

## SACE Board Discussion Paper

# Valuing teachers as educational assessors: exploring an Institute of Educational Assessors

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## Introduction

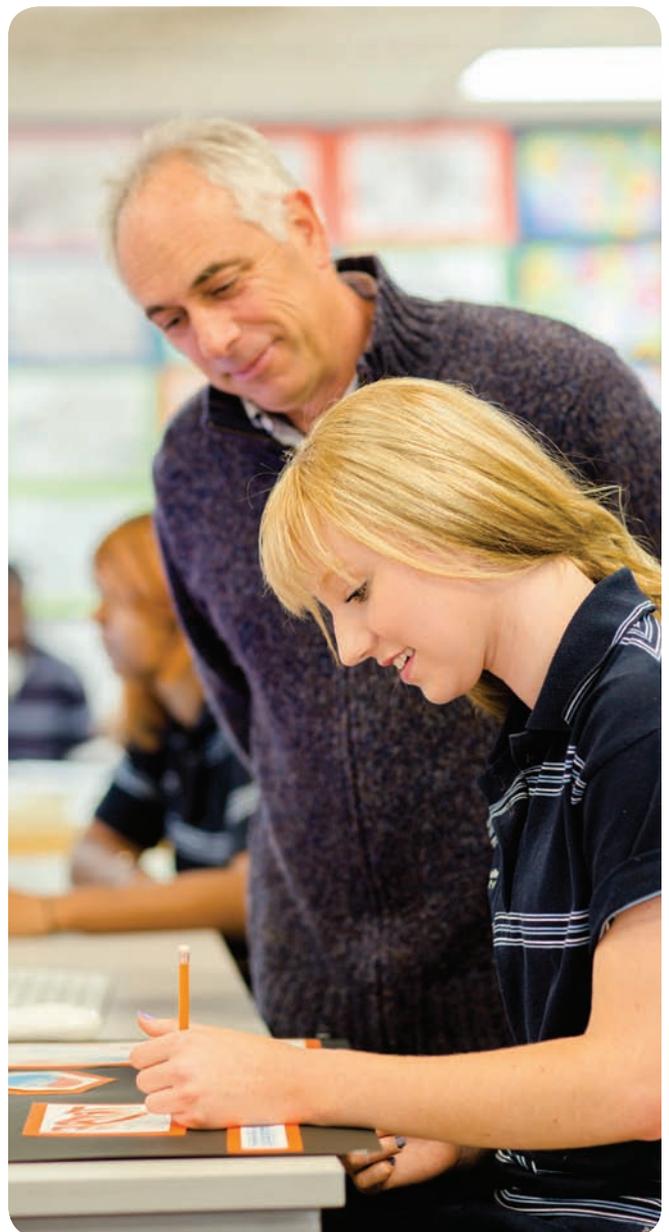
Preceded by a review and period of development, the new South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) was implemented during 2007 to 2011. Following the first year of full implementation, an evaluation was conducted in consultation with educators and other key stakeholders. The SACE Board of SA responded to the recommendations of the evaluation with the November 2012 statement, *SACE Directions and Actions*.

These directions and actions emphasise the importance of continuing to strengthen professional expertise in assessment. In relation to the proposed Institute of Educational Assessors, there is a commitment 'to work in partnership with the school sectors, subject associations and the universities to progressively establish an Institute of Educational Assessors – a partnership that would focus on the development and accreditation of the professional expertise of teachers in assessment' (SACE Board 2012, p.5).

The impetus for an Institute of Educational Assessors is linked to the SACE and initially senior secondary education. However, it is fully expected that the proposed Institute would be inclusive of all teachers, from Foundation to Year 12, and others with interest and expertise in educational assessment.

This discussion paper outlines how the proposed Institute of Educational Assessors could recognise and strengthen the professional role of teachers as educational assessors.

Educators in schools, universities, professional associations, and other education organisations are invited to respond to the working parameters described here and contribute to the emerging plans and development opportunities.



## Valuing teachers as educational assessors: exploring an Institute of Educational Assessors

Recent key developments have placed increased emphasis on the importance of educational assessment and the role of assessment in teaching and learning:

- The Australian Curriculum, based on the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum* (ACARA 2011) includes achievement standards describing expected student achievement from Foundation through the senior secondary years. This national development is guided by the *2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA 2008).
- The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) focuses on standards-based assessment practice and emphasises the role of teachers and teacher judgment in the assessment of each student's evidence of learning (SACE Board 2011).
- *The National Professional Standards for Teachers* describe the knowledge and skills expected of teachers through seven standards and four career stages. Standard 5 specifically outlines teachers' responsibilities to 'assess, provide feedback and report on student learning' (AITSL 2011, p.16).

- *The Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* confirms the importance of continuously improving the professional knowledge, practice, and engagement of all teachers and school leaders to achieve improvement in student learning outcomes (AITSL 2012).

