



international research in assessment and measurement at NFER

NFER's Department for Research in Assessment and Measurement specialises in test development and research into assessment-related questions. We work on projects of importance to national and international educational policy and its implementation: through research, the development of assessment instruments and the evaluation of assessment initiatives. We have a consistent track record of developing high quality assessment materials to meet the needs of a variety of audiences.

NFER has been involved in test and assessment developments for over 60 years. Over that time we have developed unparalleled expertise in test development and evaluation processes, and a thorough understanding of the needs of learners, teachers and policy makers. We have been involved in the development of statutory national tests, optional tests and banks of optional assessment materials, and assessment for learning materials. We have also undertaken research into the use of technology in many parts of the assessment process.





Test development

We ensure that our test development processes at NFER are always fit for purpose. We use the subject and test-development expertise of our 40-strong team to define a clear 'construct' and agree the purposes for which the results will be used, then write the questions. Where appropriate we carry out informal trials and pre-tests of the materials and thorough statistical analysis to refine the questions. We currently develop national curriculum tests in England and have developed highly confidential tests for selection and accountability purposes. We have procedures and premises to ensure the security of the materials at all times.

Piloting

NFER leads the piloting of many new assessment instruments, agreeing the desired purposes, and then developing instruments to meet these, analysing results and collecting user feedback over the course of the pilot. Piloting provides reliable evidence to inform refinements to the instruments or processes, or to support the live release of the assessments.

Independent evaluations

NFER undertakes independent evaluations of new assessment systems to ensure they meet the purposes for which they were designed. Evaluation methodologies include the collection and analysis of test results and user attitudes, as well as comparisons with external measures such as existing tests and more qualitative collection of user views through focus groups.

Assessment research

We carry out research into effective test development, administration, analysis and reporting methodologies. For example, we have investigated issues such as the reliability of e-marking compared with paper-based marking, assessment for learning in science, and pupil attitudes to reading as part of commissioned research to meet the needs of particular customers. We also fund our own research to inform the wider educational community.

Training and consultancy

In the international arena NFER provides training to professionals working in Ministries of Education or test development agencies on conducting research in assessment contexts, or on test development and analysis methodologies. Training and consultancy services can be tailored to the needs of partner organisations.

International surveys

NFER has had a long involvement with international assessment, and was a founder member of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), which was set up in the 1960s and organises international comparative studies of educational achievement. We have carried out several rounds of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in England and Scotland. We were also the National Centre for PISA 2006 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and are currently National Centre for the whole of the UK for PISA 2009.

As well as administering such surveys in the UK, NFER has also contributed to the development of the tests for both PIRLS and TIMSS as part of the international consortium.

Examples of international projects

Evaluation of the revised English syllabus in Singapore

The Ministry of Education in Singapore wished to evaluate the success of the revised English syllabus which was introduced in primary and secondary schools from January 2001. To this end NFER was commissioned to carry out an independent evaluation. The aims of the study, which ended in 2006, were to provide a baseline measurement of the English proficiency of students on entry to primary school, and to compare the progress in English of primary and secondary pupils who followed the old syllabus with that of those who followed the revised syllabus.

Study on the development of the grade descriptors for the Hong Kong certificate of education examination in English language

A major aim of this project was to develop the grade descriptors to be used for the revised HKCE English Language examination which was introduced in 2007. This included investigation and recommendation of the number of grades necessary for coverage of the full range of expected performance. The equivalence between the grade descriptors and other internationally recognised standards was explored. A prototype examination paper, produced by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, was analysed to evaluate its coverage and suitability. The grade descriptors were refined following consultation with teachers and other educational stakeholders.

Curriculum benchmarking

In 2005 NFER was commissioned by the Education and Manpower Bureau in Hong Kong to carry out a benchmarking of draft New Senior Secondary curricula in the following subjects with equivalent subjects in the United Kingdom: Literature in English; Ethics and Religious Studies; History; Tourism and Hospitality Studies; Business, Accounting and Financial Studies; Health Management and Social Care; Home Economics; and Information and Communication Technology. For each of the eight Hong Kong subjects, four UK subject specifications were identified which were closest in subject matter and approach. These were chosen to represent a balance of representation of the educational systems in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England.



International Information Unit

We draw on a wealth of international evidence about education systems to support us in our work. Our International Information Unit hosts the Eurydice Unit for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the information network on education in Europe. The network exists to facilitate cooperation, collaboration and information sharing in education policy making. The Unit also hosts the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Internet Archive (INCA) website, which provides descriptions of government policy on education in 20 countries. Funded by QCDA and the TDA, it focuses on the curriculum, assessment and initial teacher training frameworks for the education of 3- to 19-year olds in schools. For more information visit: www.nfer.ac.uk/eurydice and www.inca.org.uk.

Contact us

For more information contact Sarah Maughan at s.maughan@nfer.ac.uk or visit our webpage at: www.nfer.ac.uk

About NFER

NFER is a not-for-profit organisation, and aims to make a difference to learners of all ages, especially to the lives of children and young people, by ensuring that our work improves the practice and increases the understanding of those who work with and for learners.

We are the UK's largest independent provider of research, assessment and information services for education, training and children's services. Our work enables policy makers and practitioners to make better, more informed decisions, drawing on sound evidence and accurate information.

Our clients include UK government departments and international Ministries of Education, who benefit from our full range of expert and professional services and research.

