turkey.

There are three questions that ICILS seeks to answer in terms of students’ use of computers as information tools, rather than simply their capacity to understand information presented from a range of sources.

First, what variations exist between countries, and within countries, in student computer and information literacy?

Second, what aspects of schools and education systems are related to student achievement in computer and information literacy in terms of: the general approach to computer and information literacy education; school and teaching practices regarding the use of technologies in computer and information literacy; teacher attitudes to, and proficiency in, using computers; access to ICT in schools; and teacher professional development and school delivery of computer and information literacy programs?

Third, what characteristics of students’ backgrounds, and levels of access to, familiarity with and self-reported proficiency in using computers, are related to student achievement in computer and information literacy? Following on from this, how do these characteristics differ among and within countries; to what extent does measured computer and information literacy correlate with self-reported proficiency in ICT; and does the strength of this correlation differ among countries and groups of students?

ICILS is a big collaborative project. Working with the 21 National Centres of the participating countries are five organisations involved in preparing the ICILS instruments, namely: the IEA Secretariat, coordinating translation and translation verification processes; cApStAn, the translation verification contractor; ACER, developing the source instruments, reviewing national adaptations and coordinating software development; Sonet Systems, developing the testing software and running the software translation system and control systems; and the IEA Data Processing and Research Centre, handling data management and the online survey systems software for questionnaires for teachers, principals and ICT coordinators.
Representatives from all participating countries have extensive input into the shape of the project. So far, there have been four face-to-face meetings in the two years the project has been running, and true to the assessment area, extensive ICT-based communication as well. The early focus of this collaboration has been on shaping the instruments to be used and ensuring they are true to the domain as well as meeting the needs of participants. More recently, work in ICILS has focussed more on operational matters in the lead up to the 2012 field trial.

The field trial is scheduled to be completed in June 2012 and this will be followed by a review of the data analyses from the field trial and selection of instrument contents for the main survey, as well as operational planning for the main survey later this year.

The main survey will follow in 2013, and detailed answers to the research questions will be available in 2014 when the report is released.

Further information about ICILS is available from [icils.acer.edu.au](http://icils.acer.edu.au)
Findings from the largest international study on civic and citizenship education ever conducted reveal that, despite the realm of politics being dominated worldwide by men, girls in lower secondary education have on average higher levels of knowledge and understanding of civics and citizenship than boys.

The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS 2009) aimed to determine how well prepared students are to be citizens in a fast-changing world and how much they have learned about civic issues through their formal education. It reported on students’ civic knowledge, as well as student attitudes and engagement related to civic and citizenship education.

Teacher and school questionnaires gathered information about the context in which civic and citizenship education is taught, including reports on teaching and learning in this area, as well as on school governance and school climate. A national context survey collected information about the provision of civic and citizenship education in each participating country.

In cooperation with the National Foundation for Educational Research in the United Kingdom and the Laboratorio di Pedagogia sperimentale at the Roma Tre University in Italy, ACER acted as the International Study Centre for ICCS 2009, conducting the study under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). ACER’s Dr John Ainley and Dr Wolfram Schulz acted as project coordinator and research director respectively.

The study involved more than 140,000 students in their eighth year of schooling and 62,000 teachers from more than 5000 schools from 38 countries. The main survey was conducted in 2008 in countries following a southern hemisphere school calendar and in 2009 in those with a northern hemisphere school calendar.

A report on the initial findings was released in June 2010. It found:
- Different approaches to civic and citizenship education are evident in the participating countries. These approaches include providing a specific subject for this learning area, integrating civic-related content into other subjects and including citizenship content as a cross-curricular theme.
- Students from Finland, Denmark, Korea and Chinese Taipei showed the strongest results in civic knowledge.
- Substantial gaps in achievement were found between the higher and lower achieving countries as well as within countries.
- In almost all countries, girls outperformed boys in their knowledge and understanding of civics and citizenship.
- Fifteen participating countries had taken part in a previous IEA study of civic education, known as CIVED, in 1999. In seven of those 15 countries, there has been a significant decline in civic content knowledge since 1999. In only one (Slovenia) has there been a significant increase.
- A strong endorsement of gender equality was found. However, females were more supportive of gender equality than males in all participating countries.

