



*Improving Learning*

# Corporate profile



Photo by Guy Lavoipierre, Student of Sholem Aleichem College, Elsterwick.

*ACER's mission is to create and promote research-based knowledge, products and services that can be used to improve learning across the life span*

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) is one of the world's leading educational research centres. Our goal is to support every learner, every learning professional, every learning institution and our learning society through our work.

ACER has built a strong reputation as a provider of reliable support and expertise to education policy makers and professional practitioners since it was established in 1930.

As a not-for-profit organisation, independent of government, ACER receives no direct financial support and generates its entire income through contracted research and development projects and through products and services that it develops and distributes.

ACER has experienced significant growth in recent years and now has more than 340 staff located in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Dubai and New Delhi.

# Making a difference through research

ACER is a leader in the provision of quality educational research, both within Australia and internationally. As a national, independent research body, ACER brings a high level of expertise and objectivity to its work.

Blending solid experience and creative talent with established methodologies, ACER is a full-service research consultancy specialising in collecting and interpreting information to shape strategic decision making. One of ACER's great strengths is its people. The organisation is unique, in that it has more than 130 dedicated research staff with many years of experience and expertise in a range of disciplines and research methods.

ACER aims to provide research evidence to improve learning across the lifespan. Researchers work on a range of projects focusing on early childhood through to primary and secondary school, vocational education and training, and higher education. ACER examines key issues around improving teaching and learning, analysis of policy, and evaluation of a variety of programs for both students and educators.

ACER's research contributes to the achievement of four goals identified as key to improving learning:

## Learners and their needs

**Goal: Every learner engaged in challenging learning opportunities appropriate to their needs.**

Current work covers early childhood education, reading, literacy, and information and communication technologies. There is also research investigating transitions between different stages of learning, from one level of education to another, and from education into the workforce.

ACER's systemwide testing work focuses on identifying more effective ways of monitoring achievement across entire education systems, providing more usable school-level reports and providing better feedback to teachers and parents. Projects are designed to provide educational decision makers with improved information about student learning.

ACER has considerable expertise in measuring learning in digital environments, and has developed assessments of information and communications technology literacy and reading in digital environments. Staff have experience in using simulations and virtual laboratories in science to track learning and give feedback to teachers and students, and are currently exploring how to provide maximum access to online assessments for students with disabilities.

ACER also undertakes and promotes research that focuses on key issues related to the improvement of educational outcomes for Indigenous students, research relating to equity and social justice in education, and public health education.

## The learning profession

**Goal: Every learning professional highly skilled, knowledgeable and engaged in excellent practice.**

ACER conducts a range of work in relation to teacher education, teacher professional development, teacher quality, assessment of teacher performance and leadership in schools.

Current work involves analysis of the Australian teaching workforce, development of professional standards for teachers and school leaders and an international study of primary and secondary mathematics teacher education.

## Places of learning

**Goal: Every learning community passionately committed to implementing evidence-based practices to improve outcomes for all learners.**

ACER undertakes analysis of policies and practices for both government and non-government organisations, working closely with schools, businesses and community

groups to help them identify need, collect data, monitor programs, and measure the impact of their policies and practices.

ACER's expertise in higher education covers policy research, selection testing, student engagement, performance measurement, program benchmarking, outcomes assessment and graduate destinations.

## A learning society

**Goal: A society in which every learner experiences success and has an opportunity to achieve their potential.**

ACER has been instrumental in the implementation, management and reporting of large-scale surveys such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS) and the IEA International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS).

This work involves expertise in sampling, survey management, and collection and marking of secure assessments. ACER provides high quality psychometric and data analysis, manages externally commissioned data analysis projects, and undertakes research on psychometric and other quantitative research issues. Staff expertise in these areas is also utilised in the design, implementation and analysis of smaller customised surveys for clients.

ACER develops assessment and reporting resources for a wide range of academic and non-academic educational outcomes. ACER staff develop test constructs, research test validity and reliability, develop assessment methods and resources, interpret psychometric data, and develop methods for item banking, online test delivery and reporting. Our staff have expertise in educational data mining to extract information and patterns of learning from big data sets.

Partnerships between schools and their local communities can provide mutual benefits. ACER initiated the NAB Schools First awards program which encourages partnerships between schools and other organisations, while ACER's TenderBridge service helps to connect schools with philanthropic organisations.

Beyond compulsory schooling, ACER research covers technical and vocational education and training, the youth labour market and higher education. There is also considerable research into the economics of education.



# Supporting professionals and organisations

ACER develops and provides research-based products and services to support the work of practitioners and organisations to improve learning.

ACER's professional resources focus on three priorities: understanding and addressing the needs of individual learners; promoting quality teaching and leadership; and supporting organisational improvement.

