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Australian Council *for* Educational Research

ACER

Australian Council for Educational Research

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) is one of the world's leading educational research centres.

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ACER has built a strong reputation as a provider of reliable support and expertise to education policymakers 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 offices in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Dubai, Jakarta, London and New Delhi who are working on education projects across the world.

ACER provides research and assessment services, consultancy, support and professional development programs to governments and educational organisations in numerous countries. In addition, ACER develops, implements and evaluates regional, national and international assessment programs for a broad range of international clients. ACER has been engaged in significant collaborative work with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as the leading partner in a consortium responsible for the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

ACER also collaborates on a number of international development projects with organisations such as UNICEF, the World Bank, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), contributing to educational evaluation and reform in a number of countries.

Further, ACER is the International Study Centre responsible for the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) and International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS), and jointly conducts the IEA Teacher Education Development Study (TEDS) with Michigan State University.

ACER in 2013 established four strategic centres, each tasked with leading research and development in a key area of ACER's work. One of these, the Centre for Global Education Monitoring (GEM), is tracking progress in the provision and quality of schooling through the systematic and strategic collection of data on educational outcomes, and factors that influence these.

GEM aims to support improved policies, programs and practices in education and, ultimately, improved educational progress for all learners.

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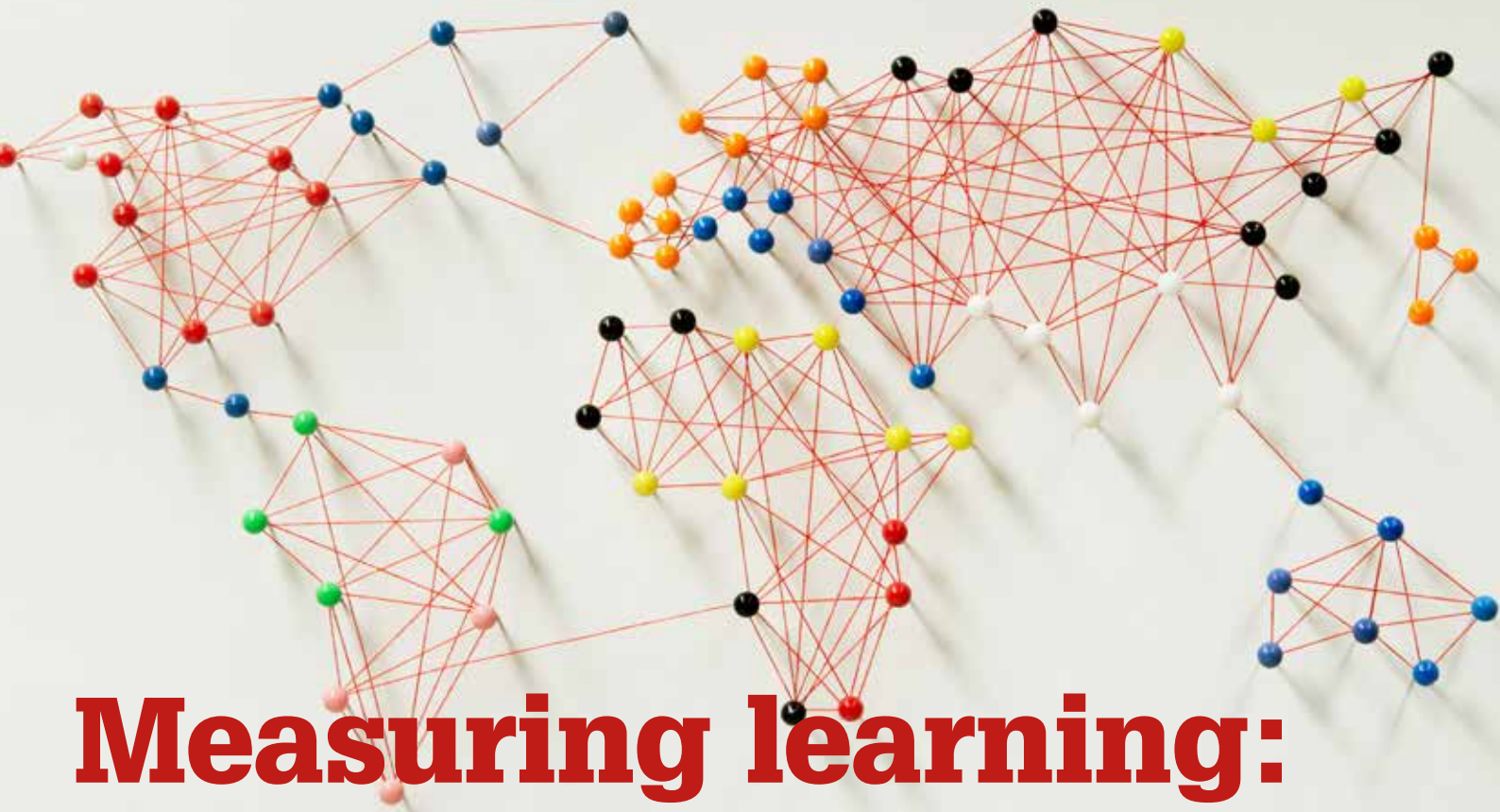

Measuring learning:
Why we need to work together

One of the keys to increasing the quality and comparability of learning measures is cooperation within the international community to develop common benchmarks to measure learning outcomes, argues **Jeaniene Spink.**

Jeaniene Spink is the Research Director for ACER's Educational and Development Research program.