Since the release of the initial findings, an extended international report and a technical report have also been published. The international database of results and accompanying user guide were released to the public in 2011 to allow further analyses. Regional reports released for Europe in 2010 and Latin America in 2011 address issues of civic and citizenship education of special interest in these parts of the world. A regional report for Asia will be released in 2012, as will an encyclopaedia on the approaches to civic and citizenship education in all participating countries.

Preparations have already begun on the next implementation of ICCS, scheduled for 2016.

Further information about ICCS is available from [http://iccs.acer.edu.au](http://iccs.acer.edu.au)
Expertise and networks from Australia to PNG
For Simaima Tavil-Melachon, working at ACER has been, in her words, ‘a perfect fit.’ Seconded to ACER as one of only 30 recipients of a prestigious 2012 Prime Minister's Pacific-Australia Award (PMPA), Simaima contributed her intimate knowledge of the education system in PNG to a grant application for the All Children Reading program on a proposed project to address improvement in literacy in Papua New Guinea. She worked on this proposal, submitted in late January, with Leila Ismail, ACER Manager of International Development, and Marion Meiers, Senior Research Fellow in ACER’s Teaching, Learning and Transitions research program.

Simaima completed a Bachelor of Science in Applied Chemistry at the PNG University of Technology in Lae in Morobe Province and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education at the University of Goroka in PNG's Eastern Highlands Province. She was then awarded an Australian Development Scholarship to complete her Master of Science and Technology Education at La Trobe University in Melbourne in 2011.

‘When I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in 1995 there was a real need for resourceful science teachers in PNG,’ said Simaima, ‘but as soon as I began teaching I saw there was also a need for effective literacy programs.

‘The turning point for me was when I was teaching science in a remote school and I found the students were struggling, not because of their ability, but because of their literacy, even though I was teaching in the local creole. Later, when I was teaching in Port Moresby, I saw the difference in literacy standards. Those experiences got me interested in programs to develop literacy and integrated science learning. The work I'm doing at ACER is a perfect fit for me because it addresses literacy from the primary level to the level of vocational education and training.’

The PMPAs form part of the Australian Government's Australia Awards initiative, designed to promote knowledge, education links and enduring ties between Australia and our neighbours, particularly the Pacific, East Timor and PNG. It also aims to assist nation building by strengthening institutional capacity and leadership in the Pacific and by building sustainable people-to-people linkages. The PMPAs are administered by AusAID.

‘Receiving a PMPA was a surprise and a humbling experience,’ said Simaima. ‘I hadn’t actually even considered applying. I was working on my minor thesis for my Master of Science and Technology Education at La Trobe University, addressing links between Indigenous knowledge and the science curriculum. I completed my Masters with the support of AusAID, and it was my AusAID scholarships contact officer at La Trobe University, Janine Campbell, who suggested I apply for a PMPA, so really it’s her I have to thank.

‘I’ve learned a huge amount, working with a team of amazing people. The team approach at ACER has meant I’ve been able to pick up so many skills from so many helpful people. Just as importantly, it’s also meant I’ve quickly developed an expanding network of contacts.’

When asked who she would choose if she could take three of ACER’s people back to PNG, Simaima’s immediate reply is ‘Only three?’. Her more considered answer goes back to the teamwork approach and networks.

‘In a way,’ she said, ‘it wouldn’t matter who I chose because any three people would have so much shared and collaborative knowledge and so many useful contacts. When I return to PNG I’ll be going with a lot of friends from ACER, knowing I can draw on their expertise and a really rich network. That’s incredibly valuable.’

And if she could take three ACER resources or services back to PNG?

‘In my teaching experience the real need is for resources that address literacy and numeracy, so I’d take anything and everything that addresses that. I’d take resources and services that support selection and monitoring for schools, leadership and management, and vocational, adult and workplace education.’

Simaima is now considering her next step.

‘I’ve received several job offers, and there are many openings. Of course, I’d love to work on the All Children Reading program. It would be great to see that project succeed and I’d love to work on it in PNG.’

