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NATIONAL CENTRE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION RESEARCH

Country background report: Addressing the training and assessment needs of adults with low basic skills in Australia

This report was prepared by the NCVER as an input to the OECD study "Improving Teaching and Learning for Adults with Basic Skill Needs through Formative Assessment". The document was prepared in response to guidelines the OECD provided to all participating countries. The opinions views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, state and territory governments, the NCVER or the OECD.

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Executive Summary

Adults with low 'basic skills'

In Australia the term 'basic skills' is not commonly used on its own to identify skills which are considered essential for functioning in mainstream culture. Nevertheless, when we refer to adults with 'low basic skills' we are generally speaking about adults whose spoken language, reading, and written communication, and numeracy skills fall below that considered essential for individuals to operate effectively at home, at work and the community at large. Such levels are identified for access to government-funded language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) programmes.

Adults with low levels of language, literacy and numeracy skills are over-represented among:

- unemployed Australians, especially the long-term unemployed,
- adults from non-English speaking backgrounds,
- Indigenous Australians, and
- prison populations (over-represented by indigenous Australian males).

In 1996 the Survey of Adult Literacy (SAL) found that about 6 million Australians did not have the basic literacy and numeracy skills to cope with the basic literacy demands of everyday life. This survey is to be followed up with a similar survey in 2006.

Policy, programmes and practice

It is not easy to provide a national picture of policy and practice that applies to adult basic education or the assessment of adults with low basic skills. This is because the national government[1] and the state and territory governments have a variety of strategies and initiatives in place for addressing these problems. However there are some current national government initiatives (for example, recently implemented 'welfare to work' legislation, language programmemes for migrants, and workplace training initiatives) which have affected the provision of LLN training for Australians in similar ways.

- The Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) funded by the national government but administered by the states and territories provides assistance to eligible unemployed individuals (including migrants) seeking a job to improve their opportunities for getting and keeping a job, and their skills at functioning effectively in everyday life.
- The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), administered centrally but contracted out to state and territory training organisations, provides language training for migrants.
- The national government's Workplace English Language and Literacy Program (WELL) provides workers in industry with LLN training. To date, there have been positive evaluations of all three programmes.
- National programmes also exist for research and innovation related to literacy, language, and numeracy training.

[1] Australia is a federation comprising a federal government (with national responsibilities) and state and territory governments. In this paper we will use the words 'national' and 'federal' interchangeably to refer to the federal government.

- Separate state and territory strategies also aim to help adults improve basic LLN skills so that they can obtain employment.

There are no formal policies which govern how teachers will go about conducting formative assessments (that is, monitoring the learning progress of adults) in formal and informal programmes. However, there are national mechanisms for assessing and reporting on outcomes in the national government-funded language and literacy programmes and for assuring the quality of vocational education and training (VET).

- The National Reporting System [NRS] incorporates standards for the measuring of outcomes and is mandated for reporting on outcomes of specific government-funded national programmes like LLNP, and WELL. However, it is also often used in other language, literacy and numeracy programmes to inform the development of training and assessment processes. A recent review of the LLNP has recommended reforms to the way that outcomes are measured so that learning gains achieved by those who do not complete the programme are also recorded.
- The Australian Quality Training Framework (currently being expanded to focus more on outcomes and continuous improvement) includes standards which require registered training organisations (RTOs) providing nationally accredited VET training to identify and support clients who may require or request LLN support in their learning. Trainers and assessors must satisfy standards of competence, and assessments must be valid, reliable, flexible and fair' with provision of appropriate feedback to learners.
- A key feature of the assessment of vocational competencies is that they are to only use LLN requirements that are sufficient for the demonstration of competency. Above all LLN skills are to be embedded (that is, 'built in, not bolted on') into VET training leading to nationally recognised Training Package qualifications

Training provision

Formal training occurs within language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) programmes and is generally delivered in the vocational education and training (VET) as well as the adult and community education (ACE) sector.

This training may be provided in:

- stand-alone courses,
- units embedded into nationally recognised industry training programmes and accredited courses leading to national VET qualifications,
- workplaces, educational institutions, or community centres, and
- homes by volunteer tutors who provide LLN training (generally language training to migrants).

The language, literacy and numeracy teacher workforce is mostly female, ageing and increasingly casualised. In 2001 a national survey of LLN practitioners reported that over three-quarters of practitioners were over the age of 40 years. Almost a third were over the age of 50 years, 85% were female, and 70% were in casual or contract employment. They held a mix of formal qualifications and experience. The great majority were former primary and school teachers.

Flexibility for teachers and trainers

The learning outcomes in accredited curriculum frameworks and competency standards in nationally recognised industry programmes (Training Package qualifications) prescribe what a learner must be able to do to show achievement of a certain learning outcome or competency, and the assessment criteria and conditions that must be met. However, teachers in these programmes are also at liberty to use a range of training and formative assessment tasks and strategies to observe and record student progress towards the achievement of competency.

There is an intentional lack of prescription for how teachers and trainers will apply methodologies for teaching and assessment in accredited VET programmes. This is to enable them to implement techniques that can be customised to local situations and to the individual needs of learners.

There is also great flexibility for practitioners in adult and community sector (ACE) non-accredited courses to adjust requirements to learner needs through informal assessments. It also helps to provide an environment for experimentation and innovation, and a supportive, non-threatening environment for adults with low skills coming back into training.

Formative assessment

Formative assessment is defined in various ways to distinguish it from final assessment. One definition that has been used by VET practitioners and researchers in Australia refers to the 'strategies used by teachers to provide opportunities for feedback or information on progress towards achievement of competence'. However, there is also support among some academics for the view that feedback can only be linked to formative assessment if the feedback is used by the student to improve performance in subsequent assessments.

A blurring of the boundaries

The advent of competency-based training and assessment in the Australian (VET) system has shifted the traditional focus from final assessments to ongoing assessment. Here students are able to request assessments as they feel ready, and spend more time in acquiring skills to re-take the assessment if they are unsuccessful. These arrangements have led to a blurring of the boundaries between final and formative assessments, and between formative assessment and teaching and training practice.

Trainers and assessors have the flexibility to apply those pedagogical techniques that they feel suits the need of the programme and the student. This flexibility is tempered in part by the need to ensure that the principles for achieving consistency and validity in judgments about performance are applied. Nevertheless there is a strong commitment to using multiple forms of information and reality-based tasks in initial placement, and formative and final assessments. Teachers also make use of self assessments, peer assessment, and collaborative assessment techniques.

A national guide for assessors of nationally recognised industry programmes recommends a process of 'reasonable adjustment' to ensure that the process of assessment does not provide candidates with undue stress. Practitioners commonly assess non-curriculum outcomes such as self-esteem, attendance and motivation.

A strategy for the recognition of informal learning currently being trialled in the state of Victoria has also been found to help adults from disadvantaged backgrounds to understand their own ability to learn, and to develop confidence in going on with learning.

Trialling and moderation of assessments

The trialling of assessment tasks and moderating of assessments to ensure validity and consistency is commonly promoted for ensuring consistency and validity of assessments in national and local programmes. However, the application of such processes to assessment practices in general is often inhibited by scarcity of resources and time.

Assessment materials and resources

A vast array of materials and resources (in on-line, print, CD-ROM and video formats) has been developed with government funding to assist practitioners (including VET and LLN trainers and assessors) to undertake assessment including formative assessment. In addition, national websites link practitioners to federal government information on policies and practice, programmes and resources. A reading and writing hotline provides advice to callers on where to access LLN resources and training.

The way ahead

A fundamental belief in providing all Australians with access to basic language, literacy and numeracy training to function effectively in the English-speaking communities and workplaces underpins the Australian approach to helping adults with low basic skills. In addition, legislation has been passed to move unemployed individuals on government pensions into employment. Keeping in mind that increasingly such individuals are also characterised by low level language, literacy and numeracy skills, the new legislation has also led to an increased focus on language, literacy and numeracy training.

- ✧ However there are a number of challenges facing the future effectiveness of current adult basic education programmes and practices. These are associated with:
  - ♦ the extent of low basic skills in the adult population and the particular characteristics of adults with low basic skills,
  - ♦ ensuring that such adults and those with multiple forms of disadvantage (including Indigenous Australians, and Australians with a disability) have access to and participate in adult basic skills education, and
  - ♦ providing opportunities for adults to acquire basic and more sophisticated levels of language, literacy and numeracy in order to keep up with constant workplace and legislative reform, advancing technology, and changing work practices.
- ✧ There is also a need to raise the professionalism and status of language, literacy and numeracy practitioners, provide them with adequate initial training and continuing professional development tailored to the needs of different groups.
- ✧ In view of the ageing of the LLN practitioner workforce there is also need to ensure its replenishment as current practitioners reach retirement age and leave the workforce. This means that the sector will need to consider effective strategies for recruitment which address issues related to appropriate initial training, formal qualifications, and remuneration.
- ✧ If practitioners are to implement effective formative (and summative) assessment techniques, they will continue to require access to adequate time and resources to enable them to analyse student needs, develop and apply useful recording strategies, and engage in trialling and moderation of assessment tasks.

1. Introduction

The generic term 'basic skills' on its own is not always used in Australia to describe the set of skills considered essential for basic functioning in mainstream culture. Rather the tendency has been to name the particular skills that make up this basic set. Classifications like key competencies and employability skills are used to refer to the different skills that individuals need for entry into employment. The concept of essential skills, which builds on prior classifications like key competencies and employability skills, has recently come under discussion (Ithaca Group, 2005). Central to these classifications are adequate language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills.

Low basic skills in Australia

When we refer to adults with 'low basic skills' in the Australian context we are generally speaking about adults whose English language, literacy (reading and verbal and written communication) and numeracy (practical calculations, measurements, and numerical estimations) fall below levels that are considered essential for individuals to participate at a basic functional level in the English-speaking mainstream culture. Keeping this in mind we will use the terms 'basic skills' interchangeably with LLN skills.

Adults with low levels of basic skills are over-represented among unemployed Australians and especially the long-term unemployed. They may not have completed school, may have interrupted employment histories, and may be located in labour markets with high unemployment (Gleeson, 2005). Data on the educational attainment of prison populations (over-represented by Indigenous Australians [ABS 2005]) also indicate high levels of literacy and numeracy problems (Noonan, forthcoming).

It is generally the case that those with low basic skills do not perform well in the labour market. However, there are some Australians who have been able to succeed in employment, and economic and personal life, in spite of their low levels of language, literacy and numeracy (Waterhouse and Virgona, 2005).

Organisation of report

In this report we provide a snapshot of how Australia goes about addressing the training and assessment needs of adults with low basic skills. We identify key challenges for adult basic education, and report on national,state and territory government language, literacy and numeracy initiatives (including government-funded training programmes and projects). We then provide an account of the nature of vocational and community-based training provision, and assessment policies and processes. Following this, we discuss formative assessment and innovative teaching practices, and materials and resources designed to provide assessment guidance. We also provide a description of the nature of the adult language and literacy workforce and opportunities for professional development. We end by drawing some conclusions.

II. Challenges facing the provision of adult basic education

There are a number of challenges facing the provision of adult basic education in Australia. These are associated with the following issues.

The extent of low LLN skills in Australia

In 1996, the Survey of Adult Literacy (SAL) found that there were about 6 million Australians who did not have the basic literacy skills to cope with the literacy demands of everyday life (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997).[2] Another finding was that adult Australians whose first language was not English, those with low levels of educational attainment, unemployed people, Indigenous Australians, and those from low income groups were over-represented among adults with low basic skills. In addition, although females generally performed better than males on the prose scale (excepting for those in the 55 to 74 years age group), males performed better than females on quantitative scales.

- Mismatches between what individuals perceived to be their level of skill and their actual scores on objective tests also were observed. The discrepancies were higher for numeracy skills. Where 92% of those who believed their reading skills to be poor, were assigned to the lowest level, just 79% those who rated their numeracy skills as level 1 were assigned to this level.
- These SAL findings are now dated but a new survey is to be conducted in Australia in 2006. It remains to be seen whether or not there have been significant changes in the levels of literacy of Australian adults. More recent research indicates that Australian adults with low basic skills have been found to be the least likely to participate in training, and if they are in work are also in jobs where there are few opportunities for training to improve these skills and other occupational skills (Gleeson, 2005).
- Despite the increased focus on basic skills training in primary and secondary schooling, many young people may complete secondary schooling without adequate basic skills and will require assistance. This is supported by increasing level of school leavers participating in LLN programmes (Foley & Cavallaro, 2007). The Australian Reading Writing Hotline data also shows that growing numbers of Year 12 graduates seek help with literacy. In 2005 abut 11% of those who called the Hotline had completed year 12 or higher (including university students). Year 12 graduates who have a relatively high level of literacy but want to improve their written communication skills (generally for work-related reasons) is also an emerging caller group (New South Wales TAFE 2005).

Addressing the needs of special groups

Addressing the needs of special groups[3] has been a major social and educational policy concern in Australia. These groups include individuals who have experienced disadvantage (in some cases

[2] The SAL measured three forms of literacy: prose, document and quantitative literacy on a five-point scale. All referred to an individual's ability to use English language materials. Where levels 1 and 2 referred to the competency of individuals with very poor to poor skills in using printed materials for every day use, individuals operating at levels 3, 4 and 5 performed at higher levels of proficiency and complexity. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (1997) has described in detail the types of tasks that might identify the level of skill of individuals. These indicators for low skills are also described in appendix A

[3] At various times they have been called minority groups, disadvantaged priority and targeted equity groups. They have included indigenous Australians, those from Non-English speaking backgrounds, sole parents, early school leavers, those with physical and intellectual disabilities, prisoners, and women.

multiple forms of disadvantage) in education, labour market, and the community at large. There is a concentration of adults with low basic skills in these groups.

- ✧ A major challenge is to ensure that these adults acknowledge their need for LLN training and do something about it. Another major challenge is to ensure that these groups are motivated and able to take advantage of the training that is provided for them.
- ✧ There will be a continued need for working out ways to customise training that takes account of the cultural sensitivities and obligations of individuals from these special groups (including Indigenous Australians, newly arrived migrants and refugees from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds), and their particular and immediate economic and social needs that may affect ability to attend and participate effectively in training. It will also be important to address the needs of those who have been disadvantaged by low educational attainment levels and inadequate participation in initial schooling
- ✧ The provision of adequate facilities, materials, and support for increasing access to literacy training for indigenous Australians in remote communities characterised by low provision and/or uptake of education and training continues to be a major challenge (Kral and Falk 2004).

Addressing altered workplace requirements

Another major challenge for adult basic education in Australia is to ensure that individuals in work and those preparing to move into work have the necessary language, literacy and numeracy to operate in the workplace, and remain competitive in the labour market.

- ✧ Australian workers, volunteers and community members are also increasingly being required to implement new ways of working, apply new technologies and respond to more prescriptive legal and community demands. The major drivers of these changes are legislation relating occupational health and safety of workers, public liability insurance and supply chain quality requirements. [4]
- ✧ Individuals need to be able to understand basic workplace regulations (including occupational health and safety instructions), read instruction manuals, and implement new ways of working. They will also be required to work harmoniously and responsibly with others, and participate in training and assessment activities that may or may not lead to accredited qualifications.
- ✧ Initial workplace and training reforms of the 1980s and 1990s aimed at raising the vocational skill and qualification levels of the Australian workforce. However, the realisation that ensuring or certifying that workplaces and workers had the skills to keep up with rapid changes in technology (including information technology, telecommunications and work organisation) fore-grounded the need to address the requirements of adults with low levels of language, literacy and numeracy training in reform agendas.
- ✧ There were workers in Australian workplaces (especially production workers) who did not have sufficient English language, or basic literacy and numeracy skills to undergo workplace training and/or assessment (either because they had had limited or no schooling, their skills had deteriorated, or the ones they had acquired were not sufficient). There were also unemployed workers who had low levels of educational attainment in addition to low levels of

[4] These pressures have also increased the need for volunteers in emergency services organisations (for example local fire-brigades) to be well-trained and qualified (in terms of licences, certificates or course completions) to enable the organisations in which they work to comply with legislative requirements. Hayes, Golding and Harvey (2004) note that such compliance requirements are incurring resistance from experienced volunteers because they either believe that they already have the skills gained through extensive experience or because they lack the time to commit to training. There is also reticence to engage in training from those who perceive themselves to have low or insufficient literacy and numeracy skills to complete the training.

