Data to inform policy

The ACER Centre for Global Education Monitoring supports the monitoring of educational outcomes worldwide. Ray Adams explains how the Centre’s systematic and strategic collection of data on educational outcomes, and factors related to those outcomes, can be used to inform policy aimed at improving educational progress for all learners.

ACER has established four centres to consolidate and enhance its position as an international leader in several key areas of expertise. The Centre for Global Education Monitoring (GEM) is one of these centres. The core aims of GEM are: to strengthen the capacity of national systems to implement educational assessments, and use the results in policy development; to conduct international assessment programs; to participate in the shaping of international learning goals; to develop and maintain indicators of educational outcomes; and to report on and analyse international educational outcomes.

In recognition of the importance of the GEM mission, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) became a founding partner of GEM in July 2014, when DFAT and ACER signed a three-year partnership agreement. DFAT’s support includes a $1.5 million grant that will help to enhance the effectiveness of the Australian Government’s development assistance in the education sector through GEM’s efforts to improve the
such a way that student achievement can be benchmarked, tracked across grades and over time, and compared within countries and between countries. Strengthened assessment systems draw on background data to understand the contextual factors that affect student achievement. Strengthened assessment systems implement assessment programs that facilitate continuous internal capacity building, and also seek to build their capacity by drawing on external expertise when necessary.

GEM is working with DFAT to achieve the goals of the partnership in three focus areas. The first and central focus area is system strengthening for learning improvement, recognising that countries and education systems vary in their technical capacity to gather, process, analyse and interpret data in support of the review and development of educational policy. GEM will be working with education systems in: designing data collection activities; developing and implementing survey based assessment and reporting programs; and analysing, interpreting and disseminating assessment data.

The second focus area is developing and maintaining learning metrics and learning goals, where GEM is supporting the setting of the United Nations’ post-2015 education development goals. GEM is working closely with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Brookings Institution, and contributing an academically rigorous and research-based perspective to setting goals and indicators.

The third focus area is researching, analysing and reporting on existing assessments and their findings. The dissemination of information about and results from large-scale international assessments is often limited to those countries that participate in such assessments. Similarly, information about and results from local and regional assessments are often not well-disseminated beyond their origins. Moreover, information, reports and papers produced by the organisations that oversee assessments rarely make connections between their assessments and findings, and other assessments and findings. GEM sees this as a missed opportunity. Given the wide array of assessment-related work that is being undertaken throughout the world, it should be easier to get access to information about the assessments and their findings in a readily consumable form. And given the often high costs of data collection activities, more use should be made of collected data. GEM will be providing mechanisms devoted to the wider utilisation and dissemination of assessment outcomes, especially those in the developing world.

In this issue of International Developments, we look at ACER’s work through GEM on the development of new ‘learning metrics’ – tools for measuring learning growth; assessments that support quality teaching and learning in response to the focus of post-2015 development goals on educational quality for all; assessment work in Afghanistan and Lesotho to inform policy makers and practitioners about the quality of students’ learning outcomes; and assessment, evaluation and capacity building projects in Africa, South East Asia, the Middle East and India.

For more on the Centre for Global Education Monitoring, visit www.acer.edu.au/gem