A cooperative effort is vital, since comparable measures of learning outcomes across locations, population groups and time do not exist in many parts of the world.

The good news is that the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have placed quality at the heart of the global education development agenda for the next 15 years. The bad news is that we will be unable to determine the success of the SDGs in 2030 if we fail to develop a common understanding of what we mean by 'quality' and with no defined process for developing benchmarks of performance against a common measure.

As Rachel Outhred explained in 2015 in a post for the Economist Intelligence Unit's *Insights* magazine, developing comparable measures of learning outcomes is a necessary first step in the global discussion on learning improvements. While that's surely a view that is wholly endorsed by many in the education development sector, the crux of the issue is that comparable measures can only be possible through the development of a common set of universal metrics.

So what is a metric, or set of metrics? A metric, or scale, is not a test; it is like the lines on a ruler or other measuring device. In the same way as we use a ruler to measure length and a thermometer to measure temperature, placing the length and the temperature respectively on an agreed measurement scale, a universal metric (for reading, for example) is a measurement scale on which we can locate student reading skills. It clearly describes a successive set of skills that students come to possess as they acquire and develop reading proficiency. In order for teachers and policymakers to know where students lie on these metrics, a multitude of assessments or tests can be developed to assess their skills. Similarly, teachers and policymakers may identify locations on the metric that can act as benchmarks

to define, say, 'minimum standards' or 'basic literacy'.

It is true that a multitude of assessments are currently being implemented across the developing world. A joint study by UNICEF and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in Eastern and Southern Africa found there were 58 student assessments carried out in 21 countries in the region, yet ascertaining trends and identifying common areas and strategies for development investment as a result of these assessments was not possible. Because each of these 58 assessments used its own measurement scale or metric, comparing the results was not possible. It was like having 58 sets of bathroom scales, all calibrated in different units. Even what it meant to have 'limited learning outcomes' was defined differently by the 58 assessments.

At present there is no common reference point that allows student learning to be measured across contexts and over time, and we have no common benchmarks to define what we mean by 'limited learning outcomes'. Without this basic starting point, the risk is that scarce resources in the developing world may not be effectively targeted in pursuit of meaningful and lasting improvements in student learning by 2030.

The development of universal metrics as proposed by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics has the potential to revolutionise investment strategies in education. Providing a common metric for measuring student learning will not only impact student assessment, but also teacher development strategies, curriculum reform platforms and national education standards setting. A universal metric neither precludes the use of multiple assessments nor replaces existing student assessments. A universal metric instead provides a common reference point: in other words, a global measurement scale.

But how do we develop this universal common metric? The most cost effective way is by building on existing assessments; that is, by using existing test items from multiple assessments implemented in a range of educational settings across the world so that a conceptual measure of student learning can be built. This means that a universal scale will be exactly that – universal. It will not be based on a single assessment program or instrument, but will be an amalgamation of all existing measures of student learning.

Some critics have argued that a common universal metric is not possible, especially in the context of reading, given the cultural and language-specific elements of reading literacy. This assertion, however, is challenged by the international scale construction that has successfully underpinned such assessments as the Programme for International Student Assessment and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study. More recent research conducted by ACER has drawn on data from thousands of student responses to more than 500 items and on the outcomes of 26 000 pair-wise comparisons of items from a multitude of different assessments, to support the drafting of reading metrics. The research indicates that reading metrics that begin with basic reading prerequisite skills, that often vary across languages, and progress to include sophisticated information retrieval and reflection upon text can be built. As Ms Outhred correctly points out, while such a metric inevitably involves compromise, and may not be perfect, there is strong research evidence to show that a robust scale fit for the purpose can be achieved.

ACER has for many decades designed and run various assessment programs around the world, and provided support for a variety of international, regional and national education programs. Through the Centre for Global Education Monitoring, ACER is using its long experience and established expertise to advance models of good practice related to different aspects of education, particularly in developing countries. A recent memorandum of understanding between ACER and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics means two of the world's leading educational research centres are now collaborating to support standardised and definitive reporting of countries' progress towards achieving learning for all.

The development of a set of common universal metrics for reading and mathematics may not be easy, but the fact is the global community has signed up to the challenges of the SDGs. We therefore have a responsibility to build what is likely to become one of the most important drivers of quality improvement for the lives of millions of children across the world. The time to act on this is now. ■

In this issue

In this issue of *International Developments* we look at the purposeful collection of educational data through progressive achievement testing to enable teachers to establish where students are in their long-term learning, diagnose individual strengths and weaknesses, identify the best next steps for action, decide on appropriate evidence-based interventions, monitor the progress students make over time, and evaluate the effectiveness of their own teaching decisions and approaches.

We also explore how a new primary years assessment is helping teachers, curriculum designers and policymakers to better measure the learning achievement of students in South East Asia; investigate the impact of a professional learning program for aspiring school principals in Indonesia; and find out how a national assessment program to support teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia is also developing organisational capacity.