Issues of public and occupational and safety also concern those who have to prepare and apply hazardous chemicals in their jobs. In their study of workers engaged in chemical handling and spraying FitzSimons, Mlcek, Hull and Wright (2005) note the importance of complying with specific legislation as a major driver of numeracy skills training.

basic skills. Keeping this in mind there was a need to review traditional methods of training and assessment so that such workers could have their existing competencies recognised, and could participate in any further training and assessment activities should they be required.

- ✧ As a result, the functions of the literacy and numeracy professionals were expanded to include working in actual workplaces in addition to educational institutions.
- ✧ This altered the access to literacy and numeracy training for adults with low basic skills who were already in work, and those aiming to find employment. Although programmes for improving the language, literacy and numeracy skills of adults based in educational institutions continued, these too were aimed at improving skills that would help workers obtain, maintain or progress in employment.
- ✧ The government's 'Welfare to Work Strategy' (Australian Government 2005) which aims to get people off government pensions and into the workplace, has meant that there will be an increased need to provide language, literacy and numeracy training for adults with low basic skills.

Raising the professionalism and status of practitioners

Another challenge is to raise the professional status of adult literacy teachers. In 2005 the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL), the peak body for adult literacy issues, promoted the discussion of professional standards and qualifications in adult literacy and numeracy teaching. Formal VET programmes established to provide professional LLN qualifications for practitioners are now available.

Increasing our knowledge of total provision

We still do not have a complete picture of the total provision of LLN training in Australia. However, research is currently underway (Schueler in progress, & Foley & Cavallaro, 2007) on the extent of LLN units of competency that are embedded in vocational subjects and courses. A survey is also underway to determine the extent of community-based LLN provision (Dymock in progress).

Attracting and retaining practitioners

In 2001 the Access Division of TAFE[5] New South Wales conducted a survey of 555 adult literacy providers (from the adult and community education (ACE) sector, TAFE and private providers involved in government funded literacy and numeracy programmes (New South Wales Access Division, 2001).

- ✧ There were a total of 253 responses (75 from managers, and 176 from teachers). 85% were female and 77.5% were over the ages of 40 years. Almost a third were 50 years and over. In addition, just 30% were employed on a permanent basis, with the remainder either employed on a casual or contract basis.
- ✧ This ageing of the workforce of adult literacy and numeracy practitioners will provide major difficulties for training provision if there are not adequately trained teachers to take the place of current teachers reaching retirement age who decide to go into retirement.
- ✧ The casualisation of the LLN workforce also provides added challenges for providers as the few permanent teachers must deal with the various administrative issues that are required for conducting an effective programme. In addition, learners will also be disadvantaged in the absence of the continuity which is often provided by having the same teacher throughout a course (New South Wales TAFE Access Division, 2001).

[5] TAFE refers to Technical and Further Education. TAFE institutes are public providers of vocational education and training.

III. Literacy and numeracy policies, strategies and systems

National and State and Territory government[6] policies are concerned with ensuring that all Australians have opportunities for skills development and recognition of these skills. This includes adults with low basic skills. The following statement on the Commonwealth government's website devoted to adult literacy and numeracy (literacy-net) underscores its commitment to literacy provision for all adults.

- 'Literacy provision must be available to all so that adults can fully participate in the labour force; use literacy skills at work; participate in adult education and training and use literacy at home and in the community. Literacy is not only about skills acquisition but the application of these skills in multiple environments for multiple purposes. Language literacy and numeracy are crucial underpinnings to learning to learn,generic skills and essential skills for the Australian population' (DEST 2006).
- There is currently no specific policy governing formative assessment of language, literacy and numeracy competencies for adults with low levels of these skills, although researchers and practitioners have called for its incorporation into national VET policy (Clayton, Blom, Meyers and Bateman 2003).
- Nevertheless the special skill needs of learners are incorporated into standards for assuring the quality of training and assessment in the VET system (to be discussed in more detail later on) to ensure that assessments are reliable, valid, fair, and flexible.
- There is also a focus on assessing LLN skills according to contexts in which they are used. This is done by embedding LLN units into vocational programmes, and using reality-based training and assessment tasks.

National initiatives

A number of national initiatives have been implemented to address the needs of language, literacy and numeracy skill needs of Australians, and especially adults.

- The *Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP*), adopted in 1991, aimed to provide the means for all Australians to maintain levels of spoken and written English appropriate for a range of contexts, and to have access to training that would suit their particular needs. To this end, the Commonwealth Government of the time applied additional funding to help State Governments provide literacy training for adults who required this. This policy no longer drives the provision of LLN training but its philosophical underpinnings have had a major influence on provision and access.
- The *Australian Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence,* developed in 1993, was designed to inform curriculum development and to support the development of a national reporting system on language, literacy and numeracy competence. This framework organised the achievement of competence according to complexity of a task, and the amount and nature of help received by individuals in performing the task. These principles continue to be applied in the assessment of LLN competence.
- The *National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy* of 1993 had an early influence on the integration of adult literacy within reforms to mainstream VET provision. In addition, the *Australian Quality Training Framework* (first adopted in 2001 and reviewed in 2005) also specifically addresses the necessity to address the needs of special groups (including adults with low basic skills) in delivery and assessment strategies.

[6] Australia is a federation comprising a Commonwealth government with specific national responsibilities, and State and Territory governments with their own sets of powers and responsibilities.

- A *National Framework for Professional Development of Adult Literacy and Basic Education Personnel* was adopted in 1993 to provide a systematic and national approach to professional development for this group of workers and for newly recruited teachers. It also aimed to provide staff with an opportunity to upgrade the quality of teaching and management of adult literacy and basic education programmes within the government technical and further education sector.
- The *Literacy and Numeracy Training Programme* (LANT) adopted in 1998 to improve the employment prospects of unemployed jobseekers also helped to support the Commonwealth Government's 'Mutual Obligation' policy where 18 to 24-year-olds in receipt of government benefits had to engage in training or labour market schemes to maintain access to unemployment benefits (Department Education, Science and Training 2002).
- *The National VET strategy (Shaping the future 2004–2010)* priorities are concerned with ensuring that all Australians have the competencies to function effectively in employment (DEST 2003a). Two of the priorities specifically apply to adults who may also have difficulties in functioning effectively in the modern workplace. These relate to increasing the participation of mature age workers in training, and encouraging Australians who are not fully participating in labour markets to engage with training. These priorities will have a continued impact on the extent to which language, literacy and numeracy skills training, especially for adults with low basic skills, continues to remain an essential part of VET training. It will also have a major impact on the type of assessment strategies used.

State and Territory initiatives

State and territory governments have also developed strategies aimed at improving language, literacy and numeracy of their adult citizens. To this end they make funds available for adults with low LLN skills to engage in training which will help them move into the labour market.

- The Tasmanian Government's *'Ensuring Essential Literacies' strategy* is a long-term strategic plan for post-year 10 education and training. As part of this plan the government has also established an adult literacy taskforce in conjunction with the Commonwealth government. It has conducted an environmental scan of literacy provision in Tasmania and found that a more consistent and coordinated approach to providing adults with quality literacy support is required.
- The Western Australian government's *State Training Strategy* acknowledges the role that both formal and informal learning has in addressing the needs of adults with low basic skills. However, there is a concern that some groups (for example, the long-term unemployed) are not participating in formal training, and because they are not in work, they are also excluded from many informal learning opportunities that are encountered in work.
- South Australia's *New Ways, New Times and New Skills Strategy* comprises a 10-point action plan which highlights improved partnerships between the Adult and Community Education (Sector) and the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in the provision of language and literacy skills for those who have been socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged.
- Victoria's *Maintaining the Advantage* skills strategy aims to build the skills of Victorians to 'respond to future challenges presented by social change, economic growth and international competition'. To this end, the government has allocated $10.88 million dollars to fund 1800 places for Victorians aged between 35 and 64 years who do not have a year 12 qualification or equivalent to enrol in courses at Certificate III level or above.
- The Queensland Government has also launched its *'Queensland Skills Plan' (2006)* which identifies training strategies to ensure that labour supply is aligned with the current and future needs of its industry. One of the components of this plan is to provide training that 'works for individuals'. This involves a better understanding of each individual's particular

skill needs, and strategies for the needs of special groups (including Indigenous Queenslanders, people with a disability, and older workers).

- The 2002-2004 strategic plan for Australian Capital Territory VET (*ACT Vocational Education and Training*) has as one of its key focus areas (Key Focus Area No. 3) a devotion to achieving equitable outcomes. This includes promoting the customisation of training for equity groups, and the availability of assistance to students and employers. It also includes encouraging people from equity groups to complete training, and to support the development and implementation of ACT and national equity strategies. The 2005 – 2009 plan also had as one of its key goals to 'identify and respond to particular needs of learners including those in equity and target groups'.
- The Northern Territory has in place a *Technical and Vocational Skills Learning Support Modules Policy* to assist training organisations to customise training to the needs of adults with low levels of required underpinning knowledge (which may also include low LLN skills). These modules have been developed in recognition of the fact that there are many clients from remote area communities (mainly Indigenous Australians) who speak English as a second, third or fourth language, and may live in areas that have been disadvantaged in terms of lack of access to appropriate schooling. In addition there are also other Territorians who may not have reached a functional literacy standard equivalent to year 10. The learning support modules are specific to the Northern Territory and are only to be used in conjunction with nationally recognised courses and programmes.
- The New South Wales Government has traditionally had a major commitment to addressing the training needs of individuals from special groups (and especially those with low LLN skills). TAFE NSW (the government provider of vocational education and training) is responsible for managing the Reading Writing Hotline that provides a national referral service for adults seeking to improve their LLN skills. The government has also supported programmes for migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds that prepare them to enter general and vocational courses, and for retrenched and mature age workers to build self-confidence and develop team work skills. In addition, it has funded 'equity reviews' of Training Packages[7]. It has also established a new Equity Strategy Group to coordinate decisions on equity and strategy policy in TAFE NSW.

The National reporting system (NRS)

The *NRS* comprises standards for the assessment of proficiency gains of participants in specific government-funded language, literacy and numeracy programmes, namely the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP), and Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program (to be discussed later on in the report). It is also designed to allow a nationally consistent means of reporting student outcomes from these and other nationally recognised and other accredited and non-accredited LLN programmes. The NRS also describes the types of assessment principles and conditions of performance that must be observed.

Although the NRS is used in a variety of formal and informal ways to assess language, literacy and numeracy skill levels of adults, it is mandatory for assessing outcomes in LLNP and WELL programmes.

- Developed in 1994, the NRS incorporates five macro skills: reading, writing, oral communication, learning strategies, and numeracy. Associated with each of these macro-skills are indicators of competence which describe the specific competencies that are to be demonstrated, and five levels of competency which describe the level at which each indicator is achieved. These levels are used to identify 'individual levels of competency in language, literacy and numeracy for identifying further vocational training or educational

[7] Training Packages comprise national industry competency standards, assessment guidelines and qualifications for a particular industry. They lead to nationally recognised vocational qualifications.

needs, and tailor programmemes to suit individual needs'. Each of the levels above a 'not yet achieved' level is associated with increasing levels of complexity.

- The NRS also comprises other aspects of communication (that is, procedural communication, technical communication, personal communication, cooperative communication, systems communication, and public communication).
- The aim of the key principles that underpin the NRS is to ensure that assessment tasks are 'grounded in a relevant context and not be culturally biased', and students are assessed across a wide range of tasks integrated into practice. In this respect the NRS is used as a diagnostic tool for identifying adults with low basic skills, as well as a tool for initial placement assessments, on-going assessments, formative assessments and curriculum development. There is also increasing use of the NRS in language, literacy and numeracy programmes being delivered in workplaces and training institutions. In addition, Perkins (2005) reports that all 'major adult literacy curricula have been mapped against the NRS' (p38). She suggests that the NRS should be incorporated into a broader package that includes revised rules for government reporting, easy to use support materials, and professional development resources for practitioners.
- Not all practitioners are prepared to use the NRS in a broad range of diagnostic and training contexts. This is because it was designed for reporting on outcomes and should be so used.
- A resource to help practitioners develop assessment tasks for the different indicators of the NRS was developed in 1998 and still continues to be available on the website of the Department of Education and Training (DEST). This resource was developed by Fitzpatrick, Wignall & McKenna 1999).

IV. National government-funded LLN programmes

The national (federal) government funds the provision of the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP), the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program (WELL) and the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). Funds are also available to help those who would like to prepare to enter apprenticeships through the New Apprenticeship Access Program. In figure 1 we provide a diagrammatic representation of the these four different programmes, the populations they serve, and possible pathways that can be followed.

The Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP)

The LLNP is a national government-funded programme aimed at helping eligible job seekers (between the ages of 15 and 64) to improve speaking, reading, writing, or basic numeracy skills. It commenced in 2002.

- Aimed at helping unemployed people seeking a job to improve their opportunities for getting and keeping a job, and to function effectively in everyday life, the programme is administered by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST 2006), and Centrelink, an agency of the Department of Human Services (DHS 2006). Job Network Members contracted to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR 2006) provide referral services to the LLNP. These organisations are involved in the initial identification and referral of jobseekers that are eligible for LLNP training. The referral is based on an initial assessment of eligibility and suitability for training skills in an interview with government officers (at Centrelink) or contracted Job Network Member staff. In most cases the potential client must be a jobseeker in receipt of a government benefit and must agree to be referred to the programmeme because their lack of English language or literacy and numeracy skills is a barrier to obtaining and keeping a job. Adults are eligible for the basic stream of the

nationally-funded LLNP if their performance in initial assessments is observed at level 2 or below of the NRS.

- An individual who is considered to have low reading ability will score at level 2 or below (that is, at the 'not yet achieved level1', and at 'level 1' and 'level 2') on specific indicators. Individuals performing at NRS Level 1 in reading are able to read and identify letters of the alphabet, numbers, signs and symbols relevant to personal factors and to the immediate environment. They may also be able to locate specific information in simple graphs, diagrams or pictures. The individual who is unable to do this will score at the 'not yet achieved level'. At Level 2, the individual is expected to be able to read and say what is happening in a simple text about familiar topics or locate information and data in simple graphs, diagrams or pictures.
- At level 1, in writing, individuals will be able to copy letters of the alphabet, numbers and dates in correct order, and write his or her name, address and signature, and the names and addresses of others. They will also be able to write one or two short simple sentences to express an idea, message or opinion drawn from a given text. At level 2, individuals are able to write about a familiar topic using conjunctions to link simple sentences. They will also be able to complete forms and write notes using facts and personal information about familiar contexts.
- Contracted LLNP providers carry out a professional assessment of potential client skills to ensure that they meet the NRS skill levels required for programmeme participation and to ensure their suitability for training. In this initial assessment the eligible job seeker will be asked to respond to a series of spoken and written test items (mapped against the NRS at different levels) in an interview which may last between one and two hours. These items will test a candidate's reading, writing, numeracy, listening, and speaking skills and learning strategies.
- An assessor (generally a literacy and/or English language professional) will interview the jobseeker during this initial assessment and provide assistance when requested to do so. The assessor will record on the assessment sheet next to each item the extent to which assistance is requested or provided. This is used to assign an NRS level to the individual's performance. Those individuals who are assessed at level 2 or below will then be approved for LLNP participation (for the basic training streams of the programmeme). The initial outcomes of performance are used as a baseline and compared with results of other NRS ratings applied to assessments conducted at the end of the course or programme.
- Although assessment in these programmes occurs at the beginning to ascertain suitability for LLNP participation, and at the end of the programme to report on outcomes, there is a need for the LLNP provider to maintain records of the individual's progress throughout the course, so that outcomes of achievement may be reported accurately against the NRS indicators of competences. This is a form of continuous assessment where outcomes in progressive assessments throughout the duration are combined to provide a final result.
- An assessment and placement resource for this programme developed by Fitzpatrick, Wignall and McKenna (1998) for the Department of Employment, Science and Training, provides strategies and sample activities to be used.
- The LLNP is also available to migrants who score at level 2 or below. Migrants are also able to access an advanced language stream if their skills are assessed at level 3 or higher but below level 4. The programme is also introducing from 1 July 2006 a more advanced stream of training for literacy clients who have their skills assessed at NRS level 3 or above but have at least one NRS macro-skill assessed at below NRS level 3.
- The 'Welfare to Work' Legislation aims to get as many people who have been on welfare to move into jobs. Although jobseekers may be identified for participation in LLNP because of their low LLN skills, they may not spend time in the programme to develop these skills if they are able to get a job whilst in the programme. However, LLNP rules allow an

individual to retain their eligibility to participate in the programmeme if their employment status changes once they have been referred and have commenced training.

