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ACER celebrates 75th anniversary

ACER celebrated its 75th anniversary on 1 April 2005. ACER was established in the 1930s with a grant from the US based Carnegie Corporation and for 75 years has been undertaking a wide range of research and development and providing services and materials in support of educational policy-making and improved professional practice.

When ACER was established in the 1930s, it was funded by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, a US organisation created in 1911 to promote 'the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding.' The grants were to benefit the people of the United States, although a small percentage of the funds could be used for the same purpose in countries that are or have been members of the British Commonwealth. The official title 'Australian Educational Research Council' was first selected, but then changed at the first council meeting.

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. It had a policy of functioning through the state Institutes of Educational Research, although this was never particularly successful.

In the 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.

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Prior to the establishment of ACER there had been no educational institution with an Australia-wide interest. The first research undertaken was: "the standardisation of scholastic and mental testing for Australia; a study of the number of children aged 10 to 18 in each school grade or type of occupation; and the fundamental problems of the primary school curriculum."

During the Second World War, ACER was involved in psychological testing for personnel selection to the Armed Services and government departments. In 1940 ACER examined 600 army signallers with a large battery of tests then, for three years from 1942, ACER was mostly concerned with the war effort, with regular work suspended. During the war years, ACER became known as an educational and psychological testing service, in addition to its research emphasis. ACER also worked on publications dealing with evacuation possibilities, and advised the Department of Post-War Reconstruction. 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 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 the beginning of studies into adolescence and unemployment.

From its beginnings with two staff in 1930 and five by the end of the decade, ACER has grown into a large, independent, not for profit organisation with more than 200 staff located in Melbourne and Sydney with additional offices in Dubai, India and the UK.

Further details of ACER's history can be found in a brochure that has been produced to mark the 75 th anniversary. [Download 75th Year Brochure](#)

References

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Junior secondary school students and the world of work

A report that investigated the educational and occupational plans of junior secondary students prepared by ACER for The Smith Family was released in March. The study surveyed 3271 financially disadvantaged students in years 8 and 9 who are part of the Smith Family's Learning for Life Program.

The report: Junior secondary school students' perceptions of the world of work found more than one third of the surveyed students do not fully understand the education level required to achieve their dream job.

Of greatest concern, 23 percent of these students expect to gain employment in their chosen field despite the mismatch in their education and career plans, setting them up for disappointment later in life.

The main findings of the research conducted by ACER for The Smith Family show students with an unrealistic view of future career options are more likely to:

- be male (32.3 percent of males misunderstand the level of education required for their preferred job against 21.9 percent of females);
- report below average achievement at school;
- have low levels of vocational engagement; and
- be unhappy and keen to disengage from school.

Many of these students are already considered 'at risk' due to their difficult financial backgrounds. The inability to achieve their work aspirations could lead to them feeling further disenfranchised, slipping into a downward cycle characterised by low levels of education, low paying jobs or unemployment. However, the news isn't all bad, according to The Smith Family's National Manager of Strategic Research and Social Policy, Dr Rob Simons.

"These students are seeking jobs across a wide spectrum of occupations, demonstrating they are not marginalised or demoralised about their future prospects," he said. "The research highlights the importance of helping students better align their study plans with their chosen field to channel this enthusiasm and avoid difficulty with gaining meaningful employment when they are ready to enter the workforce.

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"For some students, this may mean re-thinking when they intend to leave school. For others, it will mean setting more realistic career goals that will engage their interests and be attainable given the level of education they intend to reach."

Of the students surveyed, more than half (52.3 percent) intend to undertake further study after school with students identifying University, TAFE and apprenticeships or traineeships as likely options. Students' perceptions of their own school performance weighed heavily on their plans for further study with those who perceive themselves as doing better at school most likely to plan post school education.

The Smith Family is currently undertaking further research into the perceptions and post school plans of older Learning for Life students in years 10, 11 and 12, with results due to be released later this year.

The full report *What do students think of work? Junior secondary school students' perceptions of the world of work* by Adrian Beavis, David Curtis and Niola Curtis and further information on the Learning for Life program are available on The Smith Family website at www.smithfamily.com.au

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Managing challenging behaviours workshops

The challenge of finding ways to assist children to behave considerately, cooperatively and positively was addressed at a workshop presented by ACER in Taree, NSW on 19 March. The workshop was funded by the Telstra Foundation.

Education expert Dr June Slee helped early childhood educators and childcare workers understand what causes difficult behaviours, develop strategies to foster more cooperative and on-task behaviours and to support each other to implement targeted and consistent approaches to deal with challenging behaviours.

According to the workshop's convener, Dr Alison Elliott, Research Director, Early Childhood Education with ACER, early childhood staff say that increasing numbers of young children exhibit aggressive, disruptive, hostile and inconsiderate behaviours.

"Children with a history of 'difficult' and off-task behaviours are prevented from taking advantage of early learning opportunities. They also disrupt learning for other children," Dr Elliott said.

The workshop was intended to help participants design and implement programs to enhance children's development, especially those most 'at risk' of early learning and school adjustment difficulties. Around 30 participants from childcare centres and preschools in Newcastle, Taree, Foster and Gloucester attended.

The workshop was one of several tailor-made professional development programs in early childhood education to be presented by ACER through Telstra Foundation funding. For further information on the workshops please contact Alison Elliott at the ACER Sydney office on (02) 8338 6800 or by email at [.\(JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address\)](#)

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ACER assists US school reform program

ACER is working with America's Choice, a whole school reform project operating in many schools in America, to develop assessment items for the Ramp-up facet of the program. Ramp-up is a withdrawal program designed to assist students whose literacy and numeracy skills are two or three years behind that of their peers. ACER will develop assessments for Ramp-up programs at Grade 6 and Grade 9 that will provide feedback on student progress over time. ACER will be adapting items from its iAchieve mathematics assessments and developing new reading items plus assessments for fluency and writing. The initial implementation will involve pen and paper assessments with on-line data entry by schools and automatic report generation. The administration of the tests is likely to go on-line in the second year of operation.

Research Conference 2005

ACER's Research Conference 2005 will take place in Melbourne from 7-9 August at the Grand Hyatt Hotel. The theme of this year's conference is 'Using data to support learning.' The conference will consider issues currently being confronted by Australian schools in their collection and use of data. It will examine international best-practice solutions to these issues. It will identify future challenges and promising directions in the collection, analysis and use of data to support learning in schools. Download Conference Brochure for conference program and registration form. Enquiries can also be directed to Kerry-Anne Hoad, ACER Centre for Professional Learning,

Tel: 03 9277 5402 or email [.JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address.](#)

Computers, Thinking and Learning

The latest title from ACER Press, Computers, Thinking and Learning by David Nettelbeck, was launched on 12 April by Garry Barker, Technology Editor for The Age newspaper. [Computers, Thinking and Learning](#) is a collaboration of engaging ideas from both teachers and students to help meet the challenge of new curriculum requirements.

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ACER Corporate Profile

ACER's corporate profile brochure has been updated and reprinted. Download Corporate Profile. To request a print copy please email [. \(JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address\)](#) with your mailing address. Please state clearly in your email that you would like a copy of the new corporate profile brochure.

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