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Results in from national surveys on philanthropy in education

The findings of the first national survey on philanthropy in education have confirmed that when it comes to grant seeking, those least equipped can often be the ones most in need, with nine out of ten Australian schools surveyed considering themselves novices at philanthropic grant seeking.

The three-year Leading Learning in Education and Philanthropy (LLEAP) project seeks to explore whether the full potential of funding and partnerships across the philanthropic and education sectors is being achieved. The 2011 Survey Report, released in November, uses the responses of 302 schools, not-for-profits, philanthropic foundations and trusts to help form a clearer picture of the current impact of philanthropy in education.

Presenting the key outcomes of the survey, LLEAP project leader and ACER Senior Research Fellow Dr Michelle Anderson said the findings show that schools have limited knowledge, experience and expertise about philanthropic grant making, which could put them at a disadvantage when it comes to resourcing great educational projects.

Results from LLEAP show that 92 percent of school respondents in Australia considered themselves new or novices to philanthropic grant seeking and 53 per cent indicated they had never been successful in securing a grant from philanthropy.

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In contrast, 77 per cent of not-for-profit respondents (who work with, or for the benefit of, schools) identified as experienced or expert in philanthropic grant seeking and 44 per cent indicated they have succeeded in securing a grant three or more times in the last year.

Foundations and trusts were asked whether improvements could be made in the quality of grant seeking. Of the 38 trusts and foundations that said grant seekers could improve in the application process, a key identified area for improvement was to ensure there is alignment between the grant seeker's and foundation/trust's objectives.

Yet LLEAP revealed that around 90 per cent of schools surveyed said they *never* read a foundation/trust annual report (compared to around 15 per cent of not-for-profits); almost 78 per cent *never* read a foundation/trust website when accessing information about grants (just over eight per cent for not-for-profits); and around 82 per cent of schools *never* referred to foundation/trust purposes when considering whether to apply (less than six per cent for not-for-profits).

Dr Anderson says this may offer an explanation as to why not-for-profits are so much more successful at obtaining philanthropic grants than schools.

The survey findings are currently being used to inform the development of a *LLEAP Dialogue Series Guide*, an evidence-based manual designed to help grow ideas in education for maximum impact. The *Guide* is due out in 2012 and is pitched at new or novice grant seekers and makers. It will include case studies of good practice and other useful tools and information.

LLEAP is an initiative of Tender Bridge in partnership and with funding in 2011 from The Ian Potter Foundation. Tender Bridge is a national research and development service of ACER. For further information, including a copy of the 2011 Survey Report, visit <http://lleap.acer.edu.au>

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University retention and completion rates have improved

The retention rate for commencing bachelor degree students in Australia has increased from 81 per cent in 2001 to 84 per cent in 2009, while the completion rate has increased from 72 per cent in 2005 to 80 per cent in 2008, according to an ACER research briefing released in November.

The ACER *Joining the Dots* research briefing (Volume 1, Number 6, October 2011) also noted that in the next few years new university enrolments are expected to come disproportionately from low socio-economic status (SES) groups that are historically under-represented.

The engagement of low SES groups will be crucial to ensure the Australian Government achieves the target of 40 per cent of all 25 to 34 year olds having a qualification at bachelor level or above by 2025.

ACER Senior Research Fellow, Dr Julie McMillan, said currently university students from low SES backgrounds persist in their studies at rates similar to, or slightly lower than, high SES students.

"As the participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds increases, it will be necessary to continue to monitor their retention and completion rates closely. Among those who discontinue their studies, low SES students are more likely than high SES students to cite academic and financial difficulties as a consideration for non-completion of their degrees," said Dr McMillan.

The briefing examines how students who commence higher education studies progress through their courses. The briefing provides a synthesis of currently available information on student retention, attrition, and completions, as well as the reasons underlying course non-completion.

Dr McMillan said Australia's completion rates are substantially higher than the OECD average of 70 per cent, but substantially lower than the 93 per cent reported by Japan.

"While the results are positive, and considerably higher than the 2005 figure of 72 percent for Australia cited by the Bradley Review, there remains scope for improvement," Dr McMillan said.