Whatever the future holds, one thing is certain: she’ll be taking a wealth of expertise and a network of contacts—and friends—with her.
Education systems must bridge Indigenous and Western worlds

Education for Indigenous students must complement, not overwrite, Indigenous wisdom and values, a Canadian expert told delegates to the annual ACER Research Conference in August last year.

Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Knowledge and Learning, Professor Lorna Williams, of the University of Victoria, British Columbia, drew parallels between the education of Indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia.

‘When an individual is embedded as a member of a dominant culture everything is designed to fit that cultural world. From this position of relative comfort, it is difficult to even notice that there are people who might have a different approach,’ Professor Williams said.

‘The challenge for education systems, which are built on Western perspectives of teaching and learning, is to create spaces within these foreign and alienating environments that provide an opening to the Indigenous world,’ she said.

Professor Williams said education systems should incorporate Indigenous ways of learning and teaching, such as songs and stories, and should reconsider attitudes to time and assessment practices that exclude Indigenous ways of learning.

According to Professor Williams, the success of Indigenous students relies on developing their Indigenous identity through programs that promote the cultures, knowledge, values and languages of Indigenous people, as well as on establishing support networks for Indigenous students, including peers, mentors and elders.

Professor Williams said education systems should support Indigenous students through transitions between year levels, transitions to post secondary and from post secondary back to the communities.

‘Indigenous students are immersed in a foreign and alien environment when they are in school. Social rules and interactive behaviours are different,’ said Professor Williams.

‘When they return to their homes and communities they are different. Although the community appreciates the knowledge and skills they have acquired, it takes attention to resocialise back into the community with a new identity,’ she said.

Professor Williams said education systems should also offer experiential learning, and practicum and apprenticeships, and should connect learning to the community so that it is seen as purposeful and meaningful.

‘Students must perceive their school learning as adding to their knowledge, not obliterating their own Indigenous wisdom and values,’ Professor Williams said.

The ACER Research Conference 2011, on the theme Indigenous Education: Pathways to success, was held in Darwin from 7 to 9 August. The 2012 research conference, on the theme School Improvement: What does the research tell us about effective strategies? takes place in Sydney from 26-28 August 2012. Further information about both of these conferences is available from www.acer.edu.au/research-conference
AHELO fieldwork goes live

Interesting new questions lie at the core of the OECD’s Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) Feasibility Study, led internationally by ACER. Is it possible to undertake an international assessment of final-year students’ capacity to use, apply and act on the knowledge and reasoning they have gained from their degrees? Is it possible to assess these outcomes in an efficient and internationally comparable way? Can policymakers, institutional leaders, faculty and students be convinced that the assessment of higher education learning outcomes is an essential checkpoint in the educational process?

The previous edition of International Update reported on preparatory work underway by ACER and partner organisations to create AHELO assessment frameworks and instruments in three testing strands—generic skills, economics and engineering—and context instruments for students, teaching staff and institutions.

From February 2012, preparatory work was put to the test as fieldwork commenced. Up to 40 000 students and 10 000 teaching staff across more than 250 higher education institutions in 16 countries participated in the fieldwork between February and May 2012.

In addition to multiple choice items, all three assessment strands incorporate constructed response tasks which invite students to type an extended response. These responses must be scored by domain experts in each participating country. Ensuring that scoring standards are replicated and monitored across countries is one of the challenges involved in the AHELO Feasibility Study. This calls for the development of detailed scoring rubrics and the intensive training of those responsible for scoring in each country.

In November 2011, ACER’s Associate Professor Hamish Coates, Dr Sarah Richardson and Julian Fraillon led a three-day international training session for national project managers from all countries involved in AHELO’s fieldwork. The lead scorers for each country (mostly university professors) were provided with an introduction to the scoring approach used in AHELO. They also scrutinised the scoring rubrics created by test developers and made suggestions for their revision.

Follow-up international training from ACER and partners occurred in March 2012 in Paris. The lead scorers from each country were provided with rigorous training in the application of scoring rubrics. They practised scoring genuine student responses under the guidance of test developers and were trained in using the AHELO Test System to monitor between-scorer reliability. After this meeting, lead scorers returned to their countries and trained other members of the national scoring teams.

