



Whole of Community Engagement Initiative

Action Statement on Indigenous Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy in the Northern Territory

March 2017

Literacy is a fundamental human right and essential to peoples' ability to fully develop their knowledge and potential. English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN¹) capability enables progression along educational and career pathways and is essential for full participation in community, business, the economy and broader society. Current Indigenous adult LLN policy focuses on employment however, improved adult LLN has proven flow on effects for children, parents, families, and society as a whole. Everyone - including government, non-government, business and the community, have a responsibility to work together, ensuring design and delivery of literacy capacity building models where Indigenous people actively 'own' the process. A long-term, Territory-wide, multi-partisan policy commitment is essential to sustained LLN outcomes in urban, regional and remote areas of the NT.

In November 2016 eighty one individuals (36% were Indigenous) from twenty-eight organisations and agencies attended a LLN workshop at Charles Darwin University (CDU), participants identified significant need and support for positive change, formed an LLN Network, agreed on the core elements of a joint statement and committed to action. The LLN Network² hopes that the following Statement will make a positive contribution to the essential foundational work required for improved Indigenous adult LLN in the NT. The Statement calls for the development of a targeted policy framework, clarification of responsibility, and coordinated action. *The LLN Network welcomes the opportunity to continue to work closely with all tiers of Government and other stakeholders on this critical issue.*

¹ Although we use the term 'LLN' throughout this document we are also referring to the range of foundation skills required in order to establish, apply and maintain LLN in life, on-line, and in the workplace. Refer to the definitions in Appendix 1, Part II.

² Refer to Appendix 3 for list of organisations and numbers attending the November workshop

What is required?

1. An Indigenous adult LLN policy framework

- 1.1 Consult on, and identify, where overall responsibility for Indigenous adult LLN sits within the Northern Territory Government and which department may be responsible for development and implementation of an Indigenous adult LLN policy framework for the NT.
- 1.2 Institute a broad and inclusive multi-partisan, inter-sectoral consultation process to raise awareness and develop the policy framework and implementation plan.

2. Long term investment to build capacity

- 2.1 Identify commitment and options for long-term, secure and flexible funding for implementation of the adult LLN framework.
- 2.2 Identify commitment to, and options for, funding for accredited as well as non-accredited training to meet the vocational education, academic, and real-time learning needs of Indigenous adults at all levels of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)³.
- 2.3 Commit to resourcing and maintaining a qualified, well-resourced adult literacy workforce in the Territory who have job-security. This workforce should include a high proportion of Indigenous people and local language speakers.
- 2.4 Reflect requirements of the Foundation Skills Professional Standards Framework (Foundation Skills Strategy 2012) in the training and development of LLN practitioners.
- 2.5 Commitment to building and maintaining local level, non-formal LLN delivery capacity within urban, regional and remote settings through provision of education, training, resourcing and mentoring of local level workers/volunteers/champions.

3. Innovative and culturally appropriate delivery responses

- 3.1 Expand the evidence-base of proven LLN service design and delivery models which may meet the needs of Indigenous adults, organisations and communities in the NT. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - a) Community-wide and community-campaign models
 - b) Workplace capacity building models
 - c) Organisational workforce development models
 - d) State-wide delivery models
- 3.2 Clarify responsibility for convening and maintaining the NT-wide LLN stakeholder network to inform government policy-making, standards of delivery, and amplify the Indigenous voice.

³ Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) – the Australian Government’s tool for measuring competency in reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication and learning skills.

- 3.3 Provide support for maximum Indigenous input at all consultation stages to ensure that LLN program models and education and training resources include Indigenous pedagogies and content.
- 3.4 Apply best practice approaches when employing, training and retaining Indigenous employees, and in joint venture initiatives, through assessment of ACSF⁴ levels and subsequent provision of appropriate developmental support.
- 3.5 Assess and build the capacity of community-based LLN “champions” through targeted training and support.

4. Building a stronger evidence base

- 4.1 Consolidate and generate statistics or conduct a survey on ACSF levels of Indigenous adults in the NT, including those from urban, regional and remote settings.
- 4.2 Undertake a study of the economic impact/cost of low levels of LLN in the Indigenous population in the NT.
- 4.3 Establish an LLN clearinghouse function for the NT which includes a comprehensive database of research evidence to raise awareness, increase understanding, and support consultation and policy-making processes.
- 4.4 Establish a clearinghouse for collection and distribution of appropriate LLN teaching and learning resources (past and present).
- 4.5 Resource and embed developmental evaluation into programs and projects to enable:
 - a) Ongoing policy and service refinement
 - b) Comparison of different implementation models, tools and methods
 - c) Sharing of findings across an LLN focused network
 - d) Identification of factors contributing to success; and
 - e) Ongoing analysis of impact and outcomes (individual, family, social, economic etc.)