Programme participation

There were 21 817 participants who started training in LLNP (see table 1). Of these, about three-quarters were from a non-English speaking background. Those over the ages of 30 years accounted for the greatest proportion of participants.

Table 1 Characteristics of LLNP participants for 2004

Characteristics of LLNP participants	No. of participants	% of participants
Language-speaking background		
English speaking background	6 397	30.3
Non English speaking background	15 420	70.7
Total	21 817	100.0
Indigenous background		
Indigenous background	887	4.1
Non-Indigenous background	20 930	95.9
Total	21 817	100.0
Age group		
15-30	5 751	26.4
31-50	11 816	54.1
51-65	4 250	19.5
Total	21 817	100.0

Source: Department Employment Science and Training (2004) LLNP statistics, unpublished data.

A small proportion (2.6%) of LLNP participants were undertaking the programme via distance education and4.1% reported having a disability.

Programme evaluation

- The NRS outcomes achieved by Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme (LLNP) participants meet the LLNP's present Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which measure learning and other outcomes. However, it is evident that the programme can improve the measurement and reporting of the learning gains achieved by clients especially those who do not complete their training. The Program has therefore carefully considered the need to better measure and report on client learning gains. The Draft Program Guidelines thatcome into effect from 1 July 2006 cover this issue.
- From 1 July 2006 the Programme's newly contracted providers will record client outcomes as they are achieved or when clients' programme involvement status changes. Client progression to a further block of 160 hours of training (to a maximum of 800 hours training in a two year period) will require the client (apart from clients with very low assessed skills at initial entry) to have made learning gains that providers must record in the LLNP's on-line administrative system. The KPIs that providers need to achieve have also been revised to provide a greater focus on client learning outcomes which will be recorded and reported at the NRS indicator level.

The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program

The WELL program was established by the federal Government in 1991-1992. Today it continues to assist Australians workers to improve their language,literacy and numeracy skills so that they can meet individual and company employment and training needs. This includes workplace LLN skills that will affect workplace safety, quality, efficiency, and productivity.

Funding is based on an integration of language, literacy and numeracy skills within vocational training. The government provides what it calls 'seed funding' to establish programmes and expects enterprises to make some financial and in-kind contribution. Funding is available for projects related to the: development, delivery and assessment of training activities (training projects), the development of resources to be used in training and assessment (resource projects), and strategic initiatives which relate to industry-wide projects and programmes (strategic projects).

Training projects

- Before employers will be awarded funds for a WELL training project, they must be able to show that their organisation requires LLN training. (For example, in filling out their application for WELL funding they may refer to having high levels of school leavers in their workforce who have inadequate LLN skills for their jobs. They may also require those in supervisory positions to upgrade their LLN skills so that they can better understand workplace documents and legislation). Once employers have been approved for WELL - funded training projects then the LLN trainer who has been selected to deliver the programme will visit the organisation to speak to employers about what the company is hoping to achieve through the project. In designing a suitable strategy, the LLN trainer will need to use workplace documents to contextualise the training and feedback from supervisors to focus on specific areas. Workers who will participate in the programme will be interviewed also, either in groups or on a one-to-one basis. These activities will enable the LLN trainer to customise the training to the needs of the organisation and to the needs of individuals.
- Where LLN skills are to be embedded into vocational training leading to nationally recognised qualifications, then the LLN trainer will either collaborate with the workplace vocational trainer to address LLN skills in training and assessment processes and materials, or prepare special programmes that map learning outcomes to units of competency in specific nationally recognised VET programmes. In keeping with the philosophy of competency-based training, assessment is conducted on an on-going basis and workers will achieve units of competency according to what they demonstrate. Formative assessment strategies are based on observations of how adult learners understand classroom instructors and learning materials, and feedback from learners and trainers. This approach enables training practices to be modified according to the performance of learners.
- In the first year of all training projects employers are expected to contribute $1 for every $3 of government funding, and to match the dollar amount in any subsequent years where funding is approved. In addition, employers are expected to provide venues, equipment, and paid leave for training (where supported by any enterprise agreement).

Programme participation

- In 2003-04, there was nearly $13.9 million provided for 250 WELL projects involving 23,214 workers across 16 industry groups (Balzary, 2004). Between July 2004 and May 2005 information provided by the programme administrators indicates that there was a total of 18 143 participants in WELL programmes across Australia.

Resource for practitioners

- A resource for WELL practitioners (Doing WELL in the West, 2003) provides a practical guide to planning and running WELL training in Western Australia, and also advises practitioners on how to go about developing a formative assessment tool. A CD-ROM resource ('WELL-trained') developed for the WELL programme ('DEST 2006) to be discussed in greater detail later on in the report, also provides practical advice to practitioners on how to integrate LLN into vocational training in four different industry areas (aged care, cleaning, manufacturing and food processing).

Programme evaluation

- A post-implementation review of the programme conducted for the government after three years of its operation (Baylis 1995) found that the programme was meeting its objectives. In many participating enterprises the programme was found to lead to reform of current workplace communication practices. It was also found to be reaching small and medium sized enterprises.
- The government is currently conducting another review of the WELL programme. Findings of this implementation have yet to be made public.

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)

Basic English language courses for adults have their roots in the post-World War II years of migrant settlement. Moore (2001) notes that The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) can be traced back to 1948 when English language classes were established in migrant hostels to assist migrants in settling in the new country and helping them learn the English language. These were run jointly by the Department of Education and the then Department of Immigration (now the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs [DIMA]). The programme was originally set up to develop essential language skills for very new migrants; however, it soon became evident that even those who had been in the country for a few years required continued help with English. In the late 1970s the federal government increased the amount of recurrent funding available for the programme, and began to implement a series of training reforms which saw the introduction of competency-based curriculum frameworks in AMEP training.

- Today DIMA continues to fund AMEP and organisations in each state and territory tender for funding to deliver the programme. Basic English language tuition is available for newly arrived migrants and refugees from non-English speaking overseas backgrounds, assessed as not having functional English. As the aim of AMEP is to help these new Australians make a successful transition into Australian life, there is also an effort to help participants learn about Australian culture and customs. In addition, it provides opportunities for participants to establish social networks with others.
- The programme comprises 510 hours of tuition or 'the number of hours it takes to arrive at functional English, whichever comes first'. The Special Preparatory Programme is also available for those who are refugees and those who have entered Australia on humanitarian grounds. This component is provided to those who have been assessed as having special needs that have arisen from their pre-migration experiences (for example, torture, trauma and limited or no schooling).
- Increasingly focussed on ensuring that AMEP achieves the pre-determined learning outcomes for government funding, teachers and administrators are often called on to help students deal with practical issues of settlement, including advising on behaviours that are considered to be unacceptable in mainstream Australian society and under the law.

Programme delivery

- AMEP classes may be conducted in traditional classrooms, community centres, mosques or churches. There are also opportunities for migrants to take these classes via distance education, or have a home help tutor work with participants in their homes. Participants are assessed for their level of skill in initial placement tests that are used to allocate participants to appropriate classes or programmes. The test used for this is the International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR) that comprises indicators of listening, speaking, reading and writing ability which are of increasing levels of complexity[8]. On completion of AMEP training migrants may also apply to enter the LLNP programme.

Programme participation

In 2003–2004 more than 33 000 clients from 190 language backgrounds took part in AMEP activities. A total of around 6.2 million hours of tuition was provided at a cost of $98.8 million.

- In 2002 DIMA conducted a random survey with clients and former clients (who had also experienced at least 10 hours of AMEP tuition with current service providers). A total of 3203 participants (representing 87% of contacted clients) responded to the survey. A breakdown of the characteristics of respondents shows that they had an average age of 37 years and that the great majority (two-thirds were female). Six language groups accounted for almost three-quarters of AMEP participants (Mandarin, Vietnamese, Arabic, Cantonese, Serbian, and Bosnian) and just under two-thirds of participants had migrated for family and humanitarian reasons (see table 2). The characteristics of respondents to the sample were generally similar to the student population from which the sample was drawn.

[8] These indicators range from no comprehension of even the most simple speech or text through to being able to comprehend, speak and write with professional proficiency, through to being able to speak, comprehend and write like a native speaker.

Table 2 Number and percentage of AMEP survey participants, 2001

Characteristics of respondents	No. of participants	% of participants
Gender		
Males	1 057	33.0
Females	2 146	67.0
Total	3 203	100.0
Age group		
16-24 years	480	15.0
25-34 years	1 089	34.0
35-44 years	961	30.0
45+ years	673	21.0
Total	3 203	100.0
Years of schooling		
No schooling	95	3.0
9 years or less	673	21.0
10 – 11 years	673	21.0
12-15 years	1 762	55.0
Total	3 203	100.0
Hours of participation in AMEP course		
Up to 200 hours	1 826	57.0
Over 200 hours	1 377	43.0
Total	3 203	100.0
Migration stream		
Family	801	25.0
Humanitarian	929	29.0
Skilled	384	12.0
Provisional	1 057	33.0
Other/not recorded	32	1.0
Total	3 203	100.0

Source: Table derived from Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2001, 'National AMEP Client Satisfaction Survey Report', Adult Migrant English Section, Canberra

Current occupations

Respondents to the AMEP 'Client Satisfaction Survey' were also asked for their current employment status. Just under a third were in either full-time, part-time, or casual employment. About the same proportion reported being engaged in home duties (see table 3). Just over an eighth were unemployed. Males were more than twice as likely to be in full-time employment than females. Where 40% of females were unemployed this was the case for just 3% of males. Males were two times more likely than females to report that they could not work because of health reasons. About a fifth of males reported that they were engaged in home duties compared to an eighth of females. Males were also more likely than females to report being in retirement.

Table 3 Current employment status of respondents to AMEP 'Client satisfaction survey', 2001

Employment status	Total	%	Males	%	Females	%
Full-time	560	17.0	308	29.4	252	11.7
Part-time	239	7.0	73	7.0	166	8.0
Casual	194	6.0	63	6.0	131	6.1
Home duties	469	28.0	217	21.0	252	11.7
Unemployed	884	15.0	31	3.0	853	39.5
Unable to work (health reasons)	97	3.0	44	4.2	53	2.4
Retired	244	8.0	120	11.5	124	5.7
Other	516	16.0	190	18.2	326	15.1
Total	3 203	100.0	1 046	100.0	2 157	100.0

Source: Table derived from figures from Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2001, 'National AMEP Client Satisfaction Survey Report', Adult Migrant English Section, Canberra

Research and national moderation programmes

- The AMEP Research Centre, comprising researchers from the National Centre for Language Studies at Macquarie University in New South Wales and the Department of Educational Studies at Monash University in Victoria, was set up to support the programme. This research centre coordinates a national on-line bank of test items for use by AMEP teachers, and organises and conducts a national assessment moderation programme.

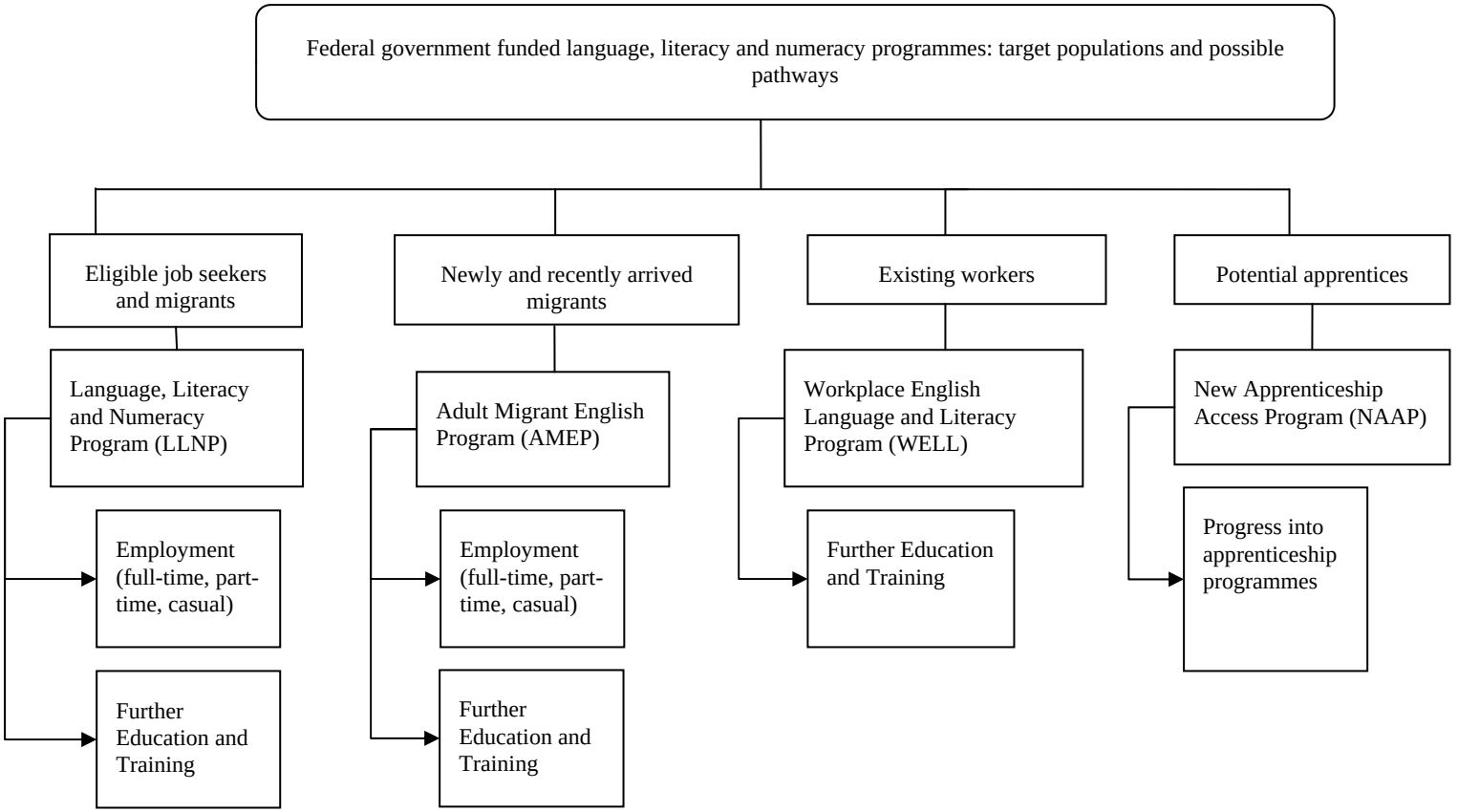
Programme evaluation

- Over three-quarters of the respondents to the AMEP 'Client Satisfaction Survey' were satisfied or very satisfied with their assignment to class levels, and with training facilities. About 90% reported that they enjoyed the classes and that teachers were interested in providing assistance. In addition, participants in the Special Preparatory programmes also reported satisfaction with these courses. Humanitarian entrants tended to be the most satisfied with all aspects of the AMEP experience, and Skill stream migrants the least satisfied. Keeping in mind that the majority of skilled migrants do not always access the AMEP, such findings would seem to apply to skilled migrants finding it difficult to reach the English levels required.

