



NSW Adult Literacy & Numeracy Council

Submission

To: Ms Anita Roberts, Project Co-ordinator & Mr. Rober Bluer, Project Manager
Subject: IBSA Foundation Skills Training Package Development Project
Date: 31 October, 2011
From: NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council

Dear Anita and Robert,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to your consultation on the IBSA project on the development of a training package for Foundation Skills.

The NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council is a membership based organisation representing adult literacy and numeracy practitioners, researchers, program managers, teacher educators, student teachers, and provider organisations.

Please find attached comments from our organisation which we hope can inform your project.

Yours sincerely,

Keiko Yasukawa
President, NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council

Overview and definitions

The Council strongly supports the education aims of the project, that is to:

- *reduce attrition from vocational programs*
- *enhance pathways and career development for existing workers*
- *overcome barriers that some learners experience in accessing vocational education and training pathways*
- *promote collaboration between specialist practitioners*
- *highlight the importance of foundation skills in vocational education and training.*

These needs are felt strongly by practitioners and provider organisations, and we support initiatives that can address them.

We are, however, concerned that a Foundation Skills Training Package Development Project has commenced prior to the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults being released. We appreciate that this development has been agreed by the National Quality Council and IBSA in responding to this decision, so this is not a criticism of IBSA. However, it does present problems for us a stakeholder group being consulted because the IBSA project assumes a particular definition of what Foundation Skills are, prior to those being defined in the Strategy document. In our submission to the Consultation paper for the Strategy, we were critical of the ways in which Foundation Skills were discussed in the paper; we have had no official information about whether the definitions have changed during the Strategy development. In the absence of clarity on what it is we are talking about, it is difficult to comment on its Training Package! Therefore, our comments will necessarily be general.

Similarly, Employability Skills are currently undergoing a national review and a consultation process is underway. It would be preferable to use both accepted definitions of Foundation Skills as agreed nationally for the Strategy and revised Employability Skills as the basis for the Training Package.

Foundation Skills Training package users

We understand from p. 2 of your paper that the Package will be designed for:

- *education and training providers working with individuals and enterprises to build vocationally relevant skills*
- *Industry Skills Councils packaging qualifications and skill sets for their industries.*

In this case, it may be appropriate to name the Training Package more specifically to reflect that, eg Foundation Skills for VET and Work. Trying a one-size-fits-all approach to meet the widely varying needs and aspirations of the diverse groups of Foundation Skills learners is likely to be counter-productive, especially since many of the learners at the lower level courses have needs that interact with Foundation Skills in complex ways and it is through personal, flexible and creative approaches that help these learners find confidence and purpose in engaging with learning.

For students in VET courses and pathways, we believe there are different kinds of LLN needs. There are the LLN practices that define the discourses of the vocational context and work that the students are entering. These practices must be taught to all students in a highly contextualized and realistic environment – for example in the actual workplace or in simulated workplaces. These LLN practices not only help the students become ‘work-ready’ in terms of skills and knowledge, but in developing their identities for the occupations they are entering – eg as plumbers, hairdressers, aged care workers and so on.

The teaching of these LLN practices must be part of the pedagogy of the VET courses, and would

require teachers of both the vocational area and the LLN area to work closely together to develop the necessary pedagogy.

Foundations skills development to improve pathways

The mandate to increase the number of workers holding higher level qualifications creates another kind of LLN need – the ‘academic’ LLN practices that are needed to negotiate the more theoretical knowledge of the vocational area. It would be important to make explicit to the students that different LLN practices are needed here to those needed in the workplace. The draft document specifically refers to *advanced maths skills to successfully achieve vocational qualifications or access to further education and training pathways*”.

Both of the above two LLN needs must be taught explicitly to all VET students, and not treated only as remedial work for some targeted students. Having curricula to support this teaching by the LLN teachers and the VET teachers will be beneficial.

In some cases, there may be groups for whom English is an additional language, and for whom extra tuition in spoken and written English is beneficial. For such students, being able to co-enrol in an English language course that is integrated in content and assessment with a VET qualification may be a way of improving their English with the confidence that they are learning the English that is going to help them work in their chosen field.

Some at risk students will also require intensive integrated literacy and numeracy skills development in specific areas as part of their vocational study. Some of these students may not self-assess themselves as needing to further develop their literacy and numeracy, but who would benefit from integrated and inclusive literacy and numeracy delivery. For all of these kinds of needs, however, it is unclear if it is a new Training Package that is needed, or a policy that enables providers to more easily package units from existing curricula and provide wrap around services to create the kinds of integrated learning and teaching that will help students.

Foundation Skills Training Package content

Further detail of the scope of the proposed qualifications and examples of draft units is needed to judge whether they will be appropriate for the needs of the broad group of intended learners.

Including Certificate I and II qualifications which are not aligned with the Australian Qualifications Framework is extremely problematic. Industry bodies, workplace staff and vocational trainers from other industry areas will need a lot of guidance, and examples of model programs to overcome potential confusion.

Providing nominal hours of literacy and numeracy skills development units and an adequate range of units will be a critical in ensuring the qualifications meet the needs of learners with multiple areas of disadvantage. These learners require time to reach their LLN learning goals and gain competency. The span of two ACSF levels within a qualification is considerable for many learners, especially the span from level 2 to level 3. It is unclear whether the proposed qualifications would be used for pathway LLN skills development programs such as the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP), but if that is the intention there would need to be enough units at each ACSF level to allow learners to progress.

The requirement to include a vocational unit at Certificate 1 (ACSF 1-2) level is questioned for all students. For some students, depending on the entry level of their chosen industry area, a vocational unit may not be achievable. It would be more appropriate to make vocational units elective in the Certificate 1 course but require that the LLN units are based in an industry context using industry texts and examples.

While a text based approach is welcomed, a one to one relationship between units of competency and specific text types is problematic. It will be difficult to include the full range of texts/contexts required by learners across industry areas and would be preferable to group texts according to purpose ie information text. This would also cater for specific texts required by some industry areas. Whatever organising principle is adopted it is important that the development of the learners' critical literacy and numeracy skills is included.

For numeracy, it is important that the learning process is not simply text-based, but involves authentic tasks, using, as far as possible, the authentic material and symbolic artifacts of the workplace. The question of 'transfer' of learning from a formal learning situation to a situation of use in practice is one of the salient issues in mathematics education.

Development also needs to include adequate units of competency developed at ACSF levels 4-5 for students and workers who need pathways to higher level qualifications including into study in a higher education qualification.

Electives units in the proposed Foundation Skills courses should be allowed to be imported from accredited courses as well as other Training Package qualifications to make the courses appropriate to the broad range of students requiring LLN skills development.

The majority of accredited LLN courses currently used by RTOs are mapped to the ACSF, and so if a common reference point in terms of levels is needed, this already exists. Units from these accredited courses can already be added to Training Package qualifications under existing packing rules but this rarely happens as it adds to delivery time and costs. Inclusion of LLN units may be at the expense of vocational electives which may also disadvantage learners. Whilst this is a policy issue rather than one directly related to the development of the Foundation Skills Training Package, unless it is resolved it will be difficult to ensure widespread take up of the Training Package units in vocational courses.

The delivery

Much of the recent research on VET has focused on the delivery end, and IBSA too has focused on this in its review and design of the new Diploma in VET. If delivery is to be improved (eg in better integrating LLN into VET pedagogy), then what is needed is the support on the ground to enable this to happen. LLN teachers in NSW already have curricula that they use for foundation skills development. Units from these courses are mapped to ACSF levels, text based and not dissimilar to what is described for the new Training package yet they are not widely integrated into VET courses. Opportunities for collaborative delivery, time to plan and develop integrated pedagogies, professional development and related strategies will be critical if the Foundation skills Training Package is to have the desired impact.

The important focus on good pedagogy means that both the LLN and VET teachers must be well-qualified as teachers in their respective specialist areas.

It is difficult not to feel that this Training Package project is pre-mature. There are many implicit assumptions about definitions, policy and resourcing in the consultation paper that are opaque to those of us outside the inner circles of the development of the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults. We would welcome further information that would enable us to gain clarity on these areas.