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Online assessment to aid learning in the home

In a first for Australia, ACER will launch its latest initiative in online assessment this month with *iAchieve at home*, an educational support activity for children and parents at home.

The *iAchieve at home* program brings together the latest advances in educational measurement and internet technology to provide a series of web-based multiple-choice tests in English and Mathematics for students in Years 3-10.

Tests are available for different ability levels and individual reports are provided as feedback for students and parents on test scores and a measurement of the student's performance against comparable groups throughout Australia.

"The most exciting feature about this program is that students get immediate feedback in a way that empowers students to take control for improving their own learning," said ACER's Professor Jim Tognolini. "Many parents have told me that they want to be better informed and more involved with their child's education, *i Achieve at home* will enable parents to become more involved in supporting learning at home."

Students in the *iAchieve at home* program complete a test at the beginning and end of the year and can see how they have progressed during the year.

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A team of 15 test writers, IT specialists and teachers have been working for the past year to develop this web-based teaching support. All test items assess a national curriculum outcome, have been reviewed by experienced teachers and trialled in schools.

"Because students can log on to *i Achieve at home* at home any time, this gives families the flexibility they need when combining busy lives with a desire for more information about how their children are progressing at school. This means students can find out early when they are doing well or when they might need to work harder or get extra help."

Professor Tognolini said that developments on *iAchieve at home* are continuing with ACER staff working to provide parents with access to general information about education and learning through the broader information for parents on the *iAchieve at home* website.

This year English and Mathematics tests will be available for students in Years 3 to 10. The program will be expanded in future years to include all subjects across Years 1 to 10.

Registrations for the first testing phase of *iAchieve at home* are now open. The cost of the program is \$50 or \$25 per subject. To register or find further information, visit the website at www.iachieveathome.com.au

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Establishing the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership: ACER's response

In 2003 the Commonwealth Government released an issues paper on the establishment of a National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership. In December 2003 the Allen Consulting Group invited responses to this issues paper from interested parties. Dr Lawrence Ingvarson, Research Director of the Teaching and Leadership research program, prepared ACER's response.

Extract from ACER's response

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) is an independent, not-for-profit research organisation. Our mission is to create and disseminate knowledge and tools that can be used to improve learning.

ACER's interest in NIQTSL stems from the view that the proposed NIQTSL has great potential to strengthen teaching as a profession and, thereby, the quality of student learning. The lack of common standards at the professional (national) level weakens the profession and limits our ability to certify with confidence the competence of those entering the profession and those who reach high standards of professional practice. Educational research has made sufficient progress to warrant the establishment of a body with responsibility to identify patterns of teaching that relate to better learning outcomes, and the outcomes to be expected from teacher education programs. NIQTSL's significant potential, therefore, lies in its capacity to provide the following functions:

1. A professionally credible system of **certification** for highly accomplished teachers (based on evidence of professional development and effective performance, which would include documented leadership activity, but not be tied to specific roles or positions in schools or school systems)
2. A national system for the assessment and **accreditation** of teacher preparation programs and institutions
3. A vehicle for promoting the development of **uniform approaches to, and standards for, the registration** of teachers across states.

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These appear to be the core functions for the NIQTSL - when its proposed roles and functions are boiled down to the real, concrete, unique services that a NIQTSL would actually provide. Australia is long overdue for an independent national professional body with these quality assurance functions to safeguard the public interest and promote the profession.

(A note on terms:

*For consistency, we use the term **certification** to refer to the endorsement (certificate) a professional body gives to a **person** who meets a specified set of performance standards (not an accumulation of course completions or academic credits). **Accreditation** is the term that is usually used to refer to the endorsement of the quality of a training **program** as a means of preparation for a specified purpose, such as entry to a profession.)*

Our following comments are guided by the view that certification and accreditation would be the central functions that the proposed NIQTSL would carry out. No other body has the certification function at present, so a NIQTSL would have a unique and significant role to play in providing this service to the profession and employing authorities.

