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Three steps to improve the quality of teaching and learning

A submission by Professor Geoff Masters, Chief Executive of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), to the Senate Inquiry on Teaching and Learning on maximising our investment in Australian schools in October, suggests measures to restrict and raise the quality of student intakes to teacher education.

'If Australia aspires to be among the world's highest-performing nations in school education, it will need to learn from world's best practice in the selection of its teachers. This will mean developing clarity about the attributes sought in future teachers and testing for those as part of initial teacher education selection processes,' Professor Masters observes in his submission.

'Another key to raising the status of teaching as a profession is to control more tightly the numbers of students being admitted to teacher education courses.

'The admission of large numbers of students into teacher education courses not only leads to a situation where many graduates are unable to find employment (the case currently in some Australian states), but also can lower the quality of teacher preparation itself.'

Alongside measures to restrict and raise the quality of student intakes to teacher education, Professor Masters' submission identifies two further steps that governments can take to enhance the quality of teaching and learning: set and confirm the achievement of minimum standards for registration; and recognise and reward the development of specialist knowledge and skills.

'The introduction of national assessments of teacher competence...would be an important step in ensuring that every beginning teacher meets minimally acceptable standards of essential skills before being registered to teach,' Professor Masters observes in his submission.

'A third general strategy for improving the quality of teaching and learning in Australian schools is to recognise and reward the development of high-level pedagogical knowledge and skill. This strategy depends on clarity about the nature of highly effective teaching, continual professional development in the implementation of evidence-based practices, and processes for recognising and rewarding expert teaching.'

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Read Professor Geoff Masters' *Enhancing the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Australian Schools* submission to the Senate Inquiry on Teaching and Learning on maximising our investment in Australian schools at

http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/Masters_submission_to_Senate_Inquiry.pdf

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Research Developments online

After 14 years, ACER has published the final print edition of *Research Developments*. You can still get the latest school education research news in the free, online-only *Research Developments* in 2013. [Subscribe to *Research Developments*](#) by 30 November 2012 and go in the draw to win one of five \$100 ACER Press vouchers.

Meanwhile you can read the current issue of *Research Developments* in PDF. Julian Fraillon reports on the results of the National Assessment Program – Information and Communications Technologies. He describes Australian students' proficiency in information and communication technology (ICT) and their use of ICT at school and at home, and how it has changed over time.

Juliette Mendelovits reports on the findings of an international assessment of 15-year-old students' ability to read digital texts. Analysis of the digital reading component of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment enables international comparison of Australian students' ability to read, understand and interact with digital texts, and comparison of digital and print reading ability.

Danielle Anzai reports on the development of a computer-based early-years literacy and numeracy assessment that will be used to assess Year 1 students' literacy and numeracy skills in the Northern Territory from 2013. The assessment pioneers an approach where early years students independently interact with the program, rather than requiring one-to-one administration by a teacher.

Geoff Masters reports on the considerations necessary in developing a framework to measure and reward school improvement, drawing on his keynote presentation to the 17th annual ACER Research Conference, held in Sydney in August 2012, to emphasise that the focus of school improvement must be on improvements in the day-to-day work over which schools have direct control.

To read the current edition or to subscribe to *Research Developments* visit www.acer.edu.au/rd

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Student engagement is key to staying competitive

Demand-driven funding arrangements in Australia's higher education sector have given more weight to student decisions and behaviours, making student engagement a vital part of institutions' competitiveness, a conference in Melbourne heard in October.

ACER and the LH Martin Institute hosted a two-day conference on higher education student engagement. Speaking ahead of the conference, Associate Professor Hamish Coates, ACER Higher Education Research Director and LH Martin Institute Program Director, said new regulatory and competitive contexts emerging in Australia and around the world are creating an urgent need to be efficient, to grow and to improve.

'We're in a higher education growth phase that is essential to social and economic growth, and environmental sustainability,' Associate Professor Coates said.

'A major key to enduring prosperity lies in taking better leadership of student engagement.'

Associate Professor Coates' presentation focused on trends in student engagement and outcomes measurement. He said that, over the last 30 years, there has been a shift from a period where little data was collected, to one where satisfaction or 'happiness' was measured, to the current focus on measuring effectiveness.

Associate Professor Coates was joined by higher education experts and stakeholders at the conference, where they discussed challenges around student engagement and shared strategic insights to further improve the quality of Australian higher education.

Opening the conference, Emeritus Professor Alan Robson from the LH Martin Institute said that the quality of the student experience is the defining difference between institutions.

Professor Richard James from the University of Melbourne said that 'engaged moments' happen for different students in different places at different times, and that engagement levels are unlikely to be static, rather they have peaks and troughs. He said that the diversification of the student body means there is no one-size-fits-all approach to improving engagement. He noted that, in light of the increase in the number of students with an ATAR lower than 60 entering university, the problem institutions face is not one of low socio-economic status, but one of low preparedness for study.

Professor Sally Kift from James Cook University then discussed the importance of successfully transitioning first year students into university study. Noting that student engagement varies more within institutions than it does between them, she said that the curriculum should be intentionally designed to support students and foster engagement.