The New Apprenticeship Access Program (NAAP)

The New Apprenticeship Access Program (NAAP) was established in 2005 to help job seekers improve their skills (including basic skills) and improve their chance of getting an apprenticeship or traineeship.

Figure 1 Language, literacy and numeracy programmes funded by the federal government



The Adult Literacy National Projects

The Adult Literacy National Project program aims to help 'adult Australians to improve their literacy skills for work, education and training, at home and the community' via three major programmes: a Reading Writing hotline, Innovative projects, and the Adult Literacy Research Program.

- The *Reading Writing Hotline* enables those wishing to improve reading and writing skills to place a free telephone call with the hotline which links them to relevant training providers. Between April and October 2005 there were 3885 calls to the hotline. For the same period in 2004 there were 3775 calls.
- The *Innovative Projects* programme provides funding for pilot projects, resource development projects, and strategic projects which display innovative approaches to address issues of low adult literacy. In 2005 the Commonwealth Government funded projects aimed at:
  - improving the literacy skills of school leavers using distance education,
  - compiling electronic readers for adult literacy students,
  - creating a professional development kit for teachers and trainers of adult literacy learners from oral learning cultures,
  - helping parents to participate in the education of their children through literacy
  - developing financial skills,
  - expanding adult literacy pathways for workers in the Transport and Distribution sector,
  - implementing integrated models for literacy provision in community volunteering programmes,
  - developing a language and literacy resource for expectant mothers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and
  - providing a support programme for volunteer literacy tutors.
- The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) *Adult Literacy Research Program* manages research (funded by the Department of Education Science and Training) to investigate issues and disseminate findings of studies which will inform policy and practice in adult literacy. A list of current and completed research projects appears at Appendix B.

Other government projects and programmes

The national and state and territory governments fund a number of other initiatives aimed at helping adults learn basic skills.

- The national Basic IT Enabling Skills (BITES) for Older Workers Programme aims to help these groups to successfully engage with computer and information technology.
- A variety of state and territory government initiatives fund training activities to help those with low LLN skills get back to work.

V. Provision of training

Adult basic education programmes and activities are funded independently or jointly by Commonwealth and State and Territory governments, community organisations, and individuals. However, there is no comprehensive data on the amount of LLN training that is occurring across the nation.

Commonwealth (national) and State and Territory (provincial) governments provide funding aimed at improving access to education (including basic skills education) of all Australians and

especially of special groups. In addition, providers across states and territories may independently tender for government funding to deliver such programmes.

Individuals who require basic skills training may also access such training from private commercial providers, family and friends and local community organisations. Funding is also available to prepare individuals to learn other basic life skills including food preparation, budgeting and other life skills. In some States and Territories local libraries also provide at no cost English language skills for beginners.

Vocational Education and Training system

The VET systems of all states and territories have programmes and strategies in place to address the language, literacy and numeracy skills of adults with low basic skills.

- These programmes include stand alone language, literacy and numeracy courses provided for students to improve these skills to help them better deal with mainstream VET classes. They also comprise specific communication, literacy and numeracy competencies which have been or are being incorporated or embedded into Training Packages and accredited vocational programmes across all levels of the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF)[9] .This integration means that training and assessment of these competencies are subject to the Australian Quality Training Framework[10] standards for quality assurance of the delivery and assessment of training.
  - However, there is no overarching structure that mandates how teachers, trainers and assessors go about the task of assessing students. Such advice is provided in: supplementary documentation, general texts on assessment, national and local seminars and workshops about assessment, and resource kits prepared by practitioners themselves, or consultants provided with government funding to develop resource materials.
  - Across the different states and territories there are also vocational preparation courses (called by different names) that have been specifically designed to provide training in English language proficiency and basic skills for older workers, sole supporting mothers, long-term unemployed, women, prisoners, people with a disability and indigenous Australians.
- Courses which are funded under specific government language, literacy and numeracy programmes aim to prepare students to meet the standards of the National Reporting System.

Adult and Community Education (ACE)

Adult and community education (ACE) sectors exist in each State and Territory. Although different in terms of organisational structure. they are community-based and all provide similar services and are concerned in various ways with the provision of adult basic skills education courses. Increasingly, there is an overlap between ACE and VET provision as ACE providers become registered to deliver VET qualifications. In addition, it is not unusual for individuals, especially those who require basic skills training to enrol in ACE courses to acquire or refresh these skills and then move on to a national or state and territory accredited VET course at a higher level.

- The mix of courses offered by ACE means that ACE caters for a broad range of participants with different needs and aspirations. Participants differ according to income

[9] The AQF organises and outlines the qualifications available in secondary, VET and higher education sectors.

[10] The AQTF outlines the standards that must be addressed by providers if they want to acquire and maintain registered training organisation status and so deliver nationally recognised courses and qualifications. AQTF standards also address access and equity issues and the provision of training and assessment services. It also comprises standards for bodies charged with registering RTOs and monitoring their performance.

levels, social, educational and cultural background. Although the majority of ACE participants are female, there are some areas (generally those dealing with mathematics and computing) that are dominated by males. ACE is heavily involved in LLN training (especially in Victoria).

- In a study of the ACE sector in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria, Saunders (2001) found that ACE students had chosen ACE as a learning sector because the learning environment was relaxed and supportive and less threatening for those whose past experience with study and learning had been poor.
- That mature unemployed adult learners (over the age of 45 years) who are disadvantaged in the labour market appreciate relaxed, and non-threatening environments provided by non-accredited ACE programmes in their initial return to training has also been supported by Catts, Gelade & Gerber (2003).

In summary, informal assessment of performance, including the provision of meaningful feedback, which can be used by learners to improve skills, and helps learners to develop skills and knowledge, occurs in ACE programmes as it does in other sectors.

The extent of LLN training provision and participation

We do not have a clear knowledge of the extent of language, literacy and numeracy training provision or participation. However there have been studies which have attempted to get a picture of participation. One such study conducted by Foley & Cavallaro (2007) has found the following.

- Between 2002 and 2004 there was an increase in student numbers, course enrolments, and annual training hours in nationally recognised courses that have a large component of LLN activity (that is, courses which are classified as general education programmes, social skills courses, employment skills courses and other 'mixed field' programmes) (Foley & Cavallaro, 2007). These programmes are provided to assist those with low levels of basic skills move into higher level courses. This is at a time when total activity in the public VET system has declined.
- Compared to their representation in the total VET population (47.7%) females accounted for 54.8% of the LLN population.
- The three groups that account for greatest increases in participation during this time were males, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, and older Australians. This increase may be associated with the recent introduction of the 'Welfare to Work' legislation which aims to ensure that long-term unemployed and others on government benefits participate in employment or training to prepare them for employment. Traditionally however women have been most predominant in LLN courses.
- Foley & Cavallaro (2007) have also highlighted the over-representation of those from indigenous, disability and non-English speaking backgrounds in courses with LLN activity (see table 4).
- Nevertheless, there continue to be segments of the population that either are not aware of or fail to take up opportunities for training.
- There are also areas in remote Australia where provision continues to be sparse and take-up low.

Table 4: Student characteristics of literacy and numeracy students and total VET students 2002-2004

	2002		2003		2004	
	LLN	Total VET	LLN	Total VET	LLN	Total VET
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Indigenous Status						
Indigenous	7.4	3.5	7.4	3.4	6.5	3.6
Non-Indigenous	73.0	76.3	72.8	77.2	73.3	77.9
Unknown	19.5	20.1	19.8	19.4	20.2	18.6
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total students	160 900	1 682 900	165 000	1 717 800	188 300	1 595 200
Disability status						
Disability	12.3	4.9	13.4	5.3	11.7	5.7
No disability	68.1	79.1	67.6	78.3	65.3	77.1
Unknown	19.6	16.0	19.0	16.4	23.1	17.2
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total students	160 900	1 682 900	165 000	1 717 800	188 300	1 595 200
Language spoken at home						
English language	62.7	70.7	60.0	71.3	58.9	69.0
Non-English languages	18.6	11.6	21.4	11.7	21.3	12.1
Not known	18.7	17.8	18.6	16.9	19.8	18.9
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total students.	160 900	1 682 900	165 000	1 717 800	188 300	1 595 200

*Source: Foley & Cavallaro (2007)

A study devised to capture training activity in literacy and numeracy courses or programmes that have been embedded into Training Package qualifications is also underway. The major limitation for capturing data on training activity is the development of a clearer definition of the scope of what would constitute such a course.

VI. Assessment policies

The need to address the special needs of all adults with low basic skills in national or state and territory accredited or non-accredited training and assessment is supported by legislation aimed at preventing discrimination in all walks of life, and providing equal access to educational and employment opportunity. In addition, the Australian Quality Training Framework establishes standards for delivering and assessing accredited VET programmes. Less-clearly defined is policy that relates to the assessment of language, literacy and numeracy in non-accredited VET programmes. However, the introduction of competency-based training and national or state and territory accredited LLN curricula, and accountability measures have altered the 'face of literacy provision and assessment practices in particular' Doherty, Mangubhai, & Shearer (1996).

- There are no formal policies governing how teachers will go about formative assessment (that is, monitoring the learning progress of adults) in formal and informal programmes. However, as already noted, there are national mechanisms for assessing and reporting on outcomes in national government-funded language and literacy programmes (the National

Reporting System [NRS] and for assuring the quality of vocational education and training (VET).

- Learning outcomes in accredited curriculum frameworks (for example, Certificate in Spoken and Written English) and competency standards in nationally recognised industry programmes (that is, Training Package qualifications) prescribe what a learner must be able to do to show achievement of a certain learning outcome or competency, and the assessment criteria and conditions that must be met. However, teachers are at liberty to use a range of training and formative assessment tasks and strategies to help students achieve to record student progress towards the achievement of competency.

VET policy and regulation

VET policy in Australia has supported the adoption of competency-based training and assessment (CBT). Under the Australian version of CBT, Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) identify the competency standards, qualifications, and guidelines for assessment for nationally recognised VET qualifications. These are then incorporated in national industry or enterprise-specific Training Packages that must be endorsed by government. There are no prescribed methodologies for helping learners achieve the competency standards. However, there are detailed prescriptions of what constitutes competent performance. Although assessment guidelines provide some broad conditions that must be present for achieving a 'reliable, valid, flexible and fair' judgement about performance, there is no prescription about the types of assessment tools or resources to be adopted.

- Training providers who want to deliver nationally accredited training and/or assessment services and qualifications, must be registered and quality assured under the standards of the Australian Quality Training Framework. These standards address the competence of staff, the nature of assessment, and the need to address issues of literacy and numeracy. For example, compliance activities which apply more directly to assessment strategies (including those for adults with low basic skills) are found in Standards 1, 6, 7, 8 and 9 (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005a).
  - Standard 1 requires RTOs to have in place 'written policies and procedures for ensuring quality training and assessment within its scope of registration and scale of operations'. Standard 6 requires RTOs to 'set out access and equity principles'.
  - Standard 7 states that the RTO must ensure that assessments must be conducted by assessors who have acquired identified competencies.[11]
  - Standard 8 states that assessments should be 'valid, reliable, fair and flexible' and 'equitable for all persons, taking account of individual needs relevant to assessment'.[12]
  - Standard 9 is concerned with both Learning and Assessment Strategies and states that 'the language, literacy and numeracy skills required are consistent with workplace demands specified in the relevant units of competency or module and that these skills are developed in learners'.

Although these standards for RTOs set out what must be achieved, they intentionally do not specify the tools or methodologies that must be used. Nevertheless, each standard provides a list of examples of evidence to be used in the preparation of applications for registration, and for responding to quality audits.[13]

[11] These are: plan and organise assessment, assess competence, and participate in assessment validation.

[12] It must also 'involve the evaluation of sufficient evidence to enable judgements to be made about whether competency has been attained'. The standard also states that the RTO must ensure that 'assessments provide for feedback to the applicant about the outcomes of the assessment process and guidance on future options in relation to these outcomes'.

[13] For example, one of the examples of evidence suggested for Standard 9 is that RTOs must prepare a plan which identifies a range of learning and assessment tools to suit a variety of needs and evidence of this implementation. It also includes a procedure for the systematic identification of individual learning needs and evidence of its implementation.) In addition, there is vast array of support

- A Training Package that provides specific training and assessment qualifications for trainers and assessors to support the implementation of the RTO standards is also available. This is the Training and Assessment (TAA) Training Package that provides qualifications at the Certificate IV and diploma level for trainers and assessors. These qualifications (or equivalent competencies) are also required for compliance with standard 7 (which refer to the competence of RTO staff).

Other LLN programmes

There are no specific policies that spell out how people will assess language, literacy and numeracy skills in non-accredited programmes delivered by the VET and ACE sectors. Although there are reporting requirements which indicate the mandatory use of the NRS for government–funded language literacy and numeracy programmes (for example, WELL, and LLNP), there are no formal policies about the use of formative assessment techniques. However, as we have already stated practitioners have access to a wide range of materials and resources to help them with these processes.

VII. Assessment processes

The competency-based training and assessment approach (CBT) adopted by the VET system in Australia drives the delivery, location and assessment of nationally recognised VET training. In a sense the move to a competency-based approach has blurred the distinction between formative, ongoing and final assessment processes. This is because the results of all assessments can identify strengths and weaknesses of learners to be used for further skill development. Boud (2000) also notes that assessments have a 'double duty' (that is, formative assessment for learning and summative assessment for certification).

Although the NRS is a mandatory tool for reporting on outcomes in the federal government-funded LLNP and WELL programmes there is no compulsion for it to be used outside these programmes. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for LLN practitioners to refer to this for their own practices. From July 1 2006 clients in federal government-funded programmes will be assessed against learning outcomes which are mapped to the NRS.

Competency-based training and assessment

In the VET system learners are able to:

- move through training requirements at their own pace,
- enter and exit programmes according to their own timelines,
- determine when, where and how they will undertake the training, and
- decide when they are ready to take assessments and re-assessments.

This means that they are able to complete components of qualifications and full qualifications as soon as they are able to demonstrate ability to perform the competencies identified in the industry standards. (Should they be unable to demonstrate competent performance in the first instance, there are opportunities for them to be re-assessed. However, many institutions have applied rules specifying the number of times that learners can re-sit assessments before they are expected to re-enrol in the module.) They are also able to exit programmes having completed a small number of competencies and acquire a 'statement of attainment'.

materials and resources to help RTOs and their trainers and assessors plan and conduct assessments, including formative assessments (to be discussed later on in the paper.

- This approach enables students to come in and out of the training system and to build up the units of competencies towards recognised qualifications as they have the time and the resources to do so.

Recognition of already acquired knowledge and skill

To ensure that learners do not have to repeat already acquired skills and knowledge, and to provide a mechanism for recognising and certifying the workplace competencies of workers, the Australian VET system allows learners (including workers) to negotiate exemptions, undertake challenge tests, and apply for formal recognition of prior learning and current competencies. In addition to recognising already acquired competencies, these assessment processes are used also to identify gaps in training to inform subsequent training activities. However, the preparation and gathering of materials to support claims for assessment is a difficult task for adults with low basic language, literacy and numeracy skills.

Ensuring quality of assessments

The assessment of skills in CBT programmes (as they are in non-CBT programmes) must involve processes that are able to deliver judgements that are reliable and valid. However, the Australian standard for RTO assessments has added 'flexible and fair' to the list.

- This enables the customisation of assessment tasks to the needs of learners, and makes it possible to use a variety of different methodologies.
- Being flexible in the assessment of the performance of adults with low basic skills is essential for meeting their needs.
- Underpinning these requirements are requirements for assessment tasks to include practical workplace practices and processes, and/or simulated situations which mirror these practical environments.

