Dear Ms Pancini

Thank you for your letter of 27 April 2012 to Senator Chris Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research concerning the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults and the May Budget. As Minister Evans has recently given me responsibility for foundation skills, the letter has been referred to me to reply on his behalf.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your input into the development of the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults. ACAL's ongoing commitment to foundation skills nationally is appreciated.

I can assure you that whilst the Government finds itself in a tight fiscal environment, this year's Budget maintains a commitment to key programs and initiatives to improve foundation skills for adults as well as a broader skills reform agenda. This is a consolidation on recent commitments to key programs as was seen in the 2010-11 Budget which saw increased investment in foundation skills training and other support over four years with an additional $115 million through the Foundation Skills Package and $182.8 million through the 2011 Building Australia's Future Workforce package.

The 2011-12 Budget committed over $379 million to adult foundation skills. Included in this commitment was an increase in funding for the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program which will result in the Government's investment in the Program being over double that made by the previous Government.

In addition to funding programs that directly assist individuals to develop their foundation skills, the Australian Government funds a number of initiatives that aim to expand the quality and availability of training options and strengthen foundation skills in the national training system:

- to reach more people at need, the Australian Government is working with Industry Skills Councils to map Training Packages to the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), including work being undertaken by Innovation and Business Skills Australia to up-skill vocational trainers and develop a Foundation Skills Training Package to assist trainers to build foundation skills support into mainstream vocational training;
• the Australian Government is also investing $1.154 million over two years in the development of an ‘employability skills framework’ which is expected to complement the ACSF. The Framework will assist trainers, educators and those working with job seekers to prepare for employment or a career change by highlighting ‘non-technical’ skills and knowledge; and

• to help address practitioner shortages, the Australian Government has committed $1.76 million over four years (from 2009) to provide scholarships of up to $5,250 toward an adult language, literacy and numeracy practitioner qualification.

In addition, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship administers the legislated Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), providing free English language tuition to eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants who have no English at all.

As you know, the Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment has endorsed the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults. Now that agreement has been reached on the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development, I plan to release the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults later in 2012. The priorities set by the Strategy will encourage broader engagement in foundation skills programs, make positive systemic changes to the education and training sectors in relation to foundations skills, and improve outcomes for individual learners.

The implementation of policies, actions and priorities prescribed by the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults will be addressed and developed both individually by jurisdictions and through broader national processes, including the National Agreement on Skills and Workforce Development and its associated National Partnerships and implementation plans. Implementation will also be addressed in the annual work plan of the Standing Council. This process will provide a framework to encourage broader engagement in foundation skills programs and improve learning outcomes for individuals over the next decade.

If you would like to discuss these issues further, Susan Devereux, General Manager, Foundation Skills Branch within the Department would be happy to meet with you in Melbourne at a mutually convenient time. Ms Devereux can be contacted on (02) 6121 5829 or susan.devereux@innovation.gov.au.

I trust the information provided is helpful.

Yours sincerely

SHARON BIRD MP