'Once students come to our door the educational conditions we have put in place dictate their success,' Professor Kift said.

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Similarly, the Commonwealth Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education's David de Carvalho said that teachers are the most important factor in creating student engagement, with good teachers able to inspire interest in mundane topics while ineffective teachers kill interest in the most topical subjects.

Mr de Carvalho then discussed the changes to the higher education sector since the introduction of demand-driven funding arrangements. He outlined the Commonwealth government's new measure of student experience, the University Experience Survey (UES), the 2011 pilot of which found more than 84 per cent of students were satisfied with teaching and learning at their institution. With results of the 2012 administration currently being analysed, Mr de Carvalho told delegates that the higher education sector will be consulted on reporting arrangements.

During her presentation on widening participation, Professor Kerri-Lee Krause from the University of Western Sydney said it is vital that governance and policy are enablers, not inhibitors, of student engagement. Discussing the relationship between quality and competitiveness, she said it is important that universities engage their staff to engage their students. Echoing sentiments expressed earlier by Professor Leo Goedegebuure from the LH Martin Institute, who warned against institutions substantially increasing enrolments without also increasing staffing levels, Professor Krause told delegates, 'If you're going to embark on a growth agenda you need to be pretty sure you've got the resources to support that growth.'

The issue of inclusive practice was touched on by several speakers, including Dr Nadine Zacharias from Deakin University, who said it was time to change the ways universities 'do business' in order to ensure accessibility, inclusion and engagement for all students. In their presentation of Indigenous students' engagement with university, Dr Christine Asmar from the University of Melbourne and Dr Susan Page from Macquarie University highlighted research that calls for a whole-of-university approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success, involving both faculties and student services working with Indigenous centres.

The 4th National Student Engagement Conference, on the theme *Enhancing retention and outcomes in a competitive environment*, at the Sebel and Citigate Albert Park in Melbourne on 30 and 31 October 2012 brought together representatives from 12 Australian higher education institutions and seven organisations involved in the sector to present at the conference. Presentation slides from some speakers will be available online soon, while the full conference program and list of speakers, is available now from <http://www.acer.edu.au/student-engagement>

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ACER Update

Schools First national winner

The national award-winning partnership in the 2012 *NAB Schools First Awards*, Tumut High School and Rising Sun Rural in regional NSW, was announced at Myer Mural Hall in Melbourne on 7 November. The Tumut High School and Rising Sun Rural partnership was one of seven State/Territory Award winners that made up the short list for the national awards. The other six short-listed partnerships were: Gray Primary School and The Smith Family, NT; Gin Gin State High School and Kolan Landcare, QLD; Star of the Sea School and City of Charles Sturt, SA; Flinders Island District High School and Flinders Council, TAS; Woodleigh High School and Brotherhood of St Laurence; VIC; and John Wilcock College and Uniting Church Homes, Hillcrest, WA.

Established in 2009, *NAB Schools First* is a partnership between NAB, ACER and the Foundation for Young Australians.

Further information on the 2012 *NAB Schools First Awards* is available from <http://www.schoolsfirst.edu.au/sf-news/tumut-high-school-2012-nab-schools-first-national-award-winner-.php>

International assessment reports

The 2011 reports for the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) will be released in December.

Further information on TIMSS and PIRLS is available from <http://www.acer.edu.au/timss/overview>

LLEAP and student engagement

According to LLEAP (Leading Learning in Education and Philanthropy) 2011, there's a large gap between those in schools who know how to engage with philanthropy and those who do not, with nine out of 10 schools in Australia having 'never' or 'only once' connected with philanthropy.

Drawing on data from the second national LLEAP study, Drs Michelle Anderson and Emma Curtin say student engagement is a key focus for schools, not-for-profits working in education and philanthropic foundations and trusts. The second LLEAP Report will be released in November.

Further information on LLEAP is available from <http://www.acer.edu.au/lleap>

Excellence in Professional Practice Conference

ACER invites you to share and learn with the best in the profession at the inaugural Excellence in Professional Practice Conference for teachers.

The conference to be held in March addresses the theme, 'Teaching the Australian Curriculum: Excellence and innovation in the classroom' by drawing together teachers from across Australia to share their professional practice and expertise, and learn from one another about best practice in teaching the Australian Curriculum from classrooms across the country.

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The Excellence in Professional Practice Conference takes place on the Gold Coast on 17 and 18 March, 2013. Further information is available from <http://www.acer.edu.au/eppc>

Vocational and workplace education and training: Building on evidence to improve skills

The second National Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Conference 2013, addressing the theme, 'Building on evidence to improve skills,' to be held in May will bring together evidence-based research with industry and training perspectives in order to share and discuss issues around the assessment of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) and implications for effective vocational and workplace education and training (VET).

Speakers at the conference will include researchers, managers and coordinators with local and international expertise in LLN skills and adult learning, from industry and the VET sector, along with policy makers from industry, industry skills councils and government.

The second National Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Conference 2013 will take place at Ultimo College, Sydney Institute, on 9 and 10 May, 2013. Further information is available from <http://www.acer.edu.au/nallnac>

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