Embedding LLN skills into all vocational training

As already noted, the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) includes standards especially concerned with ensuring flexibility and fairness and quality training for all clients. As a result LLN skills have been integrated into Training Package qualifications and other national or state and territory accredited courses.

- In 2002, the Queensland Government funded a resource developed by Helen Foley to help practitioners understand the reason for this integration, and to provide guidelines for implementation (Queensland Department of Training and Employment 2002). The resource was called *Understanding and applying vocational language, literacy and numeracy within the AQTF*. The first of the guidelines relates to the importance of practitioners understanding the LLN requirements of the courses they are delivering. This will mean analysing LLN needs by types of tasks, context of tasks and level of tasks.[14]
- The AQTF requires RTOs to inform students that a LLN assessment is available to them prior to enrolment. This also means that RTOs have in place procedures for assessing the LLN skills of those students who either request these initial assessments or those who are

[14] Two methods are given for conducting this analysis. One is to take each unit of competency and to identify the LLN macro skills (reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy skills) that are required in each competency. Another method is to scan the LLN competencies by occupation and by job tasks and to develop a detailed list of LLN requirements for the qualification. Once this is done it is important to give the different LLN macro skills a level based on the complexity of the task. This can be done by using approximate levels (ranging from basic, simple, unfamiliar, challenging, complex).

identified as needing extra assistance and support during the course. Foley advises RTOs to evaluate training and assessment materials and methods to determine the extent to which the LLN demands of the assessment tasks match the demands of the workplace competency. Where there is a mismatch practitioners are urged to modify materials and assessment items.

Assessment in other language, literacy and numeracy programmes

Assessments in stand-alone language, literacy and numeracy programmes delivered by VET or ACE providers, and in the government-funded LLNP and WELL programmes are aimed also at providing accurate judgements. Assessments in LLNP and WELL programmes occur at the initial placement stage, throughout the programme, and at the end of the programme.

There are also requirements for organisations accessing government LLNP and WELL funding to report achievements against the standards of the NRS (comprising practical every day tasks that require reading, speaking, listening, writing and basic arithmetical calculations). In this sense there is a combination of formative and summative assessments that enable providers to monitor and record progress and report on student achievement.

Multiple sources of information

A major principle adhered to by LLN trainers in stand-alone courses or LLN embedded into Training Package qualifications is the use of a wide range of assessment tasks and contexts (Marr, Helme & Tout 2003). These can include open-ended questions where it is up to the student to develop and present information (in oral or written formats) in response to questions, and closed-questions where the student has less flexibility.

- Cumming and Kraayenoord (1996) note that there are some adult LLN students from English-speaking backgrounds (including indigenous Australians) who find it easier to express their responses verbally rather than to write them. In contrast, students from a non-English speaking background (presumably international students who have undertaken formal English language programmes) may prefer written to oral presentations. LLN students may be also be given more time to complete an assessment task.
- Marr, Helme & Tout (2003) attempted to provide a snapshot of current assessment practices being used nationally by adult numeracy practitioners based on their interviews and focus group discussions with practitioners. They found that practitioners tended to believe in a 'holistic notion of competence', comprising cognitive and affective attributes, and that assessing this holistic competence required the use of multiple sources of information.[15] The researchers found that practitioners used informal and formal assessment and that they were 'continually compiling a picture of the students' numeracy competence' (p15) and using this information to make judgements, and to plan the next stage of teaching.

Moderation processes

The trialling of assessment tasks and moderation of assessments are essential if there is to be consistency among assessors and assessments are to provide a valid judgment. However, these activities take time and effort.

[15] At the 'core' of this competence was the individual's 'shift towards an identity as a more numerate individual' (p3). On the journey to competence the individual would be able to demonstrate the required skills and knowledge through repeated demonstration and understanding of the concepts involved. The individual would also be able to integrate their new understanding with other areas of learning. In addition, the individual would be able to apply numeracy skills to practical situations outside the learning environment. The affective components of confidence included the confidence with which students approached a task, their reason for wanting to develop the skill, and awareness of themselves as learners. A growing responsibility for their own learning also indicated increasing levels of competence.

- A Queensland survey of six LLN regional networks in Queensland, found that 56% of respondents (including 55 practitioners across the networks) participated in moderation activities with other teachers (Doherty, Mangubhai, & Shearer 1996).
- The use of moderation activities (within training organisations, and at state and national levels) in which trainers and or assessors (from a specific field of study) get together to discuss assessments to ensure a consistency approach to arriving at judgements, is also another quality assurance mechanism currently being used in LLN and other vocational programmes.
- The moderation of assessment items at national level and state level has enabled the AMEP Research Centre to develop banks of assessment items that may be down-loaded from the internet by AMEP teachers across Australia. However, the extent to which lack of time and resources may affect the willingness and ability of many teachers to take part in these needs to be investigated.
- National quality assurance and moderation activities to maintain the quality of training and assessment in LLNP also exist. National Independent Verifiers audit the training and assessment records and processes of all LLNP providers. Moderation workshops are conducted to ensure the consistency of assessments. However, attendance at these workshops comes at a cost for practitioners and this will affect the ability of practitioners (especially those from regional areas) to attend workshops that are often held in the state capital cities.

VIII. Formative assessment

Formative assessment comprises 'strategies used by teachers to provide opportunities for feedback or information on progress towards achievement of competence or learning outcome' (Hyde, Clayton and Booth (2004) p33). Formative assessment is mainly used to inform subsequent training, with results being used to make modifications to both teaching and learning practice.

Strategies and processes

- These strategies can include assessment activities where students are required to complete a task, or feedback sessions (verbal or written) about observed performance on a task. They may include portfolios developed conjointly by teachers and students, portfolios prepared independently by students, teacher observations, self-assessments, peer assessments, projects, tests, presentations and, and short answer tests (usually called quizzes).
- Hyde, Clayton and Booth (2004) found that the most frequent form of formative assessment used by VET trainers and assessors is feedback provided to students by teachers and assessors via phone calls, faxes, emails, chat-room, discussion boards and, face-to-face contact. This is followed by self-assessment and reflective activities, on-the-job feedback by assessors or supervisors, and completion of activities or draft assignments (say workplace learning project) submitted for comment, advice, marking or contribution to the final assessment. There was substantially lower use of learner-tracking management systems, or log-books or work diaries. According to these researchers good practice in assessment is one that plans and designs the learning experience to 'seamlessly incorporate the formative model of assessment in such a way that it becomes a part of learning and not just an assessment event' (ibid, p33).
- The Doherty, Mangubhai, & Shearer study found that 67% of LLN practitioners formally administered assessment tasks that reflected the programme objectives as 'checkpoints' through the course.

Applying formal and informal numeracy assessment strategies

- Marr, Helme & Tout (2003) also found that practitioners involved in numeracy training applied both informal and formal formative assessment strategies to make judgements about

numeracy competence, and to plan further training and assessment activities. Teachers also applied the concept of 'negotiated' learning and assessment with students.

- ✧ Informal assessment included observations, listening to students' oral responses and explanations, involving students in assessments, and portfolios of student work. Formal assessment included written tasks such as problem-solving tasks, revision tasks, and tasks requiring the completion of forms. Some practitioners also asked students to write their own tests. Non-written tasks included practical demonstrations, oral presentations to the teacher or to small or large groups, and one-to-one interviews.
- ✧ Teachers were found to be frustrated with their feelings of inadequacy, and insufficient time to develop good assessment tasks, and manage the diverse needs of students with a varying range literacy and English language competence in their classes.

Using real-life tasks

The notion of 'bringing reality' to assessment tasks pervades the Australian approach (evident in classrooms and curriculum documents) to the assessment of LLN skills. In their discussions with adult numeracy practitioners Marr, Helme & Tout (2003) found that using 'real-life objects' in numeracy tasks helped to link a learner's everyday knowledge to formal knowledge.

- ✧ Real-life materials were also found by these researcher to help learners and their teachers share experiences about common events undertaken by adults outside the classroom situation (for example, shopping, paying bills, driving cars, and catching public transport).
- ✧ Sharing of common experience can also help teachers and students create the social bonds 'which makes students more willing to listen to each other's subject-related ideas' through the sharing of these experiences.
- ✧ Using tasks where students work together to make an object (say a tool box of specific dimensions or a cake of a certain type) also helps teachers to understand strengths and weaknesses of particular students as they work together to complete the task.

Assessing for initial placement

Formative assessments for LLN programmes may also include initial placement activities conducted under formal test conditions, or non-formal observations and discussions. Australian practitioners in VET and in LLN programmes must engage in these processes if they are to provide training customised to the needs and skill levels of the learner. Almost 90% of LLN respondents to the Doherty, Mangubhai, & Shearer study noted that they used initial placement or diagnostic tests in their practice.

- ✧ Initial placement assessment used to assign the level of competency of learners in the government-funded LLNP, comprises an extensive test where participants work through items (mapped against the National Reporting System) independently or with the assistance of the assessor. Where participants work independently through items their independence is recorded on the assessment form and is used to help determine a meaningful NRS level for the participant. The government has also funded the development sample activities and assessment tasks for use in initial assessments in the LLNP (Fitzpatrick, Wignall & McKenna 2006).
- ✧ In contrast, the initial placement assessment in the WELL programme is far less structured and formal. Here practitioners use the results from interviews with learners to assign learners to appropriate training levels. In addition, the collaboration of literacy and numeracy professionals and VET workplace practitioners also helps to contextualise and modify learning materials, assessment tools and training delivery to suit the needs of individual workers throughout the course of the programme.

Recognition of informal learning

The Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) is currently developing better methods for the formal recognition of informal learning (RIL). This means working out ways to determine the extent to which learning gained in informal situations can contribute to achievement of formal qualifications.

- The VQA defines informal learning as learning that is developed as a result of participating in paid or un-paid work which results in meaningful community outcomes. It includes learning from engagement in community activities, discussion groups, meetings and workshops, and taking part in non-recognised but planned and structured programmes such as short courses. The VQA and the Adult Community and Further Education Board of Victoria have also undertaken joint projects to investigate the feasibility of such an approach, develop new units of competency and a suggested assessment process, and pilot the approach for a range of different learners and different contexts.
- The feasibility study found that effective recognition arrangements could be used to assist groups of adult learners including women, culturally and linguistically diverse learners, indigenous Victorians [that is, Koories], learners with disabilities, young people and older learners. It could also help those who were unemployed, living in socially and disadvantaged areas, early school leavers, existing workers and volunteers.
- The next stage developed four units of competency and an associated discussion-based assessment process. The last stage of the project trialled a new accredited unit of competency ('Enhance personal and or employment capabilities through informal learning') and used a discussion-based assessment process to gauge a candidate's level of informal learning. A statement of attainment describing performance at one of four levels was given to successful candidates on completion of the assessment process.
- An evaluation of the trial programme has indicated that the RIL process (with some adjustment) may be used to help individuals understand more about their own learning capacities and their confidence for further learning.

Assessing non-curriculum outcomes

In helping adults to develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills there is a general tendency among Australian adult literacy and numeracy professionals to focus also on non-curriculum outcomes like increased self-esteem, motivation and attendance. These attributes are considered to be central to the development of skills in other areas.

- When the New South Wales study (NSW TAFE Access Division, 2001) asked teachers whether they also assessed non-curriculum outcomes like increased self-esteem, motivation and attendance over three-quarters of the respondents replied in the affirmative.
- Marr, Helme & Tout (ibid) also highlight the importance of assessing what they called the 'affective' attributes of competence (including confidence, and self-awareness).

Providing effective feedback

Feedback is central to the process of formative assessment. However, Boud (2000) supports the view held by Sadler (1989) that feedback can only be associated with formative assessment if suggestions provided in the feedback are used by the student, that is, if the student 'completes the feedback loop'. He believes that 'unless students are able to use feedback to produce improved work, through for example redoing the same assignment, neither they nor those giving feedback will know that it has been effective' (ibid. p158).

- Extensive use of teacher feedback is observed in English language classes for international students hoping to improve their English language skills to enter further study at an Australian

university. Although these adults would not be considered to have low basic skills in their own languages (and are therefore not really within the scope of this paper) the practices used to develop their English language skills are based on the use of formal feedback to improve subsequent work.

- An Adelaide-based programme (for international students from non-English speaking countries) demonstrates how feedback is used to produce improved work. After the teacher has explained and modelled the components of a critical essay the students are given a formal task that requires them to summarise main points and to provide a critique of a single text. Students must prepare a first, second and final draft with the teacher giving general feedback of what has gone wrong and to what areas the student needs to pay attention in the first draft and second drafts. The student will amend the draft taking into account the teacher feedback. The final draft will be assigned a formal mark. These practical tasks will provide the student with the skills and knowledge that they will require to prepare a response to a written examination that requires them to read a text they have not seen before and then prepare a critical essay under test conditions. Once students have had considerable practice in writing about a single text, they will be required to write a critical essay based on information from three texts. The same process of preparing first, second and final drafts, and undertaking an assessment under test conditions will apply.

Using student observation sheets

The use of student observation sheets to assist teachers to record observations of students completing assessment or learning tasks is a common technique in assessment and especially formative assessment. These can include check-lists of common behaviours students use in problem-solving, or formal notes of how students go about solving a particular problem. Marr, Helme & Tout (2003) have used their 'task process cycle' approach to numeracy assessment to draw up a sample observation and recording sheet. The main elements of this sheet is to record how students go about selecting relevant information, choosing a strategy, applying the strategy, reflecting on outcomes.

Some practical examples of how to record day-to-day informal observations of how students are progressing are described by Brown (1999). Brown is of the opinion that teachers should document some of their informal observations so that information about student achievement or need for improvement is not lost. This can be used to inform the development of subsequent tasks. Practitioners are advised to develop 'simple, time-effective and achievable systems for recording informal impressions' (ibid. p 7)'.[16]

- Brown suggests that teachers use the 'student observation sheet' which comprises columns for recording the week of the observation, details of the various skills that are being observed (for example oracy, literacy, interpersonal and other skills), and a column for teacher comments. In using this tool, teachers are told to divide the class into groups and to observe one group of students every few days. There are also suggestions for establishing a common format for recording across teachers.
- The effectiveness of these monitoring activities will also depend on the consistency of attendance among students. Regular attendance is not always demonstrated by LLN students.
- Brown also suggests that teachers be systematic about how they go about determining the assessment criteria for use in observations. She advises teachers to use observations of small chunks of learning so that small achievement gains may be measured. The monitoring of non-language outcomes (for example, confidence, motivation, cultural understanding, learning

[16] Although Brown is writing about monitoring learner progress in ESL (English as a Second Language) programmes, her suggestions can also be used in other literacy and numeracy programmes.

about learning, clarification of goals, access and entry into further training and employment) is also recommended.

- ✧ Doherty, Mangubhai, & Shearer (1996) found that although 94% of respondents to their study undertook ongoing informal observation and consideration of student progress and strengths and weaknesses, just 56% systematically recorded their observations of student progress on an ongoing basis.

Maintaining portfolios of student work

Another popular tool used for formative assessment purposes is the portfolio. The Doherty, Mangubhai, & Shearer study noted that 75% of respondents maintained a portfolio of student work samples as a record of student progress. Portfolios may include samples of work (selected by the teacher and or learner), teacher observational notes, learner self-assessments, and progress notes that have been developed by teacher and student.