On the policy front, we report on ACER's analysis of the impact of large-scale assessments on education policy in the Asia-Pacific region that is helping stakeholders improve the design and usefulness of assessments, and find out why the citizen-led approach to the collection of information about schooling and children's learning is improving educational monitoring and informing policy making in India, Mali, Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

Further information

A version of this article was first published in the Economist Intelligence Unit's *Perspectives* online magazine. www.eiuperspectives.economist.com

Mapping progress

Using data for teaching and learning

In a world of rapidly expanding data, it is important to keep in mind that there are three central uses of data in school education. **Geoff Masters** explains.

Geoff Masters AO is the Chief Executive Officer of ACER.

It is easy to be overwhelmed by data. And the situation is poised to become worse as new technologies enable the capture of increasingly detailed information about what takes place inside and outside classrooms. Already there is talk not only of recording what students do, but also of capturing conversations, social interactions and even facial expressions. Companies offer to analyse the 'big data' sets that schools can now generate with the promise of discovering what teachers may not already know. Whether this leads to important new insights remains to be seen.

Purposeful data collection

In the meantime, the collection of educational data serves three vital purposes in schools: identifying starting points; monitoring improvement; and evaluating effectiveness.

Identifying starting points

Schools use data to establish and understand where students are in their learning. This usually means

establishing what students know, understand and can do at the time of assessment – questions that can be answered in varying degrees of diagnostic detail. A good understanding of where students are in their learning is essential for identifying appropriate starting points for action. This is true for classroom teachers in targeting teaching on individuals' levels of readiness and learning needs and in setting appropriate stretch goals for further learning. But it also is true for school leaders, system managers and governments. Effective decision making at all levels depends on a good understanding of the status quo – which may include an understanding of how different groups of students are performing or how student performances compare with performances in other places.

Monitoring improvement

Schools use data to monitor progress over time. The most direct way of establishing whether successful learning has occurred is to monitor changes in what students know, understand and can do. The amount of learning that has occurred can be measured as the progress or growth that students have made. A basic expectation should be that every student will make excellent progress in their learning – for example, over the course of a school year – regardless of their starting point. Reliable information about change over time is also required by education leaders to judge whether standards are declining or improving in schools and school systems.

> ‘To establish where students are in their learning, to monitor progress over time and to evaluate the impact of interventions on learning progress, a “map” is required of the learning domain through which students are progressing.’

Evaluating effectiveness

Schools use data to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. Data are required by teachers to judge whether particular teaching strategies have resulted in better learning. If one teaching strategy is more effective than another, the most direct evidence of that will be a difference in the improvements they have produced. The evaluation of educational programs and materials also depends on carefully collected data that can be used to measure improvement. And school and system leaders use data to evaluate the impact of school-wide and system-wide programs and initiatives to raise achievement levels and close equity gaps.

A frame of reference

These three central uses of data in school education all require an appropriate frame of reference for interpreting data. A useful analogy is the monitoring of a person’s journey through physical terrain. To establish and understand where a person is on their journey at any given time and to monitor the progress they are making, an understanding – ideally a map – is required of the terrain through which they are travelling. In much the same way, to establish where students are in their learning, to monitor progress over time and to evaluate the impact of interventions on learning progress, a ‘map’ is required of the learning domain through which students are progressing.

A map makes it possible not only to monitor progress, but also to describe what progress looks like. It does more than locate a person in terms of numerical coordinates, it describes the kinds of observations that can be expected at that point in a person’s progress. A map of a learning domain describes increasing levels of knowledge, skill and understanding. The fundamental purpose of assessment is to establish where students are in their long-term progress through such a domain.

ACER’s progressive achievement scales

The progressive achievement scales that ACER has developed in reading, mathematics and several other learning areas are examples of ‘maps’ of learning domains.

The map that underpins the *Progressive Achievement Tests in Mathematics (PAT-M)* is shown in Figure 1. Increasing mathematics achievement is reflected in progress up the scale. A small number of *PAT-M* tasks are shown here and, when read from the bottom up, give a sense of students’ increasing skill levels in one aspect of mathematics: using units of measurement.

When schools use ACER’s *Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT)* they are provided with information about where individuals are in their learning progress, both quantitatively as a position on a numerical scale and qualitatively in terms of the kinds of skills demonstrated at that level of achievement. When schools test on more than one occasion they can measure the progress – or growth – of students over time. And, by comparing rates of growth, schools are able to evaluate the effectiveness of different teaching strategies and interventions. All three uses of *PAT* data play an essential role in effective teaching and learning.

International progressive achievement testing

Progressive achievement scales have been developed for a range of ACER’s tests: the *PATs* in Australia; the *Essential Learning Metrics (ELMs)*

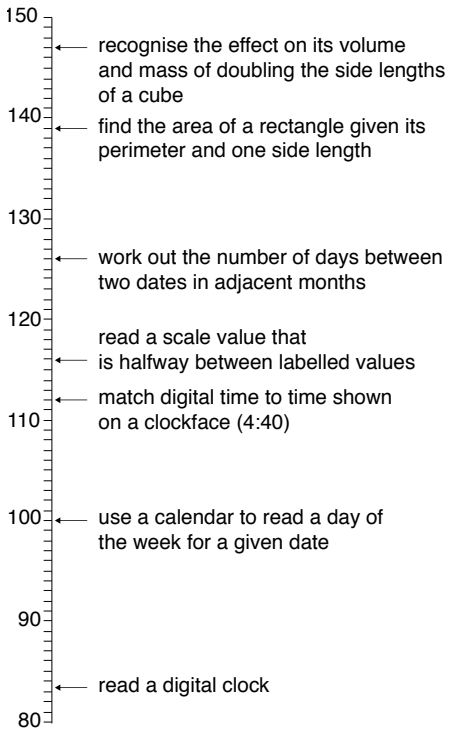

Figure 1. Some tasks on the *PAT-M* progressive achievement scale

in England; the *Indian Progressive Achievement Scales (IPAS)*; and the *Progressive Achievement Scales-Middle East (PAS-ME)*. These progressive achievement scales provide both quantitative and qualitative data on student progress that can be used to diagnose strengths and weaknesses, monitor learning progress or growth over time, and determine next steps in teaching and learning.