A range of fee-based products and services including resources, professional learning, assessment services and information services are offered to professionals and organisations. ACER products and services are underpinned by the collection, analysis, interpretation and use of data relating to learners and organisational performance.

## Professional learning and leadership

ACER professional learning activities are designed for educators and leaders, data professionals and others who want to improve learning experiences and outcomes for learners of any age and at any level.

The **ACER Institute** conducts conferences, workshops and extended programs which are evidence-based and practice-oriented. The focus is on improving educational outcomes through leading practices in assessment, data literacy, organisational improvement, literacy, numeracy and educational leadership. Graduate programs incorporate research evidence, the use of tools and frameworks and action research in participants' own settings, and can lead to university credit.

ACER assists schools and education systems to set goals and design strategies for improvement, and to monitor and demonstrate school improvement over time, through the National School Improvement Tool. This tool brings together findings from international research into the practices of highly effective schools and school leaders, and is supported by seminars, audit processes and mentoring activities. ACER's leadership work includes career development programs, leadership

and management courses, information services and the Principal for a Day program.

## Resources and information services

ACER develops, publishes and distributes evidence-based resources and information services for practitioners, organisations and researchers in education and related fields.

**ACER Press**, the publishing arm of ACER, publishes and distributes resources designed to support practitioners in education and psychology. In education, ACER Press specialises in materials to assess and support improved learning in the core areas of literacy, numeracy and science and provides a range of support resources in special needs, teaching and learning, and student wellbeing. In psychology, ACER Press provides high quality tools to support professionals in early childhood, education, health and organisational settings.

ACER's published resources are available online, by phone and at our two ACER bookshops, located in Melbourne and Perth. Our experienced customer service officers support customers in identifying and using resources suitable to their needs and a team of expert education and psychology consultants work directly with practitioners and organisations to provide professional advice and support.

ACER's **Cunningham Library** is one of Australia's most comprehensive educational research libraries. It provides educators and researchers with access to more than 50 000 books, 400 professional journals and an extensive collection of conference papers and reports.

For over 50 years the Cunningham Library has produced the *Australian Education Index* (AEI), which has indexed over 200 000 items of educational research, journals, book chapters, conference reports and educational



theses. The library produces databases of specialist education research, including on international education, distance education and online learning, and Indigenous education. These databases are available on the ACER website along with the ACER research repository, *ACEReSearch*, which contains over 1900 items of freely downloadable educational research produced by ACER.

### **Assessment services**

ACER provides fee-for-service assessment programs for schools, universities, TAFE institutes and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), employers and governments in Australia and internationally. These services include secure admission and selection testing; programs for monitoring student achievement; quality, certification and benchmarking; test scoring, reporting and data interpretation; and online and computer-based assessment and reporting.

ACER has specialised test development teams to deliver targeted assessment solutions to meet client needs. With extensive project management capacity, ACER provides full service implementation, including: test development, candidate registration, analysis and reporting, test centre management, test supervision and security management. ACER has a dedicated data processing facility and provides high quality reporting and analysis services.

**ACER School Assessment Services** provides assessment services for schools including select entry, gifted education and scholarship programs; programs for monitoring achievement in literacy, numeracy, science, languages and general ability; and programs for measuring social-emotional wellbeing. Test scoring, reporting and data interpretation services include OMR scanning, standard and customised reporting and national and international benchmarking.

**ACER Higher Education Assessment Services** develops and operates specialised university admissions and selection programs, including for medicine, health sciences, engineering, law and mature aged and alternative entry, and programs for measuring student aptitudes for a range of purposes. ACER works with higher education providers to develop capacity in effective assessment practices and to benchmark and monitor learning outcomes.

**ACER Vocational Assessment Services** specialises in the development of tools for monitoring and measuring skills in language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) and related employability skills, and externally validated quality and benchmarking services for RTOs. ACER also develops and operates secure selection and recruitment testing services for employers in industries including police and emergency services, banking and finance, mining and construction and government services. These include screening tests for large scale recruitment programs, measures of graduate and professional aptitudes and skills and workforce development tools.



# International work

ACER recognises the importance of equipping students, teachers and school leaders with the skills necessary to thrive in a global environment, and has set itself an ambitious international agenda to achieve this. ACER provides support through commissioned research projects, consultancies, professional development, and the provision of high quality assessment services and products to numerous countries and international clients.

## International studies

ACER led the consortium managing the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) from 2000–2012. PISA assesses the mathematical, scientific and reading literacy of 15-year-olds in more than 60 countries. ACER also developed the literacy tasks for the OECD Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), a new international adult literacy study.