The approach to the training of scorers is indicative of the attention to detail and international cooperation required for all facets of operations in a large cross-national study such as AHELO. Similar approaches have been taken to the training of national project managers in the translation of assessment instruments, the sampling of students and teaching staff and the use of the AHELO Test System. In addition to training, all those involved in AHELO are provided with ongoing support and advice to help them implement AHELO activities in their countries.

Already, much has been learned through AHELO of the capacity to develop assessment definitions and instruments that are valid across languages and cultures. Results from the main testing round will yield new knowledge about higher education students’ learning. Creating strategies for higher education institutions and stakeholders to make good use of this information is the key challenge ahead.

Further information about the AHELO Feasibility Study is available from www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo

Below: Delegates and presenters at the AHELO Feasibility Study three-day training session held in Paris in November 2011
Innovative international assessment communities evolve

The approaches, intentions and passions that have driven scholars to collaborate internationally on research over many years are being increasingly deployed to cultivate international assessment communities. These communities show genuine and substantial potential for improving the assessment of student learning, and for shedding informed light on educational outcomes.

This momentum is timely, for higher education is moving into an era that places far greater emphasis on understanding knowledge and learning, and on using evidence-based insights for monitoring and improvement. This calls for assessment resources that yield valid and reliable data, and that are efficient to implement, analyse and report.

As an independent and internationally focused agency with a mission to improve learning, ACER is supporting higher education institutions and systems around the world to take collegial leadership in building robust, efficient and relevant assessment resources and materials.

As the agency leading the OECD’s Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) Feasibility Study¹, ACER has the privilege and opportunity of
collaborating with hundreds of experts globally on work unfolding in numerous systems and hundreds of institutions. After considerable design and development, many countries are entering the fieldwork phase of the study, supported by interlinked concepts, methods and practices. An international meeting to discuss results is scheduled for December 2012.

With similar intentions to international innovations like AHELO, many countries are building their own national assessment regimes. Work has been underway in the United States for some time. In recent years, the Australian Government has flagged its intentions in this area as part of quality and regulatory reform, as has Saudi Arabia. In April 2012, a Learning Outcomes Symposium was convened in Ontario, Canada. Many countries in Asia are planning next steps. Such policy developments stimulate new perspectives on future higher education.

Diverse institutional and disciplinary innovations are underway in sync with these government and inter-governmental initiatives. In Australia, ACER is collaborating with several medical schools and international experts to design and build a medical assessment collaboration. In 2012, ACER is coordinating a series of new Assessment Symposia. The Higher Colleges of Technology in the United Arab Emirates have developed system-wide learning assessments to enhance institutional effectiveness.

By leveraging benefits from collaboration, systems, institutions, teachers and students have much to gain from increased collaboration on the assessment of student learning. But there is significant work to be done to set foundations, to discuss and debate options, to engage learners, teachers and leaders, to realise quality enhancements and cost reductions, and to yield evidence that affirms that this work offers better—and likely ‘new’—forms of education and development.

Quality assurance research and its relevance to China

Professional certification can improve teaching quality

A properly functioning standards-based teacher certification system has the ability to improve teaching quality, as it would provide incentives for all teachers to work towards high professional standards, ACER Principal Research Fellow, Dr Lawrence Ingvarson, told delegates at an international seminar on teacher education held in Brazil in November.

Dr Ingvarson was a keynote speaker at the seminar on Innovation and Quality in Teacher Training and Professional Development, which was organised by Brazil’s Instituto Singularidades. Around 500 people, mostly from Latin America, attended the seminar in Sao Paulo, Brazil, where efforts are being made at the national level to reform teacher career structures and pay systems so that there is a closer alignment between career progression and developing expertise as a teacher.

Dr Ingvarson’s presentation focused on using professional certification to promote, recognise and reward accomplished teaching. He explained that a standards-based certification system makes decisions at key transition points in a teacher’s career, such as graduation, registration (entry to the profession) and advanced professional certification.

‘Unlike bonus pay schemes, professional standards cover the full range of what good teachers are expected to know and be able to do to promote quality learning,’ said Dr Ingvarson.

Dr Ingvarson argued that professional standards provide a more valid basis on which to assess a teacher’s knowledge and skill than student performance on standardised tests. Professional standards also provide more useful feedback about how a teacher might need to improve. The certification process in itself, he argued, improves teachers’ ability to improve student learning.

