

ACER International UK (ACER UK)

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Information about our services

ACER UK is an independent, not-for-profit research organisation dedicated to advancing education through innovative, high-quality products and services, with a particular focus on assessment. As part of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Group, we are recognised globally as a leading provider of trusted expertise and support to education policy makers and professionals. We create and share evidence-informed insights and tools in support of our vision; a world where every learner can thrive. Our collaborative and transparent approach, combined with strategic stakeholder engagement, positions us as the ideal partner to deliver educational data collection and research services.

Experience in Educational Data Collection

ACER UK undertakes mixed method, formative and summative evaluation projects across all levels of education. We have a wealth of experience in qualitative and quantitative data collection, working with a range of education settings through primary, secondary and post-16. Our experienced administrators have conducted one-to-one, small group and whole class assessments, both digital and paper-based, and we have successfully managed large-scale remote data collection using our proprietary platform.

We have particular expertise in the assessment of literacy, English reading, maths and 21st-century skills, and have specialist skills in pairwise comparison methods.

ACER UK has managed large-scale trialling projects for the **Standards and Testing Agency (STA)**, including KS1 and KS2 national curriculum assessments, phonics screening check and reception baseline assessment. These projects each involved up to 300 schools and 5,000 pupils across England.

We were also the provider of the **Scottish National Standardised Assessments** for six consecutive years, achieving a national completion rate of 94 per cent. These online assessments, designed to monitor learner progress at Primary years 1, 4 and 7 and Secondary year 3, covered literacy, numeracy and writing.

Internationally, ACER serves as the **OECD's international study centre for PISA** overseeing the development of assessment materials, coordination across participating countries, data analysis, and the production of international reports. This role demonstrates our capacity to deliver complex, large-scale projects involving many hundreds, or even thousands, of educational institutions.

In post-16 education, we have conducted focus groups and surveys with A-level students as part of our evaluation of the **Royal Society of Chemistry's Spectroscopy in a Suitcase (SIAS) programme**, to determine the extent to which the programme was meeting its goals and objectives and inform future development.

We have supported multiple **EEF-funded evaluations**, including a randomised control trial of the **KS2 Reading Fluency** project with Verian, where we administered the YARC (York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension) and MDFS (Multidimensional Fluency Scale) tests in 180 schools.

For the evaluation of the EEF-funded projects **Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants** and **Digital Feedback in Primary Maths**, we independently administered, invigilated, collected and marked paper-based tests taken by over 8,000 pupils from years 3 to 5, in more than 150 schools. Pupils sat Essential Learning Metrics (ELMs) tests, developed by ACER, in either Reading Comprehension or Mathematics and we achieved a completion rate of over 95%.

We have also been working with King's College to evaluate the **Making Fluent and Flexible Calculators** project, by administering digital maths progress tests, attitude questionnaires and calculation fluency assessments in a randomised control trial across 120 schools.

Field Force Capacity and Expertise

For all large-scale data collection projects, ACER UK relies on recruiting and training administrators. We manage a group of assessment administrators, a pool which we are continuing to grow, covering regions throughout the UK.

When working in schools, all our administrators are skilled and experienced education professionals, holding QTS and an Enhanced DBS certificate (or GTCS and PVG/Enhance Disclosure if based in Scotland). They are interviewed to assess their professionalism, skill sets and suitability, and only those with sufficient experience in classroom organisation, as well as good communication and organisational skills are selected.

Once recruited, ACER UK provides comprehensive project-specific training, based on proven approaches. This may be virtual or face-to-face depending on need. Our training ensures that they are well prepared to complete all activities prior to the test day, during the test session and after the test session. Administrators must meet quality requirements following training to be approved for undertaking assessments.

During administration periods, ACER UK administrators have access to a helpline providing support. Following each visit, a short online questionnaire is completed noting any issues, providing an additional check on administration consistency. Educational institutions hosting an ACER UK assessment administrator are encouraged to provide feedback on their experience and, if required, quality monitors can be recruited to carry out observations.