These developments highlight the significance of educational assessment in teaching and learning. They also emphasise that educators from foundation, primary, secondary, tertiary, and community contexts can continuously develop their knowledge and deepen understanding of current theory and research in educational assessment.

The proposed Institute of Educational Assessors would play a key role in contributing to assessment expertise and professional practice by focusing on three broad functions:

- 1. Fostering educational assessment as professional practice**
- 2. Enhancing professional expertise in educational assessment**
- 3. Promoting innovation and research in educational assessment**



... in schools with strong evaluation cultures teachers pay more attention to which strategies work well for which students and under what circumstances; they also develop stronger interest in understanding learning theories and refer more often to evidence-based research (OECD 2005, p.5).

# 1. Fostering educational assessment as professional practice

An Institute of Educational Assessors would enhance professional practice in educational assessment through promoting two foundation principles:

- quality educational assessment contributes significantly to improving student learning
- assessment is integral to pedagogy and to informing practice.

These principles confirm that educational assessment is at the heart of professional practice.



... you can enhance or destroy students' desire to succeed in school more quickly and permanently through your use of assessment than with any other tools you have at your disposal (Stiggins 2007, p.22).

The significance of these principles is highlighted in the 'assessment for learning' movement, which has been influential in promoting the ways in which assessment can contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning. It focuses on:

- aligning and integrating assessment with learning and teaching processes
- encouraging teachers to use assessment evidence to provide feedback to students to close the gap between their current understanding and assessment standards
- promoting the use of a wide range of assessment tools and practices
- supporting students to become actively involved in their own learning and assessment.

The characteristics of 'assessment for learning' are linked to the 'inside work' of teachers and students, where evidence gained through

assessment is used to adapt and improve teaching and student learning outcomes. In this context, assessment is used to elicit students' understanding in order to provide immediate feedback to teachers and students that can be used to form subsequent teaching and learning (William & Thompson 2007, p.51).

A standards-based assessment framework supports assessment for learning. This approach encourages the use of a broad range of assessment activities and tasks. It also enables teachers to design assessment tasks which provide students with opportunities to demonstrate learning progress in relation to articulated standards.

The education profession recognises a range of challenges to develop greater understanding of the purposes of assessment, the pedagogy that supports quality assessment practice, and ways that evidence of learning may be used to improve student learning and assessment policy. These aspects of assessment understanding and practice are both complex and inter-related.

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) *Reforming Educational Assessment: Imperatives, Principles and Challenges* (2013) promotes comprehensive assessment reform and advocates the development of a 'Learning Assessment

System'. It suggests that such a system would be 'equally relevant in all educational assessment contexts, including classroom diagnostic assessments, international surveys, senior secondary assessments, national literacy and numeracy assessments, and higher education admissions testing' (ACER 2013, p.61). It also promotes the 'repurposing of assessment' and suggests that 'assessments should be seen as having a single general purpose: to establish where learners are in the long-term progress within a domain of learning at the time of assessment' (ACER 2013, p.58).

## Discussion points:

- What are some of the challenges and issues in placing educational assessment at the heart of professional practice?
- How could an Institute of Educational Assessors engage with teachers and other educators to strengthen professional practice in educational assessment?

## 2. Enhancing professional expertise in educational assessment

The proposed Institute of Educational Assessors would focus on enhancing professional expertise in educational assessment by:

- developing and promoting a range of professional learning programs and courses in partnership with universities, professional associations, and school sectors
- facilitating the recognition of professional learning in assessment through certificate, diploma, degree, and post-graduate qualifications
- identifying and sharing professional resources.

Professional literature describes the theory and practice of teaching and learning and includes knowledge and skills specific to educational assessment. Educators and educational leaders appreciate the need to continuously interrogate their understanding of pedagogy, learning and assessment theory. They appreciate that building 'assessment literacy' supports quality analysis of assessment methods and outcomes. Assessment literacies also provide opportunities to strengthen

shared understanding and engagement with colleagues in collaborative professional learning.

Fullan, Hill and Crevola in *Breakthrough* describe this appreciation of theory and practice as being both 'on the dance floor and in the balcony', (2006, p.96). In other words, being able to step away from an immediate activity to gain a wider perspective, and analyse both the practice and the impact of the pedagogy.

Identifying professional learning needs and interests and promoting accredited professional learning in collaboration with key partners would be the most important and potentially most influential roles of the proposed Institute. This professional learning could include:

- strengthening understanding of assessment theory and practice
- using research and evidence-based information to support decision-making in relation to assessment policies and practice
- developing professional learning communities.





...assessment literacy is defined as

- 1) knowledge of the means for assessing what students know and can do,
- 2) interpretation of the results from these assessments, and
- 3) application of assessment results to improve student learning and program effectiveness

(Webb 2002, p.1).