In Australia, *PATs* have been developed for Mathematics; Reading; Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar; and Science. These tests are available both in paper form and online, and are suitable for students from Years 1 to 10.

In England, tests in the *ELMs* suite have been developed for Mathematics and Reading Comprehension. These tests, available online, address England's new National Curriculum and are suitable for students from Years 2 to 10.

In India, tests in the *IPAS* suite have been developed for Mathematics; Reading Comprehension; Science; and General Ability. These tests are available both in paper form and online, and are suitable for students from Years 2 to 10.

In the Middle East, *PAS-ME* suite is in development for Mathematics; Reading Comprehension; Science; and General Ability, suitable for schools following the curriculum of India's Central Board of Secondary Education and National Curriculum of England. To be available online, the *PAS-ME* suite of tests will be suitable for students from Years 2 to 10.

All these tests provide valuable data that teachers can use to establish where students are in their long-term learning, diagnose individual strengths and weaknesses, identify the best next steps for action, decide on appropriate evidence-based interventions, monitor the progress students make over time, and evaluate the effectiveness of their own teaching decisions and approaches.

Further information

Progressive Achievement Tests, www.acer.edu.au/pat

Essential Learning Metrics, www.elms.aceruk.org

Indian Progressive Achievement Scales, www.ipas.acer.edu.au

Supporting leadership preparation in **Indonesia**

Kathryn Moyle reports on an evaluation of a professional learning program for aspiring school principals in Indonesia.

Professor Kathryn Moyle is Research Director in ACER's Education Policy and Practice program.

School systems around the world are supporting professional learning initiatives that improve the quality of students' learning outcomes. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Education and Culture has identified the importance of exemplary school principals in high-performing school systems and major strategies for systematic educational reform. Those strategies include improvements in the processes used to select principals; a development program for high-potential school leaders; the systematic appraisal of principal performance; and the provision of ongoing professional development of principals.

Since 2010, principal preparation, licensing, recruitment and performance appraisal are controlled by ministerial regulation. This regulation includes the requirement that aspirants complete the Principal Preparation Program and receive a licence number, before becoming a principal.

Preparing Indonesia's new principals

According to the World Bank, the Indonesian national education system is the third largest education system in the Asian region and the fourth largest education system in the world, with more than 50 million students and more than three million teachers in more than 220,000 schools, located in some 500 districts.

To evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and impact of the Principal Preparation Program, the Indonesian Government in 2014 and 2015 has worked with an international team led by the Australian Council

for Educational Research (ACER) to evaluate principal preparation initiatives in Indonesia.

The evaluation, funded through the Analytical and Capacity Development Partnership, a facility established by the governments of Indonesia, Australia and the European Union, with the Asian Development Bank, was conducted across 31 districts in 14 provinces of Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Nusa Tenggara, Bali, Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua.

Principal professional learning

The Principal Preparation Program involves in-service and on-the-job professional learning that shares similarities with professional learning approaches in countries such as China, Hong Kong, Canada and Scotland in Great Britain. The Indonesian Principal Preparation Program comprises:

- an initial seven-day program of in-service face-to-face professional learning, equivalent to 70 learning hours;
- a three-month program of on-the-job workplace learning, equivalent to 200 learning hours; and
- a subsequent three-day program of in-service face-to-face professional learning, equivalent to 30 learning hours.

Previous evaluations of other principal preparation programs show the importance of addressing both the curriculum or pedagogical leadership role and the administration or management roles of school principals. Principal preparation programs also have to support aspiring principals to develop their leadership skills so that their future school communities recognise them as educational leaders.

Indicators of successful principal preparation

Nine indicators identify successful principal preparation programs generally speaking, all of which have informed the evaluation of the Indonesian principal preparation program in particular.

- The purpose of the professional learning program is explicit, and focuses on the education of teachers aspiring to be school leaders. The goals of the program reflect the demands made of future school leaders, schools, and students; and the definition of success is tied to student learning in the schools administered by the graduates of the professional learning program. The purpose of the program is supported by policies and administrative guidelines.
- The content of the professional learning program is documented and matches its purposes and goals. The coherence of the program is obvious to the participants in the program. The content is rigorous, logical, coherent and organised to teach the skills and knowledge required by principals at specific types of schools.
- The content of the professional learning program integrates the theory and practice of leadership and administration with the realities of the daily work of principals in schools.
- The facilitators employed in the professional learning program include academics and practitioners who are expert in school leadership, up-to-date in their field and productive in terms of undertaking and publishing research on principals' professional learning.
- Admission criteria used to select participants into the professional learning program are designed to recruit aspiring principals who have the capacity and motivation to become successful school principals.
- School-based research and professional learning are carried out in the program so that aspiring school principals can learn how to lead research and staff development that can be used to inform future practice within their schools.
- The financial resources allocated to the delivery of the program include the funding of additional teachers to allow participants to give the program their undivided attention.
- The professional learning program engages the participants in continuing assessment, including self-assessment and improvement in both the off-the-job and on-the-job professional learning components.
- The program itself is subject to regular review and evaluation that is based on feedback from participants, facilitators and policymakers to ensure the program is of high quality, driven by practice, cost effective, and relevant and useful to both practitioners and policymakers.

