



SkillCheck Successfully Completes Automation of Australia's National Assessment for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) turns to SkillCheck to Help Develop and Automate National Assessment For ICT Literacy in 6th and 10th Grade Students

BURLINGTON, Mass., April 4, 2005 --SkillCheck, Inc., the leading innovator in automated skills and behavioural assessment, today announced that it has successfully completed the development and automation of Australia's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) literacy assessment. The national exam will be used to benchmark the ICT literacy of 6th and 10th grade students. The benchmark study will commence in September 2005 and will be repeated every three years to monitor Australia's progress in student technology literacy.

The test-automation project was initiated at the request of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), a non-profit organization specializing in educational assessment, including student assessment, system and school testing, and national and international educational surveys. ACER had been faced with the formidable challenge of determining how to effectively benchmark ICT literacy for the nation.

ACER Research Fellow Julian Fraillon explained, "paper tests fell short of what we wanted when it came to testing computer skills. We knew that we needed a testing solution that could accurately measure a wide range of computer-related skills and abilities, including higher-order information-management skills, and no existing product, paper-based or automated, could do everything we needed."

To meet these needs, ACER planned a unique assessment that combined linear (multiple-choice) test items to test knowledge, simulation-style performance-based items to test skills, and live-application test items that would require students to complete projects that could be evaluated by a human grader for both technical and higher-order thinking/information processing ability. To make their vision a reality, ACER turned to SkillCheck.

Over a six month period, SkillCheck's IT and content-development teams worked closely with ACER test developers and technologists to create an assessment that exactly met ACER's requirements. SoNet systems in Melbourne developed the software that integrated the native applications such as MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint with the SkillCheck platform so that artifacts created by students could be saved and assessed. A Dutch company (InAlbum) modified a computer-based photo management program for inclusion in one of the modules.

The final product includes a set of theme-based test modules that are structured to emulate real-world student exercises and projects. The assessment also includes a survey designed to capture important demographic information from candidates as well as collect details about students' exposure to and use of computers at home, work and school.

"The Australian ICT Assessment was an interesting departure from what we have seen in student technology assessment projects anywhere else," explained Jon Haber, SkillCheck President and contributor to an upcoming book on resources for assessing student ICT literacy, to be published by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) later this year. "Whether linear or performance based, paper-based, computer or Internet delivered, most other assessments we have seen or created consist entirely of objective, machine-scored test items. The ACER approach that combines machine scored test items and human-scored exercises allows for a much broader range of abilities to be assessed, particularly the higher-order thinking skills that are part of a developing world-wide consensus as being at the core of ICT literacy in the 21st century."

The assessment is currently being delivered to 1,000 Australian 6th and 10th grade students as part of a field test that will generate data for validation purposes. Once that research is complete, the exam will be taken by 8,000 students nationwide at over 500 schools across the country.

Fraillon says that the combination of expertise from all the parties has resulted in an imaginative authentic assessment tool. "The exercise involved contributions from many sections within ACER, from specialists such as SkillCheck and SoNet and support and guidance from the Australian Performance Measurement and Reporting Taskforce that commissioned the project."

The complete project is expected to be finished by the end of 2005, with a report published in 2006 regarding the current standards of student ICT literacy in Australia and how that varies among individuals, groups and educational jurisdictions.

About ACER

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) is one of the world's leading educational research centres, committed to creating and distributing research-based knowledge, products and services to improve learning across the lifespan in both formal and informal settings. The organization was established in 1930 to support to education policy makers and professional practitioners through state-of-the-art educational research, products and services and today provides research and development services to educators in Australia and around the world. For additional information, please visit our website at www.acer.edu.au.

About SkillCheck

SkillCheck provides assessment products and services to the education, training, staffing services, Human Resources and certification industries. In addition to providing more than 800 skills and personality assessments for employers (including the world's largest staffing firms), SkillCheck has also worked with educators to create high-quality, performance-based student and teacher assessments in the US and around the world. SkillCheck was the developer of the Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC³), the world's first globally validated, basic level ICT certification, distributed by it's partner, Certiport, Inc. in over 50 countries and twelve languages. For additional information, please visit our website at www.skillcheck.com.au

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