IAEA annual conference 2012

Astana, Kazakhstan

Cito and NFER with presentations from: Randy Bennett, Yoav Cohen and Godswill Obioma

Symposium (90 mins.)

The use and misuse of assessment data in test-based accountability systems

*During the 2011 conference in the Philippines, CITO organised a discussion group on accountability and assessment. The reactions of delegates have led us to arrange a continuation of this debate in Kazakhstan in 2012.*

Over the last two decades we have seen a global change in the governance of public education resulting from the introduction of a new, market driven educational policy in the early 80s. As part of this, test results are being used increasingly to monitor whether schools are implementing government policy effectively.

Important characteristics of these changes are:

• the quality of education is defined in terms of student outcomes;

• (national) standards-based curricula are introduced;

• success is monitored by performance in national tests.

Test-based accountability systems tend to focus on whether students and schools meet required levels of performance, and if not, sanctions are generally imposed on the schools. There is a growing concern among test developers about the impact of such high stakes systems on the teaching and learning that takes place in schools and the quality of decisions that are, in many cases, based on the results of a single exam or test.

There are, therefore, two key issues that test developers must consider when developing tests for use in high stakes contexts: firstly how can the tests best be designed so they have a positive impact on teaching and learning, and secondly, how can we ensure that the users of the results are aware of the issues surrounding their use. The effectiveness of test-based accountability systems is undermined by the tendency to focus entirely on a single score or ranking when reporting results. But perhaps an even more important threat is the lack of awareness among decision makers of the implications of accuracy of measurement and measurement error for the validity of their decisions.

Educational testing agencies place a great deal of effort in developing high quality assessment instruments that are used in high stakes testing programs, however, they should also take responsibility for informing users and clients objectively about the ways in which the results can and should be used.

In this symposium we will consider how tests are designed so that the results they produce can be effectively used for accountability purposes, while still having a positive impact on the teaching and learning that takes place in classrooms.