Evaluation of principal professional learning

The evaluation has found that the Principal Preparation Program is both relevant and useful to the participating aspiring principals and their immediate supervisors. They report that the program improves school leadership and administration skills.

Since principal effectiveness is fundamental for high-performing schools, the effective preparation of school principals is crucial, and effective preparation depends on high-quality professional learning for aspirants and ongoing professional learning for incumbent school principals. ■

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Building assessment capability in **South East Asia**

A new primary years assessment will help teachers, curriculum designers and policymakers to better measure the learning achievement of students in South East Asia. **Jeaniene Spink** reports.

Jeaniene Spink is the Research Director for ACER's Educational and Development Research program.

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), with support from the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, is working with South East Asian countries through the South East Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) to provide culturally relevant assessment tools to measure learning outcomes for students in the primary grades.

The South East Asia Primary Learning Metric (SEA-PLM) for Grade 5 students, a collaboration between SEAMEO, UNICEF and ACER, aims to develop a set of tools that partner governments can use to better measure and understand the status of learning achievement. The initiative also aims to strengthen the capability and capacity of national examination and assessment staff, and support collaboration on the development of learning assessments and standards, across the education systems of member countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations.

The SEA-PLM collaboration focuses on numeracy, literacy and global citizenship skills. While the initial SEA-PLM will assess Grade 5 students, the design will also enable

the development of assessments for students in the early primary grades.

The SEA-PLM collaboration reflects a growing global interest in system-level educational monitoring in order to obtain high-quality data to inform policy making, but also to develop the technical and analytical capabilities of national examination and assessment systems.

The SEA-PLM program is designed in such a way as to enable benchmarking with other assessments, in a future phase of programming, to enable comparisons to existing in-country assessments and examinations, and to students in other parts of the world by including items to link with other assessments.

Following a review in 2014 of existing frameworks, ACER staff with expertise in international surveys, psychometrics, and test development have developed a draft assessment framework. Following field trials, translation and further review and refinement, the collaborative partners will be conducting the SEA-PLM in 2016.

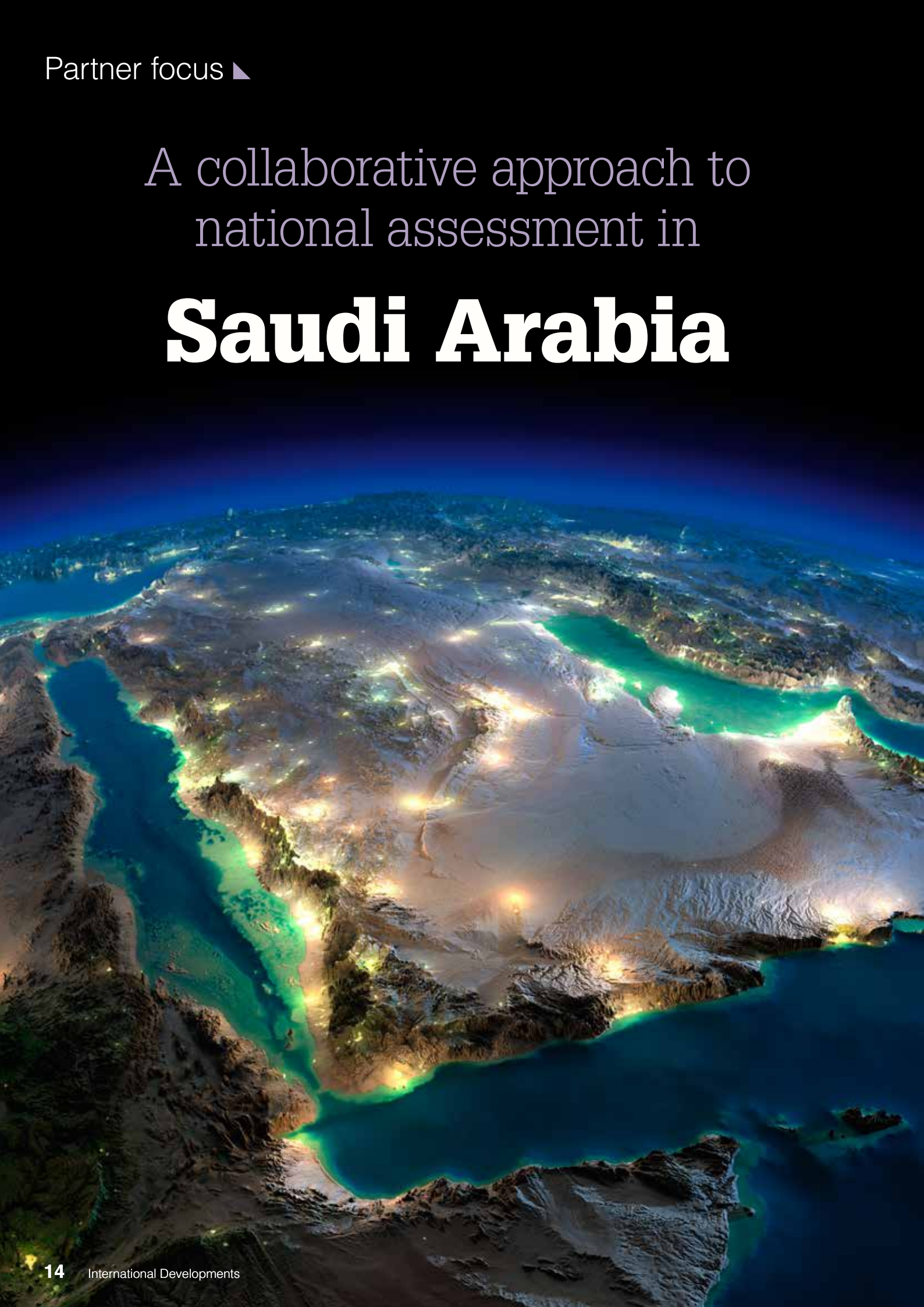
By building capability through collaboration, ACER's work on the SEA-PLM will help to strengthen learning assessment, standards and policies, and support improvements in teaching and learning across South East Asia. ■