4 Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) – the Australian Government’s tool for measuring competency in reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication and learning skills.

Principles to guide policy and action

- The need for early establishment of first language is seen as essential to the continuing vitality of culture and heritage and to the development of LLN competency. Cultural heritage and English language are viewed as equally critical and mutually supportive.
- LLN policy and service delivery models should include genuine collaboration, the valuing of Indigenous knowledge and culture, and acknowledgement of Indigenous educational and career aspirations.
- It is essential that philanthropic, volunteer, business and industry sectors work in tandem with all tiers of government to increase sustainable Indigenous workforce participation in urban, regional and remote locations.
- Success will be enhanced by community-led and community-informed solutions, two-way collaboration, and a shared purpose based on mutual respect, trust and cooperation.
- Indigenous adults have the right to contribute to their own learning process where learners become teachers and teachers become learners. Therefore, communities should be able to tailor and inform LLN programs to best suit their own location and context, needs, purposes, goals and aspirations.
- Adequate time, resources and expertise are required prior to commencement of community literacy campaigns, to stimulate conversations and information-sharing within communities. These activities enable assessment of project feasibility based on levels of individual and community interest.

The Action Statement working group
For the LLN Network
March 2017

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Part two

Background information for the Action Statement on Indigenous adult LLN

Prepared by the working group of the
NT Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) Network
March 2017

This document provides some essential background information on Indigenous adult literacy in the NT to support the Action Statement on Indigenous adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN).

The Northern Territory Government's 'Framing the Future Strategic Plan' lays the foundation for a "prosperous economy and sets the guidelines for a strong society that ensures everyone has the same access to opportunities and resources and lays out a policy to encourage everyone to participate"⁵. Currently the NT government is developing an economic framework that will form the basis for long-term economic decision making in the Territory. The Australian Governments' 'Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing the North' states that "The north will only truly achieve its potential with the participation of all the people who live there, including Indigenous Australians." There is widespread recognition of the importance of Indigenous economic engagement, maximised employment, and participation in business development.

Many Indigenous adults cannot reach their potential or participate fully in the economy or in society due to low levels of English language literacy and numeracy (LLN)⁶. The economic cost of low levels of Indigenous adult LLN in the NT has never been calculated. Also, there are no consolidated statistics available for Indigenous adult LLN levels (as there are for other States and Territories).

The Northern Territory (NT) is the only Australian state or territory to have no statement, policy or strategy for Adult Community Education (ACE) or any direct application of government funding to the sector. Most state and territory ACE strategies or policy statements recognise the importance of ACE in delivering language, literacy and numeracy. (ALA, 2013)⁷

5 Adam Giles, Framing the Future (2015)

6 Although we use the term 'LLN' throughout this document we are also referring to the range of Foundation skills required in order to establish, apply and maintain LLN in life, on-line and in the workplace. Refer to Appendix 1.

7 *The Role of Adult and Community Education in Regional & Rural Australia*. Melbourne: Adult Learning Australia (2013).

The national Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey (ALLS) in 2006 did not include data from remote community settings. As an indicator of NT ACSF⁸ levels, between 2010 and 2012 the Charles Darwin University (CDU) Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) team conducted 266 Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) assessments⁹ of work-ready people in a number of remote Indigenous NT communities. The outcome was that 86% of those assessed were at ACSF 1 or below (the lowest level on the 5 point ACSF scale). Level 3 is the level required to engage productively in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and to function well within any workplace.

The resident population of the NT in 2015 was 244,307 and approximately thirty percent of this population are Indigenous. The NT Government acknowledges that a critical issue for long term growth prospects of the Territory is the degree to which the Indigenous population is engaged and participates in the economy and the workforce¹⁰. Indigenous people, however, remain proportionally under-represented in the NT workforce. Many Indigenous adults cannot advance along educational pathways beyond Certificate II level in VET because their skills in reading and writing, numeracy and oral English communication are not at a level that allows progression along the learning pathway¹¹. Also, enrolment numbers, retention rates and educational outcomes for Indigenous people in higher education continue to remain low in the Territory.¹² A significant contributing factor is that appropriate, long-term and customised adult language, literacy and numeracy assistance is generally hard to find and secure.