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“For example, the overall rates mask substantial differences between domestic and overseas students, with overseas students consistently displaying higher retention rates and lower attrition rates throughout the last decade. Also, there is considerable variation among institutions, with retention rates for commencing bachelor degree students ranging from 60 per cent to 94 per cent in 2009.”

Dr McMillan said while it was encouraging to see completion rates improve over the last few years with four in five students completing their bachelor degrees, it was important to understand and develop appropriate retention strategies for those who didn't complete their studies.

The most common reasons students give for discontinuing study relate to interests, health and personal factors, and their course turning out to be not what they wanted. Financial and academic difficulties are less prominent considerations.

** The retention rate is a measure of the proportion of commencing students in a given year who continue studying in the following year.*

Joining the Dots is a subscription-based resource provided by ACER to those with an interest in Australian Higher Education. In 2011, the series includes eight research briefings, a monthly news and event digest and a webinar series. More detail can be found at <http://www.acer.edu.au/jtd> or by emailing: [.JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address.](#)

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Evaluating educational outcomes under the Northern Territory Emergency Response

An ACER analysis has revealed the literacy achievement of Year 3 students in schools within the Northern Territory Emergency Response communities has shown improvement that is greater than the improvement among Year 3 students in all Northern Territory schools and all Australian schools.

Last week the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) released an independent evaluation of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). Initiated in June 2007, the NTER is “a set of government initiatives designed to protect children, to make communities safer and to build a better future” for the 45 000 Indigenous Australians living in communities and town camps in the Northern Territory.

The independent evaluation of the NTER is a requirement of the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement, the expiration of which in 2012 also marks the end of the NTER. Each chapter of the evaluation report was prepared by independent authors from some of Australia’s most prominent analytical organisations. ACER researchers Dr Sheldon Rothman, David Slattery, Dr Sarah Buckley and Dr John Ainley prepared the chapter titled, ‘Enhancing education’.

ACER examined the results of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) from 2008 to 2010. The analysis showed that the mean scale score in the Year 3 Reading domain in the NTER schools improved from 173 in 2008 to 205 in 2009, then improved again slightly to 208 in 2010. During the same period, the percentage of Year 3 students who were at or above the national minimum standard increased from 18 per cent in 2008 to 28 per cent in 2009 and 41 per cent in 2010.

The authors found that, while there is no definitive evidence of improvement in Numeracy or Writing, it is probable that results in Year 3 Numeracy also indicate improvement. And while there has been improvement in Reading at other year levels as well, it is not as pronounced as at Year 3.

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However the authors acknowledged that many of the efforts to improve teacher quality under the NTER and Closing the Gap agreements would take time to have an impact and therefore student outcomes attributable to the NTER may not be readily observed in the first two years of NAPLAN results. The report also examined school attendance. It found there has been no observable improvement in school attendance between 2006, before the NTER was introduced, and 2010, the last full year for which data are available. School attendance did show some improvement in 2008 and 2009 but then declined in 2010. Examination of the 2011 school attendance figures when they become available would be necessary to determine if that decline is absolute or if it was related to other factors, such as the extremely wet conditions experienced over most of the Northern Territory during the year.

ACER's report also discussed a number of other programs that aim to increase the resources allocated to schools serving the NTER communities. The authors found that, while there have been increases in infrastructure, including new classrooms and teacher housing; in teacher professional support; in preschool programs; and in support for student wellbeing and nutrition, it was not clear whether these increases can be attributed to the NTER alone.

The report concludes that, at this time, it is too early to determine the effects of efforts to improve the quality of teaching on student outcomes, as there has been little opportunity as yet for new teachers to enter the NTER schools, for the effects of professional development to flow through to the classroom or for new teacher housing to influence teacher turnover or the quality of teaching.

The full evaluation report, *Northern Territory Emergency Response Evaluation Report 2011*, is available from the FaHCSIA website: <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au>

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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 abler graduates by providing a basis for higher salaries, increasing incentives for professional learning, and 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.

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“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 at:

http://works.bepress.com/lawrence_ingvarson1/189/

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Quality Assurance in the Australian Higher Education Sector

ACER Research Fellow Dr Yu Zhao presented at the 11th International Forum on Higher Education, held in Chongqing, China, from 22 to 24 October 2011.