The role of quality professional learning in strengthening educational practice and student outcomes is significant. As Lorna Earl states in *Teacher Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis*, 'Many factors influence student learning, but it is increasingly clear that what teachers know and are able to do is one of the most important of all ... [therefore] ... professional learning represents an enormous investment in the development of human capital, directed at ensuring that the teaching and learning in our schools is up to date and effective' (Timperley, et al. 2007, p.vii).

In *The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: Making Sense of the Evidence*, a meta-analysis of national and international evidence on the impact of leadership on a wide range of student outcomes, Viviane Robinson (2007) draws similar conclusions about the role of leaders in schools, 'In high-achieving and high-gain schools, teachers report their school leaders (usually the principal) to be more active participants in teacher learning and development than in otherwise similar low-achieving or low-gain schools' (p.15).

*The National Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL 2011), the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (AITSL 2012), and a nationally consistent approach to the requirements for teacher registration, all emphasise the importance and necessity of continuously building professional capacity. Separately and together, these standards and requirements support the development of professional learning programs with credit towards professional qualifications.

### Discussion points:

- What are some of the most effective ways that educators currently use to enhance professional expertise in educational assessment?
- How could an Institute of Educational Assessors support teachers and school leaders in engaging with professional learning programs that contribute to professional qualifications?

### 3. Promoting innovation and research in educational assessment

The proposed Institute of Educational Assessors would be able to provide leadership in assessment innovations, and support educators in contributing to and learning from e-assessment developments.

The Institute could promote innovation and research in educational assessment by:

- supporting educators to frame relevant and important research questions
- recognising educators' work in action research through accreditation
- providing a key contact for professional resources and expertise
- promoting and publishing research findings.

Although not limited to online, web-based, and e-developments, many of the opportunities for innovation in assessment relate to engagement with the 'digital world'.

'We must acknowledge that because of this new digital landscape, our students not only think differently but also learn differently from the way we learn' (Crocket, Jukes & Churches 2012, p.7). In the digital world there are extensive opportunities for innovations in pedagogy and assessment. Increasingly there are more opportunities for educators to share their expertise, and work collaboratively with just-in-time, and 'real time' connections with other learners and teachers. The digital world also opens fresh opportunities for the creation and sharing of data and information.

... In this 21st Century, students need to understand the basic knowledge of their domain of study, but also need to be able to think critically, to analyse, to synthesise, and to make inferences. Helping students to acquire these skills will require changes in the assessment culture and the assessment practice at the school and classroom level, as well as in higher education, and the work environment. It will also require new approaches to large-scale, high-stakes assessment

(Segers, Dochy & Cascallar 2003, p.1).

In *Leading Schools in a Data-Rich World*, the authors suggest that becoming skilled in using data is not straightforward. They also suggest that many leaders are 'struggling to cope with the demands and challenges of making data useful rather than burdensome' (Earl & Katz 2002, p.xiv).

Earl and Katz identify what they believe are the key capacities for leaders in a data-rich world, and outline that for informed professionalism, leaders will need to:

- develop an inquiry habit of mind
- become data literate
- create a culture of inquiry in their school community (Earl & Katz 2002, p.26).

As well as working directly with educators, the proposed Institute could provide leadership in assessment innovation and research at a range of other levels. These could include:

- supporting extended research studies, such as longitudinal studies of the performance of a particular student cohort
- undertaking systematic analyses of statewide, national and international assessment data to draw performance comparisons, monitor improvement and inform policy development
- investigating how assessment is perceived and used by stakeholders (teachers, learners, parents, employers, policy-makers) within education systems.

Importantly, the Institute's innovation and research work would involve partnerships with other educational and community stakeholders and would be inclusive of international networking with other specialists in educational assessment.

#### Discussion points:

- What innovations in educational assessment are educators currently developing in their practice?
- How could an Institute of Educational Assessors support teachers and school leaders to contribute to and benefit from research and innovation in educational assessment?

## Feedback

This discussion paper focuses on the potential of an Institute of Educational Assessors and suggests that there are three broad functions that the Institute could fulfil:

1. Fostering educational assessment as professional practice
2. Enhancing professional expertise in educational assessment
3. Promoting innovation and research in educational assessment

Your feedback on these broad functions, and the discussion points suggested in this paper is welcome and will assist in shaping further planning.

Please use the form on the SACE website to provide feedback to the Institute of Educational Assessors Steering Committee [www.sace.sa.edu.au/exploring-institute](http://www.sace.sa.edu.au/exploring-institute)

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The membership of the committee includes nominees from the Association of Independent Schools of SA, Catholic Education SA, the Department for Education and Child Development, the University of Adelaide, Flinders University of South Australia, the University of South Australia, the Council of Educational Associations of SA, and the SACE Board of SA.



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