English language, literacy and numeracy proficiency is critical to a person's ability to engage with mainstream society and systems, and central to having an informed voice in all aspects of daily life; from parenting and interacting with health-care and legal systems, applying for jobs, accessing a bank account or obtaining a drivers' licence, to financial and business management and tendering for business contracts. LLN ability is critical to an empowered Indigenous contribution to social action, policy making and decisions about how best to frame the Indigenous future. The Industry Skills Advisory Council (ISAC) of the NT noted that *"At the recent Nhulunbuy forum a Yolngu participant asked 'How many Yolngu people know about these economic summits to develop the North?' He said, 'Yolngu people do not understand these words, they know shop language but do not know this language for business and economic development.'* ISAC commented that *"unless we have in place a plan for developing foundational skills, Aboriginal people will continue to be unfairly excluded from economic development across Northern Territory"*¹³.

The above statement is an indication of the significant policy and services gaps which exist for Indigenous adults who live in the NT, where remoteness is a significant issue and English is often spoken as a second or third language and not often used at home. No government policy comprehensively addresses the LLN needs of the majority of Indigenous adults in the NT, that is, all people who are no longer attending school. Also, a primary policy focus is on early childhood and school-aged LLN yet the 2017 Closing the Gap Prime Ministers' Report states that *"across the eight areas (reading and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9), the proportion of Indigenous students achieving national minimum standards in NAPLAN is on track in only one area (Year 9 numeracy) and that "NAPLAN results for Indigenous students are worse in more remote areas."* It is to be noted that the NAPLAN measurement system does not acknowledge the fact

8 The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). That is, the Australian governments' standard for comprehensively assessing: reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication and learning skills.

9 The Australian governments' standard for comprehensively assessing: reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication and learning skills.

10 Building Northern Territory Industry Participation (BNTIP) Policy: Department of Trades, Business and Innovation, 2016

11 Retention rates in very remote Australia are estimated at 16.6%, and it is likely that the rates are lower in the NT (BIITE, publication pending, 2017).

12 Bandias S., Fuller D., Larkin S. *Indigenous Students in the Tertiary Education Sector*, Journal of International Education Research, Third Quarter 2014 Volume 10, Number 3

13 Email comment to the SPP source: Industry Skills Council of the NT, March 2017

that for many Indigenous children in the NT English is a second language and that teachers are not ESL¹⁴ trained.

A panel discussion at the national Indigenous Leaders' Conference at Charles Darwin University in November 2016 highlighted that, although adult LLN continues to be treated as a peripheral issue it is actually at the core of this economic dilemma as well as central to social capacity building and community development. A comprehensive, committed Territory-wide, approach to low levels of LLN is required in the NT¹⁵.

Evidence gathered by Whole of Community Engagement (WCE)¹⁶ initiative at CDU during the past two and a half years indicates high levels of educational aspiration within the six remote NT communities where it has operated. Indigenous leaders and other stakeholders have spoken out strongly about the need for improved English LLN and said that they continue to feel “locked out” or “left behind” in education. The WCE initiative found that if a person has low levels of LLN and they are not within the school system, then accessing resources and assistance is most often extraordinarily difficult. Many people also spoke about the general need for Indigenous-led and Indigenous-informed approaches and the need for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to work together respectfully, sharing knowledge and expertise to find solutions to this complex issue.

Through interviews, focus groups and workshops the WCE Strategic Priority Project (SPP) on LLN has identified high levels of organisational and inter-sectoral commitment to support positive change and improved Indigenous adult LLN in the NT. A pre-conference workshop *Indigenous adult English LLN* was organised at CDU on the 9th November, 2016. The one-day workshop was attended by eighty people from twenty-eight organisations and government agencies (Appendix 3).¹⁷ Thirty-five percent of participants were Indigenous, including a number of senior leaders. A network of interested individuals and organisations was consolidated at that event and the membership continues to expand.

The elements of an *Action Statement on Indigenous Adult LLN* were agreed at the workshop. The *Action Statement* has been edited by a group of sectoral specialists, including Indigenous educators, National Training Award recipients, and a range of others in business, government and non-government agencies and academia who were present on the day (Appendix 3). The *Action Statement* fully supports the spirit and intent of associated Northern Territory and Commonwealth Government policy initiatives (Appendix 2).

