

Building connections in South East Asia

Sarah Richardson reports on ACER's recent collaborative work with institutions in South East Asia to support higher education.

In the Asian Century it is vital that Australian organisations invest in building respectful, sustainable relationships with their regional counterparts to provide mutual benefits into the future. After all, South East Asia is on Australia's doorstep and is home to a number of fast growing economies.

There has been growing collaboration between higher education stakeholders in Australia and South East Asia in recent years, but these tend to focus on research collaborations and student mobility. Collaborations around teaching, learning and assessment remain relatively rare.

To address that, ACER delivered symposia in Bangkok, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur and presented at a conference in Singapore in August 2013. Under the umbrella term 'Smarter Learning' the aim was to share insights, stimulate conversations and build new relationships around a number of initiatives.

Bringing together representatives from ministries, quality agencies, peak bodies and higher education institutions, the symposia focused on methods to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. ACER staff discussed insights from the AHELO Feasibility Study, Australian Medical Assessment Collaboration, Australasian Survey



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of Student Engagement and other relevant activities.

ACER's delegation was led by Senior Research Fellow Dr Sarah Richardson and included Peter McGuckian (Director of International Development) and Ralph Saubern (Director of Professional Resources).

Professor Leo Goedegebuure and Marion Schoen from the LH Martin Institute at the University of Melbourne joined the ACER team to present on methods to manage faculty and lead strategic change in higher education institutions.

In common with colleagues in the higher education sector in Australia

there was significant emphasis on enhancing the employability of graduates. Achieving this outcome encompasses a whole range of activities from reviewing curricula and enhancing quality assurance to providing professional development for teaching staff and collecting data on the learning outcomes of students.

Particular areas of interest included the sharing of best practice in teaching and learning in different disciplines; building the skills of teaching and learning practitioners; and quality assurance of post-graduate education and benchmarking quality assurance practices.

The events were hosted by the Office of the Higher Education Commission in Thailand, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency, BINUS University in Indonesia and the Council for Private Education in Singapore. Educational counsellors at the Australian embassies in each country were instrumental in facilitating connections with these host organisations.

ACER aims to build on the initial connections made with higher education stakeholders in South East Asia through the delegation to develop initiatives to encourage collaborations and build synergies across countries in order to enhance the quality of higher education teaching and learning for the benefit of all.