More Information

For more information on ACER's work on monitoring trends in educational growth, visit the Centre for Global Education Monitoring at www.acer.edu.au/gem

For more information on ACER's work on assessment reform, visit the Centre for Assessment Reform and Innovation at www.acer.edu.au/cari

A collaborative approach to national assessment in **Saudi Arabia**



Work on a national assessment program to support teaching and learning is also developing organisational capacity in Saudi Arabia.

A collaborative assessment project involving the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and Saudi Arabia's Public Education Evaluation Commission (PEEC) has involved the rapid development of national sample assessments of students in Grades 3 and 6 in Mathematics and Science.

The assessments undertaken in May 2015 involved 25 500 Grade 3 and 6 students in 560 schools across the kingdom. The 2015 assessments, as established in PEEC's seven-year strategic plan, are being followed in 2016 by national sample assessments of Grades 3, 4, 5 and 6 students' Arabic literacy.

PEEC expects the national assessment to expand each year in terms of the number of grade levels and subjects to be assessed. PEEC's seven-year strategic plan also includes a timetable for the introduction of computer-based and technology assisted assessments to enable interactive, adaptive and multimedia-rich assessments.

Working on a tight schedule the tests were developed, field trialled, finalised, printed and distributed in less than nine months. This is effectively half the time typically required for such a project'.

The close collaboration has involved the development of assessment frameworks addressing the curriculum taught in schools in Saudi Arabia, as well as the development, trialling and evaluation of the assessments themselves to ensure they are robust, appropriately challenging, culturally appropriate and engaging for students at each grade level.

The assessment program also includes a survey of students, teachers and parents to gather information about students' family resources, attitudes to school and learning, and experience of school.

According to PEEC's Vice Governor, Dr Saleh Anshumrani, 100 markers at the PEEC marking centre in Riyadh in June scored approximately 370 000 items in just over two days using ACER's custom online marking system.

The success of the marking process was testimony to PEEC's organisational skills, the robustness and quality of ACER's marking technology, the skill and the dedication of the Saudi teachers employed by PEEC to complete the marking, and the quality of the assessments themselves.

Working on a tight schedule the tests were developed, field trialled, finalised, printed and distributed in less than nine months. This is effectively half the time typically required for such a project.

The collaboration to develop and deliver the national assessment program is also building the capacity of PEEC to progressively assume responsibility for all aspects of their national program. ■

The big picture

The impact of assessments on education policy

ACER's analysis of the impact of large-scale assessments on education policy in the Asia-Pacific region aims to help stakeholders improve the design and usefulness of assessments.

A new report from ACER through its Centre for Global Education Monitoring and the Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific through UNESCO Bangkok aims to understand how assessments like the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study and the Programme for International Student Assessment inform system-level decision making.

Using large-scale assessments of students' learning to inform education policy: Insights from the Asia-Pacific region, by Mollie Tobin, Petra Lietz, Dita Nugroho, Ramya Vivekanandan and Tserennadmid Nyamkhuu, identifies the characteristics of assessments that most influence education policies.

Assessments that have an impact on education policy are more frequently:

- national rather than international;
- focused on secondary rather than primary school students; and
- sample based rather than census based.

System monitoring and evaluation

While large-scale assessments of students' learning are often used for a variety of purposes, the report has found that assessment programs that are linked to policy in the Asia-Pacific region are typically used to ensure the quality of education systems, essentially as diagnoses of system strengths and weaknesses over time. After quality, most large-scale assessments are intended to ensure the equity of education systems for subgroups, and accountability of education systems in improving students' learning outcomes.

The study found that national assessments are most frequently used by policymakers to monitor and evaluate education policies, with implementation in terms of curricular and other programmatic reforms the next most frequent use.

Not surprisingly, large-scale international assessments are also often used by policymakers to evaluate the quality of national education systems through the comparison of students' learning relative to other nations, but also to inform agenda setting, and identify policy options and strategies.