The theme of the forum was 'Improving the Quality of Higher Education and Construction of a Powerful Nation in Higher Education'. Around 600 people from mainland China, United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan were in attendance.

In her key-note address, Dr Zhao gave a presentation (co-authored by ACER Senior Research Fellow Dr Sarah Richardson and ACER Higher Education Research Director Associate Professor Hamish Coates) which discussed the efforts in Australia to monitor and assure quality in higher education.

"Australia is currently undergoing a transformation in the way in which quality is assured in the higher education sector," Dr Zhao said. "One of the key features of this transformation was the establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in July 2011."

Through TEQSA, Dr Zhao explained, Australia is in the process of developing national teaching and learning standards for higher education.

Dr Zhao told delegates there are currently a number of ways to measure the quality of a university's *research*, with one of the most well-known being the Shanghai Jiao Tong rankings index. Universities regularly use their research ranking as a proxy to demonstrate the quality of education they offer. Dr Zhao argued that this is, however, problematic because there is little evidence to indicate that research excellence automatically leads to high quality teaching and learning.

Currently, Dr Zhao said, there is no generalised assessment of students at the end of their university degrees. Hence it is not possible to compare what students from different institutions know and can do by the end of their degrees, and we have no measure of the quality of the education they have experienced.

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Dr Zhao told the conference that this raises a number of questions for the higher education sector, including: how to best measure what students learn during their university degrees; whether it is important to have national and international rankings of students' learning outcomes, in the same way in which research is ranked, and how universities can agree on what students should have learnt by the end of their degrees.

Dr Zhao suggested that international developments such as the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) Feasibility Study, managed for the OECD by ACER, will influence Australia's response to these questions.

"The objective of the AHELO Feasibility Study is to discover whether it is possible to assess what students know and can do at the end of their degree in a way that is comparable across a diversity of institutions and countries," she said.

"Australia, and indeed the world, will be watching the outcomes of the AHELO Feasibility Study very closely to see what lessons they can learn to improve quality assurance in the higher education sector."

ACER leads the international consortium of organisations implementing AHELO. The International Project Director is Associate Professor Hamish Coates and Dr Sarah Richardson manages international activities. AHELO is taking place across sixteen countries, including Australia. Further information on ACER's work in the area of higher education quality and standards is available from: <http://www.acer.edu.au/highereducation/research-and-consultancy/>

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Informing tertiary education planning

There is considerable interest in the provision of and access to tertiary education within Australia's states and territories. In 2009 the Victorian government began developing a Tertiary Education Plan for the state. Released in 2010, the plan detailed various targets and policy objectives in this sector, notably in response to the national 40 per cent bachelor degree attainment target for 25-34 year olds and the national 20 per cent low socioeconomic background enrolment target.

In a report advising on the development of the Victorian Tertiary Education Plan, Expert Panel chair Professor Kwong Lee Dow noted that both of these targets will require greater participation from outer Melbourne and regional Victorian communities if they are to be achieved. A number of more specific Tertiary Education Plans, based on geographic locations within Victoria, are therefore being constructed.

One such plan is being constructed for the Gippsland region in Victoria's East and South-East. To inform the development of the Gippsland Tertiary Education Plan, Skills Victoria this year commissioned ACER to prepare three separate reports providing supporting analysis of (1) the region's industry, employment and population profile, (2) the region's student profile and (3) of student demand projections for the region.

The first report analysed Gippsland's industry, employment and population profile, highlighting recent change and projecting further change over the coming years. The employment analysis found that Gippsland has a lower rate of participation in the labour force than Melbourne. In regard to industry, of the eight largest industries in Gippsland, manufacturing is the only one projected not to grow. The demographic analysis identified that the proportion of 20–40 year olds in Gippsland was significantly lower than in Melbourne and Victoria.

The second report provided statistical analysis of the local student profile, examining the numbers of school students and retention rates to year 12, the destinations of year 12 completers and tertiary choices of non-year 12 applicants from Gippsland.