- ✧ Portfolios are also especially useful for external trainers providing LLN training in workplaces. The learning outcomes or the competency standards associated with particular programmes may be used to organise in a single folder the work samples produced by students. Having these samples organised in this way will help teachers track the progress of students, develop appropriate subsequent training, and provide evidence of achievement for reporting purposes. A portfolio of selected tasks completed during the course of a programme may also be used as objective reference materials to instil confidence in learners who may perceive that they are not making any progress and may be becoming increasingly frustrated.
- ✧ A Neighbourhood Learning Centre in Victoria (Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre) has been running a professional development project titled 'Assessment Models for Low Level Literacy Learners in ACE'. One aspect of the project is the use of student portfolios. Teachers have taken some of the principles espoused by Brown (op. cit), as well as using their own action research, to improve their on-going assessment practices. An initial in-house professional development programme was used to give teachers opportunities to better understand how portfolios, observation sheets, and other forms of recording student performance during courses, can be used to monitor learner progress and to increase student ownership of the assessment process. The intention is to develop some web pages which can be used by teachers and students to access information on assessment processes.[17]
- ✧ Other LLN providers (including Adelaide-based LM Specialists, English Learning Services of TAFESA, and Pathways Training) also make frequent use of portfolios of student work samples to track the progress of learners and to provide a record of student learning.

Arranging for self, peer and collaborative assessments

It is relatively common for students to be asked to evaluate or assess themselves or their peers as a way to identify their major strengths and weaknesses. Self-assessments can be used to help students take responsibility for their own learning. The Doherty, Mangubhai, & Shearer study noted that 83% of respondents encouraged students to evaluate their own progress throughout the course. However, 61% facilitated this process at the completion of the course.

- ✧ The most useful self-assessments [according to Brown (op.cit.)] involve learners indicating the difficulties they have encountered in undertaking specific tasks or events. One way for learners to reflect on their own performance in a systematic way is to use a 'learning diary'

[17] Neighbourhood learning centres are community based and aim to provide community members with specific skills and opportunities for learning and for recreation. In addition to providing personal development classes, they also provide classes in English, language and literacy and computer skills.

which details what they have done each day, found to be difficult, and want to know about. The diary concludes with an action plan for the next day. Other techniques include skills audits where students talk their skills, talents and deficiencies. This information may help to allocate students to tasks where they can use their particular strengths, or give assistance to overcome any weaknesses. Another technique is to use videos of student performance for self-reflection or for peer discussion. (McNickle 1994).

- ✧ Peer assessments are also tools for providing students with constructive feedback on areas of strength and weakness. Such peer assessments may be conducted in small groups, the whole class, or pairs. Peers can also act as 'friendly spies' (McNickle 1994) by providing just positive feedback on the performance they have observed. However, to be useful such an approach needs to break down the assessment task into specific components. Detailed responses about how a group 'feels' about the way the student has demonstrated a skill without providing suggestions about how this can be improved can help the student to self-correct behaviours. McNickle believes this is especially useful for formative assessment.
- ✧ Collaborative assessments between students and their teachers are useful because students can participate in their own assessment, develop ownership for the task, responsibility for the outcomes, and additional motivation for learning. These assessments can also be used to increase student motivation for learning. However, they may not suit those students who lack confidence or are threatened by this responsibility, and require additional teacher time and attention (McNickle 1994).

Commonly used formative assessment practices

The NSW TAFE Access Division study also found that teacher observations, portfolio and self assessments were most commonly used by LLN teachers (see table 5)

Table 5: Commonly used formative assessment practices

Practices	No. of responses	% of respondents
Teacher observation	167	94.9
Portfolio	132	75.0
Self-assessment	108	61.4
Project	82	46.6
Tests	81	46.0
Presentations	75	42.6
Quizzes	64	36.4
Other	32	18.2

Source: New South Wales TAFE Access Division, 2001 'Adult literacy and numeracy practices 2001: a national snapshot ', NSW Department of Education and Training, Sydney

Note: Respondents provided multiple responses

IX. Assessment materials and resources

Although there are no overarching policies governing the exact details of the tools and items practitioners will use in assessments, there is a vast array of assessment materials and resources to help practitioners in all programmes to implement effective assessment practices (see Appendix C). These comprise:

- ✧ resources available in a variety of formats (for example, on-line, in print, audio and video tapes, and CD-ROMS),
- ✧ national websites (for example, training.com.au) which provide links to commonwealth and state-based information on policy, practice, programmemes and resources,
- ✧ links to current, useful language, literacy and numeracy information is also available on the national LiteracyNet website also funded by the national government, and
- ✧ a national newsletter providing practitioners with information about the implementation of Training Packages.

Guidance for assessors

A major resource which provides practitioners with specific advice on how to go about undertaking assessments in a variety of formats, is a set of 10 guides developed in the Training Package Assessment Materials Project funded by the Commonwealth Government (former Department of Education, Training and Youth affairs [now DEST] 2001). The first of these guides (called the Training Package Materials Kit) covers the key aspects of the assessment process (that is, visualising competence, collaboration, targeting evidence, gathering evidence and records and feedback. It helps assessors to understand the rules of evidence (that it must be valid, sufficient, current, and authentic).

- ✧ Assessors dealing with language, literacy and numeracy requirements are advised not to use techniques for gathering evidence that require LLN skills beyond those specified in the unit of competency. That is, assessors should not use written evidence gathering techniques when planning an assessment when it not required as part of the unit of competency. In this way there is a safeguard for recognising the occupational skills and knowledge of those who may be competent in what they do but not able to express this adequately in written forms.
- ✧ Assessors undertaking formative assessment are advised to consider assessment to be an ongoing process which occurs throughout a programme, and which involves the collection of evidence of on and off-the job performance. The guide also provides advice on how to go about receiving and recording in feedback sessions involving the assessor and the candidate coming together to discuss and complete an assessment record (a sample is also provided in the guide). This assessment record also provides a space for the workplace supervisor to add comments about observed performance. At this feedback session the assessor and the candidate discuss the strengths and weakness of the learning and identify strategies for further training and assessment. The guide confirms that 'feedback contributes to the whole assessment process and the materials that are developed to support it'.
- ✧ The remainder of the guides provide assistance and support materials for assessment of competencies in higher qualifications, recognition of prior learning and current competency, and conducting assessments for small workplace. There are support materials for assessor training, and for candidates in new apprenticeship and trainee programmes. In addition, there are guides to assist training providers to establishing partnership arrangements for the assessments, establish formal and informal assessor networks, and to develop strategies for ensuring consistency in assessment. There is also a guide to assist RTOs on meeting the standards of the AQTF.

The process of 'reasonable adjustment'

The Training Package Assessment Materials Kit also includes a guide to support the training of assessors. This guide advises assessors to adopt a process of 'reasonable adjustment' if they are to 'treat all people equally in the assessment process' (Guide no. 4, p147). This applies to candidates with physical and intellectual disabilities as much as it does to those with low levels of education, and low language, literacy and numeracy skills.

- Assessors are advised to focus on what is required for the candidate to demonstrate competence in a task while keeping in mind how certain disabilities may impact on the ability of the candidate to demonstrate this competence. They are also advised to build a rapport with the learner to identify needs, and to make the necessary physical adjustments to facilities to provide appropriate physical access. This may mean adjusting physical facilities for those with physical disabilities (for example, providing ramps for wheelchair access, installing adjustable desks, and providing enlarged print materials, braille translations, audio tapes, speech synthesisers, AUSLAN interpreters or scribes). Assessors must also create a 'climate of tolerance, acceptance and support' to ensure that the candidate is not unduly stressed by the assessment process.
- The main principle that must be respected in adjusting the assessment process to meet the needs of individuals from such special groups is to alter the structure of the assessment without altering the outcomes of the assessment. In doing so assessors may need to:
  - allow additional time to complete work tasks,
  - extend timelines for the completion of assignments,
  - change the venue and the dates for assessments, and
  - use more appropriate forms of evidence (for example, assignments rather than examinations, oral rather than written questions, short answer questions rather than multiple choice items, using audio or videotape answers instead of written answers).

Screening students for LLN assistance

The AQTF requires RTOs to inform students that an LLN assessment is available to them prior to enrolment. This means that RTOs will also have in place procedures for assessing the LLN skills of students who ask for assessments or may need extra assistance and support during the course. The guidelines in *Understanding and applying vocational language, literacy and numeracy within the AQTF* advise RTOs to evaluate training and assessment materials and methods to determine the extent to which LLN demands of the assessment match the demands of the task, and to modify materials and assessment items where this is required.

- In screening students for LLN support Foley urges trainers to:
  - be clear about the aim of the screening and explain these to students,
  - make the assessment as informal and as friendly as possible by making sure that the student is not threatened and by helping them to understand that this is not a 'test' in the real sense of the word,
  - let students discuss any LLN issues they may have as soon as possible to identify whether or not they need to 'brush up on reading, writing or numeracy', so that support can be provided should they require it,
  - inform the student that no one else will see the results and that if the student is worried about reading the questions the trainer will do this for them, and
  - give learners extra time to complete the task and if they require assistance to complete the task note down that this has been provided.
- Once the student is identified as requiring extra support then the normal processes for modifying the training and the resources should be followed.

Supported self-paced training and assessment (SSTA)

The CD-ROM resource for trainers in WELL programmes (WELL-Trained) already described, has been developed for aged care, cleaning, food processing, and manufacturing industries. These industries typically comprise substantial groups of workers with LLN training needs. It includes a variety of suggestions and sample activities for use in training and formative assessment.

- It also includes a training and evaluation programme developed for the cleaning industry by Sue Maloney from The Hunter Valley Institute of Technical and Further Education (TAFE)

in New South Wales. It provides an example of how LLN needs can be addressed using self-paced training and assessment processes. Such an approach is especially useful for those enterprises that cannot afford for their workers to spend large amounts of time in off-job training and assessment activities.

- The supported self-paced approach to training (SSTA) relies on the identification of the LLN competencies required by the units of competency and specific workplace resources, development of specific written training resources and support materials, and an assessment process which combines interviews, with portfolio of evidence, and observations by workplace assessors. LLN practitioners conduct interviews with students, accredited workplace assessors conduct observations of workplace performance.
- This approach may be applied to learners working individually or in groups and for formative as well as final assessments. It can be used in the recognition of current competencies (RCC) and for the identification of learning gaps. It may also be used with learners from a wide range of literacy levels and in a variety of workplaces.[18]

X. Innovative teaching practices

Innovative teaching practices include those that diverge from traditional classroom methods of delivery, although there is scope for innovation also within these traditional methods. It is difficult to provide even a snapshot of the multitude of innovative teaching practices used in Australia. Firstly, teachers are at liberty to adapt and modify practices to suit particular circumstances and learner needs. Secondly, what is perceived to be innovative for some teachers may prove to be commonplace for others. Nevertheless, there are a number of common themes about general principles that have emerged.

Commitment to a student –centred approach

A major theme observed in teachers of adult language, literacy and numeracy in Australia is a commitment to the student-centred approach where the needs, goals and welfare of students are paramount.

- Learners are encouraged to participate in the planning of their own programmes through discussions with teachers.
- There is a focus on making use of multiple strategies to maintain interest and achieve effective outcomes.
- Students may work independently at their own pace or work in pairs or small groups to develop required competencies or assignments.
- Although they generally learn in face-to-face class-rooms there are also opportunities for them to access on-line learning programmes.
- Teachers are focussed on using examples related to the immediate life or work expectations of learners.
- Understanding the culture of the workplace is essential for LLN practitioners working with enterprises; understanding the particular sensitivities of particular groups is essential in for LLN trainers in both workplace and institutional settings.

[18] The first task for the LLN trainer is to gather current workplace documents and materials and information of work processes, and to map the LLN needs to the competencies required for the particular unit of competency. This will help the LLN practitioner to create the SSTA booklet around a particular unit of competency. An industry expert will be consulted to check and confirm that the competencies reflect the actual competencies required in the workplace. A booklet of support materials (including cleaning procedures, standard operating procedures, materials safety data sheets, photocopies of emergency procedures and sample forms and badges) is also developed. The answer booklet, which provides answers to questions in the SSTA booklet, comprises answers (written in plain English) that have been provided by the industry expert.

Developing relevant and culturally appropriate learning programmes

LLN trainers are especially committed to ensuring that they design training programmes based on the needs of learners, whether they be learners in LLN programmes delivered in institutional settings or those in workplaces, or in VET programmes leading to nationally recognised qualifications. LLN trainers providing institutional-based programmes will require an understanding of the educational, occupational and cultural background of learners, as well their immediate needs and aspirations.

- Trainers who deliver LLN training in the workplace and vocational programmes will need to understand the needs employers have for LLN training, the tasks that must be performed, the level of LLN skills possessed by learners, and the requirements of the particular vocational programme being delivered.
- Trainers in both environments will also have to understand the particular problems associated with people from different cultural groups and those that have experienced recent and particular hardships (for example, refugee groups).
- Adapting training methodologies that are sensitive to the particular needs and cultures of these groups is essential.

Meeting employer needs

Employers may enlist the help of LLN trainers for a number of reasons. These include wanting to provide opportunities for workers and those in leadership or supervisory positions.

- Employers may want to ensure that training opportunities are made available to production workers and those in leadership or supervisory positions to acquire LLN skills to understand better workplace documentation, legislative requirements and new ways of working. They may also want to ensure that all workers (including those with LLN deficiencies) have the opportunity to acquire extra certificates, licences, and nationally recognised VET qualification or units of competency for personal and career development. There are also those who want to ensure that workers who are required to have completed certain licences and qualifications for compliance with legislation or insurance requirements are able to undertake the training for these.
- Whatever the employer reason for wanting their workers to engage in training, the role of the LLN trainer is to make sure that an analysis of needs is conducted prior to developing the tasks and activities that will be required. This primarily means ensuring that LLN learning tasks are based on examples of real workplace tasks and responsibilities. This will require the LLN trainer to understand the culture of the workplace, collect workplace documents and forms, and improve his or her understanding of work and decision-making processes.
- For example, trainers going into the workplace to provide LLN training for the nationally recognised Training Package qualifications in Aged Care (DEST 2006) are advised to begin by analysing the needs of the workplace. This includes checking tasks and roles undertaken by staff and especially by learners to be involved in the programme. Job descriptions and current industry documents (including, manufacturer's instructions, documents and forms, posters and graphics, equipment instructions, work instructions, and induction manuals) are collected to provide examples of the LLN skills that are required in the workplace. Shadowing workers during a work shift is also a technique suggested to help trainers understand the culture and processes used in the workplace. In addition, digital photographs of procedures, signs, machinery, products and personal protective equipment will also help trainers to identify the most appropriate competency to use and to design innovative learning materials.
- Such activities will enable trainers to understand workplace expectations, gather workplace materials, select appropriate competencies from the Training Package and map tasks to the competencies. The LLN trainer will also have to understand the LLN skills required by the

competency in terms of what people will have to listen to and understand, say, read and write. They will also have to identify what numeracy skills are required.

Applying multiple training techniques

A snapshot of the multiple types of LLN learning strategies being used across Australia is provided by the following findings of the already discussed New South Wales TAFE Access Division study.

- Teachers preferred student or learner-centred activities and believed that learner self-confidence and self-esteem were essential to the effective acquisition of LLN skills and continued engagement with training. Teachers were also dedicated to 'building an atmosphere of excitement and continuous improvement' (ibid. p 74). Preferred ways to develop student confidence and self esteem included small group work, whole group discussions, pair work and brain-storming. Having students work in small or large groups was perceived to help students to talk through their ideas with others and to learn from the experience of others. Brainstorming gave all students an opportunity to contribute to discussion and to build the foundations of activities that were to follow.
- Reading activities were also preferred by teachers because they were perceived as providing assistance in understanding the level of student understanding of the language. They were also felt to be helpful in introducing students to reference tools which would be very useful to students outside the classroom (for example, dictionaries, or computer spell checks).
- Creative writing activities enabled students to recount their experiences in written form, and to develop their vocabulary and use of appropriate sentence structures. Genre writing activities gave them experience in writing with a specific purpose in mind.
- Strategies for students to improve their spelling were also favoured because it was acknowledge that in the main students who came for LLN help had problems with spelling.
- Other favoured teaching practices were critical thinking activities that required students to be critical in literacy and numeracy activities, and demonstration (by the teacher) of how to apply a particular skill. For example, the demonstration of the correct way to read or write sentences, especially for those for whom English was a second language, was preferred because it was felt that students would not be daunted by a task if they saw how it was to done before they started the task.
- Preferred numeracy teaching strategies were student-focussed and involved students in practical activities which had relevance to daily life, and were focussed on process rather than content of learning. The most popular strategy was to use everyday materials to contextualise the skills being taught, followed by individual and group problem-solving activities, and activities using worksheets, estimating tasks, calculators, computer packages, demonstrations and critical numeracy activities.