Impact on education policy

More surprisingly, the review found that some large-scale assessments have little to no impact on education policy or decision-making in Asia-Pacific countries, even where education systems conduct national assessments or participate in international assessments.

Typical barriers to the use of assessment data in the development of education policy include:

- perceived low technical quality of the assessment program;

- lack of in-depth and policy-relevant analyses to identify and diagnose issues;
- poor timing of the assessment program and non-integration of the assessment into policy processes;
- inappropriately tailored dissemination to stakeholders; and
- lack of dissemination to the public.

Where large-scale assessments do influence policy, they most frequently influence system-level policies, followed by resource allocation policies. They least frequently affect policies that have a direct impact on teaching and learning practices at the school and classroom level.

Assessments are more likely to have an impact on education policy when they are integrated into policy processes by legislation, are long-term and well-funded, and are the subject of media attention, although hypercritical media attention in some instances can trigger poor policy making with unintended consequences.

Next steps

The report includes a variety of recommendations to improve the integration of assessments in education policy processes.

- Mandate assessment programs and the agencies that manage them through legislation and funding.
- Design assessment programs to collect information relevant to identified policy concerns.
- Design assessment programs to collect information about student outcomes in relation to socioeconomic background, school and home resources and the like.
- Build relations between officials responsible for conducting assessments and policymakers to facilitate communication and understanding of results.
- Report assessment results in ways specifically targeted to policymakers that address relevant policy issues.

More information

Using large-scale assessments of students' learning to inform education policy: Insights from the Asia-Pacific region, by Mollie Tobin, Petra Lietz, Dita Nugroho, Ramya Vivekanandan and Tserennadmid Nyamkhuu, is co-published by ACER's Centre for Education Policy and Practice and Centre for Global Education Monitoring.

For more information on ACER's work on monitoring trends in educational growth, visit the Centre for Global Education Monitoring at www.acer.edu.au/gem

For more information on ACER's work on education policy, visit the Centre for Education Policy at www.acer.edu.au/epp

Citizen-led educational monitoring shows **promise**

A citizen-led approach to the collection of information about schooling and children's learning is showing great promise in terms of educational monitoring and policy making.

According to a review undertaken by Charlotte Waters at the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), the citizen-led approach being used in India, Mali, Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda is yielding reliable information about children's basic learning levels, measuring change in these levels and raising awareness of local issues.

The ACER review addresses four citizen-led, household-based assessments: the Annual Status of Education Report in India, Beekunko in Mali, Jangandoo in Senegal, and Uwezo in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. ACER is providing support in terms of capacity building and is in negotiations to provide similar support to ASER-Pakistan, a citizen-led assessment organisation modeled on ASER India.

According to Ms Waters, 'The "citizen-led" description refers not only to the fact that the data collection activities are completed by volunteers in each district, but also to the focus on local data collection in a way that engages locals, and thereby raises awareness of local issues of schooling and learning levels, and triggers discussion about possible solutions to these issues.'

With more than 600 districts, each with anywhere between 1000 and 3000 schools, the Annual Status of Education Report is not simply a national survey, but also away to build traction in every district through a citizen-led, household-based approach.

The survey focuses on India's 575 or so rural districts, and works with local partner institutions or organisations to sample about 30 villages from the census for each district, with partners then the survey with a sample of about 20 households from each village.

The sampling approach enables the collection of representative information about the basic reading, arithmetic and schooling experiences for between 500 000 and 600 000 school-aged children.

Ms Waters said the Annual Status of Education Report has had an influence at the state level in India, with many state programs now aimed at improving learning outcomes in response to its results. The regular assessment of student learning outcomes is becoming a feature of state systems, and several states are now using similar tools to conduct these assessments, she said. ■

More information

Read more on citizen-led approaches to the collection of information about schooling and children's learning, available in The Annual Status of Education Report survey: *Monitoring learning levels of children in rural India,* published by ACER's Centre for Education Policy and Practice and Centre for Global Education Monitoring at www.acer.edu.au/files/AssessGEMs_ASER.pdf

For more information on ACER's work on best practice in the collection of data for monitoring of educational outcomes worldwide, visit the Centre for Global Education Monitoring at www.acer.edu.au/gem

Current international projects

Australia Awards – global tracer facility

ACER is building a research facility involving the collection and analysis of information about graduates of Australia Awards scholarships for the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The Australia Awards are a key element of Australia's overseas aid program and provide opportunities for people from developing countries to undertake study at Australian universities and TAFE institutions. Over a four-year period, the global tracer facility will undertake an annual 'Tracing Survey' and 20 detailed case studies of Australia Awards alumni dating back to the 1950s. The information will enable DFAT to assess the development contributions and public and economic diplomacy outcomes of Australia's investment. The global tracer facility is a joint project within ACER, drawing on resources from the Tertiary Education and the Education and Development research teams.

Understanding the university student experience in Japan

A large-scale university student survey undertaken in partnership by ACER and Kawaijuku Group in Japan is collecting data relating to student experience and engagement, offering institutions the opportunity to benchmark with other Japanese universities as well as Australian universities. A pilot for the Japanese University Experience Survey (JUES) has been completed with 19 universities and more than 7000 students in 2015. The pilot has informed development of a JUES main study involving about 50 Japanese universities and tens of thousands of students. ACER's Tertiary Education research team is leading this work.