Issues are very rare, but if they occur are dealt with swiftly. Any underperforming administrator may be required to complete additional training or be removed from our database.

Our approach to recruitment and quality assurance is tried and tested and has been proven to be effective, focusing on the uniformity of data collection in diverse contexts.

Communication Systems

Schools and settings:

Across all our projects we pride ourselves in providing a high-quality service to schools, maximising the role of the experienced test administrator and reducing the requirements on teachers and school staff. Clear, concise communications set out the purpose of the data collection activity along with any actions that need to be taken.

For large-scale trialling of assessments, the ACER UK Trial Management Portal allows us to simply and efficiently confirm all administration details with schools. The portal holds school contact details, administration dates and other documentation. Through the portal, schools are able to schedule test dates and follow-up visits and securely share pupil data and access arrangements.

Our dedicated project support team is always on hand to support schools with queries, responding to schools within 24 hours.

Evaluators:

We work closely with evaluators to understand the specific needs of every data collection exercise, and through regular open and honest communication ensure that we collaborate effectively to deliver the best possible outcomes.

Typically, we will provide regular checkpoint reports and management information to support constructive discussions at meetings. Risks are managed effectively to minimise issues, but where issues do occur, they are raised promptly to the evaluator along with a rectification plan.

Quality Assurance Strategies

At the start of a project, we agree with evaluators the strategy for achieving the required response rate. This will include, for example, agreeing any use of incentives. We consistently

achieve excellent response rates of over 90%, through our clear communications and effective reminder strategies.

ACER UK implements best practice quality assurance processes throughout each project to ensure data integrity and quality. This includes having a single source of truth for project data, applying unique identifiers to schools and pupils and carrying out data verification checks at key stages.

Through high quality administrator training and ongoing quality monitoring throughout data collection periods, we are able to minimise instances of missing or poor-quality data. Where this is identified we implement rectification plans, which may include the Helpdesk team contacting the administrator or school as a matter of urgency to resolve the issue.

Project Leadership

Colin Watson, CEO, has oversight of all ACER UK's projects, supported by Dr Sladana Krstic, Head of Research and Emma Palmer, Head of Project Management.

Colin Watson, CEO, has over 20 years' experience in assessment, and in his previous role at the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) was responsible for the development and delivery of all national tests in England, including secure administration of trials within schools.

Dr Sladana Krstic, Head of Research, has over 20 years' experience in educational research and project management (including for QCDA and Ofqual). She undertakes data analysis (including psychometric analysis and qualitative analysis) on ACER UK projects.

Emma Palmer, Head of Project Management, has managed a broad range of complex and large-scale education projects, working with hundreds of schools across the UK. This includes leading the delivery of multiple rounds of KS2 Technical Pre-Tests for the STA.

Our team of project managers and coordinators are experienced in recruiting and training administrators, allocation of schools, monitoring project delivery and reporting, and have previously managed data collection for EEF projects.

Additional Data Services Offered

The team at ACER UK is highly experienced in test development, survey design, evaluations and psychometric analysis; the management and administration of large-scale research projects; application of pairwise comparison method; and the organisation of seminars, conferences and professional development programmes.

ACER researchers have expertise in the collection, analysis and dissemination of both qualitative and quantitative data. Researchers routinely use a range of analysis software, including Qualtrics, SPSS, R, Nvivo, and Dedoose.

Cost Model and Pricing Structure

Every data collection project is priced according to its unique requirements and circumstances. Our cost model will depend on a number of factors, including:

- Length of administration
- Length of assessment window
- Number of schools/settings
- Required response rate, and projected number of mop-up sessions
- Mode of delivery (online or paper)

Once these factors have been clarified, we would collaborate closely with evaluators to ensure the project delivers excellent value and to recommend ways in which the project brief may be modified to help achieve cost-effectiveness.