According to Dr Ingvarson, the benefits of certification schemes include making teaching more attractive to more able graduates by providing a basis for higher salaries, increasing incentives for professional learning, and providing more interesting career paths for accomplished teachers. He pointed to research that shows teachers who gain professional certification are significantly more likely to remain in teaching.

‘Conversely,’ Dr Ingvarson said, ‘if a standards-based certification system was working well it would lead teachers who could not attain the standards to consider other occupations.’

To be effective, Dr Ingvarson advised that certification at advanced levels should be a voluntary career step that most teachers aspire to. Furthermore, it should be something achievable by most teachers given opportunities for professional learning, not just an elite few.

Dr Ingvarson said that teachers are more likely to aspire to certification if they have a sense of ownership of the process, such as is achieved by placing the teacher whose performance is being assessed in the active position of being asked to show they meet the standards in their school context. Examples of how a teacher might show this include: samples of lesson plans and associated student work over time; videotapes of classroom interaction with supporting teacher commentary; and records of contribution to the school and professional community.

He contrasts this to the passive position that is typical of many merit pay schemes using evaluation methods such as classroom observation, student ratings forms, supervisor reports and national tests of student achievement.

‘I see teaching standards and the ability to apply them as a means for teachers to gain their credentials as a profession,’ said Dr Ingvarson.

The full conference paper, Professional Certification: Promoting, Recognising and Rewarding Accomplished Teaching, by Dr Lawrence Ingvarson is available to download from the ACER Research Repository: http://works.bepress.com/lawrence_ingvarson1/189/

Photo by ACER Project Publishing
The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) is one of the world’s leading educational research centres. Its mission is to create and promote research-based knowledge, products and services to improve learning across the lifespan.

ACER was established in 1930 and for more than 80 years ACER has built a strong reputation as a provider of reliable support and expertise to education policy makers and professional practitioners. As a not-for-profit organisation, independent of government, ACER receives no direct financial support and generates its entire income through contracted research and development projects and through products and services that it develops and distributes. ACER has experienced significant growth in recent years and now has more than 300 staff located in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Dubai and New Delhi.

ACER works in an increasingly international context providing support through consultancies and professional development programs to several countries establishing national assessment programs and through products and services that it develops and distributes. ACER has experienced significant growth in recent years and now has more than 300 staff located in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Dubai and New Delhi.

ACER has extensive experience in providing professional development programs for ministries of education and institutions throughout the world and through agencies such as Australia’s overseas aid program (AusAID) and the World Bank. ACER has undertaken a broad range of consultancy work to support aid-funded projects. Recent examples include:

- a significant number of projects under the AusAID-funded Australian-Indonesia Basic Education Program: Contractor Strategic Advisory Services, including evaluation of the impact of teacher certification policy, research into the national examinations and item development training;
- a report for the Secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on behalf of the East Asia Summit, which outlines strategies for promoting regional economic competitiveness and community building through cooperation in education across the 16 member countries.
- work for the Ministry for Public Education in Mexico to develop a test for students in two secondary school levels, incorporating PISA items, that will allow them to compare their students’ achievement with data gathered from PISA and provide a progress monitoring tool.
- work for the World Bank and the Ministry of Education in Tajikistan to design and set-up a new National Testing Centre, which will be responsible for all national assessments in the country.

International assessment services

A number of ACER’s assessment services have been adapted or specially developed for international clients. The International Schools Assessment (ISA) was developed by ACER researchers to measure the reading, mathematical literacy and writing (narrative and exposition) achievement of students in Years 3 to 10 in international schools worldwide. The International Benchmark Tests provide pencil and paper tests for students in Years 3 to 10. The tests measure student performance in the generic skills that underpin the teaching of English, mathematics and science. The program is administered by schools in India and the Middle East. A number of universities in the United Kingdom and Ireland now use ACER-designed tests for entry into medical schools, and mature-age university admissions.

Development projects

ACER has extensive experience in providing professional development programs for ministries of education and institutions throughout the world and through agencies such as Australia’s overseas aid program (AusAID) and the World Bank. ACER has undertaken a broad range of consultancy work to support aid-funded projects. Recent examples include:

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