Those present at the LLN workshop hope that this Statement will contribute to positive change and coordinated inter-sectoral and multi-partisan responses to low levels of Indigenous adult literacy in the NT. We welcome the opportunity to continue to work closely with all tiers of government and stakeholders on this critical issue.

The Action Statement working group, for the LLN Network

March 2017

14 English as a Second Language (ESL)

15 It is to be noted that the Tasmanian Government is currently implementing a successful ten year, annually funded policy framework and action plan through delivery of the 26TEN adult LLN program.

16 Funded through the Australian Governments' Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) at CDU

17 Refer to attendance list in the Workshop Report

Appendix one: LLN Definitions

The following definitions support the will and intent of the Action Statement:

1. **The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Developments' (OECD) definition of literacy for the Programme of International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC):**

“Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.”

<http://www.oecd.org/edu/innovation-education/adultliteracy.htm>

2. **OECD definitions of literacy and mathematical literacy for the Programme of International Student Assessment:**

“Reading literacy is defined in PISA as the ability to understand, use and reflect on written texts in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate effectively in society.”

Source Publication: Education at a Glance, OECD, Paris, 2002, Glossary

<http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=5420>

“Mathematical literacy is defined in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) as the capacity to identify, understand and engage in mathematics, and to make well-founded judgements about the role that mathematics plays in an individual’s current and future private life, occupational life, social life with peers and relatives, and life as a constructive, concerned and reflective citizen.”

Source Publication: Education at a Glance, OECD, Paris, 2002, Glossary

<http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=5388>

3. **United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation extract from the Belem Framework:**

“Literacy is an essential basic skill and a key competency for active citizenship in all parts of the world. It evolves and is embedded in everyday life, working life and civic life. Literacy is continuously shaped and reshaped by the evolving complexities of culture, economy and society. Adult education definitively extends beyond adult literacy, but adult literacy is imperative for people to engage in meaningful learning. It is a prerequisite for personal, social and political emancipation.”

(Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future Belém Framework for Action 2013, pg 3)

http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UII/confintea/pdf/working_documents/confinteavi_framework_en.pdf

4. **The National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults definition: Standing Council on Tertiary Education Skills and Employment (SCOTESE, 2012)**

“For the purpose of this Strategy, foundation skills are defined as the combination of: English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) – listening, speaking, reading, writing, digital literacy and use of mathematical ideas; and employability skills, such as collaboration, problem solving, self-management, learning and information and communication technology (ICT) skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life. Foundation skills development includes both skills acquisition and the critical application of these skills in multiple environments for multiple purposes.”

https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/national-foundation-skills-strategy-for-adults_o.pdf

Appendix two: Related Government policies

Following are a number of the policy documents which support Indigenous adult literacy. The list is not comprehensive. There is a policy gap for Indigenous adults at a national and Territory level. It is to be noted that none of the following policies comprehensively address the needs of the majority of Indigenous adults in the NT.

1. **The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults 2012 -2022**

A ten-year framework which brings a national focus to improving education and employment outcomes for working age Australians with low levels of foundation skills (language, literacy, numeracy and employability skills).

https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/national-foundation-skills-strategy-for-adults_o.pdf

2. **The Australian Core Skills Framework**

The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) is a tool which assists both specialist and non-specialist English language, literacy and numeracy practitioners to describe an individual's performance in the five core skills of learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy. It provides a consistent national approach to identifying and developing the core skills in three diverse contexts; personal and community; workplace and employment; and education and training. In particular, it offers: a) shared concepts and language for identifying, describing and discussing the core skills, and b) a systematic approach to benchmarking, monitoring and reporting on core skills performance.

<https://www.education.gov.au/australian-core-skills-framework>

3. **Commonwealth Indigenous Procurement Policy: Australian Government, July 2015**

https://www.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/indigenous_procurement_policy.pdf

4. **Building Northern Territory Industry Participation (BNTIP) Policy: Department of Trades, Business and Innovation (2016)**

Building Northern Territory Industry Participation has been developed as a direct response to business and industry development needs. It aims to increase local industry participation in projects through giving competitive Territory businesses the opportunity to contribute to the future growth of the Territory and enhancing Territory business and industry capability.

<https://business.nt.gov.au/business/publications/policies/building-northern-territory-industry-participation-policy>

5. **Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing the North, Australian Government, June 2015**

“The White Paper includes measures to unlock the north's potential across six key areas: simpler land arrangements to support investment; developing the north's water resources; growing the north as a business, trade and investment gateway; investing in infrastructure to lower business and household costs; reducing barriers to employing people; and improving governance.”