ACER led an international consortium to undertake the OECD's Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) feasibility study, completed in 2012. AHELO involved testing final-year students' learning outcomes in generic skills, engineering and economics. ACER is also the international study centre for the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) and the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS).

ACER is responsible for the Australian component of studies conducted by the IEA, such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and ICILS.

## International offices

Established in 2003 and 2004 respectively, ACER's United Arab Emirates office in Dubai and the not-for-profit company the Australian Council for Educational Research (India) in Delhi are both expanding to keep

pace with the strong commitment of governments in their regions to world-class education.

## International assessment services

A number of ACER's assessment services have been adapted or specially developed for international clients.

The International Schools Assessment (ISA) was developed by ACER to measure the reading, mathematical literacy and writing achievement of students in Years 3 to 10 in international schools. Each year, more than 50 000 students in 300 international schools in around 80 countries participate.

The International Benchmark Tests for students in Years 3 to 10 measure performance in the generic skills that underpin the teaching of English, mathematics and science. The program is administered by schools in India, the Arab States, South Africa, Indonesia and the Philippines.

ACER provides individually tailored national and regional assessment programs that can relate to international standards, particularly PISA, in countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Mexico, Indonesia and Spain. ACER has developed the new United Arab Emirates National Assessment Program (UAENAP). Consultancy work has been undertaken in Colombia, Chile, Brunei, Bangladesh, Singapore, Hong Kong and Zimbabwe.

A number of universities in the United Kingdom and Ireland now use ACER-designed tests, such as GAMSAT (Graduate Medical School Admissions Test), for entry into medical schools, and for mature-age university admissions.



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## Development projects

ACER has extensive experience providing capacity building and expert educational consultancy to ministries of education and institutions around the world, and through development agencies such as AusAID, the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO. Recent examples include:

**Bangladesh:** Working with government to develop a national assessment system to measure student learning in secondary and higher-secondary schools and evaluate the performance of the education system.

**Ethiopia:** Undertaking a diagnostic review of assessment to inform the design and preparation of the student learning assessment subcomponent of the World Bank's General Education Quality Improvement Project.

**Tajikistan:** Providing consultancy for the World Bank on a range of policy and procedures related to the establishment of a new National Testing Centre, a new system of university admissions, and the professionalisation of assessment.

**Indonesia:** Contributing to a 2010 study to obtain a picture of the quality of education of Year 9 students in Indonesian madrasah (Islamic schools). More than 6000 students from 150 Islamic Junior Secondary Schools participated in the study. The study was a collaboration between ACER, Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, AusAID, the Indonesian University of Education and the Basic Education Capacity Trust Fund.

**Australia:** Undertaking consultancy work through AusAID's Education Resource Facility (ERF) to inform AusAID's education programming around the world, such as literature reviews and synthesis reports, as well as larger projects such as an impact study of AusAID's scholarship program, capacity building for governments in the South Pacific region, and a review of higher education in Papua New Guinea. Through the ERF, ACER also delivers professional development programs to AusAID staff through the ERF website and face to face.

## ACER Institute international programs

The ACER Institute provides a range of international programs to education leaders, researchers, policy makers, educational practitioners and other professionals. The ACER Institute's international programs draw on its established programs in educational assessment, literacy and numeracy teaching and learning, and educational leadership as well as its recognised expertise in a wide range of other domains. Programs can be tailor-made to respond to specific requests and are delivered on-site in Australia or offshore at the client's home base.

# Australian Council for Educational Research Limited

ABN 19 004 398 145

## Melbourne

19 Prospect Hill Road (Private Bag 55)  
Camberwell VIC 3124  
Australia  
T +61 3 9277 5555  
F +61 3 9277 5500

## Sydney

1/140 Bourke Road (PO Box 6483)  
Alexandria NSW 2015  
Australia  
T +61 2 8338 6800  
F +61 2 9693 5844

## Brisbane

1/165 Kelvin Grove Road  
Kelvin Grove QLD 4059  
Australia  
T +61 7 3238 9000  
F +61 7 3238 9001

## Perth

7/1329 Hay Street  
West Perth WA 6005  
Australia  
T +61 8 9235 4800  
F +61 8 9235 4888

## Adelaide

97 Pirie Street  
Adelaide SA 5000  
Australia  
T +61 8 7129 4493  
F +61 8 8232 4446

## Dubai, UAE

Block 2B, Office No G21  
(PO Box 502339)  
Knowledge Village  
Dubai  
United Arab Emirates  
T +971 4 366 4098  
F +971 4 366 4097

## New Delhi, India

1509, Chiranjeev Towers  
43 Nehru Place  
New Delhi  
India  
T +91 11 2646 4304

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[www.acer.edu.au](http://www.acer.edu.au)