

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### *Study reveals ICT proficiency of Australian students*

Australia's educators and policy makers now have a comprehensive picture of the level of ICT literacy of Australia's Year 6 and 10 students following a landmark study completed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

The report of the *National Assessment Program – ICT Literacy Years 6 and 10* was released this week by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). It reports on a study conducted in 2005 involving approximately 7400 students from Years 6 and 10 in around 520 schools across Australia.

Although ICT has been embraced with enthusiasm by Australian schools and students, to date there has been no national assessment program to determine how ICT literate Australian students are.

In what is believed to be the first assessment of its kind, all of the testing and marking took place in a totally computer-based environment with no pen and paper components.

The assessment instrument included simulations of common application programs used to assesses student ICT skills, multiple-choice and short text responses to assess students' knowledge and understanding of ICT and live software with which students created larger authentic information products.

Researchers established a single ICT literacy scale against which the achievements of students at Years 6 and 10 can be reported and proficiency levels linked to descriptions of student performance.

ICT education experts from all States and Territories used the contents of the assessment to establish challenging but reasonable proficiency standards for Year 6 and Year 10. Overall 49 per cent of year 6 students attained the proficient standard and sixty-one per cent of Year 10 students reached or exceeded the proficient standard set for their year level.

However, according to ACER's deputy chief executive and lead author of the report, Dr John Ainley, ICT literacy is not developed to a uniformly high level among Australian school students.

"The assessment shows that students are adept at using the basic elements of information technology but may need more knowledge and skill in applications that involve creating, analysing or transforming information," he said.

Differences in ICT literacy achievement were noted across socioeconomic, Indigenous and non-Indigenous and school location groups.

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ICT literacy was strongly associated with socioeconomic background. Approximately two-thirds (68 per cent) of Year 6 students and three quarters (75 per cent) of Year 10 students whose parents were 'senior managers and professionals' attained the proficient standard compared to around one third (32 per cent) of Year 6 students and almost half (49 per cent) of Year 10 students whose parents held 'unskilled manual, office and sales' occupations.

ICT proficiency was also lower for students from remote locations compared to their peers from metropolitan locations and lower for Indigenous students than non-Indigenous students. No significant difference in proficiency was found between boys and girls and students of English and non-English speaking background at either year level.

"Consideration should be given about how best to reduce the achievement divide associated with these student background factors," Dr Ainley said. "Improving access to computers for students in non-metropolitan areas and from the least affluent socioeconomic backgrounds would be an important starting point."

ICT literacy is defined by MCEETYA as the ability of individuals to use ICT appropriately to access, manage, integrate and evaluate information, develop new understandings, and communicate with others in order to participate effectively in society.

The ICT Literacy Report is the third published as part of the National Assessment Program, and follows the 2003 national Year 6 Science Report and the Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004. The next national ICT assessment is due in 2008.

The National Assessment Program – ICT Literacy, Years 6 & 10 report, published by MCEETYA is available online from <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/>

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