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It found that school retention rates are significantly lower in Gippsland than in metropolitan regions. Analysis of *On Track* Victorian school-leaver data found that, compared to other regions in Victoria, school completers in Gippsland are less likely to be studying a Bachelor degree and are more likely to be studying at Certificate I–III level, in an apprenticeship, in part-time employment or looking for work. The report also identified that there are large numbers of adult learners within the region.

The third report provides three projections of attendance rates at technical and vocational courses and tertiary courses in the Gippsland region, and focuses on persons aged 18-22. The three projections in this report are all modelled from 2006-2026, as 2006 represents the most recently available Census data. A Flat Projection assumes that 2006 proportions of attendees will remain stable. A Conservative Projection assumes that the trends in tertiary attendance in Gippsland will continue into the coming decades, while an Optimistic Projection assumes that tertiary attendance will rise at a more rapid rate than has been evident in the past decade or so.

The information contained in these reports is being used to help achieve the goals of the Gippsland Tertiary Education Plan – to improve the delivery of tertiary education, improve post-school destinations for students, improve participation in education and training more generally for the community, identify and rectify gaps in delivery, and to prepare the sector for demand driven funding in both higher education and vocational education and training.

Each of the full reports is available from the ACER Research Repository:

Industry, Employment, and Population Profile - Supporting Analysis: Gippsland Tertiary Education Plan by ACER researchers Daniel Edwards, Paul Weldon and Tim Friedman

http://research.acer.edu.au/higher_education/24/

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Student Profile - Supporting Analysis: Gippsland Tertiary Education Plan by ACER researchers

Daniel Edwards and Catherine Underwood

http://research.acer.edu.au/higher_education/26/

Student Demand Projections - Supporting Analysis: Gippsland Tertiary Education Plan by ACER

researchers Daniel Edwards and Paul Weldon

http://research.acer.edu.au/higher_education/25/

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ACER Update

New edition of *Research Developments* now available

The Summer 2011-12 edition of *Research Developments* is now available online from <http://research.acer.edu.au/resdev/vol26/iss26/1/>. Print copies will be distributed at the end of November. The articles in this issue cover the findings of the Longitudinal Literacy and Numeracy Study for Indigenous Students (ILLANS), upcoming changes to the early childhood education and care sector, ACER's report for the Review of Funding for Schooling Panel on the way school funding is targeted to disadvantaged students, and the emerging multidisciplinary field of the science of learning.

ACER Student Engagement & Experience Conference

Higher education experts and stakeholders will gather in Melbourne next week to discuss challenges around student engagement and share strategic insights to further improve the quality of Australian higher education, at a two-day conference presented by ACER in conjunction with Criterion Conferences. The conference, on the theme *Measuring & Improving Student Engagement & Experience: Increasing the quality of teaching & learning to encourage retention in higher education*, takes place at the Novotel on Collins, Melbourne, on Tuesday 22 and Wednesday 23 November 2011. Further information, including the full conference program and list of speakers, is available from <http://www.improvingstudentengagement.com/>

2011 NAB Schools First National Award winner announced soon

The winner of the 2011 *NAB Schools First* National Award will be announced at a special awards ceremony on Wednesday 23 November. The seven State/Territory Impact Award winners, announced in October, are in the running for the National Award and the chance to increase their total aggregate awards funding to \$500 000. Established in 2009, *NAB Schools First* is a partnership between NAB, ACER and the Foundation for Young Australians. For more information visit <http://www.schoolsfirst.edu.au>

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ACER scholarship test reaches 50-year milestone

In 2012, ACER's Cooperative Scholarship Testing Program (CSTP) will undertake its 50th testing cycle. In a break from tradition, in 2012 the test will take place on 25 February in line with requests from schools. Previously, the CSTP test date was in May each year. Schools wishing to participate in the February 2012 testing program must enrol with ACER as soon as possible. Parents wishing to take up the early bird discount for student registrations must register by 16 December. The final cut-off date for student registrations is 6 February 2012. For further information visit <http://www.acer.edu.au/tests/cstp>

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Private Bag 55, Camberwell, Victoria Australia 3124
Tel: + 61 3 9277 5555
Fax: + 61 3 9277 5500
Web: www.acer.edu.au