The 43rd conference of the regional CIE society, the first under the new name of OCIES, was held at the University of the South Pacific’s (USP) Emalus Campus in Vanuatu from 3-6 November, 2015.

Given that one of the key motivations for the change of name was the members’ wish for a name more representative of the region within which our society exists, and more inclusive of educationists from the many countries within Oceania, it was seen as important that the first conference under the new name also be the first held in a country other than Australia or New Zealand. The decision to pursue the possibility of holding it in Vanuatu was arrived at early in 2015. While the advent of the devastating Cyclone Pam that struck Vanuatu in March created some delays in planning, the potential for the conference to contribute to post-cyclone recovery further affirmed the choice of Port Vila.

Also significant was the decision for the conference to be convened by a joint team from Vanuatu, New Zealand and Australia. The success of the conference demonstrates the value of establishing and building on strong relationships across the region.

The conference’s theme and subthemes were developed with the intention of guiding the reinvigoration of CIE in Oceania. They reflected the convening committee’s broad objectives:

• to revitalise our society by encompassing the diversity of issues, interests, perspectives and contexts represented in Oceania,
• to widen participation in and add depth to debates and dialogue about how CIE can contribute to education in the post-2015 era at global, regional and national levels.

Overall, the conference was very successful in achieving these objectives; see key details below.

Preparation
Organisation had a later than desirable start due to delays in finalising the name change (from ANZCIES to OCIES), and in securing OCIES executive approval to proceed and to facilitate the establishment of a Conference page on the new OCIES website. The advent of Cyclone Pam also contributed to a later than normal start, as there was uncertainty as to the capacity of USP/Port Vila to host. The conference website pages were set up in late June and the call for papers went out early July.

Given that University of Auckland (UoA) was leading arrangements from a distance, two visits to Port Vila were necessary to make all the arrangements. Regular updates were provided via the website and a gmail account established for support of the conference.
The unique nature of the conference arrangements, involving a partnership of three different institutions in three different countries as well as support from Vanuatu local education institutions and development partners, is noteworthy insofar as it signified the new era of OCIES as a more regional, inclusive society.

**Participation and Programme**
Overall, there were 100 registered attendees (understood to be the largest attendance at our regional CIE society’s annual conference to date) of which 82 were fee paying. Our attendees represented institutions and organization from 11 different countries in total. Over 30% of attendees were from Pacific Island and other developing countries, and almost 25% were post-graduate students.

The three-day programme involved presentations delivered by a total of 76 people - mainly through parallel paper sessions but including keynotes, the invited language symposium, panel discussions, workshops and the closing plenary session; about 10 of the 76 presented in more than one format. The largest number of presenters (29) were based in Pacific Island countries (Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Cook Islands, PNG) representing various campuses of the University of the South Pacific, Solomon Islands National University, Ministries of Education, and a range of regional agencies and non-government organisations. The next most numerous grouping (25) comprised presenters based in Australia from a range of universities (Sydney, QUT, UNE, Melbourne, RMIT, Victoria Melbourne, Monash, South Australia, Wollongong, Sunshine Coast, Charles Sturt) and ACER. NZ presenters (18) came from five universities (Auckland, Canterbury, Victoria Wellington, AUT and Unitec). Both the Australian and NZ presenter groups included diverse ethnicities, with presentations addressing research in diverse locations. Although only a small number of presenters were based in institutions beyond Oceania, a reasonable proportion of papers (about 25%) presented research undertaken beyond Oceania; in Indonesia (x2), Maldives, Singapore/Malaysia, Nepal, Canada, Timor Leste (x3), Laos, Thailand (x2), China, USA.

The keynote addresses were presented by Associate Professor Kabini Sanga (Victoria University of Wellington), Dr Christine Fox (formerly of University of Wollongong) and Dr Seu'ula Johansson-Fua (University of the South Pacific). The programme also included an invited panel speaking on issues of Language in Vanuatu and a closing plenary session with invited speakers.

The conference was preceded by a workshop organised by the Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training and the Australian/New Zealand supported Vanuatu Education Sector Programme, focused on issues of literacy and language.

**Sponsorship and Scholarships**
The Research Unit for Pacific and International Education (RUPIE) of UOA provided $3500 sponsorship towards convening of the conference – funds were used to cover some management costs and some of the travel costs involved in organisational visits between Auckland and Vila. Six scholarships of $500 plus registration fee were provided by the OCIES Executive, to emerging scholars selected through a competitive process. The Conference Convening team also provided 10 scholarships to Vanuatu-based educators from the
Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education, Vanuatu Institute of Technology, and the Vanuatu Ministry of Education.

**Income and Expenditure**
The Conference was planned with the objective of breaking even, but a small surplus of $615 was achieved. A total of $27,000 revenue was collected which comfortably covered the various costs involved. Management costs were kept to a minimum; other than the $1,000 Eventbrite processing fee all management work was done voluntarily or with RUPIE support. Major costs were travel and accommodation for keynotes, and additional costs of scoping visits due to convening the conference from a distance. Most conference expenditure fed directly into the local economy thus assisting with post-cyclone recovery.

**Participant Feedback**
A simple survey was sent out to all registered participants shortly after the conference. 53 people responded.

Almost all respondents agreed with positive statements about the conference content, organisations, and indicated they would attend future conferences and recommend it to others. These results are shown in the chart below.

![Participant Feedback Chart]

Just one respondent strongly disagreed with these statements and responded negatively to the other questions. Because no contact details were provided we have been unable to follow-up and seek to address this person’s concerns.

The aspects of the conference that people most valued, from highest to lowest were:

1. Exposure to different perspectives or new research
2. Networking and informal interactions
3. The keynote speakers  
4. The parallel sessions  
5. The location  
6. Presenting my research and getting feedback  
7. The affordability of the Conference  
8. Attending the OCIES AGM

We also asked open questions about what sessions interested participants the most and why and suggestions to improve future conference programmes. Sessions on language issues and literacy (9 respondents), the Keynote speakers (10 respondents) and sessions on Pacific education were the most popular (8 respondents). Several respondents (5) commented that they enjoyed the sessions with a strong research base the most and a further 8 respondents provided general comments to the effect that all sessions were useful and interesting. One respondent noted that some sessions did not have a very strong research base.

Of note from the suggestions for improving future conferences were several comments about increasing the outreach and promotion of OCIES, ensuring the outcomes of conferences are shared more widely and promoting the conferences more to enable more diverse participation. Several comments were made about needing to increase regular communication particularly to Pacific institutions and academics, and to find ways to include more ‘novice’ researchers and students. One respondent commented on the lack of representation of research from the Asia region and the need to ensure we communicate that OCIES does not exclude Asia. Several respondents commented on the value of having the conference in a Pacific location and the desire for this to continue. Other suggestions made were for more ‘practical’ sessions, inclusion of other media such as video/documentary, dedicated sessions for students, and opportunities for interaction with USP students or ‘field trips’ when in country.

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On behalf of OCIES 2015 Conference Organising Committee  
Feburary 2016