Themes and topics

The theme or topic technique is also widely used in LLN training and particularly with new migrants learning English. Using this technique the trainer will develop a learning programme made up of tasks and activities related to a particular theme. Themes and topics may also be negotiated between trainers and learners.

- For example, a theme about 'safety' may comprise learning about safety in the home, safety at the beach, safety on the roads and safety in the bush. It may incorporate learning emergency numbers for police, and the addresses and phone numbers of hospitals and medical clinics. It may include a visit to the beach to learn about the role of lifesavers, and the safety rules that must be obeyed. It may include learning about the principles of first aid. As well as providing learners with experiential learning activities trainers will also invite guest speakers from police, hospitals and fire brigades to discuss issues about safety.

- ✧ As far as possible the LLN trainer working with new migrants will incorporate tasks and activities which are relevant to immediate survival in a new country.

Embedding LLN skills into all vocational training

As already noted The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) comprises standards especially concerned with ensuring fairness and quality training for all clients. As a result LLN skills have been integrated into Training Package qualifications and other national or state and territory accredited courses.

- ✧ The teaching and learning cycle suggested in the 'WELL-Trained Resource' (DEST 2006) is based on teacher modelling of a skill, student observing the modelling of the skill, and student practising the skill. For example, the trainer might show students a video of good and poor examples of a tour guide providing information to visitors to the zoo. The class can then be divided into small groups to discuss what it is that makes each type of behaviour good or poor. Trainers and students can then work together to come up with an example of an effective way for providing information to visitors. Opportunities for role-play and provision of feedback on individual performance can also be used to develop appropriate skills.
- ✧ Trainers may choose to work closely with LLN specialists to resolve specific learning issues for one or more students in a particular class. They may also choose to engage in team teaching with the LLN specialist and the vocational trainer working together in the same classroom. Both these approaches are expensive but provide professional development for the vocational trainer and the LLN specialist and extra assistance for students. Alternatively LLN specialists may withdraw students with intensive LLN needs and work with them separately from the rest of the class group. This approach may also be expensive. Students may feel embarrassed by being singled out and it may be difficult to arrange suitable times for students to attend both vocational and LLN training sessions.

Applying industry-specific resources

The DEST (2006) 'WELL-Trained' CD-ROM resource (developed by Crina Virgona from Workplace Learning Initiatives) includes guidance for WELL trainers in the aged care industry. This informs trainers that the major principles for teaching LLN learners and other learners are generally the same. Nevertheless, LLN trainers will have to provide additional opportunities for learners individually and in groups to be 'exposed to the words and the language' required for a particular task, 'practise the words and language', and use the outcomes of the exercise in real work situations. It is also important for trainers not to presume that learners can go ahead with a task without prior preparation. This is about breaking down the task into its discrete elements, and questioning the learner about the exact things they will do in undertaking the task.

- ✧ For example, as part of their training workers may need to explain a project they have to complete to a meeting of their work colleagues. Such an activity will also help their colleagues understand what LLN learners are doing and provide some suggestions for the project. To prepare for this staff meeting the LLN trainer will provide opportunities for learners individually and in groups to build up the repertoire of words to be used in the explanation, practise speaking and writing the words and sentences that will be used, and present the information to the meeting.[19]
- ✧ Alternatively, the LLN trainer will use a real-life security incident at a nursing home as a trigger for learners to discuss the nature of the event, how it occurred, and the adequacy of

[19] In addition, it is important for trainers to provide as much assistance as possible for learners to develop their vocabulary. For example, an exercise book may be used for learners to record new words, how they are pronounced, their meaning, the grammatical attributes, and an example of how they can use the word in a sentence.

current security processes. They will also be asked to speculate on what may have happened if the incident had occurred at times when there were less staff members available to deal with the problem, and to suggest ways to improve processes. Once again the teaching principles require learners to be exposed to the words and the language, practice the language and apply this to a real-life situation.

- ✧ Another strategy to support learners in work situations is to use mentors. This will help to further contextualise the learning to the workplace, increase the networks available to workers, and provide support to the learner when it is required. Mentors can also provide 'an inside perspective on professional' behaviour expected of practitioners. However, before mentors commence working with learners they must also undergo some training. This is to help them understand that their task is to help the learner become independent, rather than to do too much for the learner. Staying within the 'confines of the training programme' is an essential requirement for mentors.
- ✧ Role-plays where different scenarios, preferably based on real life events, are used to give learners opportunities to apply their knowledge and skill to problem-solving is perceived to be another useful teaching strategy. As individuals are often hesitant to engage in role-plays, it is important for trainers to provide scenarios with enough information for learners to understand the context of the role play.

Using computer-based training

There is an increasing trend for LLN trainers to adopt modern technology into their training practice, and to help students to access information and resources on the internet. A computer-based LLN programme (Mortimer 1996) which led LLN students through a series of basic key word recognition tasks were found to raise student motivation, self-esteem, and amount interaction with students from other college programmes.

XI. The adult language, literacy and numeracy workforce

There is limited information about the current adult literacy and numeracy work-force. Some information is available from the New South Wales TAFE Access Division study already described and studies by Mackay, Burgoyne, Warwick and Cipollone, (forthcoming) and Berghella, Molenaar & Wyse (2004).

An ageing, feminised and casualised workforce

The LLN teacher workforce is mostly female, ageing and increasingly casualised (TAFE New South Wales Access Division, 2001, Berghella, Molenaar & Wyse 2004). In 2001 over three-quarters of LLN practitioners nationwide were over the age of 40 years (see table 6). Almost a third were over the age of 50 years, and 85% were female.

Table 6: Age groups of LLN teachers, 2001

Age groups	% of teachers
20-30	2.3
31-40	20.2
41-50	48.5
51+	29.0
Total	100.0

Source: TAFE NSW Access Division, 2001, Adult literacy and numeracy practices 2001: a national snapshot, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, Sydney.

- Berghella, Molenaar & Wyse (2004) surveyed practitioners in the government-funded WELL programme and found that 45% of the 42 respondents worked full-time, 21% were in permanent part-time positions, and the others were employed on a casual or contract basis.
- Managers in the already discussed New South Wales TAFE national study also reported that teachers worked on a casual, contract or permanent basis (50%, 20% and 30% respectively).

A mix of qualifications and experience

Practitioners continue to hold a mix of qualifications. For example, about four-fifths of the practitioners in the Berghella, Molenaar & Wyse Study (2004) also had a teaching undergraduate degree, while almost two-thirds had post-graduate Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) in Adult Literacy qualifications. This compared with 20% of the VET workforce who held a bachelor's degree and 20% who held a post-graduate degree. However, the demand for higher education courses specialising in this area has been declining in recent years.

A national snapshot of the qualifications of 642 LLN teachers provided by managers who reported on the teaching qualifications of teachers in their organisations is provided in table 7.

Table 7: Qualifications of LLN teachers, 2001

Qualifications	No. of responses	% of all responses
Post-graduate adult basic education	184	26.4
Certificate IV in Workplace Assessment and Training	181	26.0
Postgraduate TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages)	91	13.1
Primary school teaching	90	12.9
Secondary School Teaching	90	12.9
Masters degree in relevant field	53	7.6
Trade qualifications	8	1.1
	697*	100.0

Note: Some teachers were reported to have more than one qualification.

Source: TAFE NSW Access Division, 2001, Adult literacy and numeracy practices 2001: a national snapshot, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, Sydney.

Teaching and training experience of LLN workforce

In 2001 well over two-thirds of LLN teachers had teaching experience gained in primary or secondary schools (see table 8).

Table 8: Teaching and training experience of LLN teachers, 2001

Teaching Experience	No. of teachers	% of teachers
Primary School Teaching	221	37.4
Secondary School Teaching	186	31.5
Tertiary Teaching	57	9.6
Vocational (trade, labour market programmes) teaching	49	8.3
Industry (workplace) Training	43	7.3
Other	35	5.9
Total	591	100.0

Source: Table derived from figures in TAFE NSW Access Division, 2001, 'Adult literacy and numeracy practices 2001: a national snapshot', New South Wales Department of Education and Training, Sydney.

Specialists, trainers and volunteers

Mackay, Burgoyne, Warwick and Cipollone, (forthcoming) divided the LLN workforce into three groups.

- These comprise specialist LLN practitioners, vocational trainers (who will need to address language, literacy and numeracy issues in their delivery of mainstream VET training), and volunteer tutors.
- Specialist language, literacy and numeracy teachers generally came into the workforce with teaching qualifications, and postgraduate qualifications in the English language, literacy and numeracy field. Vocational trainers came to the VET field with industry qualifications and teaching qualifications. Volunteer tutors had a minimum of volunteer training.
- In addition over half of the LLN specialist teachers had been in the field for over ten years, and those in TAFE and Adult Migrant Support Services were reaching retirement age.

XII. Professional Development: frameworks and programmes

There is currently no national database recording the professional development activities of language, literacy and numeracy practitioners in Australia. However, it is clear that if we are to develop effective professional development programmes to suit the need of practitioners, it is essential to consider the special backgrounds of specialist LLN practitioners, vocational trainers and volunteer tutors. Taking note of the age demographic of practitioners will also be essential if we are to maintain the skills of the LLN workforce once current practitioners reach retirement age and leave the workforce.

Keeping current with LLN developments

The New South Wales study indicates that managers and teachers keep up with what is happening in their field is a number of activities with the most frequent being via informal networks, going to conferences and professional reading (see table 9).

Table 9: Multiple activities used by managers and teachers to keep current with LLN practices

	Teachers		Managers	
	No. of responses	% of teachers	No. of responses	% of managers
Informal networks	121	68.8	57	76.0
Professional reading	117	66.5	62	82.7
Conferences	107	60.8	50	66.7
Formal organisational networks	78	44.3	45	60.0
Adult Education Resource and Information Service (ARIS)	76	43.2	48	64.0
The Internet	72	40.9	43	57.3
Professional association	67	38.1	40	53.3
Other	25	14.2	19	25.3

Source: Table derived from figures in TAFE NSW Access Division, 2001, 'Adult literacy and numeracy practices 2001: a national snapshot', New South Wales Department of Education and Training, Sydney.

Note: Individuals reported being engaged in more than one activity.

In addition, teachers' most recent involvement in professional development activities included moderation workshops for the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA), National Reporting System training or moderation workshops and computer training sessions. These courses generally lasted one day or less and were delivered by external providers in capital cities. This often provided difficulties for teachers in remote or regional locations in terms of cost and distance. However, the Australian government has funded and continues to fund a number of national professional development initiatives to assist practitioners in the VET system to participate in professional development activities.

National frameworks

The provision of specific professional development activities for adult literacy and basic education practitioners may be traced back to the early 1990s with the implementation of the Training Reform Agenda. The principles that underpinned this provision continue to be important for the provision of professional development in the VET system.

- In 1991, the National TAFE Staff Development Committee undertook a study to explore the professional development needs of this group. The findings of the study led to the development of The *National Framework for the Professional Development of Adult Literacy and Basic Education Personnel* (TAFE Staff Development Committee 1994). The main aim of the framework was to provide a nationally consistent approach to planning, developing and evaluating professional development for this group for 1993 and 1994. The framework also aimed to ensure the development of processes for the recruitment and induction of personnel and promotion of opportunities for practitioners to develop additional competencies. Other aims were to increase the competencies of practitioners so that they could deliver training in a broad range of situations and contexts, and to ensure that relevant research and theoretical developments were used to inform current teaching practice.
- A set of 13 principles for provision of professional development for this group, underpinned the framework. They highlighted the importance of providing learning activities which mirrored the main features of the new VET training system (for example, competency-based training, recognition of prior learning, flexible delivery, technology and resource-based learning, open learning, choice of learning activities). In addition, programmes were to focus on a combination of theory and practical experience. In particular they should help practitioners develop additional knowledge on how 'people become literate and numerate ... and apply 'the most advanced knowledge of how language and mathematics should be taught' (ibid p3.).

- Although the framework does not specifically talk about the need for practitioners to develop their knowledge of assessment including formative assessment, the strategies associated with appropriate induction included the use of mentors, peer review and support groups. These strategies are often used in formative assessment.

National Programmes

There are three major national programmes which provide for the professional development of trainers and assessors in the VET system. These are Reframing the Future Program, Flexible Learning Initiatives, and the Professional development for Equity Program.

- The *Reframing the Future* programme is currently funding two small projects which are aimed improving the skills of vocational trainers to embed language, literacy and numeracy within their Training Package programmes, and to meet the needs of the AQTF. One uses an action learning methodology and the development of a 'community of practice'. This is being run by South Bank TAFE in Queensland. Another uses a work-based learning methodology and is being run by RMIT University Post-Compulsory Education and Training Research Centre. Both use coaching and mentoring techniques as main professional development tools. There is also 'increasing diversity' of the types of professional development activities being funded and accessed [Mackay, Burgoyne, Warwick and Cipollone (forthcoming)].
- The *Flexible Learning Framework* for 2005, collaboratively funded by Commonwealth and State and Territory governments, is concerned with providing the VET sector with e-learning skills, professional development opportunities, resources and support networks. In 2005, it also aimed to meet the e-learning needs of industry groups, students and communities, Indigenous Australians and Australians with a disability.
- The *Professional Development for Equity* project comprises a set of nine government-funded projects aimed at supporting equity issues in a wide variety of contexts, including developing resources to support equity issues in the delivery of training in the Training and Assessment (TAA) Training Package, and monitoring changes in professional development practices relating to training people with a disability. There is also a project aimed at providing examples of how to advance equity issues in the National VET system, and another aimed at helping Industry Skills Councils to and Indigenous issues into their strategic planning. There are also three guides for working with equity groups. These are the:
  - Working with Diversity: A guide to Equity and the AQTF
  - Working with Diversity: Quality Training for Indigenous Australians, and
  - Working with Diversity: Quality Training for People with a Disability.

The project also provides funding for recognition of prior learning (RPL) and recognition of current competency (RCC) for Indigenous VET practitioners. The Billabong website (http://www.billabong.gov.au) has also been created to support professional development for Indigenous VET staff.

Volunteer tutor training

- The use of volunteer tutors is common across Australia in the federal government-funded AMEP. The Home Tutor Scheme matches trained volunteers to migrants or refugees who want to learn English in their own home. Providers of AMEP in all states and territories will provide or make arrangements for the training of volunteer tutors. The TAFE Tasmania Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) has delivered Volunteer Tutor Training sessions for those interested in becoming adult literacy volunteers.
- The South Australian government funds an adult literacy tutor-training (including volunteer tutors) programme which addresses the skills and knowledge required by tutors of adults with low levels of basic skills. The South Australian programme is also aimed at practitioners in

community centres, those who develop individual teaching plans for students, and those who have the time to spend improving their own learning.

- ✧ The Western Australian government also provides support to the Read Write Now organisation that provides free literacy and numeracy tutoring for adults. Volunteers provide training in local libraries, neighbourhood learning centres and community centres.

Formal LLN qualifications and training for LLN professionals

South Australia has also introduced a formal qualification for literacy professionals. This is the Certificate IV in LLN Assessment and Training. It is directed at those who train or tutor in the community, supervise or mentor others, or work as a LLN trainer or tutor, a workplace vocational trainer, or as specialist tutors working with adults with disabilities. There is also a course in adult numeracy teaching for practitioners in the adult literacy and basic education sector to improve their understanding of methodologies teaching numeracy and basic mathematics to adults.

