



# Celebrating 75 years of improving learning

*ACER celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2005. For 75 years, ACER has been undertaking a range of research and development projects and providing services and materials in support of educational policy-making and improved professional practice.*





ACER was established in 1930 with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, a US organisation created in 1911 to promote 'the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding'.

The official title 'Australian Educational Research Council' was first selected, but then changed at the first council meeting in 1930 to Australian Council for Educational Research, which has not changed since. The original staff of two grew to five by the end of the first decade.

### ACER's early years

Prior to the establishment of ACER there had been no educational institution with an Australia-wide interest.

ACER's early focus was on research as opposed to service activities, and making ACER a clearinghouse of research information. Emphasis was placed on primary and secondary education.

In its early years ACER built up an image as:

- a centre devoted to the scientific study of education;
- a knowledgeable institution that could be used by Australian educators to improve their information, and a source of reference on what was the best and latest in educational thought and practice; and
- a supporter of progressive education.

During the Second World War, ACER was involved in psychological testing for personnel selection to the Armed Services and government departments. For the three years from 1942 to 1945 ACER was mostly concerned with the war effort, with regular work suspended. Its war time work helped lead to government financial support for ACER from 1946 and confirmed it as a significant national institution.

In the post war years, ACER was able to move away from war work to focus on schools again. There was now more emphasis on testing. ACER had become dependent on government finance. ACER's work now included: a large growth in library work; establishment of a semi-autonomous test division; conferences of test users; research into test theory; Australia-wide curriculum survey; university study to determine predictions of academic success; and studies into adolescence and unemployment.

In the 1960s ACER began the Co-operative Scholarship Testing Program (CSTP) for scholarships to independent schools. The program still runs today along with several others.

ACER grew rapidly in the post-war decades, outgrowing several premises. From two staff in 1930, then five at the end of the decade, ACER now has more than 200 staff members, located in three Melbourne premises as well as in Sydney and Dubai.

### Timeline

- 1928** James Russell from the United States visited Australia on behalf of the Carnegie Corporation to assess the state of education and investigate appropriate means of assistance.
- 1929** Representatives from each of the states except Queensland, and Executive met to form a constitution. Official title 'Australian Educational Research Council' was accepted.
- 1930** **February.** Australian Council for Educational Research was established (its name being changed at the first council meeting) with the agreement of a grant from the Carnegie Corporation.  
**April.** Commenced operation.  
K.S. Cunningham was appointed first Executive Officer, and served from 1930-1954.
- 1930** First ACER publication, *Educational Research Series No. 1, Individual Education*, by C. Fenner and A.G. Paull.
- 1935** A Library Group was established and ran until 1948. ACER was instrumental in setting up free library services in Australia.
- 1937** The international New Education Fellowship Conference hosted by ACER in Australia. The conference began in Brisbane in August, and concluded in Perth seven weeks later after moving to other capital cities. The conference was a huge success, with more than 8000 people attending.
- 1939** Funding from Carnegie Corporation ceases. ACER had saved some of the initial grant money, which kept the organisation afloat during the war years until government support became available in 1946.
- 1940** ACER begins aptitude testing with army recruits.
- 1957** ACER established the *Australian Journal of Education*, which is still published today.
- 1962** Co-operative Scholarship Testing Program (CSTP) for testing for scholarships to independent schools begins. The testing program still runs today.
- 2002** ACER's core grant provided by Australian governments ceased.
- 2002** **January.** Sydney office opened.
- 2004** Dubai office opened.
- 2005** **April.** 75th anniversary of the establishment of ACER.

### Further Information

Connell, W.F. (1980) *The Australian Council for Educational Research 1930-80*, ACER: Melbourne.

Williams, B. (1994) *Education With its Eyes Open: A biography of Dr K. S. Cunningham*, ACER: Melbourne.