Strengthening teaching as a profession depends fundamentally on building the capacity of the profession to develop common standards and norms for practice, grounded in research-based knowledge. Professional standards are the essential bridge between research and practice, as the purpose of standards is to articulate what the research indicates effective teachers need to know and be able to do. Developing standards should, of course, be a national enterprise, conducted by a professional body characterised by expertise and independence. Professional standards, by definition, are profession-wide; they do not vary across states, schools or employing authorities and sectors.

The second area of significance for the proposed NIQTSL lies in its potential to strengthen teacher education as a research-based enterprise. Teacher education, like teaching needs to be guided by up to date research. What teacher educators teach may not necessarily be based on cutting edge research on teaching and learning. Carefully developed, research-based standards for beginning teachers serve to frame and guide the curriculum for professional preparation programs. They also provide a basis for using outcome-based measures for the accreditation of teacher education programs. No vehicle for doing this exists currently for teacher education in Australia.

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To our knowledge, no teacher education program or institution has ever been discredited, yet variation in quality is known to be considerable. Teacher education is arguably one of the least accountable and least examined areas of professional education in Australia.

Accreditation and registration need to be tightly linked, mutually reinforcing activities, but they are not at present. Accreditation of a teacher preparation program should depend, in theory, on evidence that the program does produce graduates who meet performance standards defined by the registration body. When this is the case, registration standards based on research serve to frame the curriculum for teacher education - and provide a means of constantly revising that curriculum in the light of new research. The inter-relationship between registration and accreditation is weak at present in the case of teacher education, as registration is usually a rubber stamp event based only on meeting qualification requirements, not successful completion of an induction program and evidence of attaining performance standards in real work settings. Teacher education institutions are not assessed and accredited in terms of the quality of outcomes they produce.

(In some states (eg Victoria), teacher registration is becoming a process, rather than an event that takes place during an induction period wherein recent graduates learn to demonstrate how they meet performance standards for registration.)

A NIQTSL, with a national accreditation function along the same lines as the Australian Medical Council (AMC), would provide a basis for state registration bodies to move toward uniform approaches to the registration of teachers.

The above functions indicate that a complex and extensive research agenda would have to be completed by a NIQTSL before it would have the capacity to implement any of its proposed functions.

A NIQTSL with a strong research base to these functions would lead to:

- A valid standards-based system of accreditation of teacher education programs with a greater capacity to protect and enhance the quality of initial teacher education (linked to state and territory registration standards and processes);

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- Professional standards that describe what the profession determines its members should get better at over time. (A NIQTSL could provide the needed umbrella organisation for bringing existing standards development work together (eg ASTA, AAMT, AATE, ALEA) and extending it to standards development in other specialist areas (eg ECE, Primary, LOTE, PE, etc) ;
- The development (by other organisations and associations) of an infrastructure for continuing education with the capacity to prepare teachers for certification (and thereby engage most teachers in effective modes of professional development);
- A rigorous system of professional certification and recognition for teachers who show evidence of development towards high professional standards of knowledge and practice
- Encouragement for employers and unions to create a stronger market for good teachers and retain the best teachers close to practice in positions where they can provide practice-focused leadership to other teachers.

Overall, these functions would provide a much needed national approach for attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers that would supplement and support the efforts of state governments, other employing authorities, teacher unions and professional associations also make to assure quality in the teaching profession.

Download:

[Establishing the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership: ACER's Response](#)

by Dr Lawrence Ingvarson, Research Director of the Teaching and Learning research program.

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ACER UPDATE

National Awards for Quality Schooling

ACER and the Australian College of Educators will jointly manage the National Awards for Quality Schooling (NAQS) again in 2004. The project is conducted on behalf of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). ACER has responsibility for all stages of the assessment process. ACER staff will develop the judging strategy for the awards; the criteria applied to short-listing candidates and train the judges.

Professional Standards in Science

ACER has been asked by the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne to provide a PD program for aspiring leaders in science. ACER will conduct in-school programs for three or more teachers from a single school and 'cluster' programs for individual teachers. The PD program will run in Terms 1 and 2 this year, and teachers will develop a professional portfolio of work in such areas as scientific literacy, pedagogy in teaching and learning, and professional standards.

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