Key professional development providers

National and state and territory based conferences, workshops and seminars that are held by national bodies, education and training institutions, and industry stakeholders are the key providers of professional development for LLN practitioners.

- ✧ Key providers of professional development for the general VET workforce dealing with adult basic skills are the TAFE institutes themselves, industry associations, industry skills councils, and various agencies connected with the provision of employment services.
- ✧ Key providers of professional development (identified in four states by Mackay, Burgoyne, Warwick and Cipollone, [forthcoming]) for the language, literacy and numeracy workforce include the:
  - ♦ National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research
  - ♦ Australian Council for Adult Literacy
  - ♦ Australian Council of Teachers of English as a Second Language Associations
  - ♦ Victorian Adult Learning and Basic Education Council
  - ♦ Queensland Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
  - ♦ New South Wales Association of Teachers of English as a Second Language Delivery Support Service Workplace Education TAFE SA
  - ♦ Dare to Lead South Australia

Improving practitioner knowledge of VET arrangements

In view of the embedding of LLN skills in vocational training, there is a need for LLN professionals to increase their understanding of the VET system and of the vocational competencies that their students are hoping to acquire.

- ✧ The need for LLN professionals (especially those servicing embedded VET programmes) to engage in professional development on a regular basis is associated with their expanded role. They are now required to assist VET content professionals and practitioners to develop easy to understand learning materials and assessment resources to meet the needs of those with low basic LLN skills (Berghella, Molenaar, and Wyse 2004). According to these researchers the 'built-in approach (where literacy and numeracy is integrated with VET content-specific training) has not only expanded the training and assessment responsibilities of literacy practitioners, but has also extended their involvement in implementing organisational change, interpreting of standards, and the training of supervisors and managers. They argue that because these functions require greater levels of responsibility, well-developed negotiation skills, and knowledge of the content of a variety of Training Packages, practitioners need time and support to improve their skills and knowledge.

- Support may be differentiated according to the experience of the practitioner. For example, entry-level practitioners could be provided with opportunities to shadow experienced practitioners and be mentored by them. They would require support in understanding and using National Reporting System criteria, and developing resources. The experienced practitioner would need opportunities to expand their knowledge of the workplace environment (for example, industry and enterprise-specific issues, state and commonwealth government policies, the VET system, information technology, and the production of monitoring and reporting system).
- Berghella et al also note that paid time to develop these skills and knowledge, or to develop networks for accessing useful information, has not generally been available to literacy professionals. This is also supported by Mckenna and Fitzpatrick (2004), who report that access to professional development is also restricted because of limited funding.

Attitudes to professional development

Mackay, Burgoyne, Warwick and Cipollone, (forthcoming) asked practitioners for their views on professional development.

- LLN specialist teachers were generally enthusiastic about professional development that would help further improve their teaching practice. They were not very interested in professional development activities used to discuss administrative and workplace systems.
- Vocational trainers on the other hand were interested in raising their awareness about LLN issues; however, these were not their top priority.
- Volunteer tutors wanted to improve their teaching so that they could provide better assistance to students.
- Barriers to engagement in professional development were similar. All three groups lacked time to engage in professional development because of other work priorities (for example, reporting, preparation). Volunteer tutors also spoke of limited time due to engagement in other paid work and life responsibilities. Funding constraints affected all three groups similarly. However access to professional development depended on whether or not the LLN and VET practitioners were in permanent or casual employment.

Current and future professional skill gaps

All three groups (LLN specialists, VET practitioners and volunteers) in the Mackay et al study identified the need for professional development activities that would improve teaching practice and deal with the needs of individual learners and specific learner groups.

- All three groups wanted to learn about how to access and develop appropriate learning materials and skills in information and communication technology. However, specialist LLN teachers and VET practitioners wanted to be able to deal with the changing profile of their learner clients, and to develop consistent and reliable assessment practice. Where LLN specialists wanted skills to comply with increasing requirements for reporting, VET practitioners wanted help in implementing Training Packages.

Two initiatives should help to reduce the professional skill gap.

- In 2005 the South Australia government accredited an advanced diploma in Language, Literacy and Numeracy which will qualify practitioners to deliver LLN training.
- The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (the Training Package which details the competency standards for those wishing to conduct accredited VET training and assessment) will also have the opportunity to develop a range of skills that will improve the language, literacy and numeracy skills of learners.

XIII. Conclusion

Government policy and the implementation of that policy through government funding mechanisms have meant that there is substantial provision of basic skills education for adults in Australia.

- This is supported by a tradition of providing opportunities through nationally recognised and other accredited and non-accredited education and training for adults with low levels of basic LLN skills. These include those who have had either negative prior experiences with schooling, not attended initial schooling in English and or any other language (for example, recent refugee migrants) and those who have as a result suffered social and economic disadvantage.
- There is also an enduring belief in providing equal educational and employment opportunity for all Australians.
- Ensuring that those who require LLN training are made aware of these training opportunities and are provided with adequate support and encouragement to take up these opportunities continue to be major challenges.

Multi-sector provision

A vibrant adult and community education (ACE) sector provides many opportunities for adults with low LLN skills to improve these skills in a relaxed and supportive environment. It also provides opportunities for them to participate in non-accredited training and move into national or state or territory accredited training if they so desire. In addition, reforms to the vocational education and training (VET) system have had a major impact on re-thinking traditional strategies for the delivery and assessment of training (including that which refers to LLN training).

- To this end there has been major attention paid to the development and production of resources (including on-line resources) and activities to help practitioners customise training to the needs of students. Attention has also been paid to ensuring that these low LLN skills do not act as a barrier to the assessment of other vocational competencies.
- The VET system is focussed on making it easy for people to access training when and where it is required. It has therefore implemented a system of recording progress towards full qualifications on statements of attainment.
- This paper has been focussed on training for adults with low basic skills, however, the university sector is also involved in the provision of language skills training for international students who need to upgrade their English language skills before they can gain access to degree-level courses in Australian universities.

Intentional lack of prescription about pedagogy

Basic adult education in Australia is characterised by an intentional lack of government prescription about practical pedagogical issues.

- This gives teachers the flexibility to determine how they will go about helping students achieve formal learning outcomes or competency standards. It also helps them to adjust their training and assessment strategies to local and individual needs.
- In addition, the freedom available to practitioners in non-accredited VET or community-based courses provides an environment for experimentation and innovation. If such a system is to be effective, teachers must have access to multiple teaching and assessment materials and resources.

- A wealth of such resources is available both on-line and in physical formats. However, the extent to which these resources are used, however, depends in great part on teacher awareness of their existence, and their ease of access.

Student-centred teaching and assessment

A commitment to meeting the needs of individual students and to involving them in learning and assessment tasks based on real-life events and situations pervades the provision of LLN training and assessment in Australia.

- Formal or informal training needs analyses conducted at the commencement of programmes help ensure that activities are pitched to student ability levels and address particular student needs and aspirations.
- Portfolios developed conjointly by teachers and students, teacher observations of student progress, self-and peer-assessments, student and teacher negotiations of learning and assessment tasks, collaborative assessments, individual and group projects, presentations and quizzes are tools are used in varying ways by Australian practitioners to observe and record the stages at which individual students progress through learning.

The way ahead

A fundamental belief in providing all Australians with access to basic language, literacy and numeracy training to function effectively in the English-speaking community and workplace underpins the Australian approach to training for adults with low basic skills.

- The effectiveness of this approach depends on the extent to which:
  - individuals recognise their need for LLN assistance and are prepared to take up the opportunities available to them,
  - LLN training and assessment techniques address the particular needs of individuals on commencement, during, and on completion of LLN training programmes, and
  - adequate initial training and opportunities for continuing professional development for practitioners.
- If practitioners are to implement effective formative (and summative) assessment techniques they will continue to require access to adequate time and resources to enable them to analyse student needs, develop and apply useful recording strategies, and engage in trialling and moderation of assessment tasks.
- In view of the ageing of the LLN practitioner workforce there is also need to ensure its replenishment as current practitioners reach retirement age and leave the workforce. This means that the sector will need to consider effective strategies for recruitment which address issues related to appropriate initial training, formal qualifications, and remuneration.

Appendix A

Survey of adult literacy (SAL)

Level 1 or 'very poor' skills

Individuals identifying with level 1 had very poor skills and could be expected to experience substantial difficulty in using printed materials they encountered in every day life. They could:

- locate information on a medicine label and find and underline a sentence in a newspaper
- identify why a particular ingredient was to be used in a recipe and find one piece of information in a short fire-safety article

They could also:

- find a specified percentage on a simple chart, enter the number of theatre tickets required on an order form, and identify from a simple chart the country with the smallest projected quantity of radioactive waste
- Add a handling charge to total cost on an order form.

However, those who were unable to do these things were also assigned to this level.

Level 2 or 'poor' skills

Individuals assigned to level 2 also experienced difficulties with using materials used in daily life. They could be expected to:

- explain what happens when a plant is exposed to low temperatures from simple, short and clearly structured written information
- find out where to get more information about personnel issue and about a new law from provided flyers
- identify from a brief review of movies which are comedies

They could also:

- enter the intended date for trip to the theatre on a ticket order form and identify the country with the lowest proportion of female teachers from a simple chart
- use a bus timetable to identify the latest bus available under certain conditions, and use a compound interest table to list all the rates that will provide more than $500 interest if $100 is invested for 20 years.

They were also able to:

- use a simple chart to calculate the percentage of men teachers, given the percentage of women teachers
- indicate the quantity of a specific ingredient required when a recipe is halved, and use a bus timetable to calculate the duration of a given bus ride.

They could also use a weather chart for Asia and calculate the difference between today's temperatures and in Bangkok and Seoul.

Levels 3, 4 & 5

Individuals at levels 3 could be expected to be proficient in using materials encountered in every day life; however they may not be able to use all materials at a high level of proficiency and could use longer more complex texts. They could use the conditional, compare and contrast information, and to extract numbers embedded in complex figures, and could use while those at levels 4 had very good literacy skills. They could match and integrate information, make higher order inferences, and perform higher level arithmetic calculations. Those at level 5 had very good ability to perform above these levels.

A second SAL survey is to be conducted in 2006.

Appendix B

Projects funded by the Adult National Literacy Project program and administered by NCVER

Current projects

- *Enhancing the refugee literacy and employability through community engagement* (J Miralles and B Golding, in progress).
- *Numeracy in the workplace* (B Marr, in progress)
- *Provision or development? Exploring employers' understanding of workplace literacy, numeracy and employability skills* (P Waterhouse and C Virgona, in progress).
- *Through the looking glass– cross sectoral exchange to enrich adult literacy provision* (O Hull & U Burgoyne, in progress).
- *Classroom management strategies to address the needs of Sudanese refugee learners* (O Hull and U Burgoyne in progress).
- *Diverse approaches and outcomes: Community adult literacy and numeracy provision in Australia*, (Dymock D in progress)
- *Current and future professional development needs of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce*; SMacKay, U Burgoyne, D Warwick and J Cipollone (forthcoming)
- *The professional development requirements for Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programme practitioners*; T Bergehella, J Molenaar, L Wyse (forhcoming)
- *Literacy support for Indigenous people – current systems and practices in Queensland*; N McGlusky and L Thaker (forthcoming)
- *Reframing adult literacy and numeracy program outcomes: A social capital perspective*; Stephen Black, I Falk and J Balatti (forthcoming)
- *Social and economic benefits of improved adult literacy: towards a understanding*; R Hartley and J Horne (forthcoming)
- *Literacy in the new millennium*; M Lonsdale and D McCurry (published in 2004)
- *Adult learning through fire and emergency services organisations in small and remote towns*; C Hayes, B Golding and J Harvey (published in 2004)
- *A fair go – an exploration of factors impacting on the VET participation and completion of selected ethnic communities*; J Miralles (published in 2004)
- *What is all that learning for? Indigenous adult literacy practices, training, community capacity and health*; I Kral and I Falk (published in 2004)
- *Two-dimensional work: adult literacy in call centre and aged care industr*ies; Peter Waterhouse and Crina Virgona (published in 2004)
- *Building sustainable adult literacy provision: a review of international trends in adult literacy policy and programs*; R McKenna and L Fitzpatrick, (published in 2004)
- *Contradicting the stereotype: case studies of success despite literacy limitations*; P Waterhouse and C Virgona, (published in 2005)

- *Economic returns to education and training for adult with low numeracy skills*; L Gleeson (published in 2005)
- *Integrated approaches to teaching adult literacy in Australia: A snapshot of practice in community services*; R McKenna and L Fitzpatrick (published in 2005)
- *Building literacy and numeracy capability in communities: Learning from exemplary practice;* R Wickert (published in 2005)
- *Learning numeracy on the job: A case study in chemical handling and spraying*; G FitzSimons, S Mlcek, O Hull, Wright C (published in 2005)
- *Literacy, numeracy and alternative dispute resolution*; J Cumming, (published in 2005)
- *Using ICT in adult literacy education: New practices new challenges*; I Snyder, A Jones and JLo Bianco, (published in 2005)

Appendix C

Selected resources to support the assessment strategies

- *Back2Basics* is a supplementary resource published by DEST (2005b) which provides practitioners with a guide to resources (including those specifically focused on assessment, and working with indigenous learners and learners with a disability. The resource also provides information on where to buy and access support materials.
- *The Training Package Assessment Materials Kit* provides assessors with tools and resources to improve assessment practices.
- *The initial Language and Literacy Placement Assessment Kit'* aims to provide guidelines for practitioners to place learners in appropriate programmes
- *Built in not Bolted On* provides practical information for workplace trainers and assessors on the integration on language, literacy and numeracy in competency standards
- *What's that you said* is a resource for language, teachers, trainers and assessors who use the NRS to report on oral skills
- *On the road* is an assessment kit to help assessors to decide those workers who require literacy and numeracy support to acquire the skills in units of competency in the industry Transport and Distribution Training Package
- *Rethinking assessment* is a book to help practitioners, policymakers and assessors apply holistic methods for the assessment of adult literacy
- *Acknowledge Diversity in Assessment Practices* also includes information on language, literacy and numeracy assessment
- *Assessing WELL* is a video which assists workplace trainers and assessors involved in the WELL programme to undertake assessment of literacy and numeracy in workplace training using industry standards
- *Doing WELL in the WEST:* is a practical guide to assist WELL practitioners to develop, plan and conduct WELL training programmes.
- *Assessment and Placement Resource for the Literacy and Numeracy Program* is a publication which provides advice to teachers and trainers on how to develop pre-training assessments using the NRS,
- *Make it Real* is a video for use in professional development about literacy awareness in workplace training and assessment
- *Progressing Numeracy: activities designed to assist the teaching of mathematics to indigenous adult learners* consists of print and on-line learning activities to help indigenous adult learners
- *Real Texts: Authentic texts for adults and youth literacy classes* helps teachers to use authentic texts (advertisements, magazine articles, public interest notices) to teach literacy and numeracy for adults and youth.
- *Well ... I never knew that!* comprises a set of CDs which record short radio programmes, and a one-hour literacy forum. The radio programmes include discussions from adult learners on how they have approached their literacy difficulties. The forum provides a discussion of the issues that confront adults with literacy difficulties.

- *Redesigning social futures: supporting women from violence situations with literacy needs* presents case studies of joint approaches to address the literacy needs of women who have experienced domestic violence.
- *Life stories: an approach to teaching literacy to adults with intellectual disabilities: a training teaching and resource package* provides an innovative approach to help trainers of people with such disabilities.
- *Aboriginal Patrols– Certificate II in Community Services – first point of contact* comprises four booklets which provide tasks which improve the literacy and numeracy of community patrol of members of the Nyoongar people to help at risk Aboriginal people on the streets of Fremantle.
- *Little by little: that's the way we learn:* is an English language and literacy teaching and learning resource for indigenous adults

Peer tutor activity toolkit 2: is a resource to support modules and learning guides for state and national adult literacy tutor training courses

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