At ACER UK we have a robust pool of experienced and skilled Test Administrators, who are well-distributed geographically. We use informed estimates for travel expenses and always make efforts to keep these costs as low as possible. We assume that our data services will be subject to VAT, and accordingly, VAT will apply to our costs.

Data Protection

We are experienced at managing complex, sensitive and high-stakes data for a range of clients. ACER UK is fully GDPR compliant and Cyber Essentials Plus accredited. Where required, we ensure that data processing agreements are in place, and complete a DPIA for sensitive data captures, ensuring that data privacy is managed as required under the applicable law.

Our Information Security (IS) Manager implements and manages our full suite of ISO 27001 certified data policies and procedures, and all staff complete regular refresher training.

ACER has consistently demonstrated compliance with reporting, IT security, privacy, and confidentiality requirements and uses advanced technologies to provide layers of security around critical data.

In the unlikely event of a breach, ACER UK would follow its Incident Response Plan and process, including informing the evaluator.

Safeguarding

ACER UK takes its responsibilities in relation to safeguarding very seriously. Our ‘Working with children and child safety’ policy outlines ACER’s commitment to establishing and maintaining a child safe environment, and the prevention and management of suspected child abuse or neglect. All children who interact with ACER staff or contractors, and/or have their personal information or educational records provided to ACER, have a right to feel and be safe.

All necessary checks are undertaken to ensure we engage the most suitably qualified and appropriate people to work with children. In addition, administrator training for each project includes safeguarding, specifically referencing ACER UK’s safeguarding policy, or that of the client if preferred. Any administrator that fails to demonstrate that they have understood the policy in their post-training assessment will not be permitted to undertake any administration visits.

Our approach to safeguarding has been successful across all projects delivered by ACER UK and no safeguarding issues have been raised in relation to staff working on any of our projects.

Project Examples

Project	Partners	Phase/ Year Group	Data Collection (test name/s and type/s)	Description (including number of learners tested)
EEF Evaluation of KS2 Reading Fluency Project	Verian	KS2 / year 6	York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension (YARC) and Multidimensional Fluency Scale (MDFS)	Evaluation of a school-based intervention Randomised control trial (RCT) 180 schools, 1080 pupils
EEF Evaluation of Making Fluent and Flexible Calculators	King's College	KS3 / year 7	Maths progress test, maths attitude questionnaire and calculation fluency assessment	Evaluation of a school-based intervention Randomised control trial (RCT) 120 schools
EEF Evaluations of Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants (MITA) and Digital Feedback in Primary Maths (DF)	RAND	MITA: KS2 / year 3 DF: KS2 / year 4 and 5	ACERs Essential Learning Metrics (ELMs) tests in Reading Comprehension (MITA) and Mathematics (DF)	Evaluations of school-based interventions MITA: 119 schools, 6106 pupils DF: 34 schools, 2,549 pupils
KS1 and 2 Item Validation Trial	STA	KS1 / year 4 KS2 / year 6	KS1 and 2 national curriculum tests	Trialling newly developed items for national curriculum tests 265 schools, 5700 pupils
Phonics Screening Check Technical Pre-Test	STA	KS1 / year 1	Phonics screening check (PSC)	Trialling newly developed items for PSC 300 schools, 3000 pupils
Reception Baseline Assessment Item Validation Trial, Field Trial and User Research	STA	Reception	Reception baseline assessment (RBA)	Trialling newly developed items for RBA 285 schools, 2250 pupils
Evaluation of Spectroscopy in a Suitcase	Royal Society of Chemistry	Post-16 / A-level	Focus groups and surveys with learners, teachers, ambassadors and coordinators	Surveys: 111 learners, 87 teachers, 33 ambassadors and 32 coordinators at schools across England Focus groups: 11 focus groups, each with approx. 6-12 participants
Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA)	Scottish Government	P1, P3, P7, S3	Scottish National Standardised Assessments	Annual delivery of more than 578,000 online assessments to learners in nearly 2,400 schools