South East Asia Primary Learning Metric

ACER, with support from the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, is working with South East Asian countries through the South East Asian Ministers of Education Organisation to provide culturally relevant assessment tools to measure learning outcomes for students in the primary grades.

The South East Asia Primary Learning Metric (SEA-PLM) collaboration focuses on numeracy, literacy and global citizenship skills. While the initial SEA-PLM will assess Grade 5 students, the design will also enable the development of assessments for students in the early primary grades.

By building capability through collaboration, ACER's work on the SEA-PLM will help to strengthen learning assessment, standards and policies, and support improvements in teaching and learning across South East Asia. ACER's Education and Development research team is leading this work.

Supporting assessment in Indonesia

ACER is supporting the Analytical and Capacity Development Partnership Indonesia (ACDP Indonesia) to improve the quality of student learning outcomes in Indonesia. ACER's technical assistance for the ACDP Indonesia Centre for Assessment – Puspendik – supports the enhancement of the reliability, validity and efficiency of assessment systems at both national and school level. The collaboration aims to support effective teaching and learning in classrooms through the provision of reliable information on individual student performance and progress, and to inform policymakers with estimates of achievement levels at the system level. ACER's International Surveys research team is leading this work.

Cross-border higher education

ACER is working on two projects investigating cross-border higher education for the Australian Government through the Department of Education and Training to inform discussions in Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings during 2016. ACER is collecting information on policy and practices around cross-border higher education provider mobility in all 21 APEC economies. The research by a multi-lingual team of ACER staff on publicly available information about cross-border mobility for each economy will inform discussion on how best to collect further information in the APEC region in order to facilitate greater cooperation.

ACER is also working with Macquarie University on the mobility of researchers in APEC economies. Macquarie University is gathering information on the range of policies around research ethics in the region while ACER is analysing data on more than a million joint publications between researchers from different APEC economies to identify trends in collaboration patterns. ACER's Tertiary Education research team in Delhi and Melbourne is leading this work.

Latest from **ACER** offices

ACER in Australia

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

In Australia, ACER creates and promotes research-based knowledge, products and services pertaining to Australian education and – through international assessment programs – pertaining to education globally.

General enquiries: +61 3 9277 5555
www.acer.edu.au/form/contact

ACER in India

In India, ACER creates and promotes research-based knowledge, products and services pertaining to education in India and – through international assessment programs – pertaining to education globally.

ACER in India is providing ongoing support to the National Council of Educational Research and Training to design, implement and report a new National Achievement Survey of students in Class X; the World Bank-funded National Student Assessment for secondary school students in Bangladesh; and developing its book distribution capabilities, introducing ACER titles addressing school improvement, teaching practices, assessment and reporting, and literacy and numeracy.

Key elements of the work program undertaken or delivered by ACER in India include:

- Teacher magazine www.acer.edu.au/teacher-india
- Indian Progressive Achievement Scales https://ipas.acer.edu.au
- International Benchmark Tests https://ibt.acer.edu.au

India enquiries: +91 11 26464304
india@acer.edu.au

ACER in Indonesia

In Indonesia, ACER creates and promotes research-based knowledge, products and services pertaining to education in Indonesia and – through international assessment programs – pertaining to education globally.

ACER in Indonesia is implementing major projects funded by the Analytical and Capacity Development Partnership to support the national examinations centre – Puspendik – in reforming the Year 12 examinations system; evaluating principal preparation for the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs; and evaluating information and communications technology in education in Papua Province.

Key elements of the work program undertaken or delivered by ACER in Indonesia include:

- International Benchmark Tests https://ibt.acer.edu.au
- Seminars addressing the assessment of thinking skills in association with Himpunan Evaluasi Pendidikan Indonesia (Indonesian Educational Evaluation Association)
- Research to build teaching capability and inform policymakers and leaders at the system and school level.

Indonesia enquiries: +62 21 293 05886 indonesia@acer.edu.au

ACER in the UAE

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), ACER creates and promotes research-based knowledge, products and services pertaining to education in the UAE and – through international assessment programs – pertaining to education globally.

ACER in the UAE is implementing an International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement eTIMSS pilot in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and Knowledge and Human Development Authority as well as an ePIRLS main study; managing the delivery and further development of the UAE National Assessment Program; and developing curriculum-specific versions of the Progressive Achievement Scales – Middle East for schools following various national curricula in the UAE.

Key elements of the work program undertaken or delivered by ACER in the UAE include:

- International Benchmark Tests https://ibt.acer.edu.au and workshops
- International Schools Assessment https://www.acer.edu.au/isa
- delivery of the annual UAE National Assessment Program

UAE enquiries: +971 4 366 4098
uae@acer.du.au [to redirect to dubai@acer.edu.au]

ACER in the UK

In the United Kingdom (UK), ACER creates and promotes research-based knowledge, products and services pertaining to education in the UK and – through international assessment programs – pertaining to education globally.

ACER in the UK is supporting the UK Standards and Testing Agency in the development of three key stage mathematics item writing work packages; providing advice to the British Council on population definition and sample design for research on the English proficiency of students in about 20 countries; and continuing the development and delivery of the Essential Learning Metrics to schools across England.

Key elements of the work program undertaken or delivered by ACER in the UK include:

- Essential Learning Metrics https://elms.aceruk.org
- MSAP UK https://msap-uk.acer.edu.au
- uniNOW https://uninow.acer.edu.au

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