<http://northernaustralia.gov.au/files/files/NAWP-FullReport.pdf>

6. **Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy, Northern Territory Department of Local Government and Community Services, 2015**

The Strategy “responds to the identified need for the Northern Territory Government to work more effectively to achieve better outcomes for community members, including for example, consistent and accountable remote engagement and coordination practice across the NT and improved coordination and collaboration within and between NTG agencies, communities, regions and head office in recording, tracking and responding to ideas and issues raised...”

https://dhcd.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/188523/REC-Strategy-160926.pdf

7. **A Share in the Future: Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024, NT Department of Education**

A Share in the Future strategy is a 10-year reform committed to ensuring Indigenous students in the NT are successful and confident in their education journey. Implementing the strategy “*will provide Indigenous students with real career choices and opportunities both within and beyond their communities.*”

https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/229016/A-Share-in-the-Future-The-Review-of-Indigenous-Education-in-the-Northern-Territory.pdf

Appendix three: The LLN Network

Table one: Composition of the LLN Network (at the time of the Nov. LLN Workshop)

Organisation	People
1. Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT (AMSANT)	1
2. ALPA - Arnhem land Progress Aboriginal Corporation	1
3. Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) / also works with Mission Australia in LLN	1
4. Australian Government: Department of Education and Training: Foundation Skills (Canberra)	1
5. Australian Government: Department of Education and Training: Foundation Skills (NT, WA)	2
6. Australian Government: Department of Employment (NT)	1
7. Australian Government: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (Top End and Central Australia)	3
8. NT Dept. of Tourism and Culture: Northern Territory Library service	1
9. NT Department of Trade, Business and Innovation: Strategic Policy -Training	1
10. Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC)	1
11. Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE)	10
12. CDU - Adult Literacy and Numeracy team – Top End and Central Australia and learner support (1)	7
CDU – VET PVC and management of VET Business Development Improvement and Community Services	3
CDU - Office of the Pro-vice Chancellor of Indigenous Leadership	2
CDU - Whole of Community Engagement - campus based staff	4
CDU - Whole of Community Engagement – Indigenous community staff - Tennant Creek, Yirrkala and Yuendumu	5
CDU- International Graduate Centre of Education, CDU	1
CDU – other higher education and VET staff (various departments)	11
13. Industry Skills Advisory Council (ISAC) NT	3
14. LINC Tasmania, Literacy Services	1
15. Literacy for Life Foundation	2
16. Mungkarta Homeland Learning Centre	1
17. Northern Institute (CDU)	1
18. Reading and Writing Hotline	1
19. STEPS Education and Training	1
20. Sunrise Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, Katherine	2
21. Tangentyere Council, Alice Springs	2
22. Tanyah Nasir Consulting Services	1
23. University of New England	1
24. Central Land Council - Walpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT)	2
25. Walpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC)	2
26. Willowra Learning Centre	1
27. Yalu Margithinyaraw Centre, Galiwinku	4
Total number of people	81

LLN Workshop attendance analysis

The LLN workshop held in November 2016 was attended by 81 people from 28 organisations and Government Departments (NT and Commonwealth). There were 21 speakers. Of the 81 people who attended the conference about 36% were Indigenous. People from 7 other organisations sent apologies and expressions of interest in participating in the network. At the end of the day everyone in the room voted to form the initial membership of an NT-Network for Language Literacy and Numeracy. A group of people also volunteered to consider the individual group consensus statements to make one statement.

Table 2: The Action Statement Working Group

The following organisations / positions have commented on and shaped this document:

Industry Skills Advisory Council NT: Industry Skills Advisory Officers X 2
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education: 1X Senior Advisor, 1X Senior researcher
Senior Indigenous leaders and educationalists: X 3
Office of the Pro-vice chancellor of Indigenous Leadership: (Senior Staff) X 3
Whole of Community Engagement initiative –3 Senior academics, one evaluation coordinator
Tasmanian Government LINC program: Manager X 1
Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research - CAEPR – ANU: Senior researcher X 1
Graduate Centre for Educational Research – CDU: Senior academic X1
Centre for Learning and Teaching –CDU – Senior academic X 1
Independent LLN consultant, Community Learning Centre Coordinator, National Training award winner X1
Australian Securities Investment Commission (ASIC